

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt, olive green trousers, and a brown hat, is walking away from the camera on a wooden boardwalk. The boardwalk is made of light-colored wooden planks and leads towards a sunset over a coastal landscape. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and light blue. There are some green bushes and grass on either side of the boardwalk.

# *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*

# Collegial Exchange

2023 • Volume 90-2

## **Educators' Health: The DKG Answer**

### **Reflections on the DKG Journey for Life**

*Charlotte's Web: A Model of  
Servant Leadership*

*Worldwide Impact:  
Networking and More*

*The Gift of Literacy*

*An Intelligent Approach to  
Artificial Intelligence*

*The Membership  
Mindset*



IGNITE HER SPIRIT, EMPOWER HER VOICE

DKG INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

National Harbor, Maryland • July 9-13, 2024





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Submissions to the *Bulletin*, a refereed publication, are reviewed by the Editorial Board and the Society editorial staff. Selection is based on relevance of the topics addressed, accuracy and validity, contribution to the professional literature, originality, quality of writing, and adherence to Submission Guidelines (see [www.dkg.org](http://www.dkg.org)). Editorial Board members evaluate each submission's focus, organization, development, readability, and relevance to the general audience of *Bulletin* readers. Due to the diversity of the *Bulletin* audience, material that expresses a gender, religious, political, or patriotic bias is not suitable for publication.

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Members are encouraged to submit manuscripts for consideration by the *Bulletin* editorial board. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin: International Journal for Professional Educators* accepts submissions of action, qualitative, quantitative, and/or mixed methods research; reviews of literature; educational program descriptions; position papers and viewpoints; and book/technology reviews. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin: Collegial Exchange* accepts submissions relating to classroom and DKG practices and programs; viewpoints on current issues; reflections or anecdotes; biographies and interviews; and book and technology reviews.

Submissions should be focused, well organized, effectively developed, concise, and appropriate for *Bulletin* readers. The style should be direct, clear, readable, and free from gender, political, patriotic, or religious bias. For more detailed information, please refer to the Submission Guidelines and the Submission Grid included in each journal issue or at [www.dkg.org](http://www.dkg.org) via *MyDKG > Apply/Submit* tab.

Special Note: The *DKG Bulletin: International Journal for Professional Educators* no longer specifies themes for each issue. This change takes place in recognition of the breadth of educational roles of our members and the breadth of educational issues of importance to educators worldwide. In line with the Society's Mission, the overriding focus for *Journal* submissions is on articles related to professional and personal growth of educators and/or excellence in education. Deadlines are listed below.

***Collegial Exchange: 90-4; Print***  
(Postmark deadline is December 15, 2023)  
No designated theme

***Journal: 90-5; Online***  
(Postmark deadline is March 1, 2024)  
Topic of choice related to professional and personal growth of educators  
and/or excellence in education.

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***Collegial Exchange: 91-2; Print***  
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# Educators' Health: The DKG Answer



The mission statement of The Delta Kappa Gamma Society the organization's quest to promote "professional and educators and excellence in education"—provides a tripartite evident in this issue of the *Collegial Exchange*. As it came issue rather "intense"—a bit more personal and reflective than tone. Writers seemed to be stretching to find the balance professional growth—or perhaps understand the twining of these two concepts around the core goal of promoting excellence in education. I wonder if readers will sense, as I did, a certain wistfulness to some of the pieces ... a longing to find answers to the challenges of current life (not just the core challenge of providing educational excellence but also the corollary challenges of isolation, war, inequity/bias) and a sense that DKG may provide some of the answers by its unique blend of collegiality and professionalism.

International—indicating personal growth of women emphasis that is uniquely together, I found this particular some other issues in overall point between personal and

The image that kept coming to my mind as I considered a way to introduce the issue was that of the caduceus—the symbol of the medical profession—that features a central winged staff with two snakes intertwined. Snakes, with their ability to shed and regenerate skin, were ancient symbols of health and healing; the staff itself was a symbol of ambassadorship in those same ancient times. Imposing the DKG analogy, the staff is our core role as educators—carrying our message and promise of excellence in education. The two snakes become professional growth and personal growth—components that support, promote, and provide balance to that key role. The intertwining begs the question whether an educator can have one without the other—can grow as a professional without growing personally... and vice versa.

Readers will note a recurring message about meeting personal needs in this issue—ranging from ensuring mental and physical health, to understanding the unique impacts of trauma, to developing leadership focused on service to others, to tailoring professional development for incoming teachers, to sharing tips and tricks for connecting members ... and more. The issue seems to be saying that promoting excellence in education is not just about being a talented and skillful educator; it is equally about being a realized individual who connects with others in a meaningful way and whose consistent personal and professional regeneration and growth—whose "health" as an educator—is structured and supported by our unique Society.

For the key women educators of DKG, the analogy to the caduceus is not as unusual as it may seem at first. The unique blend of opportunity for professional and personal growth is indeed what undergirds our health as educators—and, in turn, of the Society as a whole—as we pursue excellence in education in service to the world.

**Judy Merz, EdD**  
**Editor**





# Reflections on the DKG Journey for Life

*By Becky Sadowski,  
2023 International Achievement Award Recipient*

Each year, The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International recognizes one member for distinguished service to the Society. From recommendations submitted by members, chapters, or state organizations, the international executive board selects a member for this honor, symbolized by a gold medallion presented to the recipient. We invited 2023 winner Becky Sadowski to share her thoughts on DKG.

Never underestimate your impact on another person's journey. I realize that the beginning of my 34-year experience in DKG greatly influenced many decisions I would make as a member. The person who first approached me about joining this group of women educators carefully explained that membership is an **honor**—but one that comes with great **responsibility**. I listened as she shared so many exciting opportunities that would be available to me as well as the women who would support me along the way. She only asked that I be open to those possibilities, with the understanding that I would make my own choices regarding how I wanted to contribute to the life of the organization. I was eager to see where the journey would take me, and I quickly discovered that my mentor's description was certainly accurate! With the encouragement and support of so many others "traveling with me," I have enjoyed all parts of my membership. I am filled with gratitude for the people, places, opportunities, and connections that are woven throughout my DKG memories. My hope is that all of us will continue to embrace the responsibility of Society membership as we enjoy the tremendous benefits offered to us.

Every day we seem to be confronted with the challenge of change as we seek new ways to accomplish our work or provide tools and resources for guiding groups through the process of creating positive change. We learned this all too well when we found ourselves in a very different experience as we navigated a world impacted by a pandemic. DKG members quickly learned to communicate and accomplish their work through a more efficient use of technology. Our creativity and willingness to adapt allowed us to continue carrying out our Mission. Dr. Blanton







approached her dreams for DKG with a courageous spirit. Let's not be afraid to dream about new and different possibilities that will move us forward as a strong, relevant organization. Considering these possibilities provides us with an opportunity to focus on and shape our future.

We are a member-driven organization, which means the work of DKG is accomplished through our members who are willing to serve. Serving requires us to give of ourselves, whether it is our time, talents, leadership, ideas, or support. Those who choose to serve often discover that, while their actions may benefit someone or something else, they are also receiving a benefit. They have the opportunity to grow and make a difference in someone's life or even in the world.

DKG needs women who will assume leadership roles at any of the Society's three levels. John Maxwell, well-known for his books on leadership, offers this description of a leader: "A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way" (2019). What most of us have discovered is that different situations may call for different kinds of leadership. DKG members **are** leaders. It is when we work together—sharing our different talents, perspectives, and solutions—that we realize the impact of our efforts. I can think of no better example of this kind of collaborative leadership than a state organization's members working with a facilitator during a revitalization visit. **All** members present are asked to participate by responding to several questions posed by the facilitator during a large-group discussion. A considerable amount of time is set aside so that all members may have an opportunity to speak, and an intentional effort is made to develop an environment that encourages mutual respect. One question that often draws a great variety of responses is: "How do you want to change the 'story' of your state organization?" When members understand that there is no right or wrong answer and that all ideas are truly valued, the door to a successful revitalization experience opens. As Benjamin Zander, author of *The Art of Possibility* (2000), reminded us at the 2018 international convention ... We can lead from any chair in the room!



*Past International Achievement Award Winners — from top left: Barbara Clausen (2022), Evelyn Barron (2005), and Dr. Judith Merz (2019) — congratulate 2023 recipient Becky Sadowski at the 2023 International Conference in Phoenix.*

Using our voices to reveal our ideas, concerns, and successes is an important responsibility that we all share. I was excited to see the number of members who recently participated in the *Town Hall Meetings* via ZOOM. Many have also offered input to consultants Avenue M regarding their membership experience. Last biennium, we began meeting electronically with members who had just become DKG members. We answered their questions, inquired about their expectations for membership, and emphasized the importance of staying connected in a variety of ways. The *Inside International* meetings have provided another way for us to communicate. You are being heard, and your voices do matter!

I am deeply honored to receive the International Achievement Award. I appreciate all of you and your dedication to our wonderful organization. Thank you again for being a significant part of my DKG journey. I look forward to our future travels together!





# Charlotte's Web: A Model of Uniting Servant Leadership with Today's Essential Leadership Skills

By Phyllis Broughton

Recently, I spent a week with my 11-year-old grandson, during which time I introduced him to some of the movies and books from my childhood. This led to our discussion about *Charlotte's Web*, a timeless 1952 classic by E. B. White. He had seen the movie and enjoyed it. I shared with him the leadership qualities that I saw in Charlotte, the spider. Later, I found myself contemplating how Charlotte's unique leadership style might align with organizational leadership.

*Charlotte's Web* is a beloved children's novel that follows the friendship between Wilbur, a young pig, and Charlotte, a wise and resourceful spider. Wilbur is loved and cared for by Fern, the farmer's daughter. Wilbur is the runt of the litter, and Fern takes him as her special pet. Wilbur is fed well and very happy living in the barnyard with all of his animal friends—until he learns that he is destined for slaughter. With knowledge of his pending death, Charlotte uses her web-spinning abilities to create messages praising Wilbur and convincing the humans on the farm to spare him. At one point, Wilbur asks Charlotte why she has helped him. She replies, “You have been my friend ... I wove my webs for you because I liked you” (White, 1952, p. 164). Wilbur is touched with gratitude by Charlotte's honesty and the depth of her friendship.

With the help of barnyard friends and Charlotte's clever plans, Wilbur becomes a local sensation, with people coming from distances to see him and the web-spinning results in his pen. As Charlotte's life comes to an end, she leaves behind a sac of eggs, ensuring her legacy lives on. Wilbur faithfully watches over the eggs and takes care of them. The novel explores many themes of friendship, sacrifice, and the cycle of life.



## Pondering Leadership and Charlotte

In 2021, colleague Kaye Dotson and I published a research study on the leadership styles of past presidents of a North Carolina Delta Kappa Gamma chapter. These included (a) transformational leadership, (b) servant leadership, (c) visionary leadership, and (d) shared leadership. Results of interviews suggested that the past presidents used a combination or blend of all these styles of leadership, with servant leadership mentioned most frequently (Broughton & Dotson, 2021).

The various leadership styles from the research study (Broughton & Dotson, 2021) were identified as



the following:

1. Transformational leadership fosters and supports individual growth, provides constructive feedback, and promotes a collaborative and trusting environment among team members.
2. Servant leadership is based on the concept of serving others as the priority. (Greenleaf, 2002). It takes into consideration serving others' needs first. Servant leaders have a deep commitment to listening and being empathetic to others.
3. Visionary leadership emphasizes connecting individuals with a common vision and facilitating effective communication for collaboration. This type of leader employs the diverse talents and skills of other members to achieve strategic goals.
4. Shared leadership emphasizes a shared vision, encourages input, provides recognition, and solves problems. It includes all members to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization.

Based on this previous research, I realized that servant leadership—with its emphasis on listening and being empathetic—seemed to best describe Charlotte, the spider. Servant leadership is a desire to lead by serving others as a means of supporting the success of an organization and its members. By serving others and prioritizing their needs, leaders can create a supportive and empowering environment that promotes growth and achievement for the members as well as the organization. Accordingly, my goal in this article is to identify the relevance and connection of servant leadership—as portrayed by Charlotte, the spider—with today's leadership landscape.

As I revisited *Charlotte's Web*, I noted the numerous leadership skills exemplified by Charlotte and how these skills demonstrate servant leadership. Charlotte is a leader as she focuses on so many decisions to benefit Wilbur, the pig, and others. Throughout the book, she demonstrates servant leadership by serving others and putting their needs first.

The integration of essential leadership skills as noted by Greenleaf (2002) and Focht (2014) highlights the foundational principles of leadership. According to Greenleaf, "Servant Leadership originates from the innate desire to serve others and prioritize their needs" (2002, p. 7). Focht's (2014) key servant leadership characteristics include (a) valuing others, (b) humility, (c) listening, (d) trusting, and (e) caring. I used the characteristics from these two key authors to connect to Charlotte's servant leadership skills.

Charlotte exemplifies these skills through the following:

1. Valuing others: Charlotte prioritizes Wilbur's well-being and goes above and beyond to save him from being slaughtered. She selflessly uses her own skills and resources to protect him. She provides opportunities to recognize Wilbur in a positive way with her web-weaving skills with the words "SOME PIG," "TERRIFIC," "RADIANT," and "HUMBLE" (White, 1952).
2. Humility: Charlotte does not think about her own importance but focuses on the needs of others and identifies with Wilbur's need for friendship and support. She takes it upon herself to be his friend, offering encouragement and advice throughout the story.



*Balancing Act* © Photograph by Angela Tomlinson, DC; Spring 2021 Art Gallery





3. **Listening:** Charlotte is fully present when interacting with others and demonstrates active listening. She is attentive to the concerns and fears expressed by Wilbur and others in the barn. She responds with empathy and understanding.
4. **Trusting:** Through Charlotte's listening and compassion, Wilbur and the other animals develop trust among themselves, which allows for a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives. Wilbur trusts Charlotte with his life and continues to be loyal to Charlotte even after her death.
5. **Caring:** Charlotte's nurturing for Wilbur and the others builds a bond, demonstrating that caring leaders cultivate strong relationships within their team members. Caring for each other creates a positive and supportive environment for each of the animals.

## Beyond Charlotte: Lessons for the Future

The next generation of leaders, including Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, is emerging in leadership roles. These generations have grown up with technology and the Internet, which have shaped their values, expectations, and motivations. Although technology plays a crucial role in leadership, it is important to recognize that a fundamental understanding of leadership is still necessary and that technology serves as a tool to enhance leadership skills rather than as a substitute for them. Focht (2014) commented that new ideas and technologies are used by leaders to expand their skills. Even though *Charlotte's Web* takes place on a farm in a non-technological environment, effective communication, collaboration, caring, and empathy are demonstrated as the principles of leadership.



Apart from the earlier works of Greenleaf and Focht, a report by the 2023 International Institute for Management Development identified the following skills for today's key leadership roles (Anonymous, 2023). Charlotte effectively used her servant leadership skills to meet these identified skills.

1. **Relationship building:** Leaders strive to build cohesive and engaged teams by investing time and effort into building and strengthening relationships among team members. This helps foster collaboration, trust, and effective communication within the team. Charlotte provided unconditional support for Wilbur by nurturing and connecting with others. Her relationships were strengthened by fostering trust and cooperation among the animals and seeking assistance and input from all the animals.
2. **Agility and adaptability:** Leaders need to be adaptable and capable of facilitating change. Charlotte's ability to think outside of the box showed resilience in adapting to and overcoming obstacles with which she was not familiar even while she served others.
3. **Innovation and creativity:** Successful leaders foster innovation by developing and implementing outstanding ideas. Innovation is seen as a foundation for success and can help organizations stay competitive in a rapidly evolving world. Charlotte explored and exhibited innovative ideas to save Wilbur. She explored new ideas, words, and strategies through her web-weaving skills to capture the attention of humans to save Wilbur.
4. **Motivation:** Leaders must possess the ability to engage team members and create a positive and motivating work environment. Boosting morale is an effective technique for developing positive attitudes among team members as it leads to increased engagement, self-confidence, and



productivity. Charlotte was motivated by a sense of duty to Wilbur based on their friendship and driven by a desire to protect and guide him as well as to share her remarkable web-weaving skills for others to see. She included many of the animals in the barn to help with her strategies to save Wilbur, including Templeton, the rat, who was instrumental in searching for special words for Charlotte to weave.

5. **Decision-making:** Leaders are responsible for making sound, rational, and solid decisions that benefit the organization. This can involve making difficult decisions, even if they may not align with the overall benefit of others. Decision-making often occurs under pressure, requiring leaders to evaluate options and choose the best course of action. Charlotte did not know all the answers needed to “save” Wilbur’s life, but she invested her time and decision-making skills to plan accordingly.
6. **Conflict management:** Leaders should be skilled in managing and resolving conflicts that arise within teams or organizations. By effectively addressing conflicts, leaders can prevent them from negatively impacting productivity and engagement. Charlotte provided emotional support for Wilbur and resolved conflict among the animals by allowing them to express concerns in their roles to help Wilbur.
7. **Negotiation:** Effective leaders understand the importance of communication and negotiation in reaching mutually beneficial outcomes. They strive for win-win solutions where both parties involved feel satisfied with the agreement reached. The animals contributed to each other’s well-being by sharing resources or skills. With Charlotte’s web-weaving skills, she not only saved Wilbur’s life but also gained recognition and respect for her talents of weaving.
8. **Critical thinking:** Critical thinking is a vital skill for leaders, enabling them to think clearly, make logical connections, and consider various perspectives. It involves identifying issues, exploring potential options, and making informed decisions that lead to the best possible outcomes. Throughout the book, Charlotte tackled obstacles and considered alternative solutions.

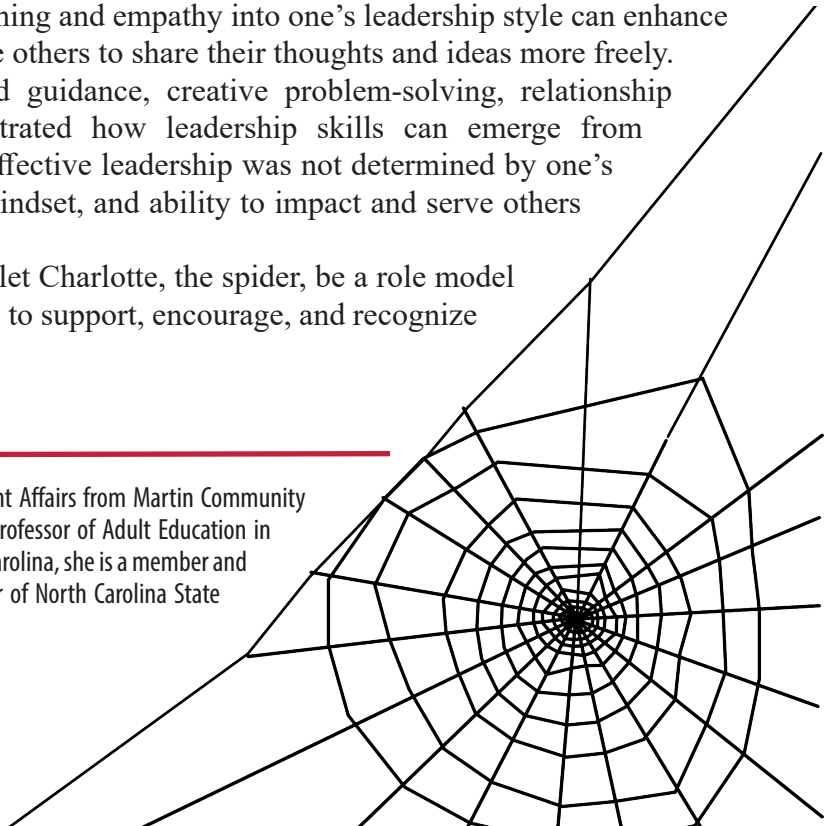
These leadership roles and skills are essential for leaders to navigate complex and dynamic environments, inspire their teams, and drive organizational success. Charlotte’s active listening skills demonstrated the importance of being empathetic and attentive to nonverbal cues and of asking clarifying questions. These qualities enable effective communication, build trust, and create an environment where everyone feels heard and understood. Incorporating active listening and empathy into one’s leadership style can enhance relationships, promote collaboration, and inspire others to share their thoughts and ideas more freely.

Charlotte’s servant leadership mindset and guidance, creative problem-solving, relationship building, and inspirational influence demonstrated how leadership skills can emerge from unexpected places. Charlotte emphasized that effective leadership was not determined by one’s status or position but rather by one’s actions, mindset, and ability to impact and serve others positively.

To be a servant leader in your organization, let Charlotte, the spider, be a role model as you dedicate your time, energy, and resources to support, encourage, and recognize others.

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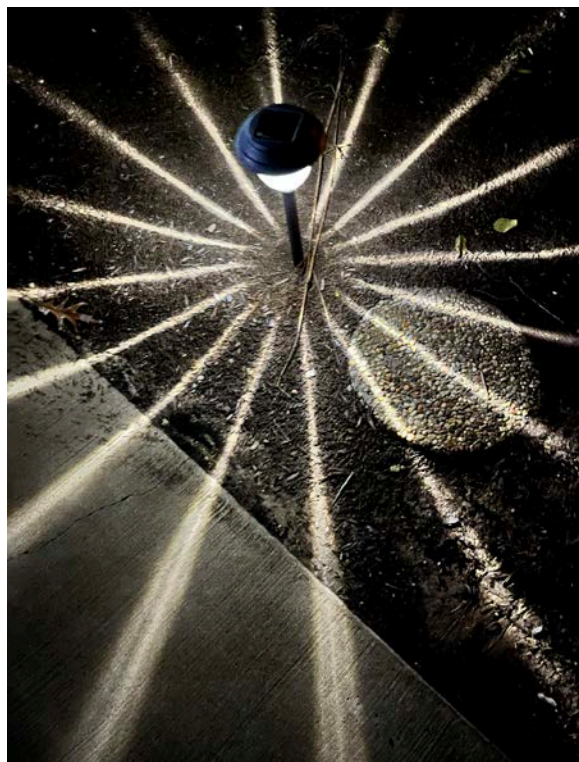
# Sandbagging: A Metaphor for Understanding Trauma

By Karen Gross

Two events inspired me to think of connections between sandbags and trauma. First, I had just finished reading Charlotte Maya's moving memoir, *Sushi Tuesdays* (2023). It is a poignant, honest, and witty story of how she and her two young children coped with the death by suicide of her 41-year-old husband (and children's father). As she says, the book took 12 years to live and 10 years to write. The book touched me professionally and personally. Indeed, who goes through life without dealing with grief, howsoever defined? The answer is: no one.

And to be clear: grief can be caused by a wide-ranging number of events or even the non-occurrence of events, and what causes grief is not homogenous. Grief does not always derive from death; termination of relationships through divorce can produce grief. So can a relationship fracture pre-marriage. Grief can also come from injuries, such as through shootings or loss of a limb, or it can stem from loss of a home or a car or a favorite object saved for generations. And grief is but one of many forms that trauma can take.

The second event occurred when U.S. President Joseph Biden tripped over a sandbag when he attended the Air Force Academy graduation ceremony in early June 2023. The president literally fell to the ground, although he was uninjured. What was startling to me, in addition to the presence of a sandbag on a stage, was what the president quipped after the event. Without pause, as if to address those who were focused on his mental acumen, he said, "I've been sandbagged." Now, he meant this literally, but he also captured a secondary meaning of the term "sandbagged." The word has been defined in dictionaries to describe having been duped, coerced, or intimidated—but it is also defined as being hit or stung unexpectedly. Howsoever the term is defined, no person wants to be sandbagged.



*A Silent Reflection* © Photograph by Mary Stayner, IL; Spring 2023 Art Gallery

## Sandbags

With these two events in mind, let's turn to sandbags and trauma—a broader concept than grief although there is overlap. In her book, Maya's college friend points out to her early in her recovery that grief is like a heavy sandbag. If we never pick up the sandbag (grief), we will keep tripping over it. When we pick the sandbag up, we note that the bag has a tiny hole that lets its sand drain out over time. Maya keeps referencing this sandbag as she and her family and friends process her late husband's suicide. The point? We need to avoid getting sandbagged if that is possible . . . and we must deal directly with trauma rather than hide it.

## The Sandbag's Shape and Draining



For me, the sandbag metaphor takes on added nuance in the larger context of trauma, especially when one focuses on students and educators. Grief caused by death is but one form that trauma can take. We have trauma everywhere, especially in the waning of the pandemic (although COVID-19 still persists). We don't have to look far to see traumatized adults and children in our schools that opened and closed and reopened. Ponder the large number of dysregulated students across the educational landscape. Ponder the exhausted educators. Ponder the families who have experienced addictions and job losses and homelessness, realities that students carry to school with them, often in invisible backpacks. So, we are surrounded by sandbags. They are at our feet everywhere we are.



However, one key for me is that, if one lifts the sandbag and it starts draining, it changes shape. And the shape it takes moving forward is not uniform for those holding the sandbag. There is no ONE sandbag and no ONE drainage system. Like students, each sandbag is different. And just as occurs with students, how one navigates and moves forward from trauma differs.

Our sandbags may look similar on the ground, but, when lifted and draining, they look and feel different. The bag's shape, the speed of draining, the weight of the bag at any given time—these all vary. And both children and adults must lift sandbags. Imagine a large sandbag's ability to overpower a young person; simply getting it off the ground is hard. Denial is easier. Just read Maya's book to see the different ways her two young sons dealt with their father's suicide; at the conscious level, one of them ignored it while the other tried to understand it.

For me, one key to appreciating the depth of the sandbag metaphor is to breakdown the item's "life."

- First, one needs to see the sandbag. Not everyone sees it; some folks just keep tripping. This occurs among students; when we see students dysregulating, we need to understand that their behavior (dysregulation) is the language of trauma.

- Second, even if one sees the sandbag, lifting it is tough for children and adults. We often need help with getting the load into our arms (minds and bodies). And we need to know we need help. Yes, people can offer help, but those with big sandbags can be helped only if they recognize the sandbags before them and can reach out to others.

We can debate the role of educators in helping students see and deal with their sandbags. Some educators do not see themselves as prepared for addressing social and emotional issues as they certainly prefer to focus on content learning. But even those without specific trauma training will encounter trauma among their students and, although they are not and should not be therapists, they can treat students in ways that are therapeutic and trauma-responsive. How they can do that is beyond the scope of this article, but here's one key strategy: Educators who connect and communicate with students are better able to help them.

- Third, how the sand drains differs from situation to situation and student to student and educator to educator. That means homogenizing how we help those struggling with grief or trauma is a flawed approach. We need to see people's situations contextually. By way of example: Death of a parent is not identical for all children. Some children know their parent is dying and, by coming to understand what is occurring and the loss that is impending, they can discover ways of dealing with the realities they confront





on their own and with others.

Death by suicide is something altogether different. The age of the child and the gender of the parent dying and the child surviving all affect their reactions. Very young children may not understand the concept of suicide, let alone death; older children may know what suicide means but cannot accept that a parent would take his or her own life. The loss of a father by a male child takes on special meaning as a role model disappears, leaving the child with only a female role model in the form of their mother. Female children who lose their mothers struggle with finding female role models, as they only have a male role model to guide them—including on sensitive issues that are gender related, such as sexuality and menstruation.

- Fourth, the sandbag never disappears . . . although we may assume it does. There is always a wee bit of sand in it—sand grains stay around. Not to trivialize this, but those of us who have lived near a beach know that sand goes everywhere and is impossible to eliminate completely from the cracks and crevices where it has lodged. Thus, the sandbag and at least some of its contents are never completely gone.

- Fifth, the sandbag's presence in our life can be changed over time. We can paint the sandbag. We can add color to it. We can decorate it. We can move it into new places and spaces. We can give it a home, a comfortable place to rest—literally and figuratively. Imagine the sandbag as a piece of evolving art. We can give the sandbag a place in our contemporary lives.

- Sixth, what happens to all the sand that spills out of the sandbag over time? Does it just sit there? Do we sweep it away? Do we turn it into beaches in our minds? We can't just let the sand pile up. We need to find a place not just for the sandbag but also for the sand.

## Schools and Sandbags

Reading Maya's memoir and the struggles of her children made me think about the experiences of trauma that abound in and around education and the students we serve. There are many examples of this, both within the United States and abroad. In the United States, we can reflect on the number of lockdowns that students and educators experience just through "swatting" incidents—those fake calls to 911 saying there is an active shooter at a particular school. These aren't actual emergencies to be sure, but they appear real when they are occurring. When one is on a lockdown, it feels like what it is: a lockdown. Whether students and educators are locked in classrooms or closets or closing shades or ducking under tables and maintaining silence, their autonomic nervous systems are activated. Seeing police cars and SWAT teams and weapons are visuals that get etched into one's mind.



A *Washington Post* (Rich & Cox, 2018) investigation estimated that more than 4 million students experienced lockdowns that were not "for real" events during the 2017–2018 school year. That number has only risen since then, given the widely reported rise in the number of swatting incidents. Then add in the number of students and educators who have experienced real lockdowns given the plethora of shootings within and near schools.

In other nations, with natural disasters abounding, including earthquakes, floods, and fires as well as the spread of disease, large numbers of students have also been exposed to traumatic events. And those numbers do not include students who are in war-torn nations. In 2023, the Global Collaboration



on Traumatic Stress estimated that 70% of the world's population have experienced at least one traumatic event (Salgado, 2023). And globally, we know that approximately 25% of the population are children aged 14 or under according to the World Bank Group (2022). If one adds youth and children together, the global population percentage for “young people” is estimated to rise to 40%.

Ponder the number of sandbags that surround us. Some of us have more than one. And all of us need help dealing with seeing and unpacking (draining) our sandbags and then finding places

where those bags and sand can be located over the length of our lifetimes. Educators can play a central role in dealing with sandbags; they are in a position to help students see them, carry them, and manage them.

## Sandbag Positives

One last thought bears consideration. When there is a flood or broken dam or a storm, sandbags can actually be our saviors. They can come to our rescue. They can keep us safe. They provide us with a defense against nature's fury. They can be stacked in high piles, serving as barriers against harm.

Just as we can see benefits to physical sandbags, we need to see there are some positives to be garnered from negative situations, including trauma. While it strikes many as counter-intuitive, something bad can lead to something good—eventually. Crisis can create opportunities, and there are individual and collective positives from trauma. I detail these in *Trauma Doesn't Stop at the School Door* (2020) and as co-author of a forthcoming book titled *Mending Education* (2024), premised on the positives the pandemic engendered in education. Crises can help us grow, albeit painfully.

Maya's memoir reminds us that trauma, including grief, can and does lead us forward and enable us to learn, grow, and eventually regain our balance—as did she and her children. Standing on sand is difficult. It can make us lose balance and tumble. But, with time, we can find equipoise. Sandbags and the sand within them, lifted and used well, teach us that important lesson.

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# Want Members? Want to Keep Them? Include Fellowship!

By Marilyn Nease

If I were to sum up the most important “best practice” for recruiting, retaining, and reinstating members, I would say, “Fellowship!”

Almost 100 years ago, Dr. Annie Webb Blanton and her 11 co-Founders developed seven Purposes. Purpose 1, these 12 women said, is “To unite women educators of the world in a genuine spiritual fellowship.” Purpose 1 is not, they said,

- honoring women educators,
- advancing women in the field of education,
- promoting legislation that supports education,
- giving scholarships and fellowships to women,
- stimulating women educators’ personal and professional growth, or
- informing members about economic, social, political, and educational issues.

Again: Purpose 1, these Founders agreed, is “To unite women educators...in...fellowship.”

Our Founders were brilliant. They knew educators need each other. They knew no one understands a woman educator like another woman educator. Purposes 2–7 are vital to DKG’s Mission, and they will naturally fall into place once Purpose 1/fellowship is available to all members and once all members feel the fellowship. Without that fellowship, many potential members will not join DKG, or they will join and drop out because they do not feel welcomed into the fellowship.

Of course, not all members will agree that fellowship is the most important of our seven Purposes just because it is listed first. They will remind us that these Purposes were crafted nearly 100 years ago in a much different professional environment. However, in today’s professional environment, fellowship with other women educators is as important as ever. Inviting members and non-members alike into the DKG circle of fellowship offers support to members and their fellow educators. Other members will say that the fellowship ideas offered in this article might not be applicable in all the countries where DKG operates. They will add that the cost of membership is high for some families, and paying such a sum per year to have fellowship together can seem excessive. These concerns are valid, but in our efforts to “get things done” in DKG, the importance of fellowship can sometimes be overlooked. We must remember that fellowship is a component of DKG and that it lends itself to the work of the other six Purposes. Accordingly, each chapter must adapt the following examples of fellowship activities and practices or devise new ones that will be effective in their own teaching and meeting environments and that will be feasible with members’ economic realities.

“...No one understands a woman educator like another woman educator.”

## Best Practices to Make Ongoing Fellowship Available to All Members

When recruiting members, we need to focus first on the joy—the fellowship of DKG membership. As we recruit these new members, we should keep in mind one thing we love about DKG fellowship. Is it the sharing? The laughter? The listening? The understanding? The refreshing break from a to-do list at school or home? Whatever defines for each of us the joy/fellowship of DKG, that is what we should share with potential recruits.





Before a chapter meeting officially starts, fellowship begins with greeters who welcome each arriving attendee. Why? We all want to receive a smile and be acknowledged when attending a meeting.

Fellowship continues by sitting with and getting to know new members or continuing members whom we do not already know. Although we all want to sit with our friends during a meeting, we must decide deliberately to pull new members and other members with whom we are not well acquainted

into our circle of friends, introducing them and engaging them in conversation.

During the meeting, we must schedule time for fellowship, just as we schedule time for the program and for chapter business. We can think of a 20-20-20 plan. First, we can begin with 20 minutes for fellowship. These 20 minutes can open with welcoming members, introducing guests, and hearing an inspirational message before moving to interactive fellowship. Interactive fellowship can include ice breakers and getting-to-know-each-other activities. For example, we can ask everyone to stand and form a circle around the room based on attendees' years of membership or induction years. In other words, members will arrange themselves in order from first-year members to 50-year members. What will happen? Members will interact as they figure out where to stand in the circle. They will have fun and get to know each other!

As another example, we can ask everyone to stand and form a circle around the room based on their birthday month; then, they can stand within each month by their day. Discoveries, such as finding that two members have the same birthday, can be shared with the whole group. Again, what will happen? Members will interact, have fun talking, and get to know each other better!

As one more example, before the meeting we can ask a beginning member and a continuing member to be prepared to tell chapter members one to three things about themselves, such as a hobby, a favorite color, or a beloved vacation spot. During the meeting, we can ask them to share with the whole group; then, they can call on two more members to stand and share about the same prompts. Once again, what will happen? Members will have fun and get to know each other better!

After 20 minutes of fellowship activities, the second 20 minutes are for the program. And finally, the last 20 minutes are for the business meeting.

After the meeting, we can use our chapter membership list to note who was absent so that we can send a "We missed you" note by email, text, phone call, or snail mail. Why? We all want to feel that we were missed—that our presence or our absence matters. We can also send a happy-to-see-you note to members who attended again after one or more absences.

### **Three More Best Practices for Fellowship: Member Spotlights, Ongoing Mentorships, Reception Lines**

First, we can spotlight new members so that everyone gets to know them. One way is to share with the entire chapter something learned about a new member during a small-group fellowship activity. Another method is to call, email, or text new members and ask them to respond to three or four fun and informative questions. Then, we can put a question-and-answer article about our new members, along with headshot



photos, in our chapter newsletter. We can do the same thing with continuing members. A newsletter can be short, just a page or two, and a personal page introducing members is delightful to create and fun to read!

Second, we need to serve as an ongoing mentor to anyone we recommend for membership. We need to check in with the new member about attending the next meeting, offer her a ride to the meetings or meet her at the meeting room door, introduce her to others, answer her questions, and encourage her to attend the fellowship times that happen beyond chapter meetings, such as lunches at local restaurants and field trips in the community. In truth, though, we must not leave engaging a new member in fellowship solely up to the member who recommended her. Instead, we *all* must serve as mentors who purposefully welcome new members, go out of our way to talk with them, and make them feel they belong in our chapter.

Third, we need to include time for a receiving line after every induction ceremony. Every continuing member will go through the line and welcome each new member—with a smile, name, and congratulations. The new members being greeted will not remember all the names and faces, but they will remember how welcomed they felt, and they will look forward to the next opportunity for more fellowship!

### Summary

Recruiting members is vital to all chapters. However, it is important that we not only recruit members but also retain those members—and fellowship is key!

DKG has experienced many changes since its founding in 1929, yet some things have remained the same. Our Founders were right about Purpose #1: Fellowship is central to DKG. “To unite women educators of the world in a genuine spiritual fellowship” means to provide opportunities to connect and enjoy time with each other.



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# Illiterate Anomaly: Journey of a Different Kind of Teacher

By Naomi Molina de Wood

While channel surfing one day, I heard a **famous pediatric neurosurgeon** talk about the importance of reading for school-age children. The history of my non-reading life flashed before my eyes. My story began as a young girl who experienced the educational cliché of being “lost between the cracks.” **I graduated from high school not being able to read.** In a world that touts “no child left behind,” I was the child who was left behind. In my most formative years for reading, I did not receive the support or academic foundation that could have altered my future. My journey to becoming literate was difficult, but it molded me into an educator who realizes the importance of considering the emotional as well as the academic needs of students.

### Through the School Years

My primary years were fraught with teachers who were more interested in training a class to be well-behaved than in nurturing individual young minds. During my train wreck of an education, second grade ranks high on the list of failed academic experiences. I had an older teacher who was infamous for being abusive toward children. I was terrified of her because she gave a myriad of students “pops” every day. In her mind, they were warranted. As in any good revolt, the word spread clandestinely among the class to wear newspaper underneath our underwear so the “pops” would not hurt so much. Heavily padded underwear was our class’s definition of great courage, defiance, and revenge.



Eventually, the day came when she gave “pops” to the quiet girl afraid of her shadow... me. I had committed an unpardonable sin. I had not done my homework. **Homework was an enigma to me.** I knew beyond a doubt I was not qualified to achieve remarkable things like completing homework; therefore, I must have deserved this righteous punishment. However, when my father, a mild-mannered man, became aware of what had happened to me, he stormed down to the school and demanded an explanation and an immediate halt to all “pops” for all students. Surprisingly, the abuse stopped for most of the children except a little boy who came to school every day in dirty clothes and smelling of neglect. Sadly, the teacher vented all her frustration on this innocent child,

counting on his parents never noticing or caring about the daily discipline. The rest of the year I was invisible to her. I did not learn to read, nor did I learn the beginnings of how to read. I am sure I did not even know my alphabet. Did this teacher exact her vengeance by becoming passive-aggressive toward me? I will never really know, but she certainly impacted my life negatively.

My educational journey did not improve as I wound my way through grade school. My Grade 4 teacher skipped over me during reading circles instead of addressing my reading needs. From teachers’ comments, **I learned they incorrectly assumed Spanish was my first language** and therefore the reason for my lack of reading ability and comprehension. I began to lie when asked about reading assignments. Then the guilt of lying to my vacation Bible teacher about reading chapters in the Bible plagued me to where I became more introverted and non-verbal.

Another memorable memory involved stinging words from my drop-dead gorgeous, beloved math





teacher. One day, I overheard him discuss me with another teacher, remarking, “*Yes, I agree. Naomi is not college material.*” I did not understand what that meant other than he thought I was not smart enough to go to college. For years, I pondered these mind-invading questions. **“How did he know I was not college material?** Was it something I did? Was it how I looked? Was it because I was not an American? Was it how I dressed? What would make him say such a cruel remark? Although the teacher did not realize I had overheard his comment, a tiny seed was planted in the back of my mind that questioned ... why not me?

In junior high school, I had a young, non-conformist, fiery, ex-nun, hippie-type English teacher. She caused several brouhahas at our school. However, I did not fully grasp the ramifications of her actions until decades later when I became a teacher. This anti-establishment teacher obtained permission to take a few students to the University of Houston main campus to see an unsanctioned theatrical group’s production of *Oedipus Rex*. (Yep: You shall kill your father and marry your mother.) This Greek mythology play was beyond controversial in my small, South Texas world. I will never forget this defining moment in my life. **I stepped off the bus onto the campus of the University of Houston** and immediately observed **I was not struck by lightning**. I did not die of some inexplicable phenomenon. My mind reasoned ... why can’t I go to college? I’m at college right now, aren’t I? Why can’t I be a student here? In my naïve, shallow, unenlightened mind, I truly did not get it. The truth is I did not have the cognitive awareness that I could not read. It simply never occurred to me because, intuitively, I knew I was intelligent. Well, thank goodness for naïve, shallow, unenlightened minds ... because, for some reason, I believed I could do it. The experience, one of the foundations for my desire to attend college, had been spurred by a teacher willing to invest time and energy into her students, to take them beyond the walls of traditional learning. For a non-reader like me, it stirred my desire to experience higher learning.

## The Journey to Reading

My desire to read began with “amor”—or, more accurately, the infatuation I had for the first guy in college who gave me any attention. His name was Jaime, and **I will forever be grateful** for that hormone-driven young man because **he showed kindness to the dumbest and most naïve Hispanic girl on the planet**. I first met him when I was attempting to register at the University of Houston. In my infinite wisdom, I had decided that registering late would be far better than trying to register in a timely manner. Back in the stone annals of university history, all registration was done in person and by hand, so I found myself in a mass-registration crowd of hundreds of students inching our way to the few registrars who were desperately and impatiently trying to assist students. Meanwhile, in preparation for the upcoming ordeal, Jaime took advantage of this time to hit on me and to ask me a blur of questions that I genuinely tried

“**...One of the foundations for my desire to attend college had been spurred by a teacher willing to invest time and energy into her students...**”



## Personal Reflection/Anecdote

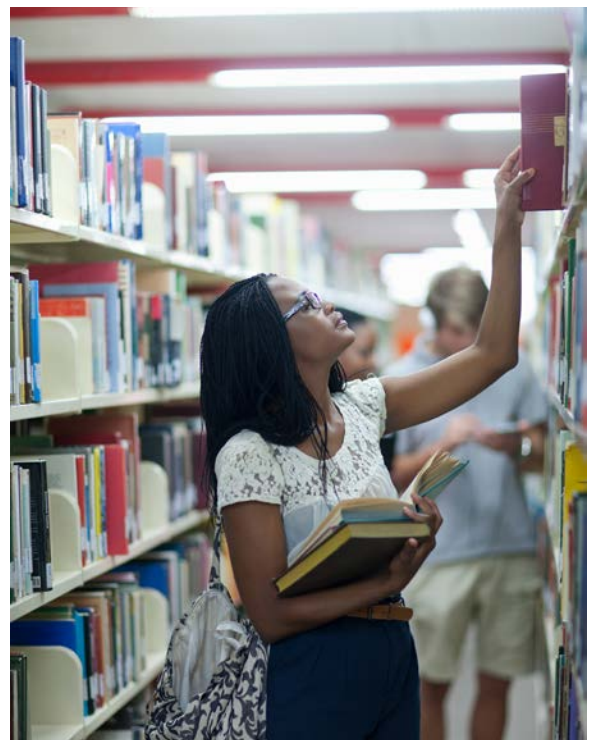
to answer but—unfamiliar with course-registration jargon—to which I provided lame answers at best. The registration process was like a scene from the 1960 movie, H. G. Well's *The Time Machine*, where the Eloi are obediently walking up these large stairs answering the siren of the cannibalistic Morlocks. After hours of detours, the attentive Jaime left me to **a very tired, frustrated registrar who discerned very quickly I did not have a clue about what I was doing.** Through some miracle that I do not recall, I registered for nine credit hours and declared my major to be mathematics. Why math? ... The answer is quite simple and logical. **Mathematics, not so long ago, never involved reading of any significance.** Mathematics was one subject I did not completely fail, and so, it became my major.

I serendipitously met Jaime one afternoon when he was in **one of his militant mindsets, spewing a diatribe** on a book he had been required to read. He was ranting and raving about how this book was a **travesty of Hispanic literature.** I was casually listening, comfortable having no idea what he was talking about but hoping to glean bits and pieces of knowledge in order to become a better student. Abruptly, Jaime handed me the book and asked me to read it so we could discuss it when we would see each other the following Monday. I was horrified. I knew I could not impress him with an insightful critique of the book. **My goal was to survive the looming conversation** without coming across as a complete imbecile. I was a wreck all weekend as **I frantically tried to read and understand what the book was about.** Jaime had stated that it should take me about one hour to read because it was so small. During the weekend, I spent hours attempting to read and comprehend the book, but I made no real progress. Come Monday, I was ready to lie with great conviction. To my eternal relief, Jaime was like the dog in the movie *UP* who got distracted by hearing, “*Squirrel.*” He was on to something entirely different! Thank you, Jaime, for NEVER remembering to ask me about that book!

Many semesters later, I enrolled in the same course Jaime had taken. I read the same book as part of the **required reading for a class entitled “Mexican American Literature.”** It took me about an hour to read. **How did I teach myself to read?** It was a painfully difficult and extremely protracted ordeal. To explain pragmatically with oversimplification, I developed three strategies. First, I wrote down countless words I could not understand or pronounce. Second, I stumbled upon a secret to help comprehension: I read aloud to myself in private. My brain understood when it heard my voice speaking words, then sentences, and eventually paragraphs. As a third strategy, I repeatedly reread the paragraphs aloud.

During this season in my life, I became interested in my Hispanic culture and heritage. **I became a regular visitor to the tiny basement bookstore/publishing house of Arte Publico. There, I randomly chose books that changed my life.** For the first time, I was reading about characters in a book who could have been my aunts, uncles, and cousins. **I felt like I had been blind and suddenly gained sight. I finally understood the drive, desire, and passion to read.** With a grateful and sincere heart, I am **thankful to Arte Publico** for publishing books by Hispanic authors, with Hispanic characters and storylines, in the 1970s.

In the following years, I took as many courses as possible based on Mexican American studies. These courses made a connection for me to learn more about myself and improve my reading skills. One such course was a Mexican American sociology class that identified so many unspoken truths about my native culture. It rattled





my core because I had never heard an accurate articulation of the idiosyncrasies of my Latino life. One of these lectures was on unspoken truths about the use of nicknames—or, more appropriately, derogatory nicknames. I was stunned by this information being so causally discussed in the class. The professor was, no doubt, merely sharing a portion of his plethora of knowledge, but it struck me as a blazing shaft of light targeting deeply guarded facts about my childhood. **I still remember the pounding of my heart drowning out the noises around me** as I spiraled downward toward dark memories of my own early educational experiences. Somehow, I managed to escape the tumultuous mental spiral and return to the lecture at hand. Hearing the blinding shaft of information dispensed during this ordinary class lecture was like being on the outside of a house when it explodes. The force of the information picked me up and unmercifully threw me to the ground as the flying shrapnel targeted my every vulnerability. I was not psychologically equipped to process such basic sociological truths about my life.



I dropped the class shortly after that lecture, telling myself I had to drop it because of a class schedule conflict ... but that was not the only reason. For years after graduating from college, I contemplated retaking the class to face myself finally through sociological eyes. It is, most assuredly, still one of my pipe dreams.

During my college years, the struggle to prove myself worthy continued. Reading was still an unmastered skill for me, and the places to look for encouragement were lacking. My Greek mythology professor wrote callously on my paper, **“Drop out of college, get a skill, get a job.”** The anger and the hatred I held for him did not outweigh the embarrassment and shame of feeling so stupid. The arrogance and lack of compassion of the professor fueled a raging passion in me to prove him wrong somehow, someday. I kept that wretched paper for more than 20 years, carrying it with me through college, career highs and lows, marriage, children, divorce, poverty, and re-marriage. After all that time, it was still painful for me to hold that paper in my hands. Those words cut me deeply, but my determination to prove him wrong was a force that propelled me onward.

## Healing and Moving On

In retrospect, time does not always allow for healing, and hindsight is not necessarily 20-20, especially when you are trying to see through years of emotional mutilation. The frequency of those voices etched a deep tattoo onto my inner self that could not be easily erased. As my 20-year high school reunion approached, my brother enthusiastically anticipated this momentous event for me—although I was neither thrilled nor excited. Ideally, one wants to show up at such an event beaming with accomplishments or showing off one’s spouse armed with loads of pictures of perfect kids. I was so far removed from that model of perfection, and the thought of attending this blast into the horror-filled past was not my definition of fun. But my very persuasive brother convinced me to attend and made all the arrangements for me to be at this glorious milestone. While in the ladies’ room, with a few other classmates (whom I could not remember without referencing their name tags), unexpectedly, *I was thrust into an episode of the Twilight Zone*. The slightly inebriated Phoebe (the most popular girl in our class) started ranting about **that dummy class to which we were all assigned during our last 2 years of high school**.

Dummy class? What dummy class? My brain was scanning at supercomputer speed, pulling up files





# Personal Reflection/Anecdote

upon files of recorded memories. My brain search was in overdrive, accessing everything I had stored from high school. What class could she be referencing? As we exited the ladies' room and made our way back into the main ballroom, she spotted a group chatting in the corner and posed the same line of questioning to them as to whether they remembered the *dummy class* they had been forced to take. They all started laughing and trashing the 3-hour class we were in every day of our junior and senior years. Each member of this elite group recounted **how the class was such a waste of time** and provided no real-life benefit.

The realization of the class they were referencing hit me like a violent lightning bolt, unnerving the little self-control I was trying to maintain. They were mocking the vocational class to instruct students about the coming age of computers ... a dummy class ... no! I did not have the presence of mind to tell them that class saved my life. The skills I was taught in the class funded all my college years. How could I explain learning how to *keypunch* opened doors to job after job? **As a non-reader, keypunching was an avenue to exit out of my hopeless future.** I lacked the skills of articulation to express how I was still deeply and eternally grateful for that skill I learned in high school. I was, and still am, grateful for a *school district that had the foresight to give low-income students marketable skills* to make a living and pursue a career immediately out of high school.

My education story ends well because I did go to college. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics. I proved all those who did not believe in my abilities wrong! What in the world motivated me to attend college? I was naïve, inexperienced, unrealistic, and lacking any kind of support. It is not a mystery to me why so many students have never had a real desire to pursue higher education to better their economic status in life, yet I defied the odds and did it.

As traumatic as my individual experiences were, they do not compare to what I have witnessed and heard during my years of working with teens, the endless avalanche of obscenity and razor-sharp words retching from the mouths of well-intentioned parents ripping to shreds the hearts, spirits, and wills of their children. After more than 30 years in the classroom, I have learned **this kind of assault upon children crosses every social, ethnic, and economic distinction.**

Teachers can become students of their students to gain insight into their individual proclivities and decipher the unspoken messages and signals they send out daily. Teachers can become cautiously aware of basing opinions and judgments on the brief time a student is in a classroom or a school. Focus can be redirected to the smallest hint of potential in any area. Teachers can speak life, hope, and possibility into each student's life, beginning a transformation that may, in turn, transform the lives of others.



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# The Gift of Literacy: The Road to Becoming a Reading Teacher

By Alethea E. Sumbry-Cetnarowski

The COVID environment that began in March 2020 had a drastic impact on the way schools functioned in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Daily instruction promptly moved from in-person to online learning. Technology was the new vehicle to ensure that learning could continue. Schools in my district, Milwaukee Public Schools, maintained online learning from March 2020 until April 2021. During this time, I continued my role as the School Support Teacher/Interventionist, delivering 15-minute, online sessions to a second grader in our virtual learning space. I also began a journey of personal and professional growth.

## The Journey Begins

In that spring of 2020, the entire landscape of education was forever changed. So was I. In early June



2020, the end of the school year had finally arrived, and I found myself sitting on my couch wondering if I had done enough to help the second grader reach her potential in reading. The answer was “yes” and “no.” Yes, I had followed the necessary procedures to work with her each day for 15 minutes, to check her progress at the end of each week, and to document appropriate data. To supplement her online learning, I had created and mailed work bundles to her home each week. These bundles included alphabet recognition tasks, decodable readers, handwriting practice, word-family matching games, and more. I helped her obtain a much needed and highly anticipated special education diagnosis and additional support in reading. But my answer was also—No. I sensed I hadn’t exhausted all the strategies

and resources to prepare her for third grade work. When her diagnosis was determined, a fellow educator told me that even though I followed procedures, my student was going to be a person who never could or would read. I was in utter shock and awe. I logged off the online meeting and cried. After much thought and a few additional online workshops during the summer of being “safer at home,” I began my quest to become a licensed reading teacher.

How could I improve a future outcome for students like the one I had just encountered to ensure that they had the necessary tools to succeed in reading? I researched coursework offerings and the timeline that was necessary to complete the work. The reading teacher licensure program offered at Mount Mary University was the perfect fit for me for several reasons. Mount Mary was close to home and school; it was affordable; and I knew the school and professors from my previous studies as an undergraduate and graduate student there years earlier. The university has an excellent reputation, and I have found much success in my career as a result of my own education at Mount Mary. The reading teacher certification would afford me the ability to better identify, understand, and provide quality instruction to struggling readers in hopes of helping them close their achievement gaps. With my husband’s blessing and support, I purchased materials and was again a registered graduate student.



## Portfolio as Evidence

After four consecutive semesters of hard work, I realized I learned a great deal about myself and what it means to be literate in this world. As I recently completed the final phase of my graduate work, I had time to review and reflect upon my final portfolio. The process of developing that portfolio was priceless. In the beginning, I didn't believe that I would or could finish what I had started. The few years leading up to this final semester were some of the toughest in my 25 years as a veteran teacher. When I looked at the final collection of standards I had to meet, proving evidence of my accomplishment seemed impossible. My greatest fear was that I didn't have the necessary artifacts to show that I knew what I was doing. After all the work, time, and energy, would I let myself down?

After a meeting with my professor, I had the clarity that I needed about what components to include in my portfolio, and one Saturday afternoon in mid-February 2023, I was ready. To get comfortable, I brewed a cup of coffee, opened my online files, and began analyzing and selecting my evidence.

As the self-proclaimed pack rat that I am, I found that what I needed was there. I had saved years of my work. I was thrilled to see a wide variety of documents, lesson plans, recordings, spreadsheets, slideshows, essays, projects, and summaries that were worthy of uploading into my final portfolio. This realization helped me regain my confidence and affirm that I could indeed demonstrate my achievements. I worked hard that entire day.

First, I created seven electronic folders, one for each of the seven standards as determined by the International Literacy Association:

- Standard #1: Foundational Knowledge
- Standard #2: Curriculum and Instruction
- Standard #3: Assessment and Evaluation
- Standard #4: Diversity
- Standard #5: Literate Environment
- Standard #6: Professional Learning and Leadership
- Standard #7: Practicum/Clinical Experiences. (2023)

Next, I created cover sheets for each folder. The most challenging part of the process was remembering how I had named my pieces in my online files. To make my search easier, I decided to go back to my original time of inspiration, June 2020. From there, I looked at each item that had anything to do with reading. As I analyzed each piece, I compared what I had to what the standard specified. If it qualified, I listed the name of the artifact on my standards table. Next, I made a copy of the online artifact and moved it into my electronic folder. My artifacts were lining up with the standards, and many pieces overlapped to meet the goals of more than one standard.

I repeated this process in one 8-hour sitting, only stopping to refuel and push on. I reviewed all items that I had created from June 2020 until February 2023. I then proceeded to color code each of my online folders and to label them in this manner: my full name, Alethea Ellen Sumbry-Cetnarowski; project name; International Literacy Association standard number; standard goal and description; and the date. I went back and double checked that each artifact was in the right place, and I ensured that my professor had access to my work.

My final portfolio contained 52 artifacts that showcased my knowledge and understanding of literacy. I included examples of lessons to support phoneme and grapheme correspondence, syllabication, and identification of initial, medial, and final phonemes in words. I also included self-created video tutorials to support my colleagues as they navigated technological resources to support virtual learning. In addition, I included my qualitative research project that analyzed a variety of formative, diagnostic assessments to determine a reader's word count per minute, vocabulary acquisition, fluency, reading comprehension, prosody, and instructional reading level. Last, my portfolio included certificates I had earned from four educational platforms that demonstrated my proficiency in the ability to assess and instruct students,





including English Language Learners, using digital tools approved at the district and state levels. I am so incredibly proud of this accomplishment.

## Reflections as a Result of Portfolio Development

As I came to achieve my goal, I asked myself three questions: First, what did it take to help a student become a proficient reader? Second, what was the difference between a student who struggled to read and a student with a reading disability? Finally, did I have what it took to know the difference and lay the foundation for my students that would give them the ability to be proficient readers? As I reflected upon my journey to obtain this license, I found the answers to these three questions.

First, to help a student become a proficient reader, I knew that it took a high level of dedication to provide explicit, systematic instruction on a regular basis. I had the intrinsic motivation and skill to make this happen. Second, through careful study and direct work, I understood and could identify the differences between a student who struggled in reading and a student with a reading disability. For the past 3 years, I was able to work with students in that regard.

With impactful planning, delivery of interventions, and collection of data, I was able to prove or disprove the need for individualized reading plans for more than 20 students in Grades 1–5. Finally, I was fully confident and had proven myself capable of recognizing and pinpointing student strengths and areas of need in reading.

## Conclusion

The greatest gift that anyone can receive from compulsory education—in the public or private sector—is the gift of literacy. I am hopeful that all children can receive this gift before graduating from high school. Such literacy is the hallmark of education and the key to a productive and successful future as a global citizen. As I make my mark as a reading teacher, I look forward to making this dream come true for my future students for many years to come.

Ultimately, my story is one of professional and personal growth, supported by my husband Dwayne and my children, Andrew, Myles, and Nic, who inspire me to be the best educator I can be. Thanks for support also go to my parents, Linda and Jim, who filled our home with numerous books and magazines and took me on countless trips to the local bookstores and libraries. My quest for growth was also supported by many professors; my principal, Sarah; colleagues Kathy and Chris; and DKG Milwaukee chapter members who offered continued encouragement. Standing on the shoulders of these individuals and of my ancestors (many of whom were once denied the right to learn to read), I am eager to work to provide support to children as they strive for the gift of literacy.



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**Alethea Ellen Sumbry-Cetnarowski**, a member of Delta Chapter in Wisconsin State Organization, is in her 26th year as an educator for Milwaukee Public Schools, where she is currently the School Support Teacher/interventionist for students in grades K4–5. Having previously earned a BA and MA in Education from Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, she recently completed reading teacher licensure from her alma mater. [sumbryae@milwaukee.k12.wi.us](mailto:sumbryae@milwaukee.k12.wi.us)



# Impacting Worldwide: A Story of Networking

By Kammie Richter and Oksana Kolesnik

Often, we do not realize how we, as individuals, may impact the lives of others. Teachers may not see the reach of their influence until years later, if at all. In 2017, I was fortunate enough to meet two international teachers through a program at the University of Illinois. My husband and I had learned of this program through volunteering at our church and had previously signed up to be a host family for international students—but we were interested in this summer program for teachers as well. Peter was from Slovenia, and Oksana was from Ukraine. We brought them to our home and had some friends over to welcome them. We cooked outside over a small fire and shared s'mores even though it was June. We all enjoyed learning about their lives, and they learned about ours. We took them back to the university and exchanged contact information, as we planned to stay in touch. Years passed, and although our communication had slowed to a crawl, we did continue to communicate. Little did we know then that, in 5 years, world situations would put us in contact once again.

Beginning in late February 2022, Ukraine was in the news. In March, I reached out to Oksana but, even though I tried various means of social media, I could not contact her. I reached out to Peter from Slovenia. He informed me he'd been getting sporadic messages from Oksana: that she had fled the country, that her husband needed to stay back home to help protect Ukraine, and that she was staying as a refugee in a Romanian city near the Romanian-Hungarian border. Then finally, in April, I reached her with his help. In May, I was relieved to receive an email from her letting me know she was all right and her poor Internet connections were the only reason for communication gaps.

Oksana told me she was staying in Romania and that her older son had told her to complete a form with Homes for Ukraine, a program allowing United Kingdom (UK) citizens to sponsor someone's visa from Ukraine and host them for a minimum of 6 months. She was hoping to go to the UK, where her son would have a job when he graduated from college. I told her I would ask my friends if they knew anyone in the UK. I wanted to help, but it was the day before Easter, and I imagined most families would not be checking their emails and would be busy with preparations for the weekend. As a member of Delta Kappa Gamma, I figured Society networking could be the answer. It was a shot in the dark, but it was, nevertheless, a shot. I asked our state organization president if it would be appropriate to put out the call to all our officers, chairs, and chapter presidents to see if they knew someone in the UK who would be willing to house a woman and her 11-year-old son for an undetermined period. The email resulted in several responses from women who knew someone in the UK. They all had to call and check with potential hosts, which, of course, could take some time. Nevertheless, I soon received an email from one member who had a friend who just happened to have a niece in the UK who had completed a form to house those with Home for Ukraine.

Less than 16 hours later, the two families were put in touch with each other. Things went well, the visas moved along readily, and, in less than 30 days, Oksana and her son had arrived in a new place to live! To me, it was a true Easter miracle!

This is only my part of the story. Oksana and her son lived it with the rest of her family. I asked her to write and share her experience, and a brief version follows.

### My Escape from War: Oksana's Story

Hello! My name is Oksana Kolesnik, and I am a teacher of English from Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. It is on February 24 when the full-scale war began in Ukraine, and I am writing my story now to share my



family experience and encourage you all to start appreciating your lives now and not to wait for the appropriate moment.

We all read the news about the beginning of the war some weeks before it started, but nobody wanted to believe it, unfortunately. For my own family, these events had an even more frustrating impact as our little son has a birthday on February 24. This year was quite a shock for all of us, and it is difficult to explain what a devastating experience it was for him especially. On February 24, he was going to have his 11th birthday party with his friends and family. However, he is a brave boy and didn't even demonstrate any regret about canceling the party. We all supported him and promised to organize a party for all his friends on the first day of the victory of Ukraine.

We stayed in our hometown for 3 weeks after the war started, hoping the situation would improve. Unfortunately, when the Russians attacked our nuclear power station on March 5 and it became really dangerous to stay there, our family was forced to make a heartbreaking decision to leave the country. Artem and I moved to Romania, but my husband had to stay at home. As you may know, men from 18 to 60 years old are not allowed to leave the country even if they can't serve in the military. This was difficult for us all, but we decided to save children as the future of the whole nation depends on them.

It took us 4 days to cross the country and get to the Romanian border. I couldn't even imagine so many people fleeing from the country and leaving everything behind. In Romania, we stayed with a wonderful family; Simona and her mother Aurika Dzitac are also teachers, and they immediately agreed to host us when they knew we had decided to evacuate from Ukraine. Simona found a school for Artem, and he made good friends there. We knew from the very beginning that we were there temporarily as I had no job opportunities there, so when the UK announced the program Homes for Ukraine, we immediately decided to apply and give it a try. We hoped to find a safe location for the next school year.

It is easier to start planning something than to realize the plan. It turned out to be quite challenging to find British people ready to take strangers into their homes. Honestly, I am not sure that I would host a family in my house in such circumstances. I sent requests to all my friends and acquaintances and just decided to wait. Can you imagine my surprise and even astonishment when, the next day, Kammie Richter texted that there was a family ready to take us immediately? We took their contact information and, the next morning, had a Zoom meeting!

Amanda Barrass and Jan Wirkus turned out to be relatives of the man who had responded to the email Kammie's friend and DKG colleague, Jane Yoder, had shared. Needless to say, we all liked each other from our very first meeting, and the next events started happening to us like a waterfall. Once we submitted applications, we got visa confirmation letters in just a couple of days (although some people had to wait for almost 2 months). This gave us more confidence in our decision, and, on May 14, we left Romania and headed for the UK. We were full of hope and anticipated the beginning of a new life. We arrived in Manchester on Saturday, and on Monday, May 16, Artem started studying at St. John's Baxenden Church of England School. Artem settled in better than we could have ever expected and made many friends at school. He is developing socially and intellectually, and his anxiety has reduced significantly. This is because of the learning environment, the teachers, and their attitude toward him.

Life in the UK is challenging for refugees as we are all in a completely new environment with rules and standards with which we must comply. However, if one has people who can help you to settle in here, soon you start enjoying amazing opportunities, and I am very happy many Ukrainian children can experience this way of life and integrate into the new society. I do hope that they will change their future lives and try their best







# Personal Reflection/Anecdote

not to have any war in the world. I am sure that we need to show them that peace is the most cherished thing in the whole world.

As I write this, we have been in Accrington, the UK, for almost 4 months. The family with whom we are staying is just amazing! Amanda and Jan treat us as members of their family, and we have already had many trips and family celebrations together. With Amanda's help and guidance, I managed to get a job in Lancashire County Council in the office of Homes for Ukraine. I work as a customer advisor, and I am proud of everything I am doing now as we help Ukrainians to settle in and make their life here comfortable and secure for kids. We enjoy quiet evenings watching quiz shows and intellectual programs together. Sometimes we even have some debates on scientific research. My son enjoys these moments!

Overall, this experience taught me not to give up but to follow my path. Life is unpredictable and full of unexpected events that we all must cherish and appreciate. Moreover, everything we face makes us stronger and ready to withstand challenges. It was 5 years ago when I went to Urbana-Champaign as a representative from Ukraine in the Study of U.S. Institutes (SUSI) program. I couldn't even think that experience was just a step to changing my life. I met Kammie and her husband and had a lovely weekend with them, enjoying the barbecue party and watching their horses. Who could think then that it was the stage to help me survive now? I have already changed all my priorities and values. I appreciate PEOPLE and experiences more than materialistic things. And I am completely confident in my future as I see that we all get what we deserve.

**Ukrainians are strong people who are worth being independent and happy. God bless you all and save UKRAINE!**

*Yours Sincerely, Oksana Kolesnik*

**PS:** Although I intended to add information about our escape from Ukraine, the recollections are still too worrying and heartbreaking. Instead, let me note that we got used to the lifestyle in Accrington and made friends. Artem settled into school, and my elder son, Andriy, pursued a job offer to work in London, so we were able to see him again. We all hoped that we would be able to plan to return to Ukraine in October. However, in September, the situation in the east of Ukraine got worse, and Zaporizhzhia was under missile attacks almost every day. My heart broke when I read the news and thought about my nearest and dearest there.

A lot of my friends and relatives joined the army to fight for our independence. My husband helped the territorial protection service at the beginning of the war. When he got a call to go to the military service, a thorough medical check-up expelled him from the list of those who can join the Army. He has poor vision, and it is doubtful that he could serve on the frontline. So, we decided that if he could join us, we would be able to work more in the UK and help our relatives who were forced to stay in Ukraine, didn't have jobs, and couldn't earn a living. My brother's family is now living in our house as all their property is completely destroyed in Orikhiv, the town near Zaporizhzhia, which is almost being demolished now... and my mother-in-law is an elderly woman who doesn't have anyone to support her financially—but she refuses to leave Ukraine.

After leaving Ukraine and staying for 2 weeks in Poland, my husband obtained a visa, and we were all reunited in the UK. We did a lot to be safe and—what is more important—to be together. And we did so with the help of educators, including several from DKG, reaching out and networking to solve a crisis.

*Oksana*

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**Dr. Kammie Richter**, inducted as a member of Xi Chapter in Illinois State Organization (ILSO) in 2010, has served as chapter treasurer and president. She became ILSO Executive Assistant in July 2015 and ILSO Editor in July 2020. A regular attendee at every ILSO convention as well as six DKG conferences and conventions, Richter has presented numerous times at all DKG levels. She currently serves on the *Bulletin* Editorial Board, 2022–2026. [kam93richter@gmail.com](mailto:kam93richter@gmail.com)

**Oksana Kolesnik** is a reserve member of Xi Chapter in Illinois State Organization.



# Entering Auschwitz-Birkenau From the Back

By Mindy Walker



Back entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau, near the Sauna and Kanada

Point of view and perspective are passions of mine when teaching any historical topic or subject. Being able to see an event through multiple lenses is part of an essential set of skills students need to analyze and think about historical events. The current approach that I take when teaching the Holocaust is having students observe key photographs from The Auschwitz Album, first known as the Lili Jacob album. Lili was a survivor of a sub-camp from Auschwitz-Birkenau called Dora-Mittelbau (United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum [USHMM], 2023). While trying to find extra clothing for warmth in the abandoned SS barracks, she found an album that contained photographs taken of a deportation at Auschwitz-Birkenau. She immediately recognized family members and

friends who had been led to the gas chambers upon their arrival (USHMM, 2023). My own personal skill set was pushed recently when I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau so that I could bring current relevance to the pictures in this album. My goal was to take present-day pictures in some of the same locations so I could help my students develop historical empathy and relevance to this complex historical topic.

In summer 2023, I was fortunate to attend a European Study Tour planned by The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. This trip was possible because I received multiple grants and awards, including the Cornet Award from Delta Kappa Gamma International Educators Foundation (DKGIEF). Our group included 12 people who are currently teachers or museum staff members from across the nation. Professor Robert Jan van Pelt was the Holocaust scholar who accompanied us on the trip, and he is a leading Holocaust historian on Auschwitz-Birkenau. My last visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau had been in 2010 with a standard, quick, school-group tour, not with a Holocaust scholar familiar with the site. This second visit would not be a quick tour but an educational experience involving a 10-hour day and 15,000 steps with our scholar and a 16-year veteran tour guide and expert on the Auschwitz-Birkenau exhibit and memorial.

## On the Tour

Our day of study at Birkenau did not begin at the large gate. We passed the gate, took a side road, and began at the location of the spur line so that our group could see the direction and precise location of the connection to the rail line before the train cars approached the infamous gate. This location was also where the first transports disembarked and then walked through the camp for the selection process. The charter bus then took us along narrow roads, and we approached what seemed to be beautiful fields. The first field had a gate, chained and



Auschwitz-Birkenau from the back of the rail line, looking toward the front gate.



## Personal Reflection/Anecdote

locked, along a rectangular-shaped perimeter. Not fully understanding the context, we walked near the museum placard that revealed we were staring at the former location of “The Little Red House” or Bunker I. This was a former home converted into a gas chamber used to kill thousands who were being deported to this camp. Eventually, the house was dismantled once the larger killing facilities were constructed to murder more people.

The tour continued after our guide unlocked a gate for us to enter a path with beautiful fields on each side. Our guide informed us that these are ash fields that bear the remains of those cremated from the nearby gas chambers. We then visited the remains of Bunker II, also known as “The Little White House,” a larger chamber constructed to murder more individuals at one time. The foundation of the perimeter is all that remains of the building, with cemetery headstones to the side in memory of those who were killed there. The next building along the path was the Sauna. This is a large building with a misleading title because this structure was used for delousing victims, taking their personal belongings, and murdering pregnant women. Outlines of previous foundational structures stand on each side of the Sauna between the camp and the barbed-wire fencing. These buildings are known as Kanada structures. At the Kanada II building, we observed some the belongings encased therein, noting charred edges along some of the items. These personal belongings remain from the fires that the SS set to the warehouses as they attempted to escape the Russians and cover up the crimes committed in the camp.

Another part of the camp ruins that deeply disturbed me was a circular foundation with a narrow walkway—only wide enough for a single person—across its center. Under this walkway was standing water. Professor van Pelt asked our group for guesses about the multiple structures that littered the area. After hearing our repeated incorrect guesses, Professor Van Pelt revealed that these had been sewage and water treatment structures. These circular structures are evidence that the community knew of the existence and function of the camp because the camp administrators had been ordered to fix groundwater issues due to complaints by those in the surrounding area. Some of these groundwater issues were due to the flood zone in which the area was constructed, the insufficient and improperly designed structures needed to handle the camp’s volume of human excrement, and the vast number of decomposing corpses buried within the campgrounds. As a result, the problem was fixed, and the camp functioned without any other complaints or intervention by the community members.



Water filtration systems at Auschwitz-Birkenau.



Kanada storage buildings are the concrete perimeters, with the Sauna in the background.

Resting on the opposite side of the Sauna building are the remains of Krematorium Five. This was the building used to murder most of the Hungarian Jews. This transport arrived by train during May-July of 1944 and was immense, including more than 400,000 individuals. These are the same people who are photographed in the album that was found by Lili Jacob (USHMM, 2023). These individuals had to wait in the nearby birch forest that rests directly near a small pond because the large gas chambers and crematoriums were not able to be utilized fast enough by the Nazis to murder so many people. This pond located between Krematorium Four and Five was used to dump ashes from the crematoriums. A famous photograph from





the Lili Jacob album shows an older man walking down to the pond with a canteen. The cruelty captured in the photograph is not only of the innocent people awaiting their planned murder but also of this unsuspecting man about to drink water contaminated with the cremation remains of fellow victims. Our group was solemn as we stood near the memorial markers by the pond. One of my colleagues took the time to pick up a stone and place it on one of the markers. A heavy burden seemed to weigh all of us down as we walked to the end of a path that led to an opening in the fencing so that we could exit the camp by the former SS barracks.

This fencing had no door, and we assisted each other by grasping each other's palms in order to cross a wide ditch while holding the wiring of the barrier in order to make a safe exit from the camp. The irony hit me after looking through the wire and reflecting on helping one another cross this ditch so we could finally leave the camp. Our group had to purchase tickets to explore this place of death, and yet our



**Pond near the birch forest and Krematorium V, where ashes were dumped from Krematorium IV and V.**

exploration was now requiring an unexpected exit. This exit required effort and teamwork. In this exploration, not only did our group emotionally share the burden of learning in-depth details of the history of this location, but we also shared the conviction of teaching about this dark place with a new perspective and point of view in mind.

location, mostly Jewish people. Having the opportunity to explore this perspective as a result of DKGIEF support allowed me to have this personal learning experience and acquire this new approach to teaching the Holocaust. Teaching the intentionality of the construction plans of Auschwitz-Birkenau provides a transparent understanding of the goals for mass murder with the continuous changes and expansions of the camp. Examining photographs taken at this location during the deportations and comparing them to the historical ruins and architectural remains allows students learning about the Holocaust to gain an in-depth understanding of this horrific place of death. This point of view provides an educational platform for classes to seek deliberation in order to better understand the Holocaust in a meaningful context.

*All photos by the author*

**Mindy Walker**, a member of Beta Chapter in Alabama State Organization, is a teacher at Holt High School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. She teaches Dual Enrollment U.S. History classes for Shelton State as well as American Government and Economics. She is an active member of multiple Holocaust education groups and creates lesson plans and curriculum units on various topics regarding World War II and the Holocaust. [walker.mindy108@gmail.com](mailto:walker.mindy108@gmail.com)



**View of Auschwitz-Birkenau from the guard tower.**

## The Impact

Holocaust history always comes back to Auschwitz-Birkenau at some point because of the large-scale physical ruins that still exist and the archival evidence that is still being examined and researched. More than a million individuals were murdered in this



## Ángeles en los Árboles: A Poem and a Transition Story

By Peggy King

### Ángeles en los Árboles

¡Aquí estoy!  
Sentada en la terraza,  
vino en mano,  
gozando en los regalos  
que El Señor nos ha dado,  
cuando un ángel se me aparece,  
volando con ramita en boca.

El Señor es artista.  
Los pájaros muestran su gloria  
en colores de rosa y rojo,  
azul y turquesa,  
negro y blanco.

Y como nosotros,  
tienen sus diablos,  
diablos que no son rojos con tenedores,  
sino lobos y gatos, lechuzas y perros,  
serpientes que tienen hambre.

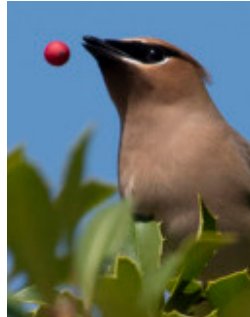
Veo una mamacita que ha ganado la  
lucha.  
Se posa en una flor mía,  
semilla en boca,  
para sus impacientes, esperando.

He mirado sus huevos pequeños cada día,  
rezando que los pajaritos sobrevivirán.  
Por el milagro del Señor,  
pronto cantarán, revoloteando también,  
mis ángeles en los árboles.

From top:

*Oops © Photograph by Maureen Theriot,  
LA; Spring 2022 Art Gallery*

*Red-Winged Blackbird © Photograph by  
Margaret Meehan, MI; Fall 2022 Art Gallery*



### Angels in the Trees

I am here!  
Sitting on the terrace,  
wine in hand,  
enjoying the gifts  
the Lord has given us,  
when an angel in flight appears,  
a little branch in her mouth.

The Lord is an artist.  
The birds show their glory  
in pinks and reds,  
blues and turquoise,  
black and white.

And like us,  
they have their demons,  
demons not red with pitchforks,  
rather wolves and cats, owls and dogs,  
hungry snakes.

I see a little mother that has won the  
fight.  
She lands on my flower,  
seed in her mouth,  
for her impatient ones, waiting.

I have looked at her tiny eggs every day,  
praying that the little birds will survive.  
Through the miracle of the Lord,  
soon they will sing, fluttering, too,  
my angels in the trees.

*Too Cold © Photograph by Eileen  
McNally, OH; Spring 2023 Art Gallery*

*Yellow-Rumped Warbler in Teton NP ©  
Photograph by Judith Baxter, CT; Spring  
2023 Art Gallery*



After 30 years of teaching students from elementary children to graduate students, my body said, “No More!”

After 30 years of travel to Latin America, my doctors said, “No More!” My love of nature, teaching, anthropology and archaeology, Latin America, and all things Spanish seemed stolen from me by my diseased kidneys. My challenge was to find new ways to satisfy this insatiable itch to teach, to learn, to speak Spanish, to climb ruins, and to travel. I tutored, taught Spanish to adults in the Oscher Lifelong Learning program, and twice tried to return to the classroom, unsuccessfully.

I live on a beautiful lake in the woods. There I have found other ways to satisfy this itch. I read Spanish novels—challenging, but what a great sense of accomplishment when I have completed an Isabel Allende or Gabriel Garcia Lorca work. My husband begs me to play at least some music in English rather than Spanish. I watch movies in Spanish—ok, sometimes subtitled! I love being immersed in nature. And I write, often in Spanish.

Here is a little poem I wrote one day. I am *sure* it may have some Spanish stylistic errors. I dedicate it to my *hispanohablante* (Spanish-speaking) sisters in DKG, asking their forgiveness for my language shortcomings! After all, I am still learning—and finally knowing—that “Yes, there is More!”

**Special Note:** The author has provided the English translation of the poem. She comments, “It is so difficult to translate creative works. I have tried, taking some liberties to try to capture the spirituality of the piece.”

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**Peggy King** is a member of Alpha Lambda Chapter in Louisiana State Organization, where she is a past president (2003–2005) and recipient of the Achievement Award. She taught public school for 23 years and has been a teaching assistant in the Louisiana State University Departments of Geography and Anthropology and Economics. With a BS in Spanish, speech, and social studies education, an MA in cultural anthropology, and an MS+30 in curriculum and instruction, King has served on several DKG International committees and has chaired the U.S. Forum. She has also been a guest lecturer on Maya culture on various cruise ships. [yucatur@aol.com](mailto:yucatur@aol.com)



# Educators: Taking an Intelligent Approach to Artificial Intelligence

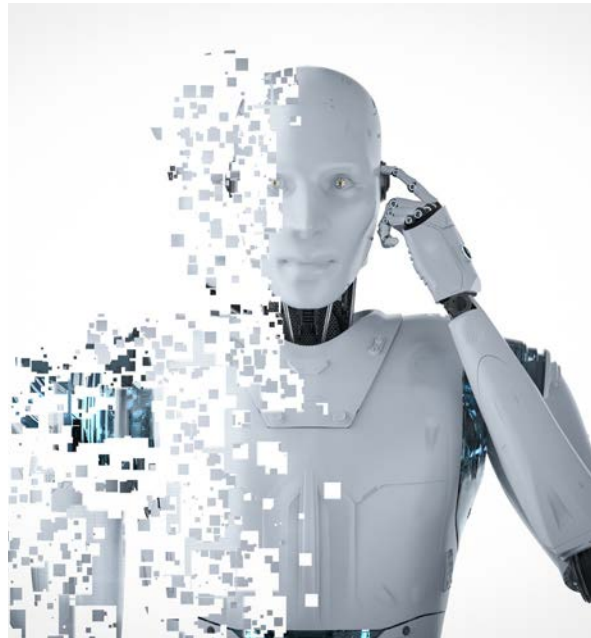
By Claire A. Swanson

The recent development and availability of generative applications like ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com>) and Google Bard (<https://bard.google.com>) have generated considerable discussion about how artificial intelligence (AI) will impact the educational community. These “chatbots” are software applications that allow humans to interact and communicate with computers as if they were communicating with another human. One interacts with AI through *prompts*, which are the instructions or questions one inputs into the AI in order to elicit a response from the chatbot. The more detailed and concise the prompt, the better the results one will receive from the chatbot. If the first result does not fully answer the inquiry, one can go back and continue the “conversation” with the chatbot with more specific information. The chatbot will realize that the new input is a continuation of the previous prompt.

AI has been available to some degree for a while, and perhaps readers will have interacted with it without realizing they have done so when using applications such as Alexa or Siri. So, what are some of the ways that AI will be affecting the educational community?

## Concerns About AI

One of the biggest concerns about ChatGPT and other similar applications is that they will allow students to have the chatbots complete their classwork for them. Those who have been in education for some time will remember that when the Internet and student computer usage became possible a concern arose that students would just “copy and paste” information. Accordingly, educators needed to revise assignments to make it more difficult for students to “take the easy way out”—and use of AI raises a similar need.



Another concern about these chatbots is that only information up to a certain date has been imported into these applications, so the most recent information will not appear in results. Another factor is that the information imported has not been vetted for accuracy, timeliness, or bias. A final factor is one of privacy concerns because AI “learns” as it goes along, and everything imported into it becomes part of its knowledge base. Because of these concerns, some districts have decided to block use of these applications in their school settings. This is a losing effort, however, because students have access to these tools outside the school and through their mobile devices when they are not connected to the school’s Internet portal.

## What to Do About AI

Artificial intelligence is here to stay. Is it not then the responsibility of educators to teach students how to use AI tools in ethically responsible and safe ways because doing so will be a skillset necessary for them to have in the future? To do so, school districts will have to revise their policies on academic integrity regarding plagiarism and other issues. Matt Miller (2023), in his blog *Ditch That Textbook*, wrote a post entitled “Writing School AI Policies? Use These 10+ Resources” that contains many resources that will

help in revising policies.

Teachers will also have to make their students aware of what assistance from AI they will accept in their courses and what they will not. Alice Keeler (2023), in her blog *Teacher Tech*, provides a great example for English teachers with the post “Acceptable Use Policy for AI in the ELA Classroom.” She provides a chart of samples of what will be acceptable and what won’t be acceptable. For example, she provides the acceptable use of “rewriting a reading passage at a lower reading level” to assist the student in understanding the passage. On the other hand, she says using the prompt “What are the main points of the reading passage?” is not acceptable. This chart could be used as a template by other teachers to form their own policies for their classrooms.

Teachers will need to learn how to create concise prompts so that they can then teach students how to use these new tools efficiently. They must also convey to their students the need to review information generated to determine if it is accurate, up-to-date, and unbiased—because these conditions are not always the case. Students should also be cautioned about what they post in a prompt because personal information put into a prompt might be viewed by a third party. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) provides free practical guides with curricular resources for AI for grades K–12. Each guide contains four student-driven projects that align with subject-area standards.

Although concerns exist about students using artificial intelligence, there are also many possibilities on how educators can use AI to reduce some of the time-consuming tasks that they need to complete routinely. For instance, if one created a prompt with a specific topic, the standards to be covered, and the format needed, AI could generate a lesson plan. Of course, the educator would need to review the result and edit as needed to meet the specific needs of a class. A form letter/email to parents could be generated with only a few terms. An educator could also use AI to differentiate an assignment to meet certain students’ individual education plans.

## In Sum

Artificial intelligence will change educational practice. AI chatbots will create some challenges for educators in that they will have to revise or develop new assignments that are not as easily printed out directly from these chatbots. On the other hand, giving students training in the AI skillsets that they will need in their future will create new opportunities to learn and grow. These tools will give educators an opportunity to develop new skills, too. Following are some articles for further reading on artificial intelligence in education.





## For Further Consideration

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### Podcasts

- Bell, K. (2023, January 24). *Unlocking the potential of K-12 students with ChatGPT: How AI could transform education* [Audio podcast]. Shakeup Learning. <https://shakeuplearning.com/blog/unlocking-the-potential-of-k-12-students-with-chatgpt-how-ai-could-transform-education-suls0184/>
- Watson, A. (2023, February 5). *How ChatGPT can reduce your teacher workload (with Dr. Monica Burns)* [Audio podcast]. Angela Watson's Truth for Teachers. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/angela-watsons-truth-for-teachers/id954139712?i=1000598067045>

### Slides

- McCrary, A. (n.d.). *20 Uses of ChatGPT for teachers with prompt* [Canva Slides]. [https://www.canva.com/design/DAFdeIVpd4E/UlppcRzTc78N7hfdBf2E0w/view?utm\\_content=DAFdeIVpd4E&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_source=publishsharelink&fbclid=IwAR3IH6B1Qh29GXVptQaR\\_HnxkZ367IIZVsiRLFRoJrVSLQCx8DH5vVo0GX0#1](https://www.canva.com/design/DAFdeIVpd4E/UlppcRzTc78N7hfdBf2E0w/view?utm_content=DAFdeIVpd4E&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publishsharelink&fbclid=IwAR3IH6B1Qh29GXVptQaR_HnxkZ367IIZVsiRLFRoJrVSLQCx8DH5vVo0GX0#1)
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# Peace Education Project: Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll Ambassador

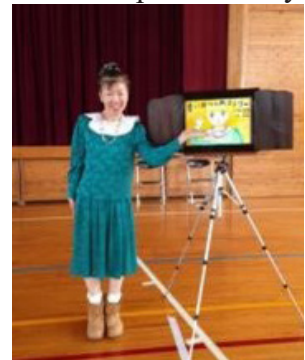
By Atsuko Ando, Atsuko Oka, Kanon Sumi, Reiko Sumi, and Mari Kamioka

The Doll Ambassador Movement began in 1927, when relations between the United States and Japan were on the verge of souring. Sidney Lewis Gulick of the United States conceived the idea of sending blue-eyed dolls to Japan, where Eiichi Shibusawa spearheaded the movement. Children in both countries gave dolls to each other to improve relations and friendship. Now, only one original blue-eyed doll remains—in Kochi prefecture. The doll's name is Emily, and she is in Sakihama Elementary School in Muroto City. But the notion of the Blue-eyed Doll and her place in promoting peace continues. By sharing about the movement conducted by Gulick and Shibusawa and about the cruel history during World War II through a special project, members of Japan State Organization provide an opportunity for children to think about the tragedy of wars and the importance of peace. They also hope to raise the issue of what we must do for peace now.

DKG Japan State Organization (JSO) launched the “Emily, The Blue-eyed Doll Ambassador” Peace Education Project in 2015. This project began with the creation of educational materials from Kamishibai, a picture-card story show titled “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll.” Meaning literally “paper theater” in Japanese, Kamishibai is a form of storytelling that combines illustrated paper cards paired with a scripted performance by a narrator (Wikipedia). The author, Toyomi Matsui, a nurse, was busy creating picture-story shows of folktales in her spare time. She happened to hear about “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll” from a friend and immediately visited Sakihama Elementary School. There, principal Murakami asked her to create a picture-story show. Although she originally declined because she thought the task would be too difficult, she was encouraged by her fellow picture-storytellers’ idea that her work could be used as a peace education material for schoolteachers and decided to take on the challenge. When she performed the finished picture-story show at a competition, it won an award for the best picture-story show. Encouraged to make the story known to as many people as possible, Matsui printed more copies of the Kamishibai and donated them to nearby schools. DKG JSO and Atsuko Ando purchased one copy each for their use. Matsui not only began participating in DKG JSO’s delivery classes in 2015 but, in July 2017, was also a guest at a workshop at the Southwest Regional Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, where she showed off her green one-piece Emily costume.



“Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll” is featured in a picture-card story show to promote peace.



Toyomi Matsui, author

From 2015-2019, JSO used Matsui’s Kamishibai as the basis for a variety of activities.

1. The authors visited schools in the Kochi Prefecture and presented to students in a wide variety of grade levels. In their presentations, the Kamishibai was projected on a large screen and performed by Matsui. Reiko Sumi sang the theme song for this peace education project: “Blue-eyed Doll” (lyrics by Ujo Noguchi, music by Nagayo Motoori, 1921) is a children’s song written before the Doll Ambassador Movement. Many DKG members were familiar with this song and sang it as children.



2. The authors presented for public groups, including an exhibition at the Kochi Civil Rights Memorial Museum and classes at the Kochi Takasaka Gakuen Lifelong University.
3. The authors conducted a variety of overseas initiatives. These included an exchange with a DKG group in New York City and teaching at a public elementary school in Brooklyn in October 2015; presentations at the 2016 DKG International Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, and the 2018 International Convention in Austin, Texas; presentation at the 2017 Southwest Regional Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii; and a series of special presentations in schools and other organizations in Hawaii.

## The New Peace Education Project

Starting in 2020, as a new type of coronavirus began to rage, “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll Ambassador” peace education project was forced to suspend its activities due to difficulties in continuing its special class on demand. At the same time, a generational shift in the teaching staff brought an increase of younger faculty members. The result was that the number of teachers and staff who knew the story of “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll” at Sakihama Elementary School decreased. Nevertheless, the authors believed it was important to continue to tell the children of Kochi Prefecture about “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll Ambassador” in the future. Furthermore, in view of the current world situation, the authors believed that this story must be widely disseminated to the teaching staff, passed on to the children in the classroom, and continued. They would also like to tell this story to as many people in Japan and around the world as possible through the use of social networking services. Accordingly, the authors developed a vision, objectives, and activities as follows:

### Vision:

Through the picture-story show “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll Ambassador,” we convey the importance of peace to children around the world. We will disseminate information in Japanese and English. We will create educational materials (YouTube videos and a picture book) that can be used by many people as peace education materials. To have the students utilize them for classes, training is also important.

### Objectives:

- Develop YouTube video of a picture-card story show of “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll” (Japanese and English);
- Publish a picture book: “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll” is useful as a teaching tool for peace education.

### Activities:

- Create and disseminate YouTube videos.

A storyboard for the YouTube video was completed by the end of December 2021. This YouTube video introduces DKG JSO and its activities. In January 2022, a YouTube video (in Japanese) of a picture-card story show of “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll” was created and disseminated with the permission of the author of the Kamishibai. The YouTube video was narrated by project member Reiko Sumi, who also sang the nursery rhyme “Blue-eyed Doll.” Kanon Sumi, also a project member, was in charge of reading the picture-card story show.

The authors also trained together on period research and completed a better “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll” picture-card story manuscript. A YouTube video was created with the new structure and released in October 2022. We will also present an English version of “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll” next year.

- Storage of “Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll”



Although in Japanese, this YouTube video nevertheless provides images of interest and an overview of the Kamishibai itself. An English version is in the planning.



In November 2021, DKG members visited Sakihama Elementary School and discussed with Principal Takemura about the future storage of Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll. They were able to confirm the importance of preserving it, the only one in Kochi Prefecture and a treasure of the prefecture for a long time to come.

The curator of the Kochi Prefectural Museum of History and Civilization gave advice on the best way to store Emily's aging body. The authors strongly felt the need to consult with experts and to begin work on the project as soon as possible. We would also like to work on better storage with the consensus of the community, while gathering the opinions of the people in the Sakihama area of Muroto City.

We will donate a storage box for the doll at DKG JSO. We would like to continue our cooperation as a bridge between Sakihama Elementary School and Kochi Prefectural Museum of History and Ethnography.

### Teaching Plan

At the heart of the project has been a coherent teaching plan (see Appendix) based on the theme: "Thinking about Peace through 'Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll Ambassador.'" The aims of the lesson are as follows:

- Children will share their images of peace and understand the preciousness of life.
- Children will listen to the song "Blue-eyed Doll" and become familiar with nursery rhymes.
- Children will learn the importance of peace and think about what they have to do now.

The reason for setting this theme is that many children will have only a vague idea of peace as a state in which there is no war. Therefore, through specific materials such as "Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll Ambassador," we would like to deepen understanding of the reality surrounding American and Japanese children before, during, and after the war. We would also like to have children develop their own ideas about what peace means in a grade-appropriate manner. We also want them to reaffirm the "goodness and importance of peace" and the "preciousness of life" and to find out what they should do now to promote peace and develop an attitude to continue practicing it.

### In Sum

The Peace Education Project and the purpose of this article are perhaps best summarized by Atsuko Ando:

Our peace education project "Emily, The Blue-eyed Doll Ambassador" has been able to expand its efforts in Japan and abroad thanks to the support of DKG International Headquarters and DKG members in the mainland United States and Hawaii. In 2015, I went to New York to interact with DKG members, including Nita Scott, Executive Director from the International Headquarters, and Lochie Musso of New York City. I was thrilled and excited to meet Lochie and introduce the picture-card story show to the members of DKG. They were very pleased with the show. This was the first international debut of "Emily, The Blue-eyed Doll."

I subsequently presented the show at a public elementary school in Brooklyn, where the children really understood the content of the story. The storytelling gave me the confidence that I could convey the importance of peace to American children as well.

In the future, we plan to work on creating a Japanese-English version of the resource book for teachers to conduct the peace study "Emily, The Blue-eyed Doll" for children, revising the English version of the picture-card story show, creating a YouTube of the English version, and publishing a picture book.

We hope that you will extend this peace education initiative to your fellow members.





## Appendix Sample Lesson Plan

Time	Activity	Points to note	Preparations
Intro 5 min.	Greetings Talk about the host school and the school district	Students line up in front of today's teachers. Proud of the school and the school district.	microphone
25 min.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding the theme</li> <li>Watch and listen to the picture-story show. Learn why "Emily, the Blue-eyed Doll Ambassador" was born and think about "the goodness and importance of peace" and "the preciousness of life."</li> <li>Think about the importance of peace based on a picture-story show.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why did they exchange doll-ambassadors before the war?</li> <li>What about the dolls during the war? What about people's lives?</li> <li>After the war and after peace.</li> <li>What is happening in the world now?</li> </ol> <p><i>"What is peace?"</i> <i>"When we learned fear, we understood peace."</i></p> </li> <li>Read a variety of books.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Think about peace and life.</li> <li>* Deepen understanding, along with the picture-card story show performance (also projected on a large screen).</li> <li>* Book of war, also recalling stories of those who experienced it.</li> <li>* Explanation of how the blue-eyed doll came to Japan.</li> <li>* Presentation of war scenes and war stories.</li> <li>* Photographs presented after the disaster.</li> <li>* Awareness, thinking, and action.</li> <li>* Introduction of poetry by the second grade elementary school student in Okinawa, Japan.</li> <li>* Invitation to reading.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Cards</li> <li>* Picture-card story show</li> <li>* PowerPoint</li> <li>* PowerPoint</li> <li>* Photo after the disaster</li> <li>* Card</li> <li>* Handout</li> <li>* Books</li> </ul>
10 min.	5. Listen to the song "Blue-eyed Doll" and become familiar with nursery rhymes.	Provide a taste of the goodness of nursery rhymes	Lyrics PC Piano
5 min.	Summary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Present what you have found out and what you think.</li> <li>* Writing activities are done in each classroom.</li> <li>* Thank you (students and DKG members)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Speak loudly and clearly.</li> <li>* Paper is prepared by the school.</li> <li>* Finally, DKG also thanks.</li> </ul>	* Impression Form

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# Building Intentional, Relationship-Focused Professional Development for Induction Teachers

By Michele A. McKie

Research shows early-career educators need support during their beginning years if we are going to retain them in the field of education (Sutcher et al., 2016). As a member of Delta Kappa Gamma (DKG) Alpha Epsilon Chapter in Georgia State Organization and an assistant professor at Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) in the College of Education, I knew our members had varied expertise that could support new teachers. Reflecting on how we could support our local educators, I envisioned a plan to use the expertise of our members. In February 2022, I proposed a partnership of the GSW College of Education and DKG Alpha Epsilon to support early-career educators in the surrounding school districts through an induction program.

## Program Planning: What Would Our Support Look Like?

I proposed the members of Alpha Epsilon Chapter connect with new teachers in our region through strategic and intentional methods. Each DKG member wanting to work in the program would identify one or two new teachers in her school who would benefit from support. The GSW College of Education would host four socials where DKG members could bring their identified new teachers. Members had the option to bring more than one new teacher from their school. GSW would facilitate the table conversations, and DKG members would spread out to have mentor conversations with the new teachers.

We also wanted to include interns as teachers. In Georgia, educator preparation providers (EPPs) receive requests for interns who are finishing their undergraduate programs to serve as teachers of record. Accordingly, the Clinical Director—who works with P–12 school district partners, faculty, and interns at GSW—ensured that GSW interns would participate in the induction program. Although they were required to attend the events as part of their paid internship, this program would allow them to work through the struggles of being a new teacher with other novice educators.



The schedule for the socials was developed around the work of Ellen Moir (2016), who researched the phases of first-year teachers' attitudes toward teaching: anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, and reflection. We intentionally planned our events during the periods of survival, disillusionment, and rejuvenation. Moir's research (2016) showed these phases occur naturally throughout the year. The survival phase is the downward slide toward disillusionment, where new teachers stay for a few months before the upward turn of teacher attitudes progresses positively near March in the rejuvenation phase. We also knew we needed to continue support beyond our socials. Throughout the remaining months of the school year, GSW used a private Facebook group to provide resources to the new educators and DKG members on topics related to these critical phases. Between the social events, DKG members were encouraged to support the educators through text messages, classroom visits, and other ways they envisioned and developed.



## Program Implementation

We identified faculty and GSW College of Education staff interested in supporting this program through their professional expertise. They received the topics of the events, and volunteers were recruited to facilitate. Faculty were informed of the program's vision to ensure we dedicated time throughout their presentations to allow table discussions during the socials. We recruited DKG members and encouraged each to become a mentor. We paired retired educators with interns because the retired educators no longer directly worked in the schools.



Each social was structured to provide 45 minutes of socialization during dinner in GSW's private dining hall, followed by a 45–55 minute presentation with time incorporated for participants to discuss classroom strategies presented, how to apply the strategies, and other issues they might be experiencing in their classrooms not related to the presented topics. Through the connections of our membership, we hosted seven DKG members, six GSW faculty and staff, eight interns, four new teachers, and one local veteran educator not affiliated with DKG during our first 2-hour social in September 2022. The inclusion of the non-DKG educator came from discussions with a DKG member at a local school. The DKG member was not a classroom teacher and wanted someone to support the teachers in her school. The member and non-DKG educator worked to identify a

new teacher to participate in the event. Not only did the veteran teacher attend but the DKG member also attended the event to support the teachers in her school.

After an overwhelmingly positive event in September that focused on behavior and classroom management, we needed to reach more educators for our next social. We had several DKG members representing only a few schools and districts in our area, but some of our highest-need areas did not have members working there. We invited novice teachers from the local county and encouraged them to “bring a friend.” Our topic for the second event focused on family engagement strategies. At this event, not only did the same participants return from September but we also increased attendance. At the end of this social, one intern asked why we were not holding these as monthly events. She expressed interest in the program and enjoyed attending the sessions. This participant's question was encouraging in suggesting that we were meeting their needs.

Our third event focused on building classroom community. Several participants could not attend due to various personal commitments, and those who came looked and acted exhausted. However, after going through hands-on activities to use in their classrooms, those exhausted teachers were smiling, laughing, and asking questions. One DKG member commented later how she felt uplifted when she left the social.

As we approached our final event in late March, we understood educators would be thinking about those final days before state testing and other year-end responsibilities. We provided them with strategies to engage students in fun and educational ways that were







more than a worksheet. We also provided time to discuss end-of-the-year expectations about testing, organization, and paperwork.

When the March meeting ended, there were no quick goodbyes. Instead, people remained to talk. One new teacher told us the induction program was what she needed because she was not getting sufficient support from the program provided by her district. Such news encouraged us. We knew there were disparities for teacher-induction programs in school districts when we started the program; we now knew we were filling an important gap in our surrounding communities.

### Future Goals

Thinking toward next year, we are strategizing how to increase attendance and participation. We want to maintain the current participants but expand to additional schools. In 2022–2023, we reached five counties in our region, but the primary participants were in the fields of elementary education and special education. We see a gap in serving early-career educators at the middle and high school levels and plan to address this in the upcoming year.

We surveyed the interns and new teachers during our March event to determine topics for next year. Topics aligned with their interests will allow us to continue focusing on the needs of the current participants while introducing new participants to our events. Our topics for 2023–2024 are (a) home/work balance and educator self-care, (b) social-emotional learning, (c) assessment and data collection, and (d) time management with paperwork.

### Reflecting on the Program

The success of the program is evident in the relationships built by the veteran educators (i.e., faculty, staff, and DKG members) with the new teachers and interns. The DKG members in the schools are the key to encouraging novice teachers to attend our events with them. The goal for next year is to use our relationships with veteran teachers in surrounding schools to identify several non-members who will commit to this work. All educators can reflect on how they felt as new teachers and the prospect of adding one more thing to their plate. However, through an experience such as the one we are building in this partnership, we hope new educators will leave these events having built relationships with one another and with our DKG members, knowing we will support them through this process.



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# Conference? Convention? What is the Difference?

By Kathleen Betke

I did it! I was invited to be a co-presenter at my first DKG international conference in Detroit, Michigan, in July 2023. In addition to providing the opportunity to offer a successful presentation, the conference left me feeling revitalized, empowered, challenged, motivated, and hopeful for the future. I delighted in exploring Detroit with fellow Illinois members Sue Simon and Joan Rog. I reaped the benefits of participating in an excellent workshop presented by Dr. Shar McGowan from Saskatchewan, Canada, titled “The Autumn Carol Project: Brilliant Acts of Mothering Ourselves.” I especially enjoyed the Moving Forward with Vitality Luncheon featuring keynote speakers International President Dr. Debbie LeBlanc and Executive Director Nita Scott. A demonstration by the Southfield Martial Arts Team, shopping at the Society Expo, and celebrating the culture of Detroit at the culminating Motown Dinner with dueling piano performers left me feeling uplifted. The networking opportunities, the rekindled friendships, and the fellowship in building new relationships with members from across the globe will resonate with me forever.



Kathleen Betke, Joan Rog,  
and Sue Simon in Detroit

I’ve wondered, “What is the difference between a DKG international conference and a DKG international convention?” Now that I have participated in the DKG International Convention in New Orleans in 2022 with more than 900 members in attendance and the DKG International Conference in Detroit in July 2023 with approximately 200 members attending, I have some clarity on the issue. Let’s see if I can help you to understand the major differences.

A Delta Kappa Gamma international convention is held in one location in even-numbered years. DKG members from all over the world attend the international convention, which includes keynote speakers, break-out presentations, and Society business. During the general business meetings, proposed amendments to the *Constitution* and *International Standing Rules (ISRs)* are presented, debated, and voted upon by all members in attendance. In 2022, members were presented with more than 100 amendment proposals. Because there was ultimately insufficient time for considering and voting on all of these, some “fell to the floor.” This means those will not be voted on until they are rewritten and/or resubmitted and considered at the next convention. Through my attendance and my vote, my voice was heard.

Delta Kappa Gamma international conferences are currently offered in three locations, making for relatively easy travel for members throughout the Society. Conferences are offered in odd-numbered years. In 2023, DKG international conferences were scheduled in Detroit, Michigan; Phoenix, Arizona; and Tampere, Finland. Keynote speakers, break-out presentations, and information on Society roles, tasks, and issues abound at conferences; however, no voting by members takes place. Conferences are smaller in attendance than conventions.

In short, convention = Society business and worldwide member networking; conference = learning and growing together with members. I hope you will plan to attend the 2024 DKG International Convention in Maryland or a DKG International Conference in 2025. I’m considering a few presentation topic ideas and will be seeking a co-presenter, so you may anticipate an email invitation from me! I look forward to meeting you there!

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**Kathy Betke** has been an active member of Alpha Theta Chapter in Illinois State Organization for 5 years and serves on the Nominations Committee for the state organization. She taught many different positions from kindergarten to college during her 39-year career in education. Betke is thoroughly enjoying travel, adventures with her grandchildren, and many volunteer opportunities in her retirement. [Kbetke@comcast.net](mailto:Kbetke@comcast.net)



# Awareness and Action to Achieve the Well-Being of DKG Members

By Elizabeth Turner, Debra Pajula, Carol Linscott, Cynthia Moore, and Beverley H. Johns

*“Mid 2022–2023 school year, a teacher emotionally shared with her class that it was to be her last day. The stress to do everything expected for her job brought her to a breaking point. She was physically and emotionally exhausted. She quit her job in order to get professional mental health help.”*

This story told by a U.S. Forum panel member speaks to the need for Delta Kappa Gamma members to address the topic of wellness. Awareness and action are the key ingredients in implementing wellness, both physical and mental, for members in DKG. If we want to be thriving members of our society and encourage others in their quest for well-being, we must focus on both ingredients.

In DKG, we realize our purpose is twofold: building a knowledge base through awareness and providing tools for our members to take action. Both components were emphasized by the U.S. Forum panel at the 2023 International Conference in Detroit, Michigan. Featured speakers were Elizabeth Turner, Carol Linscott, Cynthia Moore, and Debra Pajula, with Bev Johns serving as moderator. Collectively, these panel members have well over 150 years of experience in working with individuals within schools and other workplaces who have had or continue to have stressors that threaten their mental wellness.



U.S. Forum panel members Cyndy Moore, Carol Linscott, Beverley Johns, Debbie Pajula, and Elizabeth Turner shared wellness expertise.

## Awareness: Why Mental Health Support Is So Important

Because of the pandemic, DKG members have become increasingly aware of engaging in practices that promote wellness. The pandemic resulted in changes in how people interacted with each other, in social isolation, and in an increase in societal conflict, all having an impact on mental health and pointing to the need for mental wellness (DiegmueLLer, 2023). Mental health issues increased during this time and have been on the rise globally (Stephenson, 2021). Anxiety and depression increased (Hughes et al., 2021). Some individuals got out of the habit of taking care of themselves, and some individuals shut themselves off from social contact. Common mental health disorders, which include anxiety disorders and depressive disorders, surged (Stephenson, 2021). People were grieving for family and friends they had lost and grieving about events they missed—the losses of personal interactions and connections.

Some DKG members did not interact with others during the pandemic—not even participating in Zoom meetings or conference calls. They withdrew socially and emotionally from others for several reasons. Isolated members may have needed our help and may have appreciated something as simple as a “thinking of you” card.

Other members flourished with support from their DKG state organization or chapter that kept them connected through Zooms, handwritten communication, networking, and challenges. The pandemic was an opportunity for them to make intentional connections. Chapters continued connecting with the priority





of the well-being of their members.

Betty-Ann Heggie (2021), Canadian speaker, author, and mentor, reminds us that “we are being forced to think about things differently” now. And in a post-pandemic world, what are some of our biggest lifesavers?—Connecting with and service for others. Thinking of the importance of DKG, what better opportunity to connect and serve others.

## Definition of Terms

**Mental wellness** is a fundamental component of overall well-being. It encompasses our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. When our mental health is in good shape, we can effectively cope with stress, maintain healthy relationships, and experience a sense of fulfillment and happiness in life.

Mental and **physical health** are closely interconnected. Poor mental health can contribute to physical health problems, such as increased risk of chronic conditions, weakened immune system, and impaired sleep patterns. Conversely, good mental health promotes better physical health outcomes and overall vitality.

## Actions: What Can We Do to Promote Wellness in DKG?

- **Chapters and state organizations could establish support groups.** The Virtual Teachers’ Lounge—established by Dr. Karen Gross, Sakina Magruder, Pat Neal (all District of Columbia State Organization members), and Dr. Ed Wang—was formed during the pandemic. This site involves regularly scheduled Zoom sessions that are free and open to all educators, including all DKG members. Educators gather from all over the world to gain support in a non-threatening environment, bringing problem situations to the facilitators. The problems are discussed along with possible solutions.
- **Chapters could implement a project within their own community.** Karen Gross (DC State Organization) implemented the Kindness Rocks Project in Massachusetts (Gross, 2023), where students painted rocks with messages of encouragement, and Kathy Zwanzig (Kentucky State Organization) implemented Ladybug Rocks Project in Indiana. Rocks were placed throughout the community to bring vitality and connection during COVID-19.
- **We can meet DKG members’ need to be welcomed with kindness and support.** We can ask members how we can help and actively listen to their responses. We can support our members by acting in response to their needs and interests while acknowledging chapter members’ accomplishments.
- **We can create safe and inclusive environments** that respect diverse and equitable opinions and opportunities, thereby creating accessibility. We create connections when we address the importance of support groups, monitor our own actions to be inclusive and encouraging, and recognize the accomplishments of all members.
- **State organizations and chapters can create Mental Wellness Committees that provide programs to build awareness and support their members.** Imagine if every chapter could have at least one program a year on mental-health support! Educating all through workshops about mental health and destigmatizing the myths around mental health are essential. Programs also could promote awareness by including strategies for stress reduction, relaxation, healthy lifestyle, and time management. Breath focus, meditation, yoga practice, and leadership have common elements. DKG leaders who reflect on their self-care, listen to the needs of their bodies, and take breaks during





their day from emails and social media experience numerous health benefits. Chapters could also have contests such as Illinois State Organization's very successful 2020 Walking Challenge and Sip and Sugar Challenge. While programs can build awareness, contests provide action.

### Promoting Wellness through Connections with Individual Members

Hughes et al. (2021) reported research supporting the idea that one of the most powerful stress reducers is positive social connectedness. DKG members throughout the world share incredible positive social connections—a benefit of being a member of our Society. When we create a strong sense of belonging by socially connecting with each member and recognizing and including **everyone**, we learn and utilize each member's strengths and make connections to build on those strengths.

In addition to meetings, social events can include the main goals of having fun and strengthening connections. Humor and laughter are great stress relievers! Start meetings with a “getting acquainted” activity, and plan programs that address members' needs and interests. Provide hybrid meetings where all members can participate.

At chapter meetings, we can spotlight professionally active teachers by inviting them to share their classroom experiences and recognizing these educators for their accomplishments. Our retired members can reflect on their professional lives and provide another aspect of being educators. Consider recognizing members with chapter-level Woman of Achievement, Longevity, and/or Lifetime Service Awards. Organize appreciation fundraisers to provide current educators with needed supplies or gift cards and provide retired members with care packages that include a gift card or a pack of greeting cards.

### Promoting Wellness through Art, Movement, and Play

One of the panel members reflected on becoming quickly aware that scheduling arts education on Monday mornings was critical to her students' wellness even as it also reduced anxiety. What if we started each DKG meeting with a short creative arts activity to put people at ease? It could be something such as making a collage about themselves out of magazine images. Combining art and play when opening a chapter meeting is fun for everyone.

We might also host yoga sessions for our members so they can teach the practice to their students and use it personally. Yoga is a wonderful relaxation, concentration, and balance activity. Yoga can be done from a chair and is calming and non-threatening. Movement/yoga is another option for starting a chapter meeting.

The panelists reminded educators in attendance of the value of play, which comes naturally to children. Let's ask ourselves, “Did I take time to play today?”

### Moving Forward

The panel provided awareness and action steps that can promote wellness in our chapters, wellness through connections, and wellness through art, movement, and play. The question remains: **How will we do our part in building awareness and taking action to promote the well-being of all our members?**

Debbie Pajula stated, “DKG mental wellness support—in tandem with members actively advocating for U.S. and state educational legislation and for local school policies and board decisions—is how we can help to improve our educational system!” In the fall of 2023, the *Global Transformation Project* is preparing to propose a resolution to the United Nations requesting Science-Based Mind Body Education for Public Education worldwide (non-mandatory) in Member and Observer States. The full resolution is available, including pages of science-based research references, at <https://globaltransformationproject.org/>. We urge members to consider supporting this initiative at the local level by incorporating some of the ideas in this project.

**Can we each take one mental wellness action step today?**



**Dr. Elizabeth Tarnner**, a member of Beta Delta Chapter in Virginia State Organization, is an administrator of a public Facebook page with more than 4,700 DKG members. A frequent workshop presenter, she has chaired many DKG chapter, state organization, and international committees (leadership development, program of work, professional affairs, nominating) as well as chairing the U.S. Forum Steering Committee. She is an educational consultant in communications, leadership, instructional design, and organizational development. [Liztarnner@aol.com](mailto:Liztarnner@aol.com)

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**Beverley H. Johns**, a member of Alpha Phi Chapter in Illinois State Organization, is a past state organization president. She worked with students with the most significant emotional and behavioral disorders in the public schools, was the administrator for an alternative program, and was a Professional Fellow at MacMurray College. She is the author of 25 books in the field. [beverleyhjohns@gmail.com](mailto:beverleyhjohns@gmail.com)

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# Membership Mindset: Navigating Mixers, Energizers, and Icebreakers

By Andrea Fox

Knowing membership is such an integral part of DKG, when was the last time you considered how mixers, energizers, and icebreakers contribute to the attraction and retention of members? Recent membership surveys have highlighted challenges with attendance at meetings and declining membership. Fortunately, a potential solution has been identified: incorporating icebreaker activities to foster better connections among members (*DKG NEWS*, 2023).

## It Started with an Ask

When I was a prospective DKG member, I was tasked with hosting a “table talk” at an area workshop on “Mixers, Energizers, and Icebreakers.” Initially, I struggled with using random activities to unite people, as my introverted nature and full workload made such activities daunting. However, I realized that the key to successful engagement lies in aligning existing activities with our intended purposes, much like planning a lesson in a classroom.

DKG hosts various events with different goals, such as social gatherings, educational programs, recruitment events, and committee meetings. Regardless of the event type, our primary objectives are to build relationships, develop skills, learn about new programs, and serve others—just as in a classroom setting. When considering icebreakers or similar activities, it’s essential to keep the following factors in mind:

1. **Purpose:** Clearly understand the event’s objective and how the activity contributes to achieving it.
2. **Audience:** Know the attendees and their familiarity with each other and the organization’s culture. Choose activities that match their comfort levels. When this is not possible, select low-social-risk activities and leverage inclusive practices.
3. **Setting:** Ensure the venue is accessible and conducive to interactions, considering possible mobility, hearing, and vision needs.
4. **Context:** Explain the activity to participants, outlining its purpose and potential outcomes. Encourage positive participation by creating a non-threatening atmosphere.

## Consider the Following

Frances is a prospective member and has been invited to attend a program focused on the benefits of communication. When she enters the room, she is greeted by a current member and helped to find her seat and the light snacks provided. As the crowd gathers, she is given a small bag of M&Ms to accompany the upcoming icebreaker. Still, she is not given context or instruction and eats the candy while waiting for the main event. When the icebreaker begins and instructions are given, it is clear the candy was to be used for the opening activity. Frances is embarrassed and a bit dismayed. How did an event with a topic of communication begin with miscommunication? What might have helped the evening be more successful?

Now consider this situation: Sally is an established member of a young chapter with a tight-knit membership. Each committee works together to ensure all in attendance are greeted and clearly understand the event. Rather than stay in familiar, pre-established groups, members freely move about the room. In conjunction with the programs team, the hospitality committee selects an icebreaker based on knowing the event’s purpose is recruiting and relationship building. Today’s activity asks participants to partner with their “Sole Mate” (someone whose shoes share something in common with their own. For example, both are wearing sandals, have the same shoe size, are wearing a similar color, have laces ... or not, etc.)



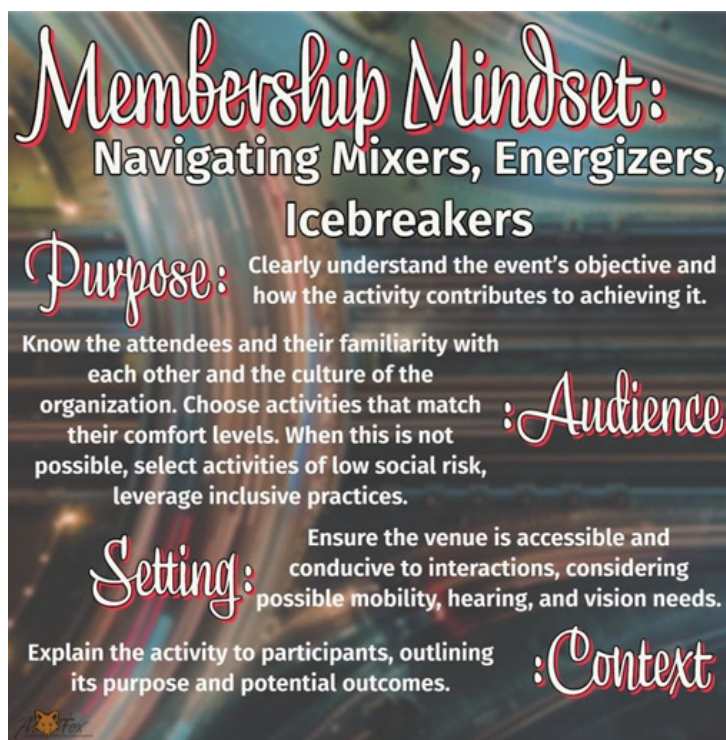
Sally directs the activity and notices Naomi, a visitor, who partners with Rosemarie, the colleague whose invitation she accepted for tonight. Sally, the hostess for the evening, recognizes Naomi and Rosemarie are teammates. Rather than make a rule that would separate a comfortable relationship, Sally allows the conversation to develop before asking each pair to thank their partner and select someone else for the next round. Having had the opportunity to meet three Sole Mates, participants return to their seats, and the program continues. As the program concludes, Sally closes the meeting with an activity in which participants reflect with at least one of their Sole Mates. As she leaves the meeting, Naomi thanks Sally for hosting such a warm and welcoming event. She notes she had not expected to meet so many people in such a comfortable yet engaging way. When Rosemarie follows up the next morning at school, Naomi is pleased she attended and shares her curiosities about DKG.

Although the second example is more successful than the first, it is important to understand thoughtful activities for adults are not much different than those we use in our classrooms with our students: They provide stability and predictability; respect participants' time, relationships, and understanding of an organization's culture; align with event goals; and promote curiosity. When our students are uncomfortable or lack understanding, they show us by exhibiting less-than-desirable behaviors. When adults are in similar situations, they also participate in negative behaviors. But the adults have the power to leave and not return.

## Final Thoughts

The examples given here are used for illustrative purposes and are not exclusive or exhaustive. Activities and social standards vary by chapter, location, and local norms and customs. The point here is to consider what will best fit both the event and the people attending. What can you think of that is acceptable and engaging? With whom might you or your committee partner to think through potential pros and cons of each activity? What context might be necessary to ensure full engagement for both new and established participants? What factors do you notice at your events that both encourage and discourage engagement?

We foster consistency, professionalism, and engagement at DKG events by valuing our members as professionals and aligning activities with their personalities and goals. Ultimately, we must understand that the magic lies not in the activities themselves but in how we connect them to our goals, the needs and preferences of our members, and each other. We are the keepers of our future. How will we focus our efforts to make room for others?



Colorful infographic designed by author Fox.

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## Promoting DKG's "Magic Carpet Ride"

Promoting Delta Kappa Gamma is a grassroots effort. If the Society is to thrive in the coming years, members need to begin sharing the stories of the impact DKG has had on their professional and personal lives. Here, the International Communications and Marketing Committee offers one vision of DKG membership as a "magic carpet ride."



Think of the movie *Aladdin* and the lyrics to the song "Magic Carpet Ride" (Menken & Rice, 1992). ***I can show you the world, shining, shimmering, splendid.*** Delta Kappa Gamma is a magic carpet ride and journey for a lifetime. Members of our Society have numerous opportunities to meet amazing women from all over the world who share our passion for making a difference, experiencing new cultures, and striving for educational excellence. The DKG world opens up when members look within and beyond their local chapters. ***I can open your eyes.*** Delta Kappa Gamma is in 17 countries and boasts a membership of more than 53,000 women. Every woman in the organization is a unique individual with something inspiring to share with her fellow members. Over the course of a journey in DKG, many of these have women become lifelong friends. These connections enable members to communicate and collaborate for the good of the Society. Look within and beyond to ***take you wonder by wonder on a magic carpet ride, a whole new world, a new fantastic point of view.***

Committing to Delta Kappa Gamma allows each member to share vicariously the cultures and worlds of all other members. The DKG Society is like a book, where turning the pages allows members to be enriched by others, even though they may never be in the same place or time zone. Acknowledging the distance between members does not diminish the reality of these DKG connections. Opportunities abound for members to travel, meet other educational leaders, and share their passion for Delta Kappa Gamma. And when members share this passion, the whole Society benefits.

Enrichment and expansion of our DKG world are happening each day. During the pandemic, many Society members became more familiar with Zoom and other electronic communication modalities. Electronic media have become a new adventure and yet another tool enabling members and chapters to connect with each other. Virtual and hybrid conferences are not only possible







but celebrated. It is hard to believe that a tragedy such as the pandemic resulted in even more ways to connect with each other! Members can celebrate their personal and professional growth in a variety of ways while promoting an authentic spiritual fellowship. By having more ways to connect, communicate, and collaborate with educators in many different chapters, state organizations, and countries, we can share and increase our understanding of economic, political, social, and educational issues impacting all educators. These new forms of electronic media also enable greater connection with *potential* members who may find the discussions on these topics engaging and relevant.

As DKG returns to a more traditional, in-person experience in many areas, there are still ***a hundred thousand things to see***. Together, members grow more confident and can meet challenges that have been placed in their paths. Members, chapters, and state organizations are now able to gather and grow together. DKG is making a difference as members marvel at the successes of our active educators and come to realize how important the relationships are in our DKG family. Helping potential members see this connection and dedication helps the whole Society flourish. ***A whole new world (every turn a surprise). With new horizons to pursue.***

Now it is time to extend a hand to others and invite more educators to join this magic carpet ride on a DKG Journey for a Lifetime. Members old and new should take a moment to reflect on their personal and professional growth since joining Delta Kappa Gamma. Be mindful of the ways that this journey has helped create opportunities to connect, communicate, and grow within the organization. Then, share these feelings and experiences with colleagues who may benefit from a strong professional network.

The International Communications and Marketing Committee encourages each Society member to take the next step in sharing the benefits of DKG membership with fellow educators. Become a more active chapter member, seek a chapter office, or look toward state organization and international leadership to help those around you see all DKG has to offer. When members become more active, they enable DKG to have a stronger impact in their communities, which encourages further growth of the organization.

**That's where we'll be. A thrilling chase. A wondrous place for you and for me.**

# DKGIEF: Did You Know?

The DKG International Educators Foundation (DKGIEF) supports effective educational projects, the educational and charitable activities of The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, and professional growth of educators worldwide. DKGIEF raises money for various funds. Read on to learn interesting facts about each one.



**Cornetet Award** - Did you know that the Cornetet Individual Award is available to employed educators whether or not they are DKG members? The award may pay for registration fees and conference-related materials, travel, lodging, food, substitute teacher (if not provided by the district), and other expenses necessary for participation in the proposed professional development activities.

Did you know that the Cornetet Seminar Professional Development Award is granted to sponsor professional development seminars? Regions, areas, and state organizations of DKG may apply for a Cornetet Seminar Award to assist in providing development opportunities for educators in their locale.

**Educators Award Fund** - Did you know that this fund offers cash awards for nonfiction writing impacting education? The Educators Book Award is decided by a committee of five DKG members, and the selected book is also recognized with an award seal. New this year is an honorable mention category.

**Educational Project Award** - Did you know that all proposed projects must be consistent with—and show a clear connection to—the DKGIEF mission statement and the DKGIEF purposes? Any project leader may apply. Applicants need not be members of DKG.

**Emergency Fund** - Did you know the Emergency Fund is solely funded by donations? The Emergency Fund helps members with a major loss due to a natural disaster by providing a \$500 check.

**Eunah Temple Holden Leadership Fund** - Did you know the International Holden Fund Committee looks for innovative ways to support speakers for international meetings and other leadership events? This year the committee funded speakers at the Latin American Conference as well as the international conferences.

**Golden Gift Fund** - Did you know that the *Leadership Management Seminar* is now called *DKG: Ignite: Leaders Empowering Leaders Program*? Currently offered every even year, it is held in coordination with staff and faculty at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas.

**International Speakers Fund** - Did you know that any DKG member is eligible to apply to be an International Speakers Fund (ISF) speaker? ISF speakers travel to a DKG event in another country to present keynotes, workshops, or training. This fund pays for air travel for the speaker. State organization presidents request speakers for their DKG events, and their state organization provides housing and meals.





**Scholarship Fund** - Did you know International Scholarships are awarded annually to members for master's and doctoral graduate study? The interest from this endowed fund is used for the scholarships, and it grows through donations.

**World Fellowship Fund** - Did you know that some World Fellows are also Fulbright Scholars? The DKG award supports housing, food, and incidental expenses. Many World Fellows say they could not accept the Fulbright award if they didn't have this additional support from DKG.

**Area of Greatest Need** - Did you know that this fund gives you a place to donate if you are having a difficult time choosing among all of these very worthy funds?

Did you know there are [many ways to give to DKGIEF](#)? In addition to a one-time donation, you can give smaller amounts on a monthly basis to add up to your annual contribution. Other options include transfer of stocks to DKGIEF, donation of your annual mandatory IRA withdrawal, and planned estate giving.

DKGIEF truly appreciates donors and recognizes contributions. Did you know each recognition level is based on cumulative lifelong giving? For example, Luminaries are anyone who gives \$1000 dollars. And a gift of \$10,000 or more is noted in the Wall of Roses memory book and with your name displayed on the rose trellis.

Learn more about the other levels at [https://www.dkg.org/DKGS/DKGIEF/DKGIEF\\_Recognition\\_levels.aspx](https://www.dkg.org/DKGS/DKGIEF/DKGIEF_Recognition_levels.aspx)

Did you know that the DKGIEF board of directors has 14 members who strive to increase these funds to be able to give more awards and scholarships? Contributions to these programs and awards can expand the reach of DKG as its members and supporters work together to impact education worldwide.





# Educators Book Award: Impacting Education Worldwide

Since 1946, The Delta Kappa Society International has recognized outstanding educational research by women on topics of current interest in education. In 1974, a committee with representation from each of the Society's regions continued this important project and, in 1982, the committee was named the International Educators Book Award Committee. In the fall, the committee sends out a request for submissions. Annually the committee chooses a book to be recognized with an award of \$2,500.

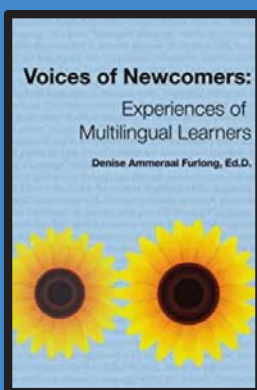
This year's committee, with representation from DKG's five regions, read four books submitted by publishers and authors. To be considered, books must be the work and research of women authors from DKG member countries and have the potential to influence the direction of thought and action necessary to meet the needs of today's complex society. The books are on topics of current educational importance and are well written, edited, and formatted.

This year's submissions were exceptional in all respects. They included topics of civil rights, race inequity, diversity, multilingual learning, inclusion, and political and social issues. The committee ultimately chose *Voices of Newcomers: Experiences of Multilingual Learners* by Denise Ammeraal Furlong, EdD, as the winning book. Honorable Mention was awarded to *Inclusive Texts in Elementary Classrooms: Developing Literacies, Identities, and Understandings* by Amy J. Heineke and Aimee Papola-Ellis.

The committee encourages all DKG members—both current and retired educators—to read these thought-provoking books. The significant work of this committee continues the impact of Delta Kappa Gamma worldwide.

## 2023 Educators Book Award

### *Voices of Newcomers: Experiences of Multilingual Learners*



By Denise Ammeraal Furlong, Ed.D.

The DKG Educators Book Award Committee is pleased to announce this year's winning book: *Voices of Newcomers: Experiences of Multilingual Learners*. This is an easy-to-read, practical guide for the early career educator, the seasoned educator and the administrator looking to meet the needs of Multilingual/English Learners, in particular Newcomers and SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education).

This author hopes to spark conversation and inspire creativity in working with Multilingual Learners as she shares valuable experiences on:

- How to manage the first days and weeks to assist the Newcomer in adjusting (academically, emotionally and socially) to their new school and class
- Asset-based perspectives on the progress of Multilingual Learners (MLs)
- Information that will help teachers academically engage these students, in addition to ways to assess and motivate them
- Reflection questions and discussions for each chapter to guide book clubs or conversations in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
- Ready-to-use resources to support educators as they meet the needs of MLs (Multilingual Learners)

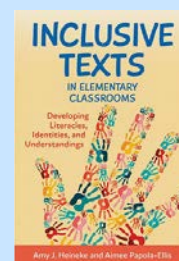
This book gives the educational community time to pause and reflect on classroom activities, teaching styles, approaches to student feelings, attitude toward the Multilingual Learner, and insight into possible family situations or trauma that they have experienced. By amplifying the voices of these students, their families, and their teachers, this handbook includes real-life stories to help educators understand these diverse perspectives.

## Honorable Mention

### *Inclusive Texts in Elementary Classrooms: Developing Literacies, Identities, and Understandings*

by Amy J. Heineke and Aimee Papola-Ellis

At a time when schools are becoming more and more diverse it is important that schools prioritize texts that mirror children's life experiences and give children a window to understanding the experiences of others. The authors take educators through a four-part framework for selecting, using, and engaging students with text that promote children's identity, and reading and content literacy. This book based on extensive research gives strategies, examples, and reflective questions. *Inclusive Texts* provides educators with the tools to meet the diverse and relevant needs of today's students.



www.dkg.org



## An Overview of Educational Systems in DKG Member Countries

**“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.” Malala Yousafzai**

Teachers around the world strive to prepare students for success. Teachers show up daily to ensure that students not only have access to learning but that all students receive the best education. In challenging times as well as those of great achievement, teachers in the 17 member countries of DKG can be counted on as a constant in the lives of the students they teach.

The school systems we know currently have evolved over the years. A lens through history shows variance in how education was delivered as well as who was taught. Schools may have been organized through churches, towns, or groups of parents. Many children were excluded based on race or ethnicity, gender, income, or geographic location.

Early funding for education was haphazard. Often, local schools were dependent on tuition paid by parents. Some were funded by charitable organizations, while others may have had assistance through property taxes or state support. Lack of funding was another reason that students were excluded from school attendance.

As populations grew, countries realized that education was not a luxury but a necessity. An investment in education would benefit whole nations by transforming children into literate, moral, and productive citizens (Kober et al., 2020). At this point, each country enacted its own laws and acts that regulated and spelled out what was required to educate its population. These laws and acts have continually undergone revisions, changes, and improvements as more research becomes available regarding the best methods of establishing and operating school systems.

It is true that we know best that with which we are accustomed. This is especially true in examining the educational systems of DKG’s 17 member countries. Unless a member has experience with other countries’ systems, her own system is what has guided her teaching and learning over the years. For example, the structure of education in Japan looks different than does that of Finland. Students in Guatemala face challenges not seen in Iceland. A study of educational systems in our member countries allows us to initiate conversation and to develop and carry out strategic plans to meet the various needs of members’ educational systems—while always keeping in mind the importance of an educated populace.

It is also important to note that the population of each of the 17 member countries varies greatly. Iceland has the smallest population at 341,000 residents; the United States has the largest number at 331,000,000. In DKG’s Scandinavian countries, Finland and Norway are home to about 5 million each while Sweden tops 10 million. The Central American countries of Costa Rica (5 million) and Panama (4.3 million) are close in numbers, with Guatemala higher at 17 million. Population is one factor in the examination of education systems and will be addressed later in this article.





## Exploring Education in DKG Countries

To show commonality as well as differences, the International Educational Excellence Committee posed questions to several members regarding the current educational systems in their countries. The committee would like to thank the following who provided answers: Bianchinetta Benavides-Segura, Costa Rica; Donne-Faye Madhosingh, Meredyth Kezar, and Daina Moore, Canada; Kaija Teikari, Finland; Claudia Estrada, Guatemala; Ingibjörg Jónasdóttir, Iceland; Paula Fabian, Japan; and Yvonne Gatley, United States. Data cited in this article are from personal communications with these individuals from April 2023; accordingly, their names are cited after each data point.



### ***What are the compulsory ages for a child to begin and end their schooling?***

Each country has set compulsory ages, and they are usually dependent on a student's birthday within the calendar year. For instance, students in many U.S. states must be 6 years old by September 1 to enroll in school (Gatley). Most countries have set age 6 as the beginning age for formal schooling that is provided free to all students. The earliest beginning age of compulsory school attendance is age 5 in Great Britain (Laas, 2023). Formal education is determined to begin at age 7 in Finland (Teikari). Many countries offer kindergarten or preschool programs that are funded at no costs to families. In this case, children will be attending school at an earlier age. Iceland municipalities run a "play school" for children ages 2 to 5 (Jónasdóttir).

The age to end compulsory schooling also varies, with age 16 being the most common age at which a student is no longer mandated to attend school. This age can also vary from state or provincial laws that dictate a longer age—to 17 or 18 (Benavides-Segura; Madhosingh, Moore, Kezar; Teikari; Jónasdóttir; Gatley). Data from other countries show a wide variance in the ages and years that students are required to attend school. Japanese students are required to attend school from Grades 1–9, which include the ages of 6 to 15 years old (Fabian). Students in Guatemala begin at age 5 and end their compulsory schooling at 12, which is also the age at which free public education ends (Estrada). Although schools are available for students beyond the age of 12 in Guatemala, the fees for these schools must be paid by the student's family.

### ***What percentage of a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is allocated for education?***

With numbers ranging from 3.1% on the low end to 11% on the high end, the gap is apparent in what each country allocates to educational spending. Educational systems in Canada (11%; Madhosingh, Moore, Kezar) offer options not found in those systems operating in Guatemala (3.1%; Estrada). The average GDP devoted to education in DKG's member countries stands at 6%. Although these numbers fluctuate on a yearly basis, what stands out is the disparity in the support of education provided to students in our member countries. Our outstanding DKG members from our neediest countries work miracles with what they are allocated.

### ***How are schools financed?***

Funding for public schools is mostly collected through a system of taxes on individuals, businesses, and properties. The way those funds are distributed is often dependent on the population of the country. Schools in our largest member country, the United States, are funded from revenue collected mostly at the state and local levels, with a small percentage contributed at the federal level (Kober et al., 2020). In Costa Rica, the Ministry of Public Education is the government entity that funds and regulates all aspects of public education (Benavides-Segura).





## *How are the levels of education denoted?*

Preschool, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary, Academic, Technical, Vocational: Words that describe levels of education are interchangeable depending on the country of origin. These levels are also directly tied to the ages of students.

Preschool is provided for age 6 in both Costa Rica (Benavides-Segura) and Finland (Teikari). Then, at age 7, students in these two countries begin their elementary grades, which last 6 years. These classes are mostly self-contained with one main teacher. The next 3 years of schooling in Finland see students moving daily from class to class based on specific subject-area teachers. The model for elementary (6 years) and what is commonly called junior high (3 years) is common in many countries.

Secondary education also varies. Most students in the United States (Gatley) attend fully-funded public high schools for 4 years. Additional choices may be available, many of which are affiliated with religious groups and many of which require fees or tuition. Charter schools have also seen a rise in enrollments. High schools in the United States are all intended to provide a general and integrated curriculum. Other countries may offer a choice in secondary schools between an academic focus and technical/vocational focus. In these schools, students take an exam that qualifies them for one or the other. Japan considers high school to be higher education and, because it is not compulsory, students must take entrance examinations (Fabian).

Higher education in the form of junior colleges and universities is available in the 17 member countries of DKG. These institutions may be public, state affiliated, or private. Entrance requirements differ, as do funding and costs.

## *Who sets the curriculum?*

In what should be a straightforward answer, the response to this question is multifaceted. Curriculum based on standards used to guide instruction can be defined by each country's ministry or department of education. Irrespective of the formal designation of these ministries/departments, the goal is to ensure a high-quality education for all who attend during the compulsory ages. This education can be affected by the GDP (see prior section) allocated to education.

With no national curriculum in the United States, individual states have primary authority over education (Gatley). Every state has a department or agency that oversees its administration of public education and establishes the standards to be used to guide instruction. Local districts and school boards take their direction from the states regarding decisions over items such as testing, academic content, graduation requirements, and number of school days—yet assume some local control. Many hot button topics have dominated state legislatures and local school boards in recent times, with laws and mandates enacted that target controversial content.

Another country with a large population and a decentralized system of governance is Canada (Madhosingh, Moore, Kezar). Provincial governments are responsible for establishing curriculum for their schools.

The Japanese national curriculum standards are revised every 10 years (Fabian). These Courses of Study have the aim of enabling all students to receive a certain degree of education regardless of where they are educated in Japan.



## **Additional Educational Issues to Consider**

Challenges to education have increased over



the past several years. No one can refute the fact that COVID-19 caused an international disruption in education. Disparities in educational systems were brought to the forefront and caused countries and their respective governments to examine their practices. Governments and schools are currently addressing gaps in education that occurred due to lack of educational opportunity.

Refugees and migrants place new demands on educational systems. Students relocating to schools in our member countries need access to public education but face difficulties with language, homelessness, and family disruptions. Concentrated work to address these issues will need to be considered and resolved to allow all students the education they deserve and require.

One final question was posed to our respondents: **Describe special or unique features of your country's educational system.** Answers to that question follow and serve to inform us of the similarities and differences in our member countries. Answers have been selected to highlight the most unique features.



- **Canada: Donne-Faye Madhosingh, Meredyth Kezar, Daina Moore**

"We have a very good public education system. Due to the geographical size of Canada and unique situations such as French being the official language in Quebec and First Nation schools, etc., our system must be flexible and meet the needs of the region. We have very remote regions as well as large multicultural urban areas, for instance."

- **Costa Rica: Bianchinetta Benavides-Segura**

"So much to say...As stated in the Political Constitution, public education is free and mandatory from preschool to high school. Since we do not have an army, the country is devoted to supporting education to the extremes."

- **Finland: Kaija Teikari**

"Basic education is totally free (meals, educational materials, school trips under 5 kilometers). Upper secondary and even vocational students study diligently without economical worries. Finnish universities do not charge term fees. Swedish is the second official language besides Finnish in Finland and is taught at school from Grade 6 onward—but it is not compulsory in Matriculation Exam any more. The most popular and compulsory foreign language is English (from Grade 3); in bigger upper secondary schools, optional 2-year courses can be offered, such as German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Russian."

- **Guatemala: Claudia Estrada**

"Spanish is the official language spoken in the country although there are 21 Mayan languages spoken in the country, mostly in the rural areas. Also two more languages not recognized as Mayan: Xinca is spoken in the southern pacific area, and Garifuna is spoken in the Caribbean area. The school year starts in January and ends in October."

- **Iceland: Ingibjörg Jónasdóttir**

"There are a number of important features:

1. The system is generally very open from most perspectives. There is no formal age frame for the education after the end of compulsory school. People can enter at any age at any level.
2. The system is basically non-tracking and thus, in principle, all parts of the system are open to everybody, even though in certain instances people must compete—but then on substantive criteria set at the entrance gate.
3. The assessment is in the professional hands of teachers—or schools—and there are currently no national examinations, except in the individual industrial arts."



- **Japan - Paula Fabian**

“Japanese-style school education provides not only classroom instruction but also guidance for students’ daily lives. Teachers have a great deal of responsibility in taking care of their students ‘24/7.’ Public elementary school students do not wear uniforms, but all public and private junior and senior high students wear uniforms. One of the main features of Japanese schools is the school lunch. School lunches in Japan are inexpensive and nutritionally balanced. Based on the guidance of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), school lunches in Japan are carefully regulated in terms of calories, nutritional value, and budget per meal. Many elementary schools may not have cafeterias, so students eat in their classrooms and take turns helping serve lunch to classmates.

“Field Day, called ‘Sports Day’ in Japan, is usually a fall event with all students being divided into teams to compete against each other. You do not have to have any athletic ability to participate. The events are often unique and fun for all, with parents/grandparents, etc. coming to watch with a picnic lunch.

“Most public schools do not really have a janitor but a school caretaker/maintenance person who is a civil servant. At the end of each school day, the cleaning is done by the students, both in the school and on the grounds and public sidewalks around the school. Students are usually divided into small groups, taking daily/weekly turns cleaning the classroom, hallway, restroom, etc. Students empty the trash, sweep, and mop daily. In elementary schools, older students usually help/work with 1st and 2nd graders. Students are taught to take pride in their school by keeping things neat and tidy with team effort.”

- **United States of America – Yvonne Gatley**

“The ubiquitous yellow school bus indicates transportation to and from school for students in the United States. ‘Nationally, 26 million children in the U.S. take 480,000 buses to and from school each day. School buses travel about 12,000 miles per year per bus or almost 6 billion cumulative miles per year’ (New York School Bus Contractors Association, 2023).

“The school year in the U.S. begins mid-August or mid-September and runs through mid-May or mid-June. These dates are often geographically driven. Most schools offer a winter/holiday break at the end of December and may additionally have a spring break.”

## Learning More About Educational Systems

DKG members may not be able to experience firsthand the educational systems of each member country but can become informed through a variety of avenues. Explore the DKG website, read the publications, and attend conferences and conventions. Invite a speaker from the International Speakers Fund to present at your state organization meetings. Connect with another chapter in a different country and hold a joint Zoom meeting. Create programs at your chapters that highlight the countries of DKG. You may be able to find someone in your community who is from that country or has knowledge due to travel or work opportunities. To pursue DKG’s vision of promoting educational excellence, educate yourself and your fellow members about similarities and differences in our educational systems.

**“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”**

**—Nelson Mandela**





# One Day at a Time

Alyona Kladieva is a World Fellowship recipient who fits the idea of “One Day at a Time.” She is one of 20 young women from around the world who were selected by the DKG International World Fellowship Committee in 2021. This alone is quite an accomplishment . . . but wait until you read the rest!

Alyona, who was a featured speaker at the 2023 DKG International Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, is an amazing young woman for more reasons than one. She and her twin brother were born in Ukraine 12 weeks early, weighing one pound and 12 ounces, on July 26, 1997. They both struggled to live. Alyona survived. However, her early arrival in the world brought physical challenges. She was born with cerebral palsy, which she lives with today and which causes her mobility difficulty. Her parents divorced soon after her birth. When Alyona was 5 years old, her mother died suddenly.

As she grew to school age, the health care system in her home country diagnosed her as “slow and profoundly mentally impaired.” This designation made obtaining an education a great deal more difficult. And yet, at age 7, she began to attend regular school. Routine lengthy trips to distant hospitals for treatments and physical therapy, sometimes being gone for months at a time, made it extremely difficult to catch up with her schoolwork. And then, when she was 11 years old, her father also unexpectedly died, making her an orphan.

Between the ages of 11 and 20, Alyona finished her basic education and graduated with a college degree in linguistics. She then started teaching privately and preparing her students to speak fluent English. Although she had been studying linguistics with the focus on translation from English/French to Ukrainian and vice versa, she felt that her calling was teaching. She wanted to gain more knowledge about various teaching techniques and methods.

## In Her Own Words

Alyona’s statement of her study plan and her intended degree objective from her World Fellowship application capture her focus:

Major Field of Study Intended Specialization: Teaching English as Foreign Language. I’m planning to specialize in Teaching English as Foreign Language because this degree relates to the degree I have in linguistics. Moreover, I teach English to Ukrainian, and I believe getting a master’s degree in the United States will give me valuable knowledge and experience that I will apply practically after I get back to my country.

A recent post on Instagram describes Alyona’s experience of “travelling in time”:

*If someone asked me before whether I had traveled in time, I would not know what to answer. But now, I know for sure that I had such an experience.*

*Just like everyone else the past is a place without war.*

*A place with messages about what I saw at the movies, what I drank at a coffee shop, what new person I met recently or how much I need to do for school.*



**2021 World Fellowship recipient Alyona Kladieva presents at the 2023 International Conference in Phoenix alongside conference organizers Teresa Cowan and Carol Herzog in a photo shared on DKG app by Donna M. Jenkins, Rho Chapter, Colorado.**

*A place where I don't see sadness on people's faces when I tell them about my country.*

*A place where I can watch a video message from my home and smile.*

*A place where I can talk to my sister without ever thinking whether I'll have such an opportunity again.*

*A place where I can hear the voices of loved ones at any moment.*

*A place where sending a text "Are you alive"? is just a thriller movie scene.*

*A place where I have enough emotions left to cry watching a sad movie.*

*A place where I have an unscathed house that I can go back to.*

*A place where every new morning is just the beginning of my day, not me checking the news and being afraid to hear about death.*

*A place where I don't cry when people ask me "How are you?"*

*A place where I can find a lot of answers to the question "what do you dream about?"*

*A place without a war.*

Alyona further writes: "I have had some challenges and adversity in my early life that have shaped my personality, my outlook, and my drive. The overall result of these painful struggles is very positive; the struggles themselves might have devastated me were it not for my strong character."

Remember: Your financial help allows young women like Alyona from around the world to fulfill their dreams of receiving a master's and/or a doctoral degree in the United States or Canada.

**THANK YOU FOR PROVIDING FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES WORLDWIDE—  
MAKING A GLOBAL IMPACT ON WOMEN, THEIR LIVES, AND THEIR COUNTRIES!**





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