

2015

# Paraprofessional Perspectives:

Essays by UFT Public School  
Classroom Paraprofessionals

A Collaboration of the UFT Paraprofessional College Program  
and The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies



**SUNY EMPIRE**  
STATE COLLEGE

*Printed by the SUNY Empire State College Print Shop  
May 2015*

# Paraprofessional Perspectives: Essays by UFT Public School Classroom Paraprofessionals

A Collaboration of the UFT Paraprofessional College Program

## **Edited by**

Brenda Henry-Offor  
Audrey Campbell  
Ryan Jenkins

## **Instructors**

Glaister Butler  
Brenda Henry-Offor  
Barbara Levine  
JoAnn Luhrs  
Syreeta N. McFadden  
Jonathan Scott  
Barbara Tepper

## **Advisory Editor**

Michael Merrill

**The Harry Van Arsdale Jr.  
Center for Labor Studies  
SUNY Empire State College**

# Foreword

It is an honor and pleasure for me to introduce the most recent collection of essays from students in the Van Arsdale center's paraprofessional college program partnership with the United Federation of Teachers.

The range and seriousness of the volume is impressive, from the charter school debate and classroom practice to reflections on the blues and grief, the essays in this collection, written by public school classroom paraprofessionals as a regular part of the courses, demonstrate their dedication to their craft and the quality of their work.

A special thanks also are due to Professor Brenda Henry-Offor, the faculty director of our UFT college program partnership, Audrey Campbell and Ryan Jenkins, who worked so hard, and so capably, to pull this collection together.

Thank you all for everything you do.

– Michael Merrill  
Dean

---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Foreword

<b>Charter vs. Public Schools</b> .....	1
by Alma Contreras	
<b>Pros and Cons of Charter Schools</b> .....	4
by Idonia Gonzalez	
<b>New York City Charter Schools: “Should I or Shouldn’t I”</b> .....	7
by Norma Maldonado	
<b>Understanding Charter Schools</b> .....	11
by Anita Munoz	
<b>Charter Schools and Public Schools</b> .....	13
by Minerva Rodriguez	
<b>Why Space Matters in the Charter School Debate</b> .....	16
by Reina Santos	
<b>Are Charter Schools the New Way to Go</b> .....	20
by Ironely Valdez	
<b>Asperger’s Syndrome and the Classroom</b> .....	24
by Linda Vilardi	
<b>Communication in the Classroom</b> .....	26
by Marilynn Veras	
<b>Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom</b> .....	27
by Tori Tanzi	
<b>Expressions of Communication: Diabetes, Blindness and Braille</b> .....	30
by Valerie Simpson	
<b>Autism</b> .....	33
by Angela Shenk	
<b>Alternate Treatments to ADHD</b> .....	35
by Roslyn Ponce	
<b>All Adults in High Schools Should Participate in Suicide Prevention Programs</b> ..	37
by Ana De Leon	
<b>The Role of the Paraprofessional</b> .....	40
by Camille Susino	

<b>Paraprofessionals Role in the Classroom .....</b>	<b>43</b>
by Mignonne Tissera	
<b>What Happens When the Confidence of a Paraprofessional is Betrayed? .....</b>	<b>45</b>
by Norma Maldonado	
<b>Confidentiality.....</b>	<b>48</b>
by Michelle McLaurin	
<b>Quality Professional Development Results in Paraprofessionals as an Effective Classroom Resource.....</b>	<b>50</b>
by Mayra L. Ortiz	
<b>Emotion and the Blues in Two Songs: “It Serves Me Right to Suffer” by John Lee Hooker and “Mississippi Goddam” by Nina Simone .....</b>	<b>54</b>
by Cindy Doherty	
<b>What is This Blues Feeling.....</b>	<b>56</b>
by Stuart R. Zak	
<b>The Blues.....</b>	<b>57</b>
by Joel Rodriguez	
<b>The Idea of Love and the Reality of Love in the Song, “Fragrance at Your Feet” ...</b>	<b>59</b>
by Gina Sampedro	
<b>An Essay on “Life is Fine” by Langston Hughes .....</b>	<b>61</b>
by Rosaly Rodriguez	
<b>The Right Decision .....</b>	<b>64</b>
by Elaine Devine	
<b>Remembering the Mangos.....</b>	<b>67</b>
by Idonia Gonzalez	
<b>My Life in a Day .....</b>	<b>68</b>
by Diane Jones	
<b>Reverie: Passover Then and Now.....</b>	<b>70</b>
by Stuart R. Zak	
<b>“Our Spring” .....</b>	<b>71</b>
by Janice Ousley	
<b>One Day of My Life .....</b>	<b>72</b>
by Gina Sampedro	
<b>On Grieving .....</b>	<b>74</b>
by Yvette Torres	

# Charter Schools vs. Public Schools

by Alma Contreras

Everyone deserves the opportunity to receive a good education. Unfortunately, not everyone has those advantages. Those that do, have different choices on how they wish to receive that education. In the United States, there are opportunities to either go to a public, private, or charter school. Charter schools are different from others in operations, regulations, and standards. However, there is disagreement on which schools are better for students. While some believe that charter schools are more successful, others argue that regular public schools function better and are more successful. I think that there are some benefits and disadvantages to charter schools.

Charter schools are independent and self-governed schools that have their own rules and regulations and are not controlled by the state like other schools are. This means that they can make their own policies, have their own educational approaches, and handle their own budget (NYCDOE). They do have to follow the Department of Education's requirement of reaching success and having a stable system; otherwise, the school will be closed. There are different ways that charter schools in different states operate. All charter schools do have the same idea of who attends them. Students have a choice. They are not forced and assigned to enroll by the school, but choose if they want to be in one or not (Bulkley). There are a lot of charter schools operating in New York City. The NYCDOE shows that, in the years of 2010 to 2011, there were up to 46 charter schools and a goal of 114 to be issued later on. Any school in New York City is eligible to become a charter school. "A traditional district school in New York City that has been in existence for at least one year can apply to convert the school to a public charter school" (NYCDOE). They can either be converted from already existing regular schools, or be built into brand new ones. An application is needed and to be approved by the SUNY. The students who go to these schools are mostly Hispanic and black. There are higher percentages of blacks and Hispanics going to charter schools than white, and it might have to do with the communities that are more urban (Bulkley). They are all developed to have their own levels and performance of academic success.

Charter schools can be very good at helping their students into reaching academic success. They have similar standards as other schools in passing the same state and regents required tests. Anyone is able to get into the schools. Disadvantaged students have more opportunities of receiving more attention and being more successful than they will in public schools. Since the schools are smaller, students also have the advantages of being in smaller classes and work areas that allows them to work more deeply with their classmates and teachers (Byalin). This leads to better performance and understanding of the material. Many students are not receiving the proper education due to low income and community circumstances, but charter schools allows

those to have more opportunities of a better education. Parents are very involved in the school's development. One system of successful charter schools is the Carl C. Icahn Charter schools in the south Bronx of New York City. In this school, parents engage in a lot of the school's development. "They organize class parties, chaperone field trips, and sign the reading logs, homework, and tests sent home" (USDOE). With the parents' help, the schools are able to have extra activities and more encouragement. I think that it is important for parents to encourage their children to get involved in school activities and be more active. It helps a lot in building a better academic environment. Teachers also are able to benefit. In an article, Byalin states that it provides teachers with choice as well (Byalin). Charter schools are willing to give teaching opportunities to any teachers. The Carl C. Icahn charter school built by Jeffrey Litt has good ways of helping its students. There are many activities for them, a variety of subjects, and after school and weekend programs. The school helps students be academically successful, especially for those with families of low incomes, and has different activities like cheerleading, scout programs, and other sports like basketball and volleyball (USDOE). It even scored higher on the state tests than all the other charter schools in New York. Charter schools can be very successful and sometimes more than other schools, depending on the way it is personally operated.

Despite their successes, though, they also can have disadvantages. Many argue that charter schools are not as good as they can be. It does open opportunities for teachers, but that also can be a bad thing. Research found that because they are open to giving teaching opportunities, they hire a lot of teachers with less experience (Bulkley). I think that for charter schools to be successful, they need experienced teachers that can make a noted difference. Charter schools are known to be either public or private, but some believe that they are not public because they don't work well with serving the community (Halle). Vouchers became popular for students, and they allow them to go to any private or public school. (Dillon). Many people take advantage of this free opportunity, which can decrease the charter schools' popularity. Many charter schools were already closed because they didn't succeed or meet the standards. More than four hundred charter schools in the United States were closed (Dillon). They also might not reach the same standards and academic success of other public and private schools. It is their purpose to be a different system, but noncharter schools do have more purposes outside their own schools that can help others and not just themselves. Charter schools are less to succeed, but just like some of them do, many more public schools do too (Halle).

There will always be different opinions about the different systems of schools and approaches to education. I believe that both sides are correct in different ways. To make each school better, the departments of education and the school themselves should make different and more effective plans to increase the rates of success. Charter schools can improve with more awareness and caution in setting its goals, standards, and policies. Everyone going into charter schools take these opportunities at their own risk.

---

## Sources Cited

- Bulkley, K. E. (2012). "Charter schools ... Taking a closer look: How charter schools operate, who attends them, how they are distinctive and how they are academically." *Education Digest*, V77 58-62. April 9, 2014.
- Byalin, K. (2014). "Charter Schools offer real choice." *Staten Island Advance*, np. April 6, 2014.
- Dillon, Sam. "For Parents Seeking a Choice, Charter Schools Prove More Popular Than Vouchers." *Social Policy: Essential Primary Sources*, pp. 471-474. April 9, 2014.
- Halle, Witt. (2014) "Boost Public schools, not charters." *Staten Island Advance*, np. April 6, 2014.
- United States Department of Education. "Education Performance and Accountability K-8 charter schools: Closing the achievement gap." Carl C. Icahn Charter School, Bronx, N.Y. April 9, 2014.

# Pros and Cons of Charter Schools

by Idonia Gonzalez

Charter schools have been a topic of debate for many in the educational community – teachers, parents, Department of Education officials – since their start in 1991 in Minnesota (Bulkley 2012). There are many who point at the fact that a considerable amount of charter schools fail due to not being able to fulfill the circumstances of their contracts – as well as fiscal and management issues – and do not actually show any real evidence of being a cheaper alternative to public schooling with better results (Bulkley 2012). Others point to the excellent parental involvement and school choice, as well as the number of charter schools that have outperformed many public schools, one example being Jeffrey Litt’s Carl C. Icahn Charter School (US Department of Education). In my experience, I’m inclined to agree with the latter, but for the sake of this essay we will be exploring the pros and cons of charter schools.

There are many pros to charter schools. The first, and most compelling, argument for charter schools is that it provides “options for families” (Mack 2012). The zoned school of your neighborhood is not necessarily the best environment for your child, especially if you live in an area where the zoned school is: a) underfunded, b) filled with problematic children; or c) not academically ambitious enough. There are plenty of more reasons as to why the zoned school may not be a fit, but the ones just listed are the most popular. However, the fact of the matter is that there are many reasons as to why parents wouldn’t want their children going to their zoned school, and there should be options for when this happens. This is where charter schools come in. With school choice, “parents are allowed to send their child to any public school within their state” (Lerner, 2006).

Another pro is that charter schools are, in theory, more likely to upkeep their school at a rate that keeps parents, teachers, and students happy because there is competition among charter schools for enrollment and retention rates. “While there’s not much evidence that test scores have risen as a result of competition, competition has made traditional public schools much more conscious about customer service and how curriculum and other decisions could impact enrollment. Certainly, there’s much less of the take-it-or-leave-it attitude in public education” (Mack, 2012). As a result, charter schools also create innovation and exciting reform policies. “Some of the most exciting experiments in American education are occurring in charter schools, such as those run by the KIPP network and the Harlem Children’s Zone” (Mack, 2012). Charter schools are unrestrained by union and other kinds of rules, so it’s easier for charters to adopt to changes like longer school years or longer school weeks.

Charter schools also can make innovations in other areas, adopting philosophies such as “Waldorf, Montessori or Reggio Emilia; around particular concentrations such as drama and performing arts, math and science, or foreign language; or managed by for-

profit institutions such as SABIS Inc. or The Edison Project” (Lerner, 2006). This kind of flexibility helps them get around educational philosophies such as the Common Core curriculum, which many parents have proven to be unhappy with and many educators are dissatisfied with, as well as getting around the No Child Left Behind Act, which many feel promotes too much of a “teach-to-test” curriculum.

Contrary to what those like myself would like to believe, there are in fact some cons to charter schools that are valid when brought up for debate. The first being this: “the schools are funded based on enrollment and charters mean loss of funding for traditional public schools” (Mack, 2012). Those who are against charter schools argue that this kind of fiscal inefficiency does not make sense. As one school official said: “If you want to improve the road system, does it make more sense to invest in the roads that already exist or build a parallel set of roads.” There also is the fact that, in the reality of it all, charter schools are actually very selective in who they choose to be in their school. In theory, charters must open their doors to all students, but this isn’t what happens. For example, a rigorous curriculum will discourage students who don’t do very well in an overwhelmingly academic environment. Lack of transportation and special education services (because charter schools tend to spend less on transportation and special education services) filters out many low-income families and discourages special education enrollment. Finally, there is the problem with charters closing. There is always the risk that the contract for the charter school, which usually last about 3-5 years, won’t get renewed because of failures to maintain their academic performance, student retention rates, and finances. However, more charter schools are closed down due to “management and fiscal issues” than due to performance issues (Bulkley, 2012).

In the 21 years since the inception of charter schools, these schools have spread to 41 states and enrolled more than 2 million students. However, one question still remains: Do kids in charter schools learn more than kids in traditional public schools? A 26-state study of charter schools conducted by Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes, or CREDO, revealed that “kids in most charter schools are doing worse or no better than students in traditional public schools (huffingtonpost.com). About a third, though, are doing better. And that’s a big jump from four years ago. The gains among blacks, Latinos, and kids whose first language is not English have been impressive and surprising, says CREDO Director Margaret Raymond” (Sanchez, 2013). More and more charter school students are doing better because they’re getting three to ten extra weeks of instruction compared to traditional public school students.

As stated above, I am for charter schools. In my personal experiences as a mother of three children, I saw the difference between charter schools and public schools when my youngest son Alfred went to Kindergarten. I registered him in a charter school, but, unfortunately, he wasn’t chosen to enroll there. I had no choice but to put him into public school, which turned out to be a nightmare. There were thirty-six students in one class with only one teacher. All the kids were misbehaving, and my son wasn’t learning anything at all. This made me very disappointed until, one day, when God

answered my prayers. The Bronx Lighthouse Charter School called my son and I transferred him in two weeks, instantly seeing great results within the first couple of weeks he attended there. My son had learned how to write his name, the alphabets, the numbers, and even shapes. Another thing I loved about the school is that there are only twenty to twenty-five students per classroom. The staff also knows my son and students have to wear uniforms. Now my son is in the sixth grade and has the writing ability of an eighth grader. I would never transfer him out of his charter school.

## Sources Cited

- Bulkley, K.E. (2012) "Charter Schools ... Taking a Closer Look: How Charter Schools Operate, Who Attends Them, How They Are Distinctive and How They Fare Academically." *Education Digest*, v.77, p. 58-62. Retrieved April 9, 2014.
- Byalkin, K. (2014) "Charter schools offer real choice." *Staten Island Advance*, np. Retrieved April 6, 2014.
- Halle, W. (2014) "Boost public schools, not charters." *Staten Island Advance*, np. Retrieved April 6, 2014.
- Lerner, L., et al., eds. (2006) "For Parents Seeking a Choice, Charter Schools Prove More Popular Than Vouchers." *Social Policy*. Essential primary sources, pp. 471-474 Retrieved April 9, 2014.
- Mack, Julie. (2012) "Weighing the pros and cons of charter schools." *Michigan Live*, np. Retrieved April 10, 2014.
- Rich, Motoko. (2014) "A Walmart Fortune, Spreading Charter Schools." *New York Times*, np. Retrieved April 10, 2014.
- Sanchez, C. (2013) "The Charter School vs. Public School Debate Continues." *NPR*, np. Retrieved April 10, 2014.
- United States Department of Education. "Education Performance and Accountability: K-8 Charter Schools; Closing the Achievement Gap." *Carl C. Icahn Charter School, Bronx, N.Y.* Retrieved April 9, 2014.
- [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/25/charter-school-performance-study\\_n\\_3493023.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/25/charter-school-performance-study_n_3493023.html)-Retrieved March 10, 2015.

# New York City Charter Schools: “Should I or Shouldn’t I?”

by Norma Maldonado

**D**o you drive an American or foreign car? I prefer the foreign-made cars because I found them to be better performing vehicles; not only do they seem to last longer with general care but also repairs are typically reasonable. However, just because I do not drive an American-made car, this does not mean that I do not support American-made products or find them any lower quality. It’s just that my *personal* experience drives me to have preference with foreign-made vehicles. This analogy can be applied to the Charter Schools System, at least in NYC. Personal preference can be a major factor.

The Charter Schools Act in 1998 ([nyccharterschools.org](http://nyccharterschools.org)), was a major reason for the rise of Charter schools in New York State. It authorized 100 charter schools throughout the state. In the fall of 1999, the *Sisulu-Walker Charter School of Harlem*, one of now 183 charter schools located in NYC, was the first charter school to open in New York. The majority of charter schools in the city can be found in Harlem, Central Brooklyn, and the South Bronx. With such a rise in charter schools and due to their location, there has been so much controversy with the charter school system of late, especially since our new mayor elect Bill de Blasio has come on board this year.

Upon researching the charter school pros and cons versus public school, I made every effort to maintain a balanced, nonbias outlook at the controversy involved in these two different educational approaches. However, my preference fell heavily with the NYC Charter School System, mainly because this is where I live and work.

Different from public schools, charter schools are public schools of choice that families can pick for their children. They are not accountable to all regulations that are expected from district schools but are accountable for academic results and for keeping their promises made to their charters, i.e., their contracts. If a charter school does not meet performance goals, it may close, which may create pressure to the individual schools to succeed at any cost. If not, they may lose their school, jobs, and students as well as their reputation. Finally, Charter schools are publicly funded yet privately run schools, allowing for flexibility in its own operation with accountability for its performance.

A charter entity is authorized to approve the applications for a newly started Charter School. The Boards of Education of School Districts, the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York and the Board of Regents are the charter entities to which applicants may submit charter school applications while acceptance and authorization for the charter school application is granted by New York City Chancellors Office, NYS Education Department and The State University of New

York Charter Schools Institute. Even though they have more flexibility and autonomy than traditional public schools, they remain closely regulated because of their use of public resources to serve the public.

Public charter schools are judged by their results: whether they achieve academic goals or not. They follow the same NYS Standards, and take the same NYS exams as other public schools. The difference is that if they are not helping their students by reaching these goals, they will be closed. In contrast, the NYC public schools are graded according to the same standardized test exams given to the students. However, if the students are not at grade level or come close to achieving grade level based on their overall test scores, the school is not closed; it is just given a grade rating score or progress report score.

## **Student Achievement**

New York City has one of the highest performing charter school sectors in the country. The city's charters continue to score higher than district school students in a large majority of communities across the city, often by very large margins. This can now be considered a long-term trend that is especially evident in the three areas of New York City where the majority of charter schools are located: Harlem, Central Brooklyn, and the South Bronx.

Parents' participation plays a large role in the success of these schools. Teachers are always available as well as the principals without needed appointments. How do they do this without the disturbance to class teaching, I am not sure. However, this is what they claim. Parents also give much time to the participation of school funding, school trips, and providing their signature for homework and take-home tests. PTA meetings can run up to five hours at a time. Likewise, public school parents also have many of the same tasks and are very active in my school, for example, P10x@304m with the PTA in fundraising and school-based activities; perhaps, not at the same rate as a new charter school, but they do cooperate with the schools' needs and are a reliable resource to my school. Similar issues arise for parents of both educational paths such as who want to sit in a PTA meeting for five hours at a time? I'm sure that custom will not last. Who has the time for that, with the reality of the whirlwind of life, especially the single parent with small children waiting at home with the sitter? Is that realistic? The role of parent participation in public schools has always been significantly underdeveloped. Parents should not just be whittled down to the PTA, Open School Week, Class Mothers, Trip Assistants, and the like.

As part of the "charter focus," the "phase conversions" and the "wraparounds," parents in public schools should be integrated into the school system in a much more highly organized and productive way. At the very least, they should have their own "professional" development program to best serve the needs of their children and the schools they are active members in. The money that charter schools siphon from public schools and from our communities should be invested more strategically and

efficaciously to re-invent public schools that extraordinarily fulfill the mission of public education and demonstrate how effective government can work not just for the few *but for all*.

Collectively, public schools must become the center of the common good and uncommon performance. The record of Charter School success is no better – and often worse – than that of the public schools. Just as some Charter Schools exceed the statistical norm, so do many, many public schools. It is not the charter that makes a school function; it is the design of the school enacted by people who care and are very well trained. It is the structure, the system, and the execution of the mission and best practices common to all. It is not the privacy and privilege of charters; it is the leadership and discipline.

## **A Broken System**

We need to be honest: The education system nationally is broken. National deficiencies in science and mathematics education threaten United States global competitiveness and, as a result, our standard of living. When parents and education advocates decry our general failure to meet college readiness standards, we are not just talking about going to college; we are talking about readiness for the job market.

## **Government at its Best**

When correctly designed, effectively run, and adequately funded, public schools represent government functioning at its best and reaching the largest number of individuals, groups, and communities with a historical record of success. (Some schools do indeed fail, but how coincidental is it that, statistically, these failures and under-performers are found in neighborhoods that are failing, and with political leadership that also has failed?)

If we grant that some Charter Schools may occasionally be more successful than the best of our public schools, then it is incumbent on these schools to share their insights, structures, systems, and skills. Even in the absence of their sharing, it would make sense for public schools to copy from the best and plan new public schools with a “charter focus.” That each new school should have a theme or overarching mission from which to launch effective curricula, align best teaching practices, create optimal learning environments, and institute a school-wide positive discipline system creates individual responsibility and a cohesive, spirited school community.

## **Conclusion**

All children should have the right to attend school. They should not be judged or segregated based on economical, intellectual, physical limitation, and/or demographic status. They are born into these categories, not by choice. The important fact is that all kids should go to school. I appreciate the pre-school grade coming back to the NYC

school system because children should start school at an early age. It provided so much of an advantage to their future. A big plus that Mayor de Blasio has signed into law is the resurrection of the Pre-School programs in New York City (nymag.com).

My own children are grown-up and have been out of the NYC school system for years. However, taking this class on Education for Paraprofessionals and the recent controversy with Mayor Bill de Blasio attempting to delete the lease of the Charter Schools from the public school buildings has given me an opportunity to take a closer look. I also have two grandchildren that are soon to enter the NYC school system, and it is important for me to research this issue.

Again, preference is at the fore! Public schools can work, I went to one. You went to one. Your teacher went to one. Most everyone I know went to one. I am open to new ideas, especially in our educational system. The future of all of us depends upon it. I truly believe that both the Public Schools and the Charter Schools can work. We just have to be open-minded and see what happens, with the hope it does not turn out like our Common Core Testing. Maybe, they should merge and become one forum for education for all. Children are our most important treasures, as they sit back and listen to all the controversies, opinions, and statistics of their educational roadway. We might just be confusing them and creating further division by these never-ending educational debates.

## **Sources Cited**

<http://www.nyccharterschools.org/resources/charter-schools-act-1998-new-york-state-amended>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/12/43-ways-mayor-de-blasio-changed-new-york.html>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

# Understanding Charter Schools

by Anita Munoz

In the capitalist system that we have today in the United States, education is not only a community service but has become a product only reachable for the most advantaged. Henry Ford explains through American consumerism and Kenneth Byalin confirms this saying that competition improves quality. Charter schools have come to be the best choice in this educational system even if you must enter a lottery. The system of education is a very complex topic that for many years has brought much controversy and is currently under discussion and will remain a very sensitive issue; moreover, it requires the same level of participation of teacher, students, parents and schools.

Charter schools have consistently achieved a good reputation. According to statistics, children who attend charter schools are better prepared academically than most children in public schools. Public schools are very distant to the academic level of charter schools, but individual success and the desire to excel not only depend on the school but the interest and commitment of each student. A good student, regardless of school district, private, or public school, will always be successful. For example, one of the most important factors of charter schools is academic instruction that includes a high degree of control and planning, leading to and developing a plan for goals and achieving those goals. This type of planning has become so famous in the education system, especially the success in achieving their goals.

To put these plans into practice of instruction, the school is subject to very high demands for professionals. The school must adopt a trained workforce that meets the expectations and goals of the school. Also, finding a labor relation professional who achieves strong relationships with students is always a benefit. There is no guarantee that this phenomenon will always be successful, but in certain schools this success can stand out. It is important to highlight the level of preparation of teachers and it has become expected in charter schools for teachers to perform more professionalism and meet the academic requirements. The teacher should not respond to a schedule or limit material according to the educational system requirements, but cover more subjects like music, art, sports, etc. ... that allow the school to become more competitive.

In regards to students who are the most fortunate of this educational model charter, there needs to be an emphasis on getting rid of discrimination. In a given class, there needs to be racial and ethnic balance, and there should not be any bias when it comes to enforcing the rules; there will be discipline to all who are not binding to the school rules. There is no description design at the time of admission of the students. The law established that all these schools must conduct fair and open admissions, but the number of students seeking admission is greater than the number who enter the lottery or on the waiting list. Registration policies have become more stringent.

Charter schools have missions and objectives to ensure that parents are involved in their children's education more highly than any other school. Teaching practices require that parents be involved in their child's homework, meaning that both parents and students participate in the same school system. The quality of education for a student is magnified when they have parents and teachers for additional support. This support allows the community to feel encouraged and motivated with this school system. Multiple sources of financing such as family contributions all support success in teaching. The economic funding for these schools makes them more independent in their planning decisions.

Public schools should take example of leadership, professionalism, and discipline of the charters. I absolutely believe in equal education for all, but if there is not performance and expected growth in public schools, I think the best option is to keep charter schools for students, parents, and teachers who feel a sense of responsibility and respect for education.

If a parent believes that their child can reach a higher education level, the best educational opportunities must be provided for the child the best educational opportunities. Henry Ford did his best selling cars to a society of consumers. Kenneth Byalin did likewise. In such a competitive society, such systems of power prevent a student to be better prepared, and education should not be seen in the same light.

# Charter Schools and Public Schools

by Minerva Rodriguez

Charter schools and public schools are very important to our community. These two educational systems provide different ways of teaching our students. They also provide resources and tools that help facilitate the jobs of teachers in order to teach students how to become better citizens of tomorrow. However, charter and public schools are very different in their approach and philosophy of educating their students.

Charter school's philosophy is more flexible and varies according to the community. It follows the vision of the community that they serve. Charter schools have many opportunities to experiment with their philosophy while public schools are very traditional and limited because they have to follow protocols from the state, as well as federal level.

Charter schools are partially private. Public schools are free, and every student is accepted. On the other hands, charter schools are known for their lotteries where they pick their students. They might want a specific type of student and reject other students. There are many issues with both public and charter schools, and this has caused many heated debates between parents, teachers, and administrators, as well as politicians.

In general, many people believe that the educational system has gone down the tube. They believe that they are failing students and overworking teachers. In other words, the public school system needs a makeover while charter schools need a push towards equality. Charter schools are often perceived to be perfect and have these wonderful strategies that help students succeed. However, discrimination is very realistic. Charter schools pick their own students leaving students with special needs out of their own "lottery." Teachers are overworked and do not have a stable job, and, therefore, they can be laid off at any point in their career without any benefits. On the reverse side, public schools are in great need of renovations. These schools need to have new regulations and opportunities for new flexible curriculum.

Moreover, in both, public and charter schools, teachers are not appreciated enough. Teachers are limited and are accountable for too many things. In public schools, students are not accountable for their actions, being disrespectful and held to limited consequences. However, in a charter school, students are more disciplined and respectful to each other. Teachers are stricter. Charter schools are funded by many organizations, which allow for families to develop networking. Students are exposed to the different organizations and have the opportunity to participate in many interesting events. Public schools, though, have to follow a rigorous plan, which does not allow teachers and students to have enough recreation time.

I believe that parents prefer their children at charter schools because the students seem to learn better and effective. Parents feel more comfortable and secure with their child because there is a strict code of discipline. However, this strict code of discipline might be difficult in our public schools because students are not well disciplined, and typically there is a stronger tension between parents and teachers. Therefore, it is ideal to send our children to charter schools, but the problem is that many children are discriminated again because of their disability. Mr. Robinson (2014) in “A Walmart Fortune Spreading Charter Schools” says that charter schools are a disservice to the public schools, putting the onus on public schools to take on the children that other schools do not want. Moreover, I believe that New York should fix the public school system. The government should focus on understanding the real issues that our children are facing in the public schools.

Charter schools are not beneficial for our community. There are many reasons. According to the “Charter Schools Mistake” by Diane Ravitch (2013), “charter schools will not end the poverty at the root of low, academic performance or transform our nation’s schools into a high-performing system.” Charter schools are very selective which discriminate against the middle class and disabled children. According to Ravitch, “the solution is that schools should abandon the use of annual standardized tests.” We are spending too much money on these tests. We need to concentrate on strategies that will help our children succeed. Public schools can be great but clearly have their issues. This is because politicians like former Mayor Bloomberg have destroyed the system. He believes in merit-based teacher pay and increasing funding for charter schools. He should focus on actually caring for the children and administrating the money correctly. He should not put pressure on teachers because it’s not only teachers but the community working together for a better future.

According to many people such as Mayor DeBlasio (2014), charter schools are a big mistake. The real concept of a charter school is to control teachers and undermine the middle class students. In conclusion, both public and charter schools have different philosophies of educating our children. We need to be aware that our public educational system has to adapt a new way and change. Charter schools should go back to being an extension of the public school serving all students equally. As an educator and a parent, we all have to educate our students including and not excluding them from learning. We need to find strategies that work and apply them in all the public schools. We also need to strengthen our students and understand their needs. It is essential that we are teaching students to be better people of the future. We need to ask ourselves: Which educational system is trying to do this?

## **Sources Cited**

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-03-21/charter-schools-in-wealthy-areas-at-center-of-nyc-battle>. Retrieved March 10, 2014.

<https://www.facebook.com/alaba.ferreira/posts/10151602051877331>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

<http://www.newsdiffs.org/diff/548239/548323/www.nytimes.com/2014/04/26/us/a-walmart-fortune-spreading-charter-schools.html>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/education/2014/03/bill\\_de\\_blasio\\_vs\\_charter\\_schools\\_a\\_feud\\_in\\_new\\_york\\_city\\_has\\_broad\\_national.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/education/2014/03/bill_de_blasio_vs_charter_schools_a_feud_in_new_york_city_has_broad_national.html). Retrieved March 10, 2014.

# Why Space Matters in the Charter School Debate

by Reina Santos

Today, parents have choices as to what type of school a child may attend. Currently, there are several choices such as: public, Lutheran, Islamic, charter, private, Jewish and parochial. The most discussed at this time are the charter schools. My main focus of this paper will be in reference to charter schools. The topic will be shared space, finance of charter schools and other reasons pertaining to shared space.

According to Kenneth Byalin (2014) in the article, “Charter schools offer real choice,” smaller classes allow teachers to help the students better in the classroom. I agree with this statement. Being that charter schools have been a hot topic, the demand for charter schools have increased, allowing more shared space within the public schools. Therefore, the mayor and school chancellor have been forced to find space for these students. Byalin continues to state disadvantaged students will benefit from charter schools because of the greater opportunities offered by them. Byalin is saying that disadvantaged children will do better because of what is offered to the students. I agree, as it can definitely be something positive for students, allowing them to be taught in more effective ways. The teacher has fewer students and more time to work with the students. This type of system they use does work. It does not necessarily work for the severely challenged students, though. Charter schools often do not admit these types of students.

Another perspective about this debate is in a New York Times article by Sam Dillon (2005) titled, “For parents seeking a choice, charter schools prove more popular than vouchers.” Dillon states that charter schools receive taxpayer money but do not receive additional funds for building and capital expenses. He also states that they need to go by a tighter budget than public schools. More or less, Sam Dillon is saying that charter schools do receive money from the state per child and that they have to budget their money wisely. If they need extra money for extra expenses, the school needs to find the money elsewhere, though. Obviously, schools need to buy other items such as computers, desks, supplies, etc. However, I think they have more than enough money to buy these types of items, as extra money can sometimes come from the billionaires, Wall Street individuals, and businesses. As long as Eva Moskowitz is in charge of the charter schools and oversees the funds, the charter schools will have enough money to supply the needs of these schools. Without this support, the charter schools would not be able to afford these expenses, making it easier for them to take up space in public schools. Mr. Witt Halle has an opinion of his own about the funds, according to his article “Boost public schools, not charter schools” (March, 2014). Witt goes on to state that charter schools repurpose money toward the private agenda and that once children go to charter schools, they predominately do not go back to public school.

They are taking the students away from the public school system and stealing money from the state. For each time a child goes to charter school, they most likely will not return to public school. The funds go to the charter school, which I consider it to be a private agenda. Diane Ravitch, a judge in the New York State Supreme Court, ruled that the state comptroller has no power to audit her schools because they are not a unit of the state; in other words, her schools are not public schools (July, 2013). She also states that this court battle was initiated by Moskowitz, which played out in amidst the confrontation with the mayor. It shows everyone how far she went and how far she will go to get her way. She does not want anyone to audit her schools. This information proves her schools are not public schools. The funds that come from the state should only go to the children that attend public schools; simply put: charter schools have their own funds.

Another article that discusses this debate is entitled “New York finds space for 3 charter schools” by Danielle E. Slotnik (NYT, 2014). Slotnik states that the three schools that needed space for the students have been found: Harlem Success Academy 4, Success Academy Jamaica, and Success Academy City Hall. This has been a heated issue for some time now, including the drive to push charter schools’ population. It also states “city will provide leasing and renovating.” In my opinion, the city should not pay for it; there was a good reason why the charter schools were not allowed to stay, aka they have enough funds to cover the costs. It allows the charter schools to put the cost to the city, saving money in their own budget. As I said before, charter schools are taking the money from another source when it is not necessary and the public school children lose out. DeBlasio denied her because she tried to force him to open up a charter middle school, and the special education students would have been evicted. The article also states “nearly all charter schools could stay at their current location but that these three would have to move because they impeded programs for students with disabilities and forced the elementary school students to attend classes with high school building.” I agree with the mayor. These charter schools are forcing out other children from their classes and, in turn, interfering with other programs. It is not fair to push out other students to cater to charter school students. They need to find another location where shared space is not interrupted or find another location on their own. The public schools will now be forced to make great changes, reduce programs, and find spaces they do not have.

Just as important, this same article says “the state budget that Mr. Cuomo and legislature leaders announced later that month prohibited the city from charging charter schools rent and required it to find public schools space for them and pay much of the cost or a private location.” Of course, this means that charter schools win. They do not have to pay rent for space; the city is responsible for finding it. As a result, the city now has extra expenses due to this decision that was made that charter schools do not pay rent. The city also will be doing the administrative work pertaining to charter schools. In other words, less work and fewer worries for them!

According to another article, “special education students are largely underrepresented in the charter school and if success academy had expanded the way it hoped, it would have reduced space for a public school serving some of the city highest needs children” (June 2012). District 75 serves students with disabilities such as autism, emotional and behavioral disorders and multiple disabilities. It is saying that special needs students are affected each time charter schools take up space inside the schools. There is not enough space or barely any space in the public schools. When these children are placed in the public school, space for the special education students and other students will need to be relocated. This is not right! In other words, charter schools are removing students from the schools due to the relocation of other students, and, as I stated before, charter schools are less inclined to admit special needs students. If the mayor had allowed Eva Moskowitz to open the charter school at the third school (P.S.149), the special needs students would have had to leave. What kind of person would allow this! It is selfish to push out students to benefit one person.

A final article about the debate is entitled “New York Schools: The Roar of the charters” by Diane Ravitch (2014). This article is more about the finances behind the charter schools. The article states she called some of the financial leaders on Wall Street, the billionaires who have paid millions of dollars for the ads attacking him. In other words, the other side has too much money. This is proving that charter schools have powerful people or businesses behind them who have the money to pay rent, so they should find their own space. If they have money to pay for ads, pay for renovations, bus children and parents to a rally illegally, pay her \$485,000 a year, and pay a firm \$500,000 a year then they have the funds to pay for space and find space on their own. By the way, if you think about it, if she were not to be effective in pushing charter schools, she would not have this job. This article also states “colocation happens when a charter school is offered public space within a public school, large schools divided into 4,5,6 small schools, public school parents oppose the arrangements; the host public school often forced to give up its art room, dance room, computer room, every room used for any purpose other than classroom instruction.”

Based on the facts of this information and other articles, whenever a charter school is placed in a public school, public space that is needed is taken away from other students that need it as much as any other student. The programs and little available spacing within the schools also are affected. It forces administration to find space where there is not enough space or if any at all. As I was writing this essay, I was trying to connect the funds from charter schools associated with shared space. The point I was trying to express is that charter schools are to be considered private and have a large budget to cover all the costs. There are other reasons as to why charter schools should not have shared space. This leads to my opinion that charter schools should not be allowed shared space. It displaces all types of students, causing overcrowding in the public schools. Our students should not be forced out of their own schools to benefit other students that are backed up by rich people or organizations.

---

## Sources Cited

<http://dianeravitch.net/2013/07/11/moskowitz-success-academy-sues-to-block-state-audit/>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

<http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2014/mar/27/new-york-charters-against-deblasio/>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/nyregion/new-york-finds-space-for-3-charter-schools.html>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/13/education/13voucher.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0-](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/13/education/13voucher.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0-). Retrieved March 11, 2015.

<http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2906>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

[http://www.silive.com/opinion/columns/index.ssf/2014/03/boost\\_public\\_schools\\_not\\_chart.html](http://www.silive.com/opinion/columns/index.ssf/2014/03/boost_public_schools_not_chart.html). Retrieved March 11, 2015.

[http://www.silive.com/opinion/columns/index.ssf/2014/04/charter\\_schools\\_offer\\_real\\_cho.html](http://www.silive.com/opinion/columns/index.ssf/2014/04/charter_schools_offer_real_cho.html). Retrieved March 11, 2015.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eva\\_Moskowitz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eva_Moskowitz). Retrieved March 11, 2015.

# Are Charter Schools the New Way to Go?

## by Ironely Valdez

Charter schools are the new way to go for parents who are fed up and tired of public schools or having to pay for private schools. In this essay, I will be discussing the many reasons why parents are choosing charter schools. According to different data, charter schools have shown a difference in the way students are being taught, along with students' test results. After reading various articles and speaking to a district representative for children with special needs attending charter schools in addition to being a parent of a child with special needs that attends a charter school, I have formed a fair perspective about the issue.

Like many parents, we all want the best for our kids especially when it comes to education. As an employee of the Department of Education, I had hands-on experience with all the changes that were occurring and were to yet come. I was fed up already seeing my child struggle for so long in a public school and learned my daughter was not going to be able to pass exams unless she went to summer school and retook exams or repeated the grade. Why should my daughter be held accountable for the new changes and her school not being able to help her or providing extra assistance where needed because of the budget and being under staff? I had no idea what a charter school was at the time, so I applied for Inwood Academy but I told myself anything would be better for my daughter as long as it wasn't a public school. However, I really didn't know until this assignment and talking with other people about charter schools, what a charter school was, how they operate, and who works in the schools. I felt horrible because I should have done my research, but I just wanted her out of public school as soon as possible. Since all the students in her school applied, I knew other parents from the neighborhood that spoke highly about the school and their programs. After applying, we got an acceptance letter at that time she didn't have an IEP, so I didn't really care to find out or ask about it. Until the summer came, I ended up getting her an IEP for many reasons, such as test accommodations, speech, and to place her in a SETTS program. Then I was afraid they wouldn't take her in the school because I thought they wouldn't be able to accommodate her needs. But I was wrong: not only did they accommodate her needs but they also were able to give her everything she needed and more. I reached out to the school physiologist and asked her about programs for kids with IEP. She was able to email me information explaining how the school helps students with IEP and ELL students. Their program is able to help students and their needs such as receiving services in the least restricted environment. Students are taught in small groups. Students take an assessment and with this the school is able to place them in the correct setting for their needs.

Here is what I found out from writing this assignment and having my child attend a charter school for the past nine months. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools: A charter school is a public school that is created by a contract with

a sponsor such as a local school district or a corporation with a group of teachers or a community, and they work together to come up with terms on how to run the school. Charter schools are unique public schools that are allowed the freedom to be more innovative while being held accountable for advancing student achievement. Because they are public schools, they are:

- open to all children;
- do not charge tuition; and
- do not have special entrance requirements.

Charter schools were created to help improve our nation's public school system and offer parents another public school option to better meet their child's specific needs. The core of the charter school model is the belief that public schools should be held accountable for student learning. In exchange for this accountability, school leaders should be given freedom to do whatever it takes to help students achieve and should share what works with the broader public school system so that all students benefit. In the early 1990s, a small group of educators and policymakers came together to develop the charter school model. Minnesota's legislature passed the first charter law in 1991, and the first charter school opened in 1992 (2015). Also charter schools are able to be organized around many different philosophies and can concentrate in various different programs such as math, drama, art, and science.

As I read the article "Charter schools offer real choice," Kenneth Byalin (2014) explains how parents are happy that they have choices in charter schools because they "offer parents and students some real substantive differences to choose from, options such as smaller class sizes and increased teacher-to-student ratios – choices that go beyond cosmetic differences. Since charter schools have become available as options in New York City, parent demand for charter school seats has skyrocketed. This is the most persuasive evidence possible that parents are dissatisfied with existing choices." After reading this article, it explains how having charter schools has made a big difference; parents were waiting for a change like this for their children. Slowly but surely Charter schools have been taking over across the country, especially in New York City. However, there are some people who aren't too happy with all the new charter schools opening because they claim Eva Moskowitz "who is the success network's chief executive officer, she earns, according to Strauss (2014), the Washington Post, \$475,000 annually, a salary paid in part by some of the many donors that have contributed big money to her charter network" (washingtonpost.com). This lady wants to obtain buildings and not pay any rent for her charter schools. Her methods of discipline in her schools have known to be harsh. Many teachers work without union and often for many hours, and some are not even certified to teach in classroom. Mr. Martinez, a charter school teacher, was able to answer a few of my questions after my daughter IEP meeting. He explained how this meeting went great compared to others he had attended. Because many schools are not able to accommodate the child for any particular reason, they decide to find ways to remove

children and place them back in the public system. They try many different ways to do so at any cost. He said it is horrible how they cannot be like the public school system, accepting every child and accommodating them at any cost.

In the end, I agree with many parents; I am for charter schools even with all the politics and what is mentioned about them – as long as they do right by my daughter and help her learn and grow as a student. It's going to take awhile like all new things do to get use to the transition into a charter, understanding how it works differently from public schools. However, for right now, my daughter is getting the help she needs to improve in grades better than she did in public school for so many years.

## **Sources Cited**

Bulkley, Katrina E. "Charter schools . . . Taking a Closer Look: How Charter Schools Operate, Who Attends Them, How they are Distinctive, and How They Fare Academically." (August 2012). Retrieved March 11, 2015.

Byalin, Kenneth. "Charter Schools Offer Real Choices." Staten Island Advance (2014)-Retrieved from [http://www.silive.com/opinion/columns/index.ssf/2014/04/charter\\_schools\\_offer\\_real\\_cho.html](http://www.silive.com/opinion/columns/index.ssf/2014/04/charter_schools_offer_real_cho.html). March 11, 2015.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/nyregion/gilded-crusade-for-charters-rolls-onward.html>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

<http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/public-charter-schools/>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/03/12/why-nyc-mayor-is-getting-unfairly-bashed-over-charter-schools/>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

## **Communications and Special Needs**

# Asperger's Syndrome and the Classroom

## by Linda Vilardi

“Asperger Syndrome, a neurobiological disorder on the Autism spectrum, is one of the fastest growing disabilities, according to Brenda Smith Myles Ph.D., chief program officer for the Autism Society of America” (Weinstein, 2009). It is currently affecting 1 in 150 children and is more prevalent in boys than girls by a ratio of 4:1 (Weinstein, 2009). Asperger Syndrome is a disorder that affects a child's social and language skills. Asperger's is on the milder end of the Autism spectrum (ninds.nih.gov). It is important to remember that all children with Asperger's have a different degree of disability and may not present every characteristic to the same degree. Teachers and paraprofessionals can play an important role in the daily life of a child with Asperger's. It can be challenging, so it is important to learn strategies to give support to each individual child with Asperger's. Children with Asperger's often seclude themselves because they are deficient socially and have limited interests (ninds.nih.gov).

A child with Asperger's may not seem ordinary, conducting themselves somewhat differently than a child without Asperger's. These children struggle with comprehending social exchanges and nonverbal signs. They may be missing instinctive social skills like taking turns when talking, the ability to keep dialogue going, or understanding irony or humor. Unfortunately, this can lead to a lack of growth of age appropriate friendships. They are very literal (“My Asperger Child”). For example, a teacher may say we need to hurry up, and a child with Asperger's may get out of their seat and begin to run, which could be a safety issue in the classroom (Weinstein, 2009). In cases like this, they have difficulty reading between the lines.

One strategy to help children with Asperger's is to form a peer group of children with similar interests. It is much easier to interact socially when you have common interests. Children with Asperger's have an all-consuming interest in a particular thing or subject to the exception of anything else. They are fascinated with uncommon activities and will become well informed about these particular interests. A way for educators and classmates to appreciate a child with Asperger's intellect is to make their interest the heart of the lesson. Use the child's proficiency to elevate peer interest and admiration. For example, you can have the child prepare a presentation or a project to share with their classmates. This is a way for classmates to respect the child's expertise (“My Asperger Child”).

Another strategy is for teachers and paraprofessionals to use a straight teaching technique to increase normal social behavior and peer communication skills. Educators also should clearly react, showing the impression of words and actions on other children through real-life interaction. This will raise their consciousness of feeling and body language and help them pick up on social cues they may be missing (“My Asperger Child”). Children with Asperger Syndrome are inflexible and do not like

any changes to their regimen. They tend to foster rituals that they are not willing to alter such as routinely getting ready for school in the same order everyday. Change can spark apprehension in a child with Asperger's. It is important to make sure students understand that schedules sometimes change. Always be prepared for a cancellation and communicate this with your students. Always let them know when there is to be a celebration, a visitor or special guest, or a fire drill. Students with Asperger's can't anticipate approaching events; therefore, they can be insecure and apprehensive about what they should do (Six Steps to Success for Asperger Syndrome). The best thing educators and paraprofessionals can do is to reassure and comfort the student often, so they know what to expect.

A child with Asperger's can greatly benefit from a paraprofessional to help them to transition throughout the day. It is critical though to be trained by an educator with clear and definite strategies tailored to a specific child. I think one of the most important points we as paraprofessionals and educators should remember is to recognize these children's talents as well as their shortcomings.

## Sources Cited

"Asperger's Syndrome." Autism Society. Retrieved from: <http://www.autism-society.org/whatis/aspergers-syndrome/>. Dec. 10, 2013.

Asperger Syndrome Information Page-National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Retrieved from: <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/asperger/asperger.htm>. Dec. 10, 2013.

"My Asperger's Child: Teaching Strategies for Asperger's Students." Retrieved from: <http://www.myaspergerschild.com/2010/10/teaching-strategies-for-aspergers.html>. Dec. 10, 2013.

"OAR | Educators and Service Providers » 6 Steps to Success for Asperger Syndrome." Retrieved from: <http://www.researchautism.org/educators/aspergersteps/index.asp>. Dec. 11, 2013.

Weinstein, Anna. "Asperger's in the Classroom." Retrieved from: [http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Aspergers\\_the\\_Classroom](http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Aspergers_the_Classroom). Dec. 11, 2013.

# Communication in the Classroom

by Marilynn Veras

The article “You won’t hear shhhh in our classroom!” by Anne Drabble illustrates the importance of teachers not dominating the conversations in the classroom. If children dominate the conversation, they can communicate better, interact with each other, and extend their language, especially for non-English speakers. It also can reduce the constant stopping to address a behavioral issue that can occur when the teacher does most of the talking and the students get bored.

As a teacher, it is necessary to ask questions, especially open-ended questions like what, where, why, and how, as it will require that the students give a lengthier response instead of a one or two word response, like yes or no. Asking questions gives us a better understanding as to how much the student knows, and whether there is prior knowledge of what we are discussing, or about to discuss. It doesn’t matter whether it is storytelling, math, literacy, etc. Also, asking a question prior, during, and after, will give the students the chance to give their opinion on what they think the discussion will be about. It also helps to see if the students are understanding, and to find out if there was any prior experience on the matter.

Modeling and consistency is the best way to teach our students. Children copy adults and do everything they see from us. Communication and interaction with our peers and students will help increase the use of language. It is necessary throughout the day, not just when we are teaching a lesson, reading a book, or working on math problems. One way to incorporate communication, interaction, and language skills to our students is Team Talk. You ask the students a question, based on what is being discussed. Then the students discuss the question amongst one another and write each other’s answers on a sticky note and share it with the rest of the class. Another way is through Learning Centers. There, you get to hear how the children express themselves with their peers by imitating what they see and hear at home, on the television, and from their siblings. Even the non-English speaking students communicate the best way they can with their peers. In fact, they teach English speakers a little of their language. A bilingual library with books, pictures with the words on the bottom in Spanish and English is another way to teach language and communication to non-English speakers. And how can I forget music and dance. That’s the best, because in music and dance you don’t need a language; you just communicate and interact by dancing. So, let’s leave the discussions to our students no matter what language they speak. You never know, we might just learn something too.

## Sources Cited

<http://ijl.cgpublisher.com/product/pub.30/prod.3061>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

# Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom

by Lori Tanzi

**H**ow does nonverbal communication affect people? People communicate every day of their lives, but we rarely notice the nonverbal part of the communication and how important it is to the meaning of the message. Body language, facial expressions, which include eye contact, touch, and even the tone of one's voice are all part of nonverbal communication. The physical appearance of a student or teacher also is a form of nonverbal communication. Often, when people communicate, they contradict their verbal and nonverbal messages. Nonverbal communication is just as important as verbal communication in the classroom.

According to Ronald B. Adler and George Rodman (2010), "It is impossible not to communicate nonverbally; humans constantly send messages about themselves that are available for others to receive. Nonverbal communication is ambiguous. There are many possible interpretations for any behavior. This ambiguity makes it important for the receiver to verify any interpretation before jumping to conclusions about the meaning of a nonverbal message (pg. 156).

Body language is one example of nonverbal communication. If a teacher is standing in front of the classroom with his or her arms crossed, a student may interpret this as a negative thing. Something as simple as this could put a student on the defensive for no reason. Students communicate their feelings this way as well. A teacher should pay close attention to their students' body language. When a student is sitting up straight or leaning towards the teacher, it usually indicates that he or she is listening. If the student is slumping in their seat, he or she is probably not paying attention. It also is a good idea for the teacher to move around the classroom. This is a way to let the students know that you are in control of the classroom space. It also helps to keep the students focused because they have to follow the teacher around the room, keeping them alert.

Since the face and the eyes are usually the first trait noticed on a person, facial expression and eye contact are probably the most important examples of nonverbal communication. This is thought by some to be the most powerful of the ways we communicate nonverbally. It is important for a teacher to make eye contact with his or her students to gain their trust and make positive impressions. Also, it is equally important for a teacher to make sure that all students' eyes are on them while giving a lesson. Eye contact also indicates that a student is paying attention to the lesson. According to K.W. Radford (2010) in his journal article, "Observing the Class," "students have become 'accomplished avoiders' by lowering their heads to avoid eye contact with an instructor and create an appearance that they are searching for a response to a question."

Research has suggested that students who make eye contact with the teacher during discussions rather than looking elsewhere in the room achieve higher test scores. A teacher has an advantage when standing in front of a classroom full of students. He or she can often tell by the facial expression of the students if they understand the lesson being taught. A smile is the most important facial expression. “Students like teachers who smile a lot, because teachers who smile send out the message that: they are enjoying being with the students, they are relaxed and they are confident” (Radford, 2010). When a teacher gets angry, it is best to try to keep a “straight face” in order to be perceived as calm, assertive, and in control of a situation.

Another form of nonverbal communication is one’s physical appearance. The physical appearance of a student is judged by both their peers and their teachers. “Preschool children rated by their peers as pretty were most liked, and those identified as least pretty were least liked. Children who were interviewed rated good-looking children as having positive social characteristics and unattractive children as having negative ones” (Adler, 2010, pg. 121). Teachers also judge students by their attractiveness. Students that are attractive are usually judged as more intelligent, popular, and friendly than unattractive students. The physical appearance of one wearing glasses tends to stereotype them as more intelligent.

The tone of your voice also is important in nonverbal communication. As they say, “it’s not what you say but how you say it.” According to Adler (2010), “Sarcasm is one instance in which both emphasis and tone of voice help change a statement’s meaning to the opposite of its verbal message. Scientists who study nonverbal communication believe the true feelings are often communicated more accurately using nonverbal than verbal language” (pg. 145). When someone is nervous, it often comes through in his or her voice. In the classroom, this is evident more often in students than in experienced teachers. Often, when certain students are called upon during class, they can become nervous, which is usually evident in their voice. They may giggle, cough, or even stutter. “Some vocal factors influence the way a speaker is perceived by others. For example, communicators who speak loudly and without hesitations are viewed as more confident than those who pause and speak quietly” (Adler, 2009, pg. 210).

Touch is another form of nonverbal communication. There also is some evidence that touching can increase learning. A tap on the shoulder of a student that is not paying attention redirects the student. “When teachers employed such behaviors as smiling, touching, and close body distance, small children tended to learn significantly more. When students grow older, touching becomes less appropriate. Touch has different impacts in the classroom depending on the age and sex of the students (Radford, 2010). Younger students like to touch things around them. This is a big part of the way they learn. They often like to touch the hair or clothes of their teacher.

If one views a video without sound of classrooms, several characteristics of nonverbal communication become evident. Each teacher had a different style of teaching. One teacher, for instance, seemed to enter the classroom a bit on the timid side. She did not stand erect and seemed to have a difficult time controlling the class. The students

seemed to be looking all around the room, not at the teacher. They also appeared to talk to one another. In this instance, the students seemed to gather from the teacher's nonverbal communication that she was not sure of herself, and therefore did not have control of the class. This teacher lost the attention of the students early on in the lesson. The next teacher stood erect and walked around the room; here, the students sat straight up in their seats and followed the teacher with both their eyes and their bodies. The nonverbal communication here was the sense of sureness of the teacher and the engaging of the students in the lesson by continually moving around. The third teacher walked around the room, even at times touching the shoulders of some of the students as he passed them. When he was standing at the front of the room, he gestured with his hand to his ear as a student in the back of the room answered a question. This nonverbal cue here was that the student couldn't be heard by the teacher. The next time the same student answered a question, he must have spoken louder because the teacher didn't give him this nonverbal cue again.

According to Kendra Cherry (2010), "Some studies have shown that between 60 and 90 percent of a message's effect may come from the nonverbal cues." Cherry also states, "the use of a teacher's nonverbal behavior strongly affects the student's cognitive learning and the quality of the teaching environment. Studies have shown that teachers with high nonverbal immediacy have high levels of cognitive learning. The students have reported the teachers with high levels of nonverbal immediacy have a more interesting class environment and the students enjoy attending class" (Cherry, 2010). Therefore, in the classroom, the teacher must be aware of both the verbal and nonverbal messages students are sending and be especially aware of the nonverbal messages that are being sent to their students by their own body language, facial expressions touch, appearance and tone of voice. These nonverbal communications are just as important as the verbal communication in the classroom.

## Sources Cited

- Adler, Ronald B., and George Rodman. *Looking Out/Looking In Interpersonal Communication*. San Francisco: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 2009. Retrieved Nov. 8, 2013.
- Adler, Ronald B., and George Rodman. *Understanding Human Communication*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Retrieved Nov. 17, 2013.
- Cherry, Kendra. "Types of Nonverbal Communication, 8 Major Nonverbal Behaviors." About.Com, 2010. Retrieved Nov. 17, 2013.
- Radford, K.W. "Observing the Class." Education Canada.com (2010). Retrieved Nov. 8, 2013.
- Rocca, Kelly. "Immediacy in the Classroom. Research and Practical Implications." Carleton.edu. 2007. Retrieved Nov. 8, 2013.

# Expressions of Communication: Diabetes, Blindness and Braille

by Valerie Simpson

Communication comes in many forms, through spoken language, reading, writing, body movements, and even the primitive noise infants display in letting a parent know their wants and needs. There is another form of communication a large percentage of people in the world use to express their emotions, feelings, and daily conversations. For a blind person, the ability to write and read in Braille does not impede life's experiences or stifle their imagination, hopes, and dreams. Statistically, some people adapt to this new way of life from a disease called Diabetic Retinopathy. Blindness due to diabetes is the number one cause of blindness in people ages 40 to 60 in the United States, according to the National Eye Institute. People are learning to cope and overcome the disadvantages of their total or partial loss of sight from diabetes. With the developmental method of Braille and the use of technology, blind people can communicate by speaking, writing, and reading in Braille.

Louis Braille developed a method of reading and writing so that blind people can utilize the same opportunities as a sighted person. Although faced with many challenges, a blind person with the knowledge of using Braille can communicate by reading and writing just as a sighted person. Louis Braille, at a young age, accidentally stabbed himself in the eye, losing his sight. Braille loved to read, but without his sight, his passion for reading was taken away. Braille, later as a young man, designed an invention that would allow blind people the ability to read by feeling clusters of raised bumps that represented letters. This concept is still used today, enabling blind people to read and write. Louis Braille's invention was a breakthrough for himself and others suffering with blindness. Braille's invention boosted the quality of life for many who aimed to live somewhat of a normal life.

Currently, we have an overwhelming population of people in the United States who are losing their sight from diabetes. Imagine being born with the ability to see, and visualizing things most of us take for granted such as reading, writing, and driving, then being diagnosed with diabetes. In some cases, patients diagnosed with the disease ignore doctor's orders, and eventually it begins to affect their sight. Diabetic Retinopathy is caused by changes in the blood vessels of the retina and the way we see things. Diabetic Retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in American adults. "All people with diabetes both type 1 and type 2, are at risk. That's why everyone with diabetes should get a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year. The longer someone has diabetes, the more likely he or she will get Diabetic Retinopathy. Between 40 and 45 percent of Americans diagnosed with diabetes have some stage. If you have Diabetic Retinopathy, your doctor can recommend treatment to help prevent its progression," (National Eye Institute).

Some diabetics experience a swelling of blood vessels, which causes fluid to leak; others may have abnormally new blood vessels that grow on the exterior of the retina. Fluid can leak into the center of the macula, the part of the eye where sharp, straight-ahead vision occurs. The fluid makes the macula swell, blurring vision. “This condition is called macular edema. It can occur at any stage of diabetic retinopathy, although it is more likely to occur as the disease progresses. About half of the people with proliferative retinopathy also have macular edema,” (National Eye Institute).

Communication with the technique of Braille becomes a way of life. Braille consists of patterns and raised dots arranged in cells of up to six dots in a 3x2 formation. The set pattern of raised dots represents alphabets, numbers and punctuations. Learning to communicate by using Braille takes practice; it’s like learning a new language. You can learn Braille in schools or vision loss programs. Trained volunteers take up to eight months to become a certified Braillist.

For a person who’s recently lost his vision do to Diabetic Retinopathy, Braille can be both challenging and rewarding. There are three versions of Braille for grades one through three. Grade 1 is for beginners, consisting of 26 letters in the alphabet and punctuation. Grade 2 consist of 26 letters punctuations and contractions. Contractions are used in order to fit on a standard printed page. Grade 3 is used for personal letters, notes, and diaries. Basically, it’s a form of shorthand using complete words in a shorten form.

Braille is used in several countries and adapted in different languages. It’s used in math and musical notation. The invention of Braille is viewed as a communicative language. Many new ways assist people with disabilities in our daily lives. Imagine having Braille in your life to assist you with your disability as a blind person. Learning a new language, communicating, and continuing some form of independence, being able to read and write using Braille printers would help you keep a sense of normalcy in your life. You can even take your home computer and change the keys to Braille in order to type.

“There is help for social and physical changes for patients to adjust and continue their lives with little interruptions from this disease. If you are an older person with the condition Diabetic Retinopathy, you will most likely have questions about your vision problems and how you can continue to carry out your everyday life” (Vision Aware, 2013).

Currently, the statistics are increasing for people developing Diabetic Retinopathy. There isn’t a cure but only preventative measures, once diagnosed. Following the doctor’s orders, a daily regimen of diet and exercise in order to maintain a low safe blood sugar, monitor blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and get annual vision screening will control your diabetes. If the number of cases of Diabetic Retinopathy decreases, the percentage of persons needing to learn Braille will too.

## Sources Cited

National Eye Institute. Diabetic Eye Disease. 2012. Retrieved Dec. 4, 2013.

Vision Aware. Vision Aware, American Foundation for the Blind. Reader's Digest Partners for Sight. June 2013. Retrieved Dec. 4, 2013.

# Autism

by Angela Shenk

In the United States alone, many individuals suffer from autism. The majority of the individuals suffering from this disability are children, more commonly found in boys than girls. 1 out of 54 boys and 1 out of 252 girls are diagnosed with Autism every year (Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2003). Autism is evident as early as age three and its cause is, unfortunately, unknown (Broer, 2005). Children that suffer from this disorder have a more difficult time in the classroom. To help autistic children succeed, they are placed in a special education program, and in most cases assigned a paraprofessional. The paraprofessional has a greater amount of responsibility because it is up to them to keep the autistic child motivated in the classroom.

Students with autism face a number of challenges including learning to read, difficulties with attention, lack of motivation, and problems with word decoding. Autism is a neurological disorder marked by severe delays in speech and abnormal self-absorption (York-Barr, Kronberg & Doyle, 1996). This disorder is characterized by a lack of response to people and actions, which limits their ability to communicate effectively. For example, children that suffer from autism often do not learn to speak, or, if they can, tend not to understand or say many words, repeating what they hear and speak using third person. As a result, some autistic children do not have social skills, show no interest in peers, and do not respond when spoken to.

The behavioral repertoire of an autistic child is that they will play repetitively with objects. For example, they will take one red block out of a whole set and will only play with that one block. They also will engage in self-stimulatory actions like hand flapping, staring at their hands or smelling things. Many children with autism also can decelerate, but the presence and severity of specific symptoms and degree of mental retardation is quite variable. Aside from their physical and mental problems, children with autism are quite different from each other. Some children are affectionate and speak fairly well, while others tend to have no social skills.

The paraprofessional's role is one of the most influential factors that impacts success or failure in the student. A paraprofessional is assigned to a particular student and can have a tremendous impact on this student through their interaction and encouragement. However, training a paraprofessional can often be a challenge for public school programs. Many schools believe that training is not important, budgetary constraints being a major reason for this issue. Moreover, there needs to be a training tool for the paraprofessional. Often paraprofessionals are placed with a student with autism with no real goal or direction, which is all the more reason for better training. The role of the paraprofessional is directly related to the goals and objectives stated in the Individualized Education Plan, which is a legal written document that outlines a child's education (IEP). In the end, the student shows

improvement. This improvement is shown when an individual paraprofessional is no longer needed. It is sometimes difficult for the paraprofessional to grasp that he or she will no longer be with this child. It is difficult to grasp because paraprofessionals are extremely passionate about helping the student. As these results reflect, keeping the paraprofessional supported, trained, motivated, and supervised is all part of the recipe for success for the student with autism.

Our perception of autism has evolved over time. Sixty years ago, autism was nothing more than an unrecognized developmental delay, generally combined with mental retardation. Today, it is recognized as an independent neurological-based disorder of significance, a major public health problem, and a topic of much research. Researchers have struggled to find a cause for the disorder without great success. Despite this difficulty, research continues in ever more sophisticated directions. Though no breakthroughs appear likely to occur anytime soon, there is a cause for hope.

The teachers and paraprofessionals that dedicate their lives to helping these children bring the hope. Having autistic children understand their class material better brings them the belief that can succeed in the future.

## Sources Cited

[https://books.google.com/books?id=DV6\\_h5ZsghgC&pg=PA377&lpg=PA377&dq=York-Barr,+Kronberg,+%26+Doyle,+1996&source=bl&cots=93VCWX406n&sig=UzjE1KIpjtpXNeCazY7BJVqf5uo&hl=en&sa=X&ei=v2QAVby2K6S\\_sQSqzIGIDA&ved=0CCYQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=York-Barr%2C%20Kronberg%2C%20%26%20Doyle%2C%201996&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=DV6_h5ZsghgC&pg=PA377&lpg=PA377&dq=York-Barr,+Kronberg,+%26+Doyle,+1996&source=bl&cots=93VCWX406n&sig=UzjE1KIpjtpXNeCazY7BJVqf5uo&hl=en&sa=X&ei=v2QAVby2K6S_sQSqzIGIDA&ved=0CCYQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=York-Barr%2C%20Kronberg%2C%20%26%20Doyle%2C%201996&f=false). Retrieved March 11, 2015.

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/archives/mgiangre/149-158.pdf>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

Giangreco, Broer, York-Barr, Kronberg, and Doyle. *The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classrooms*. 3rd. Baltimore, London Sydney: Paul H. Brookes, 2003. 1-169. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

# Alternative Treatments to ADHD

By Roslyn Ponce

One of the most common disorders in child behavior is known as Attention Deficit Disorder, also known as ADHD. ADHD is a psychological disease in which children have a problem of not being able to focus, being overactive, or a combination of these. Symptoms of ADHD are inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Children with ADHD are likely to be administered psych stimulant drugs to control their behavior and to facilitate their learning process. According to The Gale Encyclopedia of Children's Health, there are many side effects of these types of drugs in children which include: nervous tics, irregular heartbeats, loss of appetite, insomnia, persistent dry mouth, sedation, disorientation, and cardiac arrhythmia. The Food and Drug Administration also has warned that evidence of cases of liver problems have been reported with certain types of stimulant drugs.

Although it is argued by some that medicinal treatment is beneficial and not damaging, the current state of scientific research does not definitively support such a claim. This highlights the urgency for further independent scientific and political inquiry in this area (Kean, p. 199). Luckily, a number of alternative treatments exist for ADHD. Although ADHD is not a disorder that can be cured, it is one that can be managed. According to The Gale Encyclopedia of Children's Health (2012), some of the more popular alternative treatments are: EEG (electroencephalograph) biofeedback, which measures brainwave activity and teaches the patient which type of brainwave is associated with attention. Chelation Therapy focuses on removing excess lead within the body and is based on the idea that excessive lead in animals cause hyperactivity. Intractive metronome training uses a similar instrument as the metronome used by musicians to keep time in order to train individuals to develop motor and timing skills. There also are various nutritious supplements that can be used as well.

Psychosocial treatments include self- management therapy, parent training, and parent- child training in addition to a no-treatment option (Wilson, 1996). The "ADDitude Guide to Alternative ADHD Treatment" contains ADHD treatment information compiled by ADDitude's scientific advisory board and editorial staff, including in-depth research on: The impact of mega- 3 fatty acids on mental focus, the ideal balance of EPA and DHA in fish oil treatments, neuro feedback and working memory treatments which can reduce impulsivity and increase attentiveness. Also, dietary changes can improve functions such as, sequencing, prioritizing and sustaining attention as well as specific exercises and sports.

As said by The Gale Encyclopedia of Children's Health, communication between parents and providers also is especially critical to ensure an ADHD child has an appropriate environment. ADHD is a chronic condition and parents can feel overwhelmed when dealing with ADHD characteristics on a daily basis, so parents

should face the issues honestly and directly while fostering a positive relationship. All parties involved including parents, health providers, and educational providers should seek out the best treatments for all children affected by behavioral issues they cannot control.

In conclusion, I see that there are lesser risks in the natural approach of alternative treatments and psychosocial treatments than stimulant medication drugs to modify a child's behavior. Whether in a school setting or at home children affected by behavioral disorders need all the help that they can get to allow their growing process to be a successful one. Ultimately, the benefit of the affected child is the priority.

## **Sources Cited**

Kean, Brian A. "The globalization of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and the rights of the child." *International of Risk and Safety in Medicine*. 2006:195-204. Ebscohost. Retrieved July 24, 2014.

Krapp, Kristine and Wilson, Jeffrey. "Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)." *The Gale Encyclopedia of Children's Health*. 2006:203-207. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Retrieved July 24, 2014.

Read more: Hoyle, Brian. "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder." *Gale Encyclopedia of Neurological Disorders*. 2005. Retrieved March 10, 2015, from Encyclopedia.com: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3435200053.html>.

Washington Counseletter. "Alternative ADHD treatment: ADDitude guide to alternative ADHD treatment." *Associates Program Source*. January 2009:2-2. Ebscohost. Retrieved July 24, 2014.

Wilson, Laurie J. "Parents acceptability of alternative treatments for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder." *Journal of Attention Disorders*. August 1996:114-121. Ebscohost. Retrieved July 24, 2014.

# All Adults in High Schools Should Participate in Suicide Prevention Programs

By Ana De Leon

There are different programs seeking to decrease the suicide percentage in high schools. It is the responsibility of teachers and counselors to detect the behavior that may lead to suicide attempts. I do believe that all staff in high schools should receive some form of training to be able to observe certain behavior of students that appear to have suicidal thought.

The suicidal situation was so prevalent among teens that “The New Freedom Commission on Mental Health established in 2002, by President Bush, gave suicide prevention priority in schools.” (Cooper et al., p. 700). Consequently, 77 percent of public schools in America have programs that work towards suicide prevention but not all the school staff is included in these programs. As a result, the programs are not completely efficient; therefore, suicide still remains a major problem.

Suicide is one of the top causes of death among adolescents between the ages of 14-24. Keith A. King expresses this problem when he presents that “for every youth suicide, it is estimated that 100 to 200 youth suicide attempts occurs.” (King, p. 582) I believe that more help is needed in order to provide more support to the students who need to be evaluated. As shown in the New York Adolescent Mental Health Facts article, 16 percent of students in the United States have seriously considered attempting suicide, and 2 percent have attempted and were injured as a result. This mean that, if all adults in schools were trained to recognize signs of relevant behavior or mental illnesses, then the student can be referred to a professional and get the help needed for the sake of suicide prevention.

Although there are many programs in schools towards suicide prevention, and not all have been guaranteed to be effective, Gatekeeper programs have proven to be successful. The Gatekeeper programs train not only the staff, but some of the students, in order to be able to identify and prevent suicide by recognizing the signs and symptoms in students.

Many students seem to be more open to discussing their personal problems with adults in school, outside of teachers and counselors. All adults need to get involved in suicide prevention in order to get more support to address this issue. Lastly, it must be demonstrated that schools are always willing to fulfill their needs. Suicide is a problem that needs to be resolved.

## Sources Cited

Cooper, Gregory D. and Clemmets T. Holt K. "A Review and Application of Suicide Prevention in High School Setting." *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*. 2011:696-702. EBSCOHOST. Retrieved July 23, 2014.

King, Keith A. and Catherine M. Strunk and Michael T. Sorter. "Preliminary Effectiveness of Surviving the Teens Suicide Prevention and Depression Awareness Program on Adolescents' Suicidality and Self-Efficacy in Performing Help-seeking Behaviors." *Journal of School Health*. 2011:581-590. EBSCOHOST. Retrieved July 23, 2014

New York Adolescent Mental Health Facts. 2012:<http://www.hhs.gov>. Retrieved July 23, 2014.

## **Paraprofessional Development**

# The Role of the Paraprofessional

## by Camille Susino

Paraprofessionals are integral classroom members that provide support to the students and teachers they work with. According to the United Federation of Teachers' website, "UFT paraprofessionals work in the classroom as part of an educational team providing educational and supportive services to children. The teacher is the team leader and has sole responsibility for introducing new material. The paraprofessional is the re-inforcer for the teacher's lessons." The role of a paraprofessional within the classroom setting continues to evolve with each new school year. With the implementation of the common core standards and the accompanying curriculum, paraprofessionals have proven to be an asset to any classroom they are assigned.

Throughout the United States, there are many different job titles used for people who work as paraprofessionals. "These titles include paraeducator, educational aide, instructional assistant, teacher's assistant, individualized learning assistant, independent living skills assistant, and others" (Doyle, 2008). Paraprofessionals are part of an educational team and do not work alone in the classroom. There are different types of paraprofessionals whose roles and responsibilities may differ depending upon the student or job title they have. General education paraprofessionals can be assigned to an entire class and may not be assigned to just one student. Under the teacher's direction, the paraprofessional assists in any way the teacher sees fit. For example, paraprofessionals assigned to pre-kindergarten classrooms would have many different roles and responsibilities. He or she may assist with entering and exiting the classroom, enforcing the classroom rules, aiding with life skills such as bath-rooming and eating breakfast and snack (New York Department of Education, 2013). The responsibilities change according to the grade and ages of the children as well as the needs of the teacher and students in their assigned classroom.

Special education paraprofessionals use the child's Individualized Education Plan as a guide. This helps familiarize them with their student's specific needs and goals for the school year (Doyle, 2008). The paraprofessional may be required to perform or assist with some very basic life skills such as feeding, brushing teeth and toileting. For students with more challenging issues, they may be required to change diapers and provide wheelchair assistance. One-to-one health paraprofessionals provide whatever support the student requires based on his or her specific health needs. Some students with health paraprofessionals may have severe allergies, seizure disorders, or anxiety disorders. Training in the use of epi-pens, as well as specific ways to deal with seizures and anxiety, may be necessary.

Through an antipoverty program in the 1960s, paraprofessionals joined our schools in small numbers. They were poor and mostly women entering a field in which they were facing discrimination and a lack of respect. They were forced to do jobs and perform

tasks no one else would do like taking children home as well as cleaning up after sick children. With the organization and leadership of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), things slowly changed (United Federation of Teachers, 2012). We have seen a tremendous increase in starting salary from the time this job was introduced. Although, it is still far below what we feel is warranted for our job, it has definitely improved. We now have specific requirements to fulfill in order to be considered for a paraprofessional position. Exam requirements must be met and a nomination from a principal is necessary. College credits are now required within a specified timeframe. Upon completion of the required credits, paraprofessionals have the opportunity to continue their education, which is paid for in full by the Board of Education. As you further your education and the amount of credits accumulate, you can apply for salary increases that correspond to your current level of education. Obtaining a college degree, and perhaps becoming a teacher, is a major benefit of a paraprofessional career.

A few years ago, the role of the paraprofessional was much different than it is today. A paraprofessional was assigned to a student with a specific issue and was required to aid that student throughout the day. Even though most paraprofessionals are assigned to a student for a specific reason, they are required to perform other duties within the classroom. Of course, everything a paraprofessional does throughout the day is under the direction and guidance of the classroom teacher as well the expectations of the school principal.

I work at P.S. 1 in Tottenville. There are several students with severe allergies. The paraprofessionals carry an epi-pen with them at all times and never leave their student unattended. Some students require very little assistance with respect to their schoolwork. Their paraprofessionals sit very close by, so they can watch their students while they perform many other duties to help their classroom teacher. They take care of a lot of paper work, which enables the teacher to prepare lessons and do other things she is required to do. Some duties paraprofessionals perform are emptying and stuffing the students' take-home folders and bringing to the teacher's attention any important notices the student brought from home. They also mark homework and explain any corrections to the student, so they understand what they did wrong. Many paraprofessionals assist students who are having difficulty with a specific task and inform the teacher of the problem. They assist in instruction at any and all times they are asked to by the teacher or principal. Reinforcing the teaching point and task at hand as well as marking tests and recording the marks in the teacher's record book are among the duties they perform. Some paraprofessionals have been trained in DRA testing of the students, which enables the teacher to determine a student's reading level and how to record the corresponding data. They are never idle, which is very different from the role of a paraprofessional just a few years ago. Then, there were many times when the paraprofessional just sat and watched their student in the event that he or she may need some assistance. Today, they are much more hands on and definitely part of the educational team within the school and classroom. There are many times paraprofessionals are asked for their opinion or to give advice or input on

a particular matter (American Federation of Teachers, 2011). When I am asked for my input, I feel valued and appreciate being thought of as an integral part of the education team.

The direction of a paraprofessional's job is under the team leader, the classroom teacher. The education of the students is top priority. Working together as a team helps to ensure the knowledge and capabilities of the paraprofessional are utilized to produce a successful teaching environment (Doyle, 2008). As mentioned in the article, "Classroom Partners: How Paraprofessionals Can Support all Students to Meet New Standards," Barbara Ellis writes, "Paraprofessionals can be a tremendous asset in our common mission to ensure that all students meet new and more challenging Standards." In order for a paraprofessional to be an asset to any classroom, it is important that the teacher outlines the expectations and makes the paraprofessional feel comfortable to approach her with any and all questions or concerns he/she may have. As reported in the American Federation of Teachers' website, the secret to successful teacher-para relationships are mutual respect, teamwork, common goals and student success. Most teachers would agree that having a paraprofessional in the classroom is a tremendous benefit to the teacher and students alike. Providing support to both students and teachers makes paraprofessionals integral classroom members.

## Sources Cited

Creating a Classroom Team How Teachers and Paraprofessionals Can Make Working Together Work AFT. American Federation of Teachers, 2011. Retrieved Dec. 6, 2013

Doyle, MaryBeth, *The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom Working as a Team*. Baltimore, MD. 2008.

Ellis, Barbara Carter. "Classroom Partners: How Paraprofessionals Can Support All Students to Meet New Standards." *Educators Voice*. Vol. VI. nd: 20-27. Retrieved Dec. 6, 2013.

<http://www.ps1si.org/>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

Responsibilities of the Substitute Paraprofessional, New York City Department of Education. Retrieved Dec. 6, 2013.

"The ABC's of Safety and Health Guidelines for Paraprofessionals Presented by the UFT Safety Health Department." United Federation of Teachers. Retrieved Feb. 28, 2012.

# Paraprofessionals Role in the Classroom

## by Mignonne Tissera

Most special education teachers successfully influence a Paraprofessional's role in the classroom. Paraprofessionals are an important addition to the classroom. Paraprofessionals or educational assistants are incorporated into the classroom to contribute to the instruction or other delegated tasks that are assigned to them by the special education teacher. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the special education teacher to "set the stage" for the educational assistant. In this research essay, I am going to discuss what is really happening in the classroom with Paraprofessionals, though.

According to Mary Beth Doyle (1998), the Paraprofessionals make up one of the fastest growing yet least understood position in public schools today. In fact, in the early 1960s, there were approximately 10,000 Paraprofessionals working in public schools, while current estimates range from 300,000 to 500,000. Along with this significant increase in numbers of Paraprofessionals in schools, their roles and responsibilities have expanded markedly. Instead of performing tasks that are primarily non-instructional in nature, such as clerical work or housekeeping, Paraprofessionals are now involved in activities that are more instructional, such as implementing instruction designed by a certified teacher or carrying through with therapy activities designed by certified therapists. One reason for these changes is the increasing numbers of children with disabilities receiving part or all of their education in general education classrooms (p. 5).

As I mentioned in the first paragraph, Paraprofessionals are important members of the education team. During the past decade, the role of the paraprofessional has evolved from clerical assistant to a much more collaborative role with the teacher (Ziff, 2013). Paraprofessionals commonly assist with tasks such as leading small group instruction designed by the teacher, gathering materials, and providing assistance for personal care and other physical needs, assisting students to complete directions given by the teacher, facilitating interactions between students, and adapting lessons under the teacher's guidance (McVay, p. 3)

Paraprofessionals are a great asset to the education team, but there are some constraints on the responsibilities they can and should have. By law, a paraprofessional or education assistant cannot write programs without supervision of certified personnel; create new or alternative instruction without direction from the teacher or other certified personnel; implement behavior ideas without direction of the teacher or other certified personnel; or take complete responsibility for any students. Sometimes, when the role of the paraprofessional is unclear, they may actually be a barrier to student learning (Doyle, p. 5).

The relationship between the classroom teacher and the paraprofessional, along with their interaction with the rest of the team, is the key to success for students in any learning environment (McVay, p. 3). Here are some characteristics of a successful, growing team, particularly the teacher and paraprofessional relationship within that team. Time together in planned regular meetings. Both teachers and Paras share the different responsibilities for supporting all the students in the class (McVay, p. 4). Also, the paraprofessional has to establish and maintain direct communication with the classroom teacher (Doyle, p. 8).

These are some ideal characteristics found in teams working together to build successful and positive classroom for everyone (McVay, p. 4).

Most importantly, the key to success is working as a team in the classroom. An increasing numbers of Paraprofessionals are working in public schools to support the inclusion of students with disabilities; parents also have a role, providing their support and direction in defining the role of the Para. In doing this, it is so important to remember Paraprofessionals are not substitutes for certified personnel. Paraprofessionals provide extra help in the classroom and complete so many tasks not even in their agenda. Teachers need Paraprofessionals to assist the classroom with children who have special needs and disabilities. Otherwise, it is going to be chaos in the classroom. However, it still sad some professionals do not recognize how important Paraprofessionals can be in the classroom.

## Sources Cited

Doyle, Mary B. "My Child Has a New Shadow . . . . And it Doesn't Resemble Her!" Disability Solutions. Volume 3. Issue 1. May/June 1998, p. 3 and 5. Retrieved from <http://www.kcdsg.org/files/content/Disability%20Solutions%20Newsletter%20on%20Para%20Professional%20Role.pdf>. March 11, 2015.

McVay, Patty. "Paraprofessionals in the Classroom: What Role Do They Play?" Disability Solutions. Volume 3. Issue 1. May/June 1998: p. 3 and 4. Retrieved from <http://www.kcdsg.org/files/content/Disability%20Solutions%20Newsletter%20on%20Para%20Professional%20Role.pdf>. March 11, 2015.

Ziff, Barry. "Working with the Paraprofessional in your Classroom." Helpful Hints Series. Volume 10. nd. p. 2. Retrieved from <http://www.calstatela.edu/sites/default/files/centers/spedintern/hints10theparaprofessional.pdf>. March 11, 2015.

# What Happens When the Confidence of a Paraprofessional is betrayed?

by Norma Maldonado

**C**onfidence: Full trust; worthiness; reliability of a person or thing.

*Betrayal:* To hurt someone who trust you, such as a friend or relative by not giving help or by doing something morally wrong.

As Para-educators working a classroom setting, we must be a team. Our main and only objective is the focus on our students and assisting our teachers, and trust and reliability is essential to allow the function of the classroom. When a confidence is betrayed in the classroom with the paraprofessional and or with a teacher, it can really affect the temperature and the flow of the classroom. Classroom morale is down, and everyone works alone due to not trusting each other. This is not good education.

I personally experienced this exact situation in my own classroom. It ripped the trust and confidence between the Paras and the teachers due to a betrayal of trust. I am a one-to-one health para to my student “Jane” who was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, leaving her wheelchair-bound and unable to speak. However, with her eyes, she is able to speak by means of a computer (the Dynovox) attached to her wheelchair, which calibrates her pupils to the computer screen and when she looks at a particular symbol on the computer screen, the computer speaks for her. She has a gastric tube that feeds her, and she has to be toileted.

One day, I asked one of my classroom Paras, “Judith,” to assist me with Jane to the bathroom to change her diaper. Judith agreed and accompanied me. We lifted Jane from the wheelchair onto the changing table. I lifted her by her armpits, and Judith lifted her legs while changing her diaper. Judith handed me the soiled diaper and I stepped over (about three steps) to the diaper bag to get a plastic bag to place the diaper. When I turned around, Jane was on the floor. I could not believe what I was seeing. I looked at Judith who was hysterical, saying that she had turned around for a split second to get a wipe for Jane’s mouth from the diaper bag and in that split second Jane fell off the changing table onto the floor. Jane was screaming and crying.

We quickly picked her up of the floor; again, I grabbed her by both of her armpits, and Maria her legs onto the wheelchair. I noticed blood on Jane’s bottom lip, and when Judith wiped her lips, a tooth went onto the wipe. We secured Jane in the wheelchair, and Judith’s eyes, pooling with tears, asked me not to say anything to the teacher about this incident. I told her that she had to tell the teacher what had happened. Judith answered me asking “what should she say?” I told her, “Tell the teacher exactly what

happened. Jane also will tell her mother what happened so please just say the truth and that's it!" Judith agreed. We ran to the classroom with Jane and her tooth in hand and immediately Judith approached the teacher behind her desk to relate what had happened. I was able to calm Jane down, so I put on her coat, and her bussing nurse wheeled her to the waiting school bus to take her home. The teacher placed the tooth in an envelope and sent it home with Jane. I did not hear the account that Judith was telling the teacher and trusted that she would have told her what exactly had taken place. This was the biggest mistake I had ever made.

I noticed that the teacher was very calm and cool about the whole incident. She did not make a big deal about it. She calmly walked over to the nurse's office, called Jane's mom and told her she had lost a tooth. The teacher never approached me to ask me what had happened. She trusted that what Judith had stated was in fact what had happened. We all left for the day. This all happened at about 2:40 p.m. when the school day was about to end.

The next morning Jane's mom called the school stating that Jane would not stop crying, and she had to take her to the emergency room. X-rays were taken and nothing was broken. Jane was complaining of pain to her right side; they gave her painkillers and sent her home. The teacher asked me what had happened in the bathroom, and this is when I explained to her the incident. The teacher stated that that was not the version that Judith had told her. She continued to explain that Judith had stated that after her and I changed her diaper, I lifted Jane from the changing table by her armpits, and Judith lifted her legs. When we were about to sit her onto the wheelchair, I let her loose, and Jane had fallen from my arm onto the floor and that's how she lost her tooth. I immediately explained to the teacher that that was not what had happened! I told her that Jane had fallen onto the floor when Judith turned her back to Jane.

As a result of this incident, we were both suspended for five days without pay. Not because Jane fell, but because the truth was not told about the incident from the beginning. The principal explained that I should've told the teacher what had happened, and I should not have trusted that Judith would've stated the truth. In other words, I am Jane's one to one, and it was my responsibility to have given the account. If Jane would have suffered an embolism on the school bus while driving home and have died, we all would've been on the front page of the Daily News and would've possibly lost all our jobs due to the incident not have been reported immediately! The principal continued, stating that she understood that I was trying to calm Jane down from crying and that I was trusting that Judith would be truthful, but the fact still is that I was the responsible one, and as a result she had no other choice but to suspended us both for five days without pay.

Judith never apologized to me. A trust was broken and a betrayal established between the Paras in the classroom. There were five of us Paras in the class. Solidarity has been given to Judith even though she admitted to the teacher and to the principal and the UFT in written form that she had lied, she was nervous about the possibility of losing

her job. Even though she eventually stated the truth, the trust has been completely lost between her and me. And even though I continue to perform my duties as a Para in the classroom day by day, I hold no grudge against Judith and I have treated her the same. I need to maintain the peace as long as it depends on me. The teacher also has lost her trust in us, and this makes for a difficult classroom setting.

Now, Judith brings breakfast and lunch every day for the teacher and buys the teacher gifts for her baby boy. I guess this is the way Judith wants to gain her trust again. As for me, I have learned a hard lesson never to trust anyone stating an incident or an account that I also have been involved in. I must always be sure that I have an opportunity to state my version and never feel comfortable that the other person was truthful or trustworthy. I almost lost my job as a result of trusting a co-worker with the truth. This whole incident overwhelmed me and has caused me great distress mentally and physically. It will take me a long time to get over it.

# Confidentiality

By Michelle McLaurin

**B**etraying trust is a horrible thing! When someone betrays my trust, I feel emotionally hurt, let down, and most of all disappointed in that person. You should remember to always treat people the way you want to be treated and always be honored when someone entrusts you with a secret. When someone betrays my trust, it cuts me like a knife because I'm a very loyal person. For example, my husband and I always trusted a particular family member to keep our confidence, but they have betrayed us several times, which is very sad. You would think you could trust your mother and mother-in-law, but we can't. When my husband was out of work and we couldn't pay our bills, we did not want our family, and friends to know. My husband needed support from his mother so he told her everything figuring that she would help. He asked her not to share this information with anyone because where we live is very expensive, and a lot of people had a lot to say when we got the "condo" on the water. We did not want to hear anyone saying I told you so!

Furthermore, through the years, my husband and I shared a lot of personal things with my mother-in-law. However, she shared our personal business with other family members whom are much younger than us. They love to gossip, and this is how our business got exposed. We thought we could trust her but found out we could not. It is very sad and disappointing when someone betrays your trust especially when it is a family member or close friend, but when she is caught in the act, she likes to talk her way out of it and tries so hard to make my husband and I believe it was not her who told. My husband and I know it is her because we never shared our personal information with anyone else.

My husband and I were struggling really bad and did not need the gossip. When my mother-in-law is asked not to speak about any situation pertaining to us, she always does. She does not realize how devastating this is to her son and me. Her son is very hurt by this. He was always very close to his mother, but now I feel this is distancing him from her. In addition, my mother-in-law is not a very loyal person. Anything you tell her in confidence, she tells anyone who will listen.

I have learned to respect other peoples' personal business and to keep things to myself. I understand that when you hold a person's personal business in your care, you must respect the information as if it was your own. Likewise, to connect it to my paraprofessional student, I also understand what it means to keep my student's confidence and confidentiality. When you place yourself in the other person's shoes, you develop an understanding about confidentiality. I always try to be mindful of my student's personal business because his mother respects me. She is very open to me, and there are personal things in the school records that I know and always keep to myself. I also give her advice and attempt to guide her with her education, letting

her know that while her son is in my care, I will make sure he is on-task with his class work. Also, sometimes, she has a lot of problems at home, so when I could be any assistance to her, I will always try to help. My student, his mother, and I have a wonderful relationship. She can trust me to keep her and her family's confidence. Confidentiality is important to everyone. Always remember to treat other peoples' business with care the way you would want your personal business treated. Respect each other's personal business and most of all the students and their families.

# Quality Professional Development Results in Paraprofessionals as an Effective Classroom Resource

by Mayra L. Ortiz

The teacher assistant requirement for professional development appears to be a complex undertaking for school administrators, teachers, and the Department of Education. In my opinion, it requires the collaborative efforts from all in order for teacher assistants to effectively assist meeting the Core Curriculum mandated by our government. Alma R. Clayton documented the term Core Curriculum as “what knowledge should be included in the general education curriculum” (Pedereen, 2003). Several states have recognized the importance of teacher assistants (aka paraprofessionals) and have developed measures to address the need to recognize, train, and keep teacher assistants in order to obtain a “well prepared, high quality ... workforce” and to apply the “critical component to providing a stimulating and supportive early educational context” (Bowen, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Zigler, Gilliam & Jones, 2006).

Teacher assistants’ recognition as a valued contributor in education is a key factor to the collaboration among administrators, teachers, and capital budget decision-makers. Without the due recognition, opposing parties will challenge the ‘key players’ and dispute the necessary funding for state and/or private grants. Such was the debate in Great Britain, during March 2014 when teacher assistants were at-risk of losing their jobs. The opposing argument was teacher assistants “made up more than a quarter of the total school workforce in England.” In addition, the “support accounted for a large proportion of the annual education budget” (14-19 Learning & Skills Bulletin, p. 19). Both Alex Cunningham, a British politician, and Elizabeth Truss, a British Parliament minister, argued to secure funding because they “insisted” on a “highly trained, highly skilled workforce of teachers and teaching assistants.” They victoriously won the debate and avoided teacher assistants from getting fired (14-19 Learning & Skills Bulletin, p. 18).

What I considered as noteworthy was Ms. Truss point as she made reference to a 2013 Department review of school system efficiency. She pointed out the correlation of school efficiency with the administration’s responsibility for planning adequate teacher assistant training and a school structure. Administration should account for new teacher training, shared release hours for teacher/teacher assistant planning, and adequate professional development agendas and workshops. This will promote a higher quality workforce as described by the British Parliament minister. Today, numerous states, including New York, offer teacher assistants opportunities to obtain college degrees and/or state-funded programs to meet mandated certifications such as a Child Development Associate (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2004). Empire State College, based in New York, collaborates with United Federation of Teachers and has

developed a College Degree program for Paraprofessionals. This program and many others not only contribute to “improving skills” and “obtaining a college degree,” their incentive addresses the issue of turn-over and retention among teacher assistants (2015).

Gail Ghree (2007) noted the findings of an interview conducted with “53 district and school employees from six schools in three school districts.” The research describes “the costs of turnover are felt at every level within a school district” and that “strategies for increasing retention, including ensuring a threshold wage, focus on job matching ... and providing ongoing support and direction.” Also, “developing a team culture in which paraprofessionals feel valued” is stated as the areas of focus to address this issue.”

In conclusion, teacher assistants feeling valued within the school community, being well prepared to work effectively, and aspiring for growth in the workplace will improve when administrators, teachers, and capital budget officials collaboratively work on professional development that addresses due recognition, adequate training, school structure, and the fostering of teacher assistant retention.

## Sources Cited

Bowman, B.; Donovan, M. and Burns, M. (2001). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Retrieved from <http://www.seidl.org/connections/resources/citations/293.html>. March 10, 2015.

Ghere, Gail. York-Barr, Jennifer. “Paraprofessional Turnover and Retention in Inclusive Programs: Hidden Costs and Promising Practices.” *Remedial and Special Education*. Jan.-Feb. 2007 p. 21-32. Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection. Retrieved July 14, 2014.

Barnett, W. Steven; Hustedt, Jason T.; Robin, Kenneth B. and Schulman, Karen L. (2004). *The State of Preschool: 2004 state preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, N.J.: National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v7n1/ackerman.html> on March 10, 2015.

Pedergreen, Alma R., McTighe Musil, C. “Multiculturalism in Higher Education.” *Encyclopedia of Education*. James W. Guthrie. 2nd ed. 2003. Education; Social Sciences. Retrieved July 29, 2014.

Stout Sosinsky, Laura and Walter S. Gilliam. “Assistant Teachers in Prekindergarten Programs: What Roles Do Lead Teachers Feel Assistants Play in Classroom Management and Teaching?” *Early Education and Development*. Taylor and Francis Group. p. 676-706. Retrieved July 14, 2014.

<http://www.esc.edu/labor-studies-center/labor-studies-programs/uft-paraprofessional/>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

“The importance of teaching assistants” *Learning and Skills*. Retrieved March 24, 2014. 14-19. Education Source. Retrieved July 9, 2014.

Zigler, E; Gilliam, W. S.; Jones, S. M. A Vision for Universal Education Cambridge University Press, 2006. Retrieved from [http://books.google.com/books/about/A\\_Vision\\_for\\_Universal\\_Preschool\\_Educati.html?id=tikQqDHqygC](http://books.google.com/books/about/A_Vision_for_Universal_Preschool_Educati.html?id=tikQqDHqygC).  
March 10, 2015.

## **Emotions From Song**

## **Emotion and the Blues in Two Songs: “It Serves Me Right to Suffer” by John Lee Hooker and “Mississippi Goddam” by Nina Simone by Cindy Doherty**

### **“It Serves Me Right to Suffer”**

With this song, John Lee Hooker makes an emotional connection, referring to a personal experience about a past relationship and his inability to move forward from the memory. He expresses that he should be alone because of this woman he used to know, showing that this woman must have been really special to him. He is hurting inside; he cries every time he sees another woman and tries to keep it all in.

The poet mixes memory and tragedy, which is the essence of the Blues. According to Ralph Ellison, “the Blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing it from a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism.” In John Lee Hooker’s “It Serves Me Right to Suffer,” he is living in a memory of the past about a woman that he cared for which ended badly for him. It ended badly because he feels guilty that he cheated on the girl he loves.

As he sings, “You know it serves me right to be alone, alone/ Because I’m living in a memory/ A memory past and gone.” The tragedy is that he cannot look at another woman again because he will cry in sadness thinking of the past. His nerves are so bad that the doctor prescribes a prescription that will make it better with time. “Every time I look at another woman’s face/ You know tears come down my face. Hooker gives listeners a hint that if you have a person in your heart that you care for, you should not cheat or make mistakes that will end the relationship you have with your partner. If you follow this rule of thumb, there will be no suffering or regrets later in life.

### **“Mississippi Goddam”**

Similarly, Nina Simone uses an emotional connection through her anger and also disappointment, on how her country is turning into. She shows that it is sad when your own country is in poverty, and she must be strong for her brothers and sisters.

This poem mixes anger, sadness, and disappointment, which is another major tenet of the Blues. According to Ralph Ellison, “The blues offer a language that connotes a word of transience, instability, hard luck, brutalizing work, lost of love, minimal security, and enduring human wit and resourcefulness in the face of disaster.” In Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam,” she is tired of Alabama getting her upset, and

Tennessee made it worst, and also Mississippi for the painful event that her country is in. "Hound dogs on my trail/School children sitting in jail/ Black cat cross my path/ I think every day's gonna be my last."

"Mississippi Goddam" is a really sad yet poetic song that makes you think how bad the government is making its country suffer in poverty, a government, as shown by Simone, lying to the people and ultimately making them suffer.

## Sources Cited

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/ninasimone/mississippigoddam.html>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

<http://www.metrolyrics.com/it-serves-me-right-to-suffer-lyrics-john-lee-hooker.html>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

[http://testaae.greenwood.com/doc\\_print.aspx?fileID=GR0285&chapterID=GR0285-455&path=books/greenwood](http://testaae.greenwood.com/doc_print.aspx?fileID=GR0285&chapterID=GR0285-455&path=books/greenwood). Retrieved March 10, 2015.

## What is the Blues feeling?

by Stuart R. Zak

**W**hat is the Blues feeling? To answer this question, one must first try to understand where the musical style, the Blues, originated. Yes, there are many different styles, and many countries have their own understanding of how the Blues is meant to be.

The Blues style originated in the southern states of the United States. It traveled from down South to northern areas of the United States, which had large urban African American communities, such as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, just to mention a few. Once Blues clubs became trendy in these cities, people of other colors and ethnic backgrounds started to be exposed to this truly American form of music and poetry. Another reason the Blues became internationally known is the number of African Americans that served during World War Two. These men brought their love for the Blues with them wherever these troops were stationed.

The feeling of Blues can be many different things. One of the main characteristics in the Blues is an understanding that life is oftentimes unpredictable and spontaneous, and one should be open to seizing the moment of both great tragedy as well as great possibility. The Blues turns tragic events in people's lives into great possibilities, in the battle between hope and despair, and often hope wins. The Blues has taught me that within the lyrics of the songs, there are much deeper meanings that these artists are trying to convey to people around them. The feelings that you can get out of any Blues song is unique to each individual. This is why I believe that the Blues has become a worldwide, multicultural phenomenon.

# The Blues

by Joel Rodriguez

The Blues is a form of music and literature created by African Americans. It has been international in its appeal and influence around the world. The Blues is a way of dealing with your feelings. It's a combination of pain, suffering, and hardship. Rather than dwelling on it, the blues artist publicizes and demonstrates their pain through singing or writing about pain. In other words, Blues artists overcome it, whether it is by putting the context into something comedic or being sarcastic. In this paper, I am going to talk about two blues texts, a song by Nina Simone called "Mississippi Goddam" and a poem by Henry Dumas called "Employment Blues," and how both of these blues pieces relate to Houston Baker's interpretation of the Blues.

According to Houston Baker (1943), "The blues offer a language that connotes a world of transience, instability, hard luck, brutalizing work, lost love, minimal security, enduring human wit and resourcefulness in the face of disaster." This is evident in Nina Simone's song "Mississippi Goddam" when she says, "They keep on saying go slow!/ Washing the windows do it slow/picking the cotton do it slow" and so on. This part represents the hard luck and brutalizing pain that Houston Baker explained in his blues poem. In "Mississippi Goddam," Simone wants the audience to feel her pain even more, and she does a terrific job explaining to the audience how she feels about her current situation: "All I want is equality/for my sister my brother my people and me/Yes you lied to me all these years/you told me to wash and clean my ears/and talk real fine just like a lady ... Oh but this whole country is full of lies/you're all gonna die and die like flies/I don't trust you anymore." In this part, Simone emphasizes in living a fair life and how much she wishes it were so. She tells the audience the tragic part of her blues song. The tragedy is that the promises of American opportunity are being lied about. She clearly states it again when she says, "hound dogs on my trail/School children sitting in jail/Black cat cross my path/I think every day's gonna be my last." Nina demonstrates her pain and gives an insight of a rough life that she endures every day. Nina's poetry clearly depicts the life one had in the early 1960s and even when it's a rough time for her, she still sings her song, but in a melancholy tone.

In Henry Dumas's (1934-1968) "Employment Blues," the poet is talking about a personal experience of trying to find a job. The poet mixes tragedy and comedy, which is the essence of the blues. According to Houston Baker, "the blues offer a language that connotes a world of transience, instability, hard luck, brutalizing work, lost love, minimal security and enduring human wit and resourcefulness in the face of disaster." In Dumas's blues poem, the tragedy is that he can't find any job, even though he is willing to do any kind of work. "Lookin' high and low people/ drive a truck or dig a ditch yeah/I'll drive a truck or dig a ditch/cause without a job/a man's in a awful fix." He's so desperate that he will even dig holes for a living just to earn one. Dumas really goes in depth when he asks, "ain't there somebody in this city got a job for poor me?"

I'm so desperate, think I'll change my name," flat-out telling his audience that he is in a bad predicament. You can feel the emptiness he has inside of himself, the desire he has to be someone in this life, if someone or anyone can just give him a job. The comedy in the poem is when he says, "Getting interviewed the other day, man say Sit down boy,/yeah, outta work and he say sit down boy;/well I looked at the man and I say/my fist look like a toy?" I felt like Dumas was being sarcastic in a way; he's so caught up in finding work that he threatens the only chance he might have had that day of getting hired, just because he felt disrespected. Dumas plays the victim, and he plays it well.

The theory of the blues is a personal story of hardship expressed lyrically. The blues keeps the painful experiences alive, in order to transcend them, through comic and tragic lyricism. In the blues poems, "Mississippi Goddamn" by Nina Simone and "Employment Blues" by Henry Dumas, both artists clearly explained what was going on with their lives through their work. These artists are a few of many that painted a picture in my mind as I read their poems, a perfect guideline to what a blues poem is all about.

## Sources Cited

<http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/pages/4108/Baker-Houston-A-Jr-1943.html> > Baker, Houston A., Jr. (1943) Literary critic, editor, poet, educator, Chronology, Distinguished Career as Educator </a>. Retrieved from <http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/pages/4108/Baker-Houston-A-Jr-1943.html> on March 10, 2015.

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/ninasimone/mississippigoddam.html>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

[http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a\\_f/dumas/poetry.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/dumas/poetry.htm). Retrieved March 10, 2015.

[http://testaae.greenwood.com/doc\\_print.aspx?fileID=GR0285&chapterID=GR0285-455&path=books/greenwood](http://testaae.greenwood.com/doc_print.aspx?fileID=GR0285&chapterID=GR0285-455&path=books/greenwood) .Retrieved March 10, 2015.

# The Idea of Love and the Reality of Love in the Song, “Fragrance at Your Feet”

by Gina Sampedro

Most people nowadays do not know what real love is. The word “love” has different interpretations around the world for each person. How can we express the feeling of love?

It is especially difficult to express ourselves when we are in love. We can write a poem or sing a song that communicates that love we feel for that person.

A song that truly communicates love to me is “Perfume a tus pies” by Jaz Jacob because it describes my personal relationship with God. When I hear this song, I always cry because it reminds me how much he loves me and sacrificed his life on the cross for me. Also, he teaches me how to love him every day. And even though I can’t see him, I know he is with me day by day.

“Fragrance at your Feet” is an adaptation into the English version of the song “Perfume a tus pies.” It’s a gospel song that talks about the love a Christian has or feels for Jesus Christ. It is not only one way to love; it’s two ways: Love and loyalty. We can see this theme in the beginning of the song when the song says, “When I think of Your love and of Your faithfulness.”

Another part of the song that resonates with me is: “When I think of how I have been and as far as You have brought me, I stand amazed of You.” This particular lyric makes me feel very grateful because God has had mercy on me even when I mess up. God is with me during the good times and the bad times. As the song says later on, “I don’t want to be satisfied, I have tried and I want more.” This part of the song refers to my relationship with God and that it doesn’t just have one level but many. When one first has an encounter with God, it can be rather beautiful and make you want to have more time with Him just so you can feel his presence again. This is what it means when it says, “I want more.”

When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, Christians feel in debt. The lyrics certainly reflect this when they say, “Everything I have all that I am. All that I have been you own it all, that my life be for you, like a fragrance at your feet.” Although the Bible tells us that we owe no debt to him, we do feel extremely grateful. Christians’ way of giving back to Jesus is to dedicate our lives to him, which is what the song means when it says, “you own it all.” “Fragrance at your feet” symbolizes humbleness and a Christian’s offering to Him, which is to be from the heart. This is what pleases God.

I believe God’s love is the greatest love. For example, this love never fails and “is always patient, love is kind. Love does not envy; is not boastful; is not conceited; does not act improperly; is not selfish; is not provoked; does not keep a record of wrongs; finds no

joy in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth, endures all things. Love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). I believe that human love is partial and conditional. We are trying to love like He loves, giving all that we have in our relationship with someone, but we ultimately fail.

### **Sources Cited**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGfiWBNODV0&noindex=1>.

Retrieved March 11, 2015.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+13%3A4-8&version=ESV>. Retrieved March 11, 2015.

# An Essay on “Life is Fine” By Langston Hughes

By Rosaly Rodriguez

According to Ralph Ellison (1914-1944), “the blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing it from a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism (goodreads.com). The blues is a form of music and literature created by African-Americans and international in its appeal and influences. Blue as a genre is based on the blues form but possesses other characteristics such as lyrics, base line and instrument.”

In his poem “Life is Fine,” Langston Hughes (1902-1967) expresses a perfect example of the scenario when people come to death as a permanent solution for everything. “I tried to think but couldn’t; so I jumped in and sank.” The poet refers to the disillusion that people have about life. When something is difficult or terrible and seems impossible to overcome, death is seen as the only way to get out of the situation. People find death as a quick and cowardice means to run away from the pain that life creates every day. Life is a school we never graduate from, facing certain situations, problems, and difficult times. But be brave and try to solve it using the best resources and always have faith in God.

In this poem, the poet is sharing the tragedy of a man that has lost a love and what that man is trying to do to get love back. He provides different ways he is willing to die just to love again. The loss of a loved one is the motivation that pushes him to the edge, and he tries to drown himself two times. The loss of a family member or a close loved one is painful; one is forced to dwell about that person longer sharing moments and planning a future with you. The absence of this person becomes reflected in all feelings.

This poem is not only about death and trying to die; there also is a positive side: life can be fine as a wine. This man’s struggles with forcing himself to death can lead him to appreciate what he has in the end. This poem also reflects many of the societal problems in our culture today such as how people face personal problems by killing, firing, or abusing each other instead of loving, respecting, and appreciating our families, friends, and the most importantly life and all what God has given us. We were born for living, and we will survive even the loss of loved ones, because God will give you the strength to do it and take you out of that painful situation, so don’t give up and move on. In this poem, I recognize a feature of the blues is a story being told: he fell for someone, and he responded quite dramatically, to the level of killing himself and not caring about the important things in life, until he realized that life is beautiful. Life is fine: life is fine as wine.

## Sources Cited

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/348064-the-blues-is-an-impulse-to-keep-the-painful-details>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

<http://www.gradesaver.com/langston-hughes-poems/study-guide/summary-life-is-fine>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/langston-hughes>. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

## **Our Life**

# The Right Decision

By Elaine Devine

I came to the United States barely 18 years old. I remember getting off the plane at J.F.K. airport and not having a clue who was meeting me at the airport. All I knew was that some stranger would be holding up a piece of paper with my name on it. I don't remember feeling nervous at all, but I must have been. What normal person would fly off to America, not knowing what to expect and not feel somewhat nervous to see what was coming next! All I knew was that I was going to begin a job as nanny to two little kids in North White Plains, and their grandparents were Irish. That was good enough for me.

I was born in Northern Ireland in 1968. Not that my age matters, but the year might explain a little about why I came to America at such a young age. I came from a reasonably large Irish family, four brothers and four sisters, and was the oldest of the girls and had three older brothers. I couldn't imagine my childhood anywhere else. Life was wonderful from my point of view. My wonderful parents made sure we had what we needed, and although there was a lot going on around us, our childhoods were happy. I still remember Sunday afternoons, when we all squeezed into our family car after Sunday dinner. We would head off to spend the day in some remote place in the South. Not that we didn't have great places to visit in the North, but for other reasons, we would take that route. My mom would have a basket full of sandwiches, chips, and a few flasks of tea, and of course a biscuit to go with that tea for any of us that got hungry. That was a Sunday afternoon for us. As much as we squeezed our whole family into the car, we always took a turn in bringing a friend too.

For those that know Irish politics, they would remember that there has been an ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland for many years. The year I was born, in 1968, was the year the "Troubles" began. This primarily had to do with the occupation of Northern Ireland by England. The troubles started in the late sixties between Unionists and Loyalists, who mostly came from the Protestant community, and who generally wanted Northern Ireland to remain with England, while, on the other side, there were Irish nationalists and republicans, who mostly came from the Catholic community, and wanted Northern Ireland to leave England and join a united Ireland. Today, Northern Ireland is still occupied by England, but there is a peace process at this time, so life is a little different. Today's generation of children will hopefully not see what we saw as children; it will only be something they read in their history books.

As a child growing up during the Irish conflict, I didn't think there was anything wrong with our lives. Obviously, hearing bombs go off, riots taking place, the burning of cars and buses, and the constant sight of British tanks and British jeeps with young soldiers, would tell people that it wasn't a normal place to live, but it was where I was born and raised, and I knew nothing else. I remember being of elementary school age and going out my front door to go to school and finding a soldier sitting at our front

door pointing a rifle at me. It didn't seem to impact me at that age. I just looked at him and walked on. Sometimes, the soldier would give me a piece of Wrigley's gum but maybe it was to make him feel better.

As I grew and reached my teenage years, I started to understand the conflict and realize that our lives were different from other people in peaceful countries. On Saturday and Sunday nights after the disco, usually the British soldiers would come along William Street and antagonize the young fellas, and before we knew it, a riot would break out with one side throwing rocks and petrol bombs, and the other side shooting rubber bullets. I was foolish enough to be in the middle of it, but it was around this age I started to think about what else was out there.

I was just about ready to finish secondary school, and although I could have stayed on and went to college, I didn't want to. I think a lot of teenagers felt that way and again the conflict played a big part in our decisions. There were few jobs available for young people after they graduated from secondary school at the time. Plus, the economy wasn't great either. From a teenager's point of view, I thought why bother. I went on to a technical college to complete a business course and in my second year one of my older brothers had a bright idea.

I remember the day well when my older brother brought in the newspaper. He was always dreaming about going off to far-off lands. I used to daydream about what else was out there, although I was happy at home. Why would I want to leave my family? I had never thought about moving away from them. He looked at the jobs and saw a nanny job in New York. By the end of the day, I had an interview on the phone and was planning to book my ticket to New York. Everything happened so fast. I think within ten days I was headed to the airport. My brother kept telling me that he will come next. I don't remember my parents ever trying to persuade me not to go but again, I think they thought I might have a better opportunity away from home. Today, I think how difficult it must have been for them to watch me go.

As I said before, I got off the plane at J.F.K and looked for my name. I had only spoken to these people on the phone and didn't know what kind of people they were. I saw a woman holding up my name and that was the beginning of my life in the United States. We drove to White Plains where I worked for the next year taking care of their two children. The children were lovely, but life was so different for me in this new place. This was my first time away from home without anyone I knew around me, so it was tough. I used to lie in my bed during the night and just cry. These nights happened for at least month before I settled down, and my crying tapered off. I missed my family and friends desperately, though. I remember how lonely I had felt. Everyone drove everywhere. I would look for the mailman everyday just so I could say hello to someone. Eventually, throughout the year, I met some people from my hometown. We would meet up at the weekends and enjoy hanging out. After working for the family for the year, I decided to move down to Brooklyn to live with my Irish friends. It wasn't easy leaving the kids but leaving their parents

was very easy. I realized throughout that year, that the reason they hired someone from Europe was because a young American woman would not have put up with working 80 hours a week for \$100.

I moved to Brooklyn where I lived with my friends but needed to find a job. Unfortunately, being in the country illegally left me limited options for a job, so I decided to stick with being a nanny. Not long after moving to Brooklyn, I found a job as a nanny working with a wonderful family with two kids. As the time went on, I was able to work with their friends' kids too. The next twelve years they helped me settle in New York, and it was only then that I realized this was the place where I wanted to spend the rest of my life.

During those years, I grew to love the children that I took care of, and they became my family. I met my husband, got married, and raised two of my own children and still worked as a nanny. It was so nice for my two children to be around these children. After I got pregnant with my third child, we all came to the decision that I needed to stay home until they were old enough and didn't need me. I went on to have one more child and that kept me home for many years.

When my little one got to be five years old, I was very fortunate to be nominated for a paraprofessional job. I worked as a substitute Paraprofessional for two years, and by the third year I became full-time, instantly falling in love with the job. I think being around children was my calling. Also, the opportunity to work and have the summers off to spend with my kids is a dream.

I look at my life now and think that I have been very lucky. Yes, Ireland will always be home. Fortunately for me, I have all my family there, so I make trips home often, and when they need a trip away from Ireland, they love to make visits to New York. I have been a tour guide for many people that have come to visit here. Today, when I take a trip to Ireland, things are completely different. My children get to enjoy all the great qualities Ireland has to offer instead of the violence I witnessed. I have to add here that my big brother never did follow me to America. He did come one time for a visit, but that was enough for him.

This brings me to the present and how after working as a paraprofessional, I decided I might as well take the opportunity that the Department Of Education offered me and go back to college. Although, I miss my family, I have no regrets on my decision to live in America. I have met wonderful people and great friends. Life has been good.

## Remembering the Mangos ...

by Idonia Gonzalez

It was a day early in September, when I was in elementary school in the Dominican Republic. On my way to school, I had to pass through a big farm planted with so many fruits, such as coconuts, oranges, mangos, pineapples, bananas and papayas. My favorite fruit was mainly the mango, and I would stop on my way to school picking the mangos and hiding them in the bushes, so when I came back from school, I could take the mangos out of the bushes and bring them home. On that particular September day, I got to school one hour late, and the teacher punished me. She made me get down on my knees in the corner of the classroom for the entire day, and I didn't get any lunch or recess.

At the end of the day, the teacher wrote a letter to my mom with a red pen, and I had to read the letter to my mother as soon as I got home because my mother didn't know how to read. That day was the most nervous day of my life. I did not want to go home. I read the letter to my mom and in that moment my mother didn't do anything, but I saw the frown on her face and instantly knew she wasn't happy with what I told her. But, as the afternoon passed, I was feeling a little less nervous and thought my mother had forgotten about the whole situation. Much to my dismay, though, after I had gone to bed that night, my mother took a belt and whipped me so hard and in a loud voice she told me, "You should never stop on your way to school for any reason at all. You go straight to school every day; do you understand me? Do you?" I was sobbing, and I replied back to my mom "Yes mom, It won't happen again." After that day, I learned my lesson pretty well because never did I stop again on my way to school. Every day, I ran to school to be one of the first students in class. That, for me, was a lesson well learned.

# My Life in a Day

by Diane Jones

Every morning, I wake up with at least six alarms, the first starting at 4 a.m., which begins my waking up process. However, I don't get up until the 5:30 alarm. My alarm rings every half an hour. My last alarm goes off at 8 a.m., which begins my workday.

I start with a heavy heart, wondering why God gave me this headache. At 6 a.m., I move on with my day, shower, brush my teeth and rub my hurting body. Then I do my arm exercises, shake the pain out of my legs and my feet, take my meds and last I get my breast out the box and put it on. I ask God to give me strength to make it through the day, to hold me down and keep the pain away. They say God never gives you more than you can handle. I get dressed and at 6:30 a.m. head out the door, a 10-minute walk to the bus stop. The bus comes at 6:54, and I'm off to work. Sometimes, I dread going to work. The bus is crazy and getting off is a blessing in disguise: I drag along for two minutes before reaching my destination

I am entering the plantation ready to report to master. I need a cup of tea before I get started. I dream of reaching the unreachable, but if I teach just one I'm happy. Thirty-seven and a half -minutes feels like thirty-seven and a half hours. My job has only just begun: the class that I'm working in is full of impressionable children who are just beginning to learn. Some of them act like they just got off the yellow school bus and some really belong on it. I spend the next two hours working with the classroom teacher getting the children to learn to write a story and draw a picture about what they wrote. Oh, I forgot to mention that I have a one-on-one with a little girl who was in three different classes. This little girl won't sit still and has no patience with herself or others. She has to have it her way or no way at all. At 10:20, it is time for lunch duty, so I go from one class to two classes, and they are first graders. Oh boy, here we go, out of the frying pan and into the fire; lunchtime makes the children go wild!

Lunch is about 50 minutes. The children can't go out to play because it's too cold, so they make the lunchroom their playground. Now it's my lunchtime, which seems to fly by like a thief in the night. I can't eat much of anything, so I go help in another class. By noon you could really stick a fork in me, I'm done. Workday is not over yet so back to work I go. My one-to-one has at this point driven everyone in the lunchroom crazy, so begins my journal of this child. The afternoon is shot; no work is getting done with this one, and I got her. I pull out my book that has her name on it, and I begin to write, but she doesn't like when I write in the book because she knows it means that she has not done good for the day. Now, the workday is done, and it's time for home and all that goes with it.

My body is so tired; I feel drained. At home, I pop some more pills, repeat my morning routine, write in my journal what I ate today and how hard was it to walk, did my arm swell up and what about the headache and how is my vision. My goal is to regain my life, to make it as normal as possible. Finally, I go into the kitchen and make dinner for the family and then I retire to my room for the night.

## Reverie: Passover Then and Now

by Stuart R. Zak

The first thing that hits me is the smells coming from the kitchen. Then the sounds hit my ears. It's my wife cooking dinner for the whole family. When I experience these smells and sights, I begin to think about how my grandmother had Passover dinner at her house.

In my grandmother's house, the dinner was always served in the living room because it was the biggest room in the house. Twelve of us would eagerly sit around the table waiting for the start of the infamous Passover dinner. What I see now is my wife setting the table for the same number of people, and it brings joy to my heart. As I walk into the kitchen to say hello to everyone, I see on the counter some of the things that my grandparents would cook.

Some of my first memories of the Passover holiday come from what is placed on the counter in my kitchen. Even some of the tastes bring out vivid memories such as when I started to eat white horseradish instead of the more mild purple horseradish. I was probably about nine years old when this happened. We were sitting down after Passover Seder. My grandmother and mother were passing out the gefilte fish while my father and uncle were discussing which horse radish they bought was hotter. The Gold's white horseradish or the one my uncle bought at a little specialty shop in Larchmont, N.Y. Being curious, I decided to taste both of them. My nasal passage felt wonderfully clear after trying both of them. But the person who won the argument was my uncle. His horseradish was much more intense.

The next thing that brings me back is the Matzah balls cooking in the soup. Gildana learned how to make them from my mother who learned how to make them from my grandmother. Lots of people believe that Matzah balls are supposed to be light and fluffy, but that belief does not run in my family. We like sinkers, the type of Matzah balls that are dense and stay on the bottom, absorbing all the goodness from the bottom of the pot. Over the last six years of marriage, my wife has mastered how to make these legendary Matzah balls.

These two memories are just some of the things that the Passover dinner bring back to my mind from my childhood. We as adults must share these memories with our children so that when they become adults and have their own children, their memories of what we do today will be passed on to future generations.

## **“Our Spring”**

**by Janice Ousley**

“Our Spring” reminds me of a person in prison. The images of their hands bound, their teeth knocked out, and their heads being broken by a police officer are violent and make me think of jail. Someone is cursing and crying because they are hurt. The prisoner is being brought to the electric chair or the shooting wall where they execute people. Others are being silent until tomorrow as they prepare to rebel. But you can’t kill all of us, they are saying. Then the poem talks about spring. Not just any spring, but their very own spring, because they are like the rivers that fill up with snow and then flood the region in every direction. This is especially important because spring is a time of rejuvenation, of fresh starts. When spring comes, everyone feels like anything is possible. The author of the poem is illustrating the people’s plans to overcome their oppressors as “the coming of spring” because they will not be silent anymore as they rebel against those who have beaten and killed them.

The author, in labeling all of the bad things that have happened to them before transitioning to the “our spring has come,” is giving a message of overcoming adversity in the toughest of times. He tells of how they’ve been beaten and killed, and he even mentions a guillotine, but then he basically suggests the message that nothing they do can bring him or anyone else because they will be washed away by their great tides in the new era of rebellion that is soon coming. It is very important to observe the way the author lists all of the negative things before the spring has come part because it has a sort of build-up effect that makes you feel sorry for the people that are being beaten and killed, but then you get a hopeful feeling from the poem because you know that, tomorrow, they will soon rebel and fight back against their oppressors.

# One Day of My Life

## by Gina Sampedro

**M**y day begins when the sky is blue and the morning is silent with the splendor of the moon and the shining stars. I must go to his presence, to put all this day into his hands, in the hands of the all Almighty, the God of my life. I need to fulfill my heart with his love, with his strength and peace; it is a new day. The sweet scent of fresh coffee is in the air; one cup of coffee is what I need before they arrive; maybe today will be a beautiful day.

When I arrive to the classroom, my angels are here, all of them; I feel that today will be a busy day. One of my angels is not in good mood, another one is full of energy, and the rest of them are lost in space. How can we teach them today? In some ways, I have to go inside their own world. I believe my angels created their own world to hide themselves in because they do not want to live in the real one. They need to learn reading, writing, and mathematics but keeping them focused is so difficult: Sometimes it feels like I'm trying to find water in the desert. I need their attention; I need to bring them back to this world; I know it is not impossible.

For me, every day is full of adventures and creativity with my six little angels. It's Friday and we are running here, there, doing this, doing that, teaching social skills ... it's not easy. Here comes Bear, (my one- to- one); today, he's a hurricane: Everything in his path flies, such as chairs, books, and papers too. Trying to calm him down is another story, but the rest of my angels are waiting, and they want to know what is wrong with Bear and why he is acting like this. They only say to Bear "calm down, do not lose your snack, do not lose your computer time, and behave well, do not ruin the class surprise"

Today in our classroom, we are planning to have a birthday celebration for one of our angels, Jayson. He is the birthday boy and loves McDonald's, so we have happy meals for everybody, a new toy in each box, a super delicious cupcake, and no homework for the weekend. Clean up, clean up my angels, we must leave our desks neat. The day is gone, it's time to return to our homes, so dress up: coats, mittens, scarves, hats, and backpacks ready to go.

My lovely husband is waiting for me, and I'm dying to see him and my two daughters; they are my three real loves, the loves of my life. They are the greatest gift that God gave me on earth. And how can I forget my little Nino, the cutest cat in the whole world, my Falino, he is waiting for all of us at the window.

A call at five o'clock freezes my heart. I feel cold running in my veins: My mom needs an open-heart surgery next Tuesday, my sister says. Many things come to my mind for a moment. I want to cry, but deep in my heart I know everything will be okay because I know who is my God and Lord, I'm putting everything in His hands.

My two treasures want to have pizza for dinner; we are all together in my bedroom, watching movies and eating pizza. It's something that we enjoy; it's family time.

At night, we pray, giving thanks to our God for all his blessings through the day.

# On Grieving

## by Yvette Torres

Losing someone or something you love is a very traumatic experience for anyone at any age. Everyone reacts differently to a loss and employs their personal way to grieve. While there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there are healthy ways to deal with the painful causes.

As I read through some healthy grieving articles, I could not help but think of two devastating moments in my life. It was when my parents passed away, two years apart from each other, and how I dealt with my grief. For each, I must say the experience was different, mostly because of how I dealt with my loss.

I was thirty-eight years old when my mother unexpectedly passed away. It was the first time I had experienced a significant loss as such. I became very withdrawn; the feeling of guilt kept sweeping over me; I couldn't sleep and if I was able to, I would wake up crying. Moreover, I was very depressed, filled with anger, and didn't talk to anyone about it because I didn't want anyone to know how much pain I was in. I wanted everyone to think I was in control of the situation.

Now thinking back to that time, I realize how foolish that was of me. I feel that if I would have opened up and talked to my family or someone else for that matter, about how I was feeling, my healing process would have been a lot shorter and probably easier to deal with. Don't get me wrong: while time does heal the wounds, the scars of your loss remain, but that's the point of healthy grieving.

It took a very long time for me to come to peace with my mother's death because I didn't grieve in a healthy way, which is why my experience with my father's death was totally different. That time around, I practiced healthy grieving. I spoke about how I felt, acknowledging my pain and also read grieving books, which helped me cope with my loss. I focused more on my relationship with him and the memories we shared, rather than focusing more on the guilt, the anger and the pain I felt.

In my research, I discovered some helpful healthy grieving tips:

### "Healthy Grieving Tips Given"

1. Allowing time to experience thoughts and feelings openly to oneself.
2. Expressing feelings openly or writing journal entries about them.
3. Remembering crying can provide a release.
4. Confiding In a person about the loss.
5. Acknowledging and accepting both, positive and negative feelings.

6. Find a bereavement group.
7. Seek professional help.

Source: Kimball Johnson Md, 2012 WebMd.llc

It is very important to remember: as you experience a loss, although each person grieves differently, there are many ways to practice healthy grieving, such as those mentioned above, as well as acknowledging your feelings and accepting what has happened and finding the necessary support you need to deal with the pain. Following these steps can lessen the blow of your grief.

*“Interviewers often ask what I’m proudest of. There are many things that come to mind. If I had to pick one thing, I’d say it’s this: organizing classroom paraprofessionals and negotiating for them not only better salaries and benefits, but a career ladder that enables each of them to go to college.”*

*– Albert Shanker, former UFT and AFT President, 1985*



**SUNY EMPIRE  
STATE COLLEGE**

The Harry Van Arsdale Jr.  
Center for Labor Studies  
325 Hudson St., 6th Floor, Suite 600  
New York, NY 10013-1005  
212-647-7801

[www.esc.edu](http://www.esc.edu)

CSEA, Local 1000 • AFSCME-AFL-CIO