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With a dedicated focus on the needs and aspirations of educators, we curate a diverse range of best practices to support your teaching journey. From cutting-edge pedagogical strategies to engaging classroom activities, we are here to equip you with the tools and inspiration you need to ignite curiosity, foster creativity, and cultivate lifelong learners.

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION 2025

SHAPING A VISION FOR EQUITABLE GLOBAL LEARNING

Prof. Dennis A. De Jesus

Inclusive education is no longer just a concept or an aspiration; it has become a moral and practical imperative as we approach 2025. With the global community's collective push toward equitable learning opportunities for all, inclusive education represents a transformative vision for the future of learning—one that acknowledges and celebrates diversity while eliminating barriers to participation. This article delves into the challenges, strategies, and aspirations that define inclusive education and explores its vision for 2025 as a cornerstone for a more equitable global learning landscape.

THE FOUNDATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

At its core, inclusive education is a philosophy that embraces diversity and aims to provide equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their abilities, socioeconomic status, gender, or cultural background. This approach recognizes the inherent value of every individual and seeks to create learning environments where all students feel respected, supported, and empowered to achieve their full potential.

The foundation of inclusive education is built on three key principles:

1. **Equity:** Addressing systemic inequities to ensure all learners have access to the resources and opportunities they need.
2. **Participation:** Encouraging active involvement of all learners in their education and creating environments that support their engagement.
3. **Collaboration:** Fostering partnerships between educators, families, communities, and policymakers to create inclusive and supportive learning spaces.

These principles align with global initiatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030. However, the vision for 2025 demands an accelerated and innovative approach to achieving these goals.

(10 targets of SDG for quality education)

THE VISION FOR 2025

As 2025 approaches, the vision for inclusive education is centered on three transformative goals:

1. **Universal access:** Every child, regardless of their circumstances, should have access to quality education. This includes addressing the needs of children with disabilities, marginalized groups, and those in conflict-affected regions.
2. **Technology-driven inclusivity:** Leveraging technology to bridge gaps in access and ensure personalized learning experiences for diverse learners. Digital tools, assistive technologies, and online platforms will play a pivotal role in reaching learners who face physical, geographical, or socioeconomic barriers.
3. **Teacher empowerment:** Equipping educators with the training, resources, and support they need to create inclusive classrooms. This involves not only professional development but also fostering an inclusive mindset that values diversity as a strength.

CHALLENGES
TO ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Although notable strides have been made toward building more equitable learning environments, the journey to truly inclusive education remains filled with a host of complex challenges that require persistent effort and innovation to overcome. These challenges include:

1. Lack of resources: Many schools, particularly in low-income regions, lack the infrastructure, funding, and tools necessary to support inclusive practices. Without adequate resources, schools struggle to provide assistive technologies, trained staff, and accessible facilities.

2. Cultural barriers: Deep-seated biases—rooted in historical, social, and economic structures—often lead to the exclusion of marginalized groups. For instance, in some societies, there remains resistance to integrating children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms due to misconceptions about their capabilities.

3. Teacher preparedness: A significant gap exists in teacher training programs, leaving many educators ill-equipped to handle diverse classrooms. A study by UNESCO highlights that nearly 30% of teachers worldwide have never received training in inclusive education strategies.

4. Policy gaps: While many countries have policies supporting inclusive education, inconsistent implementation and lack of accountability remain major hurdles. In some regions, policies exist on paper but are not enforced due to weak governance structures.

5. Technological divide: Unequal access to technology exacerbates educational inequities, particularly in underprivileged communities where internet access and digital literacy are limited.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

In order to fully realize the vision of inclusive education by 2025, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that addresses the varied needs of all learners while mobilizing collaboration among educators, policymakers, families, and communities. Key strategies to achieve this goal include:

1. Policy and advocacy

Governments and international organizations must prioritize the development and implementation of inclusive education systems, ensuring this is achieved through the establishment of robust and well-structured policies, the allocation of sufficient and adequate funding, and the creation of effective accountability mechanisms to monitor and enforce progress.

- **Legislative action:** Enact laws with clear guidelines for inclusion, backed by dedicated funding streams.
- **Public awareness campaigns:** Collaborate with media outlets, NGOs, and community leaders to highlight success stories and break down stereotypes.
- **Accountability frameworks:** Set measurable targets (e.g., percentage of teachers trained in inclusive education or decrease in dropout rates among marginalized groups) and regularly publish progress reports.
- **Technology integration:** Investing in digital infrastructure and assistive technologies can revolutionize access to education for marginalized learners. Schools can adopt open educational resources (OERs), mobile learning applications, and virtual classrooms to provide flexible learning options.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Regular assessment of inclusive education initiatives is essential to measure progress and identify areas for improvement. Data collection on student outcomes, teacher preparedness, and resource allocation will help refine policies and interventions.

2. Teacher training

To ensure educators are thoroughly prepared to foster inclusive environments, comprehensive and well-structured professional development programs should be thoughtfully implemented, providing them with the essential skills and knowledge required to effectively support and promote inclusive practices.

- **Ongoing workshops and webinars:** Integrate hands-on sessions focusing on differentiated instruction, cultural competency, and the use of assistive technologies.
- **Mentorship programs:** Pair new teachers with experienced "inclusion champions" who can offer practical classroom management tips and real-time feedback.
- **Integration of inclusive education modules in teacher certification courses:** Incorporate robust modules on inclusive pedagogy, classroom adaptation techniques, and bias awareness into mandatory training for aspiring educators.

3. Community engagement

Establishing and nurturing partnerships with families, communities, and dedicated local organizations plays a crucial role in crafting and sustaining supportive learning environments that benefit everyone involved.

- **Parent-teacher forums:** Regularly organize open houses or community events where parents and teachers discuss individual learning needs and collaboratively develop strategies.
- **Local partnerships:** Involve local businesses, non-profits, or faith-based organizations to fund micro-scholarships or volunteer in tutoring programs.
- **Peer support networks:** Encourage parent-to-parent and student-to-student support groups that can share resources, experiences, and guidance on inclusive practices.

GLOBAL EXAMPLES

Building on the strategies and collaborative efforts outlined above, a variety of nations, alongside numerous organizations, have achieved truly noteworthy progress in their dedicated endeavors to advance and promote the cause of inclusive education:

1. Finland

Renowned for its inclusive education model, Finland emphasizes collaborative teaching, individualized learning plans, and strong teacher-student relationships. The country has eliminated separate special education schools, integrating all students into mainstream classrooms with necessary support.

2. India

The "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan" (Education for All) initiative has significantly increased school enrollment rates among children with disabilities. By providing free assistive devices, scholarships, and home-based learning options, the program has made significant strides in inclusion.

3. UNICEF's inclusive education programs

In Rwanda, UNICEF has implemented an inclusive education framework that trains teachers, improves infrastructure, and engages communities to support learners with disabilities. School attendance among children with disabilities has increased by 35% in targeted districts.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Looking ahead, the journey to inclusive education demands collective effort and unwavering commitment. By fostering an inclusive learning culture, investing in innovative solutions, and championing the rights of all learners, we can turn this vision into a reality—ensuring that education is truly a fundamental right accessible to all, without exception.

Prof. Dennis A. De Jesus, a licensed educator with a degree in Language Education from Bulacan State University, is renowned for his innovative teaching, global research contributions, and leadership. His published works and dedication to excellence make him a transformative figure in education.

FROM RAW DATA TO REAL IMPACT

TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS THROUGH DATA MINING

Dr. Mohammad Haseen Ahmed

Data mining, the process of discovering patterns, trends, and relationships within large datasets, has become a transformative tool across various sectors. It enables informed decision-making by providing insights into customer behavior, market trends, and operational efficiencies. **In education, data mining holds immense potential to convert raw educational data into actionable insights that can enhance teaching methodologies, improve student outcomes, and streamline administrative processes.** For educators, teachers, and school administrators, understanding the efficacy and relevance of data mining is crucial for leveraging its full potential.

WHAT IS DATA MINING?

Data mining involves extracting meaningful information from vast amounts of raw data using algorithms, statistical models, and machine learning techniques. The goal is to identify patterns and trends that are not immediately apparent but can provide valuable insights when uncovered. Data mining encompasses various methods such as clustering, classification, regression, and association rule learning.

Clustering involves grouping a set of objects in such a way that objects in the same group (or cluster) are more similar to each other than to those in other groups. For example, in a school setting, clustering can help group students based on learning styles or performance patterns, enabling teachers to customize lesson plans or provide targeted support.

Classification is the process of finding a model or function that helps divide the data into classes based on different attributes. For instance, an academic intervention system can classify students into different risk levels—low, medium, or high—based on features such as attendance, prior grades, and engagement, helping educators identify which students need the most support.

Regression is used to predict a continuous-valued attribute associated with an object. For example, regression analysis can help predict future standardized test scores or graduation rates based on variables like current grades, study habits, and socioeconomic factors.

Association rule learning is used to discover interesting relations between variables in large databases. A relevant example in schools might be analyzing course enrollment patterns: finding that students who excel in a certain math course also tend to do well in particular science classes, which can help counselors advise students or guide curriculum planning.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EVOLUTION

The origins of data mining can be traced back to the 1960s with the advent of database management systems. However, it gained prominence in the 1990s with the rise of the internet and advancements in computational power. Over time, artificial intelligence (AI) has become increasingly intertwined with data mining, accelerating its growth and enabling more sophisticated analysis. Key milestones include:

- The development of machine learning algorithms in the 1980s and 1990s, which provided the foundation for many data mining techniques.
- The establishment of data mining as a distinct field of study, marked by the publication of influential papers and the organization of conferences focused on data mining.
- The introduction of tools and software that made data mining accessible to a broader audience, such as SAS, SPSS, and later, open-source platforms like R and Python libraries.

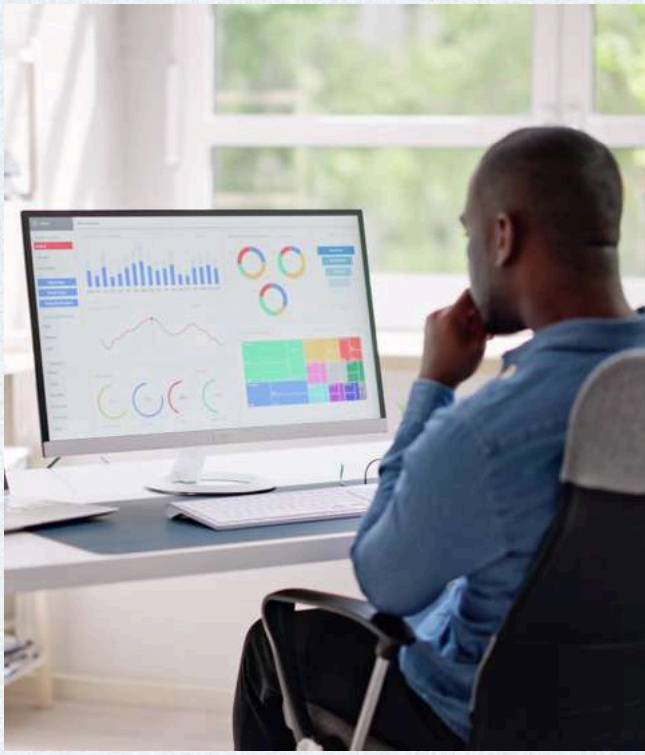
Today, data mining—reinforced by cutting-edge AI tools and techniques—continues to evolve, driving innovation and offering powerful insights across industries.

WHY IS DATA MINING IMPORTANT IN EDUCATION?

The education sector generates an enormous amount of data daily—from student performance metrics and attendance records to teacher evaluations and curriculum effectiveness. However, this data often remains underutilized because it is stored in disparate systems or presented in formats that are difficult to interpret. Data mining bridges this gap by transforming raw data into structured, actionable insights that educators and administrators can use to drive positive change. Here's how data mining can be applied in education.

1 Personalized learning paths

Every student learns differently, and one-size-fits-all approaches to education often fail to meet individual needs. Data mining can analyze students' past performance, learning styles, and engagement levels to create personalized learning paths tailored to each student's strengths and weaknesses.



Imagine a high school math teacher who uses data mining tools to analyze test scores, homework completion rates, and classroom participation. The system identifies that certain students struggle with algebraic concepts while excelling in geometry. Based on this insight, the teacher can assign targeted resources—such as interactive tutorials or additional practice problems—to help struggling students improve in specific areas without slowing down those who are already proficient.

Personalized learning ensures that no student falls behind due to a lack of attention to their unique needs. Teachers can focus on delivering differentiated instruction, which improves overall classroom performance and boosts student confidence.

2 Early identification of at-risk students

One of the most critical applications of data mining in education is the early detection of at-risk students—those who may be struggling academically, socially, or emotionally. By analyzing attendance records, grades, behavioural incidents, and even social media activity (with proper ethical considerations), data mining algorithms can flag students who are likely to drop out or face other challenges.

For instance, a middle school administrator uses a data mining platform to track attendance and academic performance over time. The system identifies a group of students whose attendance has dropped significantly in the past month, correlating this trend with declining grades. The administrator intervenes by connecting these students with counsellors, offering tutoring services, and engaging parents in discussions about support strategies.

Early intervention reduces dropout rates, improves graduation rates, and fosters a supportive learning environment. Administrators, teachers, and even parents who are informed can allocate resources more effectively by focusing on students who need the most assistance.

3 Curriculum optimization

Educational institutions invest heavily in developing curricula, but assessing their effectiveness can be challenging. Data mining allows schools to evaluate how well different parts of the curriculum align with student outcomes, helping them refine content and delivery methods.

To illustrate, a university department uses data mining to analyze course evaluations, final exam results, and post-graduation employment statistics. They discover that students consistently perform poorly in a particular module of a programming course, despite strong performances in other areas.

Upon further investigation, they realize the textbook material is outdated and lacks practical examples. The department updates the curriculum to include real-world case studies and hands-on projects, leading to improved student satisfaction and better job placement rates.

Optimizing the curriculum ensures that students receive relevant, up-to-date knowledge that prepares them for future careers. Teachers benefit from clearer guidelines on what works best in the classroom, allowing them to focus on delivering impactful lessons.

4 Resource allocation and budget planning

Imagine a situation where an elementary school principal uses data mining to examine patterns in standardized test scores, teacher-student ratios, and parent feedback surveys. The analysis reveals that classes with higher teacher-student ratios tend to have lower reading proficiency levels. Armed with this insight, the principal reallocates funds to hire more reading specialists and reduce class sizes in lower-performing grade levels.

Schools operate on limited budgets, and allocating resources efficiently is essential for maximizing educational outcomes. Data mining helps administrators identify where investments will have the greatest impact, whether it is hiring additional staff, purchasing new technology, or expanding extracurricular programs.

Efficient resource allocation ensures that every dollar spent contributes directly to improving student outcomes. Administrators can justify budgetary decisions based on empirical evidence rather than guesswork.

5 Enhancing teacher professional development

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping student success, and ongoing professional development is key to maintaining high standards of teaching quality. Data mining can assess teacher performance through classroom observations, student feedback, and assessment results, identifying areas where additional training might be beneficial.

A case in point is a district-wide initiative that collects data on teacher evaluations, student achievement, and peer reviews. Data mining uncovers that teachers who participated in a recent workshop on incorporating technology into lesson plans saw significant improvements in student engagement and test scores. As a result, the district expands access to similar workshops and provides incentives for teachers to attend.

Professional development opportunities tailored to individual needs enable teachers to grow professionally and stay current with best practices. This ultimately benefits both educators and students.

CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONIDERATIONS

While data mining offers numerous advantages, it also presents challenges and ethical concerns that must be addressed:

- **Privacy concerns:** Collecting and analysing student data requires strict adherence to privacy laws (e.g., FERPA in the U.S.). Schools must ensure that sensitive information is protected and used only for legitimate educational purposes.
- **Bias in algorithms:** If not carefully designed, data mining algorithms can perpetuate biases present in the data. For example, if historical data reflects gender or racial disparities, the algorithm may inadvertently reinforce these inequities.
- **Overreliance on data:** While data-driven decision-making is valuable, it should complement—not replace—human judgment. Educators and administrators must balance quantitative insights with qualitative observations.

The ethical implications of data mining are significant, particularly concerning privacy and data security. Schools and organizations must navigate the delicate balance between leveraging data for insights and respecting individuals' rights. Responsible use of data mining involves adhering to ethical guidelines, ensuring transparency, and safeguarding sensitive information. Organizations should implement robust data governance frameworks and prioritize ethical considerations in their data mining practices.

Data mining has the power to revolutionize education by turning raw data into actionable insights that benefit students, teachers, and administrators alike. From personalizing learning experiences to optimizing curricula and enhancing teacher development, the applications are vast and impactful. By embracing data mining responsibly and ethically, educational institutions can foster environments where every learner thrives.

"For educators and school leaders, the message is clear: harnessing the potential of data mining is not just a technological advancement—it's a pedagogical imperative."

Dr. Mohammad Haseen Ahmed is a prominent figure at the English Language Institute of King Abdul Aziz University, where he serves as a lead presenter. With over three decades of experience, he has contributed significantly as a passionate tech enthusiast and early adopter of technology integration. Dr. Ahmed has also moderated research collegium forums and participated as a panelist in discussions alongside internationally acclaimed researchers and advocates, showcasing his expertise and dedication to the field.

ASK THE EXPERTS

Welcome to **Ask the Experts**, the ultimate column dedicated to professional development in the field of education. In this dynamic and ever-evolving field, continuous growth and learning are paramount. In each issue, we explore the most commonly asked topic by interviewing invited experts for their insights, experiences, and strategies.

EXCLUSIVE

THE POWER OF METAVERSES FOR REAL-WORLD LANGUAGE SKILLS

with ANIKA BRAIN

EduVerse: Welcome to our exclusive interview series, "Ask the Experts," where we explore groundbreaking ideas and innovations shaping the future of education. Today, we are delighted to feature **Anika Brain**, a visionary EdTech innovator who has spent over 17 years transforming how learners across the globe acquire language skills and develop the competencies needed in an ever-evolving world.

With a proven track record of impacting more than 270,000 students worldwide, Anika has pioneered game-based learning on popular platforms like Roblox and Minecraft, opened new frontiers in metaverse-driven language education, and founded multiple EdTech ventures. In this conversation, Anika shares her personal journey, offers insights into the pressing challenges facing traditional language classrooms, and explains how immersive technologies can bridge critical gaps in education. We will also discusses the role of AI, the obstacles of integrating new tools into existing curricula, and her vision for a future where language learning is more engaging, accessible, and effective than ever before.

PART 1

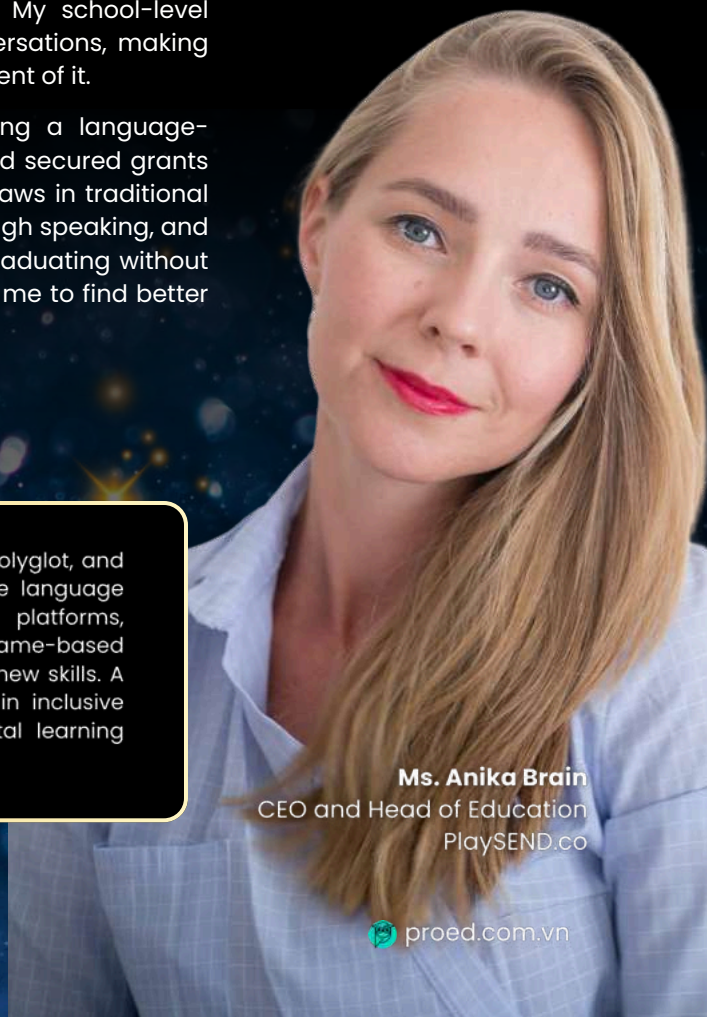
RETHINKING LANGUAGE EDUCATION THROUGH METAVERSES

1 **Welcome, Anika! Let's start with your journey. Was there a particular moment that ignited your passion for EdTech and language learning?**

Thank you! Actually, I didn't just stumble into EdTech—I ran toward it. Growing up in Russia, where real-life language practice was rare, I took every opportunity to speak with foreigners. My school-level English wasn't great, but I threw myself into conversations, making mistakes, learning on the go, and loving every moment of it.

When a university classmate suggested launching a language-learning project, I jumped in. Within months, we had secured grants and university support. That's when I realized the flaws in traditional language education—too much grammar, not enough speaking, and almost no real-world application. Students were graduating without actual communication skills. That realization drove me to find better ways to teach languages.

Anika Brain is an award-winning EdTech entrepreneur, polyglot, and innovator with over 17 years of experience in immersive language education. She has founded multiple global learning platforms, integrating AI, metaverses (Roblox, Minecraft), and game-based learning to revolutionize how 270,000+ students acquire new skills. A speaker, author, and thought leader, Anika specializes in inclusive education, neurodivergent learning, and next-gen digital learning experiences.



Ms. Anika Brain
CEO and Head of Education
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2 You've impacted over 270,000 students across the globe—that's incredible! What drives you to keep innovating in the EdTech space, and how do you stay motivated to reach even more learners?

Curiosity is my biggest driver. I see myself as an explorer, always searching for better solutions. My projects often start from personal needs. For example, my deep dive into learning technologies for children with ADHD and autism wasn't random—it was because my own son has ADHD. I needed solutions, so I created them. Those solutions eventually helped thousands of families.

Everything I've built—games, online courses, apps—originated from personal obsession. First, I explore. Then, I solve my own problem. Then, I share it with the world.

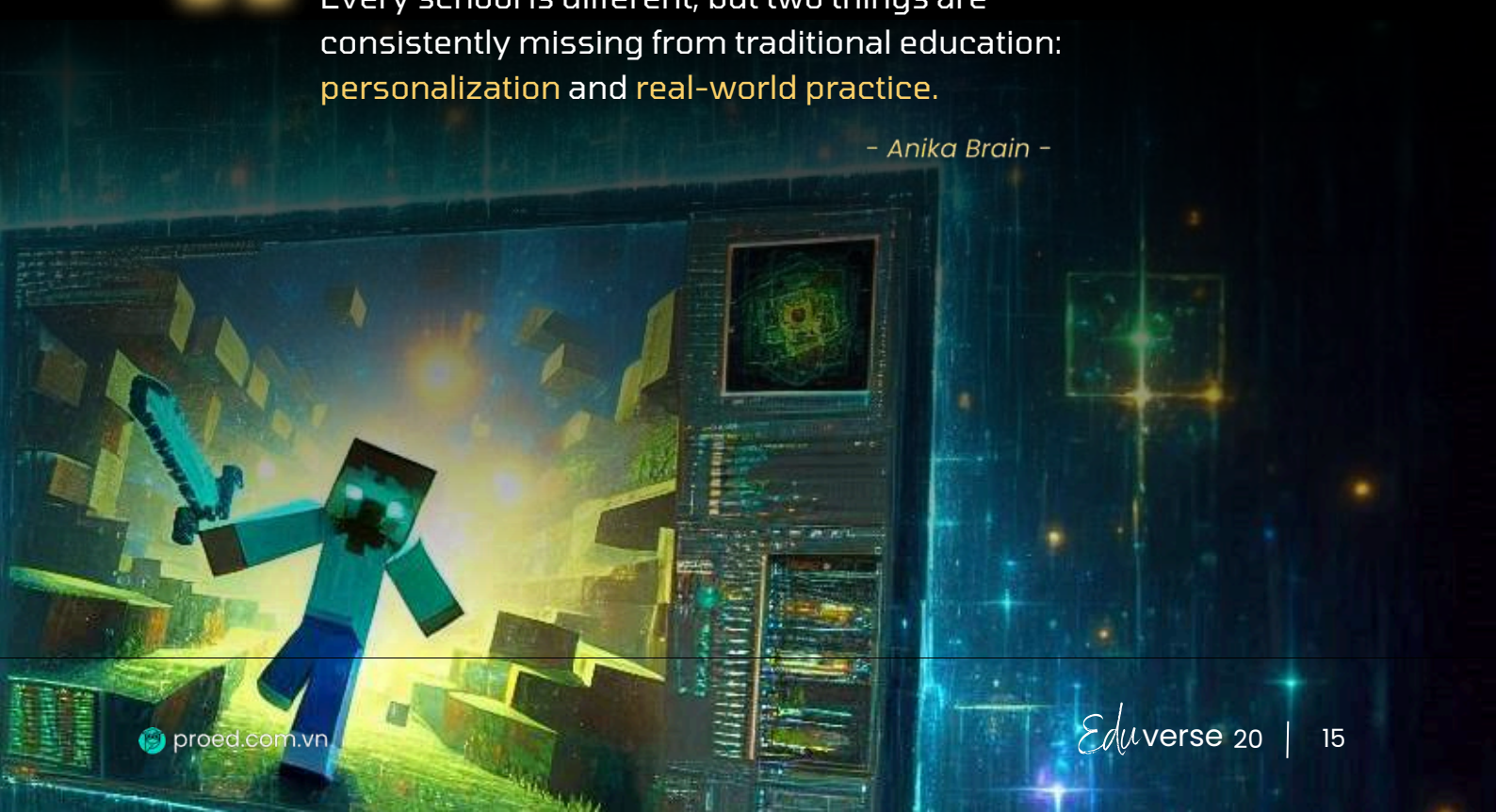
3 That's such a powerful approach. Speaking of problems, traditional classrooms still struggle with language education. What's missing, and how did you realize metaverse platforms like Roblox and Minecraft could help?

Every school is different, but two things are consistently missing from traditional education: personalization and real-world practice.

Most classrooms treat students as if they all learn at the same pace, in the same way, with the same needs. But that's not how people acquire language. And even when students do learn grammar and vocabulary, they rarely get to use it in authentic situations.

That's where gaming platforms like Roblox and Minecraft come in. They create **adaptive, immersive environments** where students can interact naturally and at their own speed. This is particularly crucial for language learning, where **real-world interaction is the key to fluency.**

> Every school is different, but two things are consistently missing from traditional education: personalization and real-world practice.
>
> *- Anika Brain -*



4 Absolutely! Learning a language without real-world application is nothing. You've pioneered the use of Roblox and Minecraft for language learning—and even soft skills development. Can you walk us through what that looks like in practice?

Imagine stepping into a virtual world with your student. No classroom, no textbooks—just an interactive environment where learning happens naturally.

One of my favorite success stories is Sasha, a Russian-speaking child who joined our English-learning experience in Roblox. He knew zero English. At first, the teacher used simple commands like "Come here," "Follow me," "Take it." Sasha didn't understand the words, but he followed along in the game.

By the third session, his mother asked, "What is your teacher saying?" and suddenly, Sasha could translate the instructions into Russian. Without memorization or mental translation, he had absorbed English the way kids learn their first language—through experience and interaction. This is what's missing in traditional classrooms and why immersive environments are so powerful.

5 That's incredible! But some educators might feel overwhelmed by the idea of "teaching in the metaverse," how can they take that very first step? What's the simplest way to start integrating these platforms into their lessons?

Here's my advice: **don't overthink it.** Just download Roblox, sit next to a kid who plays it, and **ask them to show you how it works.** That's it. Once you see the mechanics, you'll naturally start spotting ways to integrate learning.

Teachers are creative by nature. Once they understand the platform, they'll start seeing lessons everywhere—**English in one game, math in another, teamwork and problem-solving in yet another.** The first step is simply to explore.

PART 2

METAVERSES VS. AI STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE

6 Now let's talk about AI, which is everywhere these days. Where do you see AI fitting into language learning—should it be a teacher, a coach, or something else?

Let's be real—AI isn't replacing teachers yet. It might happen in the future, but right now, AI works best as **an exoskeleton for educators.**

AI can handle lesson planning, assessments, personalized exercises, and adaptive feedback—all the things that take up time but don't require human intuition. What **it can't yet do is replicate the emotional connection between teachers and students.** But give it a few years.

At least, not yet, right? If you had to compare the power of immersive metaverse learning with AI-based tutoring, how would you weigh the benefits and challenges of each? Is there a sweet spot where they work together?

AI and the metaverse aren't competitors—they're perfect teammates. AI personalizes learning by analyzing data, adapting difficulty levels, and automating routine tasks, while the metaverse provides the immersive, interactive experience that makes learning stick.

We're already using AI to generate real-time personalized lessons inside immersive environments. Soon, AI-driven avatars will act as adaptive tutors, guiding learners through missions and challenges in real time. The ideal balance? AI structures the learning, while the metaverse makes it engaging and experiential.

> The ideal balance?
> AI structures the learning, while the metaverse makes it engaging and experiential.
>
> *- Anika Brain -*

I love that balance!! But every big innovation faces hurdles—be it tech limitations, funding, or even skepticism from parents and schools. What's been your biggest challenge, and how did you overcome it?

Biggest challenge? Parent skepticism—especially around **screen time, safety, and online risks.** Totally understandable! No one wants their kid lost in a digital void or talking to the wrong people online.

So, we tackled it with transparency. We showed parents how platforms like Roblox and Minecraft have **serious privacy controls, content moderation, and safety settings.** We also proved that engaging, purposeful screen time is very different from passive scrolling.

Once parents saw their kids thriving, speaking new languages, and engaging in teamwork, concerns turned into support. Education isn't about banning tech—it's about using it wisely.

PART 3

THE FUTURE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

9 **Looking ahead, where do you see language learning in 5–10 years? What excites you the most?**

We're on the brink of a language learning revolution. AI, AR, and VR are advancing so rapidly that real-time translation may make learning unnecessary for everyday use. Imagine smart glasses that instantly translate conversations—for casual travel, that might be all people need.

But language is more than just words. Cultural immersion, emotional nuance, and human connection will remain invaluable. The future isn't just about learning words—it's about experiencing language through virtual marketplaces, real-time cultural interactions, and full sensory immersion.

10 **If you could dream up the next generation of metaverse platforms, what features would take language learning to the next level?**

Right now, metaverses engage sight and sound. The next step? Touch, smell, and full-body interaction. Imagine walking through a virtual Tokyo, feeling the fabric of a kimono, smelling fresh street food, or shaking hands with an AI-generated local.

The closer we get to full sensory immersion, the faster and deeper learning will become. The goal isn't just to simulate reality—but to expand it.

11 **Sounds irresistable!! Some experts predict that AI will blend seamlessly with immersive worlds. How do you envision AI and metaverse technologies working together to create the ultimate language-learning experience?**

It's already happening. **Roblox is integrating AI tools for faster, more dynamic world-building, meaning virtual spaces will explode in diversity and realism.** But it doesn't stop there.

Soon, **AI-powered avatars will act as teachers, native speakers, and roleplay partners,** adapting to a learner's fluency level in real-time. Imagine an AI shopkeeper testing your Spanish negotiation skills or an AI historian guiding you through an ancient civilization—all while responding dynamically to your choices.

AI will personalize, the metaverse will immerse—together, they'll create the most effective learning experience ever.

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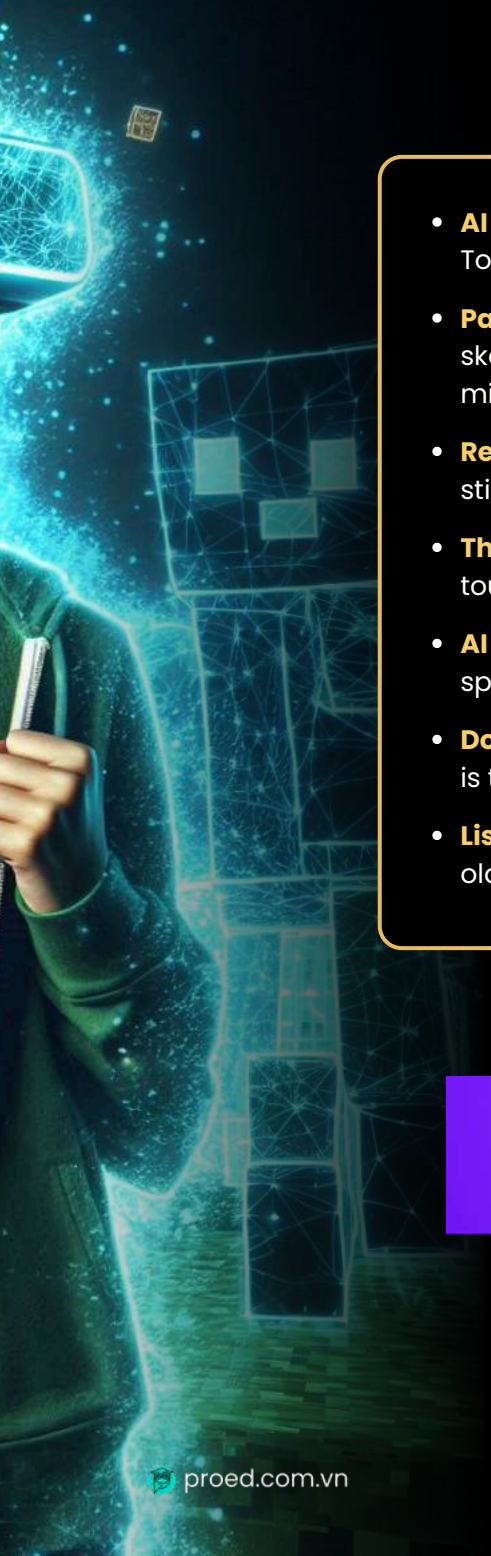
FINAL THOUGHTS

As we wrap up, what final piece of advice or encouragement would you give to teachers, learners, and EdTech entrepreneurs eager to embrace this brave new world of language learning?

Stop overthinking—just start. The biggest mistake is waiting until you feel "ready." You'll never be ready. Dive in—try a new tool, play with AI, explore a metaverse. The best way to understand is to experience it yourself.

And listen to kids. They already live in these digital spaces. Instead of forcing them into old learning models, learn from them. They'll show us the way.

The future of education isn't something to fear—it's something to shape. Let's get to work!



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **AI + Metaverse = Power Duo** – AI personalizes, metaverse immerses. Together, they create the ultimate learning experience.
- **Parents worry, and that's normal** – Transparency and results turn skepticism into support. Purposeful screen time is much more than mindless scrolling.
- **Real-time AI translation is coming** – But deep language learning will still matter for culture, connection, and nuance.
- **The future is full-sensory learning** – Imagine feeling, smelling, and touching your language environment. That's where we're headed.
- **AI avatars will change the game** – Soon, AI teachers and native speakers will dynamically interact with learners inside virtual worlds.
- **Don't wait—jump in** – The best way to understand AI and metaverses is to explore them yourself.
- **Listen to kids** – They're digital natives. Instead of teaching them the old way, learn from them and build together.

PlaySEND

PlaySEND, Anika Brain's Metaverse platform, offers a game-based approach to teaching English and Spanish to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) through popular games like Minecraft and Roblox, creating an engaging and supportive learning environment.

THE SILENT EXODUS:

What Really Keeps GREAT TEACHERS in the Classroom

Judy-Ann Green

Standing in her empty classroom, Sarah White *(her name has been changed to protect her identity)* clutched a cardboard box, its edges worn like her resolve. For eight years, this room had echoed with children's laughter, held countless "aha" moments, and witnessed the blossoming of young minds. The bare walls, now stripped of colourful student artwork and educational posters, seemed to whisper memories of Socratic Circles, peer review sessions, creative writing workshops, and morning greetings. After nearly a decade of living her childhood dream of teaching, of pouring her heart into each lesson plan and every struggling student, she was turning in her keys.

The room that had been her sanctuary, where dawn's first light caught her preparing lessons and dusk found her still grading with care, where every corner held whispers of small victories and shared discoveries, would tomorrow welcome a stranger. This space, where she had cultivated not just knowledge but dreams, where every child's growth had left an indelible mark on her heart, would soon hold another teacher's hopes. The worn carpet that had cushioned countless story circles, the window where she had watched seasons change alongside her students' transformations-all of it would become someone else's stage for teaching's daily dance.

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She was walking away. She had chosen to walk away.

"I need to detox," she told colleagues as she made the tough decision to return home to her parents. Forward a year later to 2025, when asked about reentering the teaching profession, Sarah's response was telling. During her transformative year, she mastered skiing, explored four different countries, established her own business (while developing a second venture), and as she put it herself, "I found myself again. I needed to break free."

What sapped Sarah's spirit in a profession she once loved?

When did her classroom become a cage rather than a canvas?

Sarah's story is not unique. It represents a growing crisis in education that demands our attention: the silent exodus of experienced educators from classrooms around the globe. While much attention focuses on teacher recruitment, the more pressing challenge may be retention, which is keeping our best educators where they are needed most. The stakes could not be higher, as every educator who leaves carries away valuable institutional knowledge, classroom wisdom, and irreplaceable relationships with students, colleagues, and families.

THE VOICE FACTOR:
WHY TEACHERS STAY OR GO

Dr. Lora Bartlett, Associate Professor of Education at the University of California, Santa Cruz, has conducted important new research on teacher retention. Her work examines what drives teachers' professional commitment, how they view their role as educators, and the changing demographics and characteristics of the teaching workforce. Her findings provide valuable insights into why teachers choose to stay in or leave the profession. In a groundbreaking study following 75 teachers from spring 2020 through summer 2022, Bartlett found that only one-third were truly satisfied with their careers. The distinguishing characteristic among these content educators? “A strong sense of voice-the feeling that their expertise, knowledge, and perspectives were valued in decision-making processes.”

Lora Bartlett, co-author of the book ‘Going The Distance: The Teaching Profession in a Post-Covid World,’ shared that teacher voice isn't just about being heard, It's about having genuine input into the decisions that affect their classrooms and their students’ learning experiences. This sense of agency proves crucial in creating sustainable teaching careers that withstand the pressures and challenges inherent in education.

During an interview on the NEPC Talks Education Podcast, hosted by the National Education Policy Center, Bartlet conversed with Assistant Professor Christopher Saldaña from the University of Wisconsin-Madison about professional conditions that foster career commitment and factors that threaten teacher retention. She argues that teacher voice has broad implications on teacher retention and individual job satisfaction. When teachers feel empowered to contribute meaningfully to school decisions, they become more invested in their school’s success, more likely to innovate in their classrooms, and more effective at addressing student needs. This ripple effect transforms not just individual classrooms but entire school communities.

LEADERSHIP:
THE CORNERSTONE OF TEACHER RETENTION

A LinkedIn Poll examining the primary drivers of teacher retention demonstrated striking data that reinforces what many educators have long suspected: supportive leadership and school culture account for 56% of factors influencing teacher retention which is by far the most significant element. Competitive salary and benefits followed at 17%, while work-life balance came in at 13%, and opportunities for growth at 14%. These statistics underscore a crucial truth that teachers value supportive environments over financial compensation.

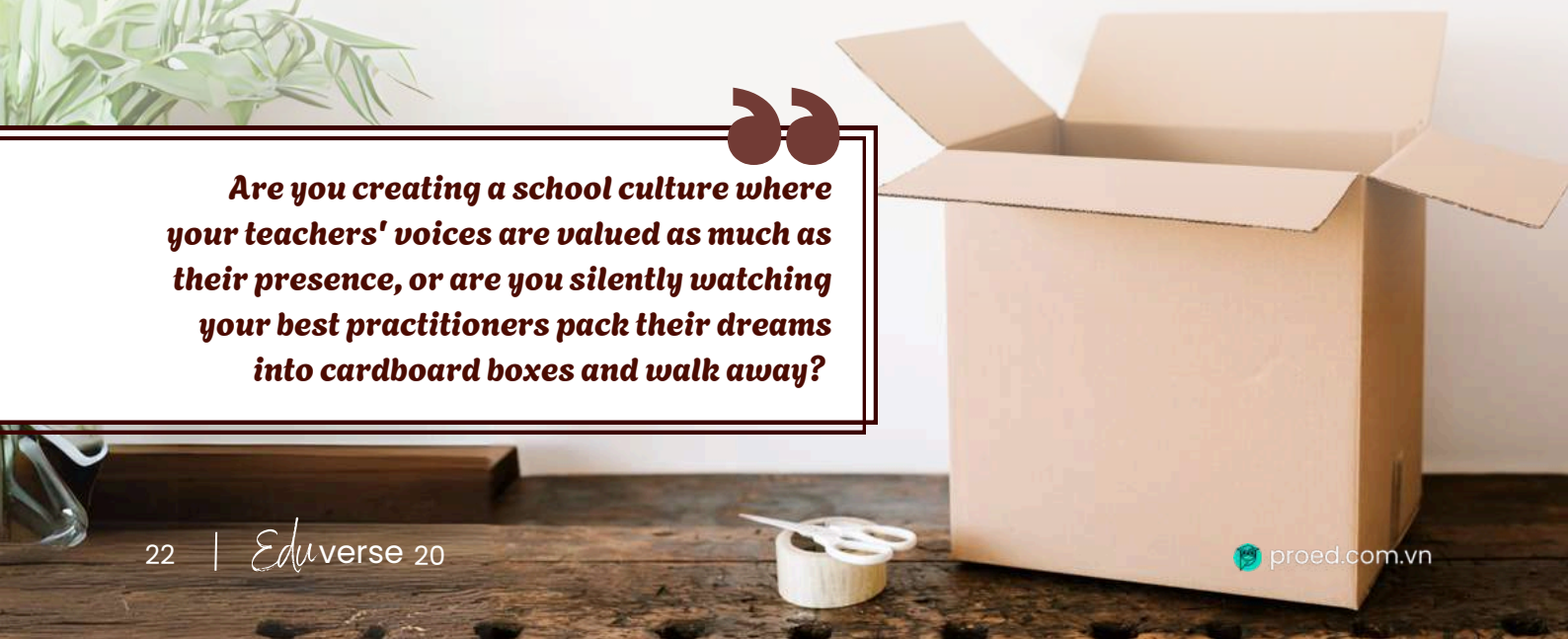
Missy Testerman-the 2024 National Teacher of the Year recipient and 33-year veteran educator, acknowledges this reality and shares, the following words of wisdom:

"My advice to school leaders is to create a school climate and culture that teachers don't want to leave," she further states that "Studies consistently show that teachers tend to leave schools primarily due to leadership issues and lack of support." My upcoming publication "Mastering the Moment: 10 Keys for Classroom Victory" (2025), reinforces the connection between teacher support and student achievement. Underpinning the premise that when teachers feel trusted and supported as professionals, their commitment to the classroom deepens directly benefiting student outcomes.

This sentiment echoes throughout the education community, captured in Missy's powerful observation: "Teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions." What does this mean? When teachers face challenging working conditions such as inadequate resources, strategic reassignment, overcrowded classrooms, unfair professional scrutiny, or limited support, these same factors directly impact their students' ability to learn and succeed. The physical, emotional, and professional environment that teachers work in, fundamentally shapes the quality of education they can provide, making their working conditions inseparable from the learning environment students experience.

The importance of supportive leadership extends beyond administrative duties, it is about creating an environment where educators can thrive professionally and personally. Effective leaders understand that their role is not just about managing schools. It's about being an ally, being a present leader in times of need. It's about courageous leadership that intervenes when executive team members overstep professional boundaries. Beyond mere management, true educational leadership cultivates an environment where every teacher and staff member can flourish professionally.

Are you creating a school culture where your teachers' voices are valued as much as their presence, or are you silently watching your best practitioners pack their dreams into cardboard boxes and walk away?



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BUILDING PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES THAT LAST

On a recent webinar Education Now hosted by Dr. Uche B Amaechi from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Victor M. Pereira, Lecturer in Education and co-chair of the Teaching and Teaching Leadership Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, emphasized the importance of relationship-building outside the classroom. "School leaders must invest in their staff beyond professional development workshops," he argues. "Creating authentic communities of practice where teachers can collaborate, share experiences, and support each other is essential."

These professional communities (PC) serve multiple purposes. For example, they provide emotional support, facilitate professional growth, and create networks of expertise that benefit entire school districts or clusters. When teachers feel connected to their colleagues and supported by their administration, they are more likely to weather the challenges that might otherwise drive them from the profession.

This community-building approach has proven particularly effective for new teachers. Mentorship programs, where experienced educators take newcomers under their wings, provide crucial support during those challenging early years. These relationships often become the anchor that keeps promising young teachers in the profession, helping them develop resilience and professional expertise that benefits students for years to come.

In what ways are you actively creating a culture of care that encourages teachers to stay, and not just survive, in your school environment?

What changes can you make to ensure that your mentoring efforts are not only about improving performance but also about nurturing the well-being and long-term commitment of your teachers?

AUTONOMY AND EXPERTISE: TRUSTING TEACHERS AS PROFESSIONALS

The experts participating in Dr. Uche's virtual discussion (previously mentioned) further highlighted teacher independence as another crucial element driving educator retention rates. One member emphatically declared that “Schools need to benefit from, rather than suppress, teachers’ expertise”. It was stressed that this approach represents a significant shift from the top-down management style often seen in education.

Recent surveys with teachers from varying countries and contexts reveal that school improvement visits to learning communities will consistently portray clear documentation of teacher voice and choice. However, one Head of School noted that, “The reality is vastly different from the truth, as embedded within the fabric of schools are camouflaged toxicity and unrealistic expectations,” that shove brilliance out the door.

The relationship between autonomy and retention is clear: teachers who feel respected as professionals and trusted to make decisions in their classrooms are more likely to remain committed to their schools and the profession. This professional trust manifests in various ways, from curriculum decisions to classroom management strategies, and plays a crucial role in teacher satisfaction and longevity.

What will you do now to retain teachers and to create a supportive environment where teachers of all backgrounds thrive?

CREATING SUSTAINABLE TEACHING CAREERS

The path to improving teacher retention is not a mystery or a deep phenomenon. It is mapped out in research and real-world experience. Key elements include:

- Establishing genuine teacher voice in decision-making processes
- Developing strong, supportive leadership at all levels
- Establishing guidelines for recognizing and celebrating staff achievements and contributions
- Building robust professional communities
- Respecting teacher autonomy and expertise
- Implementing robust structures that protect whistleblowers from retaliation or punishment.
- Providing adequate resources and support systems
- Ensuring a sustainable work-life balance
- Fostering a culture where HR operates as an independent entity of SLT, ensuring impartial support and guidance for staff
- Creating equitable pathways for professional growth and advancement

Successful implementation of these elements requires intentional effort and commitment from school leaders, district administrators, governing bodies, the learning community, and policymakers. It means creating structures that support teacher voice, investing in professional development that teachers actually want, and building school cultures that celebrate and support educator expertise.

> ***By implementing research-backed strategies and listening to educators' needs, schools can create environments where teachers want to stay and grow.***

LOOKING FORWARD: A CALL TO ACTION

The challenge of teacher retention requires immediate attention and action. As Sarah White's story illustrates, losing experienced teachers means losing more than just classroom instructors. We lose mentors, community leaders, student advocates, change-makers, and invaluable institutional knowledge. Each departure represents a setback in our collective mission to provide quality education for all students.

The good news is that solutions exist. By implementing research-backed strategies and listening to educators' needs, schools can create environments where teachers want to stay and grow. The investment in teacher retention pays dividends in student success, school stability, and educational excellence.

> ***Our students deserve teachers who feel valued, supported, and empowered to bring their best selves to the classroom every day. Only then can we truly fulfill our promise to provide every child with the education they deserve.***

Creating these positive environments requires a fundamental shift in how we view and value teachers' voices within our educational institutions. As one veteran educator powerfully stated, "Schools must become spaces where voices aren't suppressed but celebrated, where leadership and teachers create win-win situations through genuine collaboration and mutual respect." Our students deserve teachers who feel valued, supported, and empowered to bring their best selves to the classroom every day. Only then can we truly fulfill our promise to provide every child with the education they deserve.

Teachers desperately yearn for transparent leadership, equitable resource allocation, professional respect, meaningful autonomy, and shelter from unprofessional boundary breakers. Teachers long for workplace protections that allow them to teach and grow without fear.

Stakeholders, you hold the key to retaining brilliance and reactivating the boom in the teaching profession. Let's create win-win solutions for our teachers and students, we can do this together. The future of our children hangs in the balance - the time for meaningful change is now.

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Judy-Ann Green is an award-winning educator and leader whose impact spans across three continents. Recognized globally for her exceptional contributions to education, she has been honored with prestigious accolades such as Teacher of the Year, Outstanding Educator, and the Race to the Top Award for Outstanding Educator. As a distinguished speaker, writer, literacy coach, school visitor, author, curriculum designer, and professional development expert, Judy-Ann Green has proven herself to be a formidable force in education. Her innovative approach and unwavering dedication make her a prominent figure and a driving force in shaping the future of learning on a global scale.

IN THE VERSE

Welcome to **In the Verse**, your go-to column for curated education articles and news from across the internet. We'll sift through the digital realm to bring you concise summaries, keeping you informed and inspired. Join us as we navigate the vast sea of online resources and uncover the latest in educational innovation.

** Scan the QR codes or click on the titles to read more.*

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Safeguarding students

IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Aslom Ullah

Safeguarding students is one of those aspects of school life that is ongoing, requiring a pragmatic approach. This applies to British schools in the UK and those overseas. Currently, there are dozens of British schools all around the world, from Algeria to Kenya, from Spain to Vietnam. When it comes to British Schools operating overseas, then they take many steps towards fulfilling the requirements of the Department For Education, but in this ever-changing world, more steps need to be taken in order for a school to ensure it is truly safeguarding its students. Drawing from my experience in the international education field and connections with teachers in British schools worldwide, I want to highlight critical steps schools must consider. In the rapidly shifting digital landscape—particularly with the rise of social media and online gaming—schools need to go beyond merely fulfilling the statutory guidance outlined in the Department for Education's *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024* (DfE, 2024). Moreover, while these recommendations are tailored to British schools, they are not exclusive to them and can benefit any school globally.

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DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEAD AND TEAM

Most schools around the world have a nominated Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) as well as a Safeguarding Team, regularly trained online to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Staff receive annual training and are familiar with the team, while British schools typically follow DfE guidelines, implement safer recruitment, and ensure staff can log concerns monitored by the DSL. Safer internet practices do exist in most schools, in order to keep children safe when browsing the internet. Most schools also have a safeguarding newsletter sent out to parents for contact information.

TRAINING STAFF: THE FACE-TO-FACE ADVANTAGE

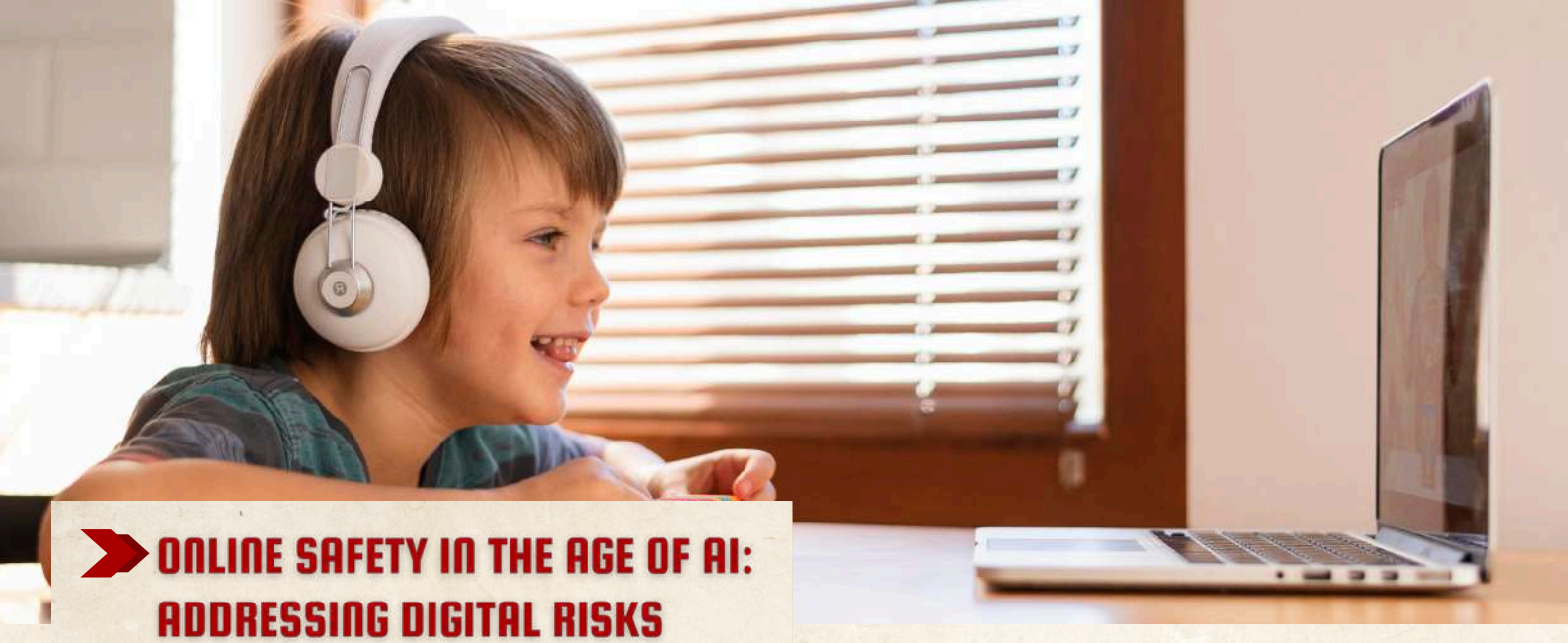
Staff training typically occurs at the beginning of the academic year during INSET weeks in August, though international schools may vary, with some opting for online sessions. While online training is effective to an extent, it lacks the interactive, face-to-face experience where scenarios can be discussed in real-time with safeguarding experts. This is crucial for understanding the subtleties of identifying concerns and signs, which are better addressed through dialogue rather than passive online courses. Therefore, it is recommended that schools prioritize face-to-face training at the start of the academic year. Moreover, this training must include all adults in the school environment, such as volunteers, contractors, and cleaners, as the DfE emphasizes that "it is essential that everybody working in a school or college understands their safeguarding responsibilities" (DfE, 2024, p.6). This inclusivity ensures a comprehensive approach to safety.

For governance, many international schools have a Board of Governors, and it is beneficial for one member to have a special focus on safeguarding. If no such member exists, it is urgent that one commences training at the start of the next term. This strategic focus ensures safeguarding remains a priority, driving development and accountability within the school.

ENGAGING PARENTS—AND BEYOND: INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

Ensuring parents and children understand safeguarding procedures is vital for a safe school environment. Many international schools send out safeguarding newsletters, often in English, which may exclude non-English-speaking parents. To address this, school leaders should identify the dominant languages spoken by parents and provide newsletters in those languages alongside English, aligning with the DfE's requirement that the policy be "transparent, clear, and easy to understand for [...] parents and carers" (DfE, 2024, p.29). This proactive approach enhances inclusivity and communication.

Parental engagement also includes online safety sessions during engagement evenings, covering signs of abuse and reporting procedures, alongside student training during ICT lessons. However, this is an area of weakness, particularly in contexts like Qatar and with the rise of AI. In many parts of the world, parents are not the only point of contact for many children, but also often cared for by nannies and drivers. Therefore, to avoid "affluent neglect"—where wealthy parents may be less involved—it is important that these caregivers are also invited to these sessions, ensuring they understand safeguarding and reporting mechanisms. Safeguarding does not and should not stop with parents; it involves all the adults in childrens' lives. The training must certainly include online safety, given the threat posed by AI, as Achinewhu-Nworgu (2016) highlights, 'we live in an age where some children know much more about surfing the internet than their parents do.' This needs to change so that adults are properly equipped with the necessary knowledge related to internet misuse and safety: 'it is imperative that they [parents] become better educated about the online world than their children' (Reddy & Minnaar, 2015, p.32).



ONLINE SAFETY IN THE AGE OF AI: ADDRESSING DIGITAL RISKS

The DfE states that "it is essential that children are safeguarded from potentially harmful and inappropriate material online" (DfE, 2024, p.38), highlighting the risks of exploitation, such as catfishing and grooming, exacerbated by AI (Johns et al., 2024). While most international school have Safe Search turned on, in many schools, little if anything is done to monitor online behaviour, failing to track websites students access after attempting to view blocked content. Schools that do not have effective monitoring practices in place need to work with their ICT managers on subscribing to an effective filtering and monitoring service, ensuring a safer digital environment.

Safeguarding extends beyond school gates, requiring a focus on empowering students rather than sheltering them, especially with AI and deepfakes that can manipulate images, potentially leading to harassment. The DfE acknowledges that "technology, and the harms related to it, evolve and change rapidly" (DfE, 2024, p.41), necessitating a pragmatic and flexible approach to online safety education in British schools worldwide.

> Education is central to the safeguarding children agenda.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR A CHANGING WORLD: EMPOWERING THROUGH EDUCATION

Curriculum development is central to safeguarding, with Tarr et al. (2013) emphasizing the need for a robust and comprehensive plan. Schools should deliver specific training on emerging threats like 'voice masking', and the 'technology which 'provides an offender' with the 'tools' to 'solicit and groom a child' (Reddy & Minnaar, 2015, p.29). This should also include training for students on AI and chatbots, integrated to school assemblies, PSHE or citizenship lessons, Computer Science as well as their ICT lessons. Such education empowers students to develop the vital critical thinking skills, and safeguard themselves when they use social media, as Struthers (2021) highlights, 'children may be better equipped to recognise and speak up [...] rather than relying on a passive system of adult supervision'. Educating them in this manner is far more effective than simply trying to guard them and keep them safe through policy and practice. 'Education is central to the safeguarding children agenda' (Warin, 2009), and if school leaders around the world wish to keep their students safe online in and out of school, then they need to 'equip children with the language and understanding for recognising abuse' (Struthers, 2021), , ensuring training is relevant to current times.

LISTENING TO THE STUDENT VOICE: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

While it is true that the DfE guidance 'does not require children's views to be actively sought', taking account of their views 'reflect[s] a more holistic approach to the child's right to be heard under Article 12 of the UNCRC' (United Nations Convention on the rights of the child' (Struthers, 2021). To capture effective feedback, schools should conduct termly face-to-face sessions or forums with a diverse group of students, conducted in single-sex groups to discuss standardized questions about child-on-child abuse, such as cyber-bullying, chatbots, deep-fakes, and AI-related issues. Tarr et al. (2013, p.133) support this, stating that the children they interviewed as part of their research stated, 'it is better if you can talk to somebody.'

The PSHE, ICT and citizenship curriculums needs to be flexible and responsive to student feedback, ensuring relevance Just as outstanding teaching is data-driven, safeguarding practices should also be, with students being the primary source of data. This approach empowers children, increases awareness, and moves them from passive recipients to active participants in safeguarding policies.

In closing, it must be reiterated that these recommendations are steps school shoulds consider, not steps they must take, as schools are already fulfilling the statutory requirements as outlined by the DfE. However, what is important to note is that, safeguarding should not stop at the fulfilment of these legal, governmental requirements as the DfE states their list 'is not intended to be an exhaustive list' (DfE, 2024, p.30). British international schools, in particular, should be proactive, addressing time-specific issues like AI, empowering students through curriculum changes, involving all adults in training, and implementing filtering and monitoring strategies. These practices are not exclusive to British schools but apply globally, enhancing safety for all students.

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Aslom Ullah is an English teacher with 15 years of experience, having taught in both London and Qatar. He has spoken at the EDI Teaching and Learning Forum as well as the Educational Experts Conference for World Arena Events on the impact that artificial intelligence is having on education.

RISE, REFLECT, AND RENEW: THE POWER OF EARLY MORNING Magic Hours

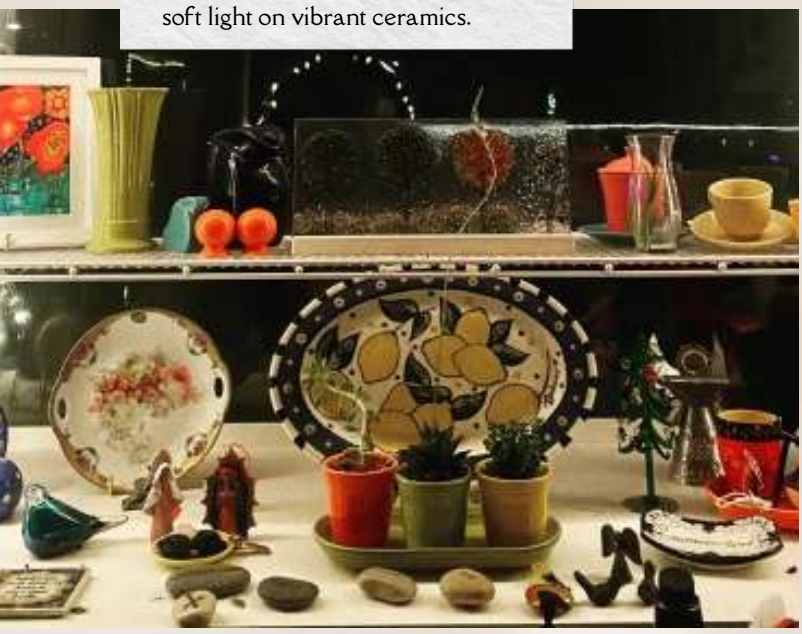
Dr. Dawn Wink

Candlelight reflects off the ceramic of my coffee cup in the early morning darkness. Outside the window, all remains cloaked in darkness, the glass reflecting the candlelight within against the opaque black on the other side of the clear pane. Little white lights string across my bookshelves and frame the window, casting all in a soft glow. My journal open before me, I pick up the pen and begin. Each evening when I go to bed, I set my alarm for 4am, no matter the day. I adore this time of day that I call the early morning magic hours. This liminal space is a time of solitude and sanctuary, a time of dreaming, creativity, and productivity lived and expressed in various ways. The composition of the landscape of my professional and personal lives would be vastly different without holding this time of each day sacred.

Creating and holding this time dedicated to peace, receptivity, creativity and planning continues to serve as a foundational piece in my teaching and professional life. Educators' lives overflow with demands, responsibilities, unexpected fires to put out, and constant negotiation of human emotions, planning, and preparation. We lose the most educators to other professions between the third and fifth years of their teaching career. The first year of teaching is an absolute blur, as we all know. You are one second in front of the students if you're lucky. By year three, teachers often wonder if they are cut out to be a teacher, a profession much harder than most imagine before beginning. The workload and human dynamics feel unsustainable if educators do have develop rhythms and tools to constantly recharge, to refill the well before it becomes permanently empty. For me, the early morning magic hours are a foundational element for sustainability in a life in education. These hours keep a steady stream, even if only a trickle sometimes, flowing into the well of my spirit. I know that I am a better educator, mother, spouse, child, friend, colleague, and the infinite other roles that each of us carry in our lives because of these sacred hours. For this, and many other reasons, I guard them fiercely.

When I slip from bed, the soft glow of light emanating from the kitchen guides my way down the hall. Another strand of little white lights frames the large bay window in our kitchen, where there was once a tiny window. A lover of light and land, I had the small window replaced with a bay window, arch above, the largest that fit in the space. Now, the strand of lights outlines the window's contours and sheds soft white light onto the content on the shelves and lands on a colorful constellation of Fiestaware, brightly painted ceramics, a Mediterranean platter of lemons, and the matching cups of vibrant cobalt, coral, and yellow that my mom carried back with her from Mallorca, Spain.

The author's kitchen window with soft light on vibrant ceramics.



Several life-changing books about writing have sculpted the rhythms, art, and craft early in my own writing life. A key book in this journey was The Artist's Way (1992) by Julia Cameron. In this book, Cameron details morning pages, three hand-written pages every morning about whatever comes into your mind, stream-of-consciousness. Cameron qualifies explicitly, "There is no wrong way to do morning pages (p. 10)." Morning pages are a time to write whatever comes into your head. "Morning pages map our own interior," she continues. "Without them, our dreams may remain terra incognita" (p. 15). This book came into my life at a time that I had a 6-month-old, 1 ½ year-old, and a 3 ½ year-old. Through many ever-changing, and often difficult, chapters of life, this has remained constant and saves me again and again. That was 25+ years ago now. I cannot imagine how different my life path would have been had I not done this. I've filled more messy journals than I can count in the intervening years.

Early morning magic hours are sacred time of solitude and sanctuary, of writing, dreaming, listening, and planning. This is usually the only time during the day that I can sink deeply into listening within to see what emerges.

There is a narrative arc to each morning. My morning pages evolved over time into a combination of dreaming and planning, of intuitive fluidity and linear lists of what needs to be done. I do treat myself to enjoying that first cup of coffee, alone in the candlelight, and allow my mind to wander where it will. I drink in the solitude and quiet, and often stare out the window into the darkness, letting my mind wander wherever it may go. There is rarely time for wandering mind later in the day, so I cherish the expansive freedom of this time in the early mornings. Then, I feel an internal shift and reach for my journal. It is time to write. I open my journal, briefly scan what I wrote yesterday, and begin.

The author's workspace and writing area in the early mornings.

Each morning, I write what comes to intuitively to me first. This time is essential to allow ideas to spark and flash for my attention. Sometimes they are soft, gentle nudges that make themselves known. What I've learned through the years is without carving this time within each day, many, if not most, of these ideas would not make their way through all else that crowds my attention. Often, surprises show up along the way during the writing. "Oh!" I find myself whispering softly in the darkness, grateful for whatever idea or thought just popped up and would have remained hidden and undiscovered without this time.

Once I've written, I move to review the on-going lists, crossing of what has been done and circling what still needs to be tended. These lists are living documents, cross out what I've done, circle what may be extra important, and add new elements. When most of the items on a page have been crossed off, I'll start a new page with the few that remain and the whole process begins again.

Then, to my computer to work on whichever writing project, publication, or presentation is the closest. The initial stages of the narrative arc of the morning primes the creative and editing pump. I've had my time to write, dream, think, muse, and plan. I move to deadlines, classes, current writing projects.

This is also a time of explicit planning how to bring ideas, dreams, creative projects into being. Much like writing with the distinct and necessary phases of intuitive, creative writing and then switching to linear, rules-driven editing, my early morning magic hours fill with both stages. This time is the only way that I keep track of the multiple writing, publishing, teaching, presenting, work, and family simultaneous happenings. Well, at least try to keep track... For as many long-hand journal pages, there are also lists of next steps. So many lists.

An inherent tension steeps the time of the early morning magic hours, as I move back and forth from dreaming to working on the next deadline, from responding to emails to a creative focus on the next writing piece due. This is such a treasured time that I often want to just sit to enjoy the peace, before the busyness of the day begins. I also feel drawn to make the most of this time to write, respond, create. That tug and pull, ebb and flow are, for me, a part of these rhythms.

The early morning magic hours are now such an integral and essential element in my life that when I miss them, due to travel or other reasons, that when I wake and sit down to them the next morning, it feels like I've returned with an old friend. I don't know which I love more — going to bed at night knowing the early morning magic hours are coming or waking in the morning knowing that they've arrived, and I can again wrap the warmth of their cloak around me.

How the magic hours enhance work quality

Space for ideas to come through. The magic hours are pro-active, not reactionary. Busy lives with heavy workloads encourage patterns of reaction, rather than pro-action. We react to this event and react to this deadline and react to this student and react to this new directive from administration. Pro-action requires time, thought, and reflection. It also requires chiseling time away from all to allow to break through the noise of the rest of the day.

Discovering and creating your own magic hours

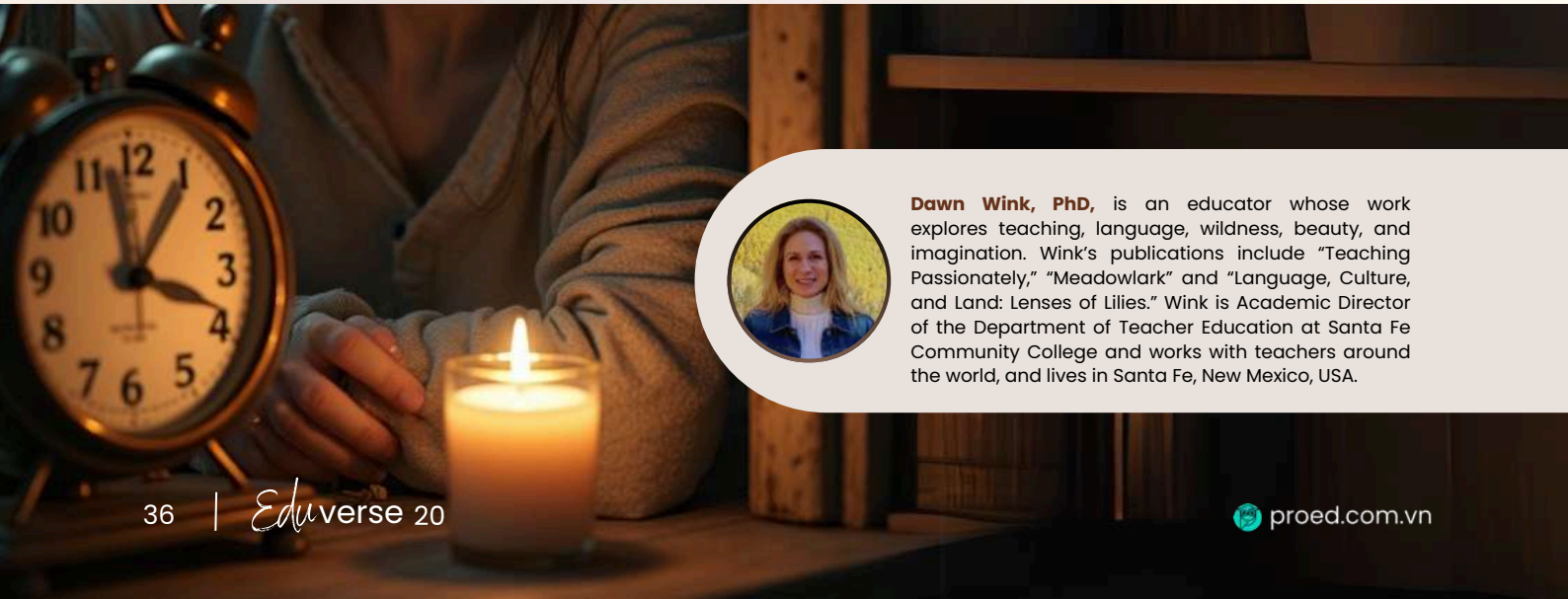
Decide on a time

We each have natural internal rhythms to work within. For me, it is the early morning. I am an early bird as much by culture and family rhythms, as by my natural biorhythms. My family heritage of ranching has shaped our biorhythms over time. Animals and ranching needs don't wait for the sun. My great-grandmother was up baking bread and cooking for the day by 4am. What I've learned is to follow my natural biorhythms. I've also learned that if I don't carve and guard sacred time before the rest of the day begins, the demands of the workday take over and that time simply does not happen. If you are a night owl, perhaps play with carving out the time then. Many of my Latina friends cannot handle the early morning hours, and they hold the late night or wee hours of the morning. Find what works for you and then guard that time ferociously.

Guard the time ferociously

Life, family members, work colleagues, opportunities will all impose on this time, seep into it, pull you away. It is the nature of life. You have to be fierce about this time, fierce with yourself and fierce with others. Otherwise, it will be frittered away to others. Protect it and guard it ferociously. If others do not respect this, that is about them, and not about you. Stay the course.

Reference
Cameron, J. (1992). *The artist's way: A spiritual path to higher creativity.* New York: Tarcher/Putnum



Dawn Wink, PhD, is an educator whose work explores teaching, language, wildness, beauty, and imagination. Wink's publications include "Teaching Passionately," "Meadowlark" and "Language, Culture, and Land: Lenses of Lilies." Wink is Academic Director of the Department of Teacher Education at Santa Fe Community College and works with teachers around the world, and lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA.

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EduVerse is excited to launch its podcast channel **EduVerse PD Podcast**, an innovative and groundbreaking professional development experience designed to empower educators in an innovative and accessible way.

This podcast series explores **cutting-edge educational trends**, shares **practical classroom techniques**, and dives deep into **EdTech innovations** and the role of **AI in education**. Our goal is to provide you with actionable insights that you can apply immediately in your classrooms, enhancing your teaching and empowering your students.

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As Andy's dynamic co-host, Liz brings a fresh perspective and a unique blend of technology and education to our show. Liz's motivational voice, fueled by her passion for learning, captivates our listeners and makes her an indispensable member of our team.

Their dynamic chemistry and vast knowledge make every episode not only informative but incredibly engaging. These AI hosts have been designed to bring the best in education directly to you, making complex ideas accessible and exciting.

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Welcome to our monthly **Classroom Techniques** column, where you can find practical teaching techniques that can be implemented in your classroom right away. Whether you're a seasoned professional or a new teacher full of enthusiasm, this column is designed to supply you with new ideas every month to improve your classroom performance.

6 TIPS TO SAY GOODBYE TO VOCABULARY LESSONS BORING

Words are amazing and learning them can boost understanding, confidence, and power. Yet, vocabulary study often bores students because teachers repeat dull tasks: look up words, copy definitions, write sentences, and test. This works for some, but not most. Try fresh, fun ways to make vocabulary exciting and effective.

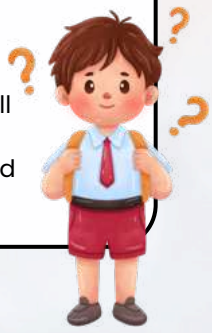
These tips are adapted from the book: ***Ideas That Really Work: Activities for English and Language Arts*** *by Cheryl Miller Thurston*

#1 "Don't have the students copy dictionary definitions."

Instead, **use a given vocabulary word orally in several sentences and have the class guess its meaning**. Decide together on an accurate, student-friendly definition, using informal language, or even slang, if needed. Consult the dictionary as a resource, but don't rely on it alone. As students "discover" the word's meaning, they'll actively engage in learning it.

What does "resilient" mean?

- Mia fell but got up fast. She's resilient.
- My phone dropped and still works. It's resilient.
- He lost his game but smiled anyway. He's resilient.



Less-but-Sticky Vocab Fun Activities

- Draw It Fast: After guessing, students sketch the word's meaning in 30 seconds.
- Add a Beat: Chant the word in a rhythm or rap your sentences to make it catchy.
- Act It Out: Say the sentences, then have a student mime the word—like bouncing back for "resilient."

"Don't overdo it. It's about quality over quantity!" #2

Choose only a few words at a time for the class to study, probably five or ten, and certainly no more than twenty. Stick with those words until you're confident your students know them well. You may end up assigning fewer words than the teacher down the hall and giving tests less frequently, but that's okay. Your students will truly learn the words rather than just memorizing definitions for a test.

#3 "Don't fall into the trap of choosing obscure words."

Choose realistic words. Don't fall into the trap of picking obscure ones from a story's footnotes. The story may mention "chiasmatypy," but how often is that useful? Instead, select words students frequently encounter. Note words that puzzle them during reading or discussions. Let students suggest words they find confusing. Look ahead to future materials and pick practical vocabulary. Always ask: *Is this a word students really need to know?*

✅ **Teach words that:**

- Are key to understanding the text's meaning.
- Appear frequently in other contexts or subjects.
- Can help students understand word families or roots.

🚫 **Skip words that:**

- Are very rare or too technical (unless essential to the topic).
- Can be understood through context or pictures.
- Won't likely be used or encountered again.

"Don't confuse vocabulary learning with spelling" #4

Learning new words isn't about spelling. We all need to understand words we may never write. Students should feel comfortable with a word before using it. So, vocabulary tests should measure understanding, not spelling. **That does not mean that you should ignore incorrect spelling.** Insist that students spell the words correctly on their papers and on their tests, but allow them access to the correct spellings. (Sometimes, copying accurately is a win!)

Focus on Meaning First: Tips for Teaching Vocabulary Beyond Spelling

- Use words in context
- Encourage speaking first
- Incorporate visuals and gestures
- Focus on meaningful practice
- Include quick, informal writing tasks where spelling isn't graded.
- Revisit words regularly

#5 "Don't just teach words, get students to use them."

Help your students actively use new vocabulary instead of just memorizing definitions. Encourage students to write stories with target words (even silly ones) and use three new words outside class. Let them share how they used them. End lessons with quick games: make sentences with list words, ask or answer questions, or create sentences about everyday topics. Don't worry if they use words in odd ways at first, understanding comes before perfect usage!

Practical Vocabulary Tips to Put Words in Action

- Have students spot and share target words from conversations, media, or signs.
- Create real-life scenarios (e.g., ordering food) to use new words naturally.
- Let students write short posts using new vocabulary.
- Assign them to teach a new word to a family member and share their experience.

Tips to Make Vocabulary Tests Fun and Engaging

- Create fill-in-the-blank stories featuring students as characters.
- Quick-fire rounds where students define or use words in 10 seconds.
- Students write mini-stories using both emojis and target words.
- Ask students to find and photograph signs or ads using target words.

"Don't make tests boring!" #6

Make vocabulary learning engaging with creative tests and a class point system! Create fun fill-in-the-blank stories using students as characters or award points for defining words, correct answers, and spotting vocabulary in real life. Students can share where they heard the words. Points can lead to exciting rewards like game days or treats!

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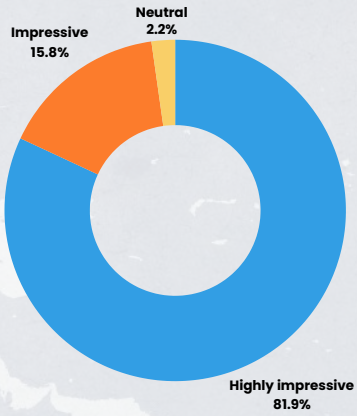


Survey participants: **538**
NPS: **86.5%**

Angela Refugio (she/her) to Everyone

AR I really appreciate the research you've incorporated into this webinar. Thank you so much for this....

Jenny Babes Caddauan to Everyone

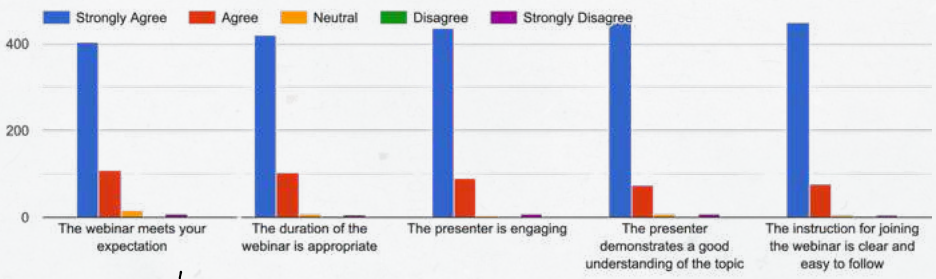
JB Learning is always inspiring that's why we need to encourage learners as well ourselves to love and embrace the journey for learning,

Carla Bazán Zurita to Everyone

CB All you have shared was interesting and made me rethink my teaching practices. I will change and adapt activities that encourage my students to improve their skills.

With a remarkable **1526 registrations** from **83 countries** and an impressive **participation rate of 54.6%**, this webinar has become one of our most widely attended events to date. An incredible **NPS score of 86.5%** shows just how much you valued the strategies shared to build confidence in language learners.

And we're deeply grateful to everyone who joined our webinar! Your time, dedication to learning, and encouraging words truly inspire us. Thank you all for being part of this journey, your support means the world!



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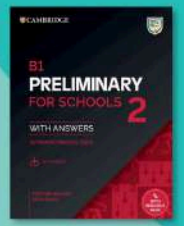

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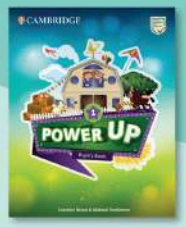

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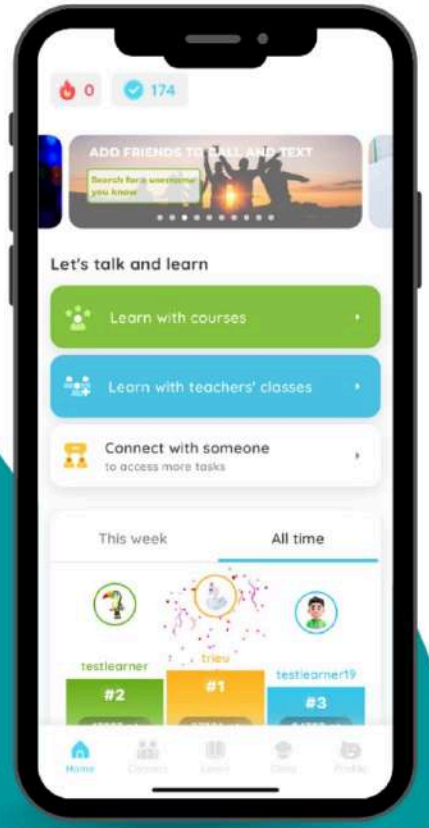

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