Why My Educator Joy Is Thriving

And How to Build a More Supportive Educational System

By Christopher Albrecht

The last day of school ended three hours ago. I am late to dinner because I am fishing 100 rainbow trout out of our classroom's cold water fish tank. The fish came as eggs, delivered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation through a grant. One of my fourth-graders, Kathryn, fed them every day for the entire year, unless another student asked her for a turn. Kathryn is on the autism spectrum and struggles with compromise and sharing. She does well in math and reading—and she is passionate about wildlife and the outdoors. She is my fish lady of the year! My class's usual field trip to Lake Ontario was canceled because of busing challenges during the pandemic, so this year's plan is to release the fish with Kathryn's parents (an archivist and a teacher) and four classmates.

Why did not every child get a turn to feed the fish? It seems unfair. Many kids fed the fish, but they had to ask Kathryn. Kathryn has a love: wildlife. And she had a challenge: sharing. By midyear, students were in the pattern of asking Kathryn if they could help feed the fish. She was coached and supported by her two-to-one aide, Mrs. Schwartz, so that over time, Kathryn—the girl who coveted the fish like a first-time mother with a newborn—was sharing, talking, and engaging with her peers. Over the course of the year, she developed a sense of purpose and belonging. Friendships became reciprocal. Now at year's end, all Kathryn wants to do is release these fish, grown to over five inches long, into Lake Ontario with school friends.

One by one, the fish are taken from our transportation vessel, and with respect and care, slowly carried down a boat launch. Each is carefully released into the waters of Lake Ontario, the vessel growing emptier, until the last two fish remain. To Kathryn, a child who struggles with emotions, it does not seem fair that one fish would be last, so the two final rainbow trout enter the wild together. Kathryn, beaming, turns to Mrs. Schwartz and says, "I am so happy."

Officially, my summer started hours ago. Why not go home, lay in the hammock, and start cocktail hour? Teachers deserve it. I have been told by so many, "Christopher, you work too much." I do work long hours; there are many calls to my understanding wife about late dinners. I have maintained this pattern of work for all 27 years of my life as a public school teacher.

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY JING JING TSONG

To understand my mindset, one simple fact must be accepted: happiness creates success, and success is about finding happiness. For Kathryn, the natural world was the gateway key to unlocking her willingness to regulate her emotions during the school day. It caused her to see the value of her peers. By year's end, Kathryn found happiness, and that made her success spill over everywhere.*

My belief that happiness equals success is why, at age 50, I fear retirement. My mind and body have changed. I am slower running the bases in kickball. My bifocals are changing yearly, and I lose stuff hourly in my classroom. All of this is normal and natural. However, a few parts of me have not aged. In fact, part of me believes that I may have found the fountain of youth for my spirit: the joy of teaching children, living in my community, and getting to witness learning. I love what I do. By asking myself how I got to this point, I hope the joy I feel can be shared. All teachers deserve to feel this good.

Thousands of factors shape every teacher. This is my story from my childhood to now, divided into five narratives. None is all that unusual, but a lot can be gleaned from them.

Part 1: The Foundation

I was raised by two very loving parents. My strict Italian American mother ruled at 5 foot 2 inches with her cooking spoon; she squeaked through high school before entering the workforce. My father, a German immigrant, attended restaurant trade school before coming to the United States. Neither of my parents had a firm grasp on working with me on homework or preparing me for college. They supported my education, listened to my teachers, and lovingly did the best they knew how, but neither had great school experiences.

The stigma that "disadvantaged" homes produce "disadvantaged" students needs to be squashed. Perched high on the pyramid of Bloom's taxonomy is creativity. Coupled with observation, my parents understood that I had interests and dislikes. I was an active boy, and my early report cards were exhaustingly similar from year to year: I could not keep my hands off other kids, and I did not use an indoor voice. Also, I was highly creative, good at math, responsible with property, and physically active. In many ways, this mirrored my homelife.

I was 7 the year my mother planted apricot, peach, pear, and apple trees. I helped dig the holes, but Mom decided on the locations. Years later I found out why. Each fall, we had a bountiful harvest of fruit, often twice the volume of the neighbors'. Each of the trees that my mom selected blossom in different weeks. For a blossom to pollinate and eventually produce fruit, pollen from one flower's stamen needs to fall upon the pistil of another blossom, often of a different tree, traveling to the ovary of the blossom. Nature does this mostly using wind and insects. However, when a young boy of 7 "paints" a flower with a gentle watercolor brush, the pollen gets on the bristles. If that brush is walked to another tree and a second blossom is painted, the flower is fertilized. I painted for weeks in the spring; in the fall, I picked the fruit, made jellies and jams, and prepared fruit for freezing. I had a passion for nature, the outdoors, and cooking. Early on, with my mother's help, I found purpose in my actions.

*I am grateful to Kathryn's parents for allowing this story to be shared.

Many parents struggle to understand today's curricula, yet we desperately need their support. Once a parent (or primary caregiver) turns away from a child's education, opportunity for the child drastically narrows. Fortunately for me, my parents saw their own strengths and recognized mine. Our educational system very often is set up to validate students' strengths. We need to do the same with their families. Just like with children, our expectations of families need to be differentiated, capitalizing on the strengths of each home.

Every child deserves a loving environment where their interests are valued, creativity is encouraged, and time is spent with caring adults. The actions adults take in the home and school need to develop a sense of purpose. In my experience, students who feel purpose have confidence, hope, and a willingness to have grit when doing less desirable tasks. I did not like reading, but because it was presented to me by a mom who gave me purpose, I did not resist. Ironically, my mother was not a strong reader. A year before she passed, she admitted that she lacked lifelong confidence because of her inability to read adult books. She saw herself as uneducated—but she was a wonderful first teacher.

I love what I do. By asking myself how I got to this point, I hope the joy I feel can be shared.

The Takeaway

The pollination of my joy for teaching can be traced back to my childhood in the 1970s. As an adult, I read nightly, teach English language arts, and am a published author. I attribute my success as a reader and writer to my mother, who struggled in reading. She did not teach me to read and write, but she imparted purpose that led to my natural desire to be educated. Her role was to find the path, hand me a paintbrush, and stay positive.

Schools have long held the heavy weight of education, but as we learn more and more about childhood, it is apparent that there is nothing standard about children. Each child is motivated by a different set of interests, both natural and nurtured. Every morning, I observe my students and change my teaching methods based on their behaviors, just like my mom did with me. Behavior issues decrease, motivation increases, and the ownership of learning goes where it should be—with the students.

My school contract states that I am obligated to be at work by 8:30 a.m. and work until 3:30 p.m. I have yet to meet a teacher who keeps these hours. In my school, we have teachers who play chess with students before school and Legos after. As needs have increased along with technology, parents and students text teachers well into the evening. So, my narrative about releasing trout is not uncommon. What I see more and more of is caring educators willing to do whatever it takes to establish trust, vision, and purpose in children.

Part 2: Creative and Confused

During my first year of teaching, I made a discovery, though at the time I did not recognize it. Appointed to a half-day middle school computer teacher position for which I was underqualified, I was a last-resort, wildcard hire at New Martinsville School in West Virginia. The internet was brand new and so was I. There were no technology standards. The simple directive from my principal was, "Teach the kids how to use the computers." The trouble was, I did not know how to use the computers.

Broke and with a wife in graduate school, I did what most first-year teachers do: I stayed late, planned my tail off, invented, created, recreated, at times faked it, then reworked it all over again. I had no idea how to work with efficiency. Not bound by standards, the crystal-clear connection between the computer, the internet, and its usefulness in the real world was never shackled. Amid chaos, there was a silver lining that I can only appreciate in hindsight: I was creating an original curriculum.

The third week of my teaching career is where this story really begins. It was a Saturday. I was toying with network cabling, and a curious student saw an open door to the school. Hours later, I had a grasp of networks, IP addresses, and HTML coding because I listened to what that student had to say. Weeks later, I had a curriculum entirely built on the thoughts of my 12-year-old students. I had the how and the why down, but the what of my teaching was conceptualized by the kids I served. In turn, I was profoundly motivated to teach this novel topic. My pedagogy has never deviated from this initial discovery.

Early in my teaching career, I spent a lot of early and late hours putting together engaging content only to fear that the lesson would fail. Great content is not effective if the delivery of the content is sterilized. Nearly 30 years later, I still am observing young teachers in the same dilemma. Successful elementary-grades teachers do not have to be masters of the entire curriculum, but they have to be eager to learn along with their students. The focus of great instruction revolves around the environment and delivery. The teacher is an artist discovering with, not only for, the students.

One more experience from early in my career is important to share. My partner teacher and I lost a student to cancer midyear during the second year of a fourth- and fifth-grade loop. It was only my fifth year in the classroom, and my partner's third. Trying everything to serve the emotional health of the class, we were in over our heads observing student behaviors that ranged from selfishness and acting out to—most unexpectedly—some kids not being affected. At the end of the year, I had a very long conversation about resigning. I was tired and frustrated; unknowingly, I had not dealt with my own grief—neither had my partner. I thought the failure of the class rested on my shoulders, and I felt ashamed.

The following year, I believe that my principal was careful about which students were placed in my class, and I began to see that there are some circumstances that we cannot control. We are teachers, not superheroes. We are human, not divine. When my student died, I did not need counseling, which is what was offered. I needed a familiar face. For me, it illustrated the worth of mentorship long after the first year.

The Takeaway

Teaching is both art and science. Though there need to be guiding standards to hold a line of equity for the sake of a fair and equal public education, a teacher's craft, the art and style of their conduct, needs years of experimentation and guidance with a system that evolves with the teacher's pace of progress.

A good teacher knows how to fail. More learning comes from a blunder than a success because success only confirms that a person is on the right path, but failure sheds light on a new path. Failure is a gift.

Part 3: The Whole Teacher

In October of 1993, I was coming to the end of my first student-teaching placement. I was young, 21 years old. Near the end of my experience, Mrs. Murawski, my third-grade teacher mentor, sat me down and told me how a teacher mentor took her under her wing 25 years prior. She explained that it was very important to her that I take on a student teacher when the time was right. The time has been right 15 times. However, an opportunity that I became part of during the 2019–20 school year redefined my understanding of mentorship.

It was spring of 2019, and I'd just become an inductee of the National Teachers Hall of Fame (NTHF) located in Kansas on the campus of Emporia State University. It is an honor that comes with connections and responsibilities. The NTHF has created a pioneering opportunity that is redefining student teaching. In Kansas, student teachers spend 16 weeks in a placement with a mentor teacher. As part of an NTHF pilot program, Jenna Pennington, a senior at Emporia State, spent 11 weeks student teaching in a fifth-grade placement in Kansas. Then, two days after completing her 11th week, she flew 1,200 miles to Rochester, New York, to finish out her final five weeks in my classroom as a fourth-grade student teacher, while also living with me and my wife.

Traditionally, a student teacher meets a mentor at school, spends the day in the classroom, and then goes home. In this unconventional program, Jenna witnessed my life at school, but she also saw firsthand something equally valuable: the delicate balance that teachers live in their communities and homes. Teaching is a lifestyle, and traditional student teaching only sheds light on part of the life of being a teacher. By living together, we quickly developed a friendship, and the depth of our conversations exceeded any that I'd had in my previous experiences with student teachers.

There were many unexpected moments and insights. There was the obvious. Jenna is from Kansas. I live and teach in upstate New York. By traveling to another part of the country, Jenna had the opportunity to experience a totally different part of America.

Whereas a dusting of snow cancels school in Kansas, Jenna was greeted by a foot of snow and the reality that snow does not close school if you live along Lake Ontario.

Evening conversations revolved less around school and more around life. She witnessed that living in the same town as I teach has a direct impact on the way I shop. She learned what it is like to be hugged by students while running errands and spent many evenings talking with my wife about what life is like being married to a teacher. Jenna was there when dinners were interrupted by a student calling for homework help, and she saw the number of calls I make to former students. Jenna came to the evening class that I taught at the College at Brockport and found out quickly that teachers are active volunteers in their communities.

The experience was only partially about observing me. Jenna brought ideas from Kansas, new and fresh ones, that opened my eyes too. She did not feel the hesitation that often happens in week one of student teaching. Weeks prior to Jenna arriving, our students began sending her 30-second video clips showcasing our school. She sent videos back. By the time Jenna arrived, personal connections had been made.

If we want young and talented teachers to be effective for years to come, they need to learn the balance between work and life. With the increasing demands on teachers, it is more important than ever for our next generation of teachers to understand this. Jenna's experience not only helped her define how to manage a classroom but also showed her how to manage living the life of a teacher. Five weeks seems short, but it was all that was needed.

My teaching is like cooking down a tomato sauce, which I loved to watch my Italian grandmother do when I was a child. It took days to boil the sauce down to the essence of flavor, and she tended to it constantly. Now, my teaching takes constant attention. I am a teacher all the time. Jenna saw this, and I know it was a lot to take in, especially because Jenna was young. However, evenings spent in pajamas talking about students, school, and life provided time to decompress. Jenna experienced a lot, but it allowed her to adopt what she liked and leave behind what did not fit her pedagogy. Teaching is an art, and all artists are different.

Why is student teaching portrayed as just an occupation? Being a teacher transcends the classroom. It is infused into our personal lives, conversations, purchases, and hearts. Getting the ultimate opportunity to share my life with a passionate and excited new teacher like Jenna not only gave her insight but fulfilled me, too. Jenna did not get to be with just a schoolteacher but a whole teacher, and it felt so validating. We talk a lot about educating the whole child. Our teacher preparation programs need to mirror this by educating the whole teacher.

The Takeaway

Being an educator is 24-7. While I shave, eat, sleep, and drive, I think about school. It is a reality that comes with the profession, but it has taken a toll on my marriage and children. As I have aged, I have learned to manage it. The trouble is some teachers do not.

I have hosted 15 student teachers and five yearlong high school interns. Though I feel that I do a great job letting each experience be rich in student interaction; discussions about style, methods, and pedagogy; observing students; and communication, the current system does not allow student teachers to see my teacher life when I am not at school. Learning how to manage a personal life is as valuable to beginning teachers as the classroom experience. Teaching is heavily magnetic, and young teachers are passionate. They will be in their classrooms on weekends; they will take home papers to grade in the evening and make phone calls at the times convenient to families. They should know how all this tugs on eating properly, exercising, spending time with family and friends, and hobbies.

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In the end, Jenna said that evenings sitting with my wife and me were just as educational as days in the classroom. Jenna now teaches fourth grade and did not have to endure a typical rookie year. Her life is balanced as well as it can be.

What is mentorship? In five weeks of not merely student teaching but living as a teacher, Jenna grew exponentially. It is time for a renaissance in teacher preparation, one that embraces the whole educator.

Part 4: Poverty or Purpose

Even as far too many schools are suffering from the tangible poverty of aging buildings, other schools are suffering from the intellectual and relational poverty of excess. The interactive whiteboards, laptops, thousands of apps—all those tools are affecting the culture of educators. Nothing will ever replace a teacher, yet students spend a lot of time on those devices.

I have a cell phone that gets turned off when I get to school. It gets turned on when the kids go home. The only exception to the rule is when I want to take a photograph. When I am teaching, I don't want to risk becoming curious and sneaking a peek at the phone. That would take my mind out of the classroom. Actions are more powerful than words; if we want our students to be mindful, students need to observe us being the same way. Students are often better at observation than adults. They pick up subtleties. If my mind is on my phone, many students will recognize that I am not mindful of them.

I have maintained a tradition with my students that has slightly selfish motives. At the end of the school year, I give them my home address. (I live in a small town, and half of the kids have trick-or-treated at my house anyways, so it is not a big deal.) Then I make

a pact: if I receive a letter from a student, I will write back and send a little something. That little something is usually a rock, feather, book, etc., that I happen to come across. Children like getting mail because it makes them feel valued. I like getting mail because it makes me feel valued too. Even more, my experience of building sustained lifelong bonds with my students through interactions like this has me feeling very loved today. To ignore this is to lose the essence, beauty, and purpose of our profession.

Students often remember their teachers for life. How often do teachers do the same? What I know is after 27 years in the classroom, I feel loved by hundreds of students because I went the extra mile. I sacrificed, but as a result I grew with joy. Some of my best friends learned in my classroom decades ago.

Teachers are hardworking, compassionate people, but not all teachers are happy: it is time for that to change.

The Takeaway

As a young teacher, I received some good advice from my principal, Filamina Peck: "Check your personal life at the door. If your personal life cannot be left at home, take the day off." Students deserve the best a teacher can offer. Many schools have the poverty of excess. The challenges that come with distractions are much larger than schools. With infinitely increasing options, the happiness of our learners will depend on how well we are able to put those distractions aside.

It is relevant to the times we live in for teachers to have frank, nonjudgmental conversations about to what degree our personal lives should overlap with our professional duties. Years ago, a note, call, or conference was the limitation for communication between teachers and parents or teachers and students. Now there are infinite ways to communicate, blurring the personal and professional even more. Teachers deserve fulfilling personal lives—and, if we so choose, our creative efforts to build lasting bonds with our students even outside the classroom can contribute to our joy and sense of purpose.

Part 5: Educator for Life

How fast does a monarch butterfly sail in the open prairie of Nebraska? I know the answer firsthand: 7.2 miles per hour. The national parks are where I spend my summers. There is a seamlessness to my year, and this adhesion is one of many reasons I am more motivated than ever—full of a powerful and optimistic joy, curiosity, and energy to be an educator.

The summer of 2020, I went from tourist to employee through a special internship for teachers. Bridled with inquisitiveness in the year that celebrated the 100th anniversary of the passing of the 19th Amendment, I spent the summer in southeast Nebraska at Homestead National Historical Park researching the connection between women's suffrage and the Homestead Act of 1862. As it turns out, 15 states and territories granted suffrage prior to 1920, but only two, Michigan and New York, were east of the Mississippi. Developing curriculum and programs and speaking with park visitors about that history was much like being in my classroom.

But the prairie holds secrets as well. Each sunbaked evening, shortly after the park closed, I traded my uniform for running sneakers and shorts and hit the trails. On a late summer run, a monarch flew in front of me for about the length of a football field. With my running watch, I clocked its speed.

Here I am, more than two decades into a teaching career, having been pushed to exhaustion with higher levels of concern for students' well-being, increased expectations for student performance, and growing curricular demands. Last year, a global pandemic was thrown into the mix, turning my kitchen table into my remote school. Yikes! However, I am happy and more motivated than ever. I can think of no greater feeling than educating my fourth-grade students, my former students, and the visitors to the parks where I serve as a ranger. I feel joy and peace in my profession during a time of civil unrest and political division because I feel a sense of purpose through the mission to serve others.

Following my summer in Nebraska, I was thrilled to become a national park ranger in Calais, Maine, to invoke interest in a tiny island called St. Croix, one of the earliest French settlements in North America, most noted for Samuel de Champlain's early cartography. Unknown to so many, this early 1600s settlement of 79 men most likely included that year, or shortly thereafter, the first free Black person in North American history. His name was Mathieu da Costa. I enlightened visitors about this historical figure, unknown to most, who connects history, purpose, and racial equity. I see relevance in this work because we have so many unanswered questions related to racial equity. Da Costa was valued for his education (a knowledge of at least seven European languages) and his understanding of trade. His story fills a gap in our collective memory of our diverse history and develops pride.

Neither teaching nor being a park ranger will make me wealthy, but I have the riches of purpose. Though a stable income provides sustenance, purposeful employment feeds the soul.

The seamlessness of my national parks summers was a wakeup call. Visitors come to a national park to experience and learn. Do all students go to school with the same passion? Education is a collective of millions of voices of teachers and other school staff who are not household names but affect every household.

We need a revolution in education. With each passing year, I am growing happier. I am still coming to school very early, and my wife is bringing me dinner on late nights. I work these long hours because I want to. Teachers are hardworking, compassionate people, but not all teachers are happy: it is time for that to change. We want a happier world. We dream of lifelong learning. It is possible. The world is hungry for purpose and hope. Therefore, the skill of investigation needs to be cultivated, and what motivates each human being needs to be validated. What years of experience tell me is that any content can be used to spark students' love of learning. The execution of the approach—the method we choose to engage the learner—is the game-changer.

The Takeaway

There is comfort in having knowledge and confidence, and there is no price that can be put on the skill of a proactive mindset.

Community Circles, Civics, and National Parks

Addressing Student Empowerment

When I was a teacher intern in southeast Nebraska at Homestead National Historical Park, Mark Engler, who was then the superintendent, concluded meetings stating, "Let us never forget our last name." He was highlighting that we were the National Park *Service*. With this mindset, I began volunteering at the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York, and likewise became a seasonal national park ranger in Maine the summer of 2021. My experiences ignited an understanding that there are nationwide needs for school-based, embedded civic practices that address personal responsibility. Like adjoining pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the narratives of the national parks fit perfectly with cultivating civic responsibility.

School days are packed, and moral discussions take an abundance of time. With an increased need for in-person communication skills due to their erosion by technology, online learning, social distancing, and a multitude of constantly shifting factors, I devote 40 minutes of weekly classroom time to community circles, which allow students to unpack and recognize emotions and feelings within a safe environment. I introduce character-building topics, which have enhanced students' empathetic mindsets while providing time and opportunities to synthesize, listen, create original thoughts, and develop a moral foundation. Community circles allow students to communicate more, debate with productive respect, and develop service-mindedness.

The world is fast paced. Contemplation is becoming a rare practice. If schools are going to support the development of civic-minded learners, the brakes need to be put on to slow the pace. Our community circles provide the time we need.

This school year, I brought the narrative of the events and people of Seneca Falls into our community circles. On July 19 and 20, 1848, oppressed women felt a need to create a better country and world by catalyzing the first women's rights convention. This example has a natural pairing with the need for civics in education. Two historic days have evolved into a deeper consideration of individuals' mindsets, the implications for current lives, and the underlying connections to history. I introduced quotes, documents, the leading figures Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, and the first women's rights convention. Then, I posed a question: *What is a call to action?*

Taking on this very challenging topic is analogous to crossing the Grand Canyon: difficult and time consuming, but rewarding. The kids had to struggle with discomfort, silence, and anxiousness—all experienced within the safety of the preestablished rules and culture of the community circle. Struggle created fractures within their common practices and mindsets—and opportunities for growth.

A month into contemplating the nature of a call to action, students' actions became more civic minded, and they began owning their learning environment. When a new girl joined our class, students decorated her locker with affirmations and welcoming messages. Community circles brought to light the importance of inviting partnerless people to join in groups to oppose awkward loneliness. Students find joy in kindness. The fermentation of the example preserved at the Women's Rights National Historical Park ignited the actions and empowerment of the students—and it all started in the community circle.

One pandemic fallout has been a decrease in communication between teachers, students, families, and communities. Community circles are one way to begin revitalizing our communication. Parents have been reporting positive developments in their children. These reports are heartening because children are *truly* educated when their actions are practiced independently. Academic gains are following. Students are recognizing the importance of inclusion, considering others' perspectives, and thinking about how to properly treat others. Students have self-guided purpose, and the soul and the mind are being fed equally.

–C. A.

Educators develop through a career of factors, some controllable and others not. I was not always happy in my career. I was confused in my first assignment, and I was scared when my student died. I am not uncommon or unique. A teaching career is an uphill marathon with some plateaus and some steep climbs. I am approaching the top of the hill. I am now number 12 on my school district's seniority list. But I still need to grow.

Sandy Koufax pitched for the Brooklyn and Los Angeles Dodgers for only 12 years, yet he was elected first ballot into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. In his final year, he retired with 27 wins and only 9 losses, recording one of the lowest earned run averages in the history of baseball: 1.73. He retired on top after pitching his best season.

Although I fear the day, I will retire. Like Koufax, it is my dream to have banner years in the end of my career. I have already begun the process. At the top of Bloom's taxonomy sits the synthesis of ideas, creativity, and self-reflection/evaluation. If a teacher at the beginning of a career requires guidance through mentorship, what structures should be in place at the end?

Those teachers who reach a silver anniversary, the 25-year mark, most likely have seen full cycles of teaching methods rebranded like they are revelations. At that point, a teacher begins to wonder, "What is my purpose?"

I am happy because I was fortunate to teach in a school that values the creativity of teachers, and that is why I continue to be curious. If I could have one wish for veteran teachers, it would be that they are challenged the same way we are supposed to challenge children, by thinking critically.

Experienced teachers can synthesize many eras of teaching because they have seen changes firsthand. Let them give their knowledge, and if it bucks the system, trust them. Experienced teachers have earned the freedom to create. Let them. Veteran teachers can self-evaluate. Let them. Though the formalization of my yearly evaluation is still very prescriptive and diagnostic, I am fortunate to have the flexibility to create, and I feel value in my voice.

Twenty-seven years in, I am a happy teacher. I still want to go to work, and I do worry about retiring. It will have to happen at some point, but there is a lot of joy in knowing that I am on a trajectory to end my career feeling fulfilled. Every teacher deserves the same feeling. ☐