



# It's All About Identity

Cooper sits at his desk, studying the quadratic formula, and soon his mind begins to formulate exciting ways to re-organize the numbers scribbled before him. Grace has a box of old cell phone parts, and along with a few household tools, begins work on an invention she's been pondering. Samantha stares at a blank canvas, holding a palette of oil paint, as she sits in the field overlooking the mountains. In twenty-three years of teaching, I have observed creativity, motivation, and ability in the actions of my students. For some, ideas are inherent. Others need examples and modeling before they join the discussion. A last group, trained to learn from a textbook, sits quietly, often declining to participate. And this only presents one aspect of their individual selves. Their identities also include age, gender, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Early on, I found it difficult to differentiate instruction for this diverse group of students. I was under the assumption that all of them would be able to keep up with a high level of questioning and problem solving, while at the same time feel comfortable in my classroom. I was wrong, and it wasn't until I learned about the varied characteristics of gifted children, the many techniques related to creative thinking, and what it means to teach for diversity, inclusion, and equity, that I found the strategies needed to inspire the entire class. I hope that the pieces in this issue of THP spark some of your amazing talent and that it translates into educational success.

*Identity Exploration through Photography*, by Andrew Comose and Thomas Hébert, demonstrate how the practice of photo elicitation can aid in having students explore their identities. Becky Cooper, Nan Janecke, and Kelly Schultz author *Fewer Dead White Guys: Creating a Multicultural AP English Curriculum*, an article rich in ideas for how to adapt curricular materials that reflect the diversity of communities. Sara Churchill gives us *Ten Evidence-based Strategies to Support Independent Reading* to ensure that teachers are meeting

the varied needs of gifted readers. *iMathination* represents the last column authored by Janine Firmender, who finishes up by revisiting the idea of engaging students as mathematically creative thinkers and communicators. *Unwrapping the Gifted* asks us to consider what happens when we take a step back and stay quiet when we see students struggling with a problem. *Socially Scientific* looks to games as tools to help students construct knowledge and strengthen critical thinking skills. *Taking the Lead* tackles learning loss due to the pandemic and offers ways to regain momentum in the classroom. The debut of *Making Curriculum Matter*, a new column by Jann Leppein, looks to the power of documentary storytelling as a metaphor for enriching conversations about designing curriculum. *Taking The Creative Leap* suggests that educators should model creative thinking and behavior to their students while providing lessons intended to develop students' creative knowledge. *Sparks of Innovation*, another new column, tells us that teaching critical and creative thinking skills begins by harnessing natural curiosity and wonder during multi-disciplinary discussions. *Buried Under Books* tackles the issue of the recent push to ban or censor book choice in the classroom.

A student's identity is more than just a grade, evaluation, incredible project, or observed behavior. Whether it is the art studio, basement "lab," or bedroom desk, our students go off into the world outside of school, their world, and attempt to navigate their own personal situations. The freedom to think and express themselves individually and creatively should be at the forefront of the classroom, for the students, in all their diversity, want to let you know who they are.

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