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## Joy, Love, and Belonging

This fall, I was fortunate to attend and present at various conferences where the recurring themes of joy, love, and belonging echoed profoundly. The Vermont Music Educator Association and the Vermont Art Educator Association both centered their conferences around the concept of belonging.

These conferences transcend the conventional boundaries of professional development, offering a unique space to share our passion for teaching and build a community that extends beyond the classroom. The collective celebration of knowledge and exchange of innovative ideas foster a genuine love for the art and science of education. Conferences become a platform where educators connect, cultivating a sense of belonging within a broader community that understands the challenges and triumphs of our field. This shared experience not only enhances professional growth but also instills a profound sense of purpose and camaraderie, contributing to a fulfilling and inspired journey in education.

However, the prevalence of the words joy, love, and belonging at these conferences goes beyond the professional realm. Rather, they are a recognition that these elements are crucial for students to be prepared and engaged in their learning journey. At the Rowland Annual Conference in Burlington, VT, I had the pleasure of hearing author and poet Ross Gay. His impactful words urged educators to prioritize joy, love, and belonging over grit for our students. In considering my own work and leaving you with the same questions posed by Ross Gay, I reflect on how joy, love, and belonging intersect with the content we choose:

When picking content, what role do joy, love, and belonging play?

## Crafting Inclusive Curriculum

When was the last time you critically examined your curriculum, considering its inclusivity and representation? This introspective query is paramount in fostering an educational environment that is both inclusive and culturally responsive.

Taking the time to engage in this crucial work holds immense importance. As educators, we wield a profound influence on shaping our students' perceptions of the world. To authentically represent all students in our curriculum, it's essential to invest time in getting to know them individually. Understanding their backgrounds, experiences, and cultural contexts provides invaluable insights into tailoring the curriculum to be more reflective of their diverse identities.

Consider this reflective journey as an opportunity to not only evaluate who is represented in your curriculum but also to delve into the rich tapestry of your students'

lives. Create avenues for dialogue, encourage student voice, and foster an environment where they feel seen and heard. By doing so, you not only enrich your understanding of your students but also gain the necessary perspective to ensure your curriculum resonates with their unique stories.

Moreover, the work doesn't stop there. [The Anti-Racist Teachers](#) offer invaluable tools for scrutinizing your curriculum, providing a foundation for ongoing exploration and improvement. Even if you're not a visual art teacher, these resources can guide you in identifying representation gaps across various arts subjects.

Additionally, consider the continued work of learning about new artists and diverse perspectives to share with your students. Introducing a variety of artistic voices fosters an inclusive learning environment and exposes students to a broader range of cultural and artistic expressions. Stay curious, stay informed, and weave these discoveries into the fabric of your curriculum.

Remember, this is a journey without a fixed destination, but rather a continuous commitment to creating a more equitable and enriching educational experience in the arts for all our students.

## **Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools**

This past year the CDC released [Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools: An Action Guide for School and District Leaders](#). In this comprehensive action guide tailored for K-12 school administrators, including principals and leaders of school-based student support teams, the focus is on identifying evidence-based strategies to positively impact students' mental health. Emphasizing the crucial role of mental health in overall well-being, the guide underscores that schools play a pivotal role in promoting behavioral and mental health through education, prevention, and early intervention efforts. With recent data revealing concerning trends in adolescent mental health, the guide offers six in-school strategies that encompass increasing students' mental health literacy, promoting mindfulness, supporting social, emotional, and behavioral learning, enhancing connectedness among students, staff, and families, providing psychosocial skills training, and prioritizing school staff well-being. Backed by research findings, the guide not only outlines these strategies but also offers approaches and evidence-based practices for implementation, emphasizing equity considerations. It is a valuable resource for fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment that prioritizes the mental health and well-being of all students.

## **Meet the Teacher**

Getting to know arts educators from around Vermont has been a rich and inspiring experience. Through conferences and collaborative events, I've had the opportunity to connect with passionate individuals who share a deep commitment to fostering creativity and artistic expression in education. Engaging with these educators has not only broadened my perspective on teaching but has also allowed for the exchange of innovative ideas and best practices.

In each newsletter, I aim to spotlight educators from across our state, offering glimpses into the remarkable individuals and talents I've had the privilege of encountering. If you have someone in mind who deserves recognition, please don't hesitate to reach out! I'm eager to continue celebrating the dedication and contributions of arts educators, honoring their invaluable commitment to the arts.



**Rebecca Skrypeck**  
**English Drama Teacher**  
**Springfield High School, Springfield, VT**

**A little background of who you are and why do this work:**

I do this work because I LOVE Theater. I have an AA, BA, and MA in Theater. I wanted to be part of the Theater for as long as I can remember. With teaching I can share that love and passion and get a regular paycheck! It makes my heart happy to see students really catch on and enjoy Theater. Some students have gone on to major in it in college but the ones who use it in their everyday life in some form; they can speak in front of a group of people, they can interact better with groups, etc. that is what really makes it worthwhile - how students can bring it into their everyday lives.

**What is your favorite lesson/unit/thing to do with your students that relates to theatre?**

It's a lot of work but I really like the fall show or spring one acts and showing the students how much work goes into producing a show both on stage and backstage.

**If you could bring one famous actor to school to share with your students, who would it be?**

If I could bring one famous actor to school, it would be Jared Leto. He is so multitalented. I think his use of Method Acting can be a little much, but he just has so much energy! When he commits to something, he commits. This is not just for his acting but his music as well. I would like him to share with the students how rewarding it is to commit to something and be proud of the outcomes of that commitment.

**Carrie Kohl**  
**K-2 Music Educator**  
**Rutland City School, Rutland, VT**

**A little background of who you are and why do this work:**

My name is Carrie Kohl, and this is my 20th year of teaching! I have had the pleasure of teaching music all over Vermont, but currently spend my time teaching K-2 in Rutland City. I've known since I was 5 that I was going to be a music teacher. I've been a band director, a choir conductor...part time, full time, overtime...but my heart has always been in elementary general music. I love building the foundation and helping to create the love of music from the beginning.

**What is your favorite lesson/unit/thing to do with your students that relates to music?**

One of my favorite lessons to do is "Charlie Over the Ocean" because the kids don't even realize that I'm assessing their singing as they play the game! Sometimes it's the only time I hear a kid actually sing, because everyone wants a turn to be Charlie!

**If you could bring one famous musician to school to share with your students, who would it be?**

If I could bring any famous musician to school I think it would be someone from the group Imagine Dragons. They have a global appeal and for my super young, yet super diverse student population, that's really important. Their songs are memorable and catchy, no matter what country you are from or what language you speak.





**Taryn Colby**  
**High School Dance and Drama**  
**North Country Union High School**

**A little background of who you are and why do this work:**

I am in my 7th year teaching full-time as the dance & drama teacher at North Country Union High School. I also help direct & choreograph our fall musicals. In the winter season, I coach our Varsity Dance Team. In my "spare time" I also teach yoga classes, work at a Lavender Farm and spend time with my three dogs.

I enjoy doing this work because it is so rewarding. One of my favorite things about being a high school teacher is watching students evolve and grow from a freshman to a senior. They are literally blossoming into adulthood during the time that I get to work with them and it's incredible to see how far they have come in such a short period of time.

**What is your favorite lesson/unit/thing to do with your students that relates to dance?**

One of my favorite lessons that I assign is the [Inspiration Box Project](#). I usually give this project to my advanced level classes who have already experimented with choreography.

**If you could bring on famous musician to school to share with your students, who would it be?**

If I could bring back a dancer from the dead, it would definitely be Bob Fosse but I don't think that my admin would allow him to meet my students. Derek Hough would be my second choice! He's so dedicated to his craft, he's humble and he inspires others to really commit to their dreams.

\*Photo includes Rebecca McGregor, my former dance teacher who has taught me everything I know! I believe this was taken at the 2022 NDEO National Conference in Atlanta

**Julie Carino**  
**Visual Arts PreK-5**  
**Northfield Elementary**

**A little background of who you are and why do this work:**

Hi there! I'm Julie Carino - artist, art educator, and arts advocate. After many years in education, I'm still passionate about teaching and learning, and I enjoy coming to the studio at school each day. I especially enjoy building relationships, acting as a creativity coach, and creating a safe space for the magic to unfold. My teaching is informed by the three guiding principles for the choice-based TAB (Teaching for Artistic Behavior) philosophy: "What do artists do? The child is the artist. The classroom is the child's studio." I'm a big advocate for the power of the arts in our lives. For Youth Art Month, downtown Northfield has been transformed into a "gallery walk" with storefronts and community hubs showcasing our young artists' work.

I find teaching deeply satisfying. I feel privileged to be a part of the moment when a learner opens up, a shift happens, and there is new understanding. The belief in making learning accessible is a huge part of why I teach. The dynamic between teachers and learners - and the learning that teachers experience - is something that I have always been excited about. There is something precious to the vulnerability involved in learning, and great power in the potential for all of us as learners. Supporting creativity by facilitating art is a unique experience. Art is an essential language for communicating about and understanding the human experience.



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I am excited to get to the Studio and support what artists are envisioning and how they are problem-solving to bring their ideas to life.

**What is your favorite lesson/unit/thing to do with your students that relates to art?**

One of my favorite projects this year was a collaborative service project that began when our amazing PE Teacher, Mike Gonnevillle, affectionately known as "Mr. G," asked for suggestions about painting large 3D geometric shapes that were looking worse for the wear after many years of use by our youngest learners. We turned this into an opportunity for a service project. In small groups, our 5th grade classes designed and painted the shapes, working collaboratively over several weeks. They were invested and engaged. The plain, scuffed geometric shapes were turned into functional works of art. It was a great way to build community right at the beginning of the year and it's exciting to know that these colorful sculptures will be enjoyed by many people for years to come!

**If you could bring one famous artist to school to share with your students, who would it be?**

I had the good fortune of going on a field trip during high school to meet Keith Haring. (Thank you, amazing art department crew: Belle, Fritz, and Pear!). He was an inspiration as he shared his story through a slideshow. Although soft-spoken, he was tough, committed, and impressive - he told us about his early days of creating art in NYC subways and getting arrested repeatedly. We were rapt! At the end of his talk, he drew us each a quick sketch. As I stood in line waiting for my sketch, I decided to ask him if he would draw on my high top sneaker, which he did. (I love that shoe!) I think my young artists would be inspired and impressed by Keith Haring, his ability to "Engage and Persist" was second to none!

**Stay Connected**

If you've reached this paragraph, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to you. A resounding shout-out to all individuals who tirelessly contribute to fostering love and passion in the arts. Remember, it's crucial to stay connected and never hesitate to reach out whenever you require assistance or support. We're here for each other in this journey of creativity and expression.

**We're on the Web!**

See us at:

<https://education.vermont.gov/student-learning/content-areas/visual-and-performing-arts>