THE MAGAZINE OF LEARNING, LEADERSHIP, AND POLICY

SESP

FALL 2024

From Screens to Streams

Megan Bang's collaborative vision of field-based science education

Northwestern
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY

Dean
Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy

Associate Dean
Coleen T. Coleman (Comm88, MS91)

Associate Deans
Kavita Kapadia Matsko (MS97), Teacher Education
Susan Olson, Undergraduate Education and Student Affairs
Kimberly Scott, Innovation, Program Development

Assistant Dean
Jeanne M. Hughes, Research

Managing Editor
Julie Deardorff

Editorial and Design
Jeff Strayer, Henry McGill
Office of Global Marketing and Communications

Image Credits
Benjamin Breth, Anna Cillan, Steve Drey, Fédération Internationale d'Escrime, Paul Goren, Paula K. Hooper, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Walter Mitchell, Eileen Molony, Nichole Pinkard, Greg Reigh

©2024 Northwestern University. All rights reserved. 9-24/14.3M/JS-HM/3480

SESP is published for alumni, families, and friends of the School of Education and Social Policy. Diverse views are presented and do not necessarily reflect the editor's opinions or Northwestern University's official policies.

SESP welcomes your feedback, including story ideas, comments, class notes, corrections, and address changes.
sespalums@northwestern.edu
847-467-3147

Find more stories and ways to connect:
sesp.northwestern.edu
X: @sesp_nu
Instagram: @sesp_nu
LinkedIn: sesp.northwestern.edu
Facebook: SESPNU

COVER PHOTOGRAPH
BY EILEEN MOLONY

6
Learning in Places
To save the earth, we must connect with it.

10
Seventy Years On
The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision changed their lives.

14
Debunking Teen Stereotypes
Are teens irresponsible and moody—or capable and insightful?

Message from the Dean **1** | School News **2** | Alumni News **17**

DEAR SESP COMMUNITY,

When my youngest son, Ely, was seven, we were on our way to a soccer game. It seemed like every week, we were traveling across the Phoenix valley to attend youth soccer games, which meant we were exposed to an amazing cross section of the place where we lived.

Ely was in the back of our Honda Odyssey, and as we drove along a major thoroughfare, he started asking questions about the many unhoused people along the street. It was a very hot August day, and he worried about where they would get water and where they would sleep and be safe. Before merging onto an interstate, we turned onto a frontage road running past acres of vacant state lands.

Ely asked, “Why doesn’t the government build houses there for the people to live in? They could take care of the land and stay safe.” This led to a prolonged conversation about the land; how jobs work for many people; why we need food, water, and shelter to be happy and healthy; and our responsibilities to ourselves and one another.

Though he didn’t know it at the time, Ely was thinking through a policy solution for people without shelter in a hot desert. His approach was to imagine a world of abundance while confronted with scarcity. I often reflect on that moment because it reminds me that children are inclined to see that we are all in this together, and that it’s possible to envision a world where being part of a greater whole is good.

At the School of Education and Social Policy, I’m surrounded by people who already believe this. Our students are known as leaders while on campus and long after they graduate, while our faculty are committed to engaging the world with influence and impact. This is made possible by staff who care for students and faculty and whose commitments to a just society are evident in how they do their work and live their lives.

As the world’s only school of education and social policy, we strive to be part of something bigger. We recognize we have a responsibility to the peoples and places where we live and work.

I hope we will remain curious and observant. That we will ask questions that start with “why” or “how come.” That we will endeavor to find ways to care for ourselves, one another, and the places where we live and love. This is what it means to be human—and it’s what it means to be part of the SESP family and community.

Warmly,

Bryan Brayboy
Dean and Carlos Montezuma Professor of Education and Social Policy

Address Change: A New Home for SESP

A $10 million gift from Steve and Tracy Cahillane will help transform SESP's new home—the Donald P. Jacobs Center—into a hub for research, learning, and student engagement. The renovation is expected to be completed in 2026.

At the heart of campus along Sheridan Road, the Jacobs Center was built in phases between 1972 and 2001 and most recently housed the Kellogg School of Management. Then known as the School of Education, SESP moved in in 1972—after the Old College building was struck by lightning—and remained there until Annenberg Hall opened in 1993.

In addition to SESP, the renovated building will be the new home of the Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs, the Institute for Policy Research, and several departments of Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences.

For many SESP alumni, Annenberg Hall, with its cozy student affairs office, candy bowl, and glorious lake views, will forever be home. But rest assured, the candy bowl will be making the move. Want to share a favorite memory of your time in Annenberg for a future issue? Please send it to sespalums@northwestern.edu.

Rendering courtesy of William Rawn Associates and Sheehan Nagle Hartray Architects

Studying School Reparations

Northwestern researchers received a five-year, $4.5 million grant from the National Science Foundation to study racial equity, STEM education, and school reform in Evanston.

The project takes into consideration two contentious events: the 1967 closing of a neighborhood elementary school in Evanston's historically Black Fifth Ward, and the school district's 2022 decision to open a new elementary school in the ward as a form of educational repair.

The researchers will work closely with Evanston/Skokie School District 65, the city of Evanston, Black families in the Fifth Ward, and community groups to ensure that students attending the new school experience rich, rigorous, and culturally relevant STEM learning, says **Sepehr Vakil**, a lead investigator and associate professor of learning sciences.

Other key researchers include **Nichole Pinkard**, professor of learning sciences at SESP, and kihana miraya ross, assistant professor of Black studies in Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences.

Mulroy Honored for Grad Student Support

Political scientist **Quinn Mulroy** received the 2024 Ver Steeg Award from Northwestern's Graduate School for her work supporting graduate students throughout the University, whether or not she was assigned to formally mentor them.

Mulroy, an assistant professor of human development and social policy, is cofounder and co-coordinator of the Connections program, a "first look" experience for historically marginalized students planning to apply to PhD programs in human development, social policy, and related fields. She also codeveloped the Politics and Policy Lab to improve mentorship, advising, and training for graduate students, a group that now includes close to 50 people.

"She has a gift of pushing for rigor while being supportive and encouraging," says **Cynthia Coburn**, professor of education and social policy and Mulroy's former program chair.

"Quinn's mentorship is caring, subtle, and pragmatic, with lasting impacts on the SESP and broader Northwestern communities," adds graduate student Claire Mackevicius. "She has helped me bridge multiple disciplines to craft my dissertation projects and consistently provides deep and rich feedback on every draft I share."

The Jack Leese Way

Stephanie Leese Emrich, daughter of Wildcat football player **Jack Leese** (BS57, MS58), was recently reunited with a memorial brick that lived in the Ryan Field end zone for decades. It reads "Jack Leese bleeds purple"—and he really did.

Leese—a legendary football coach at East Leyden High School in Franklin Park, Illinois, a wrestling official, and a member of the Chicagoland Sports Hall of Fame—left behind "a legacy of service and commitment that continues to inspire student athletes," according to an Illinois House resolution passed after his death in 2023.

MSLOC Offers Accelerated Option

In September, the Master of Science in Learning and Organizational Change program began offering an immersive, accelerated one-year degree path. Previously, students could complete a graduate degree or certificate in 1½ to 5 years.

"Flexibility has always been a hallmark of the MSLOC program," says program director **Kimberly Scott**, associate dean for innovation and program development. "We are always looking for new ways to help leaders develop and hone their vision, knowledge, and skills to create sustainable, positive change in organizations."

The accelerated program will start each fall quarter, and students will take classes with other full- and part-time MSLOC students, giving them both a close-knit cohort and full community engagement. The accelerated option is ideal for professionals taking a learning sabbatical, career changers, parents, and others looking for an intensive academic bridge to their next journey, says Diane Knoepke, the program's director of engagement and outreach.

MSLOC graduate Angela Trusty spoke at SESP's 2024 convocation.

Six Things We Learned from Ruha Benjamin

Don't just break things—rebuild them

Ruha Benjamin wants us to reckon with the impossible. A world without prisons? Schools that foster the genius of every child? The self-described "ambivalent academic" chatted with undergraduates over dinner before an uplifting and wide-ranging conversation with SESP dean Bryan Brayboy.

"We need to remind ourselves how many times people have overturned things that seemed impossible to change," said Benjamin, a sociologist and author, during the Nancy and Ray Loeschner Leadership Lecture at the Segal Visitors Center. "We don't just have power in maintaining what's bad. We also have power in eliciting and growing what we actually want."

A professor of African American studies at Princeton University, Benjamin is known for her groundbreaking research on race, technology, and justice. Her latest book is *Imagination: A Manifesto*.

Benjamin left us pondering many ideas:

Abolitionist thinking involves breaking apart and rebuilding. Benjamin's recent books urge readers to question the status quo and think about new ways to approach inequities in healthcare, education, work settings, and more. "What do we want to uproot? What do we want to grow?" she asked. "That can apply to every area of our life—personal, political, and everything in between. Abolition is reckoning with what we consider impossible in our own minds."

Keeping one foot in the academy and the other in the community changes the questions you ask. "It changes what I write about, how I write, how I'm thinking through things. It makes the work more joyful and makes me feel more purposeful."

Environment matters. "I need to be among people who have a collective mission beyond the academy, because that's what I care about. One of my corny mantras is that we don't need stars—we need a constellation."

Hope is a discipline. "Keep yourself hopeful by shining a light on the things that are life-affirming and the places and people that are working to create a more habitable planet for everyone. As a teacher, I can't just diagnose what's wrong. I have to give students a sense of power to think 'OK, what are you going to do about that?'"

"We don't just have power in maintaining what's bad. We also have power in eliciting and growing what we actually want."

Giving up hope is a luxury. "If your life depends on the systems changing into something new, then hope is something you need," she said, quoting James Baldwin: "I can't be a pessimist, because I'm alive. To be a pessimist means that you have agreed that human life is an academic matter. So I'm forced to be an optimist. I'm forced to believe that we can survive whatever we must survive."

Planting a seed is progress. "There was no evidence that slavery would ever end, but because it was unlivable, our ancestors resisted. Most didn't see the end in their lifetime, but they inspired the next generation."

Larissa FastHorse

Mitchell S. Jackson

Victor Lee

Shanequewa Love

Dan McAdams

Sally Nuamah

Susan Olson

Eleanor O'Rourke

Oiyan Poon

Yang Qu

Uri Wilensky

Marcelo Worsley

IN BRIEF

The School of Education and Social Policy was **ranked the no. 5 graduate school** in education for 2024–25 by *U.S. News & World Report*.

The Master of Science in Education and Social Policy program has been renamed the **Teaching, Learning, and Education Program** to encompass both the master's and undergraduate education programs. The name reflects the vibrant community of transformative educators who will join the field as teachers, researchers, nonprofit leaders, curriculum designers, and more.

The higher education administration and policy program launched the **Assessment in Higher Education Certificate** as part of its new executive education series. The certificate's noncredit classes are designed to help higher education professionals improve their assessment, evaluation, and research knowledge and skills.

Professors **Megan Bang** and **Uri Wilensky** were elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Bang and professor **Elizabeth Tipton** were named 2024 American Educational Research Association Fellows. Dean **Bryan Brayboy** was elected to the organization's leadership board.

Brayboy and **Bang** are cochairs of the 2024–25 community-wide One Book One Northwestern reading event featuring Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*.

Guest speakers last year included Princeton University professor **Ruha Benjamin**; playwright **Larissa FastHorse**; writers **Tricia Hersey** and **Mitchell S. Jackson**; alumna and Chicago deputy mayor for education **Jennifer Johnson** (see page 20); and race and education scholar **Oiyan Poon**.

Jeannette Colyvas and **Mesmin Destin** were promoted to professor. **Yang Qu** and **Eleanor O'Rourke** were promoted to associate professor.

Shanequewa Love, who is pursuing a doctorate in human development and social policy, received a National Science Foundation graduate fellowship to support her work looking at the relationship between Black mothers and the child welfare system.

Professor **Sally Nuamah**'s latest book, *Closed for Democracy*, won the W. E. B. Du Bois Distinguished Book Award from the National Conference of Black Political Scientists.

Professor **Dan McAdams** received a distinguished career award from the International Society for the Science of Existential Psychology.

Susan Olson was promoted to associate dean for undergraduate education and student affairs.

The SESP community recognized the scholarship of **David Rapp**, the Walter Dill Scott Professor of Psychology and Learning Sciences, and **David Uttal**, the Kenneth Burgess Professor, during an investiture ceremony and reception.

Sepehr Vakil, associate professor of learning sciences, and SESP alumnus **Victor Lee**, of Stanford University, were named to a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine consensus committee on artificial intelligence and data science in K–12 education.

Marcelo Worsley, associate professor of learning sciences, was named a research fellow with the Jacobs Foundation to support his work helping students learn computer science through sports.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

How Megan Bang is preparing children and teachers for a radically different world

By Julie Deardorff

In today's schools, children are largely sequestered from the natural world. When they do go outside, it's time for recreation; serious learning is presumed to happen mostly within classroom walls. For professor Megan Bang (PhD09), this is precisely the wrong way to prepare young people for a world undergoing rapid climate change. What children and teachers really need, she says, is outdoor education that helps them see they are part of nature and experiences that make learning relevant.

"Kids often think science is a weird school task that has nothing do with the real world," says Bang, a cognitive scientist and professor of learning sciences at SESP. "But people are more likely to express moral concern for the natural world and make collective sustainable

decisions if they view humans as a part of the natural environment and spend substantial time outdoors."

At a time when childhood has largely moved indoors and behind screens—and climate anxiety is rising—Bang and her colleagues are redesigning outdoor education using principles of Indigenous peoples' relationships with land and water. As part of the ambitious Learning in Places research project, funded by the National Science Foundation, Bang's team is using field-based and outdoor investigations into science, civics, and social studies to connect learning with real life.

The initiative builds directly on Bang's decades of research with Indigenous communities that regenerated Indigenous models of education based in lands and waters. Bang and Carrie Tzou (PhD08), professor of education at the University of Washington Bothell, are the project's principal investigators; other key researchers include Shirin Vossoughi, associate professor of learning sciences at SESP, and Anna Lees, who will soon join the early childhood faculty at the University of Washington Seattle.

"Indigenous peoples—our knowledge, leadership, and territories—have to be central to any climate agenda that cares about justice," says Bang, who is of Ojibwe and Italian descent and director of Northwestern's Center for Native American and Indigenous Research. "I want kids to be able to think about how Western and Indigenous science can complement and propel each other. I also want them to understand when deep ethical differences require decisions and behavior shifts."

Plant personhood

The Indigenous sciences, based in relationships, reciprocity, and responsibilities, view the world as a web of interdependent connections. By contrast, Western science often isolates organisms from their surroundings and seeks universal rules that apply everywhere.

Indigenous peoples tend to have a more ecocentric view of human-nature relations than do those from Western cultures, wrote Nikki Barry (PhD23) in a 2023 study published in *Cognition and Instruction*. Barry, now assistant professor at the University of California Los Angeles, was a member of Bang's research team and a teacher in Bang's Indigenous STEAM summer program. "Humans are just another creature in the broader ecosystem with important and unique roles to play," she says.

Many Indigenous peoples have viewed entities in the natural world—like animals, rivers, and mountains—as relatives to be in relationships with. While Learning in Places does not instruct children to practice Indigenous relationships with nature, it does incorporate a closely related concept called "personhood," or the idea that humans aren't the only ones with agency and perspectives. Personhood is often conflated with personification, which is projecting human qualities on nonhumans. But recent scientific advances suggest plants have their own perspectives, communication systems, and social systems—ideas that were once dismissed as pseudoscience. Now they are championed in leading academic journals across scientific fields.

Every year at Bang's two-week Indigenous STEAM summer camps, these theories are put into practice as participants build relationships with plant relatives. One child, assigned the nettle, was asked whether it would be bad if he were stung.

"Indigenous peoples—our knowledge, leadership, and territories—have to be central to any climate agenda that cares about justice." Megan Bang

"It's just the nettle's way of protecting itself," the child replied, illustrating his ability to take the plant's perspective, according to 2023 research by Barry, Bang, and others. Even more striking to the researchers was that when children thought of plants as relatives, they treated them well "not because they viewed themselves as stewards of the environment but because they viewed plants as persons, which helped strengthen their personal relationship and their ethical concern and actions."

"Should we?"

In addition to personhood, these projects emphasize decision-making as a core element of civic participation and ultimately for acting responsibly in a changing climate. In both Learning in Places and Indigenous STEAM camp, students wrestle with dilemmas about nature, asking "should we?" questions that prompt them to consider what should be done and how. In one exercise, students discovered worms on the sidewalk after a rain. Over the course of their debate over whether the worms should be scooped back onto the grass, the children learned about worm anatomy, the ecosystem, soil, decomposition, invasive species, and how worms are connected to other creatures. Relocating the worms, they observed, could affect the food supply for birds, prompting a reasonable question: "Should we move them?"

"The question of how humans should intervene in ecosystem dynamics is one that scientists, policymakers, and agencies that manage the natural world

The free Indigenous STEAM summer program for youth, held in Chicago's LaBagh Woods, features storytelling, community building, traditional Indigenous foods, medicine harvesting, and Indigenous games.

routinely ask," Bang notes. Tzou adds, "If we continue to think about humans as apart from the natural world, the decision of whether to influence it becomes invisible. That's a detriment and barrier when thinking about climate change. We're striving for a connection to the natural world."

Bang first began studying differing views of nature while working on her doctorate in learning sciences at SESP. Then, as now, she wanted schools to be places where all children have a chance to thrive. The Western system prioritizes motivation and interest, she says, but it turns out that "if you put a bunch of kids outside and help them see there's wonder everywhere, you see different learning and new forms of well-being emerge." Indeed, her work draws from other fields, like medicine, that demonstrate how being outdoors improves human health, and work showing that those who learn only about problems often have decreased motivation. A key part of Bang's programs is helping students work toward creating sustainable and just communities, using what they've learned in their field-based investigations.

"If we spend more time helping kids deliberate about what's right and what's good in the world, their politics and capacities for living differently in a changing climate will increase, as will their resiliency to the coming social changes and needs," she says. "We think technology can fix everything and we can just 'green' ourselves out of climate change, but it's going to be bigger than that. At the core are remaking just and sustainable relationships and asking new questions about how we as human beings want to live well with ourselves and others on the planet. That is our grand climate solution."

FIVE WAYS TO MOVE SCHOOL OUTDOORS

Outdoor education is more than sitting outside on tree stumps or taking field trips. Megan Bang has five tips to help educators, parents, and families learn actively with nature.

Make it intergenerational. Walk with an elder or relative and ask what they remember about rainy days and water from their childhood. Encourage children to imagine what Lake Michigan will be like 100 years from now. Gathering perspectives and memories of elders is critical, as is considering a decision's impact many generations into the future.

Start the day with familial and cultural practices. Create a routine by gathering around stories. Indigenous peoples learn how to be in the world through stories, poems, and songs shared across generations.

Remake relationships. Think carefully about culture in the classroom. A study found that children's books with Indigenous illustrators often have animals in realistic habitats, as opposed to wearing clothes or driving cars—which gives children a human-centered understanding of biology.

Visit local outdoor places. Take wondering and observational walks, harvest and forage, grow gardens, and contribute to restoration projects. Schools often focus on homework completion, and, while important, that isn't necessarily what moves your spirit or makes you feel needed.

Embrace the arts and everyday forms of making change. At Bang's summer camp, outdoor science explorations are interlaced with artistic pursuits such as weaving, drumming, and writing. The arts help children dream about possible futures, Bang says.

SCHOOL INTEGRA
70 YEARS LATER

The evolving legacy of the Brown v. Board of Education *decision*

By Alina Dizik

Between bites of TV dinners and plenty of rock 'n' roll, many American families in the 1950s learned that their lives would be changing in a more profound way: School segregation was unconstitutional. In 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* went before the Supreme Court, which ruled that state-sanctioned segregation violated the 14th Amendment. Like other landmark cases, the decision rippled across the nation.

Many policies stemming from *Brown* took decades to implement. Even today, the milestone of the civil rights movement has a troubled legacy and continues to affect educational equity around the country. A recent decision by the Evanston/Skokie School District 65 school board to build a new school in the historically Black part of Evanston—to replace one closed in the 1960s—is seen by proponents as an attempt to remediate past harm.

In May SESP, with Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, marked the 70th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision with a two-day series of seminars and workshops. On the following pages, three members of our community who participated in the event talk about how they were directly affected by the decision.

TION

Above: Paul Goren's Chicago kindergarten class in 1964. Four years later, Goren (second row from top, fourth from left) was one of the only white students in his class.

Disconnected communities

Nichole Pinkard, *Alice Hamilton Professor of Learning Sciences*

What she studies: *Connecting educational opportunities across homes, schools, neighborhoods, and communities*

Pinkard was a high school senior in Kansas City, Kanas, when she visited Northwestern as part of a summer leadership program. To broaden their experience, the group of students spent a day with public school students from Chicago's West Side. Afterward Pinkard's group was asked to reflect on the differences in opportunity they observed in Chicago compared to their own school.

> "The disconnect that grew in my community became the connection to the rest of my life."

"The inequity of our opportunities gnawed at me," says Pinkard, who began thinking about how supportive and connected communities can change lives. She attended Stanford University and later returned to Northwestern to keep studying the issue, becoming one of the first people to earn a doctorate in learning sciences. Today her research in digital learning opportunities for urban youth drives her career.

But she has mixed feelings about the *Brown* legacy, which left scars and tensions in many communities, including her own. Many Black boys ended up dropping out after Kansas City opened a new magnet school in 1979 as a response to school desegregation, she says. In her own case, Pinkard thought she'd be attending the neighborhood school with friends. Instead she rode a bus for 52 blocks to a new high school.

"Every block that took me closer to educational opportunities took me further away from community bonds and friendships I'd developed from birth," she says. "The disconnect that grew in my community became the connection to the rest of my life."

Embracing new neighbors

Paul Goren, *director of SESP's Center for Education Efficacy, Excellence, and Equity*

The center's mission: *To address educational inequities and improve K–12 education by providing school districts with timely, rigorous analyses of student progress*

A 1968 class photo on the wall of Goren's office in Annenberg Hall offers a striking glimpse into his formative years. In it, he's sitting cross-legged in the first row, wearing a tie, and smiling broadly. Goren is white; his classmates at Chicago's Avalon Park Elementary School, also dressed formally and grinning, are nearly all Black.

Goren still remembers when the first Black family moved into his South Side Chicago neighborhood in the early '60s. There was no official welcome, but neighbors noticed. Some white families began to grumble, and a few moved away. Goren's

“My work over the years to improve urban schools was a result of living through an era of white flight.”

parents, both white, had moved into their home in 1958 and lived there for nearly six decades, ignoring calls from real estate agents. His school years felt carefree and safe. “We all played wiffle ball in the backyard and rode our bikes in the park, yet all around me the white families were rapidly leaving,” he says.

Goren began a career in public schools after attending Williams College and later earning a doctorate in education from Stanford. He raised his family in Evanston and sent his three children to Evanston/Skokie School District 65’s public schools.

Later, as superintendent of the district in 2014, he commissioned an equity audit of every building, created an equity statement and policy, moved the curriculum to embrace culturally relevant practices, and, after recognizing that a disproportionate percentage of students of color were being disciplined and suspended, shifted the district toward more restorative practices.

In 2021 Goren joined SESP, where he founded the Center for Education Efficacy, Excellence, and Equity research practice partnership.

“My work over the years to improve urban schools was a result of living through an era of white flight,” he says. “From my perch, there was nothing wrong with the schools, but rather with the adults who would not embrace integrated school environments.”

Hope in learning

Paula K. Hooper, *assistant professor of instruction in education and learning sciences*

What she studies: *How to help educators approach learning as a cultural process and use technology to support inclusive teaching*

Hooper’s parents moved to the liberal community of Shaker Heights, Ohio, so their three children could access quality education in the city’s schools. When the district began the integration process in 1970, the Hoopers volunteered to bus Paula, who went with 30 other Black children to a predominantly white school in the wealthiest part of town. White children, meanwhile, were bussed to the predominantly Black school.

Paula’s father, a foreman at the post office, served on the citizens council that devised the voluntary bussing program. Her mother was a teacher in Cleveland Public Schools; during spring breaks, Paula would join her mother’s class, working with children and setting up lessons. “Education was a big deal in our family,” Hooper says.

But for Hooper, integration was “both heaven and hell.” While many of the Black teachers who transferred to Hooper’s new elementary school were incredibly supportive, it was difficult to find a sense of belonging. When Hooper once asked what she could do to move into the highest math group, a white teacher dismissed the question. At the time, it left her feeling she had experienced something she couldn’t quite name. Now she calls it racism.

Still, the experience fueled her desire to teach in ways that help children believe their ideas and backgrounds are valued in the classroom. When she returned to Shaker Heights as a second-grade teacher, Hooper designed the kind of environment that she had longed for, one that helps all students find their strengths as learners.

“It was a turning point in my commitment,” she says. “Good teaching incudes listening to how students talk and think. It is about validating their ideas in the classroom as well as recognizing family, community, and cultural practices in the learning process.

Good teaching recognizes “family, community, and cultural practices.”

“If we go back to what *Brown* was really trying to say, we will keep pushing the new ideas and tools for learning and embrace the myriad ways of thinking that all children bring to the classroom.”

Are We Wrong About Teens?

The notion of rebellious teenage behavior may be more nuanced than previously thought

By Alina Dizik

Picture a TikTok-loving teen living in the US: rebellious, bored with school, disconnected from family life, and focused on relationships with friends. At least that's how the stereotype goes.

But that's only part of the story, says Yang Qu, a psychologist at SESP who explores how parenting, stereotypes, and cultural experiences can shape teenagers' brains. During adolescence, the brain undergoes sweeping changes as neural processes reshape how teens act, think, and function. And in the US, teens are steeped in an environment that dramatizes their irresponsibility and moodiness, setting up what Qu calls a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"How children think about teens in general can influence what expectations they set for themselves as they navigate these years," he says. "Guiding youth to see teens as responsible can help them thrive during adolescence."

Qu is among several SESP researchers at the school's Center for Culture, Brain, Biology, and Learning who are exploring the power of culture over behavior and brain development. Despite a long history of incorporating culture into the study of behavioral and psychological development in children—and more recent cultural neuroscience research on how culture influences brain function—researchers know little about the role of culture in youth's brain development.

> "Imagine a shift where society and media highlight the strengths and potential of teenagers." Yang Qu

Developmental cultural neuroscience, an emerging field Qu has helped create, can fill this gap by blending theories and tools from developmental psychology, cultural psychology, and neuroscience. Using novel research methods, including functional magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI, to capture the brain in action, Qu's work with Chinese and American children suggests that thwarting negative stereotypes and helping teens see themselves as responsible can improve their outcomes in school, decrease risky behavior, and allow them to flourish in other ways.

"Yang's work highlights the power of belief in contouring our realities and is transforming our entire discipline," says Claudia Haase, associate professor of human development and social policy.

Culture and brain development

Qu, who spent his own teenage years in Beijing, studied psychology at Fudan University in Shanghai and at New York University, where he earned a master's degree. He later earned a master's in statistics and a doctorate in psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Since arriving at Northwestern in 2018 after a postdoctoral psychology fellowship at Stanford University, he's won four early-career awards, including from the National Science Foundation and the Society for the Study of Human Development. But his research path began to take shape after he moved to the US and began noticing a contrast with his own upbringing in China.

"During my teen years, I started to pursue my own interests, such as writing poetry, yet I always felt a strong sense of obligation toward my parents," he says. "For me, being a teenager was never synonymous with disrespecting parents or disengaging from school. I was quite surprised by the predominantly negative portrayal of teens in Western societies and wondered if changing this narrative could have a positive effect on them."

Decades of psychology and anthropology research show the teenage experience varies across cultures and people. Qu, intrigued by the underlying mechanism, began to suspect cultural stereotypes or oversimplified beliefs might play a role after his own research found that American and Chinese youth view the teenage years differently.

In his review paper "Stereotypes of Adolescence" in *Child Development Perspectives,* he showed that both US and Chinese seventh graders saw the teen years as a time for hanging out with peers and gaining independence. But the Americans imagined more negative stereotypical behavior, such as ignoring parents and skipping schoolwork. Chinese youth, influenced by Confucian tradition, felt teens should be fulfilling family responsibilities and excelling academically. Hong Kong

youth were on a middle ground: They had more Westernized views of adolescence than did their mainland Chinese peers.

These culturally rooted notions about adolescence can influence brain development, says Qu, who uses neuroimaging to demonstrate significant changes in brain function. In one of the first studies to explore how youth stereotypes affect the brain, he showed that negative views increased activity in the part of the brain involved in cognitive control, leading to more risk-taking over time. The study, published in *Child Development*, "highlighted that internalized negative stereotypes can shape neural and behavioral development," he says.

Moreover, the stereotypes are crucial in understanding different development paths during adolescence. The teens' differing views partly explain "why US teens show decreased school engagement over time compared to their Chinese counterparts," Qu says. Hong Kong youth's views of teens as irresponsible contributes to a higher rate of risky behavior, such as lying or stealing, compared to mainland China, according to his study of teen stereotypes in Hong Kong and Chongqing.

"It's time to change the narrative. A positive portrayal could spread uplifting messages and help teens flourish." Yang Qu

Debunking perceptions

Qu later helped develop an experimental intervention that suggested that stereotypes are not destiny and it's possible to counter negative perceptions. In a study of more than 400 Chinese youth, published in 2020 in *Child Development*, researchers talked with students about adults' stereotypes of teens, then suggested that the teenage years are in fact a time when youth take on greater responsibility.

Students were asked to describe specific examples of teens behaving responsibly at home, at school, and elsewhere. The study tracked how students thought about teens in general and how they behaved after this intervention, comparing them with control groups that only described typical teen behavior. The research underscored the causal link between stereotypes of teens and youth adjustment, laying the groundwork for future interventions in schools and families.

"Rather than just telling them that teens are responsible, we wanted the students to generate their own examples that they had observed," says study coauthor Eva Pomerantz, Qu's mentor and director of the Center for Social and Behavioral Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "We wanted them to envision it and for it to be theirs. We now know that changing students' stereotypes about teens can influence their behavior in the short term. The big question is whether we can develop a program for long-term change."

Qu's work is now driven by what he sees as a gaping hole in the field: the lack of attention to culture in the study of brain development. In an article in the journal *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, he points out that 99 percent of publications related to adolescent developmental neuroscience use subjects who are from Western countries or whose race and ethnicity are unknown.

"Yang is not afraid to suggest bold ideas and then pursue them in his research," Pomerantz says. "He is really passionate about what he is doing, which means he reads and thinks and then does what needs to be done, even if it seems like it might be impossible."

"Imagine a shift where society and media highlight the strengths and potential of teenagers," Qu says. "It's time to change the narrative. A positive portrayal could spread uplifting messages and help teens flourish."

EMOTIONS, CULTURE, AND BRAIN SCIENCE

At SESP's Center for Culture, Brain, Biology, and Learning, psychologists collaborate on research looking at how things like cultural beliefs, parental monitoring and warmth, neighborhood shootings, and fights with spouses can influence brain activity and development.

While center director Yang Qu examines how cultural attitudes and parenting practices influence Chinese and American teens, colleague Emma Adam, the Edwina Tarry Professor of Education, looks at physiological factors, including how racism, stress, sleep, and discrimination affect the brain and body.

Claudia Haase, meanwhile, studies facial expressions, signals from the body, language, and other cues to examine how emotions can transform relationships, friendships, and parent-child relationships. She is especially interested in how couples navigate the ups and downs in their relationships as they get older.

"The center is instrumental in bringing us together to understand how cultures and cultural beliefs can get into our mind, under our skin, and into our brain to shape human development," says Haase, who recently collaborated with Qu on a study about environmental influences on teen depression.

The Right to Read

Have you read a banned book lately?

Rachel Dunifon (PhD99) helped celebrate freedom of expression during a read-a-thon featuring excerpts from banned or challenged books. Dunifon, dean of Cornell University's College of Human Ecology, researches how policies, programs, and family settings influence the development of less-advantaged children.

Over the past year, the number of challenged library books has surged across the United States to the highest levels ever documented by the American Library Association. The most recent numbers show efforts to censor 4,240 titles in schools and libraries, topping the previous high of 2,571 in 2022.

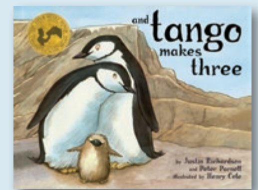
Dunifon chose a section from the classic Judy Blume novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. Challenged almost immediately after it was published in 1970, the novel details the anxieties of an adolescent girl over bras, periods, boys, religion, and other issues.

What did *Are You There God?* mean to you as a child?
Judy Blume was one of my favorite authors. Unlike most other writers, she knows how to convey how weird and awkward it can be to be a kid, developing characters who are real, flawed, funny, confused, and evolving in a way that resonates with children. As a child, reading her books made me feel like I wasn't alone and helped me realize that everyone experiences hard, fun, strange things as they grow through childhood.

Which excerpt did you pick and why?
I chose the first two chapters, when Margaret is introducing herself to the reader and has just moved to New Jersey from New York City. I moved a lot growing up, and that part of the book resonated with me—how hard it can be to move to a new place, meet new kids, start at a new school.

How did the read-a-thon go?
It was fun to reconnect with a book that I haven't read for a long time (although I did recently see the movie, which was excellent). I enjoyed seeing people's reactions as I channeled my inner 12-year-old while reading Margaret's thoughts and words. It was also great to see what my colleagues chose to read and to hear them talk about what those readings meant to them—a nice opportunity to learn more about my colleagues in a new way.

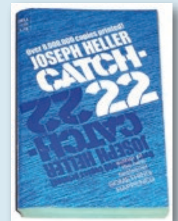
And Tango Makes Three



"I have very fond memories of reading this story with my children about two daddy penguins who so lovingly raised their family."

Rebekah Stathakis, curriculum and assessment coordinator and instructor in the teaching, learning, and education program

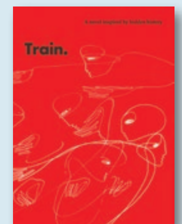
Catch-22



"While Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* on the surface is a novel about war, it really exposes the beauty and horror of life, both mundane and at its extremes, through the lens of absurdity. Books that are good for the soul do not need to be heavy or conventionally serious."

Colin Sheaff, senior developer in SESP's FUSE program

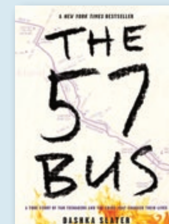
Train

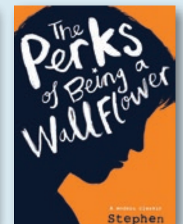


"My own book, which came out of my doctoral research at SESP, has been challenged by teachers, school districts, and parents and removed from lesson plans. I've even received a request from a group of high school teachers to send them a version with the gay characters taken out."

Danny M. Cohen (PhD11), associate professor of instruction

The 57 Bus* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower





"I love reading banned books. I let students discover them without first labeling them as banned, but the ones I assigned this year could easily fall onto a banned books list based on their themes: racism, drugs, and police acting badly."

Brian Lynch (WCAS95, MS23), English teacher at Chicago's Taft High School

Edward Whipple

Georgia L. Lorenz

Chala Holland

Chloe Grainger

Anita Thomas

William A. Sandoval

Kisa Sthankiya

Ummul-Kiram Kathawalla

Emily Machado

Tyler Hough

Eleanor Laws

Lanetta Haynes Turner

Keeley Sorokti

James Arvidson

50s

Harlan Knosher (MS59), a former professor of physical education and director of athletics at Knox College, received an honorary degree from the school. His tenure is legendary; he started as a faculty member in 1960, was promoted to full professor in the late '70s, and retired in 2000.

70s

Pamela Bolotin Joseph (MS71, PhD78) published *Teaching for Moral Imagination: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*. She is principal lecturer emerita at the University of Washington Bothell's School of Educational Studies.

Dennis Paige (MS74) published the memoir *Jolts, Synchronicities, Dream Catchers, and Milagros: A Memoir into the Fire of Original Experience*. A longtime environmental educator and conservationist, he received several major ecological landscaping awards throughout his career.

Edward Whipple (MS75) is interim vice president for student affairs and dean of students at Lake Forest College, a "retirement job" after nearly three decades as vice president for student affairs at Montana State University Billings, Bowling Green State University, Willamette University, and Boise State University.

Jordan Horowitz (BS78, MA81) retired as chief operating officer at the Institute for Evidence-Based Change. He now volunteers as a docent at California's Long Beach Museum of Art and as a grant writer for local nonprofits.

80s

Catherine French (BS86) is senior vice president and head of corporate initiatives for Cenlar FSB.

Anita Thomas (BS89) served as president of North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. She was the first woman and first person of color in the role. She was previously executive vice president and provost at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

90s

Eleanor Laws (BS90) was appointed by the National Labor Relations Board as associate chief administrative law judge in charge of its San Francisco Office of Judges. She has been an NLRB judge since 2011 and was previously a judge for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Social Security Administration.

Elizabeth "Betsy" Partoyan (BS93) joined the National League of Cities as a senior fellow at the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families.

Georgia L. Lorenz (MS95) has been president of Seminole State College of Florida since 2018.

Steve Schnur (BS96, Medill97) is chief operating officer of real estate development and investment firm CRG.

Eric R. Brown (WCAS97, BS99), a biology teacher at Evanston Township High School, served on a National Academy of Education steering committee as part of the Evaluating and Improving Teacher Preparation Programs project.

William A. Sandoval (PhD98) is head of the STEM education department at North Carolina State's College of Education.

Matt Fordenwalt (BS99) is senior vice president of life-cycle services for Rockwell Automation.

00s

Jolen Anderson (BS00, Pritzker03) is chief people and community officer for coaching platform BetterUp. She's also an executive advisory board member for SemperVirens Venture Capital.

Lanetta Haynes Turner (BS00), chief of staff for the Cook County board president, received the Motorola Solutions Foundation Excellence in Public Service award from the Civic Federation.

Chala Holland (BS01), a former teacher and administrator at Evanston Township High School, is the first Black woman to serve as superintendent of Township High School District 113 in the northern Chicago suburbs. She was previously assistant superintendent for Naperville schools and a principal at Lake Forest High School.

Rachel Wolan (BS02) is the first chief product officer for Webflow, a platform for building websites without writing code.

Juleigh Nowinski Konchak (BS03, FSM16) was appointed to the Illinois State Board of Health by governor JB Pritzker.

Faisal Mohyuddin (MS03), an award-winning writer, artist, and educator, was named to this year's "Lit 50" list by *Newcity* magazine. He also published a new book of poetry, *Elsewhere: An Elegy*.

Grace H. Yoon (BS04) is deputy city manager for Long Beach, California.

Ruby Mendenhall (PhD05) was appointed poet laureate for the city of Urbana, Illinois.

Betsy Parker (MS05) received the Mikki Jeschke Academic Adviser of the Year Award from Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis.

Kisa Sthankiya (BS06) was appointed to the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission review board by governor JB Pritzker. She is a partner at Rusin & Maciorowski in Chicago.

Emily Machado (BS09), an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, received the Chancellor's Inclusive Excellence Teaching Award and, from the Literacy Research Association, the Early Career Achievement Award.

Dave Musser (MS09) is deputy director of policy implementation and oversight for federal student aid at the US Department of Education.

10s

Adam Cebulski (MS10) founded the consulting and coaching service Transform.forward to bring strategic and sustainable changes in universities, public agencies, nonprofits, and startups.

Keeley Sorokti (MS11) won the Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award for her contributions to informal learning. A director of knowledge and collaboration at Sift, a fraud protection software company, she was a SESP instructor in the master's in learning and organizational change program from 2020 to 2023.

Roberto Cabanelas (MS13), vice president of corporate human resources for Archer Daniels Midland, was appointed cochair of its North American Hispanic/Latino employee resource group. He is a member of the board of directors of the Latino Policy Forum in Chicago.

Hailey Danz (BS13) brought home the gold in the women's PTS2 triathlon event at the 2024 Paralympics. Danz has also won two silver Paralympic triathlon medals.

Chloe Grainger (BS13) was named director of policy and advocacy for the National NeighborWorks Association, which lobbies for affordable housing and community development. He previously did policy work for Illinois congresswoman Lauren Underwood.

Ummul-Kiram Kathawalla (BS13) is assistant professor of clinical practice in the psychology department at Suffolk University.

Becca Portman (BS13) is the community success lead for the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation.

Sanjay Lumpkin (BS16, SPS20) is an assistant coach with the Atlanta Hawks. He was previously a player development coach with the Utah Jazz.

Courtney Bass Sherizen (Cert17) is chief talent and culture officer at the Wikimedia Foundation, which operates Wikipedia.

Tyler Hough (MS19) was selected as a national fellow by the Society of Experiential Education. He also published "Elevating Community Voices Through Place-Based Education Initiatives in Chicago" in the journal of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities.

20s

James Arvidson (MS20) is a career development coordinator with the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford.

Matt Casler (BS20), associate consultant at Bain & Company in New York City, helped lead the 20th annual business conference for Out for Undergrad, a leadership development organization for LGBTQ+ undergraduate students.

Sebastian Rivera (BS20) won the 65-kilogram men's freestyle wrestling bronze medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics. He was the flag bearer for Team Puerto Rico.

Dee Dee Hong (MS21) published a paper in *Teaching and Teacher Education* highlighting the lack of attention paid to immigrant students in teacher education.

Gabby Rios (BS21) is an adviser for first-year students at the University of North Carolina and teaches sections of the Thriving course.

Kristine Lu (PhD23), a postdoctoral research fellow at Johns Hopkins University, is joining the faculty of Northeastern University's College of Arts, Media, and Design as assistant professor.

Lauren Walcott (BS24) is a Bill Emerson National Hunger fellow at the Congressional Hunger Center; she works in the New York City mayor's food policy office.

Please send all news updates and address changes to sespalums@northwestern.edu.
For more class notes, visit sesp.northwestern.edu.

Jen Johnson's Vision for Education

Supporting students after the school day ends

If **Jennifer Johnson** (BS03) had her way, adults would show they care for kids by turning struggling schools into neighborhood hubs. These centers would offer extended academic, health, and social support well beyond the traditional school day. And they'd be led and driven by community members.

It's not just a vision—the Sustainable Community School Initiative is a key focus of Johnson's work as Chicago's deputy mayor for education, youth, and human services. "I really believe this model is the future of schools," she says. "It can be challenging to pull off—there's resistance to sharing power. But if leadership has the right mindset, it can be truly transformational and create the kind of loving, successful school spaces that all our students deserve."

Johnson, who returned to SESP earlier this year to talk to graduate students, began her career as a teacher at Chicago's Lincoln Park High School and became a leader in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) before her current role. Here's how she got there.

A family affair

Several of Johnson's family members are educators, including her father, a pillar of the Grand Rapids, Michigan, community where he taught high school history for 35 years.

"I saw the impact that he made on generations of families in my hometown," she recalls. "We'd go out and he'd be accosted in beautiful ways at the grocery store. We had a mailbox on our porch where students would turn in homework. I never seriously considered another path."

At SESP, Johnson advocated for more student-teaching placements in urban districts, which at the time was not a common practice. After graduation, she taught high school US history and what she calls "Eurocentric world history. Then I fought to teach African American history, which I did for seven years and really loved," she says.

"By centering young people, we can get to the root causes of many of our city's challenges."

A fighter for the union

While at Lincoln Park High, Johnson helped form the CTU caucus that elected Karen Lewis as president in 2010. For the next three years, she resisted Lewis's calls to work for the union; she loved her classroom. But the final nudge came after a colleague and mentor told her it was time to take on something bigger and advocate at a higher level. "It was the combination of Black mentors and friends pushing me out of my comfort zone that helped me make the decision," Johnson says.

At the CTU, Johnson initially worked on teacher evaluation and helped implement the eighth and tenth grade "Reparations Won" curriculum. The program covers Chicago's monetary reparations to victims of torture under former police commander John Burge; Johnson worked with educators on the curriculum, led related professional development sessions, and met many torture survivors. "It was very much a passion project," she says. "It's very relevant to this day and to ongoing struggles for justice."

In 2017, while serving as chief of staff at CTU, she began working on the Sustainable Community School Initiative, a partnership with Chicago Public Schools that provides wraparound academic, health, and social support beyond the traditional school day.

"Often kids in Chicago are demonized," she says. "We are trying to reverse that as well as prevent the trauma and the trappings" that can trip young people up.

Supporter of youth

As deputy mayor for education, youth, and human services since 2023, Johnson has been able to continue her work from a very different vantage point.

"We have not eradicated the causes of why young people participate in violence," she says. "We have to double down on that while also seeing their humanity and their needs. That requires us to see the needs of their families as well. By centering young people, we can get to the root causes of many of our city's challenges."

Sarah Whitten

As regional manager for finance and implementation for the US Trade and Development Agency, Whitten (BS09) went where she was needed most

I was born in Tokyo, Japan. My father was originally stationed there as an engineer with the US Air Force. He met my mother and stayed. I attended high school at the American School in Japan before coming to Northwestern. Having a multiracial upbringing sparked my interest in and appreciation for different cultures.

I never imagined working in finance. As an undergrad, I wanted to blend development, business, and strategy. Everything changed thanks to my SESP internship at Merrill Lynch.

The experience led to a job at an emerging markets bank in New York, where I worked closely with multinational corporations on their funding needs.

After a few years, it hit me: I was facilitating transactions in emerging markets, yet I'd never truly experienced life in one. I began applying for roles in the bank's emerging markets where English is widely spoken. South Africa, the most promising prospect, felt like the perfect next step in my journey.

Not understanding Africa, some people were skeptical. However, I was aware of South Africa's robust banking system and saw it as a calculated risk worth taking. When you have a gut feeling about something, it's important to pursue it.

Since then, I made the leap from the private to the public sector, joining a federal agency dedicated to supporting early-stage infrastructure projects. Our agency provides support to infrastructure developers, and I focus on securing funding for our sub-Saharan Africa projects.

Our projects ranged from helping a Nigerian diaspora doctor who is expanding her telehealth business in underserved communities to supporting internet connectivity in South African townships. Our projects improved the lives of many.

After spending 11 years in South Africa, it all felt quite familiar. Even relatively challenging conditions, such as rolling electricity blackouts, are things one learns to live with, and I put in place the necessary precautions, the same way the locals do. The positives about the country—its friendly people, 11 official languages, multiculturalism, and *braais*, or barbecues—often do not make it into mainstream media.

It is best to be your authentic self in the workplace. Being in a male-dominated field, I attempted earlier in my career to stay current on which sports team was playing a match. But it's difficult to keep this up if it is not genuine. Don't be shy about your interests or hobbies; your colleagues might have something to learn from you.

Every step along the way shaped my journey. Infrastructure can profoundly improve people's lives. By using trade and investment principles, it is possible to grow economic prosperity and build top-notch, sustainable infrastructure.

AS TOLD TO VIKKI ORTIZ

Northwestern
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY

Walter Annenberg Hall
2120 Campus Drive
Evanston, IL 60208-2610

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Fox Co.

GRACE AND SPEED

In her Olympic debut, fencer Daphne Chan, a first-year SESP student, reached the round of 16 in the women's foil individual event at the Grand Palais in Paris. Her finish was the best result ever for a Hong Kong competitor.