



Michelle after hanging her students' cranes



Ground Zero in Hiroshima  
71 years later



Plaque at the Hiroshima  
Hypocenter

## The Hypocenter of Learning

Michelle Van Sant, Rio Rancho Elementary School – Rio Rancho, NM



### CRITICAL THINKING

As an elementary teacher in New Mexico, the Manhattan Project is an important part of my curriculum. Robert

Oppenheimer's secret city of Los Alamos and the Trinity Site are important aspects in the development of the atomic bomb, but I felt I was only teaching half the story. Although I utilized the novel *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, I wanted to include more of the Japanese perspective. To complete my unit, I designed my FFT fellowship to familiarize myself with Japanese culture, both past and present, and to learn firsthand the consequences of the atomic bomb on the people of Hiroshima.

On August 6, the anniversary of the bombing, Hiroshima holds a Peace Ceremony to remember those who were lost and advocate for a world free from nuclear weapons. I planned my

fellowship to be there this year and my students made chains of origami peace cranes, which I hung at the Children's Peace Memorial. Although I couldn't understand the speakers at the ceremony, the release of doves and minute of silence at the exact time the bomb was dropped was universally understood. I listened to three atomic bomb survivors share their experiences in English and cried at their heartfelt memories of losing loved ones. I was shown how to make origami cranes and roses, and how to write "peace" and "love" in Japanese calligraphy. At sundown, I decorated a paper lantern and floated it downriver with my wishes for peace.

Seventy-one years later, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain a controversial subject, and while I believe it's important for students to

empathize with the victims, I also believe it's important to teach the bombings in context. This year, I plan to expand my lessons to include activities which encourage students to think critically about WWII and the future use of nuclear weapons.

*Continued on page 1*

*Today's teachers prepare students for the complex demands of their lives and careers. This Odyssey highlights a sampling of FFT Fellows' experiences categorized by 21st century skills.*

## The Hypocenter of Learning

(Continued)

Students will consider the cause and effect relationship between Pearl Harbor, the Manhattan Project and Hiroshima/Nagasaki. With the knowledge and variety of primary sources I obtained on my fellowship, I will introduce the Japanese perspective. Students will read firsthand accounts of child survivors to determine the effects of the bomb on structures and human life. There are many commonalities in the accounts and my students will identify and hypothesize potential reasons for those commonalities. They will analyze topographical maps and photographs of the destruction in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to determine why the first bomb resulted in more casualties, although the second bomb was more powerful. Then, they will compare the images of these sites to the images of traditional bomb sites and note the differences. After reading students the book *My Hiroshima* and several poems from the children's poetry book *The Second Movement*, students will create a fictional diary entry from the perspective of a child who survived the blast. They will then write a letter to the leader of a fictional country, explaining the reasons why nuclear weapons should not be used and the benefits of verbal communication. Finally, students will integrate their feelings toward the tragic events of WWII into a work of art worthy of a public location in Los Alamos.

By introducing the human experience to our study of New Mexico's role in the creation of the atomic bomb, my students will develop knowledge as well as empathy. As tomorrow's citizens and caretakers of our future world, what could be more important?



Children's paper peace lanterns

**Fund Facts:** Michelle is a National Board Certified Teacher with 22 years of experience, most recently specializing in elementary gifted services. She believes that students must become globally aware in order to make constructive decisions for humanity.

## From the Executive Director

Welcome back to all teachers and students and especially our 7000 Fellows working in 4338 classrooms in schools and districts across the country. We congratulate them on daring to innovate and on bringing authentic learning back into their classrooms.

Though they study different topics, and venture to different destinations, FFT Fellows return from their summer fellowships invigorated to teach. They share a passion for improving their students' learning experiences and a deeper purpose to give back to their communities.

Our Fellows are standard-bearers for attributes that are central to effective teaching. They show:



**Initiative** as self-starters and visionaries who think outside the box



**Courage** as risk-takers to expand outside their comfort zone



**Heart** to believe deeply in the potential of their students to do great things



**Cultural** sensitivity to create learning environments that leverage the assets of their students' diverse cultures



**Commitment** to improvement.

No matter what the curriculum or current standards, the science of teaching takes resilience, thought and continuous learning. The art of teaching comes from the heart and soul and embodies creative expression. The people who teach well are those who believe they can change students' lives, influence them and mold them, and, so they DO.

Celebrate all of the great teachers in your life, those in the classroom or out. We can't "DO" this world without them.

Ever forward,

**Karen K. Webb**  
Executive Director

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## Our Mission

Fund for Teachers enriches the personal and professional growth of teachers by recognizing and supporting them as they identify and pursue opportunities around the globe that will have the greatest impact on their practice, the academic lives of their students and on their school communities.



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"Tribute to Lost Sons and a Mother's Mourning" in Mexico City



Julianna in front of "The Art of Our Community" in Oakland



"Street Art for Public Safety" in New York City

# Muraling History and Advocacy

Juliana Houston, Westlake Middle School – Oakland, CA



## CREATIVITY

This summer, I had the luxury to be a learner. My focus was to absorb as much as I could about

the history, techniques, politics and aesthetics of street art to bring a high-quality, culturally relevant, engaging art curriculum back to my students.

I traveled to two cities key to the history and development of street art to do research.

First, I traveled to Mexico City where muraling gained recognition as a respected art form and played a prominent role in creating Mexican pride and bringing communities together after the Mexican Revolution. I learned about the Cacaxtla Murals created in 650 CE and traveled to Teotihuacan to see these early murals. I visited the National Palace, National History Museum and Palace of Fine Arts to marvel at the massive social political murals of Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. I went on street art tours to learn about contemporary artists, current politics and regulations surrounding street art and the ways in which street art raises awareness for social and political issues.

I practiced Spanish and have a renewed understanding for what it feels like to be a language learner.

Next, I traveled to New York City where urban youth took the world by storm as graffiti and hip hop culture exploded and catalyzed modern street art around the world. I visited major museums to see the work of early New York street artists such as Jean Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. I was led on impressive street art and subway art tours; I learned about politics and legality, types of street art, and contemporary street artists.

Back in Oakland, I am sorting pictures, drawings and notes to synthesize my learning and write two units of study. The first unit will engage students in the art of our community, starting with a community street art tour that helps them make sense of this art in a broader context. Students will learn the history of street art, techniques for creating street art and to name, identify and differentiate between types of street art. Using Mexico City, New York and Oakland as focus cities, students will engage in critical thinking and discourse to understand the complex perspectives

within a city toward street art. In the second unit, students will learn about how street art has been used for social activism. Students will research an issue about which they feel passionate and create art to express their learning to others. In the culminating project, 120 art students will create lasting community art that will beautify our school and community for students, families and neighbors.

This fellowship allowed me to devote myself to the learning and creation of a curriculum designed to fit the cultures, identities, experiences and interests of my students. Through these units, my students will be introduced to artists who look like them, live in similar situations and address issues that resonate with them. My students will gain skills to more deeply see and engage with the art of our community, to teach others about this art and to share their voice through public art.

**Fund Facts:** *Juliana is a Teach for America alumni and former math department teacher leader in the Oakland Unified School District.*

## Also



### Lisa Marien

Nathan Hale Arts Magnet - New London, CT

Studied with professional musicians and leading music educators in the field of contemporary a cappella music to create authentic ensemble experiences with students that develop higher order thinking, promote teamwork, ignite passion and cultivate the will to persevere in music and all areas of life.



### Maya Cunningham

JC Nalle Elementary - Washington, D.C.

Participated in an Orff Afrique workshop at Nunya Music Academy in the Volta Region of Ghana, learning traditional Ghanaian songs, games, dances, percussion and Orff techniques, to create a global music curriculum for Title I, inner city students.



Traversing an Inca Road in Lares Valley, Peru



Escaping a sudden snowstorm in the Andes

# Bringing the Incas Back To Class

Thomas Kenning, Plato Academy – Clearwater, FL



## GLOBAL AWARENESS

I wanted to conduct research in South America because there is something seriously lacking in the historical and cultural education of our students, at least where I teach. The Andes are one of the world’s cradles of civilization – where civilization as we know it was literally invented without the benefit of copying the example of some other nearby settled society. The Inca themselves were one of the great civilizations of the world, no matter how you measure it – in art, technology, wealth, military power, population, area controlled, or influence on world history. These people independently invented agriculture, astronomy and a whole social and economic system that stands alongside any other devised in the history of the world.

And yet...any officially-adopted textbook I have ever been issued is silent on these subjects. Best case scenario, the world of the Inca gets a sidebar mention or a couple of paragraphs. Doesn’t this absence in our classrooms create a bias in the minds of students? Does it not suggest that there are certain “real” civilizations – the Greeks, of course, and the Romans – and that others outside the so-called canon made a nice effort, but are somehow secondary?

This is a problem.

For almost one month, I documented Peruvian Incan culture (past and present)

to inform an interdisciplinary unit that also asks broad, investigative questions about cultural and economic imperialism that resonate to this day. I hiked ancient Inca paths to Machu Picchu, observed villagers on an island in the middle of Lake Titicaca working to keep vestiges of Inca tradition and culture alive, explored the Potosi silver mine that was the lynchpin of Spanish colonial rule in South America, and experienced the Sacred Valley, where Inca spiritual and monumental architecture reached its zenith. This firsthand research, along with the academic research I have already begun, will provide for the development of a richer curriculum aimed at grades 6-12 social studies students. This curriculum will be employed in my own middle school classrooms and posted online as part of a free, media rich online textbook I created where history education is driven not by the cultural biases of legislators, but the actual landscape of history. All lessons are aligned with relevant common core standards and foster deeper cultural and historical awareness of Inca society, past and present, as well as the distinct, blended identity that developed in the colonial years and continues to shape life in rural Peru today.

Without Fund for Teachers, my work would be a mere shadow of what it is. The organization’s generosity allowed

me to *really* investigate – in real, in person – the culture and history that I’m trying to cover. Fund for Teachers is unique in the degree to which it trusts educators to make their own decisions about what is worth their time and energy. I have won other grants from other organizations, and I have had many incredible experiences in this way. But this was the first time I designed my own itinerary and named my own outcomes. In a field that typically belittles its practitioners (educators are required to perform many prescribed menial tasks with little bearing on our actual quality or ability as professionals in order to maintain our state certifications) my fellowship was a breath of fresh air. I was treated like a professional and trusted to set my own goals and objectives – and design a plan to meet those objectives. Almost no one else in the field affords educators the same courtesy, and for that more than anything, I feel so honored to have participated in this program.

**Fund Facts:** Prior to being named an FFT Fellow, Thomas participated in the US Department of Education’s Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad in China. He’s taught every level of student, from preK through college, and holds a Master’s degree in History from American University.

## Also



**Luseane Vake Tafisi & Whitney Anopol**  
Pacific Heritage Academy - Salt Lake City, UT

Investigated how educators in New Zealand implement Pacific Heritage culture into curriculum and school culture to better engage and teach Pacific Islander students and their families.

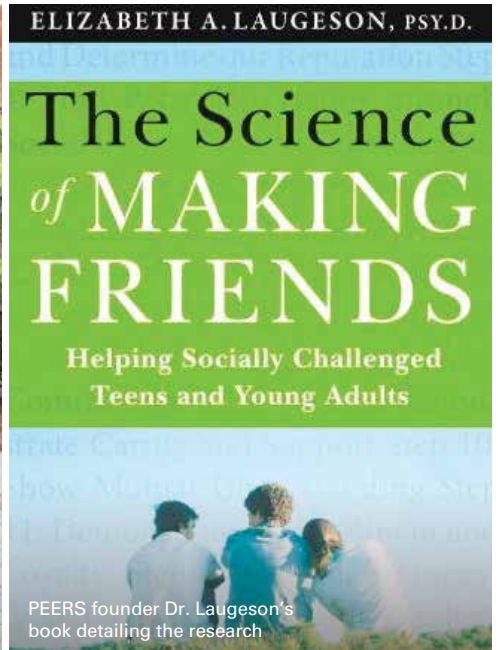


**Sarah Lytle**  
Sands Montessori Elementary - Cincinnati, OH

Embarked on a self-designed study tour of Indonesia to learn about the beliefs and practices of ancient and modern Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, and deepen personal and student understanding of world religions.



The new PEER group for Sara, Travis and Crystal



PEERS founder Dr. Laugeson's book detailing the research

## The Importance of Friendship for Students with Special Needs

Travis Ferguson, South Valley Middle School – Liberty, MO



### COMMUNICATION

It would seem logical that a student who has the intellectual ability to achieve academically, and who scores at the upper end of the scale on standardized achievement tests, *should* be able to affect success in life – as defined by societal norms. Studies have found the opposite to be true, however, and that students with delayed social skills struggle to complete college, hold a job and achieve independence to successfully navigate adulthood. Even more significantly, the lack of these skills *impedes* their ability to form meaningful relationships leading to critical mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, while hindering their ability to form social support networks we all depend on to achieve success in the world.

As educators of students with special needs at the middle and high school levels, Sara Graham, Crystal Bosch and I observed that our students were gaining social acceptance, but continued to struggle making meaningful

friendships. While other neuro-typical students talked about extracurricular activities and hanging out with friends on the weekends, many of our students were lacking in these age appropriate activities, despite expressing a desire for these kinds of friendships and inclusion in these activities. This was the catalyst that launched our search for any viable resources to help our students in this area.

As Fund for Teachers Fellows, we had the unequalled opportunity to participate in UCLA's Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS) training in Los Angeles. Developed by Dr. Elizabeth A. Laugeson, this is the only curriculum of its kind with research and data to support its efficacy in teaching the important skill of friendship. Our training equipped us with a curriculum for teaching social skills designed specifically for making and maintaining friendships in the middle and high school levels – exactly the resource and direction we were seeking. Esteemed professionals from around the world

gathered to learn the curriculum and share our passion, experiences and gains made working with students.

We're bringing the PEERS Curriculum back and, for 16 weeks, will provide daily lessons on developing the skills necessary to achieve meaningful friendships. Some of these lessons focus on meeting and making friends, holding a conversation and how to change a negative reputation. Although we talk about these topics in our Social Skills classroom, we have never spent the amount of time this training has recommended on building these skills. We know this work will be imperative to improving students' self-esteem and will play an integral role in their ability to be successful members of society.

**Fund Facts:** *With Sara, Travis teaches math, social skills and English/Language Arts to students on the Autism Spectrum; Crystal is a special education teacher at Liberty High School, working to improve students' vocational preparation, executive functioning and self-advocacy skills.*

### Also



**Adam Burns**  
Athens High School - Troy, MI

Researched British television by experiencing broadcasting center studios, filming locations and museums throughout the United Kingdom to collect new ideas for a broadcasting class and to better prepare students for careers in broadcasting and other globalizing industries.



**Marilyn DiDomizio & Lauren Martinez**  
Port Chester Middle School - Port Chester, NY

Explored across Cuba Spanish language acquisition and existing English Language Acquisition curriculum to inspire students' use of blogging, digital storytelling and virtual field trips.



WEB leaders with welcome signs



Nicole and Beth with WEB Founder Carolyn Hill



Practicing a welcome line for the first day of school

## Making Middle School More Bearable

Beth Penney and Nicole Ciccarelli, Academy of Aerospace and Engineering – Windsor, CT



### LEADERSHIP/TEAMWORK

When thinking about what we could learn through a fellowship, the big idea that came to mind was how

to build a sense of community among our middle school student population. Sixth graders are, as a whole, the largest at-risk group in middle school and while some sixth graders have a support system, many do not. So, we designed our Fund for Teachers fellowship to attend Where Everyone Belongs (WEB) Basic Training and create a structure that allows all sixth graders to have support through their first year of middle school by connecting them with eighth grade leaders we train using WEB strategies.

As soon as we returned, we managed an application process for seventh graders to apply for a WEB leadership position, selected our first class of WEB Leaders and hosted a celebration event that set the stage for a new school-wide

protocol. Students experienced some of the activities they will be running with our incoming sixth graders and painted posters that will decorate the gymnasium and create a sense of community for the incoming class. These students were not required to be there, they volunteered their time during summer vacation to start the preparations for this amazing event for our school. They are a very dedicated group of students who want to better their school community and make change!

Before school begins, WEB Leaders will call sixth graders the night before orientation to introduce themselves and, on the first day of school, wear identifying T-shirts to direct traffic in the halls. Our year-long timeline – including monthly meetings on topics ranging from study skills to socializing – will connect sixth and eighth graders. The goal of our WEB Leaders is to decrease

the number of bullying incidents and school suspensions.

We plan to put in place a structure where sixth graders get the necessary support to successfully navigate this transition and start their middle school experience on a positive note. The more connected students are to their new school, the better they will do in all the measures that are important in tracking their success: grades, test scores, attendance and discipline.

**Fund Facts:** Beth is a licensed professional engineer and now teaches sixth grade engineering and technology, winning Rookie of the Year after her first year. In addition to teaching sixth grade science, Nicole is NJHS advisor and helps integrate Next Generation Science Standards across the district.

### Also



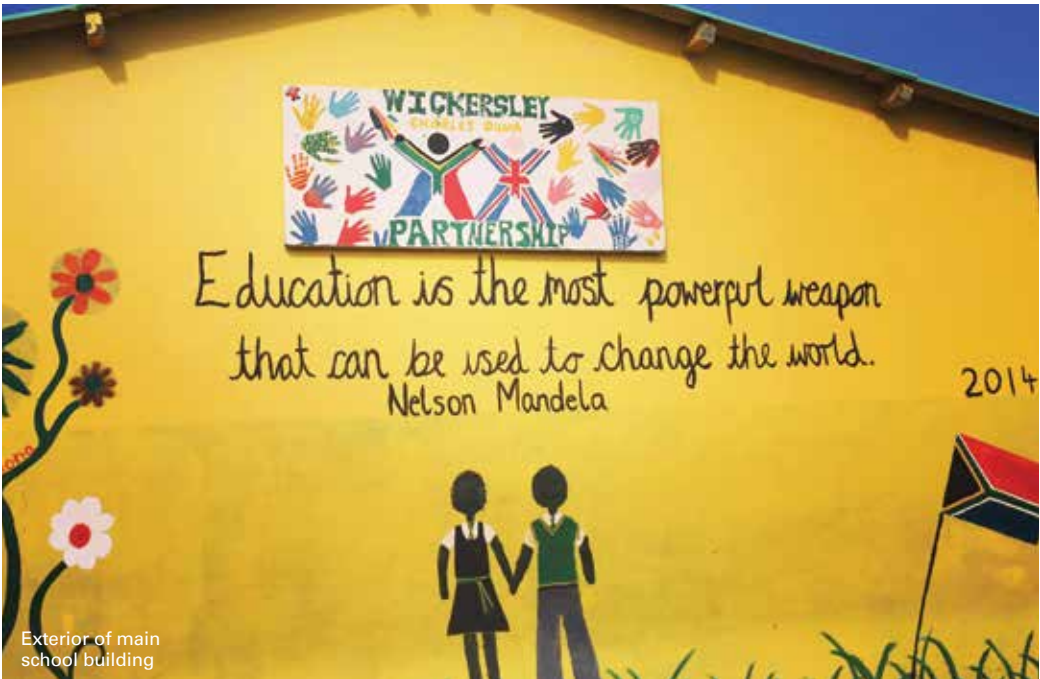
**Sara Damon**  
Stillwater Junior High School - Stillwater, MN

Joined a U.S. teacher delegation to Kenya to analyze the impact of H2O for Life Schools and enhance a service-learning project that engages, educates and inspires students to become globally-competent citizens.



**Ashraya Gupta & Julissa Llosa**  
Harvest Collegiate High School - New York, NY

Researched frontline adaptations to climate change among Peru's indigenous cultures to learn about community-focused practices and build similar student-led climate justice movements in New York City.



Exterior of main school building

Stephanie meeting elementary students

Touring the school garden

# Rising Up in South Africa and Northwest Chicago

John Beck, Pablo Casals School of Excellence – Chicago, IL



**PERSEVERANCE/SELF-DISCIPLINE**

“We used to bury at least one student a year due to HIV/AIDS, but ever since I started a nutrition program and cultivated the school garden, it has been 10 years since a student has died.” These are the words of the principal at Charles Duna Elementary within the township of New Brighton, South Africa. On a private tour of the impoverished townships that surround Port Elizabeth, both Stephanie Hanson and I started to internalize what Apartheid truly had done to communities inside the country. Before leaving on our Fund for Teachers fellowship, Stephanie (Morton School of Excellence Elementary) and I thought of Apartheid as a system of the past in which a minority of whites led the majority of the country. Although that was somewhat accurate, we experienced a reality so complex and riddled with horrific side-effects that a singular definition wasn’t appropriate.

Walking around Duna Elementary, we learned that the school houses more

than 1,000 children, all Black African, within seven small, modular buildings. Approximately 25 percent of the students are orphans; for the rest of the students, parent unemployment hovers around 80 percent. This school’s community is the product of forced relocation decades ago, when Black Africans were displaced from neighborhoods near the coast and moved six miles away in a township lacking proper housing or utilities, including adequate running water.

Yet, this still isn’t an accurate depiction of South Africa, because we simultaneously witnessed students’ perseverance, modeled by the principal, who greeted us wearing an apron and serving students breakfast. Only afterwards did she take our meeting to discuss the school, for which she secured funding from corporate sources to supplement the meager government budget, overhaul water pipes and obtain computers and a proper library. Most impressive, students grow, maintain and harvest a communal garden which

supports her life-saving nutrition program.

Rather than using our research to create units solely on South Africa’s history, we are going to relate it back to America’s civil rights movement. We plan to pair the memoir *A Mighty Long Way*, authored by one of the Little Rock Nine, with *Kaffir Boy*, an autobiography about growing up under Apartheid. Our goal is for students to observe the struggle for equality in both novels, the histories of two countries and their own lives. They need to see that their stories may be different, but they can emulate the perseverance we saw in Duna Elementary and across South Africa.

**Fund Facts:** John is a recipient of the Oppenheimer Grant in recognition of his outstanding efforts to enhance and enrich the educational lives of his students through project-based learning.

*Also*



**Patricia Chang**  
Bronx International High School - Bronx, NY

Completed a two-week bicycle repair course at the United Bicycle Institute in Portland, OR, to become the resident expert for a school bike shop and sustain a successful program impacting Students with Interrupted Education in four schools.



**Haley Boone**  
School at St. George Place - Houston, TX

Attended the fifth annual “Teaching for Peace: An Indian Immersion Experience in Practical Nonviolence” in New Delhi to create a culture of nonviolence with pre K students.



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## Mission in Motion

*"When I went to these places, I believed that I would find stories and strategies to be a better educator and writer. What I found were new ways to listen, write and become more human and humane."*

- **Monét Cooper**, Capital City Charter School – Washington, DC

### Fellowship Description

Practiced anthropological research and narrative writing in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and the United States to inform a student oral history project and performance.

### Fellowship Experiences

- Documented migration stories of family and friends in Waycross, GA, and Central America
- Deepened literary skills at Breadloaf Writer's Conference in Middlebury, VT
- Dramatically improved Spanish language competency
- Created a "chapbook" of poems documenting research as student exemplar

### Classroom Impact

- Introduced students to anthropological research methods
- Changed the structure of Writers Workshop at the school
- Instituted a creative writing/oral history project for students to research and publish personal migration stories
- Hosted launch party and public reading for "Migration Monologues" for school and wider community



At the National Center for Civil & Human Rights in Atlanta, GA