

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

## Editors

**Christopher M. Schulte**  
Pennsylvania State University

**Peter Webster**  
University of Southern California

**Eeva Anttila**  
University of the Arts Helsinki

**Mei-Chun Lin**  
National University of Tainan

<http://www.ijea.org/>

ISSN: 1529-8094

---

Volume 20 Number 4

February 18, 2019

## **What Does It Mean to Work in a System that Fails You and Your Kids? A Beginning Teacher's Journey Through the Chicago Public Schools**

Charles Vanover  
University of South Florida, USA

Citation: Vanover, C. (2019). What does it mean to work in a system that fails you and your kids? A beginning teacher's journey through the Chicago Public Schools. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 20(4). Retrieved from <http://doi.org/10.18113/P8ijea20n4>

### **Abstract**

This ethnodrama uses verbatim transcriptions of classroom stories shared by a first-year teacher in the Chicago Public Schools to help audience members ask better questions about teaching and the systems that shape teachers' labor. The production uses a small number of theatrical conventions to create an aesthetic experience built from moments of connection and moments of detachment and analysis. The script is structured as a polysemy: The teacher's words contribute to the ethnography of urban schools in the U. S. and speak to the spiritual heart of teaching. The show is designed to be staged by anyone, anywhere, to create rich dialogue about life in schools. The script is published in full, along with a short introduction.

One night, I will come

and set fire to his shelter...

My fire will destroy everything

and remove his only life raft after a shipwreck.

Thich Nhat Hanh

### **Introduction**

“What Does It Mean to Work in a System that Fails You and Your Kids?” (“System Failure”) is a public performance (Beck, Belliveau, Lea, & Wager, 2011; Leavy, 2015; Madison & Hamera, 2006) intended to help audience members ask better questions about teaching. The play tells the story of a beginning teacher’s attempts to understand and learn from her first year in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and is designed to be performed by anyone, anywhere. The production’s goal is to move audience members towards “new and richer domains of social and artistic meaning” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 32) by developing their communicative competence (Habermas, 1979; MacDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & MacDonald, 2007). Qualitative data is used to ask questions rather than provide answers (Donmoyer, 2012; Snyder-Young, 2010). The production looks towards an older stream of data-focused, ethnodramatic work (Conquergood, 2002; Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 1995; Turner, 1986) and it uses simple means to create a work of art and advocacy.

The script is built from excerpts of verbatim transcriptions of four narrative interviews I conducted during the summer of 2004 with CPS teacher Halsted Hoyne (pseudonym). I interviewed Halsted in June at the end of her first year working in the Chicago system, as part of a larger research project that studied teachers’ knowledge. As I have discussed in other places, (Vanover, 2016a, 2017, under submission), I had worked in the Chicago Public Schools for 8 years before I received a fellowship from an out-of-state university and the research projects I worked on at the university gave me experience as an interviewer.

The interviews I conducted with Halsted were organized around collaborative interviewing techniques adapted from Benner, Tanner, and Chelsea (1996) and Weiss (1995): my intention was to surface positive stories about teaching in urban schools. Before the first interview began, Halsted, similar to the other teachers, was asked to write a story about how her teaching made a difference during the 2003-2004 school year and then to read and discuss this story at the start of the first interview. Once Halsted finished sharing this story, she was asked to respond to six guiding questions she had received in advance. The three subsequent interviews I conducted with Halsted that summer used similar collaborative techniques. The

complete interview guide may be found in Vanover (2014). Extended discussions of my interviewing techniques may be found at Vanover (2015, 2016a, 2017, under submission).

I created the script for “System Failure” using a simple artistic device. Each scene in the show runs in the same order it was voiced during Halsted’s four interviews; thus, my role as an artist was to recognize what parts of the interviews were essential, and then cut most everything else (Saldaña, 2002; Vanover, 2016a). The script begins at the start of Halsted’s first interview, when the beginning teacher reads the story she wrote in preparation for her first interview, and it ends towards the end of Halsted’s fourth and last interview, when she discusses her decision to return to her school for a second year of service. The script is both an oral history (Denzin, 2001; Terkel & Grele, 1985) written in the teacher’s exact words, and a work of art that communicates the emotional reality of Halsted’s first year in the classroom (see Section 2, for the full script).

“System Failure” is part of my Inquiry Theatre series: a progression of community inquiries my colleagues and I created to support analysis of critical issues in urban education (Vanover, 2013a, 2016b, 2017; Vanover, Babson, & Langtiw, under submission; Vanover, Babson, Langtiw, et al., under submission; Vanover, Jones, Hand, Anguiano, & Knobloch, 2018). Each of the shows within this series uses data from narrative interviews I conducted to dramatize the work of teachers in high poverty, minority-majority schools. All of them set aside time for audience discussion to promote dialogue around complex problems. Because these community inquiries are intended to touch on moral issues related to the nature of a virtuous life (Greene, 1973; Santoro, 2011; Steedman, 1992), the full performances do not attempt to offer a resolution to the problems raised by the texts. Instead, the scripts are built to heighten the ambiguity of the teachers’ stories in order to, “stimulate reflection and discussion about [...] fundamental educational issues” (Barone, 2001, p. 25). These productions describe how U. S. accountability policies function at the classroom level, and describe moral concerns connected to the operation of those systems (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Palmer & Rangel, 2011; Penfield, 2010; Sanger, Osguthorpe, & Fenstermacher, 2013; Sloan, 2007).

“System Failure” is intended to be performed anywhere by anyone. The show uses three props: a chalkboard where the audience’s questions are written, a large conference table where Halsted’s interview is performed, and small meditation gong that is used to alter the audience’s understanding of the events in Halsted’s narrative. No memorization is required to stage the play. Actors either improvise or speak from the script. The production is designed to allow community members, whether in a school, an advocacy group, or a college of education to come together and create art and dialogue about issues that matter (Eisner, 2001, 2008; Finley, 2011; Hatch, 2006).

Throughout the production, I act as the master of ceremonies (Boal, 2013; Norris, 2009) and press the audience to ask questions about Halsted's experience. "System Failure" begins the moment the audience walks in the door, when I guide people to their seats and distribute printed programs. These programs have excerpts of the verbatim interview transcripts that make up the script, and I ask audience members to read these excerpts and ask questions about the data. The excerpts share stories Halsted told about her students and they describe some of the challenges she attempted to overcome in her first year in the Chicago system. These texts are intended to help the audience enter imaginatively into Halsted's world and tune into the sound of her voice. (An example of one of these excerpts is published in the Appendix; the electronic version of the full program printed for "System Failure's" premier performance at the University of Pennsylvania's 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum is archived online at Vanover (2013b).) . Buddhist prayers begin and end the performance. These prayers emphasize the Buddhist commitment to service and communicate the necessity of positive change. "System Failure" thus pushes audience members to consider Halsted's story, as she herself saw it, in relation to an issue beyond high stakes testing: the question of suffering (Boyce, 2009; Hanh, 2012).

One of Halsted's student's fathers died in the fall of her first year in CPS, and the boy responded to his father's illness by misbehaving in her classroom. Schoolwork frustrated him and the boy responded by verbally and physically attacking Halsted and other members of the school community. Halsted told me during our interview that creating a relationship with the boy was one of her proudest accomplishments; however, this connection did not end the child's misbehavior nor compensate for his loss. Halsted could not end the suffering caused by the death of the boy's father. She did not know how to teach the boy how to read at grade level. Halsted did what she could, and I believe her caring mattered, but many aspects of the situation were beyond her ability to influence as a first-year teacher. During her interviews, Halsted told me one of the most important things she learned from teaching was the necessity of doing the best she could for her students, and, when she made a mistake, to remember the importance of "getting past it, and moving on, and not letting that sort of keep you stuck."

The two Buddhist prayers that frame "System Failure" begin and end with the ringing of a small meditation gong. This gong is also rung during the script's final scenes, and, in that context, the instrument serves to break the connection (Heritage, 1984; Styan, 1992) between audience members and actors. There are better ways to teach than Halsted used during her first year, and better ways to manage the problems she confronted than the methods she chose to employ (D. F. Brown, 2004; Gay, 2000; Grant, 2012; Hassrick, Raudenbush, & Rosen, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1994). It is important for audience members to question Halsted's actions and avoid fully identifying with her choices.

This sense of distance has consequences for “System Failure” as a work of art. The playscript’s final scenes do not warm the heart; they push the problems of urban schools back at Halsted and the audience. From some perspectives, ethnodrama’s major function is to create empathy and connection with *the other*, and, consequently, the production’s primary weakness as a dramatic work flows from Halsted’s weakness as a teacher. “System Failure” does not show the audience what social justice might look like if it was practiced in an inner-city classroom in the city of Chicago. The production does not offer a radical hope that audience members might rally around. Halsted’s stories do not, in the words of Baraka (1969/1998, as cited in Denzin (2009, p. 265))

*wrestle cops into*

*alleys*

*and take their weapons...*

Halsted’s narrative is a blues (Hughes, 1959; Santoro, 2016). The play I developed from her storytelling is intended to evoke what it means to serve, fallibly, with detachment and compassion. Halsted’s failures mattered, but so did the love she had for her students.

Halsted began work at CPS to make a difference in an unjust world (Kleinfeld, 1992; Vanover & Saldaña, 2005), and, as of this writing, ten years later, she continues to work for change as a teacher in that system. Halsted is still there. She continues to make mistakes. She continues to love her students. The work continues to ask more than she can give. Early each morning she walks into her classroom.

### ***Limitations and Future Studies***

This ethnodrama dramatizes verbal data taken from four narrative interviews with a single teacher. The teacher’s version of the events described cannot be naively relied upon, given issues connected with the trustworthiness of narrative interviews and other forms of storytelling (Larson, 1997; Lincoln, 2000).

I do not assert that the story Halsted told me is the only story she might have told about her first year in CPS. I do not claim that the excerpts from her interviews I have published in the playscript are representative of the other stories she shared in her interviews, only that what is presented is the most powerful story I had the skill to cut from those data (Saldaña, 2002). I do not claim Halsted’s narrative should be privileged beyond the stories of the students who attended her classroom, the narratives of the parents who put their children in her trust, the testimony of Halsted’s colleagues and administrators, and/or other forms of data—my research design did not give me access to that evidence. While this lack of triangulation is a

weakness, it is also a source of strength, given I was able to give Halsted total anonymity when she talked about her teaching. Both CPS and the Chicago Teachers' Union supported my data collection, but no organization within Chicago was given the names of the beginning teachers who participated.

One benefit of the narrative data used in "System Failure" is it allows glimpses of classroom scenes that are difficult for ethnographers to access because of the challenges involved with receiving permissions from system management and university IRB boards (Bledsoe et al., 2007). It is unlikely for researchers to be given access to, for instance, report card pick up day at public and charter schools serving students in poverty and observe the procedures teachers and other administrators employ when they tell family members their child has failed a particular grade level. Family and community ethnography (Hill, 2003; Horsford, 2011; Jarrett, 1995; Lareau, 2011; Noguera, 2009) might also be used to examine these issues and remediate "System Failure's" most obvious limitation: the playscript is constructed from Halsted's testimony and does not resound with the voices of parents and youth (see discussions in R. N. Brown (2009, 2014) and Winn (2010)).

It is my ambition that, beyond the production of new ethnodramas, Halsted's story might inspire researchers and citizens to expand their gaze and examine the work of the Chicago system's high-level managers, subcontractors, and other major stakeholders whose off-stage policies and actions shaped her classroom experience (Herrick, 1971; Lipman, 2011). I hope such efforts will support investigations into the operation of the global education reform movement (Sahlberg, 2011) in other locales. Perhaps "System Failure" might lead to more studies which seek to shed light on the question: "Who benefits?"

*Complete Playscript*



*Figure 1.* Jennifer J. Smith performing Halsted Hoynes at the performance of “System Failure” staged at the University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, January 20, 2014.

*Cast in Order of Appearance*

**DR. VANOVER:** A professor of Educational Leadership who once worked as a teacher. He acts as the facilitator to the production and provides a brief introduction.

**THE FACILITATOR:** A member of the community where the show is performed.

**THE INTERVIEWER:** A graduate student working on his/her dissertation. He/she has a bag/backpack that holds tape recorders, IRB forms, and other interview paraphernalia. **THE INTERVIEWER** once worked in high poverty schools and s/he responds to Halsted’s stories with the humor and compassion of an insider.

**HALSTED HOYNES:** A first year teacher in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) who was interviewed by Dr. Vanover for his dissertation. She walks on stage carrying a notebook.

### *Performance Notes*

The playscript is constructed from verbatim transcriptions from four interviews conducted by the author. All names are pseudonyms. Words have been cut from the original transcripts, but no words have been added unless indicated by brackets (see Vanover, 2016a, 2017). In order to emphasize the artificiality of the performance, both THE INTERVIEWER and HALSTED read from script.

A video of the performance of “System Failure” staged at The Gerald Ford School of Public Policy at The University of Michigan is available online and contains a transcript of the event.<sup>1</sup> This video provides examples of the audience discussions that frame the scripted performance.



*Figure 2.* Charles Vanover’s introduction to the performance of “System Failure” at The Gerald Ford School of Public Policy at The University of Michigan, January 20, 2014.

### *Setting*

*A university conference room with ten sets of tables and chairs that surround a small table center stage sitting in front of a chalkboard. On the chalkboard is written, “Please read Excerpt 5 and one or two other numbered excerpts in the program for the Jigsaw we will do before the show.” A small, meditation gong sits on a stand upstage left.*

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://fordschool.umich.edu/video/2014/what-does-it-mean-work-system-fails-you-and-your-kids-beginning-teachers-journey-through->



*As the audience walks into the performance space, DR. VANOVER and THE FACILITATOR meet audience members at the door and ask them to sit in groups. Audience members are given a printed program that contains excerpts from the script and members are asked to read these texts (see Excerpt 5, in the Appendix, as well as Vanover (2013b)).*

*Groups of people sit at the tables, read the excerpts, and talk among themselves. HALSTED and THE INTERVIEWER sit among the audience members. The two actors might interact with the people at their tables or remain silent; they do not interact in character. They are just people who are at the production to help DR. VANOVER put on a performance.*

*At the session's formal start time, THE FACILITATOR provides a brief introduction. DR. VANOVER then walks in front of the chalkboard and discusses how the different elements of the performance event will unfold. He provides a quick overview about how the script was constructed and briefly describes the structured discussion protocols used to guide discussion (see MacDonald et al., 2007). He emphasizes that the purpose of the show is to help the audience ask better questions about teachers' work in schools that serve vulnerable youth.*



*After this introduction is finished, DR. VANOVER discusses in depth the data that will be performed. He shows the audience the pages in the program that display the interview guide used for the first interview and discusses how the original interview session with Halsted was organized. A transcript of the full introduction that Charles Vanover shared at the Gerald R. Ford School performance of “System Failure” is attached to the video of the performance. The following speech is not a condensed version of that monologue, but a meditation on Halsted’s story developed in 2018 for the publication of the play in “The International Journal of Education and the Arts.”*

*DR. VANOVER:* At this time, I would like to talk about Halsted’s story and share a little bit of what I have learned from putting different pieces of her interview together and leading performances of her words.<sup>2</sup>

I interviewed Halsted as part of my dissertation. I had worked in the Chicago Public Schools for eight years before I received a fellowship to study urban education at an out of state university. When I came back to Chicago to conduct the interview sessions with Halsted and the other teaches, the interactions connected to these sessions were a return to a life I once lived. The interviews brought back memories of my time in system and I saw parts of my experience in the teachers’ stories. The sessions I conducted were also the beginning of a new life in the way that every dissertation project has the potential to alter the life course of the person who conducts it.<sup>3</sup>

Some of what I learned from Halsted’s four interviews were things I already knew, but lacked words to describe. Halsted had been an actor before she started working in the public schools, and she spent her first year in the Chicago system talking about her teaching with friends, colleagues, and family. Halsted spoke more words than any of the beginning teachers I interviewed. Halsted spoke at length about her students, her colleagues, her principal, and her lessons. These episodes weren’t plotted. The stories the beginning teacher shared were not organized in a narrative with a structured conflict and a focused resolution. Instead, Halsted moved from one series of events to another series; these episodes ranged forward and back in time. After our sessions, when I transcribed and analyzed Halsted’s interviews, I spent a great deal of time going over the individual incidents and attempting to make sense of them.

---

<sup>2</sup> I Halsted’s story is discussed in depth in Vanover (2016a) and in Vanover (2017). A current performance history of the Inquiry Theatre series may be found at Vanover (under submission).

<sup>3</sup> My dissertation is available online at Vanover (2009). The original interview instruments and IRB forms may be found at Vanover (2014).



The stories of Halsted and the other teachers changed me and these changes altered how I understood their stories. I became a different person than the person who sat with the teachers in the offices of the Chicago Teacher’s Union and the University of Chicago Alumni Society. Their words were with me as I transcribed and wrote up the recordings, defended my thesis, and won a tenure track job. I saw different meanings in the stories as I myself grew and developed; my interviews became a living inquiry.<sup>4</sup>

I would like to discuss two major turning points in my interpretive process to help people begin to understand Halsted’s interviews as I have learned to see them. The first change occurred when I realized the data I collected was something more than content for an expert/novice design—which was the theoretical framework that guided my initial work. The stories I collected were raw material for a history of the Chicago Public Schools. Chicago, for people working inside the practice of social science research, is the known city. There is not any urban area on the planet with a richer collection of research studies or a more developed effort to understand the findings. In the interval between the time I had collected my data and the time when my understanding of Halsted’s story turned around, some of the leading researchers in urban education had published a series of studies about the Chicago Public Schools based on data they had collected at around the time Halsted began teaching. The

---

<sup>4</sup> See Locke, Golden-Biddle, and Feldman (2004, 2008) and Charmaz (2017) for discussions of theorizing and restructuring meanings derived from qualitative data. Springgay, Irwin, and Kind (2005), Gouzouasis (2006), and Knowles, Promislow, and Cole (2008) discuss living inquiry through arts-based research.

instruments and data analysis techniques in these works have made national and international contribution to the study of teaching and educational administration.<sup>5</sup>

Halsted's story acts as a counter to that positive history. Halsted work in an African American school in a segregated, low income, African American neighborhood. Luppescu et al. (2011)'s statistical history of the Chicago Public Schools shows that these schools were least likely to benefit from the positive changes produced by the Chicago system's leadership and were most likely to be negatively impacted by the system's policies. Halsted did not work in a school the change was being won. According to the events she described in her narrative, Halsted worked in a school that lacked the essential supports for school improvement. Her principal was not described as an inclusive facilitative leader who could communicate a positive vision for change. Halsted's school was described as place where parents lacked confidence in teachers' expertise and reform programs came and went. During her first year at her school, Halsted said about half the teachers in her building transferred out or went on leave. In fact, Halsted became the leader of the school's third grade team because there was no one else left to do the job: all but one of the grade level's teachers had left. Halsted said her school was not safe neither for faculty nor students; teachers were told to lock their doors during the school day because children snuck out of their classrooms and roamed the halls.<sup>6</sup>



---

<sup>5</sup> Roderick, Easton, and Sebring (2009) describe the role of the Chicago Consortium for School Reform: the major institutional support for much of the research on the Chicago Public Schools discussed in this paper. Hassrick et al. (2017), Luppescu, Allensworth, Moore, de la Torre, and Murphy (2011), and Shedd (2015) provide rich discussions of the educational research conducted in Chicago in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. For discussions of Chicago as the known city see, for instance, Abbott (1999), Becker (1999), and Park and Burgess (2012).

<sup>6</sup> The descriptions of non-reformed, truly disadvantaged schools in Allensworth (2017), Allensworth, Ponisciak, and Mazzeo (2009), and Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, and Luppescu (2006) provide rich grounds for imagining Halsted's experience.

When Halsted accepted her principal's offer to teach third grade, fate handed the beginning teacher a card. By choosing to teach at a large, low income African American school during the 2003-2004 school year, the evidence we have available shows that Halsted was likely to have an extremely challenging school year; she would be at high risk for burning out, quitting her job, and leaving the teaching profession for good. There were other reasons the odds were against her. There is a deep literature on how preservice teachers should learn to teach and, in Halsted's case, this research was not followed. Halsted was not given the opportunity to teach during her pre-service internship, she said that her supervising teacher was so worried about his test scores that he did not allow her to stand in front of the chalkboard, instead she worked as his aide and graded students' papers.<sup>7</sup>

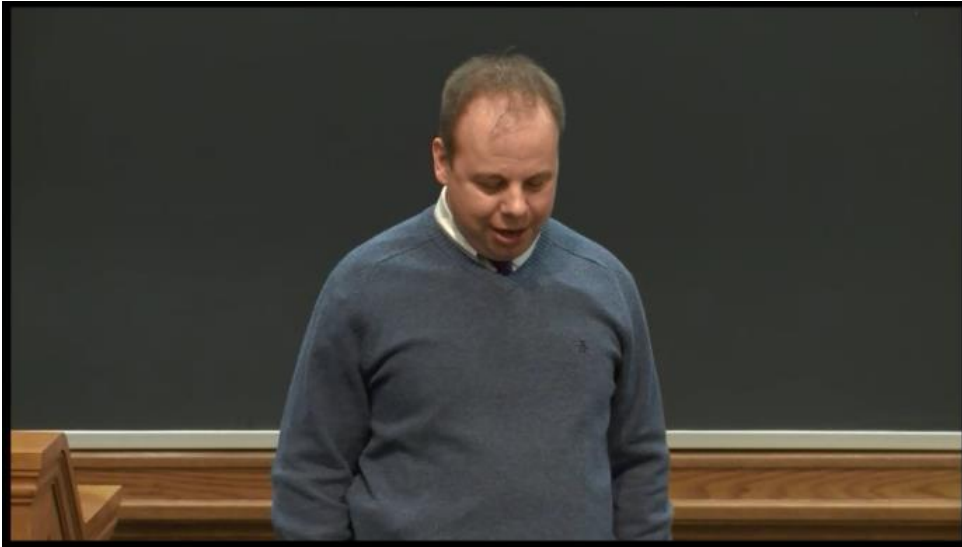
I would like to pause for a moment and ask you to think about the words I just uttered: "Halsted's supervising teacher was so worried about his test scores that he did not allow her to stand in front of the chalkboard, instead she worked as his aide and graded students' papers." One of the challenges I confront in my efforts to dramatize teachers' experience is that it is very difficult to communicate the impact of the events teacher narrate and to help others understand, for instance, the deep violation of professional trust and responsibility Halsted experienced during her student teaching. If you have not been there, it is hard to understand what it means to spend all the time and money on going back to school to become certified, and then have the person who is responsible for guiding your development fail to do their job.

The year Halsted began to teach in Chicago, the 2004 school year, was also quite fateful. As Luppescu et al. (2011)'s statistical history shows, despite management's efforts to artificially inflate publicly reported data on student achievement, reading scores in the Chicago Public Schools had been flat for more than a decade and there had only been slow growth in math scores. The achievement gap between African American students and other groups was increasing and many of the system's signature policies—closing schools and ending social promotion—negatively impacted African-American students and teachers. Here is another one of the features in Halsted's narrative that are difficult to understand if one is not a teacher. In the year Halsted started working in Chicago there were more students who were too old for third grade than any time in the system's history—mostly because these students had failed the system's basic skills exam and had to repeat that grade level. Many students were traumatized by failing these tests and repeating these grade levels; these students placed extra demands on teachers who already had challenging classrooms. Helping her students pass the

---

<sup>7</sup> For discussions of beginning teachers' experience serving vulnerable youth in U. S. schools see Kauffman, Moore Johnson, Kardos, Liu, and Peske (2002), Ladson-Billings (1994, 2001), Simon and Johnson (2015) and Sleeter (2001, 2016). Teacher induction programs in Chicago are described in Kapadia, Coca, and Easton (2007) and Lesnick, Jiang, Sporte, Sartain, and Hart (2010).

test became an issue of over-riding concern in Halsted's narrative because if her students did not pass, they had to repeat the grade level.<sup>8</sup>



When Halsted arrived at her school, fate played a final trick. In Halsted's account, her principal assigned her to a classroom filled with the most vulnerable students in the third grade, which means the students most likely to fail or to act out. When the play starts, and the actor playing Halsted describes her first week at school and her interactions with her principal, I would like you to understand that no one in urban education would think that a first-year teacher should be assigned a classroom with that many needy students in that vulnerable of a school. Halsted was placed in an extreme situation where she confronted the results of, in my view, years of chronic mismanagement.

What happened next is best described in reference to the second turning point in my understanding of the data. Halsted was a Buddhist. She began to teach in the Chicago Public Schools in response to a calling she received to leave her life as an actor and live a more virtuous life. For me, and I believe for Halsted as well, the stories she told during our interviews moved beyond a description of a beginning teacher's journey and became a meditation on the role that suffering plays in contemporary life. Halsted stayed in her classroom during her first year in the Chicago Public Schools. When the other teachers left, she remained in her position and carried on. Against the odds, Halsted returned to her school the following school year. Here is how Halsted described her first week in the classroom in

---

<sup>8</sup> Anagnostopoulos (2006), Jacob, Stone, and Roderick (2004), and Roderick, Nagaoka, and Allensworth (2005) discuss the Chicago Public Schools' student retention policy. Huddleston (2014) and Penfield (2010) provide discussions of the national context.

the journal she kept during her first year. She read the story to me during our first interview at the Chicago Teacher's Union, and we have printed it in the text of the program we passed out today.<sup>9</sup>

*DR. VANOVER reads:*

I did not expect this much anger to slap me in my face. I must have broken up 10 to 20 fights this week. I cried every night for two to three hours. I forgot everything I learned at school. Thank goodness one of my cohort members from my Master's cohort walked me through my week. This school is an emotional place. By Friday of this week, I had broken down in front of my class. And this is the first time I had questioned whether I could do this. I feel like I had been dropped into a war zone. I did not know that places this sad existed, and now I spend the majority of my time here. It is quite an adjustment.

Halsted spent her first week at school breaking up fights and yelling at her students and forgetting everything she learned at school. On Friday afternoon of that first week, Halsted walked into her principal's office and she broke down and cried. Halsted's principal comforted her. The principal took her into a small room away from the other people in the office, gave Halsted a tissue, and reminded her of some classroom management techniques that would help Halsted organize her class. These techniques also reveal Halsted's profound weakness as a teacher.

---

<sup>9</sup> The original program from the Ford school performance, along with a link to the video of the event, may be found at <http://fordschool.umich.edu/video/2014/what-does-it-mean-work-system-fails-you-and-your-kids-beginning-teachers-journey-through->



I say that Halsted’s story is a meditation on the role that suffering plays in contemporary life, and that the beginning teacher’s meeting with her principal that Friday afternoon speaks directly to heart of teaching, because it was Halsted’s principal who recruited Halsted for her school, assigned the beginning teacher to that class, and reacted to the host of predictable events that occurred at her school that year as one teacher after another—except for Halsted—quit, transferred, or went on leave. Every morning, Halsted woke up at 3 or 4 o’clock, left her husband sleeping, and walked into her apartment’s living room and began to meditate. She then fixed breakfast and drove to her school with another teacher. The two friends usually arrived at school before the principal—in the winter, they walked out of their car before dawn. After she punched in, Halsted walked through her school’s empty hallways, unlocked her classroom door, and got ready for another day. Halsted was not a good enough teacher to produce a smoothly working classroom, but despite her mistakes Halsted was there for her kids. I can imagine her trying to keep herself centered and saying prayers to get through the day.

Breathing in, I know that anger is there in me.  
Breathing out, I care for my anger.  
Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.  
Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.<sup>10</sup>

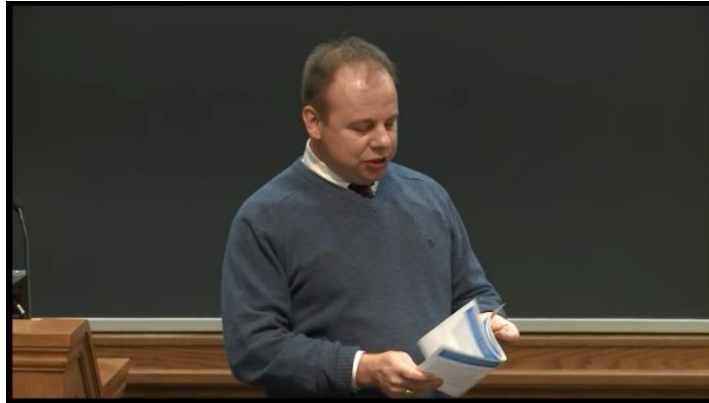
What makes Halsted’s narrative so challenging is that there is no happy ending. There is no miracle or reprieve. The kids do not come out okay at the end. They were behind when they walked into the beginning teacher’s classroom and they continued to be behind at the end of the school year in June. Halsted’s students would have to face the consequences the system

---

<sup>10</sup> Hanh (2012, pp. 1-23)



had in store for them and the beginning teacher would return to her building for another year of school.



When we perform Halsted's story, we select different excerpts from the text into the programs we make to discuss before and after the scripted performance. We try to pick out things that would matter to the audience participating in the work and put these excerpts in the program. But we always discuss the story of one of Halsted's favorite students, who I call the homeless girl. I would like you to read that story, talk about it with your neighbor, and create a set of questions about that text and the other stories in the program. THE FACILITATOR will write these questions on the board, and we will come back to them once we conclude the show. <sup>11</sup>

To guide this part of the discussion, we will follow some rules for adult learning developed by Joseph McDonald and the folks at the National School Reform Faculty that were used extensively in Chicago for a major school reform project funded by the Annenberg Foundation. I will ask everyone to check in with their neighbors and then to read the excerpts in the program silently. I would like each group member to then speak for 90 seconds without interruption. This will allow everyone in each group to share their views, before the group joins together to create a set of questions. We will keep these questions in mind during the performance and then return to them during our concluding discussion. <sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> The story of the homeless girl is excerpted in the Appendix.

<sup>12</sup> See MacDonald et al. (2007) and National School Reform Faculty (n. d.).



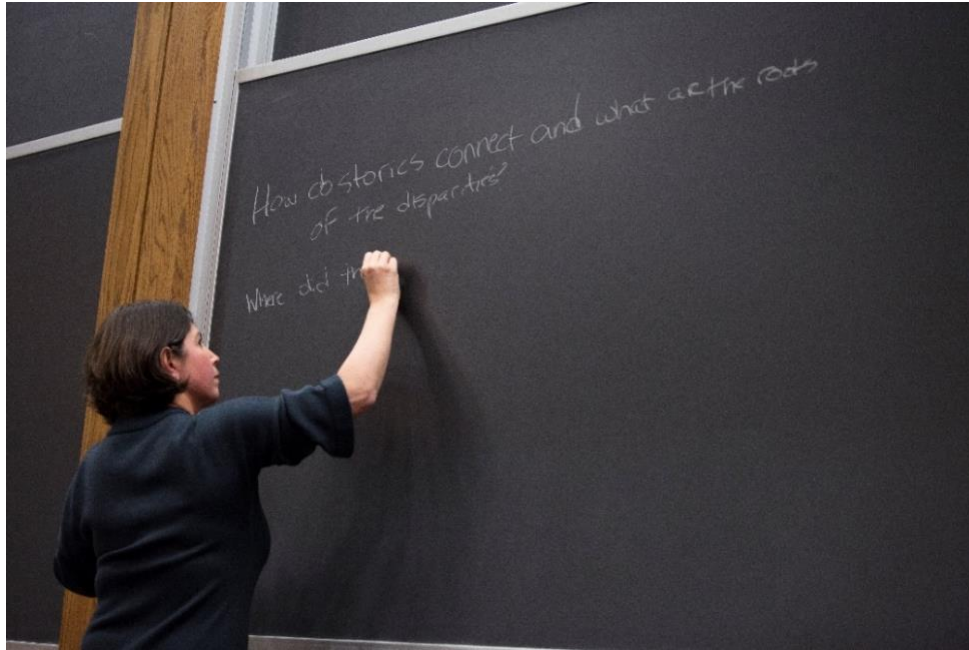
*DR. VANOVER works with the audience to quickly form into small groups and begin reading the text. He then calls out at three ninety second intervals to allow each group member to speak without interruption.*





*As the audience members begin to read their programs at the start of the first Jigsaw protocol, the actor playing THE INTERVIEWER leaves his/her seat and sits with his/her back to the audience at the conference table in the center of the room. THE INTERVIEWER sets up a tape recorder, IRB forms, and other paraphernalia and, then, checks her cell phone*

*DR. VANOVER asks the group members to create a set of questions about the texts that the team will write on the board and that the audience will discuss after the performance. As the group members report out, THE FACILITATOR writes the questions on the board.*



*When audience discussion begins and THE FACILITATOR writes the questions on the chalkboard, the actor playing HALSTED HOYNE walks on stage and sits at the center conference table, facing the audience. HALSTED places a journal next to the tape recorders, signs IRB forms, and gets ready for the interview. As she completes these actions, HALSTED is framed by the audience's written questions.*



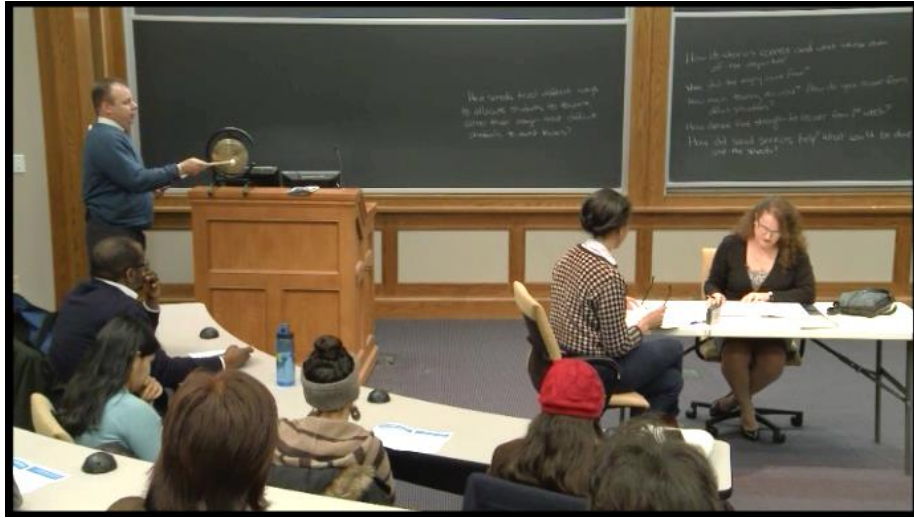
*Once the discussion is finished, DR. VANOVER walks over to the small, mediation gong placed upstage left, and asks the audience to look over the Buddhist prayers in the first page of the program. He hits the gong loudly, and the show begins.*

DR. VANOVER: If you feel comfortable, please rise and say the opening prayer printed on the program. We will be discussing Halsted's work, and it is important to respect her spirit.

*THE INTERVIEWER turns on the recorders; HALSTED looks at her journal;*

DR. VANOVER AND AUDIENCE: The passions of illusion are inexhaustible; I vow to extinguish them. The number of beings is endless; I vow to save them. The Truth cannot be told; I vow to tell it. The Way cannot be followed; I vow to follow it. Through generous actions may I attain enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.

*DR. VANOVER hits the gong loudly.*



*THE INTERVIEWER reads from a copy of the playscript;*

INTERVIEWER: This is Chicago Teacher's Union Quest Center, and I am interviewing Halsted Hoyne. This is her first interview. It is June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004, and we are going to start.

*HALSTED reads from a copy of the playscript. Every major section of the text is on a separate sheet of paper; she pauses briefly each time she moves from one sheet to the next;*

HALSTED: Okay, so you want to hear the story I wrote about a particular student? Because I also brought—I had to keep a journal this year, so I brought my journal. There'll be stuff there. But I did—I had something done [before the interview].



*HALSTED reads from her notebook;*

‘Arthur is a special child. Arthur is a very small adorable boy who was born addicted to crack. He was adopted by a wonderful man who then got very sick and died while Arthur was in my room. The first week of school, I broke up about 10 to 20 fights involving Arthur—with another little boy. And, in fact, they were the two smallest boys in my class. I, then, figured out that these two were mortal enemies and should never be in the same room together. The other boy was moved to another room, and I was left with Arthur.

*HALSTED turns the page and continues to read from her notebook;*

Arthur had personally prided himself on the demise of two fully certified teachers and a whole slew of subs the previous year. At times, I saw this kid get so out of control it would take three to four adults to restrain and remove him from the classroom. Everybody agreed this kid needed special services and a self-contained room. He had never been referred, and this was a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classroom. The case manager of my school told me I could not refer him for [special education] services as she was already too overwhelmed. This changed the day [Arthur] told the assistant principal he would have her shot for removing him from my room. Getting angry at this kid did not work. He could get a whole lot angrier back. I was stuck. I had to figure something out with him because he was here until March, and I had twenty other kids that had to work harmoniously with Arthur, and he with them.’



*HALSTED turns the page;*

INTERVIEWER: Why don't you just tell me about—could you just—could you expand on that story or tell me more?

HALSTED *points to her journal*: Absolutely. I'm going to refer to here.

This was the day he told the assistant principal that he was going to have her shot. He just—it was—he came in really angry. He told me that he was not going to do what I told him to do. So, the assistant principal, who was also brand new to the school, like I was—she sort of chased him around the room. He was a little kid, so, she just picked him up.

*HALSTED laughs and then turns the page;*

HALSTED: I would call his grandmother and, in the beginning of the year, she would just tell me how terrible he was. She had raised six kids of her own. And she had never had a kid like this. It wasn't until later on at the staffing I learned about his being born with a crack addiction. [Until] then, I didn't really fully understand that it was the woman [Arthur's father] lived with, it was [the grandmother's] son that was just a really great guy that adopted [Arthur] and just took him in and loved him.

When I went to that man [Arthur's father's] funeral, it was just so obvious this man was a pillar of the community. There had to be like two or three hundred people there. The church was packed. Everyone had wonderful things to say about him.



INTERVIEWER: How did [Arthur's father] die?



HALSTED: He was on kidney dialysis for about a year or two. I don't know what that came out of. It just wore him down. I don't think even Arthur was living with him the whole time I had him in my classroom. His father was already too sick.

*HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: I really never got him to do much academic work. It was more about a personal relationship with him. I just felt really good I didn't bail on—Because there were definitely days when I was, like,

*Whispers:*

'I am not going back. I am not going back.'

Having the computers in my room was a big turning point. [Arthur] loved—He was really, really bright on the computer. That was why I start realizing how really, really smart this kid was. He could find things. I would give him internet assignments—have him look stuff up.



*HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: And one—the day his dad died really stands out for me. He came in—Arthur was pretty normal. He was really calm. I mean, not normal, that's a weird—that's a bad term, but he was very calm.

"I am very sad today."

‘Well, what’s wrong?’

He told me his dad had died. I gave him a big hug. The kids—four periods a week [my kids] go to another teacher for computer or music or whatever. [Arthur] didn’t want to go to the outside class, and I said that was fine. He could stay with me. I said that was fine. Everything to keep him calm. I’ve lost a parent. It’s an upsetting thing.

The reading specialist came in and just said, “You can’t be in here. You have to go to your class.” She started sort of getting real direct with [Arthur]. Telling him, “No, you are going to your class. You cannot stay in here.”

I sort of pulled her aside, and I said ‘His dad just passed away this morning. I don’t mind him being in here.’

‘You are being very nice, but that’s ridiculous. He has to go to his other class.’

Whipped him into a frenzy.

“You’re going to this class.”

“I’m not going to that class.”

“You’re going to this class.”

“I’m not going to that class!”

Honestly, I did not know what to do. She’s my superior at this school. Technically, I’m not supposed to keep them out of their extracurricular classes.

He’s in tears at this point. She dragged him down to the classroom. And that, in and of itself, ate up about 15 minutes of my prep. I was sitting at my desk doing my work. He was sitting there; it was great. It whipped—it took 15 or 20 minutes out of my prep period, and then by the time she got him down there, it was time to take him back.

*HALSTED turns the page;*



HALSTED: I went to the funeral on that Saturday. I was the only Caucasian in the church. People were sort of looking at me. I felt the need to explain myself. But, I learned a lot about this man that had adopted Arthur by going to this service. I learned a lot about the family.

INTERVIEWER: What did you learn about?

HALSTED: I just learned that [Arthur] was with a really kind family. Because my experiences with his grandmother had been—I'm calling her up to say, 'He bit me. If he bites me again, I'm filing a police report.'

*HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: I watched Arthur through the whole service. It was a long service, like, almost two hours. He sat still for two hours.

I've never seen him sit still for two hours.

'When something's important to him.' Or, I don't know what it was. But, you could tell the people he was sitting with—the other members of the family—they treated him a certain way, and he had a different name, too, at home. They called him Paul, and we called him Arthur at school. I never quite figured that out.

So many people got up to speak about this man and eulogize him. I could not even tell you. [Arthur's father] was definitely a community volunteer. He did some wonderful and amazing things. They also mentioned that he adopted kids. I think he'd adopted two kids, and he had three of his own that were natural. Just sort of watching [Arthur] sit there and listen about his father. It was just amazing to see him sit there still for almost two hours, because I had never seen that.

*HALSTED threads the fingers of her hand together;*

Honestly, after that experience, he was so thrilled that I had come. I was really thrilled that I had gone. His grandmother said it meant a lot to her that I had come.

*HALSTED turns the page;*



INTERVIEWER: How did the other kids react to him?

HALSTED: In my classroom, the other kids, by the third week of school—They knew him. They had been in school with him since—They had been with him in second grade, a lot of them. He had sort of been the prime reason why they had lost two of their teachers.

At first, the kids were like, “Arthur is doing this! He’s doing this! And he’s doing this!” I would, you know, try to do the stuff you learn in the manuals. Pull two kids aside,

‘Well, what happened? What happened?’

I eventually realized the other kids needed to sort of accept the fact that this is the way he was, and that they needed to deal with him differently as well.

I had kids that just never sort of figured that out. A lot of them were pretty relieved the day he got moved out. A lot of kids were kind of relieved.

*HALSTED turns the page;*



HALSTED: And, that one little girl. He was looking for someone to sort of take care of him, and some days he would sit—I only had five girls and 16 boys. So, some days he would just, sort of, sit himself with all the girls, and they would take care of him. They'd fix his paper for him. They'd sharpen his pencil. They'd just sort of nurture him, and that's what he wanted.

He was just sort of looking for some contact, physical contact. Some nurturing from the girls, and they really liked taking care of him. Until he did something—If he got angry or pushed them or went over a line then they were done. I remember one little girl just loved him sitting by her. And he would defend her, and he'd open doors for her, and he'd give her his computer time, and it was really... very sweet.

*Emotion her voice;*

So, and, you know, I think that he's in a much better place being in a smaller classroom with more one-on-one interaction [with the special education teacher] because he really needs attention. He just—He does—So.



*HALSTED turns the page;*

INTERVIEWER: Okay, um, can you describe some moments during the year when you thought you learned something new about your teaching or your students?

*Long pause;*

HALSTED: Well, a huge thing that I learned was sort of just staying in the moment. That was one of the most important things—I had to stay very mindful of the moment because if I let things sort of—if I started worrying about 20 minutes from now, things could get out of control really, really fast. I also learned I am not above poor behavior. I was guilty of telling kids to shut up. I was, you know, guilty of locking kids out of the classroom. I mean [that was] absolutely something I thought I would never be capable of, and I did it. So, I was really grateful to have this journal to reflect upon, because sometimes I would just have to snap at myself, and say, ‘Okay, you are the adult in this situation.’ That was something I did not even think I was going to have to worry about. But, it turned out to be one of the most important things I had to worry about.

*HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: And lot of people were very—tried to be very helpful, but their idea of being helpful was bringing me a book on discipline. ‘Which, yes that is a helpful thing. Yes, that is my responsibility, but I’ve just been through 18 months of coursework on—and I’ve read, and I’ve done projects, and I’ve volunteered in classrooms, and I’ve spent a lot of time. I need to know what works in this school because all these great discipline programs are wonderful, but

if they don't have support beyond our classroom. If the school is chaotic and out of control, no matter [what] I do in my classroom—that is going to trickle down.

INTERVIEWER: Could you give me examples of that?

HALSTED: Absolutely. I have millions of examples. My room was located next to the upper grade BD room. The floor I was on was all 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms except for that one. That classroom did not have a teacher. They had a series of subs. They had a teachers' aide that was pretty constant with them, but even that changed. So, [the BD] room was constantly in disorder and in disarray. They were right next door to my room. They would be out in the hallway. They'd cuss at my kids. They'd cuss at me. They'd threaten kids. They would, sort of, be always in our hallway, and they would be really loud. They would. We were sort of told to teach with our doors closed and locked. Which, you know, to me, defeated the purpose of a community. It was, like—and having the doors closed and locked still meant you would have kids banging on your door.

*HALSTED turns the page;*



HALSTED: They had to hire ten new teachers this year. By the 4<sup>th</sup> week of school, five of them were gone. And, by the end of school, there were four of us left. Two of us are coming back next year. [All this year,] we would just look at each other.

“Are you kidding me?”

That was, like, our phrase. We would just look at each other and say, 'You can't be serious. You can't be serious that you want 'X', 'Y', 'Z' to happen while this is going on.'

*HALSTED turns the page; she holds up her journal;*

HALSTED: I want to read, this was, like, my observation from my very first week with my kids.

I did not expect this much anger to slap me in my face. I must have broken up ten to 20 fights this week. I cried every night for two to three hours. I forgot everything I learned at school. Thank goodness, one of my cohort members from my Master's cohort walked me through my week. This school is an emotional place. By Friday of this week, I had broken down in front of my class. And, this is the first time I had questioned whether I could do this. I feel like I had been dropped into a war zone. I did not know that places this sad existed, and now I spend the majority of my time here. It is quite an adjustment.

*HALSTED turns the page;*



INTERVIEWER: That's fine. Can you tell a story about a particular event that tells what teaching is all about, and, especially, emphasize the positives.

HALSTED: Okay, I think going to my friend Arthur's, father's funeral, to me, embodied what teaching is all about. It was, 'I'm going to care about you. I'm going to do the best I can for you. You are important to me.'



Then, another thing was my husband came to my classroom last Friday and met my kids. He asked them what they had liked about the year, and one little girl raised her hand, and said, “This was the first year that a teacher was ever nice to me.”

And, I was, ‘Oh, that’s so sad.’

I mean, it is sad because she is a—she was a kid who had struggled. She was repeating 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and she had struggled. She had missed so much school before, and I think that she just couldn’t stand her teachers. They yelled, and I yelled, too, but, at least when I yelled, I had a reason for yelling. I would always explain, I’m like

*HALSTED speaks in an excited whisper;*

‘Now, why do you think I am yelling at you, right now?’  
“Because we are not doing what we are supposed to be doing.”  
‘YES!!’

*HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: This year—this past year, I just minimalized everything. When they when they trashed all the math manipulatives then I’m like, ‘We don’t have calculators anymore!’

Or one day I was absent. I went to a math workshop. I am very proud of this, the sub walked out at 9:30.

*Interviewer laughs;*

I am only proud because I am like, ‘Did you see!! This is not just me!! This was an intelligent person, and they just were like, “I am not going to deal with this, I am leaving.”’



Well, they had left my room unlocked because they had to split my class up, but they didn't lock the door behind them. So, then I was telling you about that posse that runs the halls—well, they knew my class was unlocked. They just went up in there and like stole all the incentive prizes and just sort of trashed everything. But, when I went in the next day my room wasn't trashed because three of my really good kids stayed after school and cleaned up the whole room.

So, I guess that's also what it's about too, it's like touching the kids you can touch and, you know, doing the best you can with the others, but really appreciating the fact that you can touch some kids, and in a positive way. I know that was—I mean, I was crying all the time last year, but it was mostly sad or upset, but that was the day when it—'OOOHHHH!!!'

*Halsted cries; she reaches into her purse and gets a tissue;*

I was so proud of them. And, one of their—the next day was like parent teacher conferences and when one of the moms had come in, and she was like—she told me everything. She told me how they stayed after school.

“They just didn't want to embarrass you with the parents coming in. They didn't want you to be embarrassed.”

*HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: And, one—one girl who is also repeating. She lived in a homeless shelter. She was my best student—like, not academically, but behaviorally. So appropriate—never inappropriate. Never. But she missed so much school because of their living situation. There were times where she told me she couldn't get to school because—I don't think the shelter was [near us]. So, they had to take a bus, and the school used to give them reduced fare bus cards, but, like, they were out of them. So, I would always slip her money, every once in a while, just so they could get to school and back.

She was already repeating 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and she was smart. I mean, she had the skills—I just wanted her to get through and to pass, and she still is going to have to go to summer school this year, which makes me so sad. I don't know, it was just really weird. Her mother withdrew her at the end of the—withdrew her at the beginning of last week because they couldn't even stay at their shelter anymore. They had to go somewhere in the suburbs. But, she had missed so many days—she had missed almost 50 days of school. So there was no way that I could pass her. No matter where she ends up next year, I think, maybe, they will let her take the ITBS [the Chicago high stakes assessment] again. I don't know, but I have a feeling she's

going to have to do something, you know, something's going to have to happen before she can go to 4<sup>th</sup> grade.



Which is pretty upsetting, because she is such a sweet girl and, by far, my most appropriate, most behaved student and with every teacher that dealt with her—just always, just really wonderful, respectful. I used to use exit tickets at the end of the day with my kids. ‘What did you learn about reading math and life?’ Inevitably, like her and a lot of other kids, too, would write, “I learned that this class is really mean to you.”

She was just—she’s a doll and just a sweet girl. I learned a lot from her because other kids were very resentful of the treatment she received, but, it’s like, ‘She doesn’t get this treatment for any other reason other than that she always follows directions, and she always makes good choices. She always does what she thinks is best, and she never tries to hurt someone.’

*HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: I have another stand out kid. His name was Frederick, and he was 12. Or, he turned 12 while he was in my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade room. He had failed 3<sup>rd</sup> grade twice, and was an extremely angry child. Because he was so much older than the rest of my kids. He was like a bully, and his mom was kind of a bully when she didn’t know me. There was one day when I had let the class out like at 2:35, instead of 2:30, and she was telling some other adult at the school she was going to, you know, beat me up. And,

“Who do I think I was, keeping the kids in?”

A really proud thing for me is I forged a really nice relationship with her, ultimately. He had never been staffed for special ed services, and he was trying to go on, and he was still 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and it was, like, ‘Are you kidding me?’

He had severe health problems. He had a nebulizer he used daily for his asthma, severe asthma, severe gastro-intestinal problems. He missed, I think, about 70 days of school this year.

INTERVIEWER: Oh my—

HALSTED: A couple times, he was in the hospital, and he would have to go in for, like, allergy shots or asthma shots. Sometimes, he would have very bad reactions; he would be gone for a week or two. One day, he had to have four wisdom teeth out, and he was sick for two weeks.

But, towards the end of the year, we had, sort of, forged a very nice relationship. Despite the fact, the very last day of school he had a little anger fit, like one that I hadn’t seen in a couple of months, but it was because I wasn’t sure about his school—his summer school status. He was in, you know, special ed at that point, and I wasn’t sure if they were going to retain [him again.] I kept saying to him, ‘I’m pretty sure you’re not, but I can’t tell you for sure.’

And, he just lost it. He freaked out. I had to lock him out of the room. He had helped me make all the plans for the party. He had helped me plan the menu for the last day of school party, and I was, ‘You didn’t get any of it, because I had to lock you out of the room! You—and—and—and—and—and, but I’ll...’

He did calm down. And, he came back to the office the very last day of school, last Friday, and we found out he didn’t have to go [to summer school]. Suddenly, he has this big smile on his face. He was a totally different kid.

He was another infamous kid in the school. I felt really good about how I dealt with his family, because I could see very easily where he was headed in that school. I really encouraged his mom to transfer him. I could easily see him ending up in that room that was next to mine—that upper-grade BD room.



*DR. VANOVER hits the gong softly, almost like a wind chime;  
HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: [That first day] we got in the room and things were going okay. I had the chairs in a circle, and everybody was sort of sitting there. I was going through the whole thing about how I wanted school to be fun for them. And then, it, kind of, gets blurry for me, but I just remember at one point—like, I think I was telling you about [Arthur] and the other little kid that were fighting all day. I mean, at one point, just a big ol’ pile of kids—just a big fight, and I remember standing there going, ‘What am I going to do?’

So, I went home that night, forever, called up one of my classmates, and was, ‘I can’t do this. I don’t know what to—.’

She’s, “Nope. Here’s what you’re going to do tomorrow. You’re going to go in, and you’re going to do, like—.”

We had learned this creative name tags where [kids] show you different things about themselves.

She’s, “You’re going to do the creative name tag, and then you’re going to do this and this.” She set up the whole day for me. “You’re going to go back; you can do it.”

*DR. VANOVER continues ringing the gong softly;*

So, the rest of the week—I know I came home crying every night, I know that. It’s kind of a blur, but then the last day of that week—see, I don’t remember exactly what happened, all I

know is I went into the principal's office—and she just looked at me, and I started crying, hysterically.

And—again, I've heard so many horrible stories about [my principal], but she was so nice to me. She took me into a small room, and she was very kind, and she said,

“What have you done positive?”

And it was true—I hadn't set up any positive incentives. I was like, ‘Oh, Okay.’ I mean, I just forgot everything I thought I knew [from my student teaching,] and I went, ‘Oh, Okay.’

[And then, my principal told me that the school was supposed to get] these clocks and timers, but we hadn't gotten them yet, but she had suggested—she gave me hers. So big of her. She gave me hers, and she said, “I think you're going to find if you start timing them doing things, you're going to be able to keep them on task more.” And that was true. So, at the time, I thought it was ridiculous, but I did try it, and it did work.

*DR. VANOVER continues ringing the gong softly;*

INTERVIEWER: How would you time them?

HALSTED: For things like lining up, I'd say, ‘Okay, I'm going to give you two minutes to line up, and in two minutes when this clock goes off, we need to be done lining up.’ Or ‘I'm going to set the clock for ten minutes. You have ten minutes for the washroom.’ And then, I would bring it down to like eight, and just kind of make it a challenge. And, it has a thing so you could put it on the overhead, so they could watch the time, too, and they loved—like, if I let one of them hold it, it was, like, they loved looking at the timer.

*DR. VANOVER continues ringing the gong softly;*

*HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: About four years ago, I started going to a Buddhist temple, and that was another big influence for me becoming a teacher. I would go and I'd take these meditation classes. It sort of—I was kind of fighting it, too, because I thought unless I was a movie star, I was not a very successful person. So, the Buddhist temple sort of helped me see the nobility and the goodness of just going and doing a good job in a classroom. And that, that's a noble life, that's a good life, too. And also... I know I got really stressed out a lot, but I think it could've been so much worse. I did meditate every morning, and I did try to go in every morning calm. Because I saw some teachers that would walk in—they'd run in at like 8:35, they were late,

they were frazzled, and, at least, I tried to—through the Buddhist temple I'd learned sort of a morning routine which sort of woke me up calm and got me there calm. I would get there early and, at least, feel on top of it for a little bit of the day.

INTERVIEWER: What was your morning routine?



HALSTED: I'd get up at, like, five, and I'd meditate for twenty minutes, and then I would get dressed and eat breakfast and just sort of relax with some coffee, and then I carpoled with a friend, so we would get together, and we'd do the 25 minute ride to school.

It's really nice to get there early when things are quiet. And also, it's a great way to know what's going on in the school. So, if you got there early enough—our one assistant principal, she gets there at seven o'clock, and she had this posse of women that all sort of like hung out in the office the first twenty minutes of the day. The principal's not there that early, and it's the only time the school is relaxed. You can sneak copies in the office. And this group of women would just be gabbing it up.

INTERVIEWER: Anything else about your Buddhism? That was really interesting.

HALSTED: It's like the concept that it's—that you constantly have to be mindful of what's going on at the moment, and just sort of be mindful and aware of what was going on, and also just of realizing that—because, you know, everyone has a part of themselves that they wish wouldn't show itself, but, when you do show that part of yourself—which I did with my kids more than I would've liked—but, sort of getting past it, and moving on, and not letting that sort of keep you stuck.

*DR. VANOVER begins to ring the gong more loudly;  
HALSTED turns the page;*

HALSTED: So, I said to myself, ‘Okay, this was a really unusual, outlandish, extraordinary year and, you know, hopefully not what we’re going to see again.’ [And so, I decided to come back to the school.] And a huge contribution to that was the discontinuation of social promotion. We have, like, a lot of 15-year-olds in our elementary school, and they’ve all been promoted and graduated. Supposedly, we—everyone is going to be in age appropriate situations next year, maybe that will--



INTERVIEWER *speaks over Halsted:* Now, the social promotions, now—

HALSTED: That’s why I had a 12-year-old in my classroom bullying every other kid in the class because he had been through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade twice, and still didn’t know what he needed to know. He finally got staffed this year in my room. And then, that’s when I told his mom, I gave her a copy of the [staffing report] because the school didn’t even give her a copy. I said, ‘You need to take this to the school that you want him to go to. Or, go to the area officer and say how they’re not meeting his need.’

[This is the year he would go to] that room next to me, that upper grade BD room that’s been disbanded. Most of those kids were graduated. They’re somebody else’s problem now. See, I only have four kids out of 20 get promoted. I can’t imagine that. I think seven of the kids that went to summer school [this year] were already retained once. So, I’m pretty sure



they're going to get promoted on. But, I mean, there's like ten of my kids that either passed summer school or, if they didn't, they're back in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, again.

INTERVIEWER: So, you had, of your 21 last year, four [kids] were promoted [to fourth grade], the rest went to summer school. You think that half of those that went to summer school were promoted, either because they earned it, or because—

HALSTED: They already had gone through the grade once.

INTERVIEWER: Uhhh—

HALSTED: Yeah, they'd already repeated once. So, they'd gone through the grade twice.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know who the kids were—who were retained, or were moving on?

HALSTED: I couldn't tell you at this point. I do know there's two children, in particular, that I will not deal with again. So, I think most of my other kids I could handle having again, but there's two of them that I won't, and they can't make me. I mean, it hasn't happened yet.

*DR. VANOVER rings the gong loudly and waits;*



DR. VANOVER: If you feel comfortable, please rise and say the closing prayer.

AUDIENCE AND PERFORMERS RISE AND SPEAK: Throughout each of my lives, and until this instant, all virtue I have accomplished, including the blessings generated by this practice and all I ever will attain, I offer to the welfare of all sentient beings. May sickness,

war, famine, and suffering be decreased for every being as their wisdom and compassion increase in this and each future life. May I perceive all experience to be as insubstantial as the dream fabric of the night and awaken to understand the pure wisdom displayed in every phenomena. Through generous actions may I attain enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.



*Applause for HALSTED and THE INTERVIEWER; they go back to their original tables;*

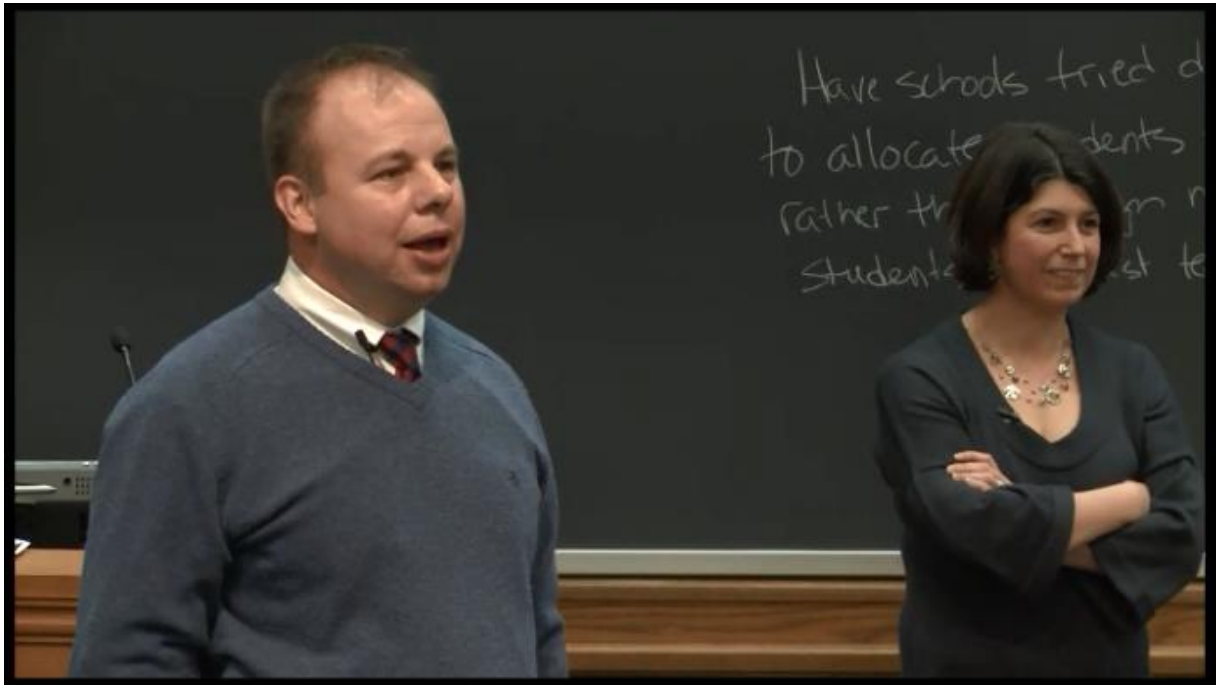
DR. VANOVER: Please take a moment to sit in your groups, look at your programs, and discuss your original questions in light of what you have learned from the play. I hope you might keep in mind the production's title question, "What does it mean to work in a system that fails you and your kids?"

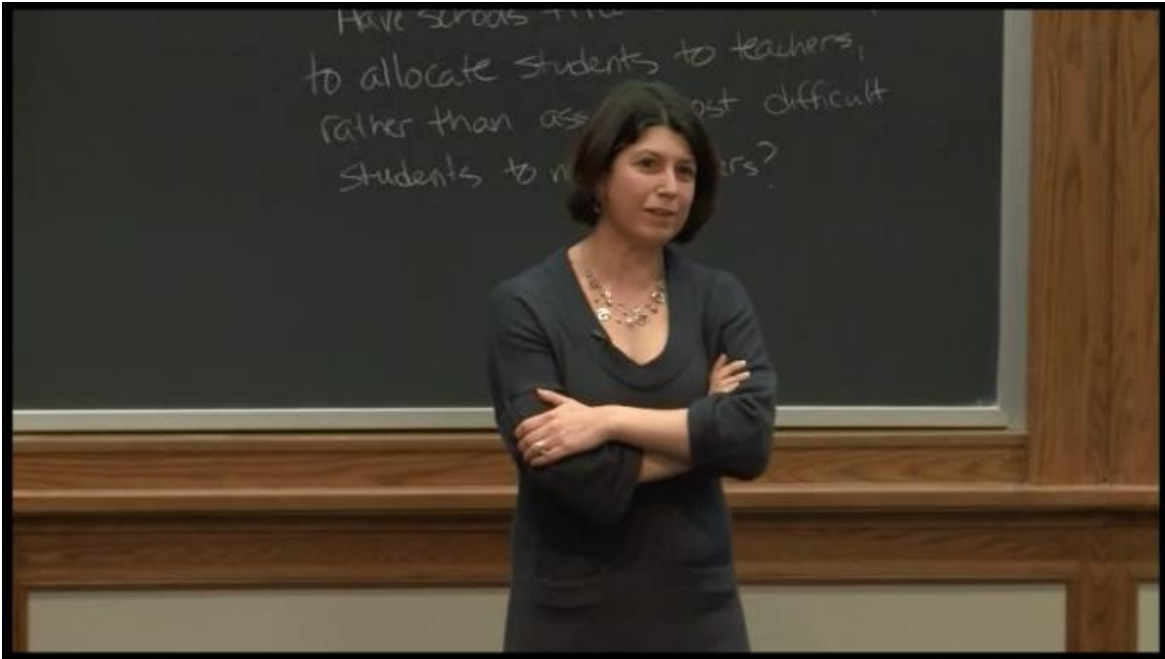




*Audience members discuss the play, first in their groups, and then as a full audience. At the Ford School performance, the FACILITATOR, Dr. Robin Jacob, also came out to answer questions. Dr. Jacob studied the Chicago Public Schools and is an expert on educational disparities.*







### **Acknowledgements**

The Gerald R. Ford School performance of “System Failure” on January 14, 2014 was part of a two part series on educational disparities moderated by Dr. Robin Jacob. Jennifer Jean Smith played the part of Halsted Hoyne and Jessica Compton played the part of the Interviewer. All images were produced by Cliff Martin and the events/AV staff at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan and are used under the principles of Creative Commons license Attribution-NoDerivs 2.0f.<sup>13</sup>

The script and performances of “System Failure” are dedicated to my late mentor, Nancy O’Connor, Dean of the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago, and to my late friend and colleague at the University of Michigan, David Johnson.

My mistakes are my own.

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fordschool/11999230545/in/album-72157639869025945/>.

### Future Performances

Beyond the protections offered by the International Journal of Education and the Arts, the performance rights to the script are protected by Creative Commons License: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs. Non-commercial, non-recorded performances of the script are permitted, although I would like to receive notice of these works. Future performers may alter the opening and concluding discussions in any way they see fit. They may also change the staging of the play and cut words from HALSTED's and THE INTERVIEWER's dialogue. Future performers do not have permission to alter or re-arrange the words that remain.

### References

- Abbott, A. (1999). *Department and discipline: Chicago sociology at one hundred*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Allensworth, E. (2017). How the organization of schools and local communities shape educational improvement. *Teaching in context*, 147-162.
- Allensworth, E., Ponisciak, S., & Mazzeo, C. (2009). The schools teachers leave: Teacher mobility in Chicago Public Schools. Retrieved from Consortium on Chicago School Research website: <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/schools-teachers-leave-teacher-mobility-chicago-public-schools>
- Anagnostopoulos, D. (2006). "Real Students" and "True Demotes": Ending social promotion and the moral ordering of urban high schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(1), 5-42.
- Baraka, A. (1969/1998). The revolutionary theatre *Amiri Baraka: Selected plays and prose of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones* (pp. 131-136). New York: William Morrow.
- Barone, T. (2001). Science, art, and the predispositions of educational researchers. *Educational Researcher*, 30(7), 24-28.
- Beck, J. L., Belliveau, G., Lea, G. W., & Wager, A. (2011). Delineating a spectrum of research-based theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(8), 687-700.
- Becker, H. S. (1999). The Chicago school, so-called. *Qualitative sociology*, 22(1), 3-12.
- Benner, P. E., Tanner, C. A., & Chelsea, C. (1996). *Expertise in nursing practice: Caring, clinical judgment, and ethics*. New York: Springer.
- Bledsoe, C. H., Sherin, B., Galinsky, A. G., Headley, N. M., Heimer, C. A., Kjeldgaard, E., .Uttal, D. H. (2007). Regulating creativity: Research and survival in the IRB iron cage. *Northwestern University Law Review*, 101(2), 593-642.

- Boal, A. (2013). *The rainbow of desire: The Boal method of theatre and therapy*. New York: Routledge.
- Boyce, B. (Ed.) (2009). *In the face of fear: Buddhist wisdom for challenging times*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Brown, D. F. (2004). Urban teachers' professed classroom management strategies: Reflections of culturally responsive teaching. *Urban education*, 39(3), 266-289.
- Brown, R. N. (2009). *Black girlhood celebration: Toward a hip-hop feminist pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Brown, R. N. (2014). She came at me wreckless! wreckless theatrics as disruptive methodology. In R. N. Brown, Carducci, R., & Kubby, C. R. (Ed.), *Disrupting qualitative inquiry: Possibilities and tensions in educational research*. . New York: Peter Lang.
- Charmaz, K. (2017). The power of constructivist grounded theory for critical inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(1), 34-45.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2006). Troubling images of teaching in No Child Left Behind. *Harvard Educational Review*, 76(4), 668-697.
- Conquergood, D. (2002). Performance studies: Interventions and radical research. *The Drama Review*, 46(2), 145-156.
- Denzin, N. K. (2001). The reflexive interview and a performative social science. *Qualitative Research*, 1(1), 23-46.
- Donmoyer, R. (2012). Can qualitative researchers answer policymakers' what-works question? *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(8), 662-673.
- Donmoyer, R., & Donmoyer, Y. J. (1995). Data as drama: Reflections on the use of reader's theater as a mode of qualitative data display. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1(4), 402-428.
- Eisner, E. W. (2001). Concerns and aspirations for qualitative research in the new millennium. *Qualitative Research*, 1(2), 135-145.
- Eisner, E. W. (2008). Persistent tensions in arts-based research. In M. Cahnmann-Talor & R. Siegesmund (Eds.), *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice* (pp. 16-27). New York: Routledge.
- Finley, S. (2011). Critical arts-based inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4 ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.



- Gouzouasis, P. (2006). A/r/t/ography in music research: A reunification of musician, researcher, and teacher. *Arts and Learning Journal*, 22(1), 23-42.
- Grant, C. A. (2012). Cultivating flourishing lives: A robust social justice vision of education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(5), 910-934.
- Greene, M. (1973). *Teacher as stranger: Educational philosophy in a new age*. New York: Wiley.
- Habermas, J. (1979). *Communication and the evolution of society* (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Hanh, T. N. (2012). *You are here: Discovering the magic of the present moment*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Hassrick, E. M., Raudenbush, S. W., & Rosen, L. (2017). *The ambitious elementary school: Its conception, design, and implications for educational equality*: University of Chicago Press.
- Hatch, A. (2006). Qualitative studies in the era of scientifically-based research: Musings of a former QSE editor. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)*, 19(4), 403-407.
- Heritage, J. (1984). *Garfinkel and ethnomethodology*. New York: Polity Press.
- Herrick, M. J. (1971). *The Chicago schools: A social and political history*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE
- Hill, R. B. (2003). *The strengths of Black families*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Horsford, S. D. (2011). *Learning in a burning house: Educational inequality, ideology, and (Dis) integration*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Huddleston, A. P. (2014). Achievement at whose expense? A literature review of test-based grade retention policies in US school. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 22, 18. Retrieved from <https://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1344>
- Hughes, L. (1959). *Selected poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Jacob, R. T., Stone, S., & Roderick, M. (2004). Ending social promotion: The response of teachers and students. Retrieved from Consortium on Chicago School Research website: <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/ending-social-promotion-response-teachers-and-students>
- Jarrett, R. L. (1995). Growing up poor: The family experiences of socially mobile youth in low-income African American neighborhoods. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 10(1), 111-135.

- Kapadia, K., Coca, V., & Easton, J. Q. (2007). Keeping new teachers: A first look at the influences of induction in the Chicago Public Schools. Retrieved from <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/keeping-new-teachers-first-look-influences-induction-chicago-public-schools>
- Kauffman, D., Moore Johnson, S., Kardos, S. M., Liu, E., & Peske, H. (2002). "Lost at Sea": New teachers' experiences with curriculum and assessment. *Teachers College Record*, 104(2), 273-300.
- Kleinfeld, J. (1992). Learning to think like a teacher: The study of cases. In J. H. Shulman (Ed.), *Case methods in teacher education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Knowles, J. G., Promislow, S., & Cole, A. L. (2008). *Creating scholartistry: Imagining the arts-informed thesis or dissertation*: Backalong Books.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan : The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life* (2nd ed.). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California
- Larson, C. L. (1997). Re-presenting the subject: Problems in personal narrative inquiry. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)*, 10(4), 455-470.
- Leavy, P. (2015). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice* (2nd ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Lesnick, J., Jiang, J., Spote, S. E., Sartain, L., & Hart, H. (2010). A study of Chicago New Teacher Center induction coaching in Chicago Public Schools: 2009-2010. Retrieved from <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/study-chicago-new-teacher-center-induction-coaching-chicago-public-schools-2009-2010>
- Lincoln, Y. (2000). Narrative authority vs. perjured testimony: Courage, vulnerability and truth. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)*, 12(2), 131-138.
- Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city*. New York: Routledge.
- Locke, K., Golden-Biddle, K., & Feldman, M. S. (2004). Imaginative theorizing in interpretive organizational research. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2004(1), B1-B6.

- Locke, K., Golden-Biddle, K., & Feldman, M. S. (2008). Making doubt generative: Rethinking the role of doubt in the research process. *Organization Science*, 19(6), 907-918.
- Luppescu, S., Allensworth, E., Moore, P., de la Torre, M., & Murphy, J. (2011). *Trends in Chicago's schools across three eras of reform: Full Report*. Retrieved from Chicago: [http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub\\_id=157](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=157)
- MacDonald, J. P., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., & MacDonald, E. (2007). *The power of protocols: An educator's guide to better practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Madison, D. S., & Hamera, J. (2006). Performance studies at the intersections. In D. S. Madison & J. Hamera (Eds.), *Handbook of Performance Studies* (pp. xi-xxv). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- National School Reform Faculty. (n. d.). The jigsaw protocol. Retrieved from <http://www.nsrffharmony.org/protocol/doc/jigsaw.pdf>
- Noguera, P. A. (2009). *The trouble with black boys:... And other reflections on race, equity, and the future of public education*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley.
- Norris, J. (2009). *Playbuilding as qualitative research: A participatory arts-based approach*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- Palmer, D., & Rangel, V. S. (2011). High stakes accountability and policy implementation: Teacher decision making in bilingual classrooms in Texas. *Educational Policy*, 25(4), 614-647.
- Park, R. E., & Burgess, E. W. (2012). *The city*: University of Chicago Press.
- Penfield, R. D. (2010). Test-based grade retention: Does it stand up to professional standards for fair and appropriate test use? *Educational Researcher*, 39(2), 110-119.
- Roderick, M., Easton, J. Q., & Sebring, P. B. (2009). *The Consortium on Chicago School Research: A new model for the role of research in supporting urban school reform*: ERIC.
- Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J. K., & Allensworth, E. (2005). Is the glass half full or mostly empty? Ending social promotion in Chicago. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 104(2), 223-259.
- Sahlberg, P. (2011). The fourth way of Finland. *Journal of Educational Change*, 12(2), 173-185.
- Saldaña, J. (2002). Dramatizing data: A primer. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(2), 218-236.
- Saldaña, J. (2011). *Ethnotheatre: Research from page to stage*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast.

- Sanger, M. N., Osguthorpe, R. D., & Fenstermacher, G. D. (Eds.). (2013). *The moral work of teaching and teacher education: Preparing and supporting practitioners*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Santoro, D. A. (2011). Teaching's conscientious objectors: Principled leavers of high-poverty schools. *Teachers College Record*, 113(12), 26-70.
- Santoro, D. A. (2016). Response: "Something Funny" about conserving humanity and teaching: Lessons from the blues. *Philosophy of Education Archive*, 135-138.
- Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Bryk, A. S., Easton, J. Q., & Luppescu, S. (2006). *The essential supports for school improvement*. Retrieved from <https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/essential-supports-school-improvement>
- Shedd, C. (2015). *Unequal city: Race, schools, and perceptions of injustice*: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Simon, N. S., & Johnson, S. M. (2015). Teacher turnover in high-poverty schools: What we know and can do. *Teachers College Record*, 117(3), 1-36.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(2), 94-106.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2016). Wrestling with problematics of whiteness in teacher education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(8), 1065-1068.
- Sloan, K. (2007). High-stakes accountability, minority youth, and ethnography: Assessing the multiple effects. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 38(1), 24-41.
- Snyder-Young, D. (2010). Beyond "an aesthetic of objectivity": Performance ethnography, performance texts, and theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 883-893.
- Springgay, S., Irwin, R. L., & Kind, S. W. (2005). A/r/tography as living inquiry through art and text. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(6), 897-912.
- Steedman, C. (1992). Prisonhouses *Past tenses: Essays on writing autobiography and history* (pp. 51-61). London: Rivers Oram Press.
- Styan, J. L. (1992). The mystery of the play experience: Quince's questions. In M. Issachoroff & R. F. Jones (Eds.), *Performing Texts* (pp. 9-25). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Terkel, S., & Grele, R. J. (1985). *Envelopes of sound: The art of oral history*. Chicago, IL: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Turner, V. W. (1986). *The anthropology of performance*. New York: PAJ Publications.

- Vanover, C. (2009). *The expertise in urban teaching project: A theory-based study*. (dissertation), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Retrieved from <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/62224>
- Vanover, C. (2013a). "They are only going to steal your cars." : An ethnodrama about teaching in the Chicago Public Schools: Performance and Discussion for the 9th Annual International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10806/12345>
- Vanover, C. (2013b). *What does it mean to work in a system that fails you and your kids? : A beginning teacher's journey through the Chicago Public Schools Handouts, performance, and discussion for the 34th Annual Ethnography in Educational Research Forum, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA* Retrieved from [https://digital.usfsp.edu/fac\\_publications/2872/](https://digital.usfsp.edu/fac_publications/2872/)
- Vanover, C. (2014). *The Expertise in Urban Teaching Project: Interview instruments, recruitment letters, and other materials* Retrieved from USFSP Digital Archive website: [https://digital.usfsp.edu/fac\\_publications/2881/](https://digital.usfsp.edu/fac_publications/2881/)
- Vanover, C. (2015). *Using ethnodrama to understand and communicate interview data: Paper for the Arts-Based Educational Research SIG*. Paper presented at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Philadelphia, PA. <http://dspace.nelson.usf.edu/xmlui/handle/10806/14786>
- Vanover, C. (2016a). Inquiry theatre. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(4), 238-248.
- Vanover, C. (2016b). Listening to the silences: A teacher's first year in words and music. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/ari/article/view/24952>
- Vanover, C. (2017). From connection to distance: Using the practice of arts-based research to interpret field work. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 46(1), 51-80.
- Vanover, C. (under submission). Problem, data, script, collaboration, performance: How we built the ethnodrama "Goodbye to All That!". *The Qualitative Report*.
- Vanover, C., Babson, A., & Langtiw, C. L. (under submission). Introduction to the Special Issue: "Goodbye to All That!": A living inquiry. *The Qualitative Report*.
- Vanover, C., Babson, A., Langtiw, C. L., Rogers, T., Salaam, O. J., & Knobloch, K. T. (under submission). Goodbye to All That!: A Teacher's Last Year in the Classroom: Performance for the 7th Annual The Qualitative Report Conference. *The Qualitative Report*.
- Vanover, C., Jones, R. J., Hand, E., Anguiano, A., & Knobloch, K. T. (2018). *Chicago Botoh: Developing a research informed dance. Paper in the juried symposium Assessing Arts-*

- Based Research. Sarah Hobson, Chair. Tabatha Dell'Angelo, Discussant.* Paper presented at the The Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, New York.
- Vanover, C., & Saldaña, J. (2005). Chalkboard concerto: Growing up as a teacher in the Chicago Public Schools. In J. Saldaña (Ed.), *Ethnodrama: An anthology of reality theatre*. New York: Alta Mira. Retrieved from [https://digital.usfsp.edu/fac\\_publications/2866/](https://digital.usfsp.edu/fac_publications/2866/).
- Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York: Free Press.
- Winn, M. T. (2010). 'Our side of the story': Moving incarcerated youth voices from margins to center. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 13(3), 313-325.

### **About the Author**

Charles Vanover worked in the Chicago Public Schools for 8 years before he received a fellowship to study educational policy. During his PhD studies at Michigan, he worked as a graduate research assistant on the Case Studies of the Study of Instructional Improvement and as a post doc on the evaluation of the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Charles' career as playwright began when he met Johnny Saldaña at a session at the American Educational Research Association and they collaborated on the ethnodrama, "Chalkboard Concerto." Charles has published two other ethnodramas about the Chicago Public Schools—"Teaching the Power of the Word" and "Listening to the Silences"—and his plays have been performed at over 50 juried and invited sessions at venues ranging from the American Educational Research Association, The International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, The Qualitative Report Conference, The University of Chicago, and the Studio@620. He is an associate professor and teachers educational leadership at the University of South Florida.

## Appendix: Sample Excerpt

### *Excerpt 5: The Homeless Girl*

*In this excerpt, beginning teacher Halsted Hoyne shares incidents about the best student in her classroom during her first year in the Chicago Public Schools. Halsted's words are taken from an interview the author conducted, and they will be used in the ethnodrama that will be performed later in this conference session. Please read this story and be prepared to share its meanings with other members of your group.*

And, one—one girl who is also repeating. She lived in a homeless shelter. She was my best student—like, not academically, but behaviorally. So appropriate—never inappropriate. Never. But she missed so much school because of their living situation. There were times where she told me she couldn't get to school because—I don't think the shelter was [near us]. So, they had to take a bus, and the school used to give them reduced fare bus cards, but, like, they were out of them. So, I would always slip her money, every once in a while, just so they could get to school and back.

She was already repeating 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and she was smart. I mean, she had the skills—I just wanted her to get through and to pass, and she still is going to have to go to summer school this year, which makes me so sad. I don't know, it was just really weird. Her mother withdrew her at the end of the—withdrew her at the beginning of last week because they couldn't even stay at their shelter anymore. They had to go somewhere in the suburbs. But, she had missed so many days—she had missed almost 50 days of school. So there was no way that I could pass her. No matter where she ends up next year, I think, maybe, they will let her take the ITBS [the Chicago high stakes assessment] again. I don't know, but I have a feeling she's going to have to do something, you know, something's going to have to happen before she can go to 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Which is pretty upsetting, because she is such a sweet girl and, by far, my most appropriate, most behaved student and with every teacher that dealt with her—just always, just really wonderful, respectful. I used to use exit tickets at the end of the day with my kids. 'What did you learn about reading math and life?' Inevitably, like her and a lot of other kids, too, would write, "I learned that this class is really mean to you."

She was just—she's a doll and just a sweet girl. I learned a lot from her because other kids were very resentful of the treatment she received, but, it's like, 'She doesn't get this treatment for any other reason other than that she always follows directions, and she always makes good choices. She always does what she thinks is best, and that she never tries to hurt someone.'

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

<http://IJEa.org>

ISSN: 1529-8094

## Editor

Christopher M. Schulte  
Pennsylvania State University

## Co-Editors

Eeva Anttila  
University of the Arts Helsinki

Mei-Chun Lin  
National University of Tainan

Peter Webster  
University of Southern California

## Media Review Editor

Ann Clements  
Pennsylvania State University

## Managing Editor

Christine Liao  
University of North Carolina Wilmington

Yenju Lin  
Pennsylvania State University

## Associate Editors

Kimber Andrews  
University of Cincinnati

David Johnson  
Lund University

Shari Savage  
Ohio State University

Heather Kaplan  
University of Texas El Paso

Deborah (Blair) VanderLinde  
Oakland University

Alexis Kallio  
University of the Arts Helsinki

Christina Hanawalt  
University of Georgia

## Advisory Board

Full List: <http://www.ijea.org/editors.html#advisory>