

Using Kaleidoscope Articles to Support Teachers' Professional Learning

Finding ways to make teaching sustainable is important for teachers' well-being, as well as for their ability to maintain a long-term career in education. But what does this really look like in practice? How do other teachers think about their own boundaries, goals, and mindsets? How can we encourage others, like our colleagues or pre-service teachers, to reflect on this topic? *Kaleidoscope: Educator Voices and Perspectives*, offers a way!

Below we highlight four articles about teacher sustainability that were previously published in *Kaleidoscope*. We suggest several [discussion questions](#) related to each article.

We also offer 4 different structures for engaging with these articles:

- [As a personal reflection](#)
- [In a short-term discussion with colleagues](#)
- [In a sustained professional learning experience](#)
- [Or within a course for pre-service teachers](#)

Each option is structured with a different venue for discussion in mind, however, the ideas in each could be modified for a different audience. While we designed this resource around the theme of teacher sustainability, many of the guiding questions could be applied to articles of different themes as well. We hope you enjoy reading the perspectives of other educators and find small ways to create sustainability in your own practice.

Teacher Sustainability Article Package

[Poetry Corner: There is Joy and Beauty Here](#) by Liz Dengate, Spring 2024

[Self-talk and Sustainability](#) by Alex Steinkamp, Fall/Winter 2017

[Burnout by the Numbers](#) by Cassie Barker, Fall 2023

[Striving to be THAT Teacher](#) by Mary Chin, Fall/Winter 2017

Option 1: Personal Reflection

If you are looking for a way to individually reflect on the articles you've read then this option is for you! This option offers a self-paced guided study of the articles with ways to deepen your understanding.

Read what speaks to you. You can read the articles in the order provided, read just one article or anything in between!

Do a mind dump. No one will be reading your writing but you, so there is no need to be eloquent, spell correctly, or even use words. Reflect in a way that feels most natural to you.

Pause and Cycle back. Take time to reflect internally, for five minutes or even a day. Consider revisiting the article and your reflections at regular intervals to see how things have changed.

Use guided prompts. There are many ways to reflect on an article, but having a focus can help deepen your thinking. You can use the general questions or see the [specific article discussion questions](#) at the bottom of this resource for ideas.

General questions to engage with a text:

- Texts could be categorized as a *mirror*, reflecting back some aspects of our own life or thoughts, or a *window*, giving us a glimpse into another experience. Consider also the *sliding glass door*—a guide for how to move from where you are to another place. Was this piece a mirror, window, or sliding glass door for you?
- What is one idea, phrase, or action that you can take away from the article? How might this change something in your day-to-day life in a small way?
- Does this article connect to other ideas you've been thinking about? Have you been in a similar situation? Create a map or draw a picture to express the connections. Bonus option: Write a response letter to the author.
- Consider the article as a whole. What does it make you think about? Then choose a single section or even line of the article. Why does this moment jump out to you? What are the themes emerging and how do they affect your thinking?
- After reading this article, what about your practice is re-affirmed? What areas do you still want to grow into?

Option 2: Short Professional Learning Experience

Do you have an upcoming PLC meeting or other singular professional learning experience? This option offers you a guided group discussion protocol to use with the articles.

Set up the space. While using the protocol, we encourage participants to sit in a circle, with the facilitator acting as an equal participant.

Create roles. While working through a guiding protocol, consider assigning roles such as timekeeper, note-taker, or facilitator to some participants to help keep the conversation moving.

Follow a protocol. Discussing classroom practice and teaching philosophies can feel vulnerable. Using a protocol helps ensure all participants feel heard. Below is a potential protocol for discussing articles.

| Small Group Article Discussion Protocol | |
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| 10 min | <p>Introduce the theme of the articles and give time to read one for further discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could assign different articles to groups or have everyone read the same one. • Participants could read the articles ahead of time and this section could be for review and reflection on the questions. <p>Direct the group(s) to read with a set of guiding questions in mind.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did we learn? (about leadership, community, identity, etc.) • How does this story connect (or not) with our own experiences? • What feelings does this story bring up for you? • More article specific questions can be found at the bottom of this resource. <p>Participants should take notes/annotate their stories as they see fit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight questions that arise within the article that you also share • Emphasize aspects that you resonate with or have questions about |
| 20 min | <p>Participants self-reflect briefly (5 min) Write for five minutes about the article and/or the guiding questions above.</p> <p>Participants discuss the story (15 min) Take turns in a group answering some predetermined discussion question(s). We recommend discussing in groups of 3-4 so everyone can voice their reflections.</p> |
| 15 min | <p>Whole group reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we recognize as <i>knowledge about our practices</i> represented in these stories? • What is one main takeaway you had personally after reading/hearing these stories that you will consider throughout this next week? |

Option 3: Sustained Professional Learning

Do you have a sequence of PLC meetings or a longer professional learning opportunity to run? This option offers a structure as well as useful deliverable products through reflection on the articles.

Discuss the article(s): Have small group discussions about each article or do a whip around about initial thoughts. You could structure this conversation using a [protocol](#) or pull from the [discussion questions](#) for each article at the bottom of this resource.

Create a sustainability plan.

- Begin by writing a love letter to yourself for a rainy day.
 - Consider the themes in each article and how they may factor into the plan
 - i. Poetry Corner: Joyful, beautiful moments that keep you teaching. How can you commit to observing these?
 - ii. Self talk: Positive mantras or reminders. What will your reminder be? Where can you place it? How can you make this thought automatic?
 - iii. Burnout: Make a plan for your dedicated work time. What support do you need to help implement the plan? How and when will you reevaluate?
 - iv. "That Teacher": Focus on strengths. Make your own list of strengths. How can these help you reach your teaching goals?
- Place your letter somewhere you can find it later.
- Set up reminders or other accountability measures to check in on the plan. The group can use each other as support throughout the implementation process.

This could be particularly effective in September/October professional development when teachers are feeling particularly stressed or could be completed in April/May as a way to consider how to implement a plan for the following school year.

Option 4: Integration Into Pre-Service Teaching Courses

Pre-service teachers also benefit from reading inservice teacher voices. This option offers instructors of pre-service teachers ways to incorporate the articles into their course.

Identify a potential course where this would fit. For example, this topic would work well in a seminar course concurrent with a student teaching placement.

Make use of the in-person and online course formats. Utilize the [discussion questions](#) below for an in class discussion or for posting in an online forum. They could be used in small groups or for whole class discussions.

Create tangible end products. Select from the potential options below or create your own assignments based around the articles from the discussion.

- Have students create a sustainability plan as used in [Option 3](#). Modify for earlier career periods such as the first week, month, or year. Instructors may choose to collect the Love Letter To Yourself and mail it out during the first year of teaching.
- Have students create class culture plans. This is a place for students to clearly articulate what pre-service teachers want their future classrooms to look like, feel like, sound like, AND what steps they will take to make that happen.
 - Some questions for consideration:
 - What is their vision for their classroom? What steps will they take to make it happen?
 - What steps might they need to prioritize? Are there small gains that can show progress along the way?
 - Have students draw on experiences from student teaching, coursework, knowledge about themselves, and any known context about their first teaching placement.
 - Maybe this would be a place to have students reflect on teachers' classes that they admire and ones they do not want to emulate? Could even be from when they were students if not from student teaching.

Still brainstorming how to incorporate *Kaleidoscope* into your practice? Reach out to us at kaleidoscope@knowlesteachers.org!

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

| Article | Questions for Reflection and Discussion |
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| Poetry Corner: There is Joy and Beauty Here | <p>Do you agree with Liz that there is <i>joy and beauty</i> in teaching? What in your personal experience informs your opinion? Write a poem that expresses how you currently feel about teaching.</p> <p>What are some outside perspectives about teaching that you've encountered? Did you find them to be accurate, why or why not? What is something you wished non-teachers knew about teaching? What is something you wished the incoming students knew about teaching? How can you share them with students, parents and other stakeholders?</p> <p>What were some common complaints you heard from the other teachers? What were your common complaints (even if you didn't articulate them out loud)? When you review the problem while thinking "<i>There is such joy here, there is such beauty</i>" does anything change for you?</p> <p>Liz writes, "<i>Can I ever do enough to deserve the magnificent privilege of being in their presence?</i>" What are some joyful and beautiful moments you've experienced this year with your students and colleagues? Make a list of specific examples. How can we build on those moments?</p> |
| Self-talk and Sustainability | <p>What was a highlight of today? What small accomplishment can you celebrate? Be present to these moments during the next few days and celebrate in real time.</p> <p>What were some of your ideals as an educator when you first started? What are your ideals now? How are your ideals similar or different from your colleagues? Are there ideals that you feel guilty about? Practice responding using Alex's words, "<i>Thanks for the reminder, I'm still trying. I still see the target, and it is still important to me.</i>" How does that feel different from your normal response?</p> <p>Alex describes teaching as "<i>a multidimensional, many-sided, different-from-every-perspective, evolving, sometimes hazy, and extraordinarily beautiful entity.</i>" Taking various stakeholders' perspectives, what should your teaching priorities be? (students, admin, parents, yourself) Decide on 1-2 priorities in your teaching. This could be in any area, such as relationships, content, teaching strategy, etc.. What are some concrete, manageable steps that you could take to bring you closer to meeting these priorities? Be sure to include the "<i>hard-to-articulate acts</i>" that you do already.</p> <p>What do you tell yourself when you don't achieve your ideals? (the key word here is "when", not "if") Who in your community</p> |

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| | <p>can support you in creating and rehearsing more positive scripts?</p> |
| <p><u>Burnout by the Numbers</u></p> | <p>Reflect on this past week. How many hours (approximately) did you work this week? What were some factors that affected the overall time (tutoring, prep, clubs etc.)? Which activities were “required” and which were “volunteer”? Consider representing your activities graphically or even tracking more concrete numbers as Cassie did.</p> <p>Make a T-chart or utilize an Eisenhower Matrix to sort your activities into “essential” and “nice to accomplish”. What might happen if you do not finish a priority task? What are your “right things” to focus on for the next week? How can your colleagues and community support you with this work?</p> <p>Cassie set firm boundaries for herself and communicated them with others, such as <i>“I reply to emails between 7:00 am and 3:30 pm.”</i> What are some clear, kind boundaries that you would like to test out? How would you feel holding yourself to these boundaries? How would you feel communicating these boundaries to students and parents? How can you let go of any guilt that may arise?</p> |
| <p><u>Striving to be THAT Teacher</u></p> | <p>When you were student teaching or early in your career, what is one significant learning experience you had? What happened and what did you learn from it? Was there a strength you didn’t realize you had? How have you made progress since that moment?</p> <p>Mary quotes the old adage, <i>“it takes a village to raise a child.”</i> Consider a student you have known for several years (or yourself as a student!) Who was in their village? What role did you play? What role are you playing for your current students? Who is fulfilling the other roles for them?</p> <p>Aristotle theorizes that <i>“virtues are formed in man by his doing the actions”</i> and happiness is found <i>“as we work towards achieving some good.”</i> What small steps are you taking this year to achieving some good? How do you find peace knowing that you might never “arrive” at your destination?</p> <p>Mary envisions <i>“teaching for decades and to have some small influences on many students in that time.”</i> If you are in it for the long haul, what practices might need to change for you this year? How can you ensure longevity in teaching?</p> |