

Teach Boldly, Fehr & Fehr,
NY; Peter Laug, 2010



Chapter 12

Nonviolence: A Philosophy and Method for Teaching Boldly

Carolyn Erler and Susan L. Allen

Dear Fellow Teachers,

In this chapter I do something that in other circumstances might seem foolish. I share with you a painful episode in my teaching career that at the time felt very much like a failure. All of us go through this, especially when we're thrown into new situations. Rather than try to forget what happened, however, I sought the help and advice of another teacher whose work I greatly admire. This teacher is Susan L. Allen, media anthropologist and tireless advocate for violence awareness and nonviolence education on the campus of Kansas State University in Manhattan, where she has been developing nonviolence-related programs for nearly 30 years. Last November, I contacted Susan out of the blue. To my surprise, she was open to talking with me. When I invited her to a dialogue about her path-breaking work in education and community organizing, her response was immediate and affirmative.

What she didn't know at the time—perhaps what I didn't even know—was that I was seeking answers to some of the most troubling questions facing teachers today. I now share this dialogue with you, in the hope that you will learn, as I did, from this amazing and masterful educator.

Nonviolence: A Philosophy and Method for Teaching Boldly

The position I filled during my first year as a public school teacher had been created after the start of the school year to comply with the state's class-size amendment. Despite the title of critical thinking teacher, my actual role was to fill in the gaps and overflows created by the school's high enrollment.

Teaching without a classroom was not easy, but then most teachers start out that way, or so I was told. I had a harder time accepting that the school principal was an officer in the army. He was new to the school, and had made many changes since his arrival: a compulsory moment of silence for our fallen soldiers after the Pledge of Allegiance; a "Wall of Heroes" in the cafeteria; American flags in every classroom and hall; and the visible presence of young members of the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps. I began to dread all these things—most of all, Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" blasting through the loudspeakers before school, after school, and between every class while school was in session. There was simply no way to escape Adolf Hitler's favorite composer.

To explain my feelings, I must relate a little of my own past. I was a public middle school student during the last years of the Vietnam War. There was a clear understanding on the part of my elders that the war was a drastic strategic mistake and waste of human life. During Watergate my older brother, who was of draft age, rejoiced at the downfall of the gloomy president and his corrupt, despicable regime. One of my clearest memories from middle school was of my eighth-grade history teacher, a lanky old socialist named Mr. Worstel, forcing us to watch the Watergate hearings. I remember him saying that our country had almost fallen into the hands of fascists. Even though I did not understand what this meant, the words stuck.

What a difference a draft makes. Wars of choice fought by volunteer soldiers and mercenaries require heavy psychological conditioning of the young and impressionable. I came to see my job as that of a state functionary, pressed into service for a mass psychological operation. The fact that I had such a view of my work rendered my teaching of critical thinking problematic, to say the least.

I dealt with my discomfort by trying to teach nonviolence. Drawing from my background in art education, I chose to approach the subject of nonviolence through visual media. The work of anime masters Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki offered fertile ground for such an exploration. Feature-length films such as Takahata's *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) by Miyazaki are distinguished by themes such as humanity's relationship to nature and technology, and the difficulty of maintaining a pacifist ethic (McCarthy, 1999).

One scene in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) shows the main character befriending a wild cat. At first the cat bites her and Nausicaä gasps. But Nausicaä does not react violently. The cat soon relaxes and begins to lick Nausicaä's wound. "There," she says to the cat, "you were just frightened." Thereafter, the two are good friends.

After watching this scene, I asked my students to imagine the outcome if Nausicaä had reacted violently. We listed behaviors that the character chose and those she did not choose, and discussed the consequences attached to each choice. Perhaps not surprisingly given their age, some students complained that lack of violence was "boring." Other students said that it was easier to practice nonviolence with animals than with humans. As one boy expressed it, nonviolence in a violent world would only get you killed. Of course, they all understood and respected Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but King, they said, "was different." When I tried to press them on *how* or *why* King was different, no one answered.

It took me a year to get "Ride of the Valkyries" out of my head. Now in a university academic setting, I help art education majors learn from their student teaching placements in local schools. Some wonder if they can "teach boldly" within the constraints of the public school system. I tell them they can, and this is how: Teach nonviolence.

I direct them to the writings of Susan L. Allen, who has devised teaching methods for children and adults that include memory aids, analogies, stories, equations, and drawings. A dedicated practitioner and inspiring author, she is currently finishing a book about what she calls "*Every Day Nonviolence*," and a children's book showing that "Nonviolence is not passive but something one can DO." Allen and I recently had a chance to get together to discuss her teaching methods. Our dialogue follows.

The Dialogue

S.A.: When I read your intro I realized “teach boldly” must mean something like, “teaching as a subversive activity,” which was one of my inspirations. I still use that phrase occasionally because working to change the status quo is what I do, and of course nonviolence (NV) is subversive in that it WILL change the status quo if accomplished.

C.E.: You just started a new semester in which you will be teaching Intro to Nonviolence to a new group of students. In “Organic Balance” (Allen, 2003), you mention that most young people you work with “do not think about the role they play with respect to balance within the whole system,” which is not surprising. Now, like me, you are teaching young adults of college age. I’m curious about how many of your Intro students, on average, come to you with some prior knowledge of NV as a practical philosophy and methodology.

S.A.: Our students think of nonviolence as something huge: peace and justice, Gandhi and King—something, they aren’t sure what, that is accomplished by famous people in drastic, global circumstances...nothing real people could do; certainly not themselves. Yet, they are drawn to enroll because something strikes them as hopeful. Most of them have experienced imbalances in the world, such as injustice, oppression, or exploitation, in their own relationships and homes, and they watch the news and know we need to do something to correct it.

What I try to do is go underneath specific circumstances to show that all relationships are systems; that systems are holistic not dualistic; and that injustice or unfairness reveals imbalance in a system. Basically, because systems are abstract and nonthreatening, I can show that a bully is a bully whether we’re talking about a dictator or an abusive husband or humans polluting the earth. The global NV axiom, “if you want peace, work for justice” translates locally to, “if we want safe homes or safe dates or safe communities, we need to work for fair relationships.” It actually is an equation: Want healthy, sustainable systems? Work for balance.

In *The Uses of Enchantment* (Bettelheim, 1977), we are reminded that a child’s mind contains “a rapidly expanding collection of often ill-assorted and only partially integrated impressions” and that “fantasy fill the huge gaps in a child’s understanding” (p. 61)....If we exchange the word *child* for *peo-*

ple and remember that we all continue to mature throughout life, this insight becomes a psychological rationale for the use of anthropologically oriented information, or nonviolence information, as a basis for a holistic perspective....Due to a lack of information, we have gaps in our own understanding that are filled with fantasies about ourselves and our world...often in the form of prejudice and fear.

I argue that information and insights from anthropology could be catalytic to...affective development...in the same way Bettelheim (1977) argues that fairy tales can affect development of the mind. According to Bettelheim, fairy tales are nonthreatening because they are removed from “ordinary reality” (61). As such, a tale can affect development through the subconscious....Anthropology can share insights in the same way by removing us from the immediate and the emotional. I think the information and insights of nonviolence works similarly. It feels nonthreatening...but in fact ‘subversively’ helps important ideas seep in, uncoerced.

Today I suggest that nonviolence teachings function in the same way fairy tales and anthropological perspectives do: to cultivate a more flexible spirit that is better able to adapt to change and more willing to accept differences and ambiguities, thus encouraging us to act to preempt many of the causes of violence. Then...I try to be very practical and work on direct experience projects.

C.E.: I want to talk about your direct experience projects in a moment. But first—of the students who already have some experience/knowledge of NV, do you know if they learned this at home, at school, or in a religious context?

S.A.: Some of our students have traveled and come upon perspectives beyond their “given” cultural frame of reference. But the major source is religion. We can talk about religion some time. In our day-and-age establishment religion has been the only source for human beings who sense they have a relationship with the universe and want to investigate it. This is another value of nonviolence language. EDNV or Every Day Nonviolence language gives us a nonmoralistic, impersonal and, perhaps most importantly, logical way to talk about that relationship that, again, goes underneath the status quo cultural stories and allows us to see them in an inclusive context.

I might add, happily, that students on this campus and in the community often have heard of the Campaign for Nonviolence (CNV) through various

events because this is our eighth year. That basic *awareness* of nonviolence is prerequisite to changing expectations—and, in my opinion, changing *expectations* is the second key step in changing from a community that expects violence and organizes around it and to a community that expects nonviolent interactions and will step up to make that happen.

The third step is *skills building* and for that we plan activities that help build skills around levels or concentric circles of relationships. These include our inner life, our interpersonal relationships, the community, the globe, and beyond, to the environment and universe, which in fact completes the circle back to our inner life.

We have an outdoor social justice film series; we offer free yoga and meditation; we have a 500+ member SafeZone (SZ) program, and lots of other projects people have heard about and/or participated in. SafeZone is the quintessential local nonviolence movement, by the way. Average students, faculty, and staff have volunteered to be trained as visible allies for fellow citizens who are troubled or who are in trouble.

We also teach academic Nonviolence Studies courses and hold nonviolent communication trainings. The CNV even adopted a highway this year to illustrate that taking care of the environment is yet another way to bring healthy balance to a human relationship system.

C.E.: Your years of organizing around nonviolence issues have obviously dramatically increased the level of violence awareness on the KSU campus. Can you estimate about how many students, faculty, and staff participate in large events such as the Campaign for Nonviolence?

S.A.: I appreciate that you think we are making a dent in the enormous challenge of changing from a violent to a nonviolent culture. The reality is that creating lasting social change moves slowly, especially for those of us who think it is so important.

I have a current list of 170 people who attend yoga fairly regularly. Others wander in and out, of course. Meditation is still growing, but we have six or eight to a dozen most Mondays. SZ is big...and I think the reason it is so popular is because it gives people a real job that they can feel. It is so rare in our money-oriented world to sense your positive power—and do it for free! We've trained over 500 K-State students/faculty/staff; we helped the local high school start its own SZ. Even the district superintendent took training,

and we've trained some local Job Corps staff and teachers from other towns so they can start a SafeZone. People who have participated in some kind of event number in the thousands—we usually have 200 or more at Movies on the Grass, the social justice film series; lots of people stop to get info or watch the international news TV at our SZ/WC/CNV kiosk in the student union. We produced a “win-win” public service announcement, read strategically by our popular football coach...that was aired on several TV stations around the state a couple of years ago; and we had 64 community members read one of the 64 “ways” to practice nonviolence on the radio one year. Lots of people wear CNV “peace + 63 other ways to practice nonviolence” t-shirts. We've sent dozens of those t-shirts to groups and individuals—a couple of local businesses wear them on Wednesdays during the season; a peace group in Dallas found us on the Internet and bought some; a school in Honolulu wanted posters. We send posters out to anyone who asks. This year we made a Spanish-language 64 Ways poster that has been popular. This year for the first time state extension offices in our 105 counties will have our posters available. We don't do direct political action in the name of the CNV because it cuts off listening by those primed to disagree—so the Spanish-language poster is a subtle way of encouraging a more inclusive definition of “All the people” in our democracy. The truth is everything we do has political intent but don't tell anyone.

C.E.: Just so our readers know, the 64 days between the assassination anniversaries of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30 and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4 were designated as the Season for Nonviolence in Los Angeles in 1998. Each of the 64 days was linked to a “way” to practice active nonviolence. Since then, the Season for Nonviolence has grown into an international grassroots campaign dedicated to demonstrating that nonviolence is a powerful way to heal, transform, and empower our lives and our communities (SNV-LA, 2008).

S.A.: Yes. And to do this we rely on volunteers. Not only are institutions tied to “fighting violence with violence,” funding agencies have been locked into grants to ‘clean up the mess’ after violence, and we, or I, have just not been good at getting money....They want to know how many acts of violence occurred before the CNV and after the CNV. We don't know! Reporting is problematic, for one thing. For another, the movement is toward culture

change and that's hard to count. Surely these participation numbers are getting high enough that KSU can get some grant money one of these years. I think we're ready to walk through that door. Maybe even find some under-standing donors.

C.E.: This gets me so riled up. Have you seen the 2005 film by Eugene Ja-recki, "Why We Fight"? It shows how the defense industry, what Eisen-hower called "the military-industrial complex," dictates U.S. foreign policy and practically runs the global economy. So of course there's no money for nonviolence education. As you said in "Activist Anthropology in a Women's Center" (Allen, 2001), we spend so much time and effort 'mopping up the blood' that we never get to address the causes of violence against women, for example. When I think about it, I get very angry.

S.A.: I'm not sure why many bright women do not acknowledge, or perhaps perceive, the problems most women face. I used to think Phyllis Schlafly and her ilk were motivated by simple 'survival-of-the-fittest' fear. They saw as clearly as feminists do that women live their lives in institutionalized eco-nomic and physical jeopardy; but instead of reacting with anger they react like threatened mother lions and fight to maintain the status quo because they've been taught our present system assures that they have one man and perhaps his brothers to protect them.

The reality that one in every two or three women experiences violence herself leads me to believe the real reasons are more complicated and include privilege, socialized self-blame and a kind of willed naiveté that looks a lot like denial. In addition, many women do not want to "make matters worse" by complaining or calling attention to themselves, and the myths go on.

On a university campus, as in the world at large, change doesn't come because it is the "right thing." In a society that continues to benefit finan-cially from discrimination against women, privilege for men, institutional financial and political inequities, abuse of power and even the use of vio-lence to solve its problems, we who are assigned the tasks associated with stopping violence are rarely in positions with enough power to change any-thing. Certainly we cannot do so in traditional ways. Change means sharing power, and that is just too threatening to those for whom the status quo works just fine.

C.E.: I want to get back to concrete teaching methods—drawings, metaphors, analogies, equations—that can be used with kids. And can you tell us why early childhood nonviolence education is so important?

S.A.: Yes, strange as it may sound, I believe humans can consciously choose to evolve; we can look rationally at our predicament and decide to change our individual and collective mind about how we resolve conflict.

Coleman McCarthy uses this quote in his book, *I'd Rather Teach Peace*:

Q: Why are we violent but not illiterate?

A: Because we are taught to read.

Exactly. We need the notes for music, the alphabet to read. When we focus on the "ABCs of nonviolence," we'll see their value and adopt them....I think sensing the need to correct the course of imbalanced relationships for our own well-being must be a "fail safe" mechanism built into human beings—like pulling yourself back from a fall just before completely losing your bal-ance on the mountain side or falling off a bike. Maybe we humans can change our minds before we all end up with the polar bears.

Even though technology now makes it possible for us to recognize we live in a "global village" and also allows us to communicate among all its inhabitants for the first time in history, human beings and human cultures have not absorbed the fact that we live in an interdependent whole system of relationships. Lessons necessary for recognizing whole systems include learning the difference between stasis and balance; recognizing healthy equi-librium as functioning more holistically like a gyroscope or a mobile rather than dualistically like a teeter-totter; recognizing relationships, large and small, as interconnected, interdependent systems that are analogous to the human body; and realizing that what individuals do, consciously or not, is "passed forward." We can see the interconnected nature of systems for the first time in human history, now, from photos of the earth from space, from the unending spiral of the DNA double helix, from an MRI that shows *your* brain mirroring *my* heart beat when we touch.

My favorite analogy for talking about nonviolence is the human body. To address "dis-ease" in relationship systems with the holistic practices of nonviolence is parallel to applying a wellness or public health model to treatment of disease in the body. It is using holistic, preventative measures rather than waiting for the system to begin to fail before we act.

I do believe that if people see that relationship systems function similarly to the human body, then nonviolent methods that help us keep relationships on course, instead of waiting for the crisis, will be adopted just as good nutrition practices are being adopted. It makes sense. It is about survival not sentiment. I think it can happen like the changes in behavior, concerning potato preparation, that happened with the monkeys on that infamous Japanese Island (Watson, 1979). When 'enough' healthy well-balanced people recognize the power of nonviolence within their own life, we'll become the "100th monkey." We will become the critical mass that can turn human beings into nonviolent problem solvers.

C.E.: How do you make your ideas visual, or visible, for your students?

S.A.: Lots of ways. I draw swirls to illustrate an invisible force like the wind as a watermark on the "64 Ways to Practice Nonviolence" (SNV-LA, 2008) poster. I try to show the "force" in things like patterns: the migration of birds, the development of a baby, the color wheel, the path of a spotlight; I especially like black birds in their fall swirls and schools of fish. The formulation of thoughts inside a brain illustrates the entropy and redundancy of life. I think those patterns and other kinds of patterns in poetry and math illustrate a force more powerful than people can begin to see themselves being a part of, and tap into without the need for creationism.

C.E.: Yes, patterns. Patterns are the very structure of the universe at the micro- macrolevels. By tapping positive, life-sustaining patterns and concretizing them into practices, some of which have strong mnemonic effects, you have, as I see it, designed a toolkit for learning sustainability. Conscious, self-reflexive learning is the process through which humans evolve, and this involves choice. So the lessons of sustainability and NV must be chosen for the reason that nothing else makes sense. NV must become the new common sense.

S.A.: Exactly. I think of my anthropological take on nonviolence as an "ecology of relationships."

C.E.: What advice do you have for teachers who are struggling to implement nonviolence education in authoritarian institutional settings such as the middle school where I taught?

S.A.: I've come to think that our only shot at breaking into this entrenched and increasingly out-of-balance organizational structure requires a mix of 'civil disobedience,' taking advantage of help from a growing number of female and male sympathizers who care about justice in the administrative hierarchy, and teaching as a 'subversive activity.' Maybe there are many ways this can be accomplished, but I'm particularly excited about teaching nonviolence.

Until we can teach and practice nonviolence in the 'real' world, beginning in kindergarten or before then, what better place than at our schools to try an approach that, among other things, has the potential to get ahead of some of the violence and is so positively framed that it can suit even the public relations office? In my opinion, our great challenge is to make nonviolence "cool" as it competes for attention beside the daily drama of violence. For example, maybe we can find ways to frame nonviolence as "green" relationships. I should say that even some of my best friends have doubts about trying to practice nonviolence on a campus. "It's too 60s," it "Sounds like Gandhi and King," and "Are we going to the president's house in a VW microbus and have sit-ins?" are some of the comments I have received.

C.E.: It reminds me of my middle school students, who seemed to be saying that MLK was made somehow less relevant by 9/11.

S.A.: In my opinion, the one critical point these people are missing is that Gandhi and King were right in the 1930s and 1960s, and they are right today. The power and the potential of nonviolence are real, which is why it has not been embraced by the establishment, and those who are serious about ending violence shouldn't be embarrassed to give it a try. The world has yet to make a sincere attempt to contest violence with nonviolence as a pragmatic set of tactics and tools as well as a philosophy that is far different from our naïve view of it as pacifism or "passive-ism."

We have to remember we are creating our futures as we speak. We can't go back and undo past imbalances that have led to violence, such as injustice and misuse of power, but we can examine current problems within the con-

text of whole systems, identify connections, discern precursors, and work to preempt a future crisis. The positive action we take to correct the imbalances is my definition of “every day” nonviolence.

Nobody said it would be easy. My conviction though—one that I learned from the holistic perspective of anthropology—is that if we can nudge the perspectives of a critical mass of citizens to a high-enough hill, changes in behavior may follow like the flow of a river. (End of dialogue)

Carolyn Erler: Conclusions

The most painful part of my job at the middle school was that I wanted to teach nonviolence, but I didn’t know how. The fact that I was an experienced educator who had always done well in the classroom added to my frustration. The lingering pain of defeat was what pushed me to seek out nonviolence educators such as Susan Allen. I wanted to know what I had overlooked so that I could change.

What I didn’t take into account was the transformative nature of learning. Susan did not tell me how to fix my mistakes; she gave me a new paradigm, a higher ground from which to think about, practice, and teach nonviolence. From this new place, I saw my “failure” as a teacher as a symptom of a narrowly focused, politicized notion of nonviolence. I had cut the meaning of nonviolence for my students to the size of my own thinking; or, as Susan put it, I had not gone “underneath specific circumstances,” which can be threatening, to lay the conceptual groundwork.

During the Vietnam War, peace was a moral stance, a movement and critique of power, just as today activists challenge the war in Iraq on grounds of nonviolence. We are familiar with peace as a form of antiestablishment discourse. But how many of us equate peace and nonviolence with healthy functioning ecosystems, the basis for life on earth? How many of us view nonviolence as the essence of sustainable relationships and the backbone of social justice? When we open ourselves to the wholeness of systems and recognize our crucial presence and role within them, we appreciate that nonviolence is another word for and a way to achieve balance.

For teachers, the elegance of Susan’s broadminded conceptualization of nonviolence is its relevance to math, science, social studies, language arts, music, art, and physical education in equal measure. If as teachers we can prepare our students in multiple ways and on multiple fronts to act on the

global imperative of nonviolence, I believe that we will have taught well—and boldly.

Thank you for letting me tell my story. I hope that in some small way, I have encouraged you to share your stories—even stories of perceived failure—with other practicing teachers. This is how we “do” solidarity as people committed not only to educating children, but also educating parents, administrators, and communities about the issues that trouble—and inspire—us the most. If you “pass forward” one idea from this dialogue with Susan, let it be this: Teachers are the leading edge of human evolution.

Peace,



To continue learning about the Nonviolence Education Program at Kansas State University, and to read articles by Susan L. Allen, visit <http://www.k-state.edu/womenscenter/NonviolenceWorks.htm>

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Chapter 13

A Marshall Plan for Teaching: What It Will Really Take to Leave No Child Behind

Linda Darling-Hammond

Dear Present and Future Teachers,

I want to share a word with you about a law that will color your professional life even after it is gone—the No Child Left Behind Act. Views on it are currently as divided as Berlin before the wall came down. Whatever one thinks about the Act, it's clear that developing more skillful teaching is a sine qua non for attaining more equitable achievement for students in the United States. If we do not have sophisticated skills for teaching challenging content to diverse learners, there is no way that children from all racial/ethnic, language, and socioeconomic backgrounds will reach the academic standards envisioned by the law. For this reason, one of the most important aspects of NCLB is its demand for a “highly qualified” teacher for every child.

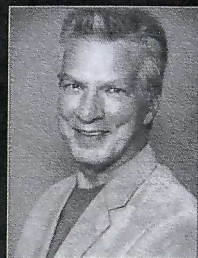
public schools, teachers are often discouraged by the restrictions placed on the education system: federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind, excess on standardized testing, pre-packaged curricula, inadequate funding, over-assessments, cultural incongruence, and social injustices. Teachers feel thwarted in meeting the unique needs of each student, and students continue to fall between the cracks in the system. This book encourages educators to **teach boldly**, using wisdom and courage to do what they know is best for their students despite the obstacles. A collection of letters from leading educators and scholars to practicing and future teachers, *Teach Boldly!* offers advice, encouragement, and inspiration in the form of bold, innovative letters to ignite teachers' passion for their work in the midst of a range of challenging situations. The book can be used as a resource for practicing teachers or as a text in teacher education programs. It is relevant to courses in foundations of education, curriculum studies, issues in education, education policy, critical pedagogy, school reform, and educational leadership.

From the hearts and experience of some of America's most knowledgeable and passionate teachers, this book shows how pedagogies of social justice often emerge, working boldly, against the grain, sometimes in spite of administrative and political obstacles. *Teach Boldly!* is a call for greater moral, creative, and intellectually stimulating teaching at a time when these characteristics are terribly under-valued. A better education system would surely emerge were many of the ideas in this book enacted. A gift for new or veteran teachers!" —David Berliner, Arizona State University

Teach Boldly! is one of those rare books that is an absorbing read, not only for practicing P-12 educators, but for educators in many types of educational institutions. The issues discussed are significant, the writing is lucid, the arguments are compelling, and the conclusions are far-reaching. I highly recommend the volume to anyone involved in teaching courageously in challenging settings." —Douglas J. Simpson, University of Illinois

Mary Cain Fehr is Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas Tech University. A former classroom teacher, art teacher, and school district administrator, she holds a B.S. in elementary education, an M.Ed. in instructional technology, and a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction. Dr. Fehr's mission as a teacher educator is to increase pre-service teachers' global and cultural understanding and prepare them to teach effectively in diverse classrooms.

Dennis Earl Fehr is School of Art faculty at Texas Tech University. He taught English, reading, and art in the public schools for ten years prior to entering the University of Illinois' doctoral program in art education. He then accepted a position at the University of Houston, where he taught for ten more years before moving to Texas Tech. Dr. Fehr also directs the National Education Taskforce, a group of educators who advocate for children in schools.



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