

Today in School Psychology

VOLUME 3

this is why a day
without direct
contact with students
is wasted

charles a. barrett

TODAY IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

**This is Why a Day Without Direct
Contact with Students is Wasted**

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Charles A. Barrett

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DEDICATION

To the children—
Thank you for your curiosity.
Thank you for being candid.
Thank you for being yourselves.
Thank you for always making the days better.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The third volume of *Today in School Psychology* features more than 75 funny, inspiring, and thought-provoking entries about what it means to serve children, families, schools, and communities. Coupled with some of my personal reflections, it's a pleasure to recognize the teachers, principals, assistant principals, deans, school psychologists, educational diagnosticians, and other educators with whom I have the pleasure of serving. It's also an honor to celebrate the next generation of school psychologists and my undergraduate students who continue to weather the challenges of completing their degrees amidst a global pandemic. If you didn't already know it, I see you and I'm proud of you. But most of all, I'm excited to share the innocence, insight, wit, and wisdom of children. As always, they are the greatest teachers and the real MVPs. Whether our paths crossed decades ago in Freeport Public Schools, or more recently in Loudoun County Public Schools, Northern Virginia Community College, George Mason University, Millersville University, or social media platforms, I'm grateful for you and the lessons you've taught me. Thank you for making me a better psychologist and educator. More importantly, thank you for what you're doing (or preparing to do) for children.

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Graduate Students**
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Guilford
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Lauren Sprowls
**Supervisor, Leadership
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Sycolin Creek
Elementary School

**Carly Wong's Fifth
Grade Students**
Sycolin Creek
Elementary School

**School Psychology
Graduate Students**
University of
Massachusetts, Boston

Hibba Khan
Park View High School
Class of 2017

ABOUT TODAY IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY, VOLUME 3

It's been a year. For me, and no doubt many educators, these four words adequately summarize the 2021-2022 school year. Even as I'm writing this on a Sunday morning in July, in reflecting on the past 10 months, it has certainly been quite a year: one that was filled with ups, downs, and everything in between.

Because confession is good for the soul, it's important for me to share that I was wrong about the 2021-2022 school year. What do you mean, Charles? Well, after many schools closed their doors in the spring of 2020, and the 2020-2021 school year was a hodgepodge of in-person, distance, and hybrid learning formats, like many educators, I was overjoyed to see students in their school buildings for the 2021-2022 school year. After all, it had been two years since I'd seen a typical first day of school and classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias filled with students. And because children are resilient, I knew that they would bounce back from the challenges of the previous school years. Being able to provide in-person instruction, five days per week, was going to be wonderful. Although I believed what I felt, I also realized that I was wearing rose-colored glasses.

In a matter of weeks, I saw it in the faces of teachers and heard numerous accounts of how exhausted and

overwhelmed they and their colleagues were feeling. It was only September or October, but it already felt like April or May. Yes, the previous years were challenging. Learning online platforms and adjusting to distance or hybrid learning were not easy feats. But those demands didn't compare to what was happening in many public schools during the 2021-2022 school year. In almost every way, and from virtually every person I've spoken to—teachers, principals, assistant principals, educational diagnosticians, school psychologists—there has never been a year like this one.

Yes, it's been a year. School counseling offices in high schools often felt like emergency room triage centers. Teachers, administrators, and any other available staff member at elementary schools spent hours chasing (sometimes quite literally) our youngest learners who were experiencing significant difficulty managing their emotions. Whether increased aggression between adolescents or children's tantrums that led to throwing furniture, schools were operating at crisis levels as they tried to support the social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of their students. And on top of this, the critical need for substitutes was likely never greater as teachers left the profession in the middle of the year—not because they didn't care about children or want to do what was best for them—but juggling the realities of an ongoing pandemic with personal and professional responsibilities simply became too much.

But although it's been a year, the children always gave us hope. The children always brought us joy. Having completed my first year as a central office administrator, I was especially grateful for opportunities to continue serving children. Whether through psychological evaluations, substitute teaching, covering lunch duty, or simply being in their schools, without exception, they made everything better.

In a few short weeks, the 2022-2023 school year will be upon us. And while I can't guarantee that the previous years' challenges will be behind us, I do know this: having made it through this year, we can make it through any year.

Whoever you are, and wherever you are in your career, *Today in School Psychology* has something for you. Whether it's the innocence and humor of children or my own musings on school psychology and public education, I know that you'll smile (perhaps laugh) and be encouraged to continue doing your best for students, families, schools, and communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'CAR' in a stylized, cursive font.

May 29, 2021

WORDS ARE WINDOWS

I'm still thinking about how the words we use are a window into how we think. For example, asking a student, "What's wrong with you?" assumes that the difficulty lies within them. On the other hand, "What happened to you?" isn't only a trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive approach to understanding a child's behavior, but it shows that we are open to the possibility that a student's presentation could have a lot less to do with what's happening within (inside) them than the systemic realities around them.

June 7, 2021

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Have you ever stayed at a hotel that you couldn't afford? Purchased an item of clothing that was priced beyond your budget? Maybe you've flown on a *buddy pass* of someone who works for an airline. These things are possible because of a *Family and Friends* discount, or you're close enough to someone who can give you what you want—and at a [much] lower rate.

Here's the lesson: this is how privilege operates. It's a system of unearned advantages that people enjoy by virtue of their association (relationship) with someone else (e.g., a friend or family member). Because of people's positionality (e.g., proximity to wealth and power), they can provide you access to what you want for a fraction of the cost. Did you earn it? No. But did you benefit from it? Absolutely.

Regardless of what some may say, privilege is real.

June 12, 2021

OPPORTUNITY AND ACCESS

Lisa, the parentals, The Prince, and I were recently in a certain grocery store in Loudoun. I'd previously heard about these books, but don't think I've ever seen them. After Lisa told me that the store had them, I had to see for myself. Even if some people believe that performance on cognitive ability tests is the path to gifted identification, because these books exist, schools and school systems cannot use children's scores on such measures as the sole, or even the primary, indicator of giftedness. Like so many areas in education, opportunity and access—in this case knowing that these books exist and being able to afford them—is at the root of subsequent outcomes.

June 14, 2021

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL EVE

It's the Last Day of School Eve and I saw the absolute best postcard in my mailbox.

The children are the greatest and will always be the greatest.

You're welcome, O.

June 15, 2021

THE SADDEST DAY OF THE YEAR

For me, the last day of school is always one of the saddest days of the year.

Happy Summer to the children and families of Loudoun County Public Schools.

June 16, 2021

MUCH TOO MUCH FUN

...I would just like to let you know how much I am enjoying your class. The approach you take to teaching has really made me feel like I am truly learning the material!

I also want to say that you do an amazing job creating an atmosphere where I feel comfortable and confident with sharing answers out loud (and that is not common for me).

Thank you so much for everything so far.

I'm grateful. Every. Single. Day.

Third summer teaching George Mason University school psychology graduate students and once again they are an absolutely delightful group. This is much too much fun to call work.

June 18, 2021

JUNETEENTH

Recognizing Juneteenth as a federal holiday is good; but it is far from the comprehensive policy changes that are necessary to challenge and eradicate systemic injustice.

Don't get distracted. We can walk and chew gum at the same time.

Focus. On. The. Fence.

June 19, 2021

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Hello Charles!

I meant to write you earlier but completely forgot. I wish I could express how beneficial this class already is. The fact that we incorporate social justice and the true realities of our educational system into our course is eye opening.

I'm grateful. My students are amazing and it's an honor to see them continue to learn as they develop as school psychologists. Every semester is different, and every class session is unique; but we always (and will always) discuss the systemic (structural) realities that differentially affect children.

July 6, 2021

INCLUSION THROUGH OUTREACH

We can't have inclusion without outreach.

*Outreach is the path that leads to creating inclusive communities for
students and families.*

July 19, 2021

IYKYK

I'm about to give the entire WJ-4.