Chapter 5
Navigating the School as a Smaller Fish:
Research-Based Guidance for Teachers of Less Commonly Taught Content Areas

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ABSTRACT

Beginning teachers face a difficult and steep learning curve, and teachers of less commonly taught content areas must navigate a unique path. A resulting problem is that many talented teachers who could bring unique and important programs for well-rounded students and schools struggle to adapt to the typical school culture and expectations. This chapter provides research-based and evidence-based strategies for navigating those waters. Anecdotes from the experiences of teachers of less commonly taught content areas are included.

INTRODUCTION

Being a new teacher is difficult. There is so much to learn on the job while simultaneously working to inspire students and impact their success. Teacher preparation programs try their best to train and educate aspiring teachers, but the reality is that the most crucial skills are learned from practice and over time. The first few years of teaching are crucial for ongoing career success. Statistics illustrate the serious concern of attrition and retention of new teachers, especially in particular environments, such as urban and rural schools, as well as schools that serve high numbers of students who are most at-risk and underprivileged (Will, 2018). An alarming 40-50% of new teachers leave the job completely within their first five years (Will, 2018). All new teachers of all content areas face universal challenges, such as classroom management, effective teaching, student engagement, communicating with administrators, collaborating with colleagues, and balancing various on-the-job demands.

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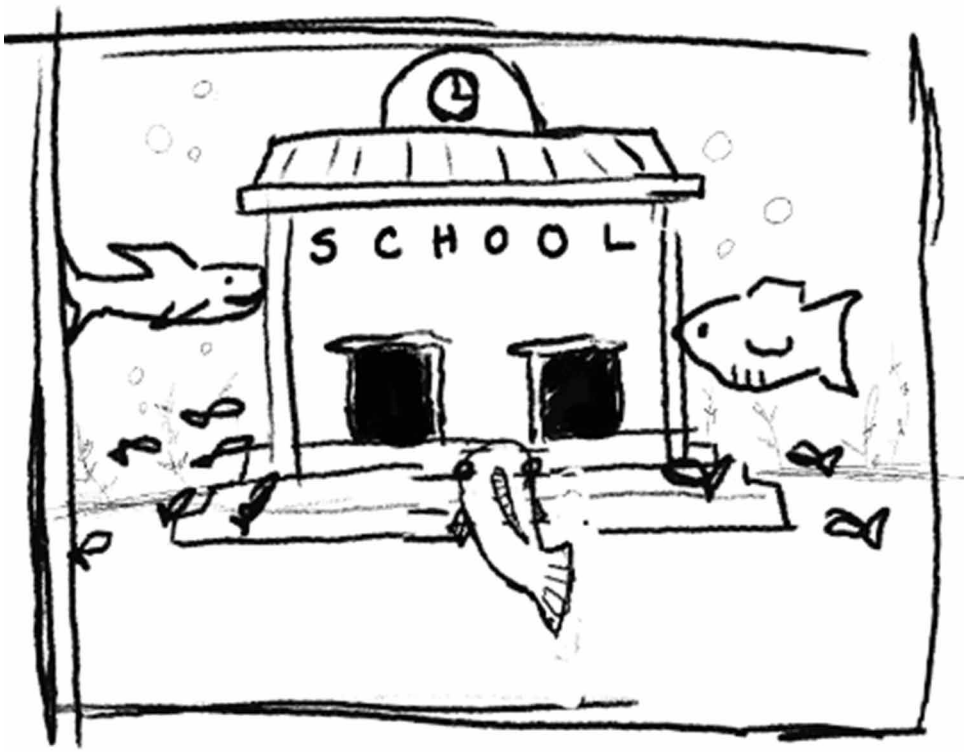
One thing that can make those initial years of teaching even more difficult is the feeling that you are alone and do not have necessary support. Some teachers may feel as if they are a *small fish in a large school*, due to the unique nature of their content areas and roles. As the only teacher or one of very few teachers of a specific content area at your school, having to figure things out as you go can be uniquely challenging! The artwork in Figure 1 below depicts the unique situation and feelings that teachers of less commonly taught content areas often experience. When most of the fish in a school of fish are all traveling together, it is important to reflect on what it is like to be the lone fish, finding and navigating your own path at each step of the way.

Figure 1. Artwork of a school of fish with a school building
Broderick, A. (2020). Fish School [digital].



The title of this chapter refers to *Less Commonly Taught Content Areas* (LCTCA). How LCTCA is defined may depend on the context, and will certainly differ between a small, rural elementary school and a larger suburban high school, among other aspects. This chapter includes the following as LCTCA: the arts (music, visual art, and other even less commonly taught subjects, such as dance and theater/drama), P.E./health, vocational and technical education programs, newer concepts such as STEAM, gifted and talented programs, foreign languages (especially less commonly taught languages, such as Mandarin Chinese or Arabic, for example), ESL, specialized areas of specific content areas (such as engineering courses at the high school level or highly specialized Special Education content areas), and many more. This chapter centers around a United States context. However, much of the information within is relevant

to a global context in many ways because schools and school districts are often organized similarly. Simply put, if you are in the group of teachers, you know who you are and what unites this group.

It may be surprising to consider certain content areas as less commonly taught. For example, most Americans would consider Physical Education to be commonly taught. However, Physical Education classes in US schools have been on the decline and have sometimes been pushed aside over the past few decades, due to stronger emphasis on what policy makers have defined as core academic subjects. Teachers of Physical Education and Health may find themselves teaching extremely large class sizes, sometimes traveling between buildings, and serving a large span of grade levels. Just like other LCTCA, these teachers' roles are dependent on the type of school and the school and school district culture. Thus, Physical Education teachers may absolutely relate to being included as teachers of LCTCA, depending on their unique situations at their schools. In the current landscape of accountability and assessment driven public education, most content areas that are not Mathematics, English Language Arts, and perhaps Science can be included in the wide umbrella of LCTCA.

For decades, the focus has clearly been on these "core" content areas, especially since the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have continued this trend toward accountability and assessment driven policies. Other factors that impact teachers of LCTCA include budget issues, funding sources, program cuts, narrowing of the curriculum, infrastructure issues (such as lack of space in a school building), lack of resources, a general lack of understanding of these programs and their benefits/necessity, current movements (such as STEM) putting limits on the curriculum, focus on college readiness, and the movement toward online teaching and learning movement.

It is important for all teachers to have a toolbox of research-based best practices to draw upon. Early career teachers need support and guidance and must take the necessary time to reflect and grow as they move from theory to practical application. New teachers need help and support at the time when the learning curve is the steepest. This chapters includes background information on LCTCA's place in the curriculum, policy concerns, practice-based issues, strategies, tips, and advice for new teachers of LCTCA. Sprinkled throughout this chapter are several anecdotes from teachers of LCTCA who were willing to share their experiences by completing a brief, online questionnaire during the 2020/2021 school year. The questionnaire was sent as a Google form link via Facebook, and teachers were simply asked to provide short responses about what it is like to be a teacher of LCTCA in US K-12 schools and what they would like people to understand about being a teacher of LCTCA. Six teachers provided open-ended responses. New teachers can gain a lot by exploring the experiences of veteran teachers.

BACKGROUND

The idea behind the term LCTCA is drawn from and inspired by previous work in the field of Education. Professionals and researchers in Foreign Language Education refer to *Less Commonly Taught Languages* (LCTL), which are languages that are not typically taught in US schools (CARLA, 2020). For example, while Spanish and French are commonly taught in the US, Arabic and Korean are not. This distinction allows teachers of LCTL to unite as a group, and to find each other, support, and resources that are most useful in their unique situation. While the specific languages that are considered LCTLs may change and evolve over the decades with ongoing trends, the ability to exist as a clearly defined category is useful to the profession. The same is true for teachers of LCTCA.

Being a teacher of a LCTCA is often a unique and challenging role. Teachers of LCTCA may hear their content areas referred to as "special subjects," "related arts," "non-core" classes, or sometimes either "non-academic" or "non-graded" content areas. These various terms do not usually define the role well and can be problematic. For example, while the term "related arts" might sound appropriate on its surface, some teachers of LCTCA, might not consider their content area an "art," per se. Importantly, most teachers of LCTCA would argue that the term "non-academic" is completely inaccurate. For example, Foreign Language content is clearly academic in nature and requires ongoing mastery of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Content such as Music and Visual Art takes thousands of hours of study and practice to master and requires highly technical and specialized skillsets and knowledge bases. Teachers of LCTCA may find it offensive to be categorized so broadly as "non-academic." In addition, the terms and areas suggested above overlap in some ways, but not others. For instance, an LCTCA might be "non-core" but neither "non-academic" nor "non-core," and so forth. Thus, the new and broadly applicable term of LCTCA is more suitable for this important but often unrecognized group of teachers.

As stated above, it is worthwhile to define the group of teachers who are *small fish within their larger schools*. However, the typically utilized terms are not agreed upon and can be problematic. With the idea of LCTL in mind, it is helpful to consider the notion of Less Commonly Taught Content Areas (LCTCA). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2020) provides a snapshot of how commonly or less commonly particular content area is taught, with enrollment statistics available online. With this type of information in mind, Elpus and Abril (2011) explored enrollment statistics for High School Music Ensemble Students and found that about 21% of high school students had participated in these typically elective courses at their public schools. Notably, the profile of the students enrolled in High School Music Ensembles did not match the overall US population, with white female students with higher socioeconomic status and more educated parents making up a large portion of students who had these opportunities. The type of school matters, with larger schools faring better for offerings, such as the arts (Elpus, 2020). Urban, suburban, and rural face unique issues, of course. Indeed, even the specific region of the US matters. The Western region of the US lags behind in Visual Art enrollment, for example, with only a third of eighth grade students taking an art class (Jones, 2017).

Unfortunately, LCTCA and the teachers who teach LCTCA are often taken less seriously by many stakeholders, including administrators, parents, and other teachers. As the anecdotes from teachers of LCTCA throughout this chapter attest, teachers of LCTCA are trying to do their best, by pleasing various stakeholders, while also educating them while going about their jobs. Shaw (2019) interviewed several music teachers and aptly described the situation as follows: "Teachers may also engage in overt resistance to performativity…teachers felt forced to actively resist or leave teaching altogether. Even when resistance occurs and situations of discord are resolved, frustrations may last and add to teacher stress" (p. 27).

While the literature on LCTCA as a group is scant, various professional publications and scholarly journals for individual groups of teachers shed light on how LCTCA are often viewed by stakeholders. According to Beveridge (2010), "treating art classes as merely fun undermines the professionalism and knowledge of any art educator, casting them as peripheral, rather than essential, players in a students' education" (p. 5). LCTCA are often the first courses to be cut when budgets become tight or political winds change in school districts. At the same time, stakeholders and policy makers often put undue pressure on teachers of LCTCA to maintain and promote their programs.

Consider the following anecdote from a high school Russian teacher regarding the unseen activities involved in teaching an LCTCA in an inner-city school district:

Russian looks great on a student's transcripts. Russian looks great on a school's course selection form. Russian looks great on documentation for the state to show ways in which we challenge our students. Great, great, great! But building and maintaining a Russian program is harrrrrrddddd!! We do a recruitment day every year with the help of a local university's Russian club (cool young adults who want you to study Russian! And here's some Russian candy! And your name in Cyrillic!). We put up signs, daring students to take Russian ("Are you up for the Russian Challenge?") or appealing to their silly weird side ("Russian. It's not just for breakfast anymore.") or to their media engulfed perspectives (here's a dozen images of Russian memes of bears and babushkas). We go talk to middle school counselors and ask them to remind their students that Russian isn't really that bad (it isn't?) and that EVERYONE takes Spanish, but cool kids take the Russian class with the other 7 students who had no idea what they were getting into either. Come on! Heck, we have a full-body-sized nose costume created with government money that adults take turns wearing throughout our school randomly (so students don't know who The Nose really is) during the two weeks that the AP English teacher reads Nikolai Gogol's The Nose with her classes (several of whom are Russian students and delight in helping their peers make the connection). A giant Nose!! It even has its own Instagram account.

The above anecdote clearly illustrates that teachers of LCTCA engage in many activities that their fellow teachers of more common content areas in their schools may never consider. Additionally, the issues that all teachers face may impact teachers of LCTCA more acutely. For example, teacher attrition, teacher turnover, stress, burnout, policy issues, and the current political landscape are all interrelated and ongoing concerns which will be explored in next section.

TRENDS OF THE PAST TWO DECADES

While issues facing teachers of LCTCA have always put this group into a unique category, specific policy changes and trends over the past two decades have made the distinction even more critical. Issues such as increasing school choice and specialized schools, federal and state policies, budget cuts and realities, and trends toward professional development for teachers contribute to the widening difference between teachers of more commonly taught and less commonly taught content areas.

School Choice

While it is not the major focus of this chapter, school choice has increased greatly over the past two decades, with more and more options for magnet programs, charter schools, cyber schools, and more. On the surface, it can be argued that certain types of specialized schools can be a special refuge for teachers and students of LCTCA. For example, magnet programs that specialize in teaching foreign languages to students all the way from Kindergarten through grade twelve allow for highly specialized and targeted environments that truly embody a school culture of language learning. However, specialized programs and school choice can also sometimes become problematic or can backfire. When one school benefits by increasing specialized programs, another school in the area may lose the few LCTCA that once existed at that school. Similarly, a school with one specific focus, such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) will likely have less time and space for other content areas, such as Music and Visual Art.

Changing Trends, Priorities, and Budgets

No matter what the context – traditional school building, more specialized magnet program or charter school, or even cyber school – a refrain almost always echoes among teachers and administrators that that there is only so much time in the school day. It is relevant to consider statistics on programs over the years and decades. For example, during the late 1990s, US schools were increasing K-12 Foreign Language Programs, especially at the elementary school level, but that trend has since waned (American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2017; Holland, 2019). Skorton and Altschuler (2012) provided clear statistics on what they consider "America's foreign language deficit," including the following:

The percentage of public and private elementary schools offering foreign language instruction decreased from 31 to 25 percent from 1997 to 2008. Instruction in public elementary schools dropped from 24 percent to 15 percent, with rural districts hit the hardest. The percentage of all middle schools offering foreign language instruction decreased from 75 to 58 percent. About 25 percent of elementary schools and 30 percent of middle schools report a shortage of qualified foreign language teachers. (para. 5)

Trends certainly change, with certain content areas dominating over others at different times. For example, during the past 10-15 years, more and more specialized STEM and STEAM (STEM plus the Arts) programs have become popular throughout the nation (Broderick, 2016). Along with the notion that there is never enough time in the school day for all content areas to be adequately taught, learned, and explored is the very real-world concern of budget realities and program cuts. Teachers and parents universally seem to know that LCTCA are always first to be cut when funds are in question. Daniel (2010) describes how budget realities, program cuts, and LCTCA (especially the arts) combine in this universal understanding:

Even with all this information visual arts programs across the country remains top of the list for removal whenever there is an economic crunch. Budget cuts are a real factor that all districts have to face at one point or another. The question then lies, what areas are worthy of keeping and what areas in our students' education can a district reduce funding or students time in? In most instances, the arts are reduced in scheduling and funding. (p. 1)

Daniel (2010) elaborates with statistics illustrating how over half of US school districts increased instructional hours for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics over the first few years under NCLB, thereby automatically decreasing the hours available for other content areas in the curriculum, often diminishing or outright cutting LCTCA from the curriculum. Naturally, the school day and year are only so long, and if something is increased, something else is decreased, respectfully. Teachers of LCTCA have felt the pain of NCLB in that funding was tied to test scores in more commonly taught content areas. Thus, a vicious cycle ensued for the first decade of the 2000s. In 2004, a survey conducted by the Council for Basic Education found that "since the passage of NCLB, instructional time for tested subjects in 75 percent of those schools had increased and instructional time for the arts had decreased" (Beveridge, 2010, p. 5). Echoing these sentiments is the fact that, "Five Hundred sixty-eight minutes (almost ten hours) per week were devoted to ELA. And only 97 minutes for art and music" (Choi & Piro, 2009, p. 28).

The outlook for LCTCA under accountability and assessment policies is not universally negative. Elpus (2014) examined the ongoing effect of NCLB on Music course enrollments and found enrollments to be surprisingly stable during that time, with about 34% of students consistently enrolled in music offerings. However, while this finding is hopeful news, Elpus also noted that ongoing disparities in representation continued, such as small numbers of English Language Learners, students with IEPs, and minority students. Thus, the impact of NCLB on LCTCA may be more nuanced, with certain groups and schools seeing more negative impacts on LCTCA than other schools have seen. Berliner (2011) noted that "negative effects are magnified among those who are in minority groups and are poor. It is past time to abandon high stakes testing policies and to experiment with alternative systems to monitor, evaluate and improve our schools (p. 300).

The notion that accountability and assessment policies may impact some teachers and students more than others is highlighted by the work of Croft et al (2015), who describe "The Perfect Storm of Education Reform: High-Stakes Testing and Teacher Evaluation" in the title of their article. The authors describe far-reaching and overarching connections, resulting in the need for serious social justice considerations:

In the face of the perfect storm we have described, our clarion call is not to endure or weather the storm, as educators have done with education reforms of the past. Previous survival techniques of battening down the hatches and waiting for the waves of reform to pass are insufficient to withstand this convergence of storm…Yet, historically, we have seen that no matter how idyllic current education reform initiatives appear on paper, they are most likely to leave educators and students adrift, feeling consumed, overwhelmed, and subjected to political finger-pointing, disappointment, disengagement, and shame. (p. 85)

Whether a particular LCTCA is more of less affected by accountability and assessment policies, it is imperative to be armed with a global understanding of the issue and strategies that can help. Daniel's (2010) practice-driven paper shares tips guided by the necessity of understanding policy initiatives. While the focus is on teaching Visual Arts in the NCLB era, the advice applies to all teachers of LCTCA:

The NCLB Act values an art education program and carries it to a high esteem as math and Language, but yet it is not carried through to administrators and schools to build their art programs because that is not what is being tested and funded. Often policymakers fail to offer the funding and follow through required to make learning in and through the arts a reality. What message does this give to teachers and students about the relevance of a solid art program as opposed to math and English? (p. 14)

Shaw (2019) detailed the specific dilemmas that Music teachers face in an era of compounding accountability measures. In analyzing the stories of teachers with various perspectives and strategies for navigating this political landscape, Shaw states the following synopsis: "Music teachers who attempt to comply with performativity demands often seem to be taking a "glass half full" approach. While these teachers may find aspects of requirements to be problematic, they try to use the reforms to reflect and improve upon their practice" (p. 25). In an earlier publication, Shaw (2016) examined Music teacher stress in the era of accountability and noted that administrator support is key. "Although all occupations are stressful, researchers have shown that teaching is consistently viewed as a relatively high-stress occupation" (Shaw, 2016, p. 104). Additionally,

School music teaching has been recognized as a stressful occupation, and may even be more stress inducing than other teaching assignments because of teachers' unique situations…Music teachers often oversee large classes and hundreds of students each day…Music teacher stress has been studied frequently as a main topic, and even more frequently as a subtopic in studies of teacher burnout and retention/attrition. (Shaw, 2016, p. 105)

These arguments from Visual Art and Music specialists would clearly apply to teachers of any LCTCA in various ways. NCLB and its ongoing impact have certainly contributed to uncertainty, stress, and anxiety for teachers of LCTCA for quite some time over the past two decades. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, attrition and retention are ongoing and crucial concerns in the teaching profession, especially for new teachers. Between 40-50% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching (Will, 2018). New teachers cite various reasons for leaving the teaching profession, but the vast majority say that stress as a contributing factor (Ryan, et al, 2017). The quantitative analysis by Ryan et.al. (2017) highlighted the role of teacher stress and current educational accountability policies on teacher attrition and retention. While teacher attrition and turnover are large concerns everywhere, some schools and school districts have worse attrition and turnover than others. Unfortunately, those are also typically schools which serve more disadvantages/marginalized student populations, such as in the inner city or in rural areas.

Accountability and Assessment Policies may lead to increased stress, burnout, turnover, and attrition. Wronowski and Urick (2019) note that while turnover is not always problematic, "chronic instability in the teacher corps in the United States, particularly in high-need schooling contexts is both an organizational and equity issue…teachers find that accountability and assessment policies are not congruent with their views of their profession" (p. 22).

On a positive note, research has shown that school climate and overall culture can make a big difference in combatting teacher stress and burnout, and hence the resulting attrition and turnover. According to Ryan et.al. (2017), school climate can make a big difference: "It may be that positive school climate may reduce the development of test stress symptoms and attrition/migration in school setting" (p. 4). Ryan et.al. (2017) elaborated that "All aspects of test-based accountability influenced teachers' decisions to migrate between schools or leave the profession entirely, both of which drain resources and damage climate within the school setting…Understanding how education policy influences teacher stress and attrition is an important step in addressing that gap" (pp. 9-10).

Stress and burnout are large contributors to attrition for all teachers, not exclusively teachers of LCTCA. Additionally, stress and burnout continue to be ongoing factors for teachers who stay in the profession, as well. It is useful to consider the main causes of such stress and burnout, especially regarding teachers of LCTCA, who often have the added stress of needing to constantly advocate for their content areas and often are the first to be the victims of downsizing, program cuts, and budget cuts. As noted earlier in this chapter, teachers of Physical Education may or may not consider their content areas to be an LCTCA, depending on the school attributes, climate, and culture. Regarding the ongoing teacher stress and burnout for Physical Education teachers, however, von Haaren-Mack et al (2020) explained that, "The most important sources of stress in physical education teachers were the curriculum, inadequate facilities/equipment, the low status of PE and students´ discipline problems" (von Haaren-Mack et al., 2020, p. 279). The authors elaborate on this point, as follows:

Whereas burnout levels turned out to be low to moderate in most PE teachers, voice disorders appear to be a serious consequence of stress in PE teachers. Thus, to enable PE teachers to take daily stressors as predictable and controllable challenges, stress management in PE teachers has to be supported by the school and the government by providing continual education and training throughout the teaching career and enhance appreciation toward PE teachers. (p. 297)

As noted throughout this chapter, a teacher of an LCTCA knows if they are in this group because of their own appraisal of their situation and feelings. Dealing with stress and burnout can be very challenging. A band-aid approach only does so much as teachers of LCTCA can make themselves feel better in the short-run but must consider the larger picture to truly find peace and to move forward. Specific strategies and helpful outlooks will be discussed later in this chapter, especially regarding finding your place as a small fish beyond your own school and school district, working and collaborating with others to gain strength in numbers, seeking a wider viewpoint, and making progress in navigating a unique path. With that in mind, it is relevant to note that assessment and evaluation are inherently bad. Shaw (2019) notes that "Assessment is an integral part of an effective and efficient music program" (p. 29). When used mindfully and in concert with a LCTCA's purpose in mind, assessment can be useful and empowering for teachers.

Another piece of good news is that NCLB led way to ESSA, which was passed legislatively in 2015. This evolving picture of accountability and assessment policies provides a much-needed change in perspective for many teachers of LCTCA. Most notably, the emphasis on provided a well-rounded education and the actual inclusion/mention of more content areas in ESSA versus NCLB is promising. Camera (2015) explains exactly how the definition of "Core Subjects" has been greatly expanded under ESSA. Similarly, the Education Commission of the States (2016) outlines a map for opportunities for the Arts under ESSA, and echoes that ESSA promotes the idea of a more well-rounded education than NCLB, its predecessor. Teachers of LCTCA can consider this aspect at least as a proverbial seat at the table and ongoing progress and recognition for some teachers of LCTCA and their students.

The news is certainly not all bad, as noted earlier in this chapter. Tuttle (2016) offered a positive spin on the current climate of accountability and assessment driven policies and ESSA. Tuttle noted that Music teachers should consider specific strategies, tips, advice, and an overall positive approach. Being informed is crucial, as are collaboration and communication. There are specific takeaways that music (and other) teachers can glean from ESSA and how it is changed from NCLB, including the listing of Music and other content areas as academic subjects, with potential funding sources, including potentially for professional development.

The term 'well-rounded education' means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience." (p. 64)

The decade from 2010-2020 has brought not only ESSA, but also Common Core (CCSS). Sears (2016) shares concerns about and reflections on these sweeping and ongoing policy shifts in the current political landscape:

The United States is grappling with massive changes in education, including recent Common Core implementation, assessment testing, and new teacher evaluation and certification models…For music teachers, policy shifts have created a need to defend the role of the arts in schools. Music education is increasingly justified by its correlation to career success in articles such as "Why Music? The Boardroom Case for Music Education" and "Is Music the Key to Success?" By engaging in constant resisting and defending, we risk losing the core of what we do as music educators and why we do it. What if we were to pause and consider two questions: What is at the heart of music teaching? In the end, what is significant about what we do? (p. 18)

Wexler (2014) echoes these sentiments regarding the CCSS, education reform, and the Arts, with specific concerns about autonomy and intellectual freedom:

The removal of affect from the already emotionally flattened public school system will leave children unprepared to find what they are good at, to use their imaginations, to make school relevant in a critical period of transition into a technological world--thus, wasting precious human resources. I argue that CCSS has overlooked the most fundamental growth that children are entitled: to imagine and shape their future. (p. 176)

The high-stakes testing culture and standardized testing focus in schools has a strong impact on LCTCA teachers, who often find themselves proctoring state exams instead of teaching their own classes for several weeks out of the school year, thus losing instructional time for their own content areas. NCLB, ESSA, CCSS, high-stakes testing culture, and related issues have certainly impacted teachers and students of LCTCA in their schools and beyond. The implications involve far more than simply curriculum and assessment and have an ongoing impact. Steinberg and Donaldson (2016) summarize that it is crucial to understand the current and ongoing political landscape, especially regarding accountability and assessment policies. The authors explained differences in how states and school districts perform teacher evaluations, and suggest ideas for veteran and new teachers, tested versus non-tested content areas, and more.

Along with these trends is the interrelated issue of high-stakes teacher evaluations and the related professional development activities required of all teachers. Close et al (2019) outline changes to ESSA teacher evaluation plans, with details that are crucial for all teachers to understand. Allison (2013) argued that professional development should always be meaningful and relevant, and not simply focus on high-stakes testing and related policies. The implications of stress and burnout noted earlier in this chapter certainly also pertain to the current culture of high-stakes teacher evaluations and impacts the teacher's notion of self and purpose (Allison, 2013). Allison provides a proposal that art teachers must act as change agents and leaders if they are to exist and flourish in this overarching culture:

Specifically, art teachers want to attend content-specific workshops that address their artistic development and pedagogical issues such as assessment in the art classroom and how to improve their effectiveness as teachers in the context of NCLB (Sabol 2013). They see the connection between their own progress and that of their students. However, in order for professional development to be effective, teachers must see the connection between the activity and their work as art teachers. There must be a perceived relevance of the content of these experiences to the skill set of the teacher's particular discipline. (p. 189)

Professional Development should not be one-size-fits-all, especially for teachers of LCTCA. Allen (2018) stresses the role of teacher agency with examples from new programs in Iowa that are meant to help with new teacher support and attrition issues. teachers need to have agency, be self-directed in their own professional growth, and collaborate meaningfully with colleagues. Allen stresses the need for a high quality and targeted professional development program for all teachers, with a growth mindset at its core. This targeted support of teachers can help, as many states are facing teacher shortages for certain types of teachers including Foreign Language teachers. Mentoring and leadership are key elements of this targeted professional development strategy and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Outsourcing and Marginalization

Another aspect of today's education climate is outsourcing and marginalization of specific subjects, especially LCTCA. Heilig et al (2010) discussed decades of history up to and including NCLB, with a focus on how Arts Education tends to ebb and flow over the years, making them easier to cut. Many will notice the ongoing swinging of a proverbial pendulum from decade to decade, which the authors describe as an ongoing "evolution and devolution" as follows:

Over time, arts education transformed to meet the needs and attitudes of schools and society…Texas's recent modifications to their educational code in H.B. 3 acknowledge many of these challenges and offer remedies: outsourced arts education, codified arts education curriculum inclusion, and a recognition designation for the arts. Despite these dubious repairs to state statutes, the main incentives associated with NCLB's Texas-inspired testing and accountability system continue to surreptitiously legitimize the neglect of arts education. (pp. 142-144)

Akin to the concern of outsourcing is the broader issue of curriculum narrowing. Berliner (2011) notes how high-stakes testing results in ongoing curriculum narrowing, with an obvious and outsized impact on teachers of LCTCA. The drill-oriented curriculum and teaching to the test that have occurred during the past 20 years have had an impact on the overall curriculum:

But worse than the sameness in outcomes is the fact that the cognitive processes demanded in this era of narrow curricula offerings are themselves quite narrow. Because public educational budgets are always tight, large-scale high stakes testing is never allowed to be very expensive. The items used to assess students, therefore, are quite often multiple choice, convergent, machine-scoreable items, the cheapest items to produce for mass testing. Constructed response items requiring thoughtful, divergent, extended, and creative responses by students are usually too expensive to score, requiring human raters well trained in a subject matter. (p. 296)

Berliner (2011) echoes these sentiments about the dangers of curriculum narrowing, explaining that:

A great deal of time for learning is added to those subjects that are tested, and a great deal of time is subtracted from those subjects not tested. In addition, many of the instructional activities in the curriculum areas tested are of a low level in terms of the cognitive processes that are called for by students. (p. 299)

Accountability and assessment culture, outsourcing, and curriculum narrowing are clearly all related in the current era and will be ongoing trends. Teachers of LCTCA must realize these issues and empower themselves to navigate their own unique paths, even more so than they have always done in the past.

GOING IT ALONE

Teachers of LCTCA must navigate their own path within the political landscape, and most importantly within their own schools. The lack of support and understanding, impacts of stress and burnout, and other factors certainly make that path difficult to swim. One crucial and oft-overlooked aspect is the concept of Emotion Labor, as described by Acheson, Taylor, and Luna (2016). The authors connected teacher burnout with emotion labor, especially for Foreign Language teachers in rural areas. A strongly perceived lack of community and institutional support creates an excessive burden for motivation and energy creation that is felt by these teachers Acheson, Taylor, and Luna describe "the use of teacher emotion labor to motivate their students, emotional burnout of the teachers, and perceived lack of teacher efficacy" (p. 522). Impacts on teacher attrition, stress, burnout, and more share a relationship with other "caring profession" fields, such as nursing. The authors suggest policies that would better support teachers who are dealing with emotion labor. The high school ESL teacher expresses sentiments regarding teachers' emotion labor as follows:

It's lonely! I have to attach myself to the English department. But I'm also one of the only staff members who gets to know almost everyone in the building because of my co-teaching, consultation, following students for all 4 (or more) years, and overall ESOL advocacy.

Along with emotion labor comes obvious logistical issues faced by teachers of LCTCA, such as a lack of resources and space/classroom issues. Many teachers of LCTCA find themselves sharing classrooms with other teachers, being split between buildings, and dealing with varying school culture, expectations, and administrators. These logistical factors are often unseen by others, making the experience even more demoralizing and difficult. The high school ESL teacher quoted above shared the following anecdote:

Being the full-time (1.0) ESOL teacher in a team of 1.5 is very much like teaching elementary school. I never have more than 1 section of a course. I never teach the same thing twice in a day. Often, my co-teaching and support duties go way beyond just the teaching of academic English, and put me in Biology, Geometry, American Government, and Health classes to support English language learning objectives in classes where my EL students are. I also cannot begin to count the number of times I'm asked the question: Do you speak ALL of their languages? OR, How do you teach them when they all speak different languages? Such a close-minded American perspective. So, I have my students tell their peers or teachers who might not appreciate their accent, that it means they speak more than one language; how many do you speak?

Teachers of LCTCA are mor likely to find themselves juggling many logistical aspects, such as their schedules changing, too many different levels/classes to prepare for appropriately and having to do the jobs of more than one person. A high school Spanish teacher shared the following anecdote, which

highlighted her frustrating schedule both before and during online instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020:

More than one prep why yes try 7. New kids at semester and classes taught in person and remote at the same time.

A middle grades ELA Intervention Specialist shared the following anecdote about the intensive teaching schedule and expectations:

The biggest thing is, even though I have less students it doesn't mean my job is easier. It's actually incredibly difficult to work with middle school aged students who don't like reading and writing because they struggle with it.

Shaw (2016) echoes these teachers' sentiments with observations from interviews with Music teachers:

Amid curricular changes, reorganization of classes and grades, and budgetary crunches, several of the teachers had seen their teaching assignments and schedules change. Tammy described this uncertainty as her main stressor. She had seen her district cut 6th grade band, eliminate one band director position, and schedule her classes such that she had roughly 10 minutes to get from one building to another. Tammy also mentioned that the stress from unexpected issues coming up had her at her breaking point: (p. 111)

Some very specific logistical concerns are noted in the literature on the teaching of specific LCTCA. Nolte-Yupari (2019) explained the reality of "Art-on-a-Cart," with tips and strategies from professionals who make it work despite the logistical challenges and feelings involved.

Although, as a field, we might have looked the other way out of annoyance in the 1980s, clearly the presence of art-on-a-cart as a working condition has not dissipated. Art teachers need solid research and subsequent resources and professional development to deal with art-on-a-cart as a, if not desirable, viable working condition. We need to shift the culture of our field to one in which we acknowledge art-on-a-cart as a part of what art teachers do. (p. 18)

Nolte-Yupari (2019) elaborated that:

The available literature infers that art-on-a-cart teachers are seeking support, not only about advocacy but best practices for classroom management and curriculum implementation, on navigating school cultures and other teacher's classrooms as well as how to think about the cart as an accompaniment to their pedagogy. Supporting teachers of art-on-a-cart does not mean validating art-on-a-cart or sanctioning it. It means validating a large contingency of art teachers in our field striving to deliver quality arts instruction in our schools. (p. 19)

Whether it involves art-on-a-cart or myriad other unique concerns, teachers of LCTCA face challenges and must be creative if they are to successfully navigate their own path. Thinking about classroom management and logistics creatively and proactively can make a big difference. Roth and Fay (2015) provided clear tips and strategies to help all teachers with proactive classroom management, especially

teachers of LCTCA. Classroom management concerns can be unique and difficult for teachers of LCTCA in their roles, since they may have many students, more than one classroom/school, many classes to prepare for, and so forth. Along similar lines, proactive communication with parents must be achieved in creative ways, including how teachers engage with potential parent volunteers, which can be huge assets and advocates for teachers of LCTCA.

The challenges involved in teaching all the children at an elementary school are particularly daunting, especially if a teacher is teaching at more than one building/level. Lester et al (2017) stress the crucial role of routines, which the authors suggest are the "foundation of classroom management" (p. 398). Students require structure, and teachers must reflect on these crucial aspects. Classroom management influences everything that teachers do professionally (like it or not) and issues with classroom management can influence everything else that they do (or do not do). Ramos and Hughes (2020) ask whether a more holistic policy toward classroom management and discipline could help with the issue of teacher attrition, which is especially relevant for new teachers to consider. The authors noted that administrators and mentors should simultaneously focus on working conditions and personal satisfaction. All these proactive strategies can help teachers of LCTCA as they navigate their unique paths.

Middle school and high school teachers of LCTCA face unique issues, as well. The high school Russian teacher quoted earlier in this chapter expresses more about the unique role and unseen duties:

We developed partnerships with FREE government funded summer immersion experiences, either in Pittsburgh (Pitt's summer STARTALK program) or in Latvia (University of Wisconsin's NSLI-Y program). A summer in a college dorm away from your parents doing fun activities with teenagers and taking regular excursions or heck, a summer abroad doing the same fun activities but across the Atlantic, both for FREE!! Getting kids to sign up is full of arm-twisting and candy-giving and Pysanky egg dying and blini eating and Uzbek restaurant dining and STILL it's a challenge to get kids to sign up and stick with it.

Teachers of LCTCA are move likely to be involved in certain types of afterschool extracurricular activities, such as coaching, travel, and different types of enrichment activities with students. They have so many unseen roles, resulting in another reason why teachers of LCTCA must navigate their own unique path in their school and beyond. Reflecting on the realities and teachers multifaceted roles, a PK-12 music teacher who taught in a small, rural school district shared the following anecdotes:

I was left out of the elementary school yearbook for several years because no one told me I should have a picture taken at both the middle/high school and elementary school. I had to attend all the evening events for the high school and elementary school without additional pay. (Open houses, special events) I taught 7 classes per day, 10 total. When they added the preschool class during my 3rd year, I gave up part of my lunch to teach it. High school teachers taught 5-6 classes per day, in comparison I taught the entire population of the preschool and elementary school, plus 3 middle/high school ensembles. Grading time was onerous. My job used to be done by 2 people, and I felt like I was only doing half as well as I could at each school. I was only required to go to middle/hs staff meetings, and no one took minutes or filled me in on policy changes, scheduling, or field trips at the elementary school until it was too late.

Accepting the realities and thinking of creative ways to navigate the path is key. A Health Careers teacher who teaches a highly specialized college bridge program to high school seniors shared the following anecdote:

While this all sounds negative, it's also oddly liberating. The conversations in my classroom can be very raw. We discuss topics such as human anatomy, mental health, death/dying, patient rights, advance directives, dementia, reproductive issues, addiction, harm reduction etc., without worrying about someone overhearing our very real conversations or the need to filter ourselves. My students are on the verge of adulthood, and are taking 5 college classes. I interact with them like I would with the college students I taught previously (nursing). We share, we discuss, we are vulnerable, we discuss elements of our lives in relation to the topics being discussed, and we can do all of this without worrying about who can overhear us in the hall, or through the walls of the classroom. We laugh, we cry, we work both independently and as members of a team, we mess up, and we learn SO MUCH from each other.

FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE SCHOOL AND SCHOOL DISTRICT

The theme for this chapter stresses that teachers of LCTCA must navigate their own path. The Health Careers teacher quoted earlier in this chapter provides the following outlook:

Not only is my content area unique to my organization (a BOCES that serves multiple school districts in a three-county area in Northern NY), but my classroom/office is located on the campus of a local medical center. As such, I'm isolated not only by my content area, but also by my geographic location. In this era of remote teaching/online modalities, one would think that collaboration would be facilitated for teachers like me. I have not found that to be the case. We are ALL spending a significant amount of time determining how to deliver high-quality content utilizing multiple modalities, but I have nobody to whom I can physically turn to ask a question/brainstorm, tweak an idea, etc. It's lonely. I don't have a group of peers around me to support me personally or professionally. I have an assigned mentor, but she is in a similar situation to mine, though she also teaches on the main campus for half the day. Our schedules make getting face time all but impossible.

It is important to realize that you do not have to go it alone! Collaborating with other teachers in creative and new ways can help. Broderick (2016) provided creative and collaboratives possibilities for Foreign Language teachers, who may not see their place in currently popular STEAM programs, noting why Foreign Language study does fit in with a STEAM focus. Teachers of LCTCA must reflect on new possibilities of how to collaborate and innovate, and can model for students active, hands-on engagement for students. Being a team-player may sound trite, but it is imperative for teachers of LCTCA as they navigate their paths. Hunter-Doniger (2018) provide possibilities for STEAM collaborations and the idea of "art infusion" as follows:

Collaboration is key because it allows for everyone involved to share ideas and experiences relevant to art infusion, resulting in enhanced lessons and shared knowledge. Collaboration helps relieve some of the pressure of developing lessons in isolation, thereby providing an atmosphere of creativity and innovation for teachers (p. 25)

Giles and Yazan (2020) express the notion clearly that "You're Not an Island" in the title of their piece about creative teacher collaboration between ESL and content area teachers in the middle grades. The authors elaborate that,

Such collaborative models will require administrators to create schedules for teachers to engage in collaborative efforts and recognize collaboration as professional development in light of the potential teacher learning opportunities…The ESL teacher may also have to bear the burden of responsibility to sustain collaboration when working with teachers with limited training and experiences related to ESL instruction. (Giles & Yazan, 2020, pp. 9-10)

Similarly, James and Bullock (2015) suggested creative possibilities for including the ELA CCSS into Physical Education lessons with developmentally appropriate examples for aligning both sets of content standards. Collaboration coincides with the necessary step of developing a leadership mentality. Stein (2020) posited the importance of teacher leadership as a factor that should be more present in schools and classrooms. Teachers should reflect on this and consider their roles, especially as teachers of LCTCA, and how they may lend themselves to empowerment and servant leadership, which Stein (2020) associates with more effective teaching. Stein also suggested that these activities should truly be leading and not simply managing, because leading is deeper and involves building and maintaining positive relationships. Finding a mentor, becoming a mentor, embodying professionalism, creating, and working with groups and teams, and participating meaningfully in school-wide and district-wide initiatives can all help teachers of LCTCA on their ongoing journeys.

Leadership also involves advocacy for the relevance of the LCTCA being taught. Salvador's (2019) passionate argument for music and music teaching explained how teachers must embody value and purpose, even amid the pain of sometimes being attacked and undervalued. Advocates must implement research-based strategies and tips for teachers which will help with resilience and centering the new teacher. Salvador emphasized that teaching music should be a joy. This advice can apply to all LCTCA. Similarly, Seaton (2008) argued for the defense of the Humanities, with a very broad understanding and perspective on making sure that there is balance in the curriculum, which in turn creates well-rounded citizens. Stein (2020) stressed the following regarding leadership and advocacy:

America's educational system has struggled at all levels since the middle of the last century, in large part because we have refused to acknowledge that a great educational system is a derivative of great teachers. Today, we need go one step further and recognize that every teacher must be a classroom leader. (p. 84)

Becoming an advocate for your LCTCA can be quite specific to your unique content area. For example, a 2019 article from CNN Wire advised in its title that, "Gutting US foreign language education will cost us for generations." Teachers of languages must arm themselves with evidence of the importance of teaching and learning languages. As noted earlier in this chapter, Skorton and Altschuler (2012) provided clear statistics on "America's foreign language deficit," stressing why Foreign Language study is relevant. Rivers and Brecht (2018) also provide evidence for Foreign Language Education advocacy, explaining where teachers stand and what is in store for the future, especially with regard to the importance and relevance of this LCTCA in the 21st century's global world, commerce, and more: "Americans value languages. Roughly 70% indicate that languages are as important as math and science, that children should be fluent in another language before they leave school, that America's languages do not threaten English" (p. 27). As the Russian teacher was quoted at the beginning of this chapter, rationales for studying the LCTCA abound. It is a relevant and unique part of our role to advocate, model, and keep up the positive momentum and energy. Teachers must clearly connect to social justice concerns and the bigger/broader picture, which is bigger than themselves and their jobs.

Creative problem solving and looking at things in new ways can help with advocacy. Levin-Epstein (2016) provided an example of a school in which Arts Education found a way to continue to thrive, even in a budget-strapped, NCLB-era of cutbacks to many programs, with the creative use of a VH1 Save the Music grant and labeling arts classes as "talent classes."

This what makes our program unique in comparison to other schools where arts classes are considered 'minor' classes. We label these as our talent/enrichment classes," Garofalo explains…As a secondary school principal, Garofalo sees the inherent value of a robust arts program. Arts education at the secondary level helps students explore their passion for the arts and fosters creativity…"Nothing helps boost a child's confidence like an auditorium filled with people applauding for you—nothing comes close." (Levin-Epstein, 2016, p. 41)

Morgan (2018) connected Arts Education with the notion of citizenship, particularly justice-oriented citizenship:

When arts educators are asked to prove the worth of arts education, we must articulate how arts learning is an essential component of the development of students' senses of who they are, both in the world and in their relationships with others. Arts education is not in service to state testing goals, nor is the presence of arts education in K–12 schools only intended to make students better at math, science, and reading. When students create from nothing a work of art that is meaningful, they are practicing the making of smart and meaningful choices, which sets the stage for the creation of a future for themselves, their communities, and their country. (p. 102)

Serving as a role model and inspiration for students is perhaps the most important aspect of teaching an LCTCA: As Sears (2016) suggested:

The work of teaching from the heart—teaching with love, passion, and justice—is the type of work that will crystallize into lasting, awe-inspiring, love-filled moments. It is work that challenges us to be empathetic, compassionate, and vulnerable in our teaching. Perhaps we can find moments to pause—to take shelter from perpetual resisting and defending—and let ourselves be open to allowing the mightiest word, love, to give rise to the music, experiences, images, and feelings that will crystalize in our classrooms, forming beautiful and deeply meaningful imprints on our golden records. (p. 19)

FINDING YOUR PLACE BEYOND YOUR OWN POND

Navigating a path as teachers of LCTCA has its challenges, but also has its proverbial silver linings. The PK-12 music teacher quoted earlier in this chapter shared the following:

I loved knowing all the students and seeing them grow and progress! I felt that a position like mine could have a unique influence and in a different, less dysfunctional place, a pre-k through 12 program would be my ideal job. Many of the issues I had were due to internal issues with the district, not with the position. Of course, the reason the job was done by 1 instead of 2 was also due to internal issues with the district.

Abril and Bannerman (2015) explored music teachers' perspectives on the factors that can make or break their programs. The authors found that the teachers were more concerned and involved with micro-level factors at their school, rather than such as the school district or beyond. The teachers did note the importance of being involved at the school district level but tended not to take much action there. Collaborating and networking more broadly is key. For example, teachers of LCTCA may unite to discuss and clarify curriculum concerns, such as a universal curriculum. Birch et al (2019) discussed the importance of quality assurance for K-12 Health Education, with ideas for teacher certification, professional development, rigorous teacher preparation, and resulting impacts on society. A 2016 article also asks in its title, "Do we need a national curriculum for K–12 physical education?" noting various perspectives from educators. It is worth considering the nuance of professionals' perspectives, where you may stand as a new teacher, and what you can contribute to the broader discourse. With the idea of that broader discourse in mind, Stauffer (2016) posited that, "The core narrative of music education shifts and evolves in the next five years or five decades, it is unlikely that it will ever be a grand unified tale shared in exactly the same way by everyone everywhere" (p. 76). Shaw (2016) noted that, "Teacher educators might consider starting a dialogue with preservice music teachers about accountability era stressors, and school administrators should consider regular training in healthy coping strategies for in-service teachers" (p. 113). Teachers must consider not only what they do as individuals, but also what they do as a united group:

As a profession, we would do well to enumerate the various examples of itemized performance targets, of cost-cutting and efficiency, and of monitoring teacher performance—to name a few. Our state and national organizations could make this a focus as they consider which policies to champion. To be sure, reforms of the past twenty years may have brought benefits, but they may also have crowded out other desirable policies and outcomes. (Shaw, 2019, p. 28)

Shaw (2019) also stressed that, "Music educators and those with a voice in music education must confront the competing ends of teacher evaluation measures founded on performativity" (p. 29). Stauffer (2016) offered additional insight into this expanded role for music teachers:

We are responsible for the music education core narrative—the one held in the public imaginary. We are responsible for disrupting stories people tell themselves about what music education is that may no longer be "true." To effect the same shift in the public story of music education that seems underway in our professional conversations (and to keep our own momentum going) will require conscious and continuous acts of re-framing the narrative and re-placing music education. (p. 75)

What teachers of LCTCA choose to do as a professional community can help to unite as one. There is indeed power in numbers, with possibilities for advocacy, outreach, service, and more. New teachers of LCTCA should utilize the research-based tips and strategies explored in their teaching communities and academic and professional journals. This practice will help them to find their own school of fish. The high school Russian teacher quoted earlier in this chapter expresses these positive outcomes and feelings:

Sometimes I just want to pull out my dusty unused English certification and settle in to a "normal" teaching gig. But what keeps me going are the looks of accomplishment when students learn the alphabet. When a student says you make a hard class fun. When a kid — no, a young man now — steps off a

plane from 6 weeks in Latvia, eyes red from crying as he left new friends and loving host families and caring teachers, and he brings a gift to your house and says that you helped him to have a "life changing summer," all the goofy antics suddenly seem worth it.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The past two decades brought new and unique challenges for teachers of LCTCA. It is important that these teachers unite, collaborate, and advocate. A positive attitude amid a realistic understanding of the hurdles and obstacles is key. Remember that you are a unique fish who will need to navigate your own path to be successful. Just like the popular children's book "The Rainbow Fish" by Marcus Pfister (1992), you may find that you are giving away your rainbow-colored scales. If you are not too careful, that ongoing process can wear away at what brought you to the field of teaching. Teachers of LCTCA know who they are and must find the right balance to thrive. Find your unique school of fish to travel along with you, even if they are not the same type of fish as you are or perhaps even not at your specific school.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Accountability and Assessment Policies: Decisions common in schools and in education policy during the first two decades of the 21st century, regarding the high usage of and reliance on testing and evaluation (both for teachers and students) to inform policy and practice in education.

Advocacy: The practice of justifying and increasing awareness of something to the community.

Content Area: The school subject, such as math or music.

Emotion Labor: Unseen and unnoticed work that a teacher or other member of a helping profession does, especially regarding advocacy within the community and the need to justify their programs.

Less Commonly Taught Content Areas (LCTCA): Content areas taught in US K-12 schools for which there is typically only one to a few teachers in that content area when compared to the more popular content areas that are always taught (i.e. core content areas).

Teacher Attrition: The phenomenon and rate of teachers leaving the teaching profession.

Teacher Burnout: Teachers' feelings of hopelessness and fatigue, due to stress and related issues.

Teacher Collaboration: Teachers working together toward a common goal, such as co-teaching a class or informing each other's practice, either within a specific school building/situation or beyond.

Teacher Retention: The ability to keep teachers teaching in schools from year to year, as opposed to leaving the profession of education.

Teacher Support: Programs (either formally organized or organic) that offer help for teachers, such as mentoring and relief, which would help to prevent and remedy teacher stress and burnout.