

Call and Response: What is Your Teacher Superpower?

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BY:



Heather Buskirk

Senior Fellows



Shira Helft

Senior Fellows



Emily Kennedy Farrar

Senior Fellows



Justin Ragland

Senior Fellows



Dwaina Sookhoo

Senior Fellows



Anthony Stetzenmeyer

Senior Fellows



Michelle Vanhala

Senior Fellows



We asked teachers in the Knowles

community to reply to this prompt: “We know that what the non-teaching world thinks of as teacher superpowers are not the superpowers we teachers know to be effective in the classroom. So, we want to know: What is your teacher superpower?”

Here are their responses.

I’ve been thinking about this one for a while, and I finally think I’ve identified my teaching superpower: the ability to read that which is illegible! I’ve even been asked to translate for other teachers or other students (when working in a group).

-Justin Ragland, 2019 Teaching Fellow

My teaching superpower is learning all my students’ names on day one. There is nothing more powerful than being able to greet them by name on day two (and also call them out as needed: “Knock it off, Dillon!”).

-Michelle Vanhala, Senior Fellow

I actually thought this past year that I DID have a superpower: the power to build strong relationships with students. I think this is the strongest superpower any teacher can have, and I am lucky to possess it. I care, no, love students unconditionally. From that love, I lower my boundaries and act like my authentic self around students, which may slowly get students to lower their walls and notice my heart’s affection for them. I then begin to talk and joke with students, make sure they feel included and like their presence matters. It’s not enough to just give

them attention; you have to ostentatiously show them they are the most important people in the world to you. Finally, there is a mutual priority-making between both students and myself that continually strengthens our relationship; there is a mutual respect and care for each other's spaces, an inclusion in decision-making, and sharing of thoughts.

-Anthony Tedaldi, 2015 Teaching Fellow

I would say that my superpower is being able to find a way to connect almost any topic to how it can help us live more sustainably on the planet.

-Ryan Morra, 2019 Teaching Fellow

I'm Elastigirl, definitely. Flexibility is absolutely key in teaching. Sometimes it's because there's a surprise fire drill, but more often it's because a lesson doesn't go the way you expect. It takes quick thinking and adaptation on-the-fly to figure out where your students are and how you can help them move forward, even if it's not along the path you originally planned or expected.

-Emily Kennedy, Senior Fellow

My teacher superpower has been an ability to stay open to fresh perspectives. When I try to look at my students, curriculum, learning environment, and more from a different angle, I often see them in fresh light. I see new opportunities and options and better understand new layers to the challenges I face. This very special superpower requires me to stay connected with my colleagues (especially ones working in vastly different contexts from mine), students, families, and the greater community. I can't flex this power alone.

-Heather Buskirk, Senior Fellow

My teacher super power is the ability to find the power in any student's thinking. Instead of thinking about, "What is your misconception?", I can, on the fly, figure out, "What question did you answer instead?"

-Shira Helft, Senior Fellow

My teacher superpower is my infectious energy. My students have told me that my 'level of intensity' pushes them to try in mathematics, even when they historically haven't experienced success. I know when to push students and when to give them space to wrestle with their understanding.

-Dwaina Sookhoo, Senior Fellow

CITATION

Ragland, J., Vanhala, M., Tedaldi, A., Morra, R., Kennedy, E., Buskirk, H., . . .

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