The Zankel Urban Fellowship gives talented Teachers College students the opportunity to improve the lives of NYC students. Since its establishment, the program has placed hundreds of TC students alongside NYC teachers in public school classrooms and after-school programs, helping boost outcomes in reading, mathematics, and more—through a partnership that benefits the underserved communities in which they live, work, and learn.

Every Friday during math class at the Teachers College Community School in Harlem, Brielle McDaniel would set a timer for one minute. Her third and fourth graders had exactly that long to solve an equation, and they were beating the clock.

Regular meetings with small groups—where Brielle used state-of-the-art learning software, along with behavior management—led students to meet their weekly goals and gain a foundation for more advanced learning concepts. One of Brielle’s students had been struggling to read at grade level. With Brielle’s help, by the end of the semester she had succeeded. “My student was so happy she could keep up in the classroom, her confidence level skyrocketed.”

Brielle also helped her fourth graders deal with bullying and violence. “I helped them speak openly and even lead sessions where they discovered ways to effectively deal with bullying.”

These sessions helped them feel empowered, which led to better focus on their studies. As a result of Brielle’s efforts, the students became more enthusiastic about school and they did not want the day to end. Brielle’s personalized instruction during the after-school program and the regular school day, alongside other teachers, was so successful that it often led students seeking her out during the day. Some students were even willing to spend more time with Brielle.

“My students were engaged, encouraged, and eager to witness their continued growth.”
Kayhan Sanyal was about to have the most challenging experience of his life, and no amount of education theory could prepare him for the realities of a classroom of fifth graders. But thanks to his use of technology, and a strong teacher support system, Kayhan, a Master’s student in Instructional Technology and Media, introduced his students at P.S. 236 in Harlem to digital applications to boost their learning and improve their confidence.

“One group of girls took ownership to set up Oculus Rift, a virtual reality headset device, on their school computers,” said Kayhan, “and a boy who was having some difficulties with learning enjoyed watching educational videos, which allowed him to review their learning and improve their confidence. My goal was to identify their strengths.”

Kayhan also introduced his students to video and filmmaking, with great results. “Students enjoyed making videos of themselves, their peers and the environment in general. Weaving their interests into the curriculum was an area where the teachers and I collaborated the most, and where we had the greatest impact.”

Diamond Smith–Edmonds wanted to create a beneficial environment for K-2 special education students at PS 194 in Harlem, but her time with the students came at the end of the day when they were tired or disengaged. “I decided to incorporate movement with instruction, which energized them and kept them focused.” Using Go Noodle, an online database of guided physical movement videos, Diamond’s students danced, practiced yoga and more, enjoying their “brain breaks.”

Building the student’s energy levels helped them focus on their lessons on basic geography and mapping skills. There were also special units on Black History, Women’s History, and National Poetry Month—where the students looked at Hughes and his blues poetry. The poetry month helped them realize they could do it on their own—“even when I wasn’t there with them.”

Julianne Barto, Reading and Math Buddy
Novel Giving Up on Learning

Julianne worked with students who might have otherwise been overlooked by helping them take ownership of their reading. “I helped them realize they could do it on their own—‘even when I wasn’t there with them.’”

Julianne fondly remembers when Prince, one of Julianne’s second graders at Grant Avenue Elementary School in the Bronx, arrived at the school just a year before, knowing very little English. Thanks to Julianne’s one-on-one lessons, Prince was able to develop his strength in literacy.

“Prince would say to me, ‘I can’t. It’s too hard. Too, too hard,’ but with support and hard work, his reading skills grew immensely,” says Julianne.

Julianne’s one-on-one lessons, Prince was arrived at the school just a year before, in Harlem, was used to saying “No, Miss, I don’t know,” when asked to speak or read in English. A recent immigrant from the Dominican Republic, she couldn’t distinguish shapes, write, or identify sounds of the alphabet. Maria was placed with Janki Bhatt, a master’s student in the Reading Specialist program, who created a plan to improve Maria’s reading skills and boost her confidence.

Working with teachers, school leaders, and TC faculty, Janki provided Maria with individualized lessons. This included phonics instruction with the Wilson Reading System (tailored for struggling readers), focusing on speaking, reading, and writing.

This experience helped Janki elevate expectations for Maria. “She recognized that ‘I don’t know, Miss’ wasn’t acceptable and we applied strategies to determine unknown words when reading.”

Soon Maria had the confidence to replace “Miss, I don’t know” with the affirmative “I do know.”

Maria, a high school student attending an English as a Second Language (ESL) class at the Heritage High School in East Harlem, was used to saying “No, Miss, I don’t know,” when asked to speak or read in English. A recent immigrant from the Dominican Republic, she couldn’t distinguish shapes, write, or identify sounds of the alphabet. Maria was placed with Janki Bhatt, a master’s student in the Reading Specialist program, who created a plan to improve Maria’s reading skills and boost her confidence.

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