

Teachers with

IMPACT

ISSUE #1 | THE DISSEMINATORS



*Step out of
your comfort
zone!*

Zeny Ulloa



*What we
do matters.*

Nelson Borrego



*Self-care is
extremely
important.*

Precious Symonette



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IMPACT

Teachers with IMPACT is a new digital magazine celebrating the most dynamic and innovative teachers in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS). Each issue will feature teachers who consistently go the extra mile for their students and community. *Teachers with IMPACT* are the teachers who students will remember for the rest of their lives. The Education Fund is proud to support all teachers in M-DCPS, especially during these challenging times. We see you!

Issue #1: The Disseminators

In this premiere issue of *Teachers with IMPACT*, we celebrate three outstanding teachers who lead by mentoring and supporting their colleagues. Each of them has led workshops at The Education Fund's Idea Expo and other conferences, and often they find their own inspiration by nurturing other teachers. Another shared experience among these *Teachers with IMPACT* is mentorship: each benefitted from their own mentors, and now they encourage, collaborate with, and mentor other teachers.

Many thanks to Ms. Ulloa, Mr. Borrega and Dr. Symonette
for being our first *Teachers with IMPACT*.
If you would like to nominate a teacher to be featured in future issue,
please email audrey@educationfund.org



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Zeny Ulloa

Digital Convergence Facilitator
M-DCPS Instructional Technology Department

Zeny Ulloa is making exciting career moves, entering the 2020-21 school year in a new position as a Digital Convergence Facilitator in the M-DCPS Instructional Technology Curriculum Support department. Previously a 2nd grade teacher at Kendale Lakes Elementary, Ms. Ulloa has a rich history of leadership and mentoring during her 15-year career as an educator. At Kendale Lakes, Ms. Ulloa served as the school's UTD Designated Steward, Science Liaison, Dade Partners Liaison, and Grade Level Chairperson.

Ms. Ulloa's leadership extends outside her classroom. She has led some of the most popular workshops at The Education Fund's Idea EXPO for the past 11 years. She has presented at M-DCPS' Digital Leader Network (DLN) and was selected to represent Kendale Lakes Elementary at the Exceeding Expectations panel at 2019's ECTAC Conference in Orlando. Awarded more than 20 educational grants from The Education Fund and other organizations, she has helped countless teachers adapt her Idea EXPO workshop projects, which ultimately impacted thousands of students.

Ms. Ulloa's record of collaboration with other teachers is perhaps best demonstrated by her relationship with her former co-teacher Jennifer Carey – their partnership was nothing less than inspiring. The two have an unshakable bond that uplifted each other and benefitted their students, who witnessed their leadership, collaborative work, and mutual respect. Yet, it wasn't always easy for Ms. Ulloa. She credits her sister, Dr. Raquel Diaz, and Ms. Sandy Vettle as her mentors when she began her teaching career. Expressing her gratitude, Ms. Ulloa recalls, "I remember seeing all the acronyms used in the school and thinking it was some secret language. No one becomes good at something without having the right guidance and assistance."

Of all her accolades, being selected by the Miami Marlins Foundation's Ballpark Wishes program to represent Excellence in Education holds a special place in Ms. Ulloa's heart. The Miami Marlins honored her on the baseball diamond in front of fans and presented her with a personalized team jersey. "One of the happiest days of my life was when I was able to share the recognition with my parents. Having my husband and parents being treated like royalty has to be one of the happiest and most memorable days for them and me."



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Nelson Borrego

Civics Teacher

Miami Beach Fienberg Fisher K-8 Center

Nelson Borrego has only been teaching for five years, but he's already making a significant impact as an educator and is demonstrating his commitment and passion for teaching in a number of ways. The 2018 Rookie Teacher of the Year holds a master's degree in Educational Leadership & Administration and is leading a workshop at The Education Fund's Idea EXPO for the second consecutive year. Constantly striving to grow as an educator, Mr. Borrego takes part in district-sponsored Professional Learning Support Teams and recently attended the 2020 Future of Education Technology Conference in Miami Beach.

Having benefitted from the guidance and mentorship from two veteran teachers, Ms. Marcela Marcos, and Ms. Jackie Isales, as well as from Ms. Mary Murphy, his former Assistant Principal (now Principal at Miami Beach Nautilus Middle School), Mr. Borrego in turn supports his colleagues through mentoring new teachers, serving as Fienberg-Fisher's Department and Grade-level Chair and as a Buddy Teacher in M-DCPS' Mint Program.

"I had a lot of help getting to where I am. No one is called to go at it alone, especially in our careers," Mr. Borrego recalls. His Fienberg-Fisher colleague, Gareth Pearson, suggested he apply to disseminate his first workshop at the 2019 Idea EXPO. Together, they collaborate on trying new, cutting-edge technology with their students as often as possible. Expect to see much more exciting innovation from Mr. Borrego in the future!





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CHANGING THE CURRENT.





Dr. Precious Symonette

Creative Writing Teacher
Miami Norland Senior High School

Dr. Precious Symonette, a 14-year veteran teacher with Miami-Dade Public Schools, is not one to rest on her laurels. Dr. Symonette was named the 2017 M-DCPS' Teacher of the Year and was a 2016 National Education Association Superhero Educator. She is the CEO of the Florida Freedom Writers Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to elevating student voices by promoting student empowerment and youth civic activism. Currently an educator at Miami Norland Senior High School, she is also an adjunct professor in the Educational Leadership Department at Saint Thomas University.

Her many accolades and achievements as an educator are not surprising. Dr. Symonette grew up with a passion for writing and for community involvement and has used that fervor to ignite her students in a number of ways. Using funds from the many Innovator, Adapter, and Student Power grants from The Education Fund, Dr. Symonette has created powerful extra-curricular projects to give her underserved students agency and a sense that their lives and struggles matter. She was recently a featured

panelist at the Florida Impact Summit, which addressed opportunity gaps in Florida schools across racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines. Dr. Symonette is especially proud that one of her students was selected to speak alongside noted author Dr. Ibram X. Kendi (*How to Be an Antiracist* and *Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*). Never one to shy away from difficult and uncomfortable topics, Dr. Symonette is currently collaborating with teachers across the District to ensure students' voices are heard.

Dr. Symonette's spirit of collaboration is rooted in her own experiences with mentors who guided her as a young teacher. "I had three mentors; one with the Miami Teaching Fellows Program, one within my content area, and another one who helped me with becoming acclimated with teaching in M-DCPS. They helped me teach more effectively and helped me to learn, apply, and certify in different areas so that I could strengthen my practice and make myself more marketable within the teaching profession."





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The Education Fund spoke with each of these inspiring teachers about leadership, mentoring, and their hopes for their students:

Why do you think the Idea EXPO is so important for M-DCPS' teachers? What sets it apart from other conferences?

No one understands the obstacles faced by M-DCPS' teachers except M-DCPS' teachers themselves. The Idea EXPO is extremely important for us because it's an opportunity to share best practices from real M-DCPS' classroom teachers. Given our **demographic diversity** in South Florida, the Idea EXPO showcases proven successful teaching ideas, methods, and resources which are specific to the cultural needs of our community and mindful of our cultural diversity. The Idea EXPO provides teachers with a wealth of knowledge that has been tested by real classroom teachers in real-world scenarios and situations.

Zeny Ulloa



The Idea EXPO lives up to its name. It is full of ideas for teachers to take, adapt, and implement in their classrooms. More importantly, it helps establish **support networks** between colleagues wherein we can reach out after the conference to help troubleshoot implementation or even share new tweaks to the existing methods that we found effective.

Nelson Borrego



The Idea EXPO is so important because it helps to facilitate **comradery, community, and collaboration** among teachers within our district. It's different from other conferences because it elevates teachers' voices, acknowledges teacher autonomy, and highlights the expertise that teachers possess.

Precious Symonette





What is the most rewarding experience you've had leading workshops for other teachers?

Without a doubt, the most rewarding experience I've had leading a workshop was introducing the Merge Cube to fellow teachers and colleagues. That moment when the teachers saw our Solar System in virtual reality was surreal! Their expression and amazement at what that little cube can do is indescribable. **Getting teachers excited** about taking that back to their students means more time for student engagement, curiosity, and learning - which leads to academic success.

Zeny Ulloa

The adage "the best way to learn something is to teach it" is the lens through which I view as I lead workshops for other teachers. Many times, questions from my fellow colleagues sparked new ideas or tweaks to existing strategies. Using the mindset, "We are all in this together," and meeting colleagues that can relate, empathize, and encourage innovation is a welcome change from what could be an isolating experience of a classroom teacher. It's good for morale to see what my colleagues are working on and to help others enact things I found to be useful in my classroom.

Nelson Borrego

It is having the opportunity to speak with other teachers and building additional relationships with teachers throughout my district, state, and even around the world; creating a community or a personal teacher network.

Precious Symonette

What difference do you see between teaching students and teaching other teachers?

The only difference in teaching students and teachers is knowing their basic limitations and strengths. **Learning is a life-long process.** In order to learn we must open our minds and be willing to accept change. If we as adults, resist that change, we stop learning and growing. As teachers we must be willing to learn new programs, methods of teaching, and constantly **step out of our comfort zone.**

Zeny Ulloa

One difference I see between teaching students and teaching other teachers in a workshop is a **sense of fear** - not wanting to make a mistake and fail in front of peers.

Precious Symonette

Where do you look for inspiration on being an even better teacher? How do you continue to grow as a teacher?

As teachers, we sometimes get caught up in the monotony of lesson planning and we don't take the time to search new and innovative means to engage our students in the learning process. We are aware of the "4 C's of 21st Century Skills" (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity), yet we sometimes miss the boat in applying the 4 C's in **our own personal educational development**.

I often find inspiration just by searching the District Catalog for Professional Development opportunities with My Learning Plan, or by visiting The Education Fund's website and reading some of the past *Ideas with IMPACT catalogs* and **curriculum packets**. Lesson planning for me is a means of sharing the enthusiasm I have for instruction with creative, out-of-the-box methods of presenting lessons. This is how I grow as a teacher and educator.

Zeny Ulloa

The inspiration comes from my colleagues and my students. The inspiration they provide is one of the strongest. That "**light bulb**" moment all teachers know about - it never gets old. When we try a different way of teaching and students "get it," makes the struggle worthwhile. Some of my students come back years later to thank me. They don't realize the impact the simple act of gratitude has, but I can say it means the world to us. I have a box where I keep all the thank you letters and drawings kids have made me through the years, and every now and again I open it when I am having a tough time staying motivated.

What we do matters, and it touches lives in so many ways.

Nelson Borrego

My students motivate me to become the best educator that I can be. When my students achieve a goal, endure a setback, have a life-altering experience, or participate in a heart-changing conversation, I am propelled to strive to be better to ensure that I am teaching from my mind, body, and soul.

My students inspire me to continue to grow as a teacher by constantly reflecting, having critical conversations with others, seeking feedback, and attending professional development activities.

Precious Symonette



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In what ways could teachers benefit from more support from other teachers?

We spend more than 8 hours a day at school with other teachers, yet due to the constraints of time, we don't seem to share best practices enough. Now more than ever with Distance Learning, **we are more isolated** from that personal contact, communication, and collaboration. Teachers sometimes forget that we are life-long learners. We need to **remember the reason we became a teacher** in the first place and explore new methods of engaging our students. I find inspiration in technology, student engagement, and bringing that knowledge to others. Yes, there is always an added benefit when you are recognized for writing and being awarded a grant, but the satisfaction of helping others is worth the time and effort I put into everything I do.

Zeny Ulloa

Teaching can be very lonely. You can easily feel like you are drowning alone and everyone else has it "all figured out." It helps to know that everyone is in the same boat, and no one has it all figured out. We all have knowledge we can share with others - **together we all stay afloat**. There are resources out there like The Education Fund that works tirelessly to assist teachers in their goals. It is vital for teachers to reach out to their colleagues to offer support, not only novice teachers, but also veterans which may view the ever-increasing reliance on technology as daunting. We all have **something to learn from each other**, and it really is one of my favorite things of the Idea EXPO.

Nelson Borrego

Teachers could benefit from more support from other teachers by having an ongoing **Professional Learning Community** that could improve their instructional practices, their self-care, and their self-reverent practices. This could also be beneficial because it would help teachers to bridge **cultural gaps** among students and help to facilitate and expand student communities as well.

Precious Symonette



How do you want your students to remember you?

Zeny Ulloa

I would like my students to remember me as an **enthusiastic, caring educator** who prepared them to be successful individuals with 21st Century Skills and helped them succeed in school, life, and their future careers. My hopes for my students are for them to be confident, successful individuals able to use their knowledge, critical thinking, and creativity to make a difference in their lives and in our community.

Nelson Borrego

I would like to be remembered as someone who made them understand that **they mattered**, their understanding matters, and that their ability to impact their environment and the world is unparalleled. Things can sometimes be difficult, but part of the process of becoming a contributing member of society is overcoming difficulties and using our God-given talents to help make the world around us a better place.

Precious Symonette

I want my students to remember that I was the educator **who taught them from the heart, with love**, and who challenged them to find their true selves and their greatness, who helped to elevate their voices, who taught them the importance of community involvement and civic activism, and who helped them to understand the importance of experiential learning. I hope to be remembered as someone who built agency into them so that they are empowered to make the world a better place. I want my students to remember me as the educator who genuinely loved them and helped to improve and enrich their educational experiences and that I taught them beyond the bell and beyond the curriculum.

What is your personal message to your fellow MDCPS teachers?

Zeny Ulloa

My personal message to my fellow M-DCPS teachers is to **never let the job become a chore**. You have the ability to be creative, innovative, and engaging for our students. Let your students be positively impacted by not just what you say, but how you say it. **Step out of your comfort zone because that's where the magic happens!**

Nelson Borrego

What we do matters, and the responsibility that we have to each of our kids is a heavy one. It is a privilege to work with children, but we cannot and should not go at it alone. We need each other and we must **support one another** so that we can achieve the great goal of giving our students the best possible educational experience.

Precious Symonette

My personal message to my fellow MDCPS teachers is to develop a strong and effective practice of honest self-reflection so that they can evolve into the best version of themselves - as individuals and as teachers. Develop a knowledge of self. Learn and study to become the type of educator that they choose to be and **work on it**, consciously every day. **Seek productive, constructive feedback** from your trusted fellow colleagues. Be who you truly are and everything and everyone else will fall into its rightful place. And, remember that self-care is extremely important.



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