

# Our conversation with you about “People at Work”...



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For us, the theme of this issue conjures up one of those diamond-shaped yellow signs that used to say “Men at Work.” Happily, in our more enlightened and inclusive times, the language on those signs has changed, as has the range of jobs that people perform, and what we even designate as “work.” Until recently, our society didn’t describe what (mostly) women did in their own homes (child care, cooking, cleaning, organizing family life, etc.) as valuable work.

Today, we can and should talk about work inside and outside of the home, as well as what constitutes work in other cultures. As some of the articles in this issue make plain, we should also talk about income and income inequality and begin those discussions in the early grades as part of our commitment to financial (and societal) literacy.

As several of our authors make clear, it is worth bringing family and community members into our classrooms to have these discussions about work, responsibility, education, income, and standard of living, and their relationship to an equitable society. From children selling lemonade, to transportation workers on the night shift, to local musicians, to child caregivers, to farmers to the proprietors of the neighborhood store, our local, national, and global societies are supported by the labor of their people.

It is worth noting that we were apprehensive when we posted the Call for Submissions for this issue, as we did not know if primary teachers were focusing much on economic concepts. In actuality, we received many more manuscripts detailing lessons in the early grades than at the intermediate level. The primary teachers in this issue amply demonstrate that our youngest children can take the lead in inquiring about different jobs and analyzing their impact on society... which is good news for all of us.

**Linda D. Davey** and **Rosebud Elijah’s** article, “Writing Our Way to the Post Office: A PreK Unit of Study,” illustrates how multiple objectives can be achieved during activities in which young children experience the impact of postal workers on our everyday lives. The Post Office unit of study provides rich opportunities for social interaction and language and literacy development, as well as an introduction to the concepts of interconnectedness, responsibility, and communication in authentic, concrete, and multimodal ways.

**Paula Rogovin’s** article, “Kindergartners’ Questions Become the Curriculum” shows how students’ questions about their new school (e.g., “How did they make the cubbies? And how is the work on the 2nd Avenue subway—right around the corner—going?”) led to multiple ways of finding and verifying answers, including books, pictures, websites, videos, interviews, social experiments, and neighborhood field trips. Students’ research ultimately resulted in student-designed social action.

In “Work, Education, and Income: Economics and Financial Literacy in the Early Grades,” **Bonnie T. Meszaros** and **Andrew T. Hill** present lessons at both the primary and intermediate levels that address the interplay of work, education, skills, and income, engaging students with literature, surveys, community speakers, and reading data from a chart. Four handouts in their lesson constitute the Pullout for this issue.

In “Work as Community Building: A Small-scale Barn Raising,” **Angel M. Bestwick** describes how a fourth grade teacher engaged her students in the study, through multiple texts, of a Pennsylvania Dutch barn-raising. Students reenacted a barn raising and learned, firsthand, that work can build a sense of community—whether the setting is a farm property or a classroom.

“Paper Bag City: Exploring Geography and Economics in the Primary Grades” by **Peter William Moran**, **Kimberly Miller**, and **Genee Witte** explains how second graders built a three-dimensional map. Then they interacted with their model downtown—as community members, consumers, and business owners, all engaged in economic exchange and decision making.

**Andrea S. Libresco’s** “Picture Books as a Springboard to Teaching about Labor Unions” highlights three terrific picture books and describes related activities that can help elementary students understand how collective bargaining works, what

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## EDITOR'S NOTES *from page 1*

early labor advocates fought for, and how they did so, and how unions continue the fight today.

Valerie Struthers Walker's piece, "A Transcultural Reading of *My Grandfather is a Magician: Work and Wisdom in an African Village*," recounts second graders' exploration of work as a cultural universal. Multiple representations of work in the lesson provide students with opportunities to recognize both similarities in how people define work and variations that reflect the different historical, geographic, economic, or cultural conditions in which people live.

These varied lessons around people's work raise the question...How do YOU tackle the topic of People at Work in your elementary classroom?

- To what extent are your lessons on "people at work" hands-on?
- To what extent are your lessons on "people at work" interdisciplinary?
- To what extent do you use literature as a vehicle for exploring a variety of types of work?
- To what extent does your study of *People at Work* link with geography? Community? Civics?

- How much emphasis do you give to "work" as a cultural universal? In what other cultures do you examine work?
- How much responsibility do you give students to learn about work? To what extent do you provide "jobs" for students in your classroom?
- To what extent do you invite members of the community into your classroom to share information about their working lives?
- To what extent do you address income inequality?
- To what extent do you address issues of workers' rights, both historically and in the 21st century?
- What economic concepts do your students find most challenging? What kinds of examples and activities help students grasp the concepts?
- How important is it to you that students acquire economic conceptual understanding at the elementary level?
- How much emphasis do you give to "work" when your students study history?
- What primary sources do you use to address *People at Work*?

We look forward to the thoughtful conversation around all of these challenging topics at NCSS Connections. Please join us!—Andrea and Jeannette 🌍