



AN ODE TO JOY

By Rafael Heller | Apr 27, 2020 | COVID-19, Editor's Note

It was early in 2019 when my colleagues and I decided that this month's Kappan would focus on joyfulness in K-12 education. We reasoned that at the end of a publishing year that featured some unhappy topics — including an issue on toxic stress, for instance, and one on the many professional challenges teachers face — readers would be eager for more uplifting content. But we never dreamed that in May 2020 we'd be in the middle of a global pandemic, schools would be shuttered, and the last thing on anybody's mind would be the joyful side of teaching and learning.

Then again, maybe that makes it the perfect time for this issue.

My 17-year-old son recently suggested a new family rule: No talking about COVID-19 at the dinner table. Look, he said, we've all spent the day monitoring the breaking news about infections, lockdowns, and the latest celebrities and politicians to be hospitalized. Isn't that enough already? For the sake of our mental health, can't we discuss something else for an hour? He's right, of course. And thanks to his recommendation, dinnertime has become a much-needed moment of calm in the storm. We tell stories about the grandparents, reminisce about the kids' early years, plan trips we hope to take some day . . . anything but talk about the coronavirus.

This month's *Kappan* doesn't quite stick to the dinnertime rule — two of our columns were written late in the publication cycle, after U.S. infection rates had begun to rise, and they offer some timely remarks on the ways in which educators are responding to COVID-19. For the most part, though, this issue gives readers a break from pandemic-related news. And no break could be more restorative, I think, than one spent reading and thinking about joyfulness.

If you haven't seen it already, then I urge you to search online for the video of the flash-mob orchestral performance of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* in Sabadell, Spain, near Barcelona. It begins with a lone musician playing the double bass in a town square as locals hang out at the end of the day. Soon he's joined by a cellist, then along comes a bassoonist, violist, and violinist. By the time the crowd begins to catch on to what's happening, an entire string section has assembled. Then, a conductor appears, the brass and percussion arrive, and a choir joins in. People gather round, stunned and delighted. It's a glorious video, and it took the internet by storm in 2012, shortly after it was produced.



On the web, it's rare for a video to go viral a second time. But today, as hospital wards have filled to overflowing in Barcelona, New York, Milan, and elsewhere, it seems that millions of people are choosing to share this clip all over again. In dark times, such expressions of joy are both welcome and contagious.

This issue of *Kappan* doesn't offer anything as exquisite as Beethoven in Sabadell, but we hope that readers will find some comfort in tuning out the pandemic for an hour or two and turning their attention to things that bring joy to students and educators, and which — once the coronavirus fades away — we'll need more than ever.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Rafael Heller is the former editor-in-chief of *Kappan* magazine.



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