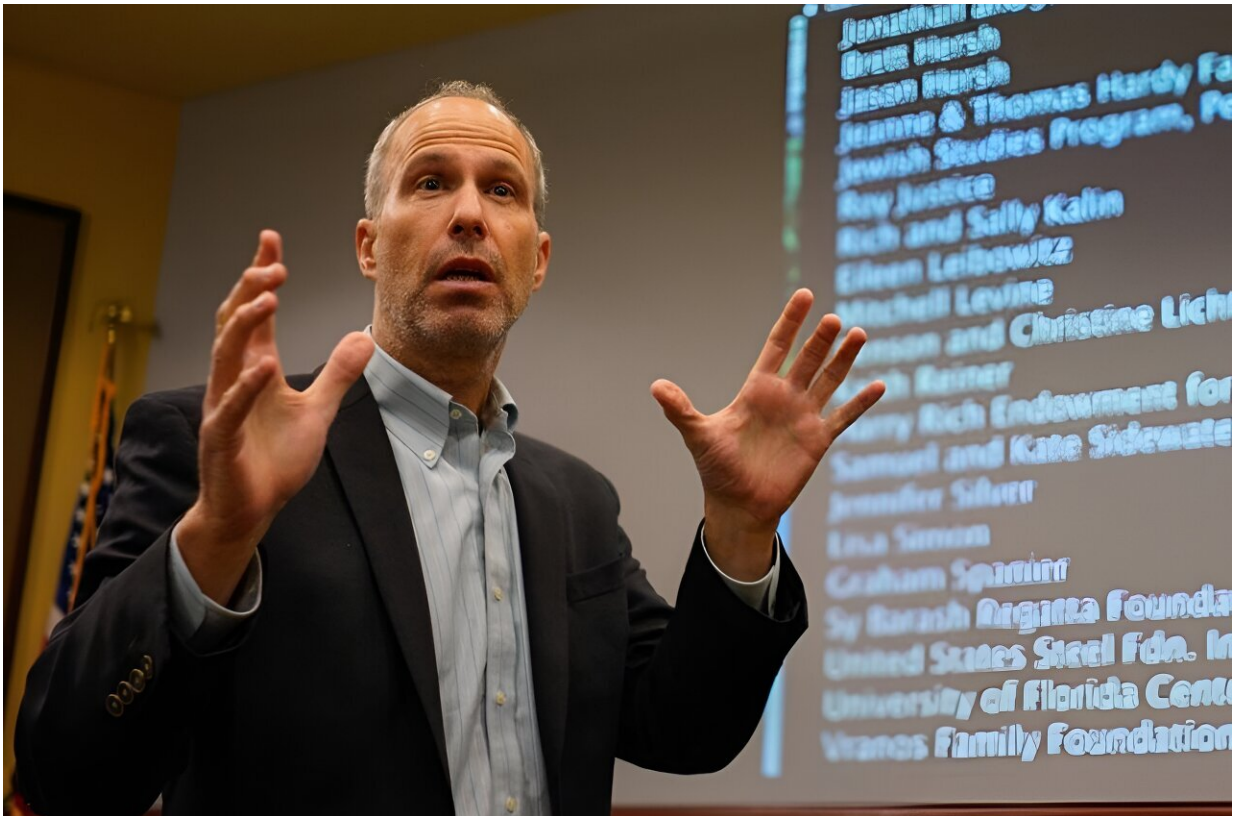


# Innovative approaches for addressing difficult topics in K-12 schools

March 12 2024

---



Boaz Dvir, an associate professor in the Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications and director of the Hammel Family Human Right Initiative, was one of the lead collaborators on the research that appeared in three separate, peer-reviewed journals. Credit: Curt Chandler / Penn State

Three journals have recently published research papers by Penn State's

Hammel Family Human Rights Initiative. The papers illustrate how the initiative's programs help K-12 educators address difficult issues such as racism.

The three journals that published the initiative papers are [\*School-University Partnerships\*](#), [\*Journal of Practitioner Research\*](#) and [\*Journal of Teacher Education\*](#). Some of the scholars who independently reviewed the papers described the initiative's research-based, nonpartisan approach, which combines practitioner inquiry with trauma-informed and asset-based practices, as novel, innovative and widely needed.

"We spend a great deal of energy and time conducting rigorous research into our work for several reasons," said Boaz Dvir, the initiative's director and an associate professor in the Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications. "These include improving our programs, strengthening our approach, collaborating with partners and participants, and sharing our findings with the world so others can challenge and/or adopt our approach."

The initiative partners with educational entities such as [school districts](#) to offer customized professional learning opportunities to K-12 educators in Pennsylvania and around the country. Program participants identify difficult issues in their curriculum or setting, come up with compelling questions about these issues, seek credible sources, collect and analyze data, investigate their findings with colleagues and initiative facilitators, and design and implement classroom- or school-application plans.

The initiative offers year- and semester-long programs, workshops and [asynchronous, self-paced online modules](#).

To examine the initiative's yearlong program, the researchers interviewed participating teachers, generated field notes, collected program artifacts, reviewed teachers' lesson plans and conducted

classroom observations.

The core research team included Dvir; initiative affiliate faculty member Logan Rutten, a University of North Dakota assistant professor; and Danielle Butville, the initiative's assistant director. The team collaborated with educators from Pennsylvania's Red Lion Area School District—Wendy Smith, a veteran fifth-grade teacher, and Eric Wilson, who at the time served as the district's chief instructional officer—to co-author two of the publications.

All three journals provide [open access](#), so readers can download the papers for free. As much as possible, the initiative aims to publish its research in such accessible spaces.

"These papers carve a distinctive niche in the research on teachers' professional learning," Rutten said. "At a time when many teachers are seeking support to address the difficult topics they face in their curriculum and school communities, our research clearly illustrates how inquiry-based approaches can offer a hopeful path forward."

The initiative team continues to examine various key aspects of its work.

"In our ongoing and future research, we are studying the impact of our programs on collective K-12 teachers' efficacy and students' learning experiences, as well as our learning as facilitators and teacher educators," Butville said.

Based in Penn State's Bellisario College, the Hammel Family Human Rights Initiative and the Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education Initiative offer intensive professional learning programs throughout Pennsylvania and around the country to support educators in their instruction of a variety of difficult issues.

**More information:** Boaz Dvir et al, Partnering to support K-12 instruction of difficult topics through inquiry-based professional learning, *School-University Partnerships* (2023). [DOI: 10.1108/SUP-03-2023-0017](https://doi.org/10.1108/SUP-03-2023-0017)

Logan Rutten et al, Practitioner Inquiry for Turbulent Times: Learning to Take an Inquiry Stance Toward Teaching Difficult Topics Through a Teacher Inquiry Community, *Journal of Practitioner Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.5038/2379-9951.8.2.1251](https://doi.org/10.5038/2379-9951.8.2.1251)

Logan Rutten et al, Leaning Into Difficult Topics: Inquiry Communities as Teacher Professional Learning for Turbulent Times, *Journal of Teacher Education* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/00224871241231543](https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871241231543)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Innovative approaches for addressing difficult topics in K-12 schools (2024, March 12) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-03-approaches-difficult-topics-schools.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.