



FROM SEED TO APPLE

Inspirational stories & lessons learned
from Washington's 2018 Teachers of the Year

Foreword by Camille Jones
2017 WA State Teacher of the Year

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The names of all students featured in this volume have been changed.

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*To teachers everywhere –
in recognition of your
struggles and commitment.*

Thank you.

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Camille Jones

2017 Washington State Teacher of the Year
Pioneer Elementary | Quincy School District

Foreword



Do you believe in the power of a story?

I didn't. Until this year. As Teacher of the Year, one of the most important lessons I've learned has been the tremendous and transformative power of stories.

I've learned this power when telling stories from my own classroom. In fact, every time I knew I really "had" the room, it was because I was sharing the stories of my students.

I've learned this power when trying to find courage in the face of fear. The voices and faces of my students propel me onward, to fight for them. My conviction is clear with their stories in my mind.

I've learned this power when surrounded by my fellow Regional and State Teachers of the Year. Their stories, of the work they've done to advocate and bring positive changes for our students, these stories fill me with hope and strength.

And I've discovered this power again in the stories of the 2018 Teachers of the Year. Each tale gives me a glimpse into a new classroom and another lens on learning that I hadn't thought of before.

I hope you will let yourself get lost in the power and the honesty of these stories. Listen for the squeaky voices and look for the hopeful eyes of students as you read these words. We carry them with us everywhere we go. They inform everything we do. They have transformed my teaching, and I know they will transform you too.



Camille Jones (front left) with other Washington State Teachers of the Year: (L to R) Katie Brown (2014), Lyon Terry (2015), and Nathan Gibbs-Bowling (2016).

Melissa Charette

Capital Region ESD 113 Regional Teacher of the Year
Washington Middle School | Olympia School District

AI Finds His Voice

Every student deserves a chance to succeed



I can still feel the excitement of the start of that school year, slightly nauseous with butterflies mixed in. It was my 4th year of teaching special education, and I had been chosen to design a new program for my district. This new program would serve high school students who were developmentally delayed and behavior disabled. These students would never live alone. They would always need support in their day-to-day lives, and their behaviors were getting in the way of their success. My job was to help them become as independent as possible.

I had four students. Sounds simple, right? But those students presented extreme behaviors: spitting, biting, hitting, undressing, and the all-feared urinating on people. If they learned how to be more appropriate, they could get jobs later in life and become a more integral part of our community. We would work on real-life skills such as eating with a fork, brushing teeth, and changing clothes.

After the first month, things were going well. I had established a consistent routine. The kids understood what was expected, and everything was running smoothly. There were still many daily challenges, but we were making progress, and the kids were learning. Then, along came AI.

At 15 years old, Al transferred in from another district. Al began his life in a hospital abandoned by his mom; a choice she made after finding out he was disabled. He had many birth defects and was developmentally delayed.

Al had lived in foster care his entire life and was deemed “un-adoptable due to behaviors.” I received his paperwork to review. His file was full of statements like “extremely violent,” “not able to communicate,” “low IQ,” and “no progress made.” There was nothing about his strengths, his interests, or who he was as a person. There had been no progress made over the past three years of his life. It was a scary file, with no hope. My staff and I prepared for him the best we could, as his foster parents never returned our calls.

Al’s first day at our school was intense. He was extremely angry because his whole world had changed. He was in a new foster home, a new school with new people, and he was completely in fight-or-flight mode. Since he couldn’t flee, he fought. That first day he attacked us by biting, hitting, kicking, and scratching 58 times. I went home that night, cleaned my wounds, and sobbed. I started questioning myself. Could I do this job? Could *anyone* do this job? Then I thought of the little boy who was 15, scared, and had no way to communicate. That night was sleepless; I was up worrying and planning for the next day, wondering how I could meet all of Al’s needs.

I went into school the next day armed with ideas, behavioral strategies, and schedules. By the end of the day, I was exhausted. His behaviors were still out-of-control. Again, I came home bruised and beaten. I mulled over ideas to implement. I continued to question myself and my abilities. But this young man needed me. He had no one else. I researched online, pulled out my college text books,

and called friends who were special education experts. I armed myself with options and back to school I went.

I ended up clearing a small classroom and working with Al by myself most of the time. In the beginning, I had to wear shoulder length leather gloves and a flack vest since he kept biting through my shirts. I didn't give up, and neither did he. As the weeks went by, we began to learn to trust each other.

My largest struggle with Al was helping him discover his voice. He was completely unable to talk. After trying and failing at many options, I began using physical objects for communication. I taped three different items to the wall to represent things he may want. A book when he wanted me to read to him, a glass when he wanted a drink and an apple when he wanted food. My plan was that when he wanted something he would touch the item and would immediately get it. However, Al did not understand and, in frustration, he would rip the items from the wall and throw them at me.

I will never forget the day he touched the water glass I had taped to the wall, and I immediately said, "Al, I see you want water." I filled a glass and gave it to him. His eyes got big as he drank it. Again, he ran to the wall and touched the water glass. Once again, I said, "I see you want more water," and filled the glass. Al got a huge lopsided smile on his face. After continuing this pattern about ten more times, he walked up to me, put his hand gently on my cheek, and looked directly into my eyes. That look said it all. He understood! It is that look that makes all the challenges in education and teaching worthwhile. My heart soared! After two months he had learned how to make requests.

After that, Al learned very quickly. He was so smart. Day after day, we were able to add more and more objects for

him to request on communication wall until the entire space was full.

Al's behaviors improved dramatically as we began to increase the communication system, add in rewards, and have a consistent schedule with behavior expectations. Within three months he went from an average of 58 attacks per day to an average of two per week. As a result of his calmer behavior, I was able to increase his learning time.

As the year progressed, Al made huge strides. We frequently took walks through the hallways at school giving high-fives to friends. People really began to connect with him as a person. He was such a sweet and caring young man. He was able to get his own lunch, communicate his needs, and follow a schedule.

At the end of that school year Al's foster home was shut down. No one was willing to adopt or foster him and he was sent away to an institution. It truly was one of the hardest moments in my teaching career. I was losing Al. I had to trust the system, as I wasn't family — except in my heart. Al would not be able to contact me. I had to let him go. I knew in my heart his life would be better because he now had a voice. A voice to let his needs be known, a voice to connect with people, and most importantly, a voice of a boy who is able to learn.

Students are not one-dimensional. They should not be defined only by the things they have done wrong. If students are not learning, it is up to us, as educators, to look outside the box and find the solution. Al could be "extremely violent," but he was also caring and clever. It took time to unlock that part of his personality, but the end result was so worth it. Al taught me to believe in myself and to keep trying because everyone deserves a voice.

Ethan Chessin

ESD 112 Regional Teacher of the Year
Camas High School | Camas School District

More Than Just Students

How teaching to students' potential transformed a music program



TJ was new to our school district as a freshman. He was a sweet kid, and polite, but he kept to himself. I rarely saw him interacting with his peers, and I almost never saw him without a pair of earbuds or headphones, mouthing along the lyrics to his private soundtrack. Often I'd find him in the practice room during lunch, sketching out rap lyrics in a spiral-bound notebook. I'd say, "Hey TJ, why don't you come out and eat lunch with some of the guys in the choir room?" He'd respond with a "Naw, I'm just a lone wolf." The real answer, I suspected, was that he just wasn't connecting with the classes or other students at our school.

I changed schools in 9th grade too, so I know it's tough being new. Music got me through the worst of it, and I assumed I'd be able to help him find a community through choir too. He was the perfect candidate. TJ loved music. He loved it maybe more passionately than anybody I've taught. And I've always worked hard to help my students connect, personally, through music. We perform music from all over the world and learn from dancers, mystics, and other experts to deepen our understanding of other

peoples and religions. My students sing popular music, suggest songs they like, and form a cappella groups to take on *Glee* and *The Sing-Off*. I tell personal stories and encourage students to connect emotionally to texts about heartbreak, loss, and joy.

But music meant something different to TJ. To TJ, music was MCs and producers, samples, and beats. TJ loved music, but I wasn't teaching the music he loved. My teaching was based on my experience of music, not his. If I wanted to tap into his passion, I'd have to do things differently.

For TJ's freshman year, I tried something scary. I taught a songwriting class, giving students the space to create the music they loved. TJ and the rest of his new crew performed in a showcase at the end of the term, and I noticed a glint of confidence in his eyes as his classmates started to see him as a capable rapper.

During his sophomore year, I recruited composers to write brand-new music for us, and I developed a curriculum introducing students to the art of composition. TJ and the others got to talk with these composers live and via Skype, asking questions about the creative process, and talking about which parts they liked (and sometimes hated). TJ wasn't completely sold on choir, but he loved this project. He talked with professional musicians about writing lyrics and going on tour, and was thrilled to perform with the pros in downtown Portland.

I started to see the TJ in everybody: from Dinah, who struggled to sing in tune but showed up to every leadership meeting, to Aaron, whose tight black jeans and stark dyed hair reminded me more of a roadie than a rock star. Just like TJ, every student had a talent waiting to be discovered.

During TJ's junior year, I turned my room inside out. Students worked with a composer to present a new hour-long performance in our community, across the river in Portland, and on tour at a music festival in Boise. But that was only the beginning. The students started to see that music is more than the person with the microphone, rapping or singing onstage. Music is your crew - the producers, sound engineers, lighting designers, and more. So we brought all of them into the classroom. Students learned what a talent buyer does and how recording engineers use ProTools. These industry professionals helped my students write press releases, book the opening act, pick out cover art, and run the sound booth at the show.

I've never seen TJ so engaged as when we were working on this project. He sat straight up in his seat for every guest speaker, and stuck around after class to ask questions. He shadowed our sound engineer and got connected with a local nonprofit that teaches teens to run live sound, where he flourished. Last spring, I saw TJ running sound at a rap concert in Portland. During his senior year, he performed at the school talent show, rapping along with a track he produced on his own computer. And this year, he's headed to community college to learn how to work in a music studio.

What did I learn from TJ? I learned that I was asking the wrong question. I started out wondering how I could win TJ over, to get him connected to my world. But when I saw TJ succeed in his own world, I realized I should have started by asking what TJ could do, and where we go from there.

Every student is a TJ. Every student is capable of doing and making. Once we see our students for their interests and passions and begin to see the world through their eyes, we know the kids we teach are more than students. They're

artists, writers, journalists, scientists, athletes, stewards of the community, volunteers, teachers, sound designers, and engineers. They contribute to society, innovate solutions to problems big and small, and create real and lasting beauty. If we don't see our students as creators, it's because we haven't yet given them the opportunity to show what they can do.

That magical night when we performed in Portland, all 155 of my students took the stage to perform a piece they had helped create in a space they had booked to an audience they had marketed that was holding programs they had helped design. A local music reviewer showed up to see the world my students had created. He must have attended hundreds of shows that year. But the next day, he wrote in the paper that our show was "the most life-affirming night of music I've experienced in some time, leaving me downright aglow with joy."

Thanks, TJ.

Denisha Saucedo

Puget Sound ESD 121 Regional Teacher of the Year
Kent Elementary | Kent School District

Don't Just Care, Believe!

A new vision for a "no excuses" classroom



As I sit down to tell my education story, I wonder which to tell. My personal story? My reason for becoming a teacher in the first place? What about the story of a girl I will call Rachel? Her story is much like mine. Or Ana's? Her story highlights a school that defies stereotypical views of a low-income, high transient school. I need to tell bits of them all.

Let's begin with why I teach. As a black young woman, I was put into a box. I was a child of color, living in a single-parent home, single income, very transient, so I must have needed someone to care for me. I didn't! I needed teachers to *believe* I could do it. Teachers thought I was a child with too many issues, and that I had parents at home who didn't care. I was too proper to be ghetto, too light-skinned fit in, too hardened for teachers to figure out. Well, my mom did care, and I am proper. I was tired of hearing that my school projects should include data about "African Americans." And I was done with being asked my thoughts around the only black character in a book or being assigned poems that called me a "Diluted Negro."

I know my teachers cared, but they didn't care enough to challenge me. I needed to hear my grammar stunk but my

ideas didn't. I needed them to believe that I could handle a challenge and wouldn't quit.

Because I didn't quit. I am a teacher. And I have had enough.

I have heard enough about the data that says our black and brown kids are failing school. I have heard enough about the stereotype that students of color have no support at home so therefore teachers should care. STOP caring. Start believing.

The assumption that only black and brown kids need help is the very reason students like Rachel slip through the cracks. Rachel was much like me, just white. She lived in a single-parent home, single income, and very transient. But she was white. So, she must have had a supportive family and resources. Right? Wrong.

Rachel was in my 6th-grade class. We built a relationship, as I do with all my students. I held her to the highest standards, and she moved on. Her real story starts when she came to see me her 9th-grade year. She was ready to drop out and needed help. She needed someone to believe that after all the drama and the issues she caused at school, she could still be successful. She needed someone to take notice and believe in her. I did. I told her that it was time to be selfish and take charge of her education. Stop doing things because she was told to (or not to), and start accomplishing them because she could.

Rachel and I spent the next several years crying and laughing together. Her senior year, without the support of her mom, she graduated. We both smiled as she walked across the stage to get the diploma she had worked so hard for. We felt like she had conquered the world. Rachel desperately needed help, and no one noticed because she didn't "look" like she needed help.

Ana was in my classroom as a 6th grader. When Ana was in 8th grade, her mom gave birth to her 4th sibling. One of her brothers, still in our building, was late to school every day and falling asleep in class. I contacted Ana to see if she had an alarm clock and questioned why her brother was late and tired at school. She informed me that her family was driving to the hospital every night because the baby was born with complications. When they were home, sleeping arrangements were tight in their small two-bedroom apartment. Dinners were often cereal because their microwave was broken. The next day I delivered a microwave and a home-cooked meal.

For weeks to follow, this was my routine. But I did not do it alone. My school staff donated, and I delivered. I delivered so many meals that one time her brother saw me walking to my classroom with my lunch and he thought it was for him! It's important to understand that at no time did we give permission for Ana or her brothers to stop going to school or stop reaching for educational excellence. We gave them all hell when they were late to school, and even more when their work wasn't their best.

This is what tough love looks like at Kent Elementary. The year Niko's mobile home burned down we bought the family new clothes and food, but we never reduced the number of math problems he had to complete in class or excused him from the level of rigor and drive he needed to achieve his goals; giving him easier work was not an option!

When Jake was in the hospital, we gave money to his dad to pay a bill and put gas in his car. But we never forgot about Jake's reading or academic goals. We brought him books to the hospital — not excuses.

One hundred percent of our kids set academic goals and are asked to know their reading levels as well as what level they are heading to next. No matter the circumstances, we never veer from the belief that all children can learn.

These are just a few reasons why I chose to transfer my own children to Kent Elementary and why my husband, Alfonso, teaches there as well. Both Ali and Lia flourished in this school that for many is considered failing. They are examples of gifted black and brown kids who were believed in and excelled because of it. They cannot understand my past frustrations with school, because they had and still have teachers who believe in them.

Kent Elementary teachers are the teachers who don't make excuses that cause our students to fail. We are the teachers who give them breakfast instead of using their lack of breakfast as a platform for their failure. We are the teachers who dig into our pockets when it matters — not because we care, but because we believe. We are the teachers who challenge and care for students like Rachel and me. We don't ignore our white kids and we don't suppress our black and brown ones with low expectations.

In 2017, my 6th-grade students had a 2% higher pass rate than the state average on the state assessment in math, 1% lower in reading, and a higher percent achieving at the highest level in both reading and math. Many began the year well below grade level. But I believed in them, and eventually they believed in themselves.

An equitable classroom begins with the awareness that we are all learners. There are many outside factors that hinder student success. As teachers, we need to make sure those factors don't become excuses or an assumption that students can't learn. At Kent Elementary, we center our

work around the love of learning, the passion for success, and the belief that we are all capable of learning and being successful. I greet every student at the door with a high-five. I let them know they are all welcome. I run a no excuses classroom because I don't just care — I believe!

Laurie Price

ESD 123 Regional Teacher of the Year
Hanford High School | Richland School District

A Shared Honor

“The thing done today is like a stone tossed into a pool and the ripples keep widening out until they touch lives far from ours.”

— *Louis L’Amour*



“Yes,” a vaguely familiar, sweet voice responded on the other end of the phone. “This is Mrs. Bailey, and yes, I taught at Phantom Lake Elementary.”

A miracle! I’d found Mrs. Bailey, my 4th-grade teacher from 1966. I’d been searching for her for weeks.

“Oh, Mrs. Bailey, I can’t believe this!” I replied, choking up. We talked for a few moments. I was walking on sunshine. She shared that my class was her 1st year of teaching and that she remembered all of us. “You were a very special class for me.”

Through tears, I could barely speak what I had been hoping and praying to say for weeks.

“I’m so glad I found you! You’re the reason I decided to be a teacher. And I want you to attend a ceremony in Seattle on September 11, celebrating Washington State Teachers of the Year. Both you and my college professor had a

powerful impact on my life and calling as a teacher. In my heart, we share this honor.”

Mrs. Bailey and Professor Madsen. These two names came immediately to mind for my list of invitees to the Teacher of the Year Ceremony where I was being honored as a Regional Teacher of the Year. I’m the teacher I am today because of these two remarkable individuals.

Mrs. Bailey was my 4th-grade teacher. Her example was so inspirational that I decided as a 9-year-old that teaching was the profession for me.

Dr. Glenn Madsen was a special education professor at Central Washington University and the reason I chose to teach high school students with special needs, emphasizing vocational education, which I’m still implementing today.

I wonder if they realized the full depth and breadth of their influence when I was their student. I think about this when I am teaching my students, who enter my life with hopes, dreams, vulnerabilities, and unique life stories. Mrs. Bailey’s and Professor Madsen’s walks as exceptional teachers touched something in my life, leaving their footprints on my heart. Their impact influenced my walk as a teacher and the lives I touch.

In September 1966, I was a scared 8-year-old, starting my first day of 4th grade. I was in a new school, new town, a new state even, new everything. That summer, my family moved to Bellevue, Washington, from New Orleans, Louisiana, when my dad was transferred through his job at Boeing. Phantom Lake Elementary would be my new school and Mrs. Bailey, my new teacher. Her kindness, compassion, and love of teaching spoke to my heart. I was immediately at home in Mrs. Bailey’s classroom.

What was it about Mrs. Bailey's teaching that touched my life so powerfully? Was it her sympathy for me as the new kid? Was it the engaging activities? I only know that when I reflect on 4th grade, a phenomenal school year floods my memory.

Pages from my childhood scrapbook's 4th-grade year invoke sweet memories. Our class were pen pals with another 4th-grade class. Oh, how we loved writing and receiving those letters! We studied the country of Japan — complete with designing and creating our own Japanese art stencils. We took a field trip to Seattle, eating lunch at a Japanese restaurant. When we returned from recess daily, she would read aloud to us from a novel. I loved listening to her gentle, expressive voice, as she brought those books to life.

On Christmas morning, 1966, chalkboard and chalk from Santa sat under the tree. He'd read my letter and delivered just what I wanted so that I could be like Mrs. Bailey. Still in pajamas, I ripped into that box of chalk and wrote phonics lessons on the board. I coerced my three younger brothers — ages 6, 5, and 3 ½ — to be my students. Many more "sibling class sessions" would follow.

For 5th grade, I changed schools. I still visited Mrs. Bailey, who was again teaching 4th grade. My school had a different spring break, so I asked if I could be her assistant during that week. After all, I was a 5th grader and knew all about 4th grade. She said yes. I worked individually with students, I helped with group projects, and I read the novel to the students after recess. Could Mrs. Bailey have known the impact this experience would have on me? I'm so very grateful to her for opening that door for me.

Over a decade later, I was back in touch with Mrs. Bailey. At a turning point in my life, I needed direction. I was successfully working in management at Nordstrom, but an inner voice beckoned me to teach. I was wrestling with what to do, as I loved my job. Yet, my heart's desire was to be a teacher. I wanted to go to college, but I didn't have the confidence to take the next step. Mrs. Bailey came to mind — even though I hadn't seen her since that 5th-grade spring break.

Over several cups of tea and a box of Kleenex in Mrs. Bailey's kitchen that November in 1978, I poured out my heart. In my mind's eye I can still picture her kind eyes and warm smile of comfort, as we sat at her kitchen table. She was still the Mrs. Bailey I remembered from 4th grade — compassionate and so interested in my life. I told about how I was struggling with the decision to quit my job and pursue a teaching degree. She listened intently; I think I did most of the talking. When she did speak, her wisdom was like a refreshing breeze. She said that I should follow my dream, that it was evident to her that teaching was my passion.

She talked about her own journey to teaching and how college was a wonderful experience and that I'd find that also. Oh, how I needed those words! My confidence grew, as she spoke about taking risks to decipher what's meaningful for your life. She described teaching as a privilege.

Reflecting on that pivotal conversation in my life gives me goosebumps. This was a life-changing decision — and one that I am so very thankful that I made. By February, 1979, I was packed and moving to Ellensburg, Washington.

Soon I was enrolled at Central Washington University, with a focus on special education. My professors were

exceptional educators who inspired us with rigorous curriculum and high expectations. Those classes were steeped in advocacy for serving individuals with disabilities. They inspired us to dig deeper, think creatively, and take risks. They challenged us to do what it takes to reach our students because everybody counts.

Dr. Madsen's advocacy for meaningful vocational education for individuals with disabilities was a powerful message. For secondary students, this focus would be about post-high school goals. It meant creating purposeful lessons to prepare and support students in their adult lives as employees and consumers. These lessons still resonate with me today.

For 24 years I've had the privilege of teaching high school students with special needs, with particular focus on developing vocational skills. I carry Dr. Madsen's teachings in my heart and classroom. I've felt his presence many times in IEP meetings, conversations with parents, while collaborating with colleagues, when I'm being the voice of transition, or advocating for students' rights.

Mrs. Bailey and Dr. Glenn Madsen were in the audience on that special September day. Before the ceremony, we met in the hallway for an emotional reunion. I was so grateful to catch them prior to being seated. It gave me a chance to tell them how much I appreciated both of them. I told them I was receiving this award in large part because of their influence. I told them they would be on that stage with me, hands on my shoulders, celebrating a shared honor.

Jon Magnus

North Central ESD 171 Regional Teacher of the Year
Wenatchee High School | Wenatchee School District

The Art of Teaching

*Student connections are the secret
to success in the classroom*



I was never going to be an educator.

Years of watching my father, a high school biology and math teacher, had convinced me that a career in education was completely out of the question. He spent his evenings and weekends correcting papers, developing lesson plans, dumpster diving for exciting scientific experiments, and then running back to school to set up labs. He worked hard through summer vacations painting houses or doing small construction projects to finance trips that gave me a taste for discovering the world. He struggled to raise his family on a teacher's income. It was a challenge.

And yet, my father loved his job. An extraordinary educator, he spent 30 years perfecting his skills. With creativity and innovative ideas, he inspired a love of learning among his students. Their success was his highest priority. He embodied the art of teaching.

As a child, I never understood. Despite the many table conversations celebrating the progress of his students, I saw only our financial struggle. For years, I needed him

by teasing that I would never become a teacher. Because, after all, you are supposed to learn from other's mistakes!

My professional plans involved traveling the world and accumulating wealth. Consequently, I spent a decade working for major corporations and running my own business in France. In an unexpected twist of life, each of these positions led me to teaching. It was in educating others that I discovered the purpose and fulfillment that climbing the corporate ladder had failed to provide. I finally came to understand the art of teaching.

At the age of thirty-three, with a newly awarded Master's in Teaching degree, I set foot in my first classroom and have never looked back.

I entered the profession with preconceived ideas about the greatest challenges of teaching — meeting the needs of a fantastically diverse group of students, consistently delivering engaging instruction, and maintaining an infectious level of enthusiasm. We studied many of these topics in our educational courses. They were common sense.

There was, however, something for which I was vastly unprepared — the daunting personal challenges that litter our students' lives like a field of land-mines. At times, when we least expect it, they bare their hearts. They share their fears, concerns, and challenges with an honest desire for advice, counsel, or a listening ear. I hear them out and marvel at their resilience.

"Mr. Magnus," they say:

"My parents are splitting up. They move me from house to house and it's driving me crazy. They talk smack about each other, and I can't take it anymore."

"I'm so depressed that I have thought about killing myself."

"I think I'm gay. My parents will hate me. I've been fighting this for so long. I'm tired."

"We don't have money to pay for electricity at our house. I'm so cold I can't even function."

"I think I'm pregnant. I haven't told anyone else but you. Help me. Please!"

"When are they going to understand that I am a person and not a test score?"

Other students manifest angry or aggressive behavior with no explanation.

Eric entered my classroom determined to fail. A thick swag of long hair drooped down over eyes that rarely met mine as I struggled to engage him in conversation. His face, flushed with frustration, spoke volumes. "Leave me alone," it said. "You are a teacher and you know nothing about me. School is the last place I want to be. I hate it here." He begrudgingly participated in games and activities but never took notes. It was exceedingly clear that he had better things in life to do than academics. Or so I thought.

Years later, Eric shared what was really going through his mind at that time. "Mr. Magnus," he said, "I was drowning my need for connection with pot, partying, girls, and friends. I grew up in poverty. I didn't have nice clothes and other students bullied me because I was poor and chubby. Though smart, I was far behind in math because I didn't apply myself at all. By the time I got to your class, I was high 24/7. I was searching for connection. Thankfully, I found it in some of my high school teachers. You all planted the seeds that helped me to see the good in me."

His revelation brought tears to my eyes. I remember thinking that I would never give up on him. We had countless conversations as I knelt by his desk talking about choices and personal responsibility. I remember the little victories as he began to change his ways by turning in an occasional assignment. I remember when his grades began to improve and he discovered a new sense of self-satisfaction. It was thrilling.

I remember the day he announced that he wanted to join us on our summer trip to France. He said that it would be impossible, though, because his family did not have the resources to pay for anything like that. For three years, I had observed him doodling away in class and found his artwork to be exceptional. "Where there is a will, there is a way," I told him. "Why not find that way by marketing your art?" He decided to make T-shirts. After designing an extraordinary print, he found a sponsor to finance the venture. He engaged other students in his affair, and sold T-shirts door-to-door all over the community. He raised the money and joined the class in June with the satisfaction of paying for the entire trip completely on his own.

That same young man is now happily married and a successful business owner.

Reflecting on Eric's story, and the personal experiences of other students, reminds me of the most fundamental aspects of our work:

- Believe in your students. Never give up on them, even if their behavior is telling you otherwise.
- Respect them for the complex human beings that they are.

- Learn from them as they learn from you. This requires listening and the pursuit of meaningful conversation.
- Validate their personal experiences and create a learning environment that levels the field of opportunity.
- Strive to help them discover their own true potential and the good they have within.

This is the art of teaching.

Mandy Manning

2018 Washington State Teacher of the Year
Joel E. Ferris High School | Spokane School District

Beyond School

Home visits strip away assumptions to reveal dynamic families and communities



With three boxes of cookies and the addresses of the students we were set to visit that day, Luisa, the Bilingual Specialist I worked with, and I got into my car and headed downtown. These were to be our first home visits ever. We were excited and nervous to discover more about our students. I'd contacted the families via our district language specialists, but didn't want to bring an interpreter with us. This was not formal. This was not evaluative. This was exploration and experience. We knew our students inside the classroom, but we wanted to know more — to meet their families, see where they lived, and how they lived. We wanted to see what life in Spokane looked like for them so we could better understand where they come from, who they are, and build relationships with their families outside of the classroom.

Our first stop took us to an area of the city known for its halfway houses for recovering addicts and convicted felons. The apartment complex sat at the base of a steep drive. Looking at the place, it was hard to imagine our studious-and-kind Abraham living there. The hard-to-navigate complex was big, with three stories and a maze

of a parking lot. The numbering system didn't make sense, so it took us awhile to figure out where the family lived. We finally made it up to the apartment 10 minutes late.

Abraham's family came from Congo in the central part of Africa. He was a happy kid who loved to sing and play the drums. And he was smart, too. I already knew he would advance beyond the Newcomer Center in one semester, even though we were only a month in at that point. When his mother opened the door, a waft of hot, steaming air greeted us along with the strong smell of fish. She'd been cooking. She hugged us as we walked in and thanked us profusely for visiting. Abraham greeted us next and showed us to one of the three couches in the small living room. Five other young people, little and big, smiled and stared at us as we sat. I wasn't sure how they were all related, except for his older sister, whom I'd met before. His grandmother sat in a recliner near the entrance to the hallway.

After a few minutes a group of boys came in, his brothers and nephews, 12 people in all. We discovered the family actually rented two apartments. The boys stayed in one and the girls in the other. It was stiflingly hot inside. The brief tour showed us that seven people shared two rooms and one bathroom in this apartment, and five shared two rooms and a bathroom in the other. They were cramped, but happy and proud of their new home. The joy in the house overwhelmed us, they were so honored by our visit.

We next visited Bah Ray, a Karen boy from Burma/Myanmar with attendance issues. He came to us from a refugee camp in Thailand, where he rarely went to school. He had street smarts and played the role of class clown with perfection. He charmed us in the classroom, but it was difficult to get him to work. He lived with his father in a cramped

apartment complex roughly five minutes away from Abraham's. The complex was old and rundown, shaped like a giant slate blue square and shadowed by trees. Several other Karen people milled around. It became clear this was a common placement for this refugee community. The complex lacked natural light, and the stairwells were dark, making it hard to find the right apartment.

We finally located it on the ground floor, half underground. We knocked, but no one answered. We knocked again and the neighbor opened her door. When we asked for Bah Ray's father, the woman held up her finger and ran off up the stairs. Moments later she came back with him. His smile spread to his eyes and radiated kindness. Bah Ray was not home. I wasn't surprised. His transition to school in the U.S. had been tough. We were still working on building a relationship with one another and he didn't trust me quite yet.

Inside the apartment there was no furniture. Bah Ray's dad wore a thick coat, even though it was early fall and warm outside. We sat on the floor. The neighbor woman stayed. She spoke a little English and helped him communicate with us. Since arriving in Spokane he'd had a tough time controlling Bah Ray. He showed us his room. There was a mattress on the floor, but it was otherwise unfurnished. It was stark and empty, vastly different from Abraham's, cramped but happy home. Our visit was short, but in that time, I saw a loving father and a tight-knit network of Karen families, finding their way together. We said our goodbyes and headed to our final destination.

Samina's family lived in a half-industrial, half-residential neighborhood in a house that looked like it used to be an old mom and pop shop. It was larger inside than it looked from the outside. There were 11 in her family.

They were from Somalia and were Muslim. All of the girls wore hijab, but only because we were there. If they did not have visitors they would have been free to uncover. At school, Samina was eager to learn and quite social. She had little English, but strove to practice speaking in order to make friends.

The family had prepared all day for our visit. One of the sisters even made a chocolate cake, because Samina knew it was my favorite flavor. After a brief tour of the house — four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, and an empty garage in which the children played — we sat in the living room to enjoy tea and cake. The eldest brother had taken on the role of dad, and told everyone what to do, where to sit, and generally how to be. He asked a lot of questions about Samina's behavior at school and whether she was serious as a student. When we rose to leave, they were very disappointed and made me promise to return with my family, which I did the following spring for dinner.

As Luisa and I went to each of the students' houses we had preconceived notions about what we would discover inside each of the houses based on the area of the city, the upkeep of the complex, the lack of natural light, or the surrounding homes and apartments. But it turned out none of our assumptions were right. We didn't find what we thought we would, whatever that was. No. What we did find was love. Each of these families had love and pride and were honored to show their homes to us, to teach us who they were and the beauty they had to offer.

As educators we often make assumptions about our students, particularly those we label "at risk." I've learned a lot from my home visits, but above all, I've discovered that sometimes the way things appear on the outside does not always define what's on the inside. When I visited my

students' houses that first time, I saw a new side to them. I saw how they interacted with their families, what they valued by what they displayed in their rooms, what they were interested in and who they missed in pictures around their houses. This knowledge impacted my teaching. Because I knew my students as more than just learners, I knew better what they needed and how to teach them. Plus, I built relationships with their families. This impacted the classroom each time we communicated on behalf of the students and every time they visited the school. The value and beauty of where our students come from may be hidden, but we can find it. When we choose to see beyond our school walls.

Jennifer Tenney

ESD 105 Regional Teacher of the Year
White Swan High School | Mt. Adams School District

Math Dance

*Pow Wow, culture, and algebra collide
in one student's math journey*



I entered the Pow Wow, and I immediately realized I was the only white person in the Longhouse. The beat of the drums almost seemed to still as the heads turned to look at me, but then the colors swirled around again in a rainbow display of beadwork and feathers. The

Grandmas were soon inviting me to sit down and asking if they could get me a plate of fry bread. I recognized one of the wrinkled smiling women as a grandma of Eagle, the student I was here to see. She took my hand in both of hers, not a handshake as I was accustomed to, but a warm greeting where she clasped both my hands and hugged them in welcome.

"Is Eagle here?" I asked. She smiled and without speaking, pointed to the dance floor.

There he was. Swirling and dipping, proudly executing the Grass Dance with grace and ease. His body conveyed the beauty and proud heritage of his people. His feet never faltered, and my soul stilled as I watched the intricate story he told.

Two days before, he had laid his head on his desk, pulling his Native Pride sweatshirt over his head as he said angrily, "I am so f*#%ing stupid. I can't do math, I am just gonna get an F anyway."

He just needs a little encouragement, I thought to myself. I tried to help, "Don't worry, Eagle, you can learn this. Let me help you." I immediately started to launch into an explanation of linear systems.

"No, Mrs. T, I can't. I am stupid, none of this makes any sense, and math teachers just get mad at me."

This stopped me. My mind stepped back, realizing that this was a lot bigger than his misunderstanding of linear equations.

I listened to him without a lens of trying to fix, but one of understanding.

He began to tell me his math story. When he was in kindergarten, his mom passed away in a car accident, and he went to live with his father. He missed most of his elementary experience because living with his father meant traveling extensively to Pow Wows across the Northwest. His father's drumming group were award-winning artists and performed throughout the year across Indian Country. Eagle was in and out of school and missed those critical skills that would have given him the base for success in algebra.

He struggled with his basic facts and he told me with self-derision in his tone, "I can't even do 2nd-grade work."

He told me about sitting in math classes and feeling dumb as his peers gave answers, and he didn't have clue what they were talking about. He said, "I can read, I read in the van with my dad. But math, I can't remember all those

stupid steps and stuff. I am just math stupid and I guess I should just get out of school now. I am never going to graduate anyway.”

Math stupid. That’s what he thought of himself.

Now as I watched him perform, telling the stories of his heritage and culture with grace, I was overwhelmed with pride and humbled with the honor of being his teacher. I stayed until the end of the dancing and tried not to let the tears come when I congratulated him on his performance.

Eagle had a profound transformational effect on how I think and teach.

How could we have created a system that allowed such a beautiful human to believe he was stupid? How could we discount his culture to the point where nothing he was learning connected to his world? And most importantly: How could I change his path so that it included walking down the aisle to receive his diploma?

He would learn math. He would graduate.

I began to teach him the power of, yet. You don’t know how to solve linear equations yet!

He said, “I know I am stupid.”

“No, yet, just means I haven’t figured out how to teach you the best way possible, yet, but we will figure it out.”

That year was full of challenges, frustrations, and celebrations. I changed the pacing. I changed the grading system, and I stopped assigning homework. I organized his learning around big concepts that he could demonstrate mastery on. Changing the grade book meant that he could

demonstrate mastery on concepts at any time throughout a trimester, without fear of failing.

But the most powerful change was the message around mindset.

I told him daily: You can learn math, and you will learn math. Mistakes are important. They allow you to learn and grow. As he began to believe in the power of yet, the change in him was gradual but dramatic. His sweatshirt was no longer over his head, and I began to see his eyes watching and silently asking questions.

Then one day his hand went up when I asked for volunteers to show work on the board. As he explained his work to the class it was if the equations danced across the board weaving his reasoning and understanding in a pattern for all of us to see and follow.

Again, my soul stilled in awe of his power and grace as Eagle again conveyed a message. This time, his message was of endurance and connections. Eagle had used the power of culture and perseverance to rewrite his math story. The narrative of his story went from feelings of failure to understanding and mastery. He conveyed confidence and knowledge that I knew he would carry into the future as part of his journey.

Gary Coyan

Olympic ESD 114 Regional Teacher of the Year
Chimacum High School | Chimacum School District

The Power of Yes

A teacher's greatest legacy is the challenge they embrace



When I was a sophomore in high school, I had no reason to come to school. I was not planning to attend college, and I struggled to find relevance in my classes. My parents had no expectations for my future beyond the limited opportunities available in our small town in northern California.

While signing up for classes that year, I asked the counselor if I could take darkroom photography. She said that it was a popular class reserved for students who were more motivated as it required a great deal of work outside of class. She didn't want to waste a spot for someone who would just go through the motions. I couldn't blame her. My transcript clearly showed a lack of enthusiasm for school. She told me that I could, however, get admitted to the class with the instructor's permission.

I left the counselor's office with mixed feelings about being called out by someone I didn't really know. I was also shocked to find that this person actually noticed my lack of interest in school, because this was the first time it had been acknowledged. I was the kind of student who

did just enough to stay at the upper end of the bottom third of the class.

It would have been easy for Ms. Kaluza to turn down my request to enter her class. She didn't. She said yes to a challenging student who would prove hard to motivate and keep on task. I don't know why Ms. Kaluza allowed me to enter her class, but when she did, I came to life! That class became my reason for coming to school, and the confidence I found in photography spilled over into other subjects.

I started to find my voice and a passion for books, writing, and social studies. I graduated high school after taking every art class Ms. Kaluza offered, in addition to being her teacher's assistant. She taught me so much more than photography. She took an interest in my life and gave me opportunities I wouldn't have otherwise had access to. It was my experience in her class that influenced my decision to say yes to teaching when other opportunities presented themselves to me.

One of the most memorable moments of my career, so far, took place my first year of teaching, which also happened to be Ms. Kaluza's last. We sat together at the Nevada Museum of Art where we both had students being honored for the artwork they had created earlier in the year. This was a powerful moment for me because I was reminded of that kid I used to be, no self-confidence and no motivation to do anything for anyone. As I looked up on stage with pride in the students I had mentored all year, I saw myself.

The students standing on that stage were the ones other teachers often dreaded to see on their rosters. Within each of these students, an infinite amount of

possibilities existed that simply had to be unlocked by someone who unconditionally believed in them, someone who was willing to say yes to the challenges they brought to class each morning.

Although Ms. Kaluza was retiring, her legacy would continue to grow and change as my teaching career unfolded. Since high school, I have had several other teachers and mentors who challenged and sculpted me into the educator I am today. I have experienced the power of great teachers saying yes at every step of my journey into education. I carry something special from each of them, and I am so thankful that they gave so much of their time, sharing their passion with me.

My most powerful learning experiences have included project-based education with a focus on real-world objectives. Learning by doing and creating forced me out of my comfort zone and gave me a product or memory I could hold onto long after the project was finished. Who are the teachers and mentors who sculpted you into the person you are today? What are you doing to honor their legacy?

All I ever wanted from teaching is to do for just one student what Ms. Kaluza did for me; to pay it forward. I say yes when presented with the opportunity to work with a challenging student or an innovative idea I'm just not quite comfortable with to honor Ms. Kaluza. I hope you do the same for your Ms. Kaluzas.

Linne Haywood

Northwest ESD 189 Regional Teacher of the Year
Darrington High School | Darrington School District

Laws of English 11

*Student stories build trust and hope
in a small rural classroom*



I teach in a small, rural school of great beauty, where kids are quick to help, early to drive, and slow to leave. It is a place far from the home of my youth in many ways.

Most obvious to me, as a teacher, is a general unwillingness to develop a positive attitude toward English classes.

Most of my students don't see themselves attending college. When you grow up in poverty, the first thing you think about when you graduate is earning money. Many of them feel neglected by the educational system or an afterthought, relegated to taking required general education courses in which they don't feel invested.

Now, don't get me wrong; I have taught many teens who read well and write with alacrity. They have used these skills to excel on their college preparation tests and have attended four-year universities. They are as dear to my heart as any of the students you are going to read about here. But they are not my norm.

By necessity, English 11 is one of the last classes of the day to accommodate the students who take the hour ride back to school from the Skills Center to attend math,

U.S. History, and English. For many of them, English 11 is the last English class they will ever have to take, and they are quite vocal in rejoicing in that fact.

English 11 is a survey of American Literature, and I try to pair their readings with the timeline of U.S. History. We start with the Native American oral tradition and move through the founding of our nation. We stop in at industrialization and end up with Vietnam.

Because our school size has diminished, this particular class contained all the 11th graders who were not in college English — 22 in all; 11 boys and 11 girls with all 11 boys still needing to pass their state English Language Arts test in order to graduate.

Some of the boys had taken and failed this ELA test four times and were on the verge of dropping out. These kids were annoyed by English. They didn't connect with me despite my best cajoling, and my lessons that I so eagerly offered them fell flat as I delivered them. There was some "bad blood" between several of the members of the class, and blowing up and storming out of the room began to be a regular occurrence. Even I began to dread 7th period. Something had to give.

We needed some order. One day, I asked the class to circle up and I sat in the circle with them. "You guys," I said, "This isn't working. We have to do something different." They were abashed, but honest. We all agreed we didn't like how the class was going. I wanted them to find the solution, and it wasn't long before one of them said, "We should have some rules!" I eagerly grabbed a poster board and started to write. "Wait," Gage hollered. "We don't want rules! Rules are for p*\$%#!" Twenty-two pairs of eyes immediately focused on me. I was notorious for outlawing swearing

in my class. I teach language and I want my students to elevate their thoughts and control their emotions. I nodded at Gage and wrote on my poster board:

“ENGLISH 11 LAWS (RAFP)”

We quickly wrote down several “laws,” although the only one we ever kept with regularity was the one that allowed them to use their cell phones for the first five minutes of class. But, we turned the corner. We began to gel as a group.

After reading Native American stories of origin, my students wrote their own stories. As you might imagine, most of my students are high on the Adverse Childhood Experiences scale and their stories reflected that. They wrote plaintive, heart-wrenching stories that included dysfunction, drugs, and despair. When I asked if they would read them to the class, they would shake their heads and then say something like, “But *you* can read them out loud... if you want,” and nod at me. And so I would. And the class grew even closer as they shared the stories of their lives.

One girl, Shayla, rarely came to class, but submitted draft after draft of her origin story. When she finally completed it, she asked if I could read it out loud, but insisted that she couldn’t be in the class while it was read. The class convinced her to stay. She wept all the way through the reading and when I would stop to check on her she said, “Keep reading. I want everyone to know me.” Each student was adamant that no one should feel sorry for him or her, and so we didn’t. There was a detente amongst the students who didn’t get along and a promise that what was “read in English 11, stayed in English 11.”

I learned a lot from this group of kids. Lessons that were sometimes painful and hard on my ego. My students didn’t

want to work because they felt disconnected from the process, and they didn't trust me. I learned that students who are angry at the system are often so because they don't feel as though anyone is listening to them. Once I met them where they were, we were able to continue the journey together.

In the spring, my students took the state ELA test. I eagerly awaited as the scores rolled in and shared the thrilling good news with each student as one after the other, they received passing scores.

For Tristan, it meant that he could graduate in June, and for most of the others it meant they could continue in their skills center training.

I tracked down Justin in the hallway one afternoon and informed him that not only did he pass the test, but he had scored well into proficient level which meant that he was career-and-college ready. "Hell yeah!" he exclaimed, as he pumped his fist into the air. "Now I can go to college!" Justin signed up for College in the High School this year, realizing a dream he didn't even know he had.

There are many blockades for students who want to leave small, rural communities. Lack of resources, lack of pathways, and, worst of all, often a lack of hope. But success can breed success and give confidence to young minds and old teachers. It's the unspoken law of English 11.

About Teacher of the Year

Since 1963, the Washington State Teacher of the Year program has selected one outstanding educator annually to serve as the Washington State Teacher of the Year.

The Teacher of the Year is selected from a slate of up to 9 regional candidates representing Washington's nine Educational Service Districts (ESDs) and Tribal Schools. In 1963, 1970, 2007, and 2013, the state program garnered national attention when Elmon Ousley of Bellevue School District, Johnnie T. Dennis of Walla Walla School District, Andrea Peterson of Granite Falls School District, and Jeff Charbonneau of Zillah School District, respectively, were each selected as the National Teacher of the Year.

Anyone can nominate someone for Teacher of the Year. Nominated teachers complete a written application and enter the regional selection process through their ESDs. Each ESD recommends a Regional Teacher of the Year to the state program. Regional Teachers of the Year undergo a rigorous state selection that includes a written application, presentation, and panel interview. The State Teacher of the Year is selected by a committee made up of diverse educators, families, students, and education stakeholders. Teachers of the Year:

- Have the respect and admiration of their colleagues.
- Are experts in their fields who guide students of all backgrounds and abilities to achieve excellence.
- Collaborate with colleagues, students, and families to create school cultures of respect and success.
- Deliberately connect the classroom and key stakeholders to foster strong communities at large.
- Demonstrate leadership and innovation in and outside of the classroom walls that embodies lifelong learning.
- Express themselves in engaging and articulate ways.

"As Teacher of the Year, one of the most important lessons I've learned has been the tremendous and transformative power of stories."

— Camille Jones, 2017 WA State Teacher of the Year



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