

Relate, Then Educate

*The Untold Stories
of Teachers, by Teachers*

Relate, *then* Educate

Rick Holmes
Andrea Avey



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The Untold Stories of Teachers, by Teachers

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*For all the educators who have been and will be,
but especially those who made us who we are.*

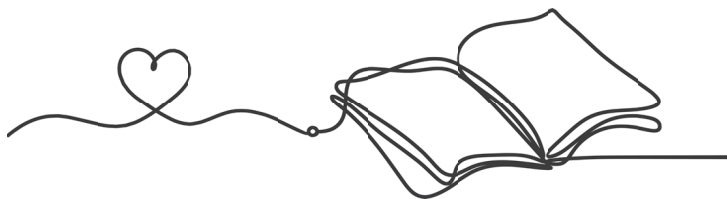
Gratefully and enthusiastically for Dr. Jeffrey Walker



Table of Contents

Notes from the Authors	ix
Abby French	1
Arturo Aviña	11
Shelly Swisher	21
Justin Belt	33
Kelli Wilson	43
Rachel Whalen	51
Monte Syrie	61
Pam Swan	71
Tonya Bobo	81
Carmelita Shouldis	93

Lorena Lopez	105
Roxana Dueñas	117
Amy Crawford	129
Jackie Mancinelli	141
Karen Workun	153
Anna Fusco	163
Acknowledgments	169
About the Authors	171
Additional Resources	173



Notes from the Authors

I didn't always know I'd be a teacher, but the signs were more evident than I would have liked to admit. My entire family is filled with various kinds of educators: superintendents, principals, counselors, teachers, school nurses, bus drivers, and more.

Outside of a couple semesters in college where I gave architecture a try, my life seemed destined to be rooted in school, a realization I was slow to embrace. I understand that what I just said hints at regret, and if I'm being honest, what you hear is correct. Let me explain.

My first attempt at teaching occurred during the student-teaching phase of my education. Up to that point,

my education classes had been driven almost exclusively by course content, such as United States history, geology, and elementary statistics to name a few. To be clear, I was taught absolutely nothing about how to manage a classroom, how to connect with kids, or what to expect when I arrived at my position behind the teacher's desk.

No, up to that point in my development as an educator, I had heard only platitudes regarding the classroom and its challenges. One sentiment in particular echoes in my ears all these years later: "At the end of my first day, I walked to my car thinking, 'I can't believe I get to do this every day.'" This was said to me by a local elementary principal who had been in education for over ten years at that point.

So when I began my lesson that fateful first day, dressed in khakis and my finest collared shirt, I was woefully underprepared for what lay ahead.

I don't want this point to be lost—I was literally raised in a school. My parents, both lifetime school-teachers and administrators, spoke of their students constantly. On an almost nightly basis, they would share stories with us about the many challenges that caring for students and their families brought my parents. These stories would regularly end with a life lesson for anyone in earshot. On most occasions, it revolved around students' innate goodness, the hard-

ships they faced, and how discipline would provide a pathway by which they could navigate their educational career and life.

Simply by hearing these stories, being around so many teachers, and feeling the reverence for education and the lives of students, I believed I was wholly prepared for whatever might occur in my own career. Obviously, I was not.

After a lackluster stint as a student-teacher, I became a “real” teacher, holding a post at the school where I went to middle school. There are so many stories to tell about my first few years in education, but the overarching narrative could be summed up like this: “What the...? Is this how it is at every school?” Really. I asked this question, or something similar, hundreds of times in four years. It seemed impossible to me that fist fights in class, threats from a sixteen-year-old eighth grader, and vicious phone calls from parents were normal in any sense.

As it turns out, over the course of a twenty-year career in education, I found that no, it’s not like this everywhere. There are better situations and worse situations to be in as a teacher. There are wonderful kids and kids who have such devastating home lives you can’t reach them, no matter how big your heart is for them. There are really inspiring administrators and those that are bent on making things difficult for everyone. Of course this is true. This is true of any career.

But oh, how nice it would have been to know how diverse, beautiful, and motivating the educational landscape really is from the outset. How valuable it would have been to receive not venerated clichés or well-edited tales from Hollywood of what teaching is like, but real-life, true-grit stories straight from the mouths of veteran educators.

Such a tool of illumination did not exist when I stumbled into my educational career. If I had been able to read stories such as those contained in this book, would I still have chosen to pursue this life? Yes. Would I have been able to lift my head from my immediate troubles in the classroom, even for a moment, to see that there are immense possibilities and tools at my disposal, tools to make the outcome of my situation better for both my students and me? The answer is yes.

The book you have in your hands should be considered a powerful tool for any young educator. The stories held within are true, raw, and purposefully given without varnish. The lessons embedded in these pages are compelling and their multi-faceted applications will vary depending on the reader and the specific moment in which they find themselves. Most importantly, you will witness the vibrant heartbeat of loving teachers, which serves to inspire their students and fellow educators alike.

Frederick Douglass once said, “Some know the value of education by having it. I know its value by not having

it.” This proves true in my life as a teacher. The misbegotten belief that I was prepared for all the challenges of teaching when I was not nearly drove me from education after four years. Upon reflection, I understand that the inertia of my family’s commitment to teaching is what allowed me to withstand the disillusionment of my early career. But how many extraordinary teachers do we lose every year because they see no lasting potential in enduring the everyday struggles?

For me, this book is an attempt to make a small deposit back into the educational profession that gave me so much. It is intended to showcase the stories of the committed souls who have chosen to jump in and equip the next generation of leaders, caretakers, protectors, intellectuals, and—yes—educators.

Enjoy.

Rick Holmes

Thank you for picking up this book. Whatever the reason you did, we believe the stories you’re about to read will inspire, encourage, and comfort you. Even more so, we believe they’ll level with you about the truth of teaching.

You’re about to read dozens of accounts from real teachers with real stories. Each individual became an educator for a reason, and each person’s purpose plays out differently in the classroom. Our hope as you move

through their experiences and reflections is that you find a common thread that runs through all of us and serves to connect us.

Some people step into education after a lifelong pursuit, the inevitable fulfillment of a childhood dream. Some because they discovered a passion for it later in life or because they wanted to reach young people and make a difference. I fell into it accidentally and with great reluctance.

Young and ambitious, I was eager to do something significant after graduating from college. In my naïveté, I thought any company would be lucky to have me and jealous to do so, but for all my high ideals and lofty goals, the job market proved a cold place, completely indifferent to me. By happenstance, I was introduced to Teach for America, a program that takes nontraditional teachers and places them across the country in low-income school districts with largely underserved student populations.

I was convinced I would be a female Mr. Keating and captain my students toward honoring their hearts and chasing their destinies. Needless to say, Mr. Keating I was not, and I discovered that impacting students is earned through tears, frustration, plaguing questions, and feelings of complete inadequacy and self-doubt. *What was I thinking? Who did I think I was?* But over time, students reveal the answers to those questions. Relationships with them bring joy and affirm the mission

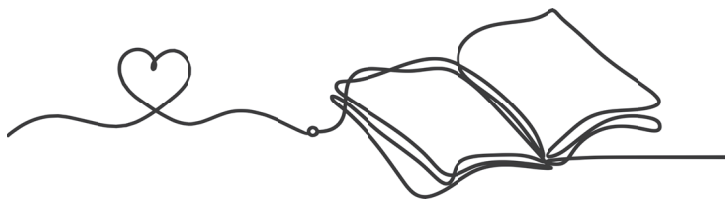
of education. I watched as my students conquered their challenges through hard work and surprised themselves with their own capabilities.

Students will always do that, and they are deserving of our respect and effort. You'll surprise yourself as a teacher, too, by figuring things out on the fly, asking the right question in the right moment, making unexpected connections with students. But hopefully, with the help of this book and these experienced educators' stories, you'll be a bit more prepared, have a few more strategies in your back pocket, and know more clearly what it looks and feels like to be a frontline educator.

We hope you find this book helpful. And remember that no matter how difficult things get, how futile your efforts appear, or even how incredibly rewarded you feel on any given day, this work is worth it, and it matters. Because your students and the stories they are going to tell one day matter. Hopefully, this book will help you understand more clearly the role you can play in those stories and why the one you bring to the table matters just as much.

Happy learning.

Andrea Avey



Abby French

Shenandoah County, Virginia

Moment of Impact

Have you ever felt insignificant? Invisible? Like the people around you are indifferent to your presence—even your existence?

As teachers, it's important to recognize that every student is bringing an unseen story with them into the classroom each day. Even fighting private battles at home. We may not always know the details, but we can see evidence of the struggle. When I was in my second year of teaching, I had a student like this.

Jada checked the boxes for every at-risk indicator you could think of. Broken home. Poor hygiene. Poverty. Physical abuse. Sexual abuse. She was a sixth grader. A twelve-year-old. I saw that she needed help and support, and I desperately wanted to give it to her but had no idea how. So, I did all I knew to do at the time: I made myself available.

For some reason, Jada chose me as her confidante. I could sense she felt safe with me. It was in the way we would meet one another's gaze during class. The shy smile I'd catch on her face when I'd say something silly or candid. The way she seemed to exhale stress and inhale a small bit of happiness when we'd talk. I invited her to start having lunch with me once a week in my classroom. Nothing fancy, no frills. Just an opportunity to share some undivided attention with each other over fruit and cold sandwiches.

Looking back, those lunches were some of the sweetest times for us both. As a new teacher, I felt like my good intentions were validated. It was special to share unfiltered one-on-one time with her. For me, it was a respite from the frenzy of trying to keep my head above water. For Jada, she had someone who listened to, supported, and encouraged her, someone who was there for her. She had a place of security she could go to escape the cruel eye of the cafeteria.

But in the middle of the year, all that changed.

She was taken suddenly out of school by Child Protective Services. Without warning, she was ripped from the fragile community and companionship she and I had worked so hard to forge over the school year. I was at a loss. Could I have done something more? *Should* I have done something more? Was she going to be okay? And would she and her problems be seen?

These were questions I didn't know the answers to ... questions that would go unanswered for over sixteen years.

Until one day, I saw a friend request pop up on Facebook. It was Jada. She found me! After all these years, we finally connected, and she gave me the rest of her story, filled in the gaps I was missing, and reassured me that not only was she all right, but she had a daughter of her own. They were both flourishing.

Her message to me was simple: "Thank you for your kindness."

I didn't do anything special for her other than give her my time and my attention. I was a new teacher, learning and figuring things out in my own right, but I was able to offer her compassion. Dignity. Respect. Affirmation. And visibility.

She told me her self-esteem was low in middle school. She'd been shouldering a weighty burden of guilt, one she often felt she couldn't stand up underneath. She was suicidal. But because someone saw her,

she was able to imagine a different path for herself. In those dark moments, our relationship made a difference to her. When she felt no one understood or cared, she could reflect on our weekly lunches, our conversations, the way we simply lived life next to each other without any sort of falsity or obligation, and that gave her hope.

Now, she writes me a letter every year. These are usually small updates, like how her daughter's doing, but she also asks me questions, mostly about parenting. She brings up things about her daughter's education. *Is this the right thing for her in this area? What about this subject and this principal in this district? Doesn't she deserve more?*

Absolutely she does.

Jada can advocate for her daughter because, in a very small way, she thinks back to how she saw me advocate for her. Our relationship allowed her to recognize she was more than her circumstances, more than a victim. She had a champion. She had someone in her corner who could see past today's problems and lend her sight to see tomorrow's potential. And now she can envision the future she wants for her daughter and can act on her behalf.

As people, it is one of our deepest desires to be seen and known and valued. It can be painful when that doesn't happen, but it can be crushing when we don't have the words to express that desire or ask for help.

Then we're all the more susceptible to those quiet little lies: *You mean nothing. No one will ever believe you. No one even knows you're hurting. How can you expect to get help, let alone escape?*

Did I have any awareness of the messages I was sending Jada when I was a twenty-two-year-old teacher? Did I understand how my small gestures were pushing back those lies that threatened to overwhelm her? Not in the least. And even now, I think, *All we did was eat lunch together.* But that's the thing about education: you never know the role you're going to play in others' stories. It is often the smallest things that have the most immeasurable impact.

Not every student can master standards. Not every student will pass those state tests come spring. But every student can be seen. Every student has a story and should get to determine how it's told. Every student can learn to view him or herself as a person of agency and power. And that is our privilege as educators—sometimes, if we see our kids that way, we can help them see the truth through our eyes. The inviolable truth that they have value simply because they exist.

Path into Education

Have you ever felt misunderstood?

Growing up, I loved school. I possessed the early learner's enthusiasm for new information, creativity, and

self-expression, eagerly looking to add to my collection of fun, new facts. Endlessly curious, I loved to learn and aimed to please my teachers.

But I failed. Over and over and over.

Despite my best efforts, I couldn't get good grades. My teachers interpreted my poor performance as apathy or laziness. The inconsistencies in my scores wreaked havoc on the reputation I wanted to build for myself: one of focus, hard work, and admiration for my teachers. Instead, the one I quickly developed was that of a classroom daydreamer: inattentive, scattered, and under-achieving. As a result, school became a traumatic place I associated with struggle and an overwhelming feeling of being totally misunderstood.

My one refuge was a nature camp I attended in the Blue Ridge Mountains during the summers. This camp was legit. Dedicated to the field sciences, campers selected major and minor areas of study. We were encouraged to pursue our interests in an unbridled way, and this attitude was buoyed by the camp's nonjudgmental atmosphere.

I decided my area of emphasis would be herpetology: the study of snakes. Because, why not?

I was intrigued by snakes while everyone else was leery of them. I saw them as fascinating creatures to be studied and appreciated, though they instilled great fear in my fellow campers, and even some counselors. Because

of this, it wasn't long before others came to regard me as a sort of snake expert. I could identify snakes and relocate the dangerous ones away from high-traffic areas. I learned about snakes and empathized with their plight. It wasn't their fault they were scaly, venomous, and looked frightening. So I chose to research them, even though they would have been easier for me to ignore and avoid like so many others did.

I found that the more I learned about snakes, the more the stigma around them weakened. The knowledge I was acquiring empowered me. I could look at a northern black racer and know it was harmless, while other people might assume it was a copperhead and dash off screaming. That was powerful. The knowledge I possessed was something no one could take from me, and I tried to share these insightful tidbits with my fellow campers so that they, too, could be fearless and empowered.

At the conclusion of camp, there was an end-of-term assembly where everyone celebrated the summer's memories and achievements, and a select few campers received some special recognitions. I remember thinking how mindboggling it must be to hear your name called over the microphone in front of the entire camp, how exhilarating it must feel. And then the unthinkable happened.

My name was called. I was given the award for Best All-Around Camper. I was flabbergasted. But ecstatic! Finally, people could see I really did care. They recog-

nized how hard I worked and how deeply invested I was in the subject I'd chosen. It was with the deepest gratitude and widest smile that I received my award.

If only my teachers and classmates at school could see me the way the counselors and other campers saw me.

When I went back to school, the chasm between the true desires of my heart and my performance in the classroom was vast. For the life of me, I still couldn't understand what was going on, and no one around me seemed to grasp my dilemma either.

Then came sixth grade. When I was eleven years old, I was diagnosed with a learning disability. We discovered I had auditory limitations, processing issues, and challenges with short-term memory. What my teachers had always chalked up to laziness and not listening was actually an inability to hear them properly. What seemed, on the surface, a blatant lack of preparation on tests really was a roadblock in my short-term memory center. At last, people knew I wasn't blowing off my schoolwork or allowing my attention to wander from the classroom. At last, I was seen rightly for who I was. But gosh, if it had only happened sooner.

Today, it is my honor and my duty to help students figure out who they are. If they are struggling, I want to help them. If they are at odds with the coursework, I want to get to the bottom of the issue and problem-solve together. If they feel invisible, I want to

make them feel seen. If they feel misunderstood, I will work to understand them.

To this day, I keep my Best All-Around Camper award on my dresser. Looking at it every day reminds me that I have been seen and understood. It is the manifestation of being known, and it spurs me on to help students define their worth and see themselves as valuable.

I teach to empower others with knowledge. I teach because information is the solvent to fear. I teach because ignorance breeds ignorance, and education breeds empathy. I teach because I see myself—that misunderstood eleven-year-old who needed an advocate—in my students. It is my purpose to reflect their power back to them, so they can feel it, own it, and use it.

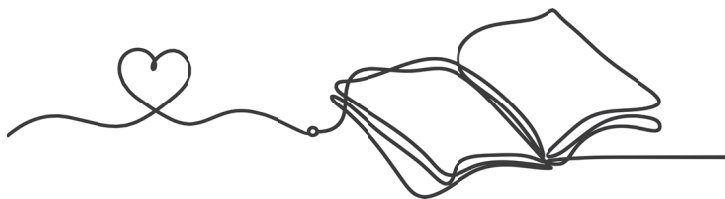
Best Practice

“I could sense she felt safe with me. [. . .] I invited her to start having lunch with me once a week in my classroom. Nothing fancy, no frills. We just shared some undivided attention with each other over fruit and cold sandwiches.”

More informal settings can be great ways to develop and deepen relationships with students. This could be in the context of a sport, club, or other extracurricular activity. These moments are invaluable in getting a glimpse of who students are as truly complex individuals beyond their basic performance in your class. On the flip side,

this is an opportunity for students to get to know you as more than “just a teacher.” Maybe even as a real human being. But what if you’re not on any coaching staff or sponsoring any school organizations?

One idea to get more casual time with students is to invite them to have lunch with you in the classroom. Now, this is something in which you need to exercise discretion and your best judgment. We recommend these lunches always occur with the classroom door open and not between students and teachers of opposite gender. Meeting with small student groups of two and three is even better and less intimidating than a one-on-one lunch. Keep the conversation light and relaxed and let the student(s) lead. Consider what an appropriate cadence could be. Weekly? Monthly? Use discernment, and never put a student (or yourself) in an uncomfortable or unseemly situation. Discuss your idea with a veteran teacher in your school before initiating something like this. You want to be aware of the school’s culture and policies regarding student-teacher interaction outside of designated class time.



Arturo Aviña

Los Angeles, California

Moment of Impact

Children don't put up any sort of facade, and what you see is what you get. After existing solely in the world of adults, this truth is uncommon and deeply refreshing. When thinking about a career, I always knew I wanted to be around kids' energy, do my best to influence them for good, and experience life through their eyes, but I wasn't sure how that would play out in my life.

Once I graduated from college, I began work as a mentor-program coordinator to try out the school setting

and get a feel for that context, and once I did, it was obvious that education was the right fit for me. I earned my education credentials, and my first teaching job was in kindergarten. At my new school, it was tradition for the kindergarten classes to perform a play and a few songs at the end-of-year culmination. As someone who had always leaned toward the science and math disciplines during college, I was nervous. I felt out of my depth with the arts, and I had no theatre experience to speak of. But, as it turned out, I loved it! That first year was a fabulous experience, so by the next spring, I was ready and eager to put up our little show. Allowing my kids to do something fun, exciting, and outside of our regular routine was a year-end treat, and this quickly became the highlight of each year. I even started an after-school drama club because I enjoyed it so much and my students wanted a bigger outlet for the performing arts.

Eight years into my educational career, I felt I was hitting my stride. I had carved an unexpected niche for myself in the arts and was running with these yearly performances. My students and I were having the greatest time each spring brainstorming ideas and sharing them with the broader school community. In spite of the budget cuts my school was suffering, we kept up this wonderful tradition, which I was grateful for. The arts are powerful, and I wanted to do all I could to keep that space alive and thriving for my kids. However, our beautiful bubble was about to be punctured.

While our drama club and yearly performances had escaped the threat of being cut, I hadn't. I received a pink slip in March, signifying I was in danger of being let go at the end of the school term due to a lack of funding.

Although this was a blow, especially as I was feeling so established and settled in my profession and at my site, it's an unfortunate reality for too many educators in our country. Initially, I felt angry and slighted and was tempted to check out for the rest of the year. But once I had a little time to process the news and recalibrate my perspective, I realized this was in no way my kids' fault. They shouldn't bear the brunt of my district's issues or my administration's decisions. With all the uncertainty facing me, I decided to make the most of my time while I had it. I decided that if this was really going to be my last year teaching, I wanted to go out with a bang, so I poured all my passion, energy, and time into the end-of-year performance with my students.

Typically, the songs performed for kindergarten culmination were what you would expect five-year-olds to sing. Simple, kid-friendly, neutral. But that wasn't how I wanted to cap off my potential last year with my students. I wanted to make a memory that would last. I wanted to pull off something surprising, bold, and unforgettable.

I taught my students a choreographed routine to Madonna's "Vogue."

My kids loved it! Their *parents* loved it! This was something completely unusual and new, and it invigorated all of us, especially my students. Doing the choreography and singing to such an iconic song was something my kiddos had never done before, but we had a sensational time. With permission, I posted the performance, and it actually went viral, which was not something I'd intended, but what a special way to celebrate and share this achievement of my students. Plus, for me personally, that performance became the reaffirmation I needed at a very low point in my career. The doubt that had begun to creep over me after receiving that pink slip completely diffused during this period with my students. The perception I was battling of myself as a dispensable faculty member, someone who wasn't making a difference or wasn't worth keeping around, changed. This experience with my students, the risk we took together, and the rewarding moments of joy and validation helped me see myself accurately once again.

Thankfully, that pink slip was rescinded, and I was able to stay at my site. Of course, I felt immense relief, but I recognized I had also gained a renewed sense of creativity and urgency as an educator. The threat of losing my job had hung over me, weighing heavily on my heart as I tried to consider and plan for the future. Conversely, it had also liberated me. I stepped into a freedom in the classroom I hadn't had before, one I likely wouldn't have accessed if

I had felt more assured in my prospects. With the future dangling loosely before me, I had nothing to lose, and as a result, I discovered and gained so much more.

Now that I knew I could continue teaching, I decided to carry this new attitude of daring with me. For the Madonna performance, I bought a video camera to record my incredible students, so now I had a new piece of equipment to utilize in the future. Suddenly, completely new possibilities opened to me. There was so much untouched territory I wanted to explore with my students. No way were we going back now. I wanted to continue to take risks and be bold. I sought out-of-the-box ideas and approaches. Because my students and their families loved the “Vogue” experience, my classes started making music videos and experimenting with other performance methods and formats.

This sort of music-driven performance is the essence of what a lot of my classes do now, especially in drama club and our other performing arts ventures. I’ve been making videos like this with my students going on eight years now, and it’s staggering to consider that all these incredible memories stem from one risky decision, one “accidental” success. One pink slip.

Path into Education

The idea of legacy is sewn into the fabric of education. The whole aim of education is to impart lessons, skills,

and memories to students in the hope that they will remember and leverage them to achieve success, make a difference, or create the life of their dreams. Educators often view the process of instruction this way: we give something to students, students take it, and they benefit from it somehow later on. It's no stretch to believe a particular academic concept or habit will serve a student well years into the future. What's harder to comprehend is the idea that generations of educators and students are telling a single story, each contributing new chapters to a single narrative, however many years apart that may occur.

I think that's what's happening with Mrs. Saville and me.

In elementary school, I was a pretty shy kid. I kept to myself most of the time, and taking risks and being super outgoing were not my things. Mrs. Saville knew that about me. She saw beyond my quiet exterior and introverted tendencies. When I think of what a "best teacher" looks like, she comes to mind. She was gentle and kind, playful and supportive, helpful and humorous. She gave her students opportunities to learn, grow, and step out of the boxes we had placed ourselves inside of. We trusted her and she made us feel secure; we knew we could survive being uncomfortable, even if only for a little bit, because she was there to keep us safe.

In fifth grade, Mrs. Saville had us make a class film as part of the D.A.R.E. initiative in my school. As a

reserved student, I never would have volunteered to perform in it on my own, preferring instead to contribute in some other way. But I was a good student, and Mrs. Saville—believing I would rise to the occasion—cast me in the film. I look back and laugh when I think of the role I was assigned: a special detective searching for drug addicts. I know, right? Like, *what?* But yeah, that was the character I was given. It was a relatively small part, which was fine with me, but I did my best with it, and even in my minor role, Mrs. Saville made me feel like a star. She gave me a chance to try something different, to dip my toe in the water and see how it felt, and she was so proud of me for breaking open my shell by playing this goofy kid detective. After that, I wasn't so scared or timid anymore. It wasn't an overnight transformation, but some of the fear dissolved, and I learned I was capable of more than I thought. Plus, I realized performing wasn't scary. Actually, it was pretty fun.

When it was time to think about college and my future career, I gravitated toward work involving kids. A fan of science, I studied psychology and was really interested in becoming a child psychologist. However, I soon figured out I wasn't interested enough to earn a master's degree, and once I got a taste of being in a classroom, that was it for me. I became an elementary teacher. I ended up teaching in my hometown at the school I'd attended myself as an elementary student, and while

that déjà vu experience has its weird moments, I really love it. It feels like home. I recognize neighbors, see my students' families walking in the area, and even work alongside some of my former teachers. My school is a special place, with so much of my history housed in this little building.

As I began to etch my imprint on the school as an educator, I was drawn to the performing arts, much to my surprise. My strengths had always been firmly rooted in science and logic. Up to this point, I believed the creative and performing arts were incompatible with my abilities, but, like muscle memory, I thought back to fifth grade and remembered my positive experience of trying something new. When I directed my class in the school's year-end singing and dancing culmination event, I fell in love with performance again, and I could see the freedom and joy I felt mirrored back to me in my students. These performances evolved into the pinnacle of the school year for me, and drama and music began to saturate my instructional practices more and more. Now, I'm dedicated to the arts full time, and I think a lot about Mrs. Saville. I do my best to channel her energy and emulate her kindness as much as I can. I try to provide the same incredible memories and opportunities for my students that Mrs. Saville gave me.

Sometimes, our stories aren't the ones we imagine writing for ourselves.

When I reflect on little fifth-grade Arturo, a shy nerd who cared so much about his schoolwork, it's almost impossible to recognize him in who I've become, an arts-education specialist working with a variety of schools in the Los Angeles area. But thinking back on where I've been and all the potential I possess reminds me that the same truth applies to students. No one stays static. Children grow and change and try out different versions of themselves. I'm so thankful I had an exceptional educator to act as my safety net. If it weren't for Mrs. Saville, I truly don't know where or who I would be today. The line leading from then to now is just so clear.

Mrs. Saville put me in that class film when I was in fifth grade. I became a teacher, like her, and I began to create films with my students. I would see students and give them roles in productions. I would see them light up with that flicker of self-awareness and pride, and now I'm working in the theatre arts exclusively. It's wild.

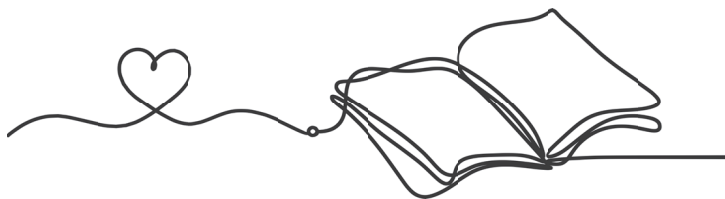
Mrs. Saville will always be a part of my story, and I am a continuation of hers. I am one of many offshoots of her legacy, and I get to tell her story year after year every time I support a drama club, watch my kids in a performance, or step into a classroom to serve and celebrate students. Now, my students are a part of her story, as well as mine, and are benefitting from her legacy. Our stories are really all the same: just distinct strands braided into the same rope.

Best Practice

“[A run-of-the-mill performance] wasn’t how I wanted to cap off my potential last year with my students. I wanted to make a memory that would last. I wanted to pull off something surprising, bold, and unforgettable.”

Teachers’ manuals and pacing guides are just that: instructional supports and frameworks for the year. They are signposts to help you gauge how to get where you’re going in one academic year. These resources are helpful, but they shouldn’t trump the needs of your students or the distinct spark that distinguishes you as an educator. If you’re bored, your students are, too, and the time is ripe for reinvigoration. Creativity and excitement in the classroom enrich instruction and are valid additives to help students remember standards and objectives. It’s important to be your unique self as an educator. If you aren’t, both you and your students are missing out.

What is a lesson or unit that could use a new approach? Think about a lesson plan you’ve done over and over that’s losing its potency. How can you brainstorm new ideas with your students? What particular traits or interests of yours can you apply to your instructional methods to make learning more fun for you and your class?



Acknowledgments

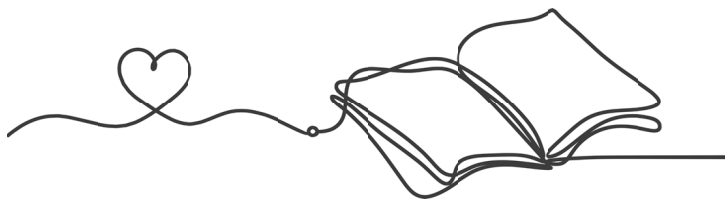
This project would not exist if it weren't for the educators who graciously and selflessly trusted us with their stories. We are indebted to you not only for your candor but also for your daily sacrifice in classrooms across the country.

Thank you to Morgan James Publishing and all those there who joined our team as champions of this project, in particular Emily Madison.

To Erin and Katie with *Relate Then Educate*: your efforts and passion activate the potency of this book and carry this mission forward every day.

To Adam and Darla: we are grateful for your forbearance, patience, and encouragement. Thank you for keeping us grounded. We love you.

And finally, to every educator past, present, and future: this world is hopeless without you. Keep at it.



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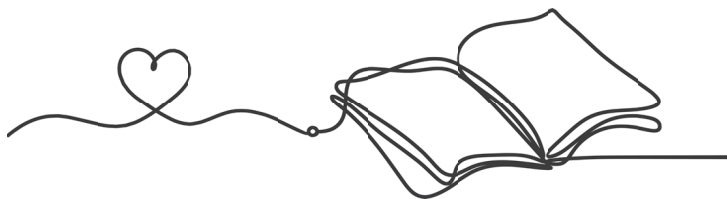


Rick Holmes is a former secondary school teacher and coach. With over two decades of classroom experience, Rick uses his perspective and experience to amplify the voices of classroom teachers through Relate Then Educate. He has a bachelor's degree in secondary education from Oklahoma State University, a master's degree in school counseling from Lamar

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Andrea Avey is a former educator who landed in the classroom by way of Teach for America. She studied English and Spanish at Oklahoma State University and holds an MA in humanities from the University of Chicago. She lives in Chicago with her husband and their dog, Fitzgerald.



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To contact Relate Then Educate for professional development, author engagements, and more, visit our website: www.relatetheneducate.com

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