

FROM SEED TO APPLE

*Inspirational stories & lessons learned
from Washington's 2017 Teachers of the Year*



Foreword by Nathan Gibbs-Bowling

2016 WA State Teacher of the Year • Milken Award Winner

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Volume VII
2017

From Seed to Apple is a publication of the Washington Teacher Advisory Council (WATAC).

WATAC is a project of the Washington State Teacher of the Year program, which is administered by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). It was founded with a two-year grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The teachers in WATAC speak with independent voices. Their opinions, beliefs and viewpoints do not necessarily reflect, nor are they influenced by, the state superintendent or staff at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The names of all students featured in this volume have been changed unless permission for their use has been obtained.

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For our students

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Foreword

Teaching is one of the most essential careers in our society. Classroom teachers serve a multiplicity of roles in their schools and help shape students' understanding and worldview. We are inspirers-in-chief. We teach everything from the ABCs to multiplying polynomials to construction trades to the intricacies of American campaign finance law. The path to a more just and equitable America will be paved through the work of teachers and our students.

Over the last year, I have had the pleasure of traveling the state and the country speaking on behalf of our profession and its societal importance. Much of the learning from my year as 2016 Washington State Teacher of the Year came from meeting and talking to teachers around our state. There are literally tens of thousands of dedicated, hardworking, transformational teachers in Washington. They are putting in an incalculable number of uncompensated hours, spending out of their own pockets for food and student supplies, and sacrificing time with their families in order to serve the students of our state.



Nathan Gibbs-Bowling

2016 Washington State Teacher of the Year
Abraham Lincoln High School
Tacoma Public Schools

Given the gravity of education, it is essential that teachers be involved in the policy conversations that shape the work we do and the schools our students attend. In my time as State Teacher of the Year, I have spoken to the State Legislature, State Board of Education, Washington Education Association, Washington State PTA and Washington State School Directors Association—the association of Washington’s school board members. These talks and conversations were fruitful, but were also isolated events. Teacher voice at the policymaking table needs to become the norm. The teachers in this volume of *From Seed to Apple* are Teachers of the Year, and join me on the Washington Teacher Advisory Council, which we affectionately refer to as WATAC. WATAC seeks to inform education and influence policy by elevating the voices and insights of distinguished teachers from every corner of the state.

For more about WATAC, visit www.watac.k12.wa.us.

You’re going to enjoy the stories in this volume. Each of them is from a Regional Teacher of the Year. Their stories are representative of the realities of teaching in our state. Their insights and observations are worth your time and consideration. Their advice is invaluable, and I encourage our leaders to act upon it.

Prepare to be inspired. Prepare to be moved. Prepare to be reminded of the importance of teachers.

Nathan Gibbs-Bowling

2016 Washington State Teacher of the Year

& National Teacher of the Year Finalist

Abraham Lincoln High School

Tacoma Public Schools

No One Does It Alone

One student's journey to overcoming tragedy and finding success

Jerry was one of my favorite students. I know, they tell you not to have favorites, but really, I couldn't help it. I had known Jerry and his family for several years by the time I was called to observe him in a 2nd grade teacher's classroom. His half brother was in my Emotional-Behavioral Disorders (EBD) classroom from 2nd through 5th grade. During those four years, the brothers had experienced the loss of their older sister to leukemia. As a teacher, it was one of the more difficult things I had to witness. The boys lived in separate homes, but shared in their grief for a lost sibling.

Fast forward a year, to Jerry in his own 2nd-grade class. I walked in as his teacher was attempting to do a lesson on the Smart Board. "Attempting" would be the key word. Jerry was busy rolling around on the floor, making funny noises, popping up next to other students, and quite literally, touching EVERYTHING in the classroom. I calmly sat and tallied the



Elizabeth Loftus

NWESD 189 Regional Teacher of the Year
Olympic View Elementary
Oak Harbor Public Schools

number of off-task behaviors I was witnessing and soon ran out of space on my form. His teacher looked exasperated as her students happily watched Jerry's exploits around the room, giggling at his antics instead of paying attention to her lesson. I happened to know she was a former special education teacher who had worked with kids like Jerry before. But this reached even her limits.

Jerry was placed in the resource room for social and behavioral help. He did not qualify in any academic areas. He was incredibly bright. We decided to place a paraprofessional with him who would monitor behavior and use a daily behavior sheet and reward system.

The very next day Jerry peed his pants in an attempt to be sent home. I found out this was not the only time he did something so drastic in order to escape the demands of school. In a weird way I was impressed. This kid was dedicated to his goal. Sadly, the goal was to leave school.

The additional help worked for a while. But as we got closer to winter break, it became clear that Jerry would need more supports and possibly a self-contained classroom. His behaviors had reached levels so high that even the resource room ran out of ways to support him.

Suddenly, before we could make any decisions, Jerry's family moved. I think the stress of losing a daughter was weighing heavily on his parents. What I now know, is that his parents fell into a deep depression after her death and were using alcohol to self-medicate. Jerry was left to witness his parents falling apart, and had no one to help him through his own grief. Moving was their way of starting over away from things that reminded them of their loss.

Jerry slipped my mind for a time, but things have a way of circling back around. Spring and summer passed,

school began again, and I got a phone call. Jerry's family had moved back to our town and registered at another elementary school. The staff was keeping me on high alert! It was only a month before his Individualized Educational Program (IEP) team decided to move him to my class. His brother had just moved on to 6th grade, and I had had a difficult time dealing with his displays of grief. What would it be like with Jerry?

I found out that Jerry's family had moved into a run-down trailer park with two bedrooms. He had to sleep in the living room on the couch so his parents and sister could have a room. You can imagine just how much rest he really got. His dad had quit drinking, but that brought an onslaught of grief and sadness that affected their entire family. His mom became very ill and was hospitalized a few times.

Jerry came to my class with all of his usual tricks. His armpit noises and silly faces were certainly admired and enjoyed by my other students, but not so much by me. He raised his hand constantly to use the restroom, to get a drink of water, needing a pencil. He peed his pants and demanded we call his father to go home, but I was onto him. "No worries Jerry. We know your dad doesn't have a car. I have extra boys' clothes in the closet. You can just go change buddy!" His hopeful face fell. I smiled to myself. One small victory!

Jerry spent that year in a small group for reading and math. Just 3 other boys and I worked with him on things far more important than reading a story or doing a math equation. We taught him how to be comfortable around and interact with people. His anxiety and off-task behaviors decreased. I stopped recorrecting Jerry, choosing instead to focus on praising appropriate behaviors. "Way to go, Jerry! I loved how you were sitting quietly and raised your hand! Please

share your answer!" His little noises and faces and excuses melted away.

Fourth grade was just as successful. As 5th grade rolled around, I met with the general education teacher he was assigned to, and the paraprofessional I had chosen to support him. We talked about how to help Jerry rejoin the general education classroom with his peers. It was a bumpy start. The fear and worry of fitting in and making friends overwhelmed Jerry. When he first came into my class, any time he felt under pressure or made a mistake, he would start to show facial tics and twitches. They had all but disappeared during the last two years in my room. I saw these signs of his anxiety return in full force and was dismayed.

In my class we talk a lot about expected and unexpected behavior. Expected behaviors are when you follow the rules, do the right thing, and people have good thoughts about you. Unexpected behaviors, just the opposite. His peers and general education teacher started to get fed up. Jerry was loud and silly in class. He tipped in his chair, raised his hand to make absurd comments, and even the noises returned. Jerry was sliding fast.

The thing was, verbal reminders didn't work with Jerry. They only ramped up his anxiety and behaviors. We decided to try a new way of communicating expected behaviors to him. We had a clear plastic cup that he could see nearby, and we added green or red paper clips to that cup. Green for expected and red for unexpected behavior. For a little while it worked, but it seemed that the impact he was having on his class was just too great. We met and looked at the possibility of decreasing his general education class time.

We met with his mom for his annual IEP and explained what was going on and what we were thinking. We wanted her input and ideas about what was really going on with Jerry. She was incredibly candid with us during this meeting. It lasted until six in the evening.

During that meeting she explained everything that had happened after the death of his sister. She shared about their family struggles, especially those of his father. Drugs and alcohol had caused a lot of pain for them after Jerry's sister died. Mom shared her own background, telling us about her troubled childhood, giving up a child for adoption and her recovery from heroin use. She shared her concerns about her husband's struggle and the impact it was having on Jerry. We were stunned. This boy had so much on his plate. How were we going to help him?

I wanted to avoid decreasing his time in the general education class, but was running out of alternatives. We knew Jerry was motivated by positive attention, but it seemed he was becoming his own worst enemy. How could we reach him? My wonderful paraprofessional had a brilliant suggestion.

"Why don't we try and give Jerry a special job to do? Something only he has access to. He is always so great when we ask him to work with other kids!"

We decided to reach out to our PE teacher. We asked him if Jerry could be an "assistant" toward the end of the school day. We set up behavioral goals that Jerry had to meet in order to get to do this PE assistant job. The PE teacher was all for it, and we presented the idea to the general education teacher. She was hesitant and first, but agreed to give it a try. We sat Jerry down and told him our idea, and his face lit up. We had some bumpy days, but within a week

or two, Jerry's anxiety lessened, his disruptive behaviors decreased, and his engagement in school returned. Being allowed to help and earning praise for it, gave him the confidence he needed to make school meaningful again.

We saw Jerry flourish for the rest of the year. He was able to keep up with all his school work and was responsible for morning announcements and flag raising. He made a small group of good friends, and he even auditioned for a speaking role in our spring music program. He was outstanding!

At the end of the school year, his parents thanked us for our hard work. As a team, we had really worked together to be creative and help Jerry do his best. I cried when his parents hugged me, and I cried when I said goodbye to him on the last day of school. This student and his family had such a profound impact on my teaching. I will be forever grateful for all they taught me.

Against All Odds

How one student's grit inspires and shapes a teacher's practice for years to come

She entered my classroom with her large, brown eyes taking it all in. Nervous. Very well-mannered. Her dress belted at the waist. She wore tights, shiny black shoes and curls in her hair. From a distance, she looked like she stepped out of a Macy's catalogue. Up close, I was struck by the strong smell of cigarette smoke. She introduced herself and we shook hands. Sadie. She took out her school supplies, quietly. Politely. Organized them in her desk. I noticed her backpack and supplies were permeated in smoke as well.

It was her first day of 1st grade. It was my first day of teaching. We both had reason to be anxious. In my class of 27 students, she immediately stood out. Sadie seemed wise beyond her years.

She spent the first day engaging when she needed to. Always polite. Always cautious. She had a persistent cough that I could not help to assume was due to the smoke exposure at home. She observed her peers, but



Kendra Yamamoto

ESD 112 Regional Teacher of the Year
Martin Luther King Elementary
Vancouver Public Schools

did not join in their games or activities. During free time, she quietly drew at her desk. Her drawings impressed me. They were detailed pictures of people, the outdoors, a dog. They were advanced compared to those of her peers.

When I called her home that evening, I spoke with her grandmother, Dee, who was her legal guardian. Within minutes, Dee shared that Sadie's mother had died of a drug overdose and her father of AIDS. Sadie was born HIV positive. My heart cracked. This beautiful, talented little girl had entered the world with so much against her. Her grandmother went on to describe Sadie's terrible behavior their first year together.

Living with her drug addicted parents, she was so neglected that she was not used to touch and never experienced healthy foods. Dee described the first time she gave her an orange and how Sadie examined it like a foreign object. They had a tough first year together. The loss. The learning. The building of trust. We talked for a long time. I shared my home number with Dee and encouraged her to call when she needed to.

I soon learned that Sadie was not the only one who needed love and support. Dee did too. Dee fell into calling me or coming by the school once or twice a week. She would share new foods Sadie had tried, the newest trinkets at Nordstrom (Dee wandered aimlessly around the mall while Sadie was at school), Sadie's latest blood cell counts.

The first time Sadie was out sick, I drove to her home to drop off school work. Dee was overjoyed. She insisted that I excuse the mess and come in. As I stepped inside, I was struck by the dark and the fog of cigarette smoke. The curtains were closed and the only light was from the muted television. This was a home of the lonely. Sadie was

quietly curled up on a recliner. She smiled her toothless, quiet smile. I chatted, filled Sadie in on the school day and left before Dee was ready for me to go.

During our school days together, Sadie slowly began to open up. Our 1st-grade class became a family. She began to trust me. And her peers. Although she still possessed a maturity level they did not, she seemed entertained by them. Her toothless, quiet smile that I knew so well sometimes erupted into a loud, infectious laugh which I could never get enough of. Sadie's learning skyrocketed. She was a sponge soaking up knowledge from every subject area. I was thrilled to share her progress with Dee, which was in no doubt due in part to Dee's help at home. Sadie continued to draw. She filled journals with her countless pictures.

In the spring of that 1st-grade year, I received a phone call from Dee. She was crying. Sobbing so hard that it was difficult to understand. What she shared devastated and angered me to a level I had never experienced. Dee had discovered that our precious and talented Sadie was being sexually abused by Dee's boyfriend. Repeatedly. The details were so horrific that I prayed for a long, painful death to the monster that could do such a thing. It was the first time I felt hate.

It took months for a court trial. It was decided that 6-year-old Sadie would testify. She took drawings to the trial. The judge allowed Sadie to share her drawings while explaining the painful details in front of the eyes of her abuser, as well as a courtroom of adults. Her bravery got him convicted.

Somehow, throughout all of life's hits, Sadie continued to smile. To laugh. To live. She continued to draw pictures that her classmates admired. She continued to be well

mannered and kind. She finished her 1st-grade year above grade level in all areas. Her resiliency reminded me that any problems I may have had, were far from her struggles.

The summer after 1st grade, Dee called to ask if I would consider becoming Sadie's godparent. Dee's health was not the best and she was unsure who else to ask. I accepted without hesitation. I looped with that class to 2nd grade. Those two years together were my most memorable as a teacher. We became a family. A family who learned together, played together, cried together and celebrated together. It is a family I am grateful to still be in contact with.

Sadie never lost her grit. Her determination. Her persistence. She graduated high school. Went on to enroll at a local community college. She got engaged to her long-term boyfriend. They have a beautiful, red-headed little girl whom they absolutely treasure. Sadie still draws, but painting has become her passion.

When I meet students who enter my class with the most challenging of backgrounds, I think of Sadie. She taught me that every student deserves hope, love and unwavering support. I cannot say how Sadie got through such dark and dreadful times. What I do know is that she serves as a reminder that no student who walks in my classroom is ever too broken to be fixed.

Who Works Harder Than Charlie?

A teacher's personal experience with early intervention and its rewards shapes his practice

After six months of tests, appointments, observations, predictions, and uncertainty, my wife and I received a diagnosis of developmental delay for our three-year old son, Charlie. We were tired, confused, sad, and worried. We didn't know what this diagnosis meant for his future. My wife and I had an inkling about what we would hear that day, but it still felt like a "punch in the gut." This was definitely a challenge to our balance.

The year before diagnosis had been full of concern, worry, and Internet searches. Is he developing and reaching those milestones that toddlers and young children should? For some of these, he was doing wonderfully. For others, he was not. Charlie would both astound and confound us. We could see flashes of his ability to interact, decipher, and



Tim Larson

NEWESD 101 Regional Teacher of the Year
P.C. Jantz Elementary School
Odessa School District

create. These flashes kept up the glimmer of hope that maybe he just needed more time. The diagnosis, though, told us that there were some things that needed to be worked on.

I remember driving home from the diagnosis meeting with my wife. Our questions ranged from “What’s next?” to “Why?” I went out to the deck to sit and reflect on the day. As I sat staring at the ground wondering if we should have acted sooner, I began to go through the stages of grief. I recognized myself ping-ponging through some of the stages—denial, anger, and bargaining. Back and forth, back and forth. I hadn’t arrived at acceptance yet.

At the end of that 10-minute staring session, something clicked in my head. “It was what it was.” Regardless of what we learned that day, my son was still the same fun little boy who had run into our bedroom that morning and jumped onto our bed to wake us up. Acceptance, or at least partial-acceptance, had arrived.

My wife and I quickly got an appointment with our pediatrician to get paperwork for the diagnosis that would allow insurance to begin covering some of the costs for therapies and interventions. Up to that point, we had paid out-of-pocket therapies for what we guessed he might need. We had known that interventions would be vital in getting him through that “developmental window” before it closed. We knew we had until his 5th birthday to make the biggest impact, and we couldn’t wait for a diagnosis to act.

During the appointment, our son’s pediatrician said something to us I will never forget. He said, “I’m not worried about Charlie, at all. The reason I’m not is because you have him right here.” He then held his hand to his heart

and continued, "No matter what he attempts to do in life, you will not let him fail." It was at this point, that final bit of acceptance arrived.

After the diagnosis Charlie, my wife, and I worked twice as hard (as if that were possible), continuing with those early interventions. We were finding out more about his disability and following up at home on each of his therapies.

For us, therapy time meant learning as much as we could. We would go back in the activity room to watch his therapies and take notes. Notes we could use at home to continue his intervention 24/7. Dinners with friends, basketball games on TV and "Lazy Saturdays" did not happen for a while. Our focus was on Charlie. Any down time meant "Charlie Time." My wife would say things like, "Imagine the fine-motor practice we could get done with this puzzle before Grandma and Grandpa come over in 30 minutes." We never met an expectation we couldn't raise.

My wife took a leave-of-absence from teaching to work full-time for Charlie. We inundated our son with the experiences, support and practice he would need before that window closed. We took him to preschool playtime, a regular preschool, and to our District's Early Childhood Center. Room for improvement was the biggest room in our house at that time. That was our mindset and that was our focus.

My wife and I worked hard, but no one worked harder than Charlie. Something we reminded him after every success. "Who works harder than Charlie?" we would ask.

And he would always say, "No one."

Around this time I had a boy named Jimmy in my class. Jimmy had just qualified for special education. Jimmy's

mom was having a hard time at our “test results” meeting. I saw that she was scared and worried. I gave the same speech to her that my son’s pediatrician gave to us. I finished the year not knowing what kind of impact it would have on their family.

Fast forward to 2015 and my family and I had moved across the state many years before. My wife, who was back in the classroom, went to Kennewick for a “Starting Strong” class. She sat down next to another teacher, and they started telling each other about themselves. That other teacher was Jimmy’s mom. As they shared their experiences, Jimmy’s mom suddenly realized who she was talking to. With tears in her eyes, she told my wife what happened in that psychologist’s office years before. She said my words made her less afraid of having a child in special education. She knew it was time to go to work and help her child.

Something so simple, but yet so powerful. It’s a lesson I never forget when dealing with parents. As elementary educators, we don’t always know how our students turn out. We need to be OK with that, but I’m sure glad I found out about this one.

As teachers, we have to remember the whole child. The whole child doesn’t stop at grades and test scores. A whole child has hobbies, interests, motivations, obstacles, daily life and parents.

Parents see their children as extensions of themselves. When their child struggles or hurts, they struggle or hurt. We have to take the time to foster a relationship with parents. You never know what small thing you say or do may help, not only the child, but also the parent. Reflecting back to those early years with Charlie helps me remember the thanks we owe to everyone who did or said something to support us.

Charlie is now in middle school and doing very well. He is the poster child for early intervention. The promises of skill mastery did eventually come. He has exited off his Individualized Education Program, caught up with his peers, and is thriving in his environment.

Today I worry about the kids who don't have access to what we could give Charlie. Those children whose parents may lack financial resources, information, or the time it takes to help their children. Regardless of the reason, schools, districts, and the state need to reach out to the community, find those children, and help them. We need to show that we care for them by pulling them through that window before it's too late.

Once Your Mentor, but Always Your Friend

Connections count

Dear Jessica,

When you walked into my algebra class at the beginning of 10th grade, you had already been to three high schools. You had dyed black hair with green in places. Your bangs covered half your face, and I couldn't see your eyes. You wore the same oversized old t-shirts, baggy jeans, and oversized baggy zip up sweatshirt every day. You were hiding in your own skin. You could not graph a line which was such a basic skill, nor could you graph an ordered pair—something you should have learned in 6th grade. Half the days you would fall asleep in class, and I would have to wake you up.

When you left my class at the end of the year, I knew you were having big troubles in school and struggling with your grades. I was so concerned about your future. You were not on track to graduate. During the fall semester of your junior year, you approached me



Carol McKay

CRESD 113 Regional Teacher of the Year
Capital High School
Olympia School District

and told me you wanted to attend the Washington Youth Academy. You needed a female mentor in order to apply, and I was the only teacher that you thought might do it. Your family believed this was an opportunity that could change your life and help you to graduate.

You had to have a state issued ID in order to apply. Although you were nearly 17 you did not have a driver's license or a permit because your family could not afford it. It was a financial burden for your family to take you to get an ID, but they did it anyway because they saw this as so important to your future. We helped you buy items you were to take with you to the Academy because your family could not afford it.

I was unsure about being your mentor. It was a two-year commitment, and we were so different that I didn't know what I could contribute. I went to the mentor training in Bremerton, learned what was required of me, and again felt somewhat inadequate. I would be in contact with you on a weekly basis through letters and email since you were an hour and a half away. I wasn't sure what we would write about since we had such different lives, different families, and different experiences. I was nervous about how I would help you with problems I had never experienced, but was committed to do my very best as your mentor.

Then the day arrived when you entered the academy, and I was there to wish you well. I could already see the difference in you even before you began. You had to dye your hair back to its natural color, wear it in a bun, and remove all of your piercings. It was the first time I could see your full face. I remember thinking—you are just a young girl about to undergo a metamorphosis.

We wrote to each other on a weekly basis, and I saved every letter I received from you—over 30 in all. They are sitting in a special folder next to my recliner in my family room. In the early weeks you were challenged both physically and by your ability to handle authority. You had to make a mental decision to go along with the program. You wrote, “I had my first phone call last weekend and I cried because that was the first time I have gotten to talk to my mom in two weeks,” and “They push you here at the academy. They don’t let you slack off or do anything the wrong way. They really do push you, because they want you to come out on top. They don’t want to see you struggle. They will help you, but all in all, you have to want that help, you have to do what they tell you because they’re only trying to help you. And I see that now.” This was the turning point for you—when you fully got on board to change your life and work through the physical, mental, and emotional challenges that were to come. I encouraged you to keep thinking about your end goals—to graduate, to get healthy, and to learn job skills.

The work was hard. You lived in a very structured “military-style” routine—drill, standing at attention, organized runs, curfew, and mandatory wake up call. You learned all kinds of life skills—how to write a letter, address an envelope, format a resume, apply for a job, make a budget, speak to adults, make conversation, resolve conflict, and address authority. You also learned the importance of exercise, good nutrition, and leadership skills. You earned a full year of credits in only one semester at the Academy. My letters were full of encouragement to you. I kept reminding you of the big picture and encouraged you to work toward graduation. I also wrote to you about my life.

You opened your heart to me in your letters. I learned that your little brother died a few years earlier when he was

eight years old. He had been your best friend, and this tore your family up. You dealt with your grief in a way you never could with your family. You told me about your dreams of being the first in your family to graduate from high school. We talked about little things and big things—like who was playing in the Super Bowl and how you know when you are in love. The transformation I saw occurring within you was tremendous. It was like watching a caterpillar become a butterfly.

I could not believe my eyes when I saw you during our off-site visit. You had lost about 40 pounds, had clear skin, clean and natural hair, a smile on your face, and a sparkle in your eyes. You told me of passing classes and getting school credit, of earning recognition for your platoon leadership, and how excited you were to be doing archery. This was the first time I had seen you feel pride in yourself. It was well deserved. I could just about touch the confidence that was exuding from you.

Your return to Olympia was difficult. Your parents had moved to Tenino while you were at the Academy. You had been so successful at the Academy, but I was worried this upheaval might throw everything off track. You started out trying to live with a friend and still attend Capital High School, but I quickly saw this was not going to work. You were missing school, transportation was an issue, the friend situation did not work out, and your family couldn't get you to Olympia for school. After much consideration, you enrolled in Tenino High School to finish your senior year.

You were an outsider to Tenino, but you found a few friends. We talked about maintaining the new habits you learned at the Academy and not falling back into your old way of life. You still had a full year of credits to

earn, and the most difficult prospect was geometry. You had passed algebra online at the Academy but were still having trouble with geometry which was a graduation requirement. I tutored you from afar via email, texting, and phone calls. We continued to meet regularly, just to talk or to do something fun.

You wanted to enlist in the Army when you graduated because you understood it would be a life that would provide you with housing, food, and a job all in one. You worked with a recruiter and prepared to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test. The test did not go well—you did not pass. You studied with a tutor, took it again, but still did not pass. I thought this might get you down, but we kept talking about the big picture and graduating from high school was the first priority. You had learned to persevere and you were determined to make a future for yourself. You were able to get your geometry credit with remediation and a supportive teacher.

You graduated from high school and were the first person in your family to do so.

I was so proud of you Jessica—almost as if you were my own daughter! I get tears of pride just thinking of your accomplishment. Although you did not join the military, you did get your first job after graduation at McDonald's.

Today you are an independent young adult with your own home, a job at a daycare, and a fine future ahead of you. Our mentorship was a key relationship in your high school years and inspired you to be the person you are today.

I learned that being a mentor was one of the most important roles I could play for any student, but especially for those we think of as "at-risk." Having consistency from an adult in your life helped you to see possibilities for your life.

Adult mentors and job experience opportunities can change a student's life. They give students hope and help them to make connections between what they are learning in school and what comes after graduation from high school. Jessica, you have changed my life as much as I have changed yours. I can't wait to hear about what you do next.

Once your mentor, but always your friend,

Mrs. McKay

Bloom Where You're Planted

*"Purpose is the place where
your deep gladness meets
the world's deep needs."*

— Frederick Buechner

In college I knew two facts to be true about myself: I was passionate about kids and Spanish, and I would absolutely never move back home to Quincy. I set my eyes on the horizon with determination. My grandma, bless her heart, always teased that I would probably return to the farm. I just rolled my eyes and smiled back. Yeah, right.

Enter: Dreamy Farm Boy. I fell for my farmer husband Bryan in high school, without knowing how this relationship would affect my plans. We dated through college (I went to Seattle Pacific University, he went to the University of Washington). He moved home to work on the family farm. I was still planning my Big Adventure.

Enter: The Great Recession. I graduated from college in 2008. I sent in resumes to Alaska Airlines and Rick Steve's—no response. Without



Camille Jones

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

options or direction, I decided to work on developing my Spanish skills through a semester abroad program in Mexico.

In the interim, I figured since I was dating Bryan, I should at least give Quincy a try. Still, I was convinced he would one day realize he didn't actually want to be a farmer after all. With my trip to Mexico as the light at the end of the tunnel, I cautiously moved home.

To my surprise, that summer was one of the most carefree and meaningful of my life. I worked as a paraprofessional in Quincy's summer school program. It was there that I finally realized I love working with kids. Why not teach?

That fall I started studying toward my elementary education certificate through Central Washington University, but I took the second half of the year off to go to Mexico. During that trip I realized I couldn't do it. I had always envisioned a global life—and I was living it. But I was living it alone. The whole experience would become nothing more than a memory, locked inside my head.

Although I spent the first 20+ years of my life determined to escape Quincy, in that moment I knew it was time to embrace my hometown. I didn't choose where I came from, but I realized that I could choose my attitude—about my home, my family, and my future. Fitting for a farm girl, the phrase "bloom where you're planted" started lacing its way into my thoughts.

Over the next year, I trained to be a teacher. I took the opportunity to volunteer weekly and complete my student teaching in a Quincy 3rd-grade class. Everything was going according to my new plan.

Enter: Budget Cuts. When certified in 2010, the landscape for new teachers was bleak. We were deeper into the recession and vacated teaching positions were not filled. Many young teachers I knew waited several years to find jobs, others simply gave up.

Thankfully, Principal Andi Sperline took a chance on me. She hired me to teach 3rd grade at Columbia Ridge Elementary in Ephrata, a nearby small town. My mentors there affected me in ways that still influence my teaching practices. I developed important relationships with colleagues, students, and families that I continue to treasure. Columbia Ridge became a home to me. I started to think maybe this was the place I had been “planted”— maybe this is where I was meant to “bloom.”

During those years, I reflected often on the many great teachers who had impacted me as a student: Rebecca Gregg, Bunny Clevinger, Bob Boyer, Chris Chelin, Norma Petersen. Each of them, along with others, altered my life. They inspired my curiosity, stretched my worldview, and challenged me to grow my potential. I skipped 2nd grade, taught myself math at double the rate of my classmates, and took the most advanced classes offered at my high school. I reenacted Civil War battles in 3rd grade, built my own computer in middle school, and discovered that I really could “do” art in high school.

If these opportunities inspired my teaching philosophy, so did the challenges I faced as a student. I let a lack of exposure to sciences develop into anxieties that I carried into college. I let the fact that I came from a small school with few college level courses stop me from advocating for my place in the advanced program at SPU. I let the male culture of the engineering department intimidate me into giving up on my childhood dream of being a computer engineer.

These memories were reflected back to me in the eyes of my 3rd-grade students. My heart broke as I watched Alex, Elaina, and Jeremy sit bored and disengaged. I struggled, often unsuccessfully, to provide challenging experiences for them. When Johnny or Ava brought me notebooks full of vivid stories and illustrations, I was frustrated that we would have to sacrifice another day of writing to keep up with the new math standards. I knew I was failing to teach them critical skills—skills they would need to compete in their complex, dynamic, integrated 21st century world. I feared what would happen if they should graduate into a market of slim job prospects, as I did—twice.

These frustrations plagued my thoughts as “bloom where you’re planted” echoed in my mind. I knew that I had found my true purpose when I heard about the opening to teach Schoolwide Enrichment at Pioneer Elementary in Quincy. This was my chance to practice everything I believed about teaching, right in my hometown. Nik Bergman, the principal, challenged me to redesign the program:

- To focus on 21st-century skills and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math).
- To expand learning opportunities and nurture potential in all students.
- To engage Highly Capable learners in the learning process, challenging them to the limits of their abilities, too.

Today, I have shown students how science, engineering, and art can be approachable and exciting. My students will enter high school and college free of the anxieties I had as a kid. I have taught them about careers in computer science and linguistics. Their eyes are open to a world much bigger than Quincy. I have encouraged them to

persevere and helped them discover their hidden talents. I have challenged my highest achievers to develop their strengths into passions.

“The achievement gap” is one of the most common phrases in education. It’s often cited as the biggest challenge we face in our schools. But I disagree. My students have shown that achievement is not the same as ability. What they need most is access. Given the opportunity, my kids can achieve great things. Last year, a 2nd grader named Gabriel caught my attention. He is a Hispanic English Language Learner in intensive reading intervention. On the first day of my schoolwide civil engineering unit, he built an arch bridge out of Legos. This was complicated engineering that no other student had attempted.

The next month he joined my advanced engineering class. At conferences, his family sought me out; they were so thankful that someone had seen their son’s potential. I was so thankful to be able to communicate with them in Spanish! I expressed that I agreed with their view of his ability and challenged them to foster his talents at home.

Throughout the unit Gabriel’s designs were far more complex, creative, and innovative than those of other students. He came to life in that classroom—a perfect example of the program’s goal. Now we can use the lens of his strength to help him develop a mindset of passion and perseverance. It will fuel his determination to read, give meaning to his achievements, and show him a vision for a successful future.

Gabriel reminds me that achievement starts with opportunity. I always say my mission is to inspire curiosity, create opportunity, and grow potential. When I left for the Teacher of the Year selection weekend in Olympia this fall,

I received a card from another student, Mia. I first met her three years ago. Even as a 1st-grade Latina girl, learning English, her potential was immediately clear to me. As her ability blossomed, I have continued to ask more of her. Now in 3rd grade, she is officially identified as a Highly Capable learner. Her encouraging note ended with the sentence “You inspire us to great things.”

This meant everything to me because she is my inspiration. I do this work for my students. I want them to experience the opportunities that sustained me as a student. I want them to confidently access those for which I wish I had been better prepared.

Mia’s note also gives me a new purpose. Inspiration is not an end goal. For me, being a Teacher of the Year is a twofold opportunity. It is the harvest of my efforts to invest in my community. Even more, it plants me in a new setting in which I am challenged to “bloom” all over again.

Your Future Starts Now

Helping “the best kids in the world” envision a successful future

Welcome to Port Angeles! We have the best kids in the world!

Now, I’m sure every teacher thinks the same thing about their kids. And they’re right. We all have the best kids in the world, because they’re our kids. Each and every one is unique and special. And they all deserve to have adults in their lives who think they are the best kids in the world. Teachers believe that about every one of their students every day.

Dig a little deeper, though, and we discover how different experiences our kids go through shape their lives.

Port Angeles is an economically distressed community where half the students live in poverty. Every day they come to school in a building that is past its lifetime. Our ceilings leak, the heaters are so loud students can’t hear their teachers, and open doors are the ventilation in our science classrooms. My kids use computers



John Gallagher

Olympic ESD 114 Regional Teacher of the Year
Port Angeles High School
Port Angeles School District

that we purchase from other school districts after they consider them obsolete. Only a quarter of them attend a 4-year college after graduation. They often see no hope for their future and give up on themselves and their education.

When I arrived in Port Angeles 20 years ago, it had three operating mills and students often looked to the mills as their future. Their grandfather worked in the mill, their father worked in the mill, and they would grow up to work in the mill. They were often disengaged from their education because they thought their future had already been written for them.

When the mills closed, I thought students would quickly see education as their key to the future, but instead they just gave up. They saw no future and they saw no way to change that. They didn't see a connection between success in school and a successful future.

When students don't make the connection themselves, we have to make it for them. High school students are each at different points on their way to their future. We need to meet them where they are and help them see where they can go.

Freshmen need help realizing that what they do now matters four years from now. Up until this point their grades haven't really mattered, and they arrive at high school thinking that it is still the case. They assume they can always fix things later. They need time to look at graduation requirements, college entrance requirements, and scholarship opportunities.

Students need to see the connection between post-secondary education and their future. As their teachers, we need to show them how education is linked to employment opportunities and lifelong earnings. Students need to

research possible careers and the training and education those careers require.

Cara was a student in my Integrated Science class her freshman year. She was a conscientious hard-working student who always did her best. During her sophomore year, her family lost their home. They moved from place to place, sometimes living with friends, sometimes in their car. By senior year she was all on her own. All those things that are part of senior year—SAT, FAFSA, Scholarship notebook, college applications—can seem impossible when you don't have parent tax forms, your awards and certificates have been lost between moves, and you don't have a permanent address. But Cara had the resiliency to survive all this. And not just survive, she excelled. She worked through all these challenges and not only graduated but was named Rotary Student of the Month and Business Student of the Year. At graduation, it was my honor to present her with Science Honors. Against all odds she began attending Central Washington University this fall.

Many students from Port Angeles can't even picture themselves at college. We take them to the University of Washington to attend lectures where they are often the youngest members of the audience. They listen to respected professors and experts in their fields. They tour the campus and meet with current students who are Port Angeles alumni so they can see the link from today to tomorrow.

Last year we Skyped with Curiosity mission scientist Ken Edgett, who discovered evidence for recent liquid water on the surface of Mars; Linda Morabito Kelly, who was the first to discover active volcanism on Io during the Voyager missions; and University of Massachusetts microbiologist

Jim Holden, who is an expert on hydrothermal vent bacteria. Our science club attended the Big Bang lecture series at the University of Washington, an Astrobiology concert at Benaroya Hall, and a performance of “Silent Sky” at the Taproot Theater in Seattle, a play about the life of Henrietta Swan Leavitt. The year ended with a scientist from the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory coming to speak to the students about the discovery of gravity waves.

Sofia, a senior in my astronomy class, wasn’t sure what she wanted to do after high school. She participated in almost all our science club trips and stayed after the lectures to ask questions. This year she is attending Portland State University and plans to pursue a Chemistry major.

It is those connections to real life that matter most. It is why Sofia and Cara and so many other students succeed.

My students go on to college and careers in every corner of the nation. One student is currently working at NASA after being the youngest member ever of the Space Policy Institute. Another student is in the astronaut candidate program after receiving his doctorate in antimatter containment for future propulsion systems. My students are designing and flying drones for Google and starting their own businesses. They are practicing artists, engineers, architects, and lawyers. Quite a few of them are teachers.

Nothing makes me happier than having a student return after graduation to update me on their life. I often put them right in front of my students to share their experiences. We celebrate the success of past graduates with our current students and discuss how they prepared for their future in high school. Students see that there is a future for them, and that future starts now.

Dear Future Teacher

America's children need you, and you need them!

We need you in this profession. We really do. And you need this profession in your life too. When you join us, you will find that there was so much you were never taught in your teacher prep program. You will probably be prepared for how to organize your classroom or select books to interest students, but you'll find yourself constantly surprised by how much you didn't know.

You will learn that you can love other people's children in ways that you never knew were possible. When you refer to your students as "my kids," strangers will ask you how many kids you have.

You'll lie awake at night thinking about the safety and well-being of current and past students. It will take a long time, but you will eventually start to accept that some things in the lives of your students are out of your control.

You will learn that sometimes your incredibly planned lesson will be



Alisa Louie

PSESD 121 Regional Teacher of the Year
Evergreen Heights Elementary
Auburn School District

tossed out the window. A student will ask a question about current events, and you will have an on-the-spot civics lesson instead.

You will learn that Brandon is a musical kid. He achieves when he can learn through music. You'll feel so awkward and dread doing it, but you'll sing and dance the Pythagorean Theorem every day. Brandon will get it. And you won't hate singing and dancing quite so much anymore.

You will find your teacher voice, your teacher look, and your teacher proximity. You'll learn that your friends, family, and strangers at the grocery store won't like it when you forget you're not at school and use your teacher look or voice on them.

You will learn how resourceful you are when there's never enough funding to fully fund your work. Your classroom roof will leak and you'll just keep on teaching, moving carefully around the bucket on the floor. Your paper supply will be limited but you'll find creative ways to have students practice skills. Your classroom will be overloaded. You'll squish all those kids in anyway and call it "cozy." You'll not only accept the conditions of the profession, you'll learn to embrace them.

You will learn that every single parent is sending you the most important person they have in their life every day. You'll learn that engaging them as partners is essential to their students' success. You will learn that your relationships with students and families may blur the lines of clear, professional boundaries and bleed over into parents' Tupperware parties or neighborhood functions. It's then that you'll be at your most effective as an educator.

You will learn the perfect moment to hug a parent when they cry in an IEP meeting.

You will learn how loved and respected you are when you go to graduations, award ceremonies, and weddings of former students. You'll feel both proud and humble to be invited into these times of your students' lives.

When you get a haircut, buy a new pair of shoes, or wear a new sweater, you might make it out the door of your own house without a single person noticing. Your students will compliment the change in an instant.

You will learn that you are stronger than you think when Jose cuts his finger or Charlene throws up all over your desk. You'll completely forget that the non-teacher version of you would be disgusted, because in that moment, all you'll want to do is make your student feel better.

You will learn how to create a fully-functioning classroom community of students with all different backgrounds, languages, mental health, physical abilities, and academic skills.

You will never again go on a family vacation without buying books or souvenirs for that classroom community.

You will learn there is a kind of tiredness that forces you into bed at 8 PM on a Friday night. The kind of tired that takes over your entire body, mind, and soul. The kind of tired that you'll happily accept because it means you're doing the hard work of making a difference for kids.

You will learn that your job is never done. When you or your own children are sick, you will debate what to do. You'll come to work feeling miserable because you don't want to miss your students' book presentations that day. When you're not actively working, you're reading about teaching or thinking about your students, but at some point you're going to need to balance your career and your life. When

you can't figure out how, the teachers you work with will rally around you and help you find the balance.

You will be frustrated by the need to be politically neutral. One of your students will inevitably be isolated by a current event. You'll learn it's not only okay, but essential, to find your advocacy voice.

Your heart will break when you can't help your students on their standardized tests. You'll feel sad and angry when you are evaluated on Julie's test scores alone because you know all the barriers in Julie's life. You will celebrate the growth she has shown, and you'll learn how to assess your effectiveness through your day-to-day work.

You will learn that teaching is never boring. You'll wade through a day where you laugh, cry, yell, smile and groan all in the same day. Then Irina will give you the biggest hug and you'll forget all the other emotions.

You will learn that you do this job for the children. Nothing else. And your work makes a world of difference.

Teaching is hard work. Very hard work. Your teacher prep program won't teach you that explicitly. But you will learn. And then you will realize that it should be hard, because it is important and it has the potential to change the world. You'll never find a profession that will fulfill you like teaching. We can't wait for you to join us!

Sincerely,

Today's teachers

The Bounty of My Labor

Student and teacher connect over their shared experience in the fields.

"I see that you are not showing much effort in the classroom, and your negative behaviors are interfering with your learning," I told Ronaldo one morning. I noticed his lack of interest in school. As his teacher, I was concerned.

I had met Ronaldo's family at the start of the school year during our "Meet Your Teacher." They spoke only Spanish. Ronaldo was a second language learner, still struggling with English. "I don't need to learn this. If I don't finish school, I'll just go and work with my dad," he replied.

Ronaldo was in 3rd grade, and he did not see any value in learning.

"Where does your dad work?" I inquired.

"He works in the fields," he said. Then he raised his head at an angle and wrinkled his forehead as he asked, "Do you know the fields?"



Jose Corona

ESD 105 Regional Teacher of the Year
Kirkwood Elementary
Toppenish School District

"Before I answer that question I want you to listen to this story," I said. "Then I'll answer your question."

The sun beat down my sweaty brow as the clods of dirt clung to the bottom of my shoes, causing my foot to bend sideways at every step. It had just stopped raining, my clothes were still dripping wet and cold. It felt muggy and hot. I could hear my loud stomach echoing with its own internal storm. It hadn't received a crumb of food since the day before. I could not blame it for being angry. There wasn't anything I could do to console it.

Work couldn't wait, and I was already behind. The bucket strapped to the side of my waist felt like lead, and my hip was throbbing with pain.

"It is time to go to school, Dad," I would say.

"Wait a while longer," he replied. "There's a lot of asparagus today, and we need your help, otherwise the rest of us will be here all day."

I am going to be late for school again, I thought, as I continued bending, cutting and carrying what seemed like millions of asparagus spears ahead of me. To my discontent, the "while longer" my Dad was talking about turned into hours. I knew that I would not be going to school.

I was only in 2nd grade when I began working. I did not understand much about life. I only knew that it was unforgiving to people like us. "We are people of the fields," my father often said. What he meant was that working in the fields was our only option for bringing relief to the poverty in which we lived. He didn't call it poverty, though, he referred to it as "misery," which is

even worse. There were nine of us in the family, and he could not work alone.

My parents tried their best to take us to school, when possible, but not always on time. "First we have to survive and get ahead," they would say.

"How long will that take?" I wondered.

The best response I ever got was from my mom one day: "It is going to take as long as it is going to last."

At school, my teachers would grumble, "Why are you late?" I would lower my head and walk into the classroom without a reply. With my heart pounding inside my chest like a hammer, I would look back and hope I wasn't followed. I was ashamed that I didn't have time to shower or comb my hair, and my hands, still stained with dirt, had the smell of work. I knew why I was late, but there were no words to explain it to someone I knew would not understand.

My frequent absence made the classroom confusing for me. Not knowing how to do the work the class was doing troubled me. The whirlwind of uncertainty made me dizzy, and I felt nauseous. "This is hard! I don't need to learn this," I would say to myself. However, there was no comparing this work to the only other type of work I knew. So, I would lick the tip of my pencil and start writing down answers, hopeful that my efforts would earn me a smiley face. A smile that I was joyful to get on paper, but that I would much rather have seen on my teacher's face.

"Wait, the kid in the story was you Mr.?" Ronaldo interrupted. "You worked in the fields?"

"Yes, Ronaldo. You are talking to the kid in the story," I answered him as a tear rolled down my right cheek and dropped onto the corner of my desk. "You asked me if I knew the fields. Not only do I know the fields, I grew up in them and I left a part of me there," I said.

"You see, people who work in the fields don't do it because they like to. They do it because they have no other choice," I told him. "You have a choice. You have the opportunity to get an education so that as a grownup you can choose the type of work you'd like to do. Don't give up now," I said. "Do you want to hear the rest of the story, or do you know what you need to do?" I asked him.

"No, I get it," he answered looking down apologetically.

Ronaldo continued being a kid and doing what kids do. But his attitude toward learning changed. He was not as distracted, and his behavior improved. He was happier and laughed often. His laugh still echoes in my mind, and I can't help but smile when I think of it. He moved on, and I lost track of him, but I always wondered what became of him.

One day, as I was walking my students to the buses, I saw a young man step out of a bus. He looked like Ronaldo, but no longer had the features I remembered. Taller than me, and now with the slight shadow of a mustache on his face, I could barely recognize him. "Mr." he said. Only Ronaldo had called me "Mr." I knew it had to be him. I was overjoyed to see him again. He told me he was now a junior in high school. So many years had passed.

"How are you doing in school?" I asked, referring to his grades.

His face lit up, and with a sparkle in his eye he said, "I am doing very well Mr., and I owe it all to you."

I confess, I teared up inside, but I realized then that our students need teachers like me who truly understand their lives. That understanding and those smiles are now the bounty of my labor.

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 10 regional candidates representing Washington's nine Educational Service Districts 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, Andera Peterson of Granite Falls School District, and Jeff Carbonneau of Zillah School District, respectively, were each selected as the National Teacher of the Year.

The State Teacher of the Year is selected by a statewide committee. Teachers are nominated, complete a lengthy written application, and enter the regional selection process through their Educational Service Districts (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.

Candidates are reviewed based on the following criteria:

- Professional biography
- Community involvement
- Philosophy of teaching
- Responsiveness to education issues and trends
- Commitment to strengthening the teaching profession
- His or her proposed Teacher of the Year platform

"These stories from real classrooms with real kids matter to all of us and should serve as a guide for how to improve education in our state."

— 2015 Washington State Teacher of the Year Lyon Terry
Lawton Elementary, Seattle Public Schools

"*From Seed to Apple* gives us a clearer picture of what it's like to be a student in Washington today. There are vast opportunities for exploration, but also incredible challenges. What remains the same for all students are the thousands of dedicated teachers, like those featured in this book, who walk beside students every step of the way."

— 2014 Washington State Teacher of the Year Katie Brown
Bellingham Public Schools

"Reflections from teachers in the classroom should be where every conversation about education starts. They will keep our discussions grounded in what is most important—our students and their experiences."

— 2013 Washington State and National Teacher of the Year Jeff Charbonneau
Zillah High School, Zillah School District