

By Beth Pandolpho

The Power of Sharing Your Story with Students

My ninth graders write about failing math tests, getting cut from the soccer team, and auditioning for the lead in the musical only to be cast in the ensemble. They write about feeling insecure about their weight, the width of their noses, and the birthmarks on their faces. And they attend classes with an array of teachers who have differing notions of where they should sit, how often they should study, and what grade they deserve.

There's a chance for teachers to bridge the divide between the adults who seem to have all the answers and the students who are still figuring out things. When my students feel like they know me, they're more actively engaged, seek my help outside of class, and are more receptive to my suggestions and ideas.



“When we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, acknowledge our imperfections, and tell our stories, we show our students that we are, in fact, more like them than they may imagine.”



John Hattie, director of Melbourne Education Institute says that a “positive, caring, respectful climate in the classroom is a prior condition to learning.” So how can we reveal even a little bit of ourselves, to create this climate and make a connection with our students?

Show Vulnerability

My students know that I cried a lot in elementary school, so my primary goal when I entered middle school was to not cry at school. They know that now, as a teacher, I find it excruciatingly painful to hear my lesson plan critiqued by my supervisor, with the commentary that perhaps it doesn't make

quite as much sense as I originally thought. And when I showed students my model book-talk video, I asked if they also heard a bit of lisp, and didn't it look like I have a lazy eye? They laughed, and assured me that neither was true.

Acknowledge Imperfections

My students know that in some areas I actually do have all the answers. I know the answers to all of our tests, I can crush a literary essay, and I can recite several poems from memory (which never ceases to impress).

However, they also know that I don't know the difference between sine and cosine or a polar and a conic, and I'm not sure which ions are positively charged—or why that even matters. They know my sixth grader watched *13 Reasons Why* on Netflix before I realized the 13 reasons why I probably shouldn't have let her. And they also know that I was always the last kid chosen for a team in PE, so if they toss me a dry erase marker, it's unlikely that I'll catch it.

Share Your Stories

I sprinkle stories throughout my classes about my older son's college applications, my younger son's football team, and how my daughter and I sing Britney Spears songs in the car. My students know that I don't like to cook, and that Atticus Finch is my fictional husband.

My stories are brief, but they offer insight into who I am as a person

and a glimpse into my life outside of school. On the last day of school, when we played “two truths and one lie,” my students knew immediately when I was lying. I asked, “How is that possible?” One student quickly responded, “Because we know you!”

Why This Is Essential

“Studies on thousands of students show that learners who are better socially connected to their teachers and classmates are significantly more engaged and achieve better than their less well-connected peers,” notes Hunter Gehlbach, Associate Professor of education at the Gevirtz School, UC Santa Barbara. When we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, acknowledge our imperfections, and tell our stories, we show our students that we are, in fact, more like them than they may imagine.

As we let ourselves be known, our students will likewise reveal themselves, and thus our connection grows. These relationships are built gradually through a mutual exchange of ideas, questions, and stories about our lives.

We can seek to know our students through ice breakers in September, by greeting them when they arrive to class, and by asking them questions when we notice their varsity jackets or their names on a field trip list. When a student shows up on crutches, of course our conversations begin with “What happened?” and “How long?” These personal exchanges often spark deeper conversations, embolden students to ask more probing questions

in class, and increase overall participation.

Also these interactions build trust, which better enables me to give students critical feedback—to tell them the truth even when it's not easy to hear. My students listen to me because I listen to them. They don't know me just as their teacher—they know me as a person.

In a faculty softball game, I am my struggling readers. When calculating grades, I am my reluctant writers. In so many ways, I am them and they are me. If we can meet them where they are, we can assure them that they're not alone as we cultivate relationships that foster deep and meaningful learning. ■

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Beth Pandolpho is an English teacher at West Windsor-Plainsboro High School North in Plainsboro, New Jersey. She has a Master of Science in Reading degree, and has taught at the high school and college level for more than 20 years. She is primarily interested in meeting the social and emotional needs of students to help them thrive both personally and academically. She can be reached at beth.pandolpho@wwprsd.org or on Twitter @bethpando.

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Connect with us and—most importantly—with each other on your favorite social media site. Why?

- To receive up-to-the-minute news on education policy & reform
- To be the first to know about new AAE offers & announcements
- To be a part of a nationwide teacher support network

When AAE members like you join the conversation, everybody wins.



Dear Member,

Thank you so much for your participation in our National Membership Survey this summer! Your time is very valuable. We look forward to analyzing your thoughts and opinions on topics such as school choice, teacher pensions, school safety, and many other issues. We share survey results with policymakers and the media, ensuring your voice is heard.

Didn't have a chance to complete our National Membership Survey this year? Do not fear!

We are increasing the frequency of our major surveys to ensure your educator voice is amplified on relevant issues across the country. A new survey will be available before the end of the year and expect a series of shorter, single-topic surveys to follow. We value your membership, your experiences, your time, and your opinions. And we are committed to being the leading association representing the educator voice!

Are you interested in doing more to share your voice? Email me at mckenzie@aaeteachers.org and learn about our Advocacy Ambassadors' Training Program!

Have a wonderful school year! I cannot wait to hear more from you in the coming months!

Best,



McKenzie Allen
Director of Advocacy
Association of American Educators
Foundation

P.S. Didn't see the email invitation to participate? Update your member record with your current personal email address at aaeteachers.org/update.

Mind Your Management: Who's Excited to Come to Class?

One of the main reasons that most of us got into education was because we love to learn and wanted to share the excitement of “a-ha” moments with our students. We knew it would be a challenge, but thought, “No worries, I’m smart, creative, funny, and engaging, and I’m sure the passion for learning will be enough to keep them on track.” Thinking back to those first weeks, it’s almost adorable the way we hoped things would be. We quickly learned that students do NOT care about grammar as much as we do. They don’t show that they care about making progress as much as we do, and they REALLY don’t care that this topic will be important to them when they get older. Ok, so clearly we have our work cut out for us and have to dig a little deeper.

In Dave Burgess’ book, *Teach Like a Pirate*, there is a chapter called ‘Transformation.’ It is such a great place to start when you’re wanting to take time to reflect on where you are and where you want to be, in terms of student engagement and general behavior management. Burgess talks about some basic marketing principles—positioning and reframing—as a way to think about motivating students. He describes what happens to many educators when they’ve hit a wall or have lost motivation themselves, such as practicing “the medicine approach” to teaching (pg 61). These teachers say things like, “I know this is not that exciting, but stay with me, because you’ll need to know it for the test.” Teaching students that they’re learning just for grades is not what educators intend to do, but it’s what happens when we don’t feel motivated by what and how we’re teaching.

We want to help you use this month as an opportunity to reflect on your classroom and behavior management successes and challenges by offering questions to keep in mind as you shift into planning mode.

- What is the vision I have for a successful school year?
- What are the most important things that I want my students to learn or remember this coming year?
- What was my biggest success from last year?
- What would I most like to improve from last year?
- What is typically the best part of my day? Why?



- How much enthusiasm do I pour into my lessons?
- How much excitement do I share with my students about this topic?

You can use the answers to these questions to start forming your road map to success.

We also have a printable download of all questions. Please go to www.leaderally.com. ■



Liz Szporm, co-founder of Leaderally, has a passion for and rich skill set in leadership development. As course developer and writer for *The Warm Up*, Liz is always looking for ways to inspire educators to grow and develop the skills that keep them feeling successful and in the career they worked so hard for. Liz lives in New Jersey with her husband and three children.

Read and Ride Bike Brings New Motivation, Thanks to AAE Grant!

Last summer, Dayna Derichs applied for an AAE classroom grant with a unique request. She was asking for a Read and Ride Bike from Kidsfit (www.youthfit.com) for her school's five- and six-year-old class.

Dayna is a long-time AAE member and is a teacher librarian at Wheeler Elementary School in Omaha, Nebraska. There, she teaches vital informational skills that encompass both the printed and the digital word.

Along with her library responsibilities, she teaches computer skills and sponsors the school's Tech Club.

Long experienced at blending technology and reading, her idea was simple. Kids like to move. They need to move, but often the academic expectations placed on them hinder their ability to engage in physical activity. The bike would allow students to continue to develop physically even while they are reading or doing homework, thus giving them an outlet for their energy.

Dayna hoped the bike would have a positive impact

on her students. She hoped that allowing students to move while reading would help build excitement. She also planned ways to make the bike a reward and to allow students to track their usage. She even envisioned pairing the bike with an odometer and having a class-wide competition to see how many miles the class could bike in a week. She hoped the contest would help foster teamwork while also having a substantial impact on student health and academic achievement.

So how did it all work out?

According to Dayna, the bike has been a tremendous success! She says, "Students read while riding and work on the bikes while riding. The activity and movement not only get students' bodies moving, they motivate our students to read! Students WANT to read while riding!"

AAE is proud to support excellent educators such as Dayna Derichs as members. Of her AAE membership, Dayna said, "I value the role associations play in the education field. When deciding on the association I wanted to join, I took into account many factors such as the benefits of the association, the cost for joining, and the reputations of each. Other educators highly recommended AAE, and it came out as my top choice."

We're even more proud that we're able to support educators such as Dayna through our National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant program. This program awards passionate educators with up to \$500. Recipients are chosen through a rigorous process that involves input from AAE members and staff.

We encourage all of our members to become involved in this important program. Members wishing to provide input on submissions can email profdev@aaeteachers.org. Members seeking a grant or scholarship can do so by filling out an application on our website. Our next deadline is October 1, 2018, so don't miss out! ■

SCHOLARSHIP & GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE OCTOBER 1!

The AAE Foundation's National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant competition is held twice a year in the fall and spring. Its purpose is to help innovative teachers. The



deadlines are March 1 and October 1 of every year. For more information, visit aaeteachers.org/awards.



Melissa Pratt is AAE's professional programs manager. In that capacity, she creates and manages programs that help AAE's members increase their professional capacity. Her favorite part of the job is the funding that she is able to provide to teachers each year through AAE's National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant program.

After *Janus*, Will We See the Teachers Union of Tomorrow?



Make no bones about it. Teachers unions are reeling from a game-changing decision from the U.S. Supreme Court, issued the same day as the news of Justice Anthony Kennedy’s retirement, so largely overlooked in news coverage. The public may not have much noticed, but unions feel they are standing at a precipice, not at all certain they can maintain the power they are long accustomed to wielding.

After the high court sided with *Janus* in *Janus vs. AFSCME*, public sector workers will no longer be required to contribute to their unions, something nearly half of all states—including Minnesota—require, regardless of whether teachers choose to belong to the union. The nation’s largest union, the National Education Association (NEA), having just held its annual convention in Minneapolis, expects to be hard hit. It is anyone’s best guess how many of the 78,000 active teachers who currently contribute to the Education Minnesota union will opt out in the years ahead, but the initial hit will almost certainly include some 7,000 teachers who have already registered their discontent over having been forced to contribute.

The fast-flowing pipeline of dollars from teachers to unions (\$600 million a year, nationally) is bound to be disrupted, and here’s why. Independent surveys consistently report that only half of all teachers see their union as “essential” and that many see dues as too high,

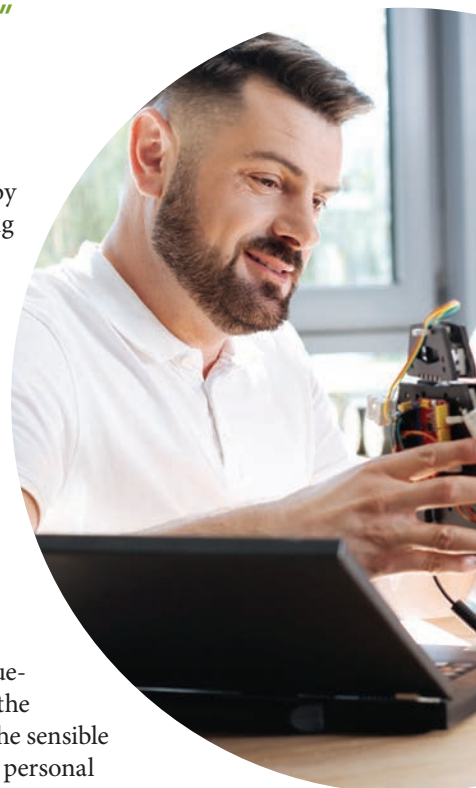
political activity as too leftist (only half of all teachers voted for Hillary Clinton), and positions on education issues run counter to schools’ paramount interests. And with much of this disaffection skewing toward younger teachers, the unions have their work cut out for them.

However, the NEA has a strong foundation on which to build. On its core functions, nearly all

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teachers give high marks: defending against claims by parents and students, going head-to-head with school districts, and bargaining for greater pay. However, as any PBS station manager can tell you, just because viewers wouldn’t have missed an episode of *Downton Abbey*, it doesn’t mean they would donate during Pledge Week.

We should soon expect the launch of a Madison Avenue-worthy campaign making the case for membership and the sensible notion that teachers have a personal responsibility to pay their fair share. The NEA just announced its intention to fuel more teachers strikes this fall.





There's one move that the NEA and its sister union, the American Federation of Teachers, could make that would keep more teachers in the fold, but it's not clear that current leaders at either union will consider it. They should rethink the combative stand on issues that directly affect teachers and students, starting with their defense of really weak or toxic teachers.

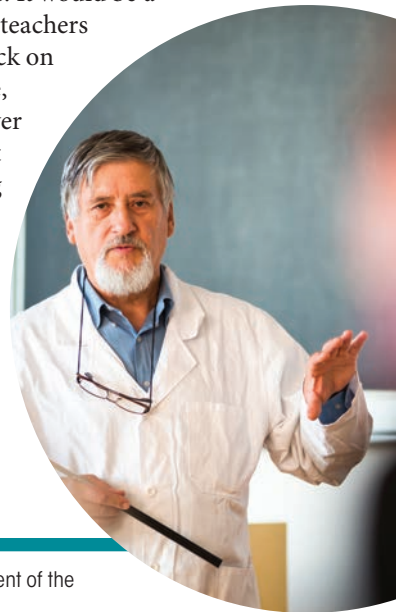
With ample cash on hand, unions have long taken to an extreme their obligation to defend every teacher—which is why some districts estimate the cost of firing a single teacher at more than \$200,000. With the two unions being the largest contributors to American political campaigns, state laws they pushed to pass now make it impossible to fire a mathematics teacher who can't teach math. A drunken math teacher? Maybe, but by no means assuredly.



More than half of all teachers don't agree with the unions' to-the-death defense of some teachers. That's because there's nothing that drags down teachers more quickly than having to work alongside teachers who don't do their jobs well. When former teachers cite poor working conditions as the most common reason they leave the profession, they generally aren't referring to unclean bathrooms. They want to be surrounded by teachers who care as much as they do.

Most teachers also recognize the harm yielded by seniority rights, although cherished by unions. That's because they saw firsthand the harm of such rights. As novice teachers, many were assigned to impossible jobs at the toughest schools, as veteran teachers had moved on to take less challenging positions. Few teachers have fond memories of their first year of teaching, knowing how they unwittingly let down their students.

Well before *Janus*, teachers unions were struggling with declining membership. The *Janus* decision is a symptom, not the source, of unions' troubles. It would be a mistake to wish for the demise of teachers unions, as there needs to be a check on school districts' own considerable, often callously inflicted, power over teachers. However, unions cannot continue business as usual, giving higher priority to individual teachers over the health of the teaching profession at large or showing preference to one group of teachers (veterans) over another (novices), particularly when placing students at risk. The path to a more certain future lies in those lessons. ■



Kate Walsh is president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and policy organization.

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Why Don't Districts Do the Easy Things to Improve Student Learning?

I've never led a school, run a school system, or served on a school board. So maybe I am about to ask something that is incredibly naïve and possibly insulting. But here goes: Why are so many of our school districts so complacent? I understand why they don't always do the hard things, like firing ineffective veteran teachers, or expensive things, like starting one-on-one tutoring programs. However, I can't fathom why so many don't do the easy, more or less no-cost things, either.

Let me offer two examples:

1. Adopting an aligned, high-quality curriculum. This has never been simpler! (Not faithful and imaginative implementation—that's hard. But picking a good curriculum? Easy!) Both states and nonprofits—especially EdReports—are doing reviews of curricular products, and a growing number are meeting high standards for quality, alignment to state standards, and usability, some of which are free. Yet what limited data we have indicate that most schools continue to choose curricula that are not aligned, not rigorous, not proven—if they are choosing curricula at all. I recently got my hands on a “Market Brief” by *Education Week* that looked at the market share of various English language arts and math curricula for elementary schools. In both subjects, the

market leader is “Other”—as in, a large plurality of districts use something “other” than the major commercial products or open education resources. It's anyone's guess what these materials are, but other surveys hint that they are probably lessons downloaded from Pinterest and other sites.

Meanwhile, the products that districts are purchasing are generally not those that score well on various rating systems. HMH's “Journeys” is the top choice for ELA classrooms, with 19 percent market share, even though it only “partially met” EdReports' very first screen. McGraw-Hill's “Reading Wonders” is next, with 5 percent, and then Pearson's “Reading Street,” with 4; the former received just middling marks from EdReports, and the latter scored terribly. On the other hand, Pearson's “ReadyGEN Text Collection” and Amplify's “Core Knowledge Language Arts” both received top ratings from EdReports for fully meeting its criteria for content and usability, yet each has less than 1 percent market share.

It's not much better in math. HMH's “Go Math” is in the lead with 16 percent; Pearson's “enVisionmath 2.0” and McGraw-Hill's “Everyday Math” come in at 8 and 7 percent respectively. None of these materials fully met EdReports' criteria for alignment to college- and



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career-ready standards; “enVision” and “Everyday Math” score particularly poorly. But now for some good news: “Eureka Math”, born as “EngageNY Math” has 9 percent of the market, plus rave reviews from EdReports and discerning states such as Louisiana. And the consumers of the product love it too; 82 percent of district administrators surveyed by *Education Week* who are frequent users of the program said “Eureka Math” helps improve student achievement. And 77 percent gave “Eureka Math” positive marks for improving instruction; the next best was 29 percent.

It’s a truism that there’s not “one best curriculum” that fits all schools’ needs. However, it’s also the case that some curricula are simply better than others. According to the *Education Week* data, the good stuff is being used by maybe 10 to 15 percent of schools. Why on earth is this number so low?

2. Making the tenure approval process more rigorous.

Teacher evaluation reform may have crashed and burned, but that’s not because the impulse was wrong. Research continues to show that teacher effectiveness varies dramatically from one classroom to the next; our lowest-performing teachers have a hugely negative impact on their students’ trajectories. Identifying these teachers at the get-go, and getting them out of our schools could do a world of good, as would recognizing and rewarding our best instructors.

However, it remains super hard to do that once teachers have earned tenure (aka a “permanent contract”), thanks to state tenure and due process laws, as well as local collective bargaining agreements. What’s not hard is denying someone tenure in the first place. Given that most teachers have to wait three or four years before they are eligible for tenure, and that three or four years is plenty of time to determine whether someone is an effective instructor, districts have a golden opportunity to ensure quality control in the classroom. They can make the tenure approval process rigorous instead of a rubber stamp. Even better: They could make it a true honor, complete with a ceremony welcoming newly tenured teachers into the most important profession in the world.

Joel Klein, former Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education made this reform, and the Big Apple’s rate for approving tenure-eligible teachers went from close to 100 percent to around 50 percent, practically overnight. It has crept back up under de Blasio, but it’s still much lower than the near universal rates we see in most districts around the country. Nor did Klein have to actually fire unproven teachers; he told most of them to try again the next year. Although many decided to leave the classroom instead.

So districts have a choice: They can make tenure an achievement or automatic. Why would anyone choose the latter?

I suppose there are two ways to look at examples like these. The hard-edged view is that our public school system still isn’t responsive enough to the need for fundamental improvements in student learning, despite test-based accountability, choice-driven competition, and everything else we’ve tried. Maybe it really is time to replace it. The other, more optimistic take is that if and when schools start to pick this low hanging fruit, we could see student learning accelerate big time.

Let me place a wager: If we could get the market share of high quality curriculum above 50 percent, and the percentage of junior teachers approved for tenure on their first try below 50 percent, we would see the most dramatic improvement in student achievement since A Nation at Risk—or maybe ever. Is there any reason, other than complacency, not to try? ■

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Michael Petrilli is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and an AAE Advisory Board member.

Legal Corner:

More Work but Not More Pay

Workplace injuries are not uncommon and range from minor to life altering. Unfortunately for teachers, workplace injuries, particularly in high risk classrooms, are becoming common.

How you react to a workplace injury can ensure adequate medical care, time away from work for rest, recuperation, and job security.

Three laws can be impacted by injuries in the workplace, and you will need to evaluate your situation carefully to make sure you are protected under any that apply to you.

1. Workers' Compensation Laws

Each state has a set of laws that protect injured workers. Under these laws you may be entitled to medical treatment income replacement, or more. In nearly all states, you are required to fill out paperwork as soon as possible after the incident. You will need to take the initiative to immediately report your injury to your supervisor and if you are able, ask for and fill out

paperwork right away. If you are not able to fill out paperwork immediately, you will need to work as quickly as possible to meet all deadlines. In some states you have as little as 72 hours to complete paperwork or risk being denied the benefits available to you.

2. Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

This federal law protects you from absences for a serious health condition and, depending on the circumstances, you might have job protection under the FMLA due to your work-related injury. Here is how it works. You must have been employed at least 1,250 hours within the last twelve months. You should contact your HR/Personnel office to get forms. Your doctor will have to fill out certain parts for you.

3. Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

This is also a federal law. The ADA protects those with disabilities. A disability is generally defined as

any health condition that remains for a period of six months or more. Depending on the severity of your injuries, this law may also be triggered. It requires your employer to provide you with reasonable accommodations, which could include a reduced work schedule or additional time to complete assigned tasks.

If you find yourself injured on the job, act quickly, obtain and return all necessary forms, and contact AAE Legal Services. We're here to help. ■



Sharon Nelson is the director of legal services for the Association of American Educators. In this capacity, Ms. Nelson oversees AAE's extensive legal teams across the country and works daily with members and panel counsel to address members' legal concerns. A passionate advocate for educators, Ms. Nelson has been a lawyer focusing on employee rights issues for nearly twenty years.



Back-to-School Message from AAE's Founder and Executive Director

Dear AAE Members and Friends,

The swirl of activity and anticipation of a new school year never fails to reenergize me and our entire dedicated team at AAE. Our professional and personal mission has always been to foster the transformation of the teaching profession by empowering and supporting our fantastic community of professionals for the benefit of our students and the nation. You hold yourselves to the highest standards and we are honored that you have chosen AAE to be a part of your preparations to make this year your most fulfilling year ever.

We know that the summer months aren't all about downtime and recharging. You're always on the lookout for new opportunities to stay motivated and to work smarter. We hope that our array of professional development tools including *Education Matters*, our *Back-to-School Resource Guide*, timely blogs and webinars will continue to help you meet the challenges of an ever-changing workplace.

There has never been a better time to be an AAE member. In addition to all the benefits, resources and peace of mind our liability insurance provides, we just announced in August that we have doubled your job protection benefits*—without raising dues! We're committed to being a truly professional association that seeks your opinion, magnifies your voice, supports your professional growth and meets your budget.

I want to take this opportunity to say Welcome Back to School, have a wonderful year, and thank you for taking our recent survey. We'll share results with you soon. Your professionalism, passion for teaching, and dedication to your students make us proud to be associated with you. For nearly 25 years now, members like you have made the Association of American Educators a trusted leader in the profession.

Gratefully yours,

Gary Beckner
Founder & Executive Director

*(Job protection benefit increases are pending in NJ and PA, but in effect in all other states and the District of Columbia.)

Do you know
a teacher who
would make
a great member?



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