Teacher Stories: Seeing our work, our students and ourselves

I am honored and humbled to receive the Stevens-Bristow Fellowship and I join President Steen in thanking Wally and Meredith Stevens for creating this award to honor the important work of teachers and teacher educators. These are difficult times for educators. Teacher bashing is very much in evidence from those outside of education. Both the portraits of apathetic and ineffective teachers in the popular press, and the portrayals of heroic solo teachers in the movies are like the images in fun-house mirrors, barely recognizable to those of us who teach. They do not reflect the complex reality of life in classrooms. With these remarks I hope to present another side, an inside view of teachers and teaching, as revealed in what teachers write, in the stories they tell about their work.

I am a writer and a writing teacher. I teach writing to both pre-service and practicing teachers. As the director of the National Writing Project in New Hampshire, I hear a lot of stories in our summer institutes, in our youth writing programs, and in our outreach work. I want to talk today about teacher stories. I will discuss what they reveal about the nature of our work in classrooms, about our relationships with students, and what writing and sharing these stories with other teachers can show us about ourselves.

In the writing project summer institute, teachers write about their teaching in a form of writing we call teacher lore. As Swartz and Albert describe it, “Teacher lore involves reading, hearing, viewing, writing, telling, and discussing stories of teaching, both fictional and true.” Teacher lore is a way of knowing and learning through narrative about the art and experience of teaching.

Every profession has its lore. In this case, I don’t refer to lessons or units or advice like “don’t smile until Thanksgiving,” but to the narratives that help us make meaning of our working lives. The elders pass down stories to instruct new entrants into the profession. Teacher lore is particularly important because teaching is a profession everyone thinks they know a lot about, but is actually one of the most difficult to penetrate. Actor Tony Danza entitled his book which chronicles his year as a high school teacher in Philadelphia, I’d Like to Apologize to Every Teacher I Ever Had. Only those who have known teaching from the inside can truly understand it, and that is what teacher lore provides, a view from the inside. Teacher lore reveals our craft to be more complex and difficult than even those of us who live it every day might imagine. In his seminal piece, “Stories and the Teaching Life,” Tim Gillespie writes about how teacher stories can act as a counter-narrative to the master/prevaling narratives about teachers. Particular teacher stories move beyond generalities to illuminate what it means to be human in the context of a teaching relationship.

Erika Martinez, one of the facilitators of our summer institute, ran a series of teacher lore stories on her blog entitled “40 days of teacher lore,” in honor of the 40th anniversary of the National Writing Project. Each day, she posted a new story, which was reposted to our Facebook page (National Writing Project in New Hampshire. Please like us.) The stories in the series were rich and varied. I’m going to share some of these stories and talk about what they reveal, starting with a story from a beginning teacher—an initiation story, as it were.

This story comes from Jean Robins, who is now teaching 4th grade in Hancock. In a piece she wrote at the NWP summer institute, she looks back on her first year of teaching in an ethnically diverse, high poverty school just outside of Chicago. She begins with a story:
My 2nd graders were laughing and talking as they filed in from outside, throats parched and faces dripping with sweat. It was the end of a hot and muggy afternoon recess in early September. The heat hadn’t stopped them from playing soccer at full throttle, but now they were desperate for water. As they stepped into the building I sent them up the hallway, past the office, past the Title I room, to the drinking fountain. After students drank their fill of cold water, they were to line up along the wall opposite the fountain and wait for their classmates.

“All right, Kiama. It’s your turn.” ... my head was just turning back to the door to welcome the next student inside when I glimpsed Kiama out of the corner of my eye. He was running up the hallway, running quickly. When he was about three feet away from the drinking fountain, he slid into it as though the fountain was home plate. His body was low and almost horizontal to the ground, when at the last second before impact he grabbed onto the fountain with both hands, stood upright, leaned into the water spigot and inhaled a vast quantity of water, slurping and splattering to gain the cooling benefit of the water on his face as well as in his belly.

“Kiama!” I called out with a stern tone. “Let’s try that again!” (I am sure every teacher in the audience knows where this is going)

He looked at me quizzically, shrugged his shoulders, and walked back to where I was standing by the door. He then turned, faced the drinking fountain, and ran as fast as he could, sliding into the fountain as if it was home plate. Ahhhh. My teacher education program had begun in earnest and I had so much to learn.

Jean came to teaching later than many and was excited to begin. She writes:

As my new students walked into the classroom that first morning of school, I was overcome with emotion. I was charmed by their smiles, their eagerness to find their desks, their purposeful work as they put supplies away. With great enthusiasm I said, “Good morning, and welcome to 2nd grade!” We stood to say the “Pledge of Allegiance” together. As I heard their earnest voices saying the words in unison, my eyes got misty and I stopped speaking to take in the beauty of the moment.

By 10:30 that morning, I was weeping for the second time, but not for joy. I had lost control of the class and I didn’t know what to do.

No profession demands so much on day one, where a teacher with no experience is expected to walk in on the first day and conduct class like the veteran across the hall. As new teachers, we often feel as though we have to prove ourselves, and we often feel that we are failing. But as Sharon Robbins writes in a reflection on her own account of her first year, “The real defeat of a new teacher comes, not in losing control of the classroom, but in succumbing to those voices which tell us we are failures.” (quoted in Swartz and Alberts) Reading teacher lore can help us to know that we are not alone and that it does get better. It can show us a teacher’s work.

So what does teacher lore enable us to see about this chaotic, unpredictable work of teachers? First, that it is immediate work. There is often no time for deliberation, and the decisions we make are crucial, and we often make them in the midst of chaos. Attempts to stress the professional nature of teaching often compare it to medicine, but the only time practicing medicine is like teaching is in an emergency room in the middle of a major disaster. Physicians generally meet their patients one on one. We call that tutoring.

Teacher lore can offer us a way to step back and capture those moments. In her story “Human Beans,” Loianne Foster, who retired after 35 years of teaching English at Stevens High School in
Claremont, takes us into the first day of a 9th grade class where a new student challenges her by announcing: “I’m not going to read any of your damned books.” The teacher quite naturally feels attacked in this situation. She wants to strike back. She writes, With Martha’s challenge, I felt blood rush through my body and prickles ping along my spine. One word formed itself in my mind: “Out!” But Martha is a stranger to her teacher on that first day of school, a stranger with whom she has to form a relationship if she is to do her job well. Teachers have to know, in moments like this one, that they don’t know. The student is not responding to the teacher as a person, but to something else entirely, and Foster doesn’t know what that is yet. Foster wants to scream, “out!”, but, she continues: the word didn’t form in my mouth. On my scalp came the curious sensation of a hand opening gently, and calmness seeped into my shoulders. The thin, strawberry blond girl bristled like a threatened kitten. “Maybe she can’t read,” I thought. “I’ll get back to you,” is what I said. The class let out its collective breath. It’s interesting to me that Foster looks at Martha in that moment, struggling to see her. So much hinges on that interchange on the first day of school. The teacher needs to summon the wisdom, which she represents as almost settling on her from above, to recognize that there is more to Martha than the overt behavior which is so evident. Much of teacher lore is about the struggle to see our students, to see beyond their behavior, to see across the span of our differences…. We need every bit of what we know, and more, to respond sensitively and effectively in any given moment.

Randy Brooker writes about an incident which took place in another difficult 9th grade class. He describes the class as “a zoo”, and says that in the first few moments, he often feels like a broken record: “Please don’t throw things.” “You should go to the bathroom before class starts.” “Tyler take your seat, please...No, your seat.” In the midst of all this on a particular day, he hears a student complain because someone else said the word “faggot.” Almost immediately, another student refers to a transgendered male student as “she.” I’ll let Randy pick up the story from here:

“I’m NOT a girl!” Adam, louder this time.
I sensed that I stood on the edge of a cliff and that this was quickly getting out of hand. I had to step in.

“Who said faggot?” I asked Adam. When that word came out of my mouth, the room went quiet. All eyes were on me now.

“Ben.” he replied.
...I decided not to call Ben out in front of everyone, making a mental note to speak to him privately later. “Alright, guys, you know how I feel about that kind of language, and if you can’t meet my expectations about this then you will be asked to leave. Now let’s drop it, please.”

I turned to the board to start the day’s lessons, but was still thinking about what had happened. I wasn’t able to concentrate on what I was trying to do because I felt flustered. I realized I had addressed the use of biased language and completely ignored Adam’s issue with being referred to as “she.” I turned back to the class to say something and saw that he had his face buried in his hands. Still I stumbled forward with my lesson. When Adam, who had been known as Angela to many of the kids in the room in middle school the previous year, moved his hands from his face and I saw he had been
crying, I knew that the issue wasn't resolved, that I had done Adam a disservice, but I was still reluctant. Why was I finding it so hard to talk about transgenderism in the classroom?

I realized I was afraid. Afraid I wouldn’t have the answers or know the right thing to say. Afraid the kids might ask an embarrassing question. Afraid of the possible repercussions of discussing such a sensitive topic with these young people. What would administration think? What would parents say if they found out?

I knew my discomfort was born of ignorance. I knew practically nothing about being transgendered. I had never known a transgendered person. I didn’t feel equipped to deal with this topic. At the beginning of the year, some colleagues and I were called to guidance to be told that we would have a transgendered student in our classrooms. We were told that Adam comes from a stable family who support him in his struggle. We were told that Adam was struggling with depression and had had suicidal thoughts. We were told to watch for “issues” in the classroom and contact guidance or send Adam down if anything happened. We were told to give him passes to the nurse’s office when he needed to use the bathroom. We were sent on our way.

I did understand the difference between gender (a social construct) and sex (a biological determination) in an academic sort of way, but this was different. This was a 14-year-old student trying to feel his way through a crisis of identity, and I couldn’t let him get hurt because I was afraid. I took a deep breath, put down my whiteboard marker… “I’m sorry, but I can’t concentrate on what I’m trying to do right now, so let’s just stop for a minute.” I knew that once I started there was no going back.

Randy goes on to explain how he tries to reach out to the student and address the issue with the class, knowing that there is much he doesn’t know, trying to move through his discomfort. He invites the class to share how they feel. When they don’t respond, he moves forward on his own:

“Ok, I’ll share. I’ll admit that this subject makes me uncomfortable. I think the reason I’m uncomfortable is because I don’t understand. Here’s what I do know. From my understanding, a person who is transgendered feels like they have the wrong body. I don’t think they regard it as a choice.” I paused to let that sink in, then stumbled forward.

“Think about it this way. Billy, you feel like a boy, right? And Sarah, you feel like a girl, right? Imagine feeling the way you do, the way you’ve felt your whole life, but picture having a girl’s body, Billy, or a boy’s body, Sarah. I think this must be what it is like.”

He knows he doesn’t have the answers, but he works through what he does know with them. He opens himself up in that moment, sharing his own thinking about something he admits to not fully understanding. He does it because he can’t ignore Adam’s pain. I am particularly struck by this sentence in Randy’s narrative: “This was a 14-year-old student trying to feel his way through a crisis of identity, and I couldn’t let him get hurt because I was afraid.”

Issues like transgenderism or racism, sexism, or violence or bullying or whatever social concerns you might choose, don’t generally come to us in the form of abstractions, or at least not only in the form of abstractions. They come in the shape of human beings—in this case a 14-year-old student trying to feel his way through a crisis of identity. Again, Randy describes how he looked back at Adam, seeing his pain, and how Adam’s suffering was ultimately more compelling in that moment than Randy’s own fear.
Because of the human connection we feel with our students, we can sometimes summon the courage and the compassion, as Randy did, to confront issues that we in no way feel prepared to deal with.

Teacher lore helps us and others to begin to see the complexities of our work more clearly. I want to talk now about how it also helps us to see our students and better understand the teaching relationship. Teacher lore enables us to look beyond obvious behavior to the complex human beings and thinkers students actually are. The teaching relationship is unique. When Randy looks back at Adam, confronts his own fear, and tries to reach across the chasm of their separate human experiences in order to understand how the world feels to this student, they experience a kind of intimacy not replicated in any other kind of relationship. The teaching relationship is characterized by a kind of intellectual and personal recognition from one thinking human being to another.

Young teachers often confuse this feeling with friendship and feel they should reciprocate as they would with a friend, or worse, they confuse it with sexuality.

A graduate student I worked with one summer in a writing workshop, Christina Metz, described this strange paradox of intellectual intimacy better than I have ever heard it explained. She wrote:

“At 28, married and with one child, I returned to school and again experienced, in the graduate classroom, the surprising intimacy of learning, of knowing and being known, that throughout my childhood had occasionally made school the place it should be—a place of magic. As a younger student, I was often then confused and disappointed that this intimacy rarely translated into friendship in any normal sense of the word, as anyone knows who goes back to visit a favorite teacher a year later, only to find there isn’t really much to talk about beyond new classes or a new job. As an undergraduate, it was easy to mistake the intimacy of learning with sexual attraction, no matter how old, stodgy or unattractive the professor in question might have been. But, as a graduate student, confronted with a professor who was, while not unattractive, eight months pregnant, the experience seemed clearer and uncomplicated by other needs. This experience of intimacy, this type of attraction seems to come with the feeling that someone outside myself is interested in what I am doing and how I do it, how I think and therefore who I am, in a limited, yet profound way.”

“In a limited, yet profound way...” in this case, the word “limited” is not intended to diminish the connection at all, but to constrain and thus, intensify it. The teaching relationship is so intimate and personal, and yet so formal at the same time. We work with another person’s thinking, yet we work always within the constraints of our role. Particularly as writing teachers, we are often privy to the most intimate details of our students’ lives, yet the price of our entrance is knowing that nothing is disclosed to us so the world may know, and that as soon as we treat that information as anything but the stuff of our common intellectual work, we have violated that trust. Yet when we truly see the student as a thinker, as a fellow human being, as someone who has a unique way of looking at the world, when we honor their thinking, the effects are world-shattering and long-lasting.

Sometimes teachers write about these moments in their own experiences as students. Erika Martinez describes in a piece so appropriately titled “See Me,” how she presented a book report in her third grade class to her teacher, Mrs. Sinoway.
That day I reported on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. By that point in the school year, I’d figured out that the more parts we quoted, the more her eyes beamed behind her large bifocal glasses, which covered over half her ample cheeks. Wanting not only better grades, but also her approval, my reports grew longer every time. I read from the beginning until Snow White and her prince lived happily ever after. Mrs. Sinoway shrugged her nose to push her glasses back up and broke into a smile that made her thin lips disappear. “Now that is a book report,” she said as she pointed her right hand covered in yellow chalk.

Erika recognizes the admiration she feels from her teacher, because she had seen her teacher look that way at Laura, a student from years past, who had returned to visit her old teacher.

Now Mrs. Sinoway would also remember me because I had presented the best book report ever. When I finished *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* she gave me the same smile she gave Laura. Like no other time in my eight-year-old life, I felt someone could see me. And I became addicted to that recognition. Each morning I looked forward to raising my hand after the bell rang and saying “present” when Mrs. Sinoway called out my name. I never wanted to be absent.

Erika writes about this experience almost 30 years later at the summer institute. She recalls the difficulty of that third grade year, her parents’ marriage dissolving, her struggles with learning English, the confusion of having arrived only recently in the country from Santo Domingo. She ends her piece by writing:

I would want to return to Washington Elementary simply to thank Mrs. Sinoway … Most of all I would express gratitude for her recognition. It took me years to learn to give this to myself. I would tell her that I hang onto that memory: the day when Mrs. Sinoway, with her eyes and her smile, saw me, all that I was, and all that I could be.

Mrs. Sinoway sees Erika and she is transformed. Joseph Schwab describes this process by writing, “when the teacher responds individually to a student before him, the student feels his own movement from item to individuality, from anonymity to personality, and he is grateful.” That recognition, that seeing, is the most precious gift one human being can give to another, and teachers do this every day when they take their students seriously as thinkers and learners. When this happens, differences of age and experience or culture seem to melt away. It’s almost as if we enter another dimension where we see our students as fellow human beings, as people whose minds we meet, as partners in thinking about the many puzzles of the world we share.

A math teacher educator, Robert Berkman, recounts on his blog how he engaged in a discussion with a ten-year-old student named Julian. He goes over Julian’s quiz and starts to talk with him about means, medians, range, and modes. As the conversation develops, Berkman recounts,

My questions moved into the hypothetical “meta” realm, where I asked things like “what if I only knew the median for this data; what would I know? What wouldn’t I know?

As Berkman talks with Julian, Julian and Berkman begin to speculate together, and in the process, Berkman develops a new lesson idea. The math educator and the fifth grade student share
their thinking. Berkman goes on to tell his readers about a chance meeting later that day that got him thinking:

As I stumbled out of school at the end of the day, I was stopped by Julian's mother. “I just wanted to thank you for the time you spent with Julian today,” she said, “he really appreciated the time you took to explain things to him.” I told her the truth, which was that I hadn’t “explained” much of anything, and that we were just having a little conversation. Nonetheless, she thanked me again. All of which got me thinking: what makes “teaching” teaching? In between checking the homework, explaining the assignments, creating and grading the exams and all the other elements of teaching mathematics, what it all comes down to is those moments of intellectual intimacy, when two minds co-mingle and understanding emerges.

It is always a matter of two minds co-mingling, even when one of those minds is only 10 years old. This seeing and this intellectual meeting, sharing thinking with another person, is enormously gratifying, but can be incredibly difficult. The gulfs that divide us from our students, of age, culture, background, gender and race, can be difficult to cross, and can be made more difficult by the pressures teachers face to push all students to meet uniform standards. Kim Hecko writes about a student in her bilingual kindergarten classroom whom she struggles to understand. David is performing far below the level of her other students, still, in February, unable to write any words to accompany his drawings. She writes,

I wonder, sometimes, if I could see David more clearly if I didn’t have to teach him to read by May, if I could stop myself from comparing his journal to those of the other kids in his group. If I could defuse that boiling impatience that wells up inside me when I have shown him the same thing for what feels like the millionth time. If I could erase what I know about his academic development based on the math and reading and writing assessments we do three times a year. Stop seeing David who can’t count to ten, can write his name but only sometimes, cannot recognize a single number; who does not know the sound of a single letter in the alphabet. Stop seeing him as a sign of my failure as a teacher.

But Hecko goes on in a way that lets us know she does see much more in him than what he cannot do:

If I could step back and watch him play. With his too pale angel skin. Square teeth I rarely see, with spots of brown the color of wet tobacco, the beginning of decay. Soft tufts of black hair ... He is his grandmother’s baby, and I can hear his cellophane light voice lifting through the night air of his grandparent’s apartment calling them, “mami, papi.”

Hecko reflects on all she worries that she cannot do for David, but in the process reveals a kind of fierce seeing that I am not uncomfortable calling a type of love.

I can’t teach him the sounds of the letters in his name. How to count the years he has been alive; one, two, three, four, five. I can’t explain why his mother keeps leaving and coming back and then leaving again. I can’t promise him that Diosito is up there or tell him what will or will not happen in the dark of night.

His world is his world. And, at school anyway, he seems so alone in it. He builds walls and takes control when he can. He refuses to learn with so much determination and intelligence.

Sometimes I think that I am more confused than he is; lost as he is among the squiggles and lines and gibberish of letter sounds and numbers I keep trying to force-feed him. I am trying to break a code as
well. Putting facts, feelings, observations, together to understand a person well enough to be of some help and to not cause any more damage. To try to figure out what I can best be to him, for three hours and twenty minutes five days a week until June. To find out if there is anything, anything at all I can give to him that he would take.

Hecko struggles to see David well enough to reach across all that divides them, to overcome the outside perspective that can only see what David is not, all that he does not know, all that he cannot do. She tries, as all teachers do, to “understand a person well enough to be of some help...” And these stories do not always end neatly, but there is no end as long as we keep trying.

Teacher lore reveals how we struggle, as Hecko does, with the burden of knowing that we pass on our visions for our students in every interaction, on our good days and our bad. The cliché about “Making a difference” is a sword that cuts both ways. While we have the power to alter a person’s life in a positive direction, we can also destroy that person’s chances and constrict their choices, and that realization accompanies us always. Ultimately we do not teach letter sounds, or differential equations or the causes of the Civil War or Of Mice and Men, but human beings, and because we are always trying to reach out to students, to understand those worlds our students bring with them, even when they seem alone in them, teaching can make us better people.

One of the pieces posted on 40 days of teacher lore recounts how a young teacher, Niki Breault, born and raised in New Hampshire, learns about violence in Central America through her 7th grade student who writes about how his mother was murdered in Honduras. Nothing in her background prepared her for this, story, but she knew how to listen, how to help the student expand on details and show instead of telling his reader, and this meant she had to have the courage to look at what he was showing her. She writes:

…it was that story I feared reading. I knew what had happened. I felt the pain it caused him every time he walked into my room. Maybe it was amplified because I was a new mom and the thought of being separated from my child caused me near physical pain. I thought about the journey he had made to get to my room, the writing he had shared, and how much he had affected me during the year.

I thought about what it means to be a teacher, and I looked up and away from my desk, to my student standing beside me. Without hesitation, I turned my back to the desk and started to read.

“I looked up and away from my desk... to the student standing beside me.” Again, a metaphor of seeing, so common in teacher lore. Niki turns away from her desk and towards her student, finding the courage to listen because she sees something in him that calls to their common humanity.

Reading and sharing our teacher lore can make the narrative in the wider culture slightly more concrete, realistic, more grounded and more student-centered. Tim Gillespie writes about the value of teacher lore for outsiders, “We teachers need to tell our stories, because true classroom narratives offer an important alternative to other prevalent modes of discourse about school life. There are competing narratives out there about this profession of ours that are dangerous, and our classroom stories resist and complicate them.” It’s certainly harder to bash teachers after reading these stories, and that matters, but the value of teacher lore extends beyond what it communicates to outsiders. Teacher lore
also has profound effects on those who write it. Kim Hecko noted that she writes about her teaching in order “to stay connected to the humanity at the core of her profession.”

I want to talk now about what writing teacher lore does for the teachers themselves. Gillespie notes that the most pernicious effects of these outside narratives are in “the arena of the teacher’s heart.” “…when I write about my teaching, I’m seeking perspective by keeping my own story of this intense work in all its sorrow and joy, challenge and success. This unvarnished account of my work helps keep me going as a teacher, the habit of writing having become a small ceremony of gratitude for a life of teaching.”

Done honestly, teacher lore reveals our vulnerability to us in a way that we can’t afford to look at in the moment. In the moment we act, but writing about that moment later allows us to sit with our vulnerability and see what it can teach us. Teaching can be intensely private. Teacher lore opens the classroom door. The process of writing it and revising it can reveal our teaching to ourselves. In the words of one writing project teacher, “The product showed others, but the process showed me.”

Part of the process is listening to each other’s emerging stories as they find their meaning. Respect can come from simply listening. Gretchen Swartz notes how it breaks through our stereotypes about each other: “When you hear someone’s story from their own lips, you know the emotional weight of their stories, then I can’t say someone fits into a particular mode anymore.” As we listen, we come to see each other as complex people, and not as this or that kind of teacher. Teacher lore also reminds us of the sacred trust placed in us, by students, the wider public, and by the parents who drop their children at our doors each day. Externalizing our work by writing our stories reminds us of that responsibility, and of the significance of our work. I am struck by what Niki Breault wrote about how in that moment with her student at the desk, she “thought about what it meant to be a teacher.” Through suffering the vulnerability of exposing our teaching to others, we find new significance, new themes and meanings. While these meanings can be affirming or troubling, they always reveal our work as meaningful, important, and interesting.

Teacher lore can also record the moments of transcendence that keep us going. I want to end by going back to Jean Robins’ story of her first year of teaching. At the end of her piece, she shows us a scene from a few months later in that first year, which provides a different view of Kiama, the student who slid so dramatically into the water fountain on that first day of school.

I was reading a book to the class about Martin Luther King, Jr., having learned after a few months that there was only one activity that would guarantee hushed silence and complete attention from my extremely lively students. Reading aloud. … Usually we sat on a big brown carpet in the back of the room, but that day I was standing in front of the class, up by the chalkboard, and the students were seated at their desks. It was a large format picture book biography of King. They listened with interest to his life story. I got to the part where King addresses the crowds at the 1963 march on Washington. The author had included an excerpt from the “I Have a Dream” speech.
As I began to read those words aloud, looking at my students’ upturned faces, I choked up with emotion. I couldn’t continue reading. I just stood without speaking in front of my class. I can still feel the silence in that classroom. It hung in the air for perhaps a full minute.

Then, not making a sound, Kiama slipped from his chair and walked to the front of the classroom. He took the book from my hands, and, standing beside me, began to read aloud to the class. He read with a clear, expressive voice. His classmates listened intently. When he finished reading, Kiama closed the book, handed it back to me, and returned to his desk. I smiled, thanked him, and carried on with the day.

As we all do in our classrooms every day. We carry on.

Ultimately, teacher lore is about seeing. For outsiders, it is about seeing the work of teachers, so that they can begin to recognize and appreciate it. For teachers, it is about seeing our students and the complexity of our relationships with them. It is also about seeing ourselves, seeing ourselves and our work in community with other teachers, and knowing anew how vitally important this work is. I feel blessed to have received so many stories and to have had the opportunity to share them with you.

Thank you.

Works Cited:


