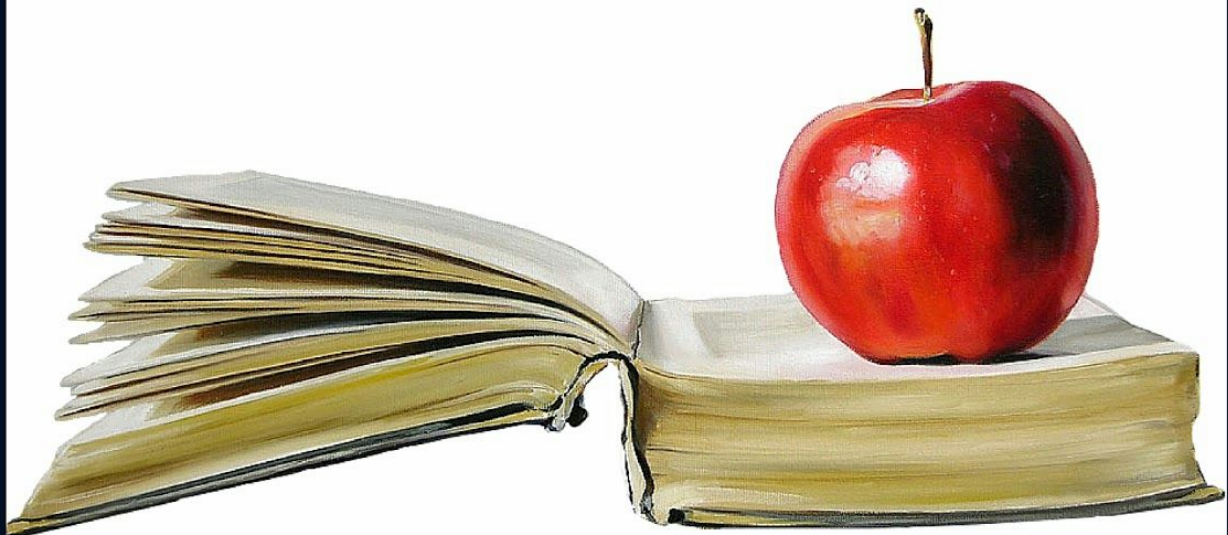


**WHAT I HAVE  
LEARNED**



**TWO YEARS OF CONNECTED  
EDUCATION**

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Some of the most important lessons we'll learn in our lives will come from the people we spend each day with, some we never even meet. Some see what we can't -- who we could be -- and teach us how to become better versions of ourselves. Others will say the words we need to hear even if we don't realize it at the time. And some will do work in such spectacular fashion that we have no choice but to attempt something remarkable ourselves.

I learned a lot from the people I [interviewed](#), [blog posts](#) I wrote, [workshops](#) I conducted, and [friends](#) I have made in the two years that *Talks with Teachers* has been in existence. I'm going to try to make a public account of what it has meant to me as I learned from exceptional educators and improved my teaching as a result.

From [Carol Jago](#), who first believed in the mission of *Talks with Teachers*, I learned of the satisfaction of permanence. She spent her entire career at Santa Monica High School, working from the same desk for over 30 years. As great an English teacher as she was, she never left.

From [Jeff Charbonneau](#), the 2013 National Teacher of the Year, I learned that we should strive to be more than teachers to our students, we should be really interesting people in their eyes. We can, and should, put down a stack of tests and do something exciting, something marvelous for ourselves, and we will be better in the classroom because of it.

I learned from Mark Barnes, author of [Assessment 3.0](#), that the moment you put a number on an assessment, the learning stops. We should value the feedback we give over the number of grades in a grade book. Geez, we have lost sight of how important that is.

I learned so many great things from [Sarah Brown Wessling](#) over the years, not the least of which is that having children makes you realize what it is like to want the world for

someone else. This responsibility, to someone else's child, is one that we should not take lightly.

Jennifer Gonzalez, who blogs at [The Cult of Pedagogy](#), has taught me that in learning, we teach, and in teaching, we learn. Because of her curiosity to learn, she has created a fantastic blog that is teaching us all.

From [Michael Dunlea](#), a 2nd grade teacher in New Jersey, I learned that, despite the 10-year gap in grades, his classroom is not that different from mine. He is a teacher that leads with the heart, and when the heart speaks, students listen.

[Chris Lehman](#) taught me to write along with my students. I had often used Atticus' line about walking a mile in someone else's shoes in my everyday life, he made me realize that it should be true in the classroom as well. Now, I write what they write. They see me do it. I experience what they experience. And in doing so, I have a better understanding of what it means to be a student.

I take the wisdom that I learned from [Dave Burgess](#) wherever I go. He said to me, "The negative teachers aren't on Twitter. No one that hates their job comes home from work, eats dinner, then hops on Twitter for an hour if they hate what they do." Thanks to him I have found my [tribe](#).

Todd Finley has modeled what it means to live and teach through the force. "*The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us; it binds the galaxy together.*" – [Obi-Wan Kenobi](#)

I have never felt the power of a dynamic speaker any more than when [Dorina Sackman](#) spoke at the first Talks with Teachers Summit. She taught me that if I can combine wit, research, and enthusiasm, I can capture the attention of any adolescent.

We all know that content matters. But [James Sturtevant](#), a social studies teacher in Ohio, taught me that true learning cannot occur unless we build meaningful relationships with our students.

I would be a student of [Elana Leoni](#), the social media manager at Edutopia, any day. From her, I learned that we all have a responsibility to listen if we are to understand. We have to support others if we are to grow ourselves.

I can say with certainty that I would not be the educator I am today if it were not for Ruth Areseneault, Jay Thompson, Susan Barber, Jori Krulder, and all the teachers in my Voxer PLN. They taught me that if we all share our experiences and insights with open minds and empathetic ears, hope will prevail.

Most adults make assumptions about what happens in school based on their experiences from 20-30 years ago. [Tony Sinanis and Joe Sanfelippo](#) taught me that we can use social media to share the wonderful things that happen in school. In doing so, we can re-write a new narrative and change those outdated assumptions.

[Rebecca Mieliwocki](#), the 2012 Teacher of the Year, reminded me that our classrooms need to be a safe space for our students. Through the turmoils of adolescence, they need places of comfort, security, and familiarity, and the classroom should be their shelter from the storm.

My repertoire of tricks and tips has been augmented thanks to Ariel Sacks' [Whole Novels for the Whole Class: A Student-Centered Approach](#). She also taught me that teachers should be graceful presences in the community whenever they can.

[Julia Thompson](#) has been a wonderful source of inspiration, wisdom, and opportunity. She taught me that even though we teach students skills each day, the larger and more lasting goal is to teach them about the civilized world.

Finally, I end with the person I miss most, the late [Grant Wiggins](#), who talked to me about the importance of effective models in the classroom. John Lennon once said, "Count your age by friends, not years. Count your life by smiles, not tears." I never had the chance to tell him what a joy it was to read his blog and the delight I had each time a new post arrived in my inbox.