

Introduction

*"If you've heard this story before, don't stop me,
because I'd like to hear it again."
— Groucho Marx*

Stories. Nearly everyone loves a good one. Stories engage us. They help us remember things. Stories can make us laugh and they can make us cry. They have the power to make us *feel*.

When I'm in church, I love when my pastor tells a story to illustrate a point in his message. Every time he utters a phrase like, "A few years ago" or "Let me tell you about the time when," my ears perk up. I lean forward in my chair. *Every* time. Why? Because I know a story is coming. I know he's about to drop some truth on me in a fashion that will not only be entertaining but long-lasting.

Storytelling is an extremely effective instructional strategy, but don't just take my word for it. Research has shown that listening to a good story can cause the brain to produce cortisol and oxytocin, neurochemicals responsible for increasing focus and creating feelings of connection and empathy (Zak, 2013). Focus. Connection. Empathy. Ingredients for making learning memorable.

INTRODUCTION

Did you ever have a teacher who was a master storyteller? I did. It was my first year of college in a history class. I don't remember the professor's name, but what I do remember is that during every single class — *every single class* — he had me on the edge of my seat as he masterfully spun tales of the Magna Carta and the fall of Constantinople. I don't remember him ever using notes. He just stood at the front of the room, periodically making illustrations on the chalkboard (yes, a chalkboard) and passionately took content many would consider boring and made it come alive.

So what's better than a good story? A story with a message. That's my goal for this book. I love sharing. I *really* love sharing. Writing that reminds me of Weston Kieschnick (@Wes_Kieschnick), one of my eduheroes, who says about himself, "I love teaching. No, really. It's a problem." That's me with sharing. I am a firm believer that the field of education is transformed when teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals — anyone who works with kids — shares their wisdom and expertise with others. This book is my humble attempt at making my contribution. I'm not sure how much wisdom I possess, but one thing I do know is this — after more than two decades in education, I have a ton of stories to tell.

A little background before we get started. I entered the field of education in 1996 and spent the first 15 years of my career teaching fourth and fifth grade in southern California. In 2011, I was given the opportunity to move into an administrative position in my district and spent the next two years serving as an

STORIES OF EDUINFLUENCE

assistant principal at the middle-school level. In 2013, I was again blessed with a new opportunity, this time to lead an elementary school as its principal. As I write this, I am in year six as the lead learner of Alta Murrieta Elementary (Go, Mustangs! #AltaRocks).

It's important to note that in the early part of my career, I had no aspirations to move into administration. None. Zero. In fact, when people would ask, "So, do you want to be a principal someday?" my response would be something like "Are you crazy? No way!" See, I became a teacher to be a teacher. I had no long-range plan that had me teaching for "x" number of years and then becoming a principal by a certain point in my career. I'm not knocking that mindset. Some people know that's what they want, set a goal and work hard to accomplish it. That just wasn't me. I wanted to be a classroom teacher, I became a classroom teacher, and a classroom teacher I would remain. Or so I thought. Administrators I worked under saw something in me I didn't see in myself and nudged me down the school leadership path. Though I initially resisted, I began to feel a calling in that direction. After several years, I answered the phone.

So back to the stories. Through my experiences in the classroom and front office, I have seen time and time again the incredible influence a teacher can have on the lives of children and the other adults around them. In a society fascinated with superheroes, I am reminded every day that the real superheroes live among us, wielding the superpower of **EduInfluence** in classrooms, front offices, cafeterias and on

INTRODUCTION

playgrounds. If you work with children, you are a superhero! Your words and actions have the power to shape the character of those you serve, to steer them toward greatness and to make them feel loved. This is an awesome responsibility and we have two choices when it comes to how we respond. We can 1) choose to be completely freaked out by this (“Oh, my goodness! What if I mess them up?”) or 2) embrace the challenge and say to ourselves, “What an opportunity!”

This book is divided into chapters, each focusing on a unique power you possess, a facet of your influence. Each power is centered on a particular belief, a belief that if embraced, can transform your practice. To illustrate these powers, I’ll share stories from my experiences, both successes and failures. We learn more from our mistakes than from hitting the bullseye and, believe me, I’ve missed the target more times than I’d like to admit. It’s my hope that by sharing my stories, even the ones I’m not proud of, I can help others become better educators. Student names have been changed to preserve their anonymity, but every story you read actually happened. There’s no fiction here. At the end of each chapter you’ll find questions for reflection to help you take what you’ve read and apply it in your own classroom, office or at home with your own kids.

If you’re looking for a book written by someone who has this education thing all figured out, I hope you saved the receipt. Sorry, but that’s not me. I’m just a guy who loves kids, loves his job, has learned a few things over the years, and is looking to share what he’s

STORIES OF EDUINFLUENCE

learned. But if you're an educator who has ever become discouraged and asked yourself, "Am I making a difference?" this book is for you. If you're looking for some encouragement and inspiration conveyed through stories that will make you smile, laugh and even cry, this book is for you. Because you *are* making a difference. You are powerful, more than you realize. You are a life changer, a superhero filled with EduInfluence.

So grab a cup of coffee or your favorite drink and settle into your favorite chair. It's story time!