

PREFACE



WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

This is the fifth book I've published, and like every piece of writing, it begins with what Peter Elbow described as "an itch" to say something. With my other books, the itch was to help teachers confer, or improve independent reading, or cultivate student agency. What springs to mind for this project is that I wrote this book to cultivate *teacher* agency. Through teacher agency, student agency arrives as a happy by-product. I wrote this book to try to quell the teacher burnout I see all around. I wrote it imagining it as a graduation gift to new teachers; as a book to get early career teachers through rough times; and to help dispirited, seasoned teachers to reclaim their strength. I want every teacher to remain in the classroom and only leave the profession for all the right reasons. I want all teachers to feel passionately engaged and experience full ownership of how they teach. My goal is to help you to be authentically, fully "you" in the classroom—to teach like yourself, not like a robot, or a pirate, or a champion, or a superhero. You don't need those razzle-dazzle likenings. You just need you.

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Unfortunately, in the United States 150,000 new teachers are trained each year, yet half of them quit within their first five years of teaching (Education International, 2017). While there is no single reason why early career teachers leave and experienced teachers feel burnout, a common theme that resonates with teachers is an overemphasis on accountability, standards, testing, and a narrative of mistrust of teachers' expertise. In addition, many teachers are in a crisis of confidence. Based on magazine articles I've read in recent months, news stories, conversations with educators, comments in social media, and the reported numbers of teachers downloading resources from Teachers Pay Teachers, I think it's fair to say that teachers nationwide are experiencing a profound loss of trust in themselves. There are many reasons for this lack of self-trust. A teacher may face roadblocks such as a lack of sound educational materials and curriculum or policies that get in the way of solid instruction. The net effect is self-doubt, a tendency to outsource decisions, and too many educators experiencing imposter syndrome. These trends can no longer be ignored, and I want to help.

Children are, by nature, empathic and can sense when a teacher is coming across as inauthentic and is playing a role due to burnout, pressure, lack of support, or fear of a new initiative. As a result, students may become anxious, guarded, or learn to play the game of school just to get by. We know that students learn more from teachers they trust and with whom they have a strong relationship. And students can't form strong relationships with teachers if they are not showing up as their true selves.

To stop this cycle, we teachers do not need fads, quick fixes, or magic bullet-style “kit” curriculum. Instead, we need a deep sense of self, a confidence in our practice, and the freedom to show up fully as ourselves. These “self-skills,” if you will, are rarely addressed in preservice teacher education programs or professional development. While the confidence of any practitioner to some degree has to develop through experience, the concepts underlying the authentic self can be taught and ought to be taught in teacher education programs. Novice teachers enter the field with knowledge of standards, assessment, and lesson planning. While these basics are important, they are not enough to keep teachers engaged, happy, and motivated over the long haul. I envision an education system where every teacher feels prepared and empowered to teach like themselves, focusing on core values and living them day in, day out with their students.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

This book is organized around five big ideas that both novice and veteran teachers can explore so that they can step fully into their roles as authentic teachers. Whether you are a new teacher trying to figure out who your authentic teacher self is or an experienced teacher who has seen the pendulum swing back and forth and is looking for some solid ground, this book is meant to help you. If I could, I would sit down with each of you, sip a cup of tea, and listen to your teaching story. What do you value? What successes have you experienced? What challenges keep you up at night? I would then share my stories—how I learned through both the good days and the very hard days of my teaching. What follows is a brief explanation of how I set up this book almost like a series of conversations. The book is divided into seven chapters, and next I explain what you might want to think about as you read each one.

Chapter 1 sets the foundation for what it means to teach like yourself and why authentic teaching is so important. I suggest you read this chapter asking yourself, “What does it mean to me to be an authentic teacher right now?”

Chapters 2 through 6 focus on five practices for teaching like yourself, and they comprise what I call the Teach Like Yourself Manifesto,

which we'll go through in Chapter 7. These practices start with getting clear on your why (your core beliefs) and then aligning your why with your how. Your how entails your teaching practices, relationships, professional learning, and your self-care. These chapters help you consider how you can match your teaching to your own inner compass and not only survive but thrive as an authentic teacher. I suggest you read each of these chapters asking yourself the following questions:

- “What are my core beliefs about teaching?” (Chapter 2)
- “How can I align my teaching practices more fully to my core beliefs?” (Chapter 3)
- “How can I build stronger and more balanced relationships with my colleagues, students, and their families?” (Chapter 4)
- “In what ways can I drive my own professional growth and learning?” (Chapter 5)
- “How can I take care of my whole self, so I can show up healthy and ready to teach each day?” (Chapter 6)

Chapter 7 brings us back to the vital importance of authentic teaching and elaborates on the manifesto from the inside cover so you can teach like yourself each day. This chapter is a call to action to help you focus on what matters most. I suggest you ask yourself, “How can I choose to teach like myself each day, and how can I encourage my colleagues to do the same?”

THREE RECURRING FEATURES

Many of the books I read about teaching paint the rosiest picture, make the strategies seem easy to implement, or distill teaching down into steps and gimmicks. But real, honest, vulnerable teaching comes from a much deeper and messier place. I chose to include three main elements in the chapters that work in tandem to help you be your most authentic self. The three features are personal stories, research-based practices, and reflection sections for you to step back and consider the teacher you want to be.

Personal Stories

I could have cut out my personal stories and stuck to the research and reflection, but as a teacher I have seen how much we can learn from hearing each other's stories. Brené Brown (2015) writes, “When we deny our stories, they define us. When we own our stories, we get to write a brave new ending.” She goes on to explain that owning our stories is

standing in our truth. I couldn't write a truthful book about authentic teaching without sharing some of my mess-ups, traumas, and aha! moments. If you find yourself cringing at some of them, know that each of these moments was a major learning experience for me. In fact, I likely learned more from the uncomfortable parts of my teaching life than I did from the easy ones. I also included the stories of other teachers and administrators through video clips at the beginning of each chapter so we can learn from multiple educators' experiences. All of the videos can be viewed on the companion website at <http://resources.corwin.com/teachlikeyourself>.

I suggest you read these stories as teachable moments. See if you can find the common element in your own teaching experience. When I share a story of misjudging a colleague, think about the places and times when you may have done this too. When I share a story of connecting with a student, give yourself a few minutes to recall your similar experiences. I also suggest you look for the larger themes within the stories. Consider why I shared this story. You may ask yourself, "What did I take away from this story?" or "Where and why am I reacting to this story?" or "How can I learn from this story, without having to go through the exact same experience myself?"

Research-Based Practices

A second element of the chapters is research-based practices that come from education, leadership, and psychology. I included the research so that you understand the why behind the practices and also so you leave with some concrete ideas to go back and try. For example, in Chapter 4 I offer some research on how to cultivate strong, supportive, and balanced relationships with colleagues and include a list of what the research suggests. This list can serve as an anchor you can come back to as a proactive process of forming relationships or as a learning space for how to help shift a less-than-ideal relationship.

The research is always tied to some very practical tools, ideas, and experiences that I highlight in summary boxes. I suggest you pause after each summary box and take stock of what you already do as a teacher and what else you might try. I am confident that you will be reading about research that confirms what you already do. When this happens, smile, feel the confidence that fills you up, and remind yourself to keep doing that practice. You may also find some research that is different, new, or even contradictory to some of what you do as a teacher. When you encounter these places, I suggest you take time to consider if and how you may want to try out the new information. It doesn't hurt to try

something new and see how it goes. I trust you to make shifts in manageable moves that will work for you and your students.

Invitations to Reflect

A third element of the book is reflection spaces for you to think, try something out, and then write about it right in the book. This is meant to be a safe space for you to not just read about a practice but to live it and write about what you discover. It is the space for you to write your teaching story and see it on the page. Once you write it down, you can make some choices: Do I want to share this with a mentor, colleague, or teaching partner? Do I want to make a major shift based on what I just wrote down? Do I see all the possibility that exists in my teaching, and can I capture that on the page? Can I see a more authentic version of my teacher self?

We know that being a reflective teacher is essential for growth and sustainability. Yet we often lack the time or support to sit and reflect on a regular basis. Give yourself the gift of time, and support yourself by reflecting on the questions and activities described in the book.

USE THE BOOK TO COACH YOURSELF

I think of this book as a sort of self-coaching tool. You can use it to take yourself on a journey into a deeper, more grounded, and even more satisfying career as a teacher. Coach Michael Bungay Stanier (2016) explains that “coaching should be a daily, informal act, not an occasional formal ‘It’s coaching time!’ event” (p. 7). He also explains that “coaching can fuel the courage to step out beyond the comfortable and familiar, can help people learn from their experiences and can literally and metaphorically increase and help fulfill a person’s potential” (p. 10). This doesn’t mean you can’t also work with a coach or mentor, as this is a wonderful opportunity, if you have one. It does mean that you can also coach yourself to fulfill your potential as a teacher. No one else knows what lies in your heart, what really motivated you to complete a teacher preparation program, and why you lay awake at night worrying about certain students. No one else knows what you say to yourself in your head as a lesson flops or shines. No one else knows what your authentic teaching self really looks like. As you read this book, please be patient and kind, taking it one practice at a time, allowing yourself the time and space to coach yourself more fully into a more authentic self.