**Daniel:** Hello, everyone. Welcome back to *aka Teacher*. And today's episode; “Reading the Room.” I'm Daniel, and I'm here with my fellow co-hosts, Shelton, Joanna and Angie. And we're gonna begin with a little check-in. How are you all feeling about the first few days or weeks of school? What hat or hats have you worn this month?

**Joanna:** Oh, I'll start out. Actually right now. Um, you know, I'm still feeling really peaceful and encouraged. I'm in the honeymoon phase, you know, uh, and, and it's, it's literally a thing and not that things are gonna fall apart at all, but things can be sometimes, really, especially, like I said, peaceful and encouraging, um, right at the beginning. So I'm currently in the peaceful and encouraging stage, um, in this school year opening.

**Shelton:** Um, I'd say I'm in a building stage, just building relationships, building a foundation to endure what the year is gonna bring, whatever that is. And yeah, just, just build it, build it.

**Joanna:** Dig it!

**Angie:** Um, so I think right now in these first few days, I'm just excited to get to know new staff members, getting excited to know new colleagues. I've got a brand new teacher in the classroom right next door to me, um, that's on my science teaching team. So I work with him pretty closely. He's a brand new first year teacher. And, um, it's really fun because he's good. And, um, like you can just like, like, you're like looking at him, do stuff, hearing him, talking with kids, he's running a couple ideas by you and you're like, "You we're meant to be a teacher." And, uh, that's, that's really fun. Like, it's really fun to see somebody who's also just enjoying themselves. And, um, so yeah, it's been actually like really enjoyable because it's fun to see someone who's kind of a natural at this job and be like, "Yes, I'm excited to hang out with you."

**Daniel:** Shelton, I hear the building. I'm doing a lot of reading myself. I feel like the hat is as a researcher. You know, we're always reading, we're always researching and doing a lot of reading around liberatory design right now and trying to bring that into the work. Um, so we've all had a couple of weeks in the books. And as you're reading the room, whether it's of the classroom or of the school or the community, how is everything going so far? What is the vibe like in your classroom or your school or your community right now?

**Angie:** I think in my school right now, everybody's I think ready for a fresh start. This year feels different obviously than like a bunch of years ago, but different than last year. You know, we, we wore masks last year until March at my school. And it just feels like a little bit like, huh, are you guys ready to have like a fresh new year? And I can really feel that energy amongst the kids. This year's seniors haven't had a normal year of school since freshmen, no, I think since eighth grade. Do the math, is it since eighth grade? I mean, if do we count last year as normal?

**Joanna:** No.

**Angie:** I don't know that I would.

**Shelton:** What's normal?

**Angie:** I know. Right? But like, so, so like this year's seniors, I feel like get this chance to kind of really enjoy this school year. It's kind of fun to watch freshmen come in and they're like, falling over each other as they walk through the hallway. And there's just like that energy that you see in school where it's just like, everybody's ready to go. And, uh, nobody's crabby yet. I, Joanna, I agree with you about that honeymoon phase. Like the kids are still following the rules. Like, they're still like up for it. And like, "Oh, they said, wait, I'll wait" kind of thing. And so, it is very honeymoon because eventually the kids are like, "I'm sick of your rules and I'm just doing what I want."

**Shelton:** Eye roll. Yeah. I would say the word comes to mind "anticipation." Cause again, I'm all over the district, so I get different things from different buildings, but I'm ready.
**Joanna:** Oh, I think the vibe is, I think it's complicated actually because yes, I see what you're talking about. I feel from students actually kind of, I feel students are a little polarized. I think the, the majority are ready to be back and I've noticed like, people are friendly. Like I said, kids really are like, "Hi. Hi. Hi. Hi. Hi." And it's really cute, you know? Um, and I, and I love that on the other hand, if, if you are not feeling that the, the polar opposite of that is people who are really not okay and seem super fragile, you know? So I've seen some students who are super fragile. Um, so, that vibe is, you know, so I'm kind of seeing like two extremes. Um, and then I think the complex part, I do think again, is with staff of like, we're not sure what the vibe's gonna be in terms of one,

Right. We, a lot of people are new, like a lot at where I work. And so it is like, right. I, I don't know you, and of course I'm gonna extend this, um, professional benefit of the doubt, but I don't, you know, so there's a lot of new people. And then in our district, our superintendent announced on the second day that he's a finalist to be a superintendent in another district. So that really puts people in, you know, there it one, it causes them to question all the initiatives because again, sadly a lot of times, because, because the institution of education so far, like I said, isn't, hasn't really been about a community vision. And it's, it's largely tied to the individuals who have decision making power. You know, people question that right away. They're like, "oh, so everything we talked about day one, maybe we're not doing," because they view the initiatives as attached to this individual.

And so there's, there's just like, question mark, you know? And, and then that, like, everybody knows their current position, you know, like where they fall and anytime you're gonna get a new leader. Right? And we don't even know if we're getting a new, new leader yet, but we're kind of like, "Well, he is a finalist. He is applying. So what does this mean?" Um, you know, and so I think then that brings in the complexities for staff. Um, and so we're working really hard, I think, as colleagues to one another to remind ourselves, like, it's really us, we work with the students no matter who comes and goes. We're here, we do this work, and you know, so that's, that's why I say it's all complex.

**Daniel:** Yeah. Joanna, I appreciate you talking about the complexity because it is. It is complex. And, you know, I think when we're talking about all of what people are bringing and, checking in with people and checking in with ourselves, uh, I think sometimes you hear this referred to as the oxygen mask rule, right? You put the oxygen mask on yourself, first. Take care of yourself and then the person next to you. But I think as educators, we very much wanna take care of the people around us first and sometimes to our own detriment. And just kinda curious in your, all of your contexts, how are you all checking in on yourself and/or the people around you?

**Shelton:** That, that self check is a daily thing for me, like start my morning with a nice little run or some exercise, then I'll get some good music. It's a party every morning at my house. So I like to be the, I like to go with the flow until I have to be the flow. So I like to keep that energy just in case I need it, but just, yeah, just to focus and the intent for the day and just staying on purpose. I'm, I'm, I'm a firm believer and I'm here for a reason and I'm doing my purpose. So just, I like to stay intentional as much as I can.

**Angie:** I would say right now for me, um, the check-in's happening in two spaces. So first for teachers, colleagues, and then also with the kids, I teach mostly juniors. So a lot of kids come back for senior year asking me for letters of recommendation, uh, from their junior year experience. And so that's a fun opportunity for kids to come back, and for me to kind of hear about their summers, hear about their classes. But, um, I do worry about kids a lot this time of year because it, I don't know what it's like at other schools, I actually would love to know. Um, but at our school, there's a very high number of kids who take AP classes. It's very much like you better be in four AP classes your senior year, or you could go live under a bridge. Like it is, it is, seems like the, I, the high expectation is just so high.

**Angie:** And you're, you're kind of like, I feel like I'm like the mother who knows better. It's like, "I don't know if it's a good idea you're taking five AP classes." And they're like, "No, I want to, it'll be great. Everything will be wonderful about it." And you're like, "I'm worried about how you're gonna feel in January." Um, and so there is that level of like concern for the kids when you're like, you're biting off more than you could chew. You know, we see that with each other as adults. But when you see that with a kid, it's hard because like kids might listen to you or they might just like, totally be like, "Well, she doesn't know how to get into college. You have to do this." You know? And so I find myself worried about my kids from that standpoint of like, oh, I hope you're not doing more than you should already. You know,?

**Daniel:** I think part of the complexity is a lot of the newness too. And there's the challenges and opportunities that come with a lot of the new relationship building and culture building that needs to happen.

**Angie:** All right, everyone, this next part of the podcast is called “True Story” where we'll get a chance to share a personal experience related to today's topic. So I have a really good story. It's back to school night this week and it, so it's meet the teacher. All the parents come in, they walk their kids' schedules and it goes from like 7:00 PM to 9:09 PM. It's super late night for all the teachers and the, the parents walk their kids' schedules. They spend about 10 minutes in every class and the teacher has nine minutes and 30 seconds to be like, "Hello, this is my class. This is who I am. This is what I teach. This is how I teach. These are the things your kids will be expected to do. All right, bye!" And, um, one thing that my science teaching team has really leaned in on is the concept of no homework.

Um, we believe that homework is, is layered. One of the things being it's an equity issue. One of the things being that we have students who are over involved, we have students who have higher levels of expectations at home, or more responsibilities than maybe even I have when I get home at the end of the day. And they were just at school for seven hours, like, let's take a break. And so we are very big on, you're gonna work in class, all class. We're not gonna have a bunch of free time, but then you're not gonna have any homework. And at the end of, like, that little spiel with the kids, a parent was like, "I totally disagree. You should have homework. What's going on here." And, and we don't tell the parents, like all the reasonings that I just shared with you guys, we're just like, "Hey, we're gonna have your kid work really hard all the time. And then there'll be no homework. Yay!" And this, this parent was very adamant of like, "I totally disagree. I don't, I think that you should have homework. And then he got up and he, like, walked out of the room, shaking his head," and another parent while the guy was still in the room goes, "Well, I really appreciate it. Thank you!

**Joanna:** At first I was like, oh, time to call Daniel in the office of research and innovation to back you up on the, uh, homework.

**Angie:** Well, and it's so hard, it's so hard because like, you know, like all night, all the parents are like, "Oh, thank you. Thank you for thinking about that. Yes. Thank you." And then, you know, you have like one, two people who kind of disagree with you and then that's where your brain sits all the time. But like, yeah, I, I'm curious about either back to school night stories, beginning of the year stories, or even how do we feel about, uh, homework?

**Joanna:** I don't know if I can say something specific, like to that question, but back to your story makes me think about, um, you know, I've shared that I do an innovative, like alternative program and just anecdotal observation is, dads struggle more with it than moms in terms of the idea of how school could look different and how expectations could be different. And again, I'm not, you know, saying this to men across the board. It just really has been something that I help my students and their families work through. Um, because in my world too, the, the kids will get accused of taking the easy way out by asserting themselves to find a program that actually meets their needs and they feel comfortable and that they enjoy. Um, and so that, that made me think a little bit of that. And even, even maybe Mad Dad could be, could be reasoned with and, and talked with, but, you know, it's more again how we take things in ourselves at first, right. And we put it up against our own schema of what is school and, you know, and so his, his response versus the other response. But, uh, yeah, that's great, Angie, that, that's a great little, just, just a tiny little idea of we're really trying to do what's best and make it work for everyone.

**Daniel:** I think something to note of the parent who walked out shaking their head is they're shaking their head because of a change that they disagree with, which says to some extent that what was happening before was working. So whether it's homework or not, and they might have not have spoken up about it before, because it was working and we tend to speak up when things aren't going our way. But how many of those things, for how many of those things are that we think this needs to change and we could do better, are actually working really well for our families or for students? That's something that came to mind. And I think I would wanna unpack it in two levels. And number one is, what does the homework look like? You know, in the case of the flipped classroom, we kind of redefined what the homework actually looked like, which tended to change people's minds of whether or not it was useful at, at home, which is connected to the second thing, which is the purpose of homework. So not only what is the student doing at home, but what is the point of doing whatever activity or task at home it is? So I'd be interested to connect with that parent.

**Joanna:** Right? Well, and I can't remember if I've shared this with you guys or not before, but one of the, the, I don't know, something that guides my work is, is what I call the four domains of learning, where we are really intentional in saying that there's more to school than just academics. You know, that they're, you know, kids have the physical needs and emotional needs and social needs as well as intellectual needs, um, which we call academic, but really could just be, again, intellectual curiosity, exploration, all of this stuff. And right now, again, our current system is like, everything is in the direction of one domain, even though we know those other three domains are, are needed to learn, and, uh, we actually could facilitate within our schools. And so when I think about homework and, and or in our program, we get to say like, "Here, your homework actually is going to bed on time, moving your body, limiting your social media, being aware of things that regulate your nervous system, so that when you return, when you come here every day, you are, you know, you're in a space to take this all in."

Um, and so I know that's how we like to talk about it. We talk about those other domains as, as the homework piece, like yes, in school, we do a lot of this traditional, like academic side. And so, um, we can do these other things out, outside, and it, anyway, I have my whole thing about there's the four domains, but right now our current structure and everything we do is set up around one. And if we could set up around all four of 'em and balance those, we might have a different understanding and we'd certainly have a different result.

**Daniel:** It sounds like speaking to the purpose of homework, you're saying the purpose of that particular homework is to honor the whole child, not just their academic development.

**Angie:** Yeah. Well, and I think that, so a lot of times, I, I do think sometimes the way we react to things comes out of a, a space of fear and not fear like, "Oh, I'm gonna get in a car accident," but like, worry. And I, and I have had this debate about homework with many people over the course of like, maybe six years. And for some people that I talk to who seem to really live in this space of like, "No, I want homework. Homework is good." I think they believe that homework equates to work ethic and that like, "Oh, if my kid doesn't have homework, they won't have a work ethic." Or "I had so much homework and now I am very successful it's cuz I did eight hours of homework every night." And to me I'm like work ethic begins at home in your community or like you have good work ethic probably because when you were six, your parents made you help clear the table every night, you know, like homework assigned by me randomly in a science class, isn't going to suddenly make your child a hard worker and the reverse, it's not going to suddenly make your kid a bum if there isn't any. And so I, I sometimes wonder if that's where it stems from. It's just like this concern that like, if they're given an easy way out, then they're never gonna work hard again.

**Joanna:** Well, and there's such an, a, they're kind of always is a misunderstanding of even childhood and child development. So like, what is the work of a child and how do we encourage that and support that inside and outside of school? Like what should be the work of a six year old versus a nine year old versus a 12 year old versus a 15 year old? You know, things to think about?

**Shelton:** I could speak on, I guess we had mentioned something about spirit, uh, parent expectation. And I do like certain in previous years back to school events, this hasn't happened currently, but I do notice a lot of black parents I can see 'em and I can feel like sometimes they don't feel welcome. So I just make it my point to go welcome 'em and sometimes I have to be the, I say the bridge, but also a translator. Cause I, I'm supposed to understand some of those parents don't understand some of the stuff that their kids get to. Cause I ask questions and I know the answers and then I keep digging and then it comes to look, man, I don't know. So then, I get to TA I get to translate some things. So I don't know. My, my thing about parent expectation is hard to expect things that you don't expect, meaning like you all were saying everybody's different, they got home, different home situations. So a general expectation for a parent to be involved or engage or engagement. It looks different for everybody. It may not be hands on or stuff like, uh, you know, what the, what some school systems expect. So I don't, yeah. I don't even know if that was a story. That's the only thing I could think of relating it to you all. So if I wasted your time, I apologize. Absolutely not. I feel, I feel accomplished. [laughs]

**Angie:** It's all valued.

**Daniel:** Well, let's say just to, just to keep going with, with homework, you know, and, and the purpose of it. So let's say to advocate for homework, let's say two reasons could be to establish this home and school connection, right? And that homework can be that way to tie the two together. So they don't seem like they're completely different domains that you go to school and you're one person and you go home and you're a different person. Or you go to school and there's certain expectations or a certain work ethic and you go home and there's a different one. So could the purpose of homework be establishing a home school, a home to school or school to home connection? Or another possibility is sort of connected to work ethic and this idea that we espouse of lifelong learning. Well, if we wanna learn throughout our entire lives, shouldn't we be learning throughout our entire day. And does homework keep us rooted to that value of lifelong learning?

**Shelton:** Daniel, you're getting real deep.

**Angie:** Wow. I'm literally writing this down. Like I'm in a professional development.

**Shelton:** I wanted to, but I got stuck. That was deep. Yeah, that was deep. Can you say that one more time please?

**Angie:** The lifelong learner one for real.

**Shelton:** Yeah. For the people in the back, say [it] one more time.

**Daniel:** Yeah. Home homework, potentially being the connection between home and school or the purpose of homework, being a connection to the value of lifelong learning.

**Shelton:** That's different. You said it a little different because I felt a little different.

**Daniel:** That was the short version. I…

**Angie:** It was like, lifelong learner, like day long learner. Like I gotta, I'm gonna learn my whole life. I'm gonna learn throughout my day.

**Joanna:** Day. Yeah. Well, and that's also really looking at it to Daniel in the asset sense, which in our current structures, homework is actually looked up, looked at in a deficit sense. Um, in terms of this is something that I'm really, again, deliberate about when I think of homeschool connections, I say, you know, to a lot of the families I'm working with school is a source of stress because it's constantly just bringing forward to you what your child is not doing. And then you're fighting over school instead of really, again, truly connected and joining over school and your child's development. So actually I was just at a, my daughter's volleyball game the other day. And her grandma was there and you know, she's just asking grandma questions. So she is just like, how's Nia doing in school, how's her grades? And I'm like, do you know, I never check my children's grades?

**Joanna:** I don't log into any of those systems I never have. And I never will.

**Shelton:** Why not? If you don't mind me asking?

**Joanna:** Because they're running their own lives, they, this, it is their education. It is not my thing to monitor and force them to comply. You know, they, they have to develop their own sense of self and responsibility. And I have found that that comes, and again, and it's not a source of stress and it's just kind of gone along. So yeah, people may think, I'm like, I'm a teacher and yet I'm the anti-teacher. Like I don't, uh, yeah, I don't check grades. I don't bother my kids.

**Angie:** You worry, but do you worry about [it], because my mom was the exact same way, but she was like, "I don't worry. I see 'em working all the time. I mean, they're obviously doin' stuff. I'm not worried."

**Joanna:** Yeah, well, you know, there's two things, not there's one, actually there's two things. One. Yeah. I'm not that worried. And two, you can't trust it. These automated grade systems, you can have an A and 15 minutes later, you got an F or the other way. And so that's part of it that you really can't trust it. And you know what, that really came to light for me when I was running one of my diversity clubs and the, my, the partner that I was running it with, he really believed like, oh, in order for us to take the kids out, we gotta check their grades. And if their grades stink, they can't come on the thing. And I was like, do you know how these grades...and he was a school psychologist. So he wasn't like a classroom teacher. And I was like, do you know...like, it's inaccurate.

It's not that it's inaccurate. You guys know what I'm saying? Like, it changes in the moment and there's lots of mistakes. And yet then that's, that's why I don't check as a parent either, because then you set me up for a fight with, you know what I mean? Like it's like, ding, ding, ding, you currently have zero or whatever. And then my daughter's like, mom, I did turn it like, again, no, this is not what I want school to be between us. And so anyway, I was started by saying like, Daniel was talking about homework in the asset sense, but there is so much, especially with automated grading systems that puts it in the deficit sense. And so, oh yeah, there could be a whole, you know, re-looking and redesigning of again, what are we connecting with parents over? And in what way? Is it in strength ways? Is it in deficit ways? We've also been, the kids have been clearing out their email accounts, you know, it's the new school year. And literally they have thousands of things in their email that are just like class notifications that you can only then ignore. You know what I mean? If your thing is just dinging all the time. So again, it's like put this thing in between us. It's kind of separated us from the purpose and value of learning.

**Angie:** We could go so much deeper into grades. We [could] have a whole podcast about grades.

**Joanna:** Oh yeah!

**Angie:** Not today though. Daniel, did you have back to school night with your own kids or Joanna?

**Daniel:** We've not had back to school night, but we've had initial conferences with teachers and you know, just a lot of those first beginning of the year interactions. And one of them was the other day and I was coming straight from work and there was a ton of unexpected traffic and I was late to pick up my kids and they're five and seven and a half. They're in elementary school and my daughter just started kindergarten. And, you know, if, if I'm late, they're gonna start to worry. And I was really stressing out, the traffic was stressing me out. And so I called the school and I just said, "It's Daniel. And I'm running late because of this traffic." And trying to get a message to the teachers. And the response was, "Uh, well, you've called the school nurse. Uh, but this is a great place. This is a great place to call, uh, instead of the office." And instead of redirecting me to the school nurse, she took my message very calmly and said, "Who are their teachers? And okay. I got, oh, there's someone here with a bloody nose, but look, I'm gonna keep talking with you," and just was handling, you could tell, handling so much on her end. And, you know, I think I got there maybe five minutes late, but I was in a panic.

**Joanna:** Yeah, it's a terrible feeling.

**Daniel:** And just to be, and just to be met with that calmness, that reassurance to someone who was dealing with their own emergencies at the school again, I think when we mentioned this before, and I think it was in the last episode, but putting the focus on those that are still in school. Just a huge appreciation to those who are in schools and, and doing the work for kids. And also as parents at home, trying to make it all work.

**Shelton:** Now it's time to move on to our look back segment of the show. Okay if we take a pause for the cause and, uh, take a look back on reflection avenue on, what's been going well and our practices this year, or some things you need to work on, or some wisdom you learn, do any of, uh, any of you have any, anything that's going well, some wisdom or something you need to work on?

**Daniel:** I'll jump back in. I've been, uh, you know, just something I think is, going well and it's really feeding off the energy of others, but really staying energized and staying creative. It's a space, I think whenever I fall out of it, something is not going well, and whether it's in my personal or professional life, what are the creative ventures that I'm seeking? Um, and I think always, uh, seeking that going after that is going well, uh, something to work on, I think I, you know, I just gave a shout out to the school nurse and I think I hold those appreciations in my head most of the time, but just practicing that daily gratitude to those around me. I think it's important, especially now that everyone around us, they're hearing those words of affirmation, they're seeing you, you know, take action to help them out. And yeah, really just, just practicing daily gratitude is something that I'm working on.

**Joanna:** My going-well is actually something really specific, but I'll share it. And it, again, I'll always talk like, I'm like, gosh, I hope this makes sense to you guys. But within my program, you know, I have these like, philosophies that endure, but right. What I love about, you know, how I approach it, like, evolves over time. So I have these things called the "productive worker traits," which are kind of like our standards in assessment. And they're very, again, external, they're the things you see, like attendance and punctuality, how organized are you? You know, how do you go about completing tasks? And so, and it goes on, but there's something very external in, in productive worker traits. And then there's something very internal, which is, is regulation versus disregulation and helping kids see, you understand just their own nervous system and, and how it's working and how it's feeling.

And I used to...and those, so those are like foundations, they're foundational understandings. And so something that I think is I'm doing really good at is integrating those more and helping the kids see how they're integrated. Um, and yeah, it was something, you know, so just this week I was like, "Aha!" You know, and just the way I was explaining it to them, you know, so again, a lot of right-season teaching is not like, I'm thinking about what I'm gonna say a week ago. You know, you're in the moment you're taking it all in, you're registering. You can see what people are vibing with. And so that just felt really good. My, my explanation, and then the connection the kids I could see had with that. And then we did some write up after and then reading that they, you know, that it did really come through.

So that was something that I was feeling really good about and right. Cuz it gets at that thing Shelton that you said that the kids need in a previous episode where they're, they're asking for those internals, you know where again, instead of looking at like, attendance and punctuality as like, are you here and are you on time? Simply, that's the external. The internal love; Well, who are you getting here for? And, and why are you coming and how, how does that make you feel all that kinda stuff? So I was feeling really good about that. And then something I think still, always to work on is, again, I, I do a program where often people are in need. And so I do get like, calls from desperate parents, you know, who can be like my kid is in this situation and they have to get here like, immediately.

And, um, not being able to operate like that because you really kind of can't either. And I could talk about that at length, in another episode, in terms of like, how do you really move someone through this stages of change so that they will be successful in a new environment? But it is still something I struggle with because like right, as a human and as a parent, I'm relating to you, you're suffering, your child is suffering. Um, and so how I take on those, you know, like I think I do good and in, in the phone calls and, and giving hope and still making the connection, but I do carry like, right. I'll feel your...I'll feel it. I hang up the phone and I feel your hurt too. And so that's always something that, um, is just, I don't know if I get better at, but it's something that I'm like, Ugh, it's in me. I, I feel bad.

Shelton (33:57):

Yeah, no, that's, that's deep people. They don't, people don't realize how we carry that. Cuz energy is tangible and how you, especially when you care, you just carry a lot of that too, when you don't think about it. So yeah. Angie, you got a...?

**Angie:** Well, I guess I, I'll keep mind kind of quick and just focus on where I wanna grow. Um, it kind of goes back to what Daniel was saying and that's really acknowledging the gratitude and those impressive moments. And um, already with all the kind of the group work that we do, community building, you can always really see kids who are definitely just a topnotch kid. You know, they're helping maybe a student who has a disability, they're patient, they're already showing leadership in a group. And the thing I wanna make sure that I'm really intentional about is sending a couple emails home or calling a couple people and just saying like, "Hey, your daughter's awesome. I can already tell it is day four and she's already a leader. Thanks. Thanks for raising a nice kid." You know, and so doing that right away. That's my goal.

**Shelton:** Awesome. Awesome. Thank you. It's important to reflect sometime, cause you gotta look back to see where you come from to know where you're going and to give you a perspective of your journey as a whole. So appreciate those stories.

**Joanna:** All right. So we are at our “Pass the Mic” section of our podcast and today we have, um, a story coming in from Tracy. And so thank you Tracy, for connecting with aka Teacher and to my fellow podcasters, listen up and then tell me what you think. Uh, here's what Tracy has to say. There are some really tough kids where I teach and it's so hard to try to be by your, it is so hard to be by yourself in a classroom when the student needs support, they could be destroying your classroom, flipping over bookcase or throwing chairs and garbage cans across the room. In those cases I ask for help immediately and often, not just like calling for help from the office, but also making sure you get on your principal's schedule to talk about what exactly the student needs to be successful, what things you've already tried that haven't worked. And once there's a plan, even if it's not perfect, making sure everyone involved understands the plan, write down to the music teacher or the lunch supervisor. Um, try not to take any of that high adrenaline and stress home. If you have a student who has extreme needs, that is not the year to work late or come in on weekends. As hard as it may be to have a classroom that isn't as beautiful as a catalog page or super polished lesson plans for the day, focus on your mental wellbeing. First, if you get screamed at all day, it is okay to just get some ice cream for dinner and veg out that night. So hearing Tracy's story, just some reactions like, can you relate? What does it make you think about? What do you think about her perspective?

**Shelton:** This used to be my life. About four years ago, I used to work at a particular school. This kid had special needs and every, I would say 20 minutes the whole day, like I knew the times he would explode, he would just jump up on the table, throw stuff around, threaten to cut his hair, the class have to evacuate. So, and that's what I, in the last episode I was talking about, I get a different role at school and I understand the bigger picture for teachers. So that's when I'm aware of those kind of situations. And I go take care of the situation as much as I can at least cuz some, you need professionals cuz of whatever details you gotta do, but at least to talk to the kid and give him support because behavior is communication. So I know that kid is he's crying up for some attention.

So communication, some love, so whatever I can do in that moment to take the energy off of that teacher, everything she explained that's, that's what I try to do. But again, like so much respect for you teachers. Like a lot of people, they, they just don't realize some of the things you go through. And like I say, that was my life. Like when I would go to this school, I literally, work out clothes, I'm run literally running down the hallway sweating and you just, you just know. So I can definitely feel with where that teacher is coming from and, and much respect to her and keep eating your ice cream.

**Daniel:** I think something I hear in Tracy's story is something that I would imagine resonates with many teachers and school staff right now. And it's that Tracy's tried a lot of things and tried multiple strategies, different approaches, and really exhausted her toolkit. And whether it's the pandemic, I think a lot of educators are saying I've tried everything that used to work and it's not working. And what do we do when we reach in for another tool or reach in a bag of tricks for something else. And there's nothing there, you know, and we reach out to those around us and they've tried it as well. Um, I think it's just a really tough situation to be in. And we start using some phrases, one that I heard that I, I kind of wanna unpack and it's that phrase of "tough students." And I think I've learned when I hear myself saying, um, that the, the, the student is tough or a certain person is tough to take a step back, not only for myself, but to take a step back and to think about what systemically is happening here? Whether it's the, in terms of the whole child, um, or what systemic pressures might there be on this child, because maybe it's a tough system that they're dealing with and what, what might be there.? And it just I've learned, it just leads to new insights and potentially a different perspective to view the child.

**Joanna:** Well, and I hear what, what you're really talking about is the difference between is behavior, something we deal with or is it something we understand? And depending on how you look at it and, and not just you again as the individual, because right, teachers are out here figuring it out. But again, how everything is set up is more on how do you deal with behavior than versus how do we understand behavior and, then when we understand that, then what we can do? I also am assuming that, um, Tracy's dealing with elementary. It sounds like an elementary story. Um, not sure. Um, but I just hear that…

**Angie:** I've seen that same story in the high school.

**Joanna:** Okay. Oh, okay. But I was gonna say, I hear a lot of this from my, from my elementary friends. Um, and so I don't have personal experience with that, but I, I just have heard the same same things from, um, and then just how distressing it is to, to everyone.

**Angie:** Yeah. I had a student a few years ago who was on the autism spectrum and nonverbal. And, um, I can remember it was literally the first day of school and he's pacing around the room and you can tell the other kids in the room are kind of like, "Whoa, what is happening right now?" And even like my like armpits, we're getting a little sweaty, just like trying to decide, okay, I set the tone right now with how I decide to reply. Like, what am I gonna say? Am I gonna acknowledge it? I'm gonna pretend like things are normal. What am I gonna do? And finally, I was just like, "Who's tired, anybody tired?" You know, everybody's kind of half acknowledging what I'm saying. I was like, "I'm really tired. And you know what? This student he's tired too, but he doesn't have the ability to just say I'm really tired. And so he's got that energy that he's getting out right now by moving about the room and he's still our classmate and he's feeling the exact way, exact same way you are. He just can't express it the same way and we're gonna continue learning. And hopefully we can all make sure that he feels more relaxed and that we can make this a place for everybody to learn." And so hats off to Tracy, cuz I have been there too with the sweaty pits, trying to decide what to do next. And it's, it's all, who knows where we're, what to do at that time. We're just doing our best one more tool in that toolbox.

**Joanna:** Right. And yet there's one aspect of Tracy's story that, um, I worry about the whole, the whole part about like how it, again, it goes into you and then you are eating ice cream and vegging out that night and how that has the potential to like impact the people you love and your space. And so again, just makes me think about how do we make a healthier space for everybody, like while we're at work so that when we come out of it, um, I feel Tracy in terms of we've got our coping mechanisms. Uh, but there's something that I hear about it in terms of as professionals. Um, you know, there there's just still work to do so. Thank you very much, Tracy, for sending in that story gave us a lot to think about and talk about much appreciated.

**Angie:** Yeah, absolutely. Thank you, Tracy. And thank you to everyone for listening. As we wrap up this episode, we want to remind you that whether you are a pre-service early career or veteran teacher, we want to hear from you. We want to hear your questions. We wanna hear your stories. You can record a voice memo or you can type it up and send it to education@pbswisconsin.org and make sure you put "aka teacher" in the subject line. We also wanna invite you to visit the [aka Teacher podcast website](https://pbswisconsineducation.org/akateacher/) to find helpful resources connected to today's episode. Thank you again for listening and we'll see you next time.