

Transcript: In Conversation with Regie: Mary Howard

Regie Routman: Hi, Mary Howard, I am so excited to be with you today in conversation with me about you celebrating wonderful you and just a great privilege to really, to celebrate you today. Talk about your life, not just your professional life, but your personal life, and how they interact.

I'd like to introduce you. Well, first of all, as my dear friend we met on Twitter. Let me say that first of all. I didn't know who you were. and after a while I couldn't not know who you were, because you were everywhere on Twitter and Facebook. And I guess the most important thing I want to say about you is, you are the most generous, kind-hearted, gracious person that I know professionally and personally.

And so it was really important to me to have you on the conversation, and to talk about what's really important in your life and your educational life and your personal life, which both are very interesting. You have been the voice of courage and reason for so many of us. So many times. It's happened to me where I see something that you've written in a blog or on Twitter, or someone has told me about it on Facebook. And I'm thinking, oh, thank goodness, she wrote, that I don't know if I would have had the courage to say it. And I'm like, Yes, thank you, Mary.

And so we actually met on twitter and started corresponding on Twitter. And then we became friends, and you actually came to my house, and I made you a fruit tart. and we got to know each other, and we've been close friends and dear colleagues ever since. And let me just say, before I let you talk us. I know you have lots to say.

I want to mention. Your first book was interesting. When I went back to look at your books. Rt. I. From all sides, which was published in 2009. And this was really about response to intervention. You sometimes call it response to instruction. And it's about responsive teaching, which, of course, we all believe in, and differentiation, and making sure that all kids are getting tier. One excellent teaching and that that covers most of the kids, and that the support that they need is less and less.

And you've done a beautiful job with that book. I know you did another one on Rt. This one I love. And this was you did in 2012, good to great teaching and focusing on the literacy work that matters. and that is really a magnificent book, because you talk about the teacher as professional decision maker and not relying on worksheets. But you said worth sheets WORT. HI love that. and saying no descriptive programs, and saying yes to professional judgment in all the work that you have done is all about respect for the teacher, and I love that about you.

Thanks again.

Mary Howard: Well, and I wanna say I've got I have your 2 books here that are always by my side. One, of course, is literacy sent literacy essentials, which is kind of the Holy Grail of teaching to me. And then the other is a book that you can see. It's dog eared already, which happened right away. The Heart Center teacher, which for me is a culmination integration of everything I've learned from you since your first book In 1984 transitions. Because this is when you just branch out to all aspects of not only us as professionals, but us as humans. And that is just such a book that is near and dear to my heart.

Regie Routman: Thank you, Mary. That's very kind. Well, the human part, you know, for both of us the humanity in teaching is what I think a lot of us are struggling with these days where it feels like we're being forced to do work that really, is not what's best for kids sometimes just saying it badly. You made a big transition in your life. Recently, where you moved from the mainland to Hawaii. and it's cold and rainy here. I'd like to be in Hawaii right now, and that story is really important, because that's when you really took on really the theme of my book, the intersection of teaching, learning, and living. In order to have a full life in a good life. They all have to go together, so so talk a little bit about about that and also about how that transition has helped you become more reflective, not just about teaching, but about your life in general.

Mary Howard: Oh, my goodness! In so many ways! And so I did move here about 2 years ago, before the pandemic. I was traveling full time, generally on an airplane, maybe 3 weeks out of the month, and that was my life. And I remember when transitions came down, I mean, I just started going to and listening to everything you did, and you kept saying the words that I couldn't get out of my head be a real person. And during the pandemic I started thinking about, am I being a real person? That I believed that? But am I doing that?

And so in your beautiful heart centered teacher book which has just meant so much to me. You talk about that intersection of teaching and learning and living. and I was really good at the teaching and learning part. I mean. Still, to this day I'm attending webinars. I'm reading research. I'm talking to teachers about research. But it occurred to me when I made the decision to move to Honolulu 2 years ago, that the one thing that was missing was that real teacher, part that living part.

So one of the things that definitely changes for me, I live right across the street from a harbor, a boat harbor. and every day for the last 600 days. I write on my Facebook a blog about what I do in the day. Every day and every day I go out. Whatever we don't have time change. So whatever time it happens to be then, which now is pretty early. I go out to see the sunrise, and then I go to the harbor to watch sea turtles swimming in 3 feet of water, just to show you how different life is. Last night I always check the beaches. I'm very much involved with the Hawaiian monk seals that are very endangered. So last night I went twice to check, and then a couple of hours before the sunset, and lo and behold! My very dear friend, Kai Ev was on the beach, and so I spent the next 4 h sitting on the beach. Being there to protect. That's what we do.

We're not the official volunteers, but we're what I call the heart volunteers, where we make sure that people don't get too close. So what Hawaii has done for me is, give me permission, and I know that's in silly to say permission, but I was always so. I felt like my professional life was Mary Howard. That's who I was. Now I realized that my professional life. The teaching and the learning were only one part of who I am, and I've discovered this person who can walk outside my front door, and my heart just fills with the love of the beauty I am allowed to see every single day. And, Regie, I have made kind of a a mantra in my life, and my mantra, especially on weekends. Weekends, are very precious to me, but what I always say is, that is a day for no rules. no plan. no schedule. and no computer.

When I was coming here in the past I remember a singer saying in Hawaii we wake up in the morning. We lift our hands to the heavens, and we say. whatever I'm learning art of whatever and everything in my life comes back to teaching, I think, because of the mandates. We're losing the whatever and the whatever is in the moment. The whatever is this, feels right for me to go to Hala ava and see the sea turtles basking in teaching. It's this feels right for me to do right now. I don't care what the script says this feels in the moment. And it's that whatever I want in the living part of my life. and it's that ever I, whatever I want for my teachers, that I trust and admire so much to be able to say, in spite of this thing, that I'm being given right now. It's the whatever that matters most to me.

Regie Routman: It's amazing. Mary. My heart is pitter patter. Listening to you, you are. You've made a transformation. You have made a life transformation. I think that. you know that's absolutely fantastic. You looked happy while you were talking about what was going on at the beach and protecting...was it the monk seals you said?

Mary Howard: Hawaiian among seals.

Regie Routman: Yeah, and I was thinking about how that relates to teaching. You are focusing on what's most important. And you're letting all the extraneous stuff that's not important. and you're leading with your heart and you are. You'd become very knowledgeable about the monk seals it. It reminds me about what good teachers do good to great teachers. You are a great teacher. Do in the classroom, make it relevant. And and you're celebrating. You were not having a lot of celebration in your life cause you were so busy working. and it all has to go together, and I love that I will say new part of you a rebirth of celebrating your life and just you know, and we don't have sunsets. I'm in Seattle, and it is really cloudy and rainy today. I haven't seen a sunset in a long time, but we find other things to celebrate. Spring comes really early here. You know, the daffodils are bloom blooming, the rhododendrons are in bloom.

So, finding that that celebration which would you. which you are doing now in a way that I have not seen before. You've also changed the conversations from what you were saying. You're having different conversations with other people and yourself.

No, this is not the entire transcript. I'll continue from where I left off:

Mary Howard: Thank you, Regie. I think about how long it took me to get to that point. I think about teachers now, because I feel like we have, you know, before the pandemic. We were in a crisis mode. I don't think we realized how much, you know, we weren't being trusted to do what we know is best for our kids. And then I think about this huge crisis that we've been in. And, you know, teachers went from being the most important people in the world to suddenly being on the back burner.

I worry a lot about teachers. I worry a lot about the mental health of teachers, and I wonder how do we help them to get to that place where they feel like it's okay to let go of the things that they can't control and really, really focus on the things that matter most? Because you and I both know that when you focus on the things that matter most, everything else seems to fall into place.

Regie Routman: Yes, it does.

Mary Howard: So how do we help teachers to get to that place?

Regie Routman: That's a great question, and I think the first thing is giving teachers permission to take care of themselves. I think we've created this culture where we almost glorify being busy, and we need to step back and say it's okay to rest. It's okay to take a break. It's okay to say no. I think leaders play a big role in this by modeling self-care and by setting boundaries themselves. When leaders are always working, always on, it sends the message that everyone else should be too.

Mary Howard: Absolutely.

Regie Routman: I think another part of it is creating a culture of trust. When teachers feel trusted to make decisions based on their professional judgment, they're more likely to feel empowered and less stressed. They're more likely to take risks and try new things because they know that they have the support of their leaders.

Mary Howard: Yes, trust is so important.

Regie Routman: And I think we need to celebrate the small wins. We need to recognize the good work that teachers are doing every day. It's not always about the big things. Sometimes it's about the small moments of connection, the small victories. Those are the things that keep us going.

Mary Howard: Yes, those small moments mean so much.

Regie Routman: They really do. And I think we need to remind teachers that they are enough.

Just as they are. They don't have to be perfect. They just have to be themselves.

Mary Howard: Yes, that's such an important message.

Regie Routman: It really is. And I think if we can create a culture where teachers feel valued, trusted, and supported, we'll see a big difference in their well-being and in their teaching.

Mary Howard: I couldn't agree more.

Regie Routman: Well, Mary, it's been such a pleasure talking with you today. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and your heart with us.

Mary Howard: Thank you, Regie. It's been an honor to be here with you.

Regie Routman: Take care, Mary.

Mary Howard: You too, Regie.