



Josh Flores: Welcome to the official CEL Talks podcast, brought to you by the Conference on English Leadership or CEL. CEL is a collaborative, dynamic, discussion-based forum for literacy leaders organized under the National Council of Teachers of English, also known as NCTE. Every year and in every episode, we honor conversations around texts, speakers, and big ideas. We believe it's essential for leaders to maintain and move conversations. Welcome to the conversation.

Josh Flores: Thank you for subscribing and sharing our CEL Talks podcast. I am Josh Flores, your host for season one. Each episode was recorded live at the 2018 CEL Annual Conference in Houston, Texas, and features speakers, keynotes, and members of CEL, the Conference on English Leadership. We hope our conversations ignites and supports conversations with your colleagues at your schools or wherever you may be listening to this. It's a great PLC tool. If you want to introduce something different to your PLCs. I think it's a great support tool for that, to start conversations that maybe you are already having or want to have. And we hope that you find all sorts of unique ways to use these podcast episodes. It's chock full of information. I had a lot of fun just talking shop about our profession with professionals this year, and I look forward to continuing this podcast series.

Josh Flores: Speaking of sharing and continuing conversations, if you would like to know more about CEL, you can find us on the Twitter at @ncte_cel. Or, you can search for the hashtag #CELchat, and you'll find our members using that hashtag and sharing and having conversations. You can also visit ncte.org, the NCTE main page, and find us under the groups tab. Here's where you can get all the information and get prepared for our 2019 Fall Conference. It's happening in November, 24th through the 26th, in Baltimore, Maryland. And get this, our theme this year, Creating Opportunity: Leadership to Ignite Movements and Momentum. I'm excited. So, hope you enjoy that. And I hope you enjoy this inaugural podcast episode.

Josh Flores: Please don't forget to subscribe and share with a teacher friend that you love and give us some feedback. Keep the conversation going with us too. Engage with us on the Twitter. So, thanks again and enjoy this episode of CEL Talks.

CEL Talks podcast, Season 1, Episode 5

It's Simple—Read and Write More with Breckan Duckworth

Breckan Duckworth: It looks like, am I the only woman who has signed up to speak to you?

Josh Flores: Who signed up? Yes, but not the only one that's been interviewed. Luckily-

Breckan Duckworth: Oh thank goodness. I was like, "This is education. We're a bunch of ladies here." What the heck?



Josh Flores: That's true. That's true.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. We are a majority.

Josh Flores: Being recorded and knowing it's going to go to publication, some are scared of that. I don't know. I don't think we should be, but we have to embrace it.

Breckan Duckworth: No. No.

Josh Flores: Right?

Breckan Duckworth: We have amazing women leaders here who are leading all kinds of sessions.

Josh Flores: Exactly.

Breckan Duckworth: Who should be interviewed.

Josh Flores: Karen Nordwall came and she spoke.

Breckan Duckworth: Good.

Josh Flores: So that was good. She was speaking about choice and—

Breckan Duckworth: Good, Karen's great.

Josh Flores: —and was fantastic. I noticed, first off, that you went to University of Alabama?

Breckan Duckworth: I did. That's my undergraduate, yes.

Josh Flores: That's awesome. Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. Roll Tide.

Josh Flores: Yeah, okay, they're the Roll Tide ones.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes.

Josh Flores: They're not the Eagles.

Breckan Duckworth: No, no, no. That's Auburn.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: We don't like them.



Josh Flores: Okay. Listen, I just moved there. I can't—

Breckan Duckworth: That's our biggest rival.

Josh Flores: —really keep track too well.

Breckan Duckworth: Where are you living?

Josh Flores: I live in Birmingham. Well I live in—

Breckan Duckworth: Oh, okay.

Josh Flores: Hoover actually.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so I grew up around Birmingham.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: It's beautiful there.

Breckan Duckworth: It is really, people don't understand how pretty it is. Yes.

Josh Flores: They don't.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. It's very hilly.

Josh Flores: I did not look forward to it and I was already like, in the South you're pretty judged.

Breckan Duckworth: What's in Birmingham?

Josh Flores: Wife's job.

Breckan Duckworth: Okay. Okay.

Josh Flores: I was talking to, oh, where was, I was at some, one of the roundtables I led earlier this week. I said, "I live in Alabama," and they got super snobby on me. These—

Breckan Duckworth: I know. I'm used to it.



Josh Flores: Why would you do that? Why would you go there? I was like, "Here's what you don't understand."

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: It is beautiful there.

Breckan Duckworth: It is a gorgeous state.

Josh Flores: I am shocked too. I did not look forward to it, but it was a step up from where I was.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. My graduate degree is from Harvard, and when I first moved to Boston-

Josh Flores: Really?

Breckan Duckworth: Would tell people that I was from Alabama, the looks on their faces about meeting someone from Alabama.

Josh Flores: That's awesome. Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: They looked horrified. Yes, now I'd give them the same schpiel of like, "It's actually a very pretty state."

Josh Flores: Yes.

Breckan Duckworth: I know we have a lot of a not so great moments in history, but ...

Josh Flores: I think that it's, I like it. [Crosstalk]-

Breckan Duckworth: That's not always still the case.

Josh Flores: That's everywhere though.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, I think we're-

Josh Flores: I'm from Texas. I lived in Oklahoma-

Breckan Duckworth: Realizing more and more that it's-

Josh Flores: Some embarrassment there.

Breckan Duckworth: It's a very nationwide problem.



Josh Flores: Yeah.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: Alabama's a lot more purple than Oklahoma was.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, especially the **Black Belt region**, people don't realize that we have a lot of Democrats living in huge parts of the states that maybe haven't always had the same access to voting.

Josh Flores: So that's fantastic.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: So, well, that's my next connection then. So my wife was also a Harvard grad.

Breckan Duckworth: Awesome.

Josh Flores: Yeah.

Breckan Duckworth: Grad School of Education?

Josh Flores: The, no.

Breckan Duckworth: Where'd she go?

Josh Flores: She got her masters in divinity.

Breckan Duckworth: Oh yes.

Josh Flores: The religious school.

Breckan Duckworth: We went to some nice parties at that divinity school.

Josh Flores: Oh really?

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: She was probably the lame one that didn't go because she's a **teetotaler-**

Breckan Duckworth: Well they were fun.

Josh Flores: I don't know, I grew up Catholic **so-**



Breckan Duckworth: As an ed school student, we had fun crashing some divinity parties.

Josh Flores: That's awesome.

Breckan Duckworth: Yup.

Josh Flores: So cool.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: You have lots of experience then.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, I think so.

Josh Flores: What do you do now?

Breckan Duckworth: I currently live in Chattanooga, Tennessee, so only about two hours from Birmingham.

Josh Flores: Yeah.

Breckan Duckworth: I am the middle school—it's a long title—middle school ELA district lead. I'm doing the curriculum and professional development for all of our middle school English teachers.

Josh Flores: That sounds fun.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. Yeah.

Josh Flores: All the, just middle school?

Breckan Duckworth: Yes. Which is great. I'm coming from, I was working in Dallas ISD previously and I was grades three through 12 professional development. Had over 220 schools that I was supposed to do all the professional development for. So now I have 17 to 20 middle schools in Hamilton County. That is much more doable and I actually know all my teachers on a first name basis. I love it. I love it.

Josh Flores: Wow.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. So I have 125 teachers, and I go in and my job is just to support them in teaching English the best they can.

Josh Flores: How long have you been doing that?



Breckan Duckworth: I actually just started in Hamilton County in July, so I was in Dallas until July.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. So new . . . back to Tennessee.

Josh Flores: Yeah.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: Okay. So are you presenting at CEL?

Breckan Duckworth: I am not, this is my first CEL convention to come to.

Josh Flores: Way to go for you, to just jump right into things then.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: What has been the biggest takeaway so far?

Breckan Duckworth: I'm excited to be here!

Breckan Duckworth: Just the sense of community. I've done NCTE, and there's just so many people there. You're being rushed around and the exhibit hall's a little anxious. It's great. It's fun.

Josh Flores: They get feisty in those exhibit halls.

Breckan Duckworth: I know.

Josh Flores: They throw some elbows for some free books.

Breckan Duckworth: I know and don't, I got some free books, don't get me wrong.

Josh Flores: I did too, but I didn't fight anybody.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, no, there were no fights. I didn't fight anyone.

Josh Flores: Don't want to get hit by a purse.

Breckan Duckworth: I love the community at the CEL. I've already met, I mean we just started yesterday, and I've already met numerous people that I have their email addresses, I know questions I want to ask them. I have people that I feel like I'll



be connected with and, not going to lie, I already looked up Baltimore hotel rooms to make sure I can come next year.

Josh Flores: Oh good. Good, yeah.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes. So I'm—

Josh Flores: I've already started planning too, I was looking at the, okay, so NCTE has already put out the proposal. I was like, "I haven't even had a chance to catch my breath, but I'm ready." Like let's do this.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. Yeah.

Josh Flores: I can't wait.

Breckan Duckworth: So I hope to be able to present something next year. I'm excited.

Josh Flores: What do you want to present?

Breckan Duckworth: We're still thinking about it. I've started typing up some topic ideas, but something I definitely want to go back and sit on.

Josh Flores: You do a lot of PD.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes.

Josh Flores: So what's your favorite PD session that you've put together or that you'd like to go and that's your passionate topic if you could present anything?

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, my favorite thing to present to teachers is on mentor texts. I love using mentor texts for writing and really showing students and teachers how do we take a really good text that is not the standard five paragraph essay. It can be any type of text, but really take some of the great writing from experienced writers to make our students more experienced writers. So that's my favorite session to do for teachers. I think at CEL, though, I'd want to present on maybe some of the leadership initiatives, curriculum writing initiatives that I've done within Hamilton County. So try to have more of a leadership lens on whatever I present.

Josh Flores: I think we definitely need that.

Breckan Duckworth: Still chewing on that. Yeah.

Josh Flores: Okay. Yeah. What's your favorite mentor texts to use?



Breckan Duckworth: Okay, so I'm middle school, so this is going to sound really funny, but I love using picture books to show some writing skills and how to incorporate dialogue into middle school writing. I think Matt de la Peña is always a really great one to show his picture books to students and show them, sometimes it's more helpful for middle school students too if you start with a picture book as a mentor text, because you can actually show them, "so this writing, this is a picture book, this is a book for kids. You guys are grown up now, you can easily write like this." So I think it's easier for them to take that on and then build them up to writing some of the more middle school level reading material.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: That's brilliant.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: Have you ever read the—it's a picture book too—it's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*?

Breckan Duckworth: I have not, no.

Josh Flores: So they're—

Breckan Duckworth: I'm always up for suggestions.

Josh Flores: They're just beautiful. It looks like pencil sketches, but you get *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* portfolio edition, and it's not actually a book. They are just more a series of prompts, but there's just so much happening in the prompt that you could just put one picture up a day and have them respond to that in the same way. I think, I haven't used it with dialogue, but that's a great idea. I'm like, now I want go back and I should try and use that with students practicing with dialogue.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, I've done things, so practicing dialogue, I have taken, out of *Last Stop on Market Street*, taken all of the prepositional phrases out of one of the pages and showed students how that affected what the author was saying and how those can affect them as authors. I mean you can do stuff around any parts of speech. Of course that's how I want to, anytime I'm doing grammar, it's definitely coming from a mentor text.

Josh Flores: Sure.



- Breckan Duckworth: I like to tell my teachers that as well. We need to stop with all the grammar all the time.
- Josh Flores: It might be preaching to the choir, but you should pick up *180 Days*, if you haven't read it yet.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yes, I have it. It is actually in my bag pretty much at all times.
- Josh Flores: Okay.
- Breckan Duckworth: Just in case I pop in and see Kelly Gallagher on the street, I'm ready for him to sign it.
- Josh Flores: Yes, I tackled him. Well, not literally—
- Breckan Duckworth: Or Penny Kittle, either one.
- Josh Flores: —Yeah, I was lucky to, I got to pick up Penny Kittle at the airport when she came to visit Oklahoma and so I got-
- Breckan Duckworth: Amazing.
- Josh Flores: —her autograph there, and then I got Kelly's here and so that was a big deal. I try to get a selfie every year at NCTE with them.
- Breckan Duckworth: Amazing. Yes. I love *180 Days*. I've actually just purchased enough copies for all of our department heads in the district.
- Josh Flores: You are going to be the favorite.
- Breckan Duckworth: I hope so.
- Josh Flores: If you're not already. You're the favorite now.
- Breckan Duckworth: Maybe not once it comes in right before winter break.
- Josh Flores: No, it's such a good, easy read.
- Breckan Duckworth: That's what I think, yes.
- Josh Flores: It gets you so pumped and jazzed to teach them writer's notebook style, like mentor text writing.



Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. So of all of my 20 middle schools, every single department head and every single instructional coach is getting a copy.

Josh Flores: Fantastic.

Breckan Duckworth: So that we can do a big book study on it at our literacy meetings.

Josh Flores: Oh man.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. Love *180 Days*. Yes.

Josh Flores: I wish I had the opportunity to buy that from a district, but I did put together a three-hour PD on using writer's notebooks just based off of that.

Breckan Duckworth: I love that.

Josh Flores: So we'll have to share resources.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes, please. See, this is what I love about CEL, another connection.

Josh Flores: Yeah, you find people that are passionate about it. I love creating professional development for teachers.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes.

Josh Flores: I mean that's all you do and making curriculum. In my new position though I get to model with students. Do you get to jump in and model in the classrooms with the kiddos?

Breckan Duckworth: Yes, yes, absolutely. I do coaching cycles. I'm in classrooms Monday through Thursday. I was told to make sure that I'm in school 60 percent of the time. I'm in schools 80 percent of the time.

Josh Flores: Good for you.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes. I, the only time I go to the central office is on Fridays for our team meetings. Other than that, I'm in schools doing coaching cycles alongside teachers. I'm working with kids as much as possible, trying to stay in that work and be someone that I'm not just the mysterious person at Central Office, but all of my teachers actually know me as a resource.

Josh Flores: So what's your typical day look like?

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, so it depends on where I am in a coaching cycle. If I'm at the planning phase, then I'm typically going to a couple of different schools and doing



planning sessions with teachers, where we're planning what they, making goals basically with teachers. So what are goals of what you want your students to look like as readers? What do you want them to look like as writers?

Josh Flores: So individual or in PLCs or something?

Breckan Duckworth: It depends. Sometimes it will be with a grade level or it'll be with an individual teacher.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: Typically if there's more than—some of my teachers, some of my schools are very small, so some of my schools only have one teacher per grade level. So in those cases I'm with one teacher. But typically I will try to be with a full grade level of English teachers, and then we will plan, we'll come up with goals and then I'll talk to the teacher about how they want to achieve those. That either can look like us coteaching together. Maybe I do a model lesson, maybe I come in and just collect data based on the lesson that we planned together. So usually I try to do about two-day cycles at each school, rotating between planning meetings and then actually implementing what our goals are.

Josh Flores: I think this is something that in this position you always deal with. How do you navigate or manage pushback?

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: Have you received any of that?

Breckan Duckworth: Of course. [laughter]

Josh Flores: Okay. I assumed so.

Breckan Duckworth: Absolutely pushback. I think part of it is staying positive and really I am very fortunate, in my role, I am not evaluative. I am support for my teachers. Just letting them know that I'm there to support them and chunking things, in the same way that we would for students, I really chunk some information for teachers if they're struggling with what the curriculum guide has in place, trying to relate it to what they're currently doing in the classroom, and how they can slowly start to interweave some of the things that we have there in the guides. Yeah, I just, I let my teachers know I'm very supportive.

Breckan Duckworth: I try to always go back to research when they're just very passionate that this is not the right thing. So far I have been very lucky that, I think part of it's actually maybe not luck, maybe I shouldn't say *luck*, but I've done a really . . . I've worked very hard to go and build relationships with the teachers before I do anything



about, I let them know I'm learning alongside them. I'm not here just telling them what to do. We're looking at research and best practices for kids, but I know they're bringing a lot to the table too. I think some of it is relationship-building.

Josh Flores: Well I think-

Breckan Duckworth: Probably not luck.

Josh Flores: Buying them books is a good way to build relationships.

Breckan Duckworth: Exactly.

Josh Flores: Right?

Breckan Duckworth: I also know the keys to our heart, buying books. I buy people a lot of food if I know I'm—

Josh Flores: Oh, good for you, okay.

Breckan Duckworth: —going to be at a school all day, a teachers know that I'm probably baking them some muffins the day before. Yeah. So anything I can do to try to just let them know I'm here to support them.

Josh Flores: I definitely got harassed for that because I just, when I was in your position similar, in a district in Oklahoma for pre-K through 12, they would always make fun of me saying, "Well your predecessor would always bring candy or cookies." Like, "You don't want me to cook for you. I'm sorry, but I'll do anything else for you. I promise."

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. Well I do let them know that it's not always the best baked goods, but there's a lot of love and heart into it.

Josh Flores: Okay. That's tasty too.

Breckan Duckworth: I let them know that, I'm not strong at all the things. I'm still learning. I did attempt this recipe and I hope you enjoy it.

Josh Flores: I'm really jealous you got this focus on middle school.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes. I love that.

Josh Flores: Is that your favorite grade level?

Breckan Duckworth: Absolutely.



Josh Flores: Which one specifically?

Breckan Duckworth: I love, love, love middle school. So I've taught six, seventh, and eighth grade. I spent one year teaching tenth grade. It was kind of my least favorite year teaching.

Josh Flores: Really? Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: Sorry high school teachers. I realize I am clearly just way too goofy to teach high schoolers. I need to be in there with the weirdo middle school kids. I love them to death. I also had time to be an assistant principal at a middle school before. It's just, it's really my passion area. So when this opportunity came up to just focus on middle schools, I couldn't say no to that.

Josh Flores: Do you have a preference over six, seventh, and eighth, one of those?

Breckan Duckworth: Not really. Sixth graders are great because they're still so sweet. They kind of have some of that elementary side to them. Then as the grades go up, I love the eighth graders. You can start to have really serious conversations with them. Then seventh graders, our poor middle child. I love them to death too. They're kind of a grab bag of if you still have the kids that hug you or if you have the kids who are now rolling their eyes, but they're unique in their own way. I love them all.

Josh Flores: I agree with you though about the tenth grade. They're a little bit, they're just a little bit too much for me.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, yeah.

Josh Flores: Eighth grade is horrifying.

Breckan Duckworth: I love eighth graders!

Josh Flores: They are horrifying.

Breckan Duckworth: Oh, I love eighth graders.

Josh Flores: Although I did find it worked out well for me when I just treated them like ninth graders. I treated them a little bit older than they were.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: Overall still, they horrify me.

Breckan Duckworth: Why?



- Josh Flores: I just, you know-
- Breckan Duckworth: Let's get through your fear here of eighth graders.
- Josh Flores: They're going through, I'm supposed to interview you.
- Breckan Duckworth: Let's talk through it.
- Josh Flores: They're just going through all these changes, and then they're just . . . they're the top of the totem pole where they are. So they're just a little bit extra obnoxious and dramatic.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, they are, okay, they are all those things. Yes.
- Josh Flores: Okay.
- Breckan Duckworth: Maybe that's why I need to be with middle schoolers. I don't know. I do know . . . so I would always, when they got a little bit too much in their head about being eighth graders and the top of their school, just remind them next year you're in ninth grade, you're back at the bottom. This is not—and those who are struggling, you let them know, these aren't the best years of your life. Promise things are going to get better. They'll go through the little moody time. Yeah, I think the, I always like to have a healthy presence of letting them know, "Hey, next year ninth grade's going to be a little bit different. We need to be ready for that. We got to bring it down a notch with the arrogance."
- Josh Flores: That's good. You got to remind them about what's coming up.
- Breckan Duckworth: Right. "I know you think you're big now, but it's not always going to be the case."
- Josh Flores: Sure.
- Breckan Duckworth: There's always someone bigger than you guys.
- Josh Flores: My favorite's ninth grade. I love ninth.
- Breckan Duckworth: All right. Okay.
- Josh Flores: I will always go teach ninth grade, I'll go work for you and teach ninth grade in the fall.
- Breckan Duckworth: Come on, come to Hamilton County.
- Josh Flores: That would be great.



Josh Flores: It's not that far from me. It's a commute.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. Yeah. Just two-hour commute. Yeah.

Josh Flores: I could never find my way because as you know Alabama, trees everywhere. I have to use GPS-

Breckan Duckworth: Yes.

Josh Flores: For everything because I—

Breckan Duckworth: Just jumped on 59 North, it'll take you straight to Chattanooga.

Josh Flores: Oh okay.

Breckan Duckworth: You got it.

Josh Flores: Whatever that means. Sure, sure.

Breckan Duckworth: Awesome.

Josh Flores: Fantastic. So in your new position, you went from the classroom to this admin position?

Breckan Duckworth: No. I have a very interesting journey.

Josh Flores: I mean it sounds like you have quite a few jobs. You were even assistant principal, you did tenth grade . . .

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. Yeah. So after graduate school I was recruited to the Dallas area for an assistant principal job.

Josh Flores: Yeah.

Breckan Duckworth: Did not love it for various reasons. Then I ended up, after teaching for another year, I went back to the classroom for a bit, I ended up working for the reading department in Dallas ISD.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: For Dallas ISD I did, was professional development for grades three through 12 and reading. Then, so kind of natural transition, this job opened up in Hamilton County. I wanted to be closer to family, and so now I get to focus on middle schools.



- Josh Flores: I want to take it back even further. What got you into education?
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, well according to my grandparents, I started teaching when I was four years old to all my cousins. Apparently there's a lot of video footage. You can watch me at birthday parties, sitting all my cousins down-
- Josh Flores: So just on YouTube?
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, sure. Not on YouTube yet.
- Josh Flores: Okay.
- Breckan Duckworth: My grandparents like to bring up the footage.
- Josh Flores: That's great.
- Breckan Duckworth: I would make all my cousins, at *their* birthday parties, sit down and take tests for me. So apparently I've been teaching a very long time. In undergrad, I actually didn't major in education. I wasn't sure what I was doing. I majored in English and classical civilization. Then—
- Josh Flores: All right.
- Breckan Duckworth: —yeah, no, I mean I've always been passionate about just teaching anyone else and I love to share knowledge. I'm one of those geeks who loves trivia. I love going to trivia games. I just love sharing information with people. I can't keep it all in. So teaching was just kind of natural . . . natural fit for me after college.
- Josh Flores: Now you're killing it. Fantastic.
- Breckan Duckworth: I hope so.
- Josh Flores: From your mini perspectives and positions then I think you'd be a good one for this question. What's an aspect of education that needs to be disrupted?
- Breckan Duckworth: Oh, there's so many.
- Josh Flores: I know. I know there's a lot, but . . . an aspect we don't talk about enough. Everyone talks about standardized testing is the devil.
- Breckan Duckworth: Right, yeah.
- Josh Flores: Or whatever.



- Breckan Duckworth: I'm very focused on just giving students more reading and writing practice. I wonder if we're spending— I see this a lot in my current district and in other roles that I've had, that we spend a lot of time, this is already really being disrupted. Teachers are doing a lot of the talking, but I don't think that we're focusing on much as—how do I explain this? So when people outside of education asked me, they're like, "So you're this reading specialist. What is it that we need to do to improve reading scores or improve literacy rates?" I always laugh and I'm like, "Well, we need to read and write more."
- Breckan Duckworth: Then people ask me, "So you are paid to just go tell teachers to have students read and write more?" Kind of, yeah, I mean I just, I see that we do a lot of activities in class. We do a lot of things that are getting away from the reading and writing. So yeah, I mean my big message is just how are we getting kids to authentically and actually read texts and be inside of text every single day and have their own writing every single day. There's a lot of little activities and grammar and sometimes coloring pages and things that just don't belong in our English classes as much as they are.
- Josh Flores: Well, we might have to edit this part out because we're going to be out of a job.
- Breckan Duckworth: That's fair.
- Josh Flores: I mean I've had this, I had this very same conversation with my friends.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.
- Josh Flores: They can't believe I got a job, the job I have now. It's like, "Yeah, I go in and I say what I think should be obvious." Quit talking so much and let the students do more talking.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yes. Right.
- Josh Flores: Make them read.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yes.
- Josh Flores: Make them write, and build relationships, which that's, I love that that's been—
- Breckan Duckworth: Yes.
- Josh Flores: —such a message ongoing through NCTE, and in CEL, is that relationships, relationships, relationships, and the importance of talk and discourse.
- Breckan Duckworth: Right. Yeah, absolutely.



- Josh Flores: Then they get engaged in the reading.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. So I actually, I guess, what I feel like is the most, the biggest disruption that needs to happen is that maybe in some ways this is simpler than we make it. Maybe we really, I mean I know that there's a lot going on. We have a lot of students from different backgrounds, but in some ways, I feel like if we just start really young reading and writing constantly and we're staying in text, I feel like some of this would go away.
- Josh Flores: I think part of being a—
- Breckan Duckworth: I would still like to still have a job. Let me just put that out there.
- Josh Flores: Yeah. Me too. Me too. Keep paying me though. It's a weird balance of we're either overcomplicating things or oversimplifying things.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yes, yeah.
- Josh Flores: So we have to navigate that as educators. What am I not putting enough time into? What am I putting, overthinking things?
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.
- Josh Flores: Too much too.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.
- Josh Flores: That problem, it's like . . . thought someone was coming up.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, so we can edit that part out. Yes, I think that we should just disrupt this idea of what English classrooms look like sometimes.
- Josh Flores: So what's your favorite activity to get them talking in class? Is there one go-to? My favorite's called chips-and-salsa.
- Breckan Duckworth: Oh tell me about-
- Josh Flores: Have you done Chips-and-Salsa?
- Breckan Duckworth: No.
- Josh Flores: Okay, well that's where—
- Breckan Duckworth: No. Tell me about Chips_and-Salsa.



- Josh Flores: It's basically like AB partners. So I say, "everybody in this row, you're the chips, everybody in this row, you're the salsa. Everybody in that row, you're guac, everybody in this row, you're queso. Make an appetizer bowl and those are going to be your buddies."
- Breckan Duckworth: Oh, I love that.
- Josh Flores: If we read a passage together, "all right, chips, you go find your guac. Queso and salsa, y'all hang out . . . go find them and just mingle and talk about the answer to this question." Something like that.
- Breckan Duckworth: I love that.
- Josh Flores: I love Chips-and-Salsa.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah, I do too. Yes, I would have—
- Josh Flores: We can be friends.
- Breckan Duckworth: I would have extra queso in all of my classes, though.
- Josh Flores: Okay.
- Breckan Duckworth: You're queso number one. You guys are my other queso.
- Josh Flores: I need a lot of queso.
- Breckan Duckworth: A lot of queso going on here.
- Josh Flores: Yeah.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. I love doing quickwrites and then having students talk about that.
- Josh Flores: Yeah.
- Breckan Duckworth: Maybe I was too OCD in my classroom. You're getting me—
- Josh Flores: You can never be too OCD.
- Breckan Duckworth: You're getting me to reflect on this a lot. I had students kind of strategically sit in pairs, but I rotated their seats every single day so that by first semester you've now sat beside every single person in the class. I had them pretty much constantly talking to the person beside them, but the person beside them



changed every single day just strategically. So you never got too comfortable with them until the end of the school year.

Josh Flores: That's so funny. I used to frustrate my kids with that.

Breckan Duckworth: Don't know if that's good or bad now.

Josh Flores: Yeah, no, it's fantastic. You've got to keep them on their toes. They get bored.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. I wanted them to have different perspectives and so—

Josh Flores: Don't get too comfortable in class.

Breckan Duckworth: Right. Exactly. I'm going to keep you on your toes. I'm consistent with what we're doing each day. You know, we're reading, we're writing every day. I'm going to keep you on your toes about what we're talking about. Yeah. I don't know if that's a good answer to your question, but-

Josh Flores: That's a great answer. Yes. I think that's a, it's good to have a seating chart, but it's also good to change it.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes. Oh yeah. Your seating chart should always be fluid. It is not permanent.

Josh Flores: That is one of those other, I think, obvious things that I've been paid to go and tell.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes. Oh, absolutely.

Josh Flores: Then it changes things overnight.

Breckan Duckworth: It's a big focus of my first week through schools. If there's already management issues in the first week, I ask, "Where is your seating chart? Great. Let me see you make one right now. If you don't have it."

Josh Flores: That comes with being OCD and organized.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes.

Josh Flores: Very structured. Good for you.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes. Oh, I had tape on the floor.

Josh Flores: Okay, well now that's too much.



Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. I don't know if you've realized how-

Josh Flores: All right, you just went overboard now.

Breckan Duckworth: I had, it was pretty duck tape. It had ducks on it. My last name's Duckworth.

Josh Flores: I caught that, yeah.

Breckan Duckworth: So I had lots of duck things, so it was very pretty duck tape, not duct tape.

Josh Flores: Well good, your personality's reflected in it.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes.

Josh Flores: That's good.

Breckan Duckworth: Absolutely, but yeah, it was a little OCD with the, where children are sitting, but they were always discussing, always reading and writing.

Josh Flores: Have you ever done any work with the National Writing Project?

Breckan Duckworth: I have not. No.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Breckan Duckworth: No. I have not.

Josh Flores: You used the term "quickwrite," and I know that's one of their terms they throw around a lot, and I just thought that was perfect.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah.

Josh Flores: That's how I like starting class.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes. That was always my warm-up. I did a quick write pretty much every single day as a warmup when I was teaching.

Josh Flores: How'd you grade them? Using a rubric?

Breckan Duckworth: Actually, they were just graded on if they kept writing. Yeah. No, I—

Josh Flores: Just volleyball that.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. No, it was definitely just—



- Josh Flores: Good job.
- Breckan Duckworth: They had a notebook that they kept every day. Their warm-up routine was they grabbed their notebook, they started writing. I did not grade them on anything other than if your hand was continuing to move.
- Josh Flores: Do you have a favorite quick write or opener?
- Breckan Duckworth: I would often, so usually it was tied to whatever my lesson was doing, I would sometimes tie it to the topic that we were doing. I don't know. A lot of times, especially on Fridays, I would give them just like, "Hey guys, whatever's on your minds right now, whatever just stressed you out about your last class. Just get it out. This is your time-"
- Josh Flores: That's a good one.
- Breckan Duckworth: "This is your time to write about it. If I've made you mad this week, write about that today. I'm not going to read it. I don't want to read it."
- Josh Flores: Yeah.
- Breckan Duckworth: Get it out on paper so maybe we don't have to talk about it.
- Josh Flores: Scratch out the bad words.
- Breckan Duckworth: Yes.
- Josh Flores: Well they're middle school, so maybe they're—
- Breckan Duckworth: Oh no, there's definitely bad words.
- Josh Flores: Oh, okay. I know my high schoolers—
- Breckan Duckworth: I love middle schoolers. The worst things that have ever been said to me though were definitely by middle school kids and not high school kids.
- Josh Flores: They're getting lazier now, right? Like the slang is AF.
- Breckan Duckworth: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Josh Flores: Now they're just, okay, now you're just lazy.
- Breckan Duckworth: They are lazier now, but I mean the middle school kids I, they just don't have the same filter. I think high school kids have learned empathy a little bit better, or



they just, they don't care. They don't care. They're just so many times, if I didn't wear makeup to school, my middle schoolers would in a second tell me, "Ms. Duckworth, you don't look good today."

Josh Flores: Gee, thanks.

Breckan Duckworth: "Are you sick?"

Josh Flores: Guess who gets an F today? Right?

Breckan Duckworth: I would always tell them, I was like, "Well guys, I'm just not wearing makeup. Thank you for noticing."

Josh Flores: So what's your favorite self-care routine for teaching?

Breckan Duckworth: I felt like I've usually been pretty good at self-care. I haven't gotten super stressed out. I think it comes from, I was an only child. I am still an only child. I don't know where these siblings came from that I'm mentioning. I think that I've always been pretty good at knowing when I need alone time. I usually take time to decompress after school, when I'm driving home. My husband knows me very well and knows that there may be a while that we just don't talk when I get home and that's okay. Everything's fine. I just need that time to either watch some trashy TV or play a video game, and that's okay. I just need my own space.

Josh Flores: Are you a gamer?

Breckan Duckworth: Oh yes.

Josh Flores: Okay, well we're going to continue this conversation, I guess.

Breckan Duckworth: Oh yeah. My husband makes video games.

Josh Flores: What?

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. Yeah. I play more than he does. Ironically, I think I play more video games than my husband, and he probably reads more than I do.

Josh Flores: All right, we're going to have to deconstruct this.

Breckan Duckworth: We'll also cut this part out.

Josh Flores: No, I think that's awesome.

Breckan Duckworth: I read a lot, my husband just reads so much. I mean he like ran through, Game of Thrones is huge, and he ran through those books—



Josh Flores: That's a notoriously thick text.

Breckan Duckworth: —in like a week or two, and he read every single one of them.

Josh Flores: Okay, what a nerd.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. I know, right?

Josh Flores: Well this has been a really fun conversation.

Breckan Duckworth: Yes. I've had a great time talking to you.

Josh Flores: I appreciate it. I think we got to go get, it looks like we've got to get ready for our Ignite sessions, but-

Breckan Duckworth: I'm happy about that too.

Josh Flores: I want to share so much with you, like resources and-

Breckan Duckworth: [Crosstalk 00:29:38] Yes, and now we're connected. Great part of CEL.

Josh Flores: Keep collaborating. Totally connected. Yes.

Breckan Duckworth: Yeah. Awesome.

Josh Flores: Fantastic. All right, thank you so much, and thank you for listening. Until next time, take care of yourself. Take care of your students and take care of each other.