

## Making a difference

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I believe that everything happens for a reason. There are definitely certain things that, no matter how much planning is made, don't work. Having just finished a job that has nothing to do with teaching, I decided to embark on something that I was very unsure of.

When I first started teaching, I remember asking myself what was I doing in a classroom full of strangers who might be thinking that they know more than I do. Some teenagers who might not even care about what I say. They had the look that said, "We have you all figured out." And then I thought to myself, "That is scary." They looked at me from head to toe, scrutinizing each and every move I made from the moment I stepped in the classroom to the moment I left the school. It became stressful at some point because I was there to teach – not to be scrutinized. Being in a stressful situation, I felt so uncertain if this was the right job for me. There was even a time when I had to confer with my mentor just to establish my wavering feelings. Is this what I wanted to do for the rest of my life? To educate the youth?

It seems like there is an unwritten rule – new teachers must prove something and be as impressive as possible. New teachers need to please the principal, colleagues, students, parents and almost everyone in the school. My first mistake was doing just that. I forgot what I was supposed to do. My second mistake was not recognizing my first mistake. This experience made me realize that I had to make my own way in the classroom without being bothered with what others might think of me. I had to find myself and develop my own style, my own techniques. It took me two years to figure out that this is what I really want to do in my life – TEACH.

It is an entirely different story now. I love my work. It gives me a sense of achievement. A different kind of 'high' that words cannot express. Being able to impart what you know makes it all worthwhile especially when students get their 'aha' moment. But it is really more than just teaching the English language. I try to make a difference. I try to make parents see their children for what they are and what they can be. There was one incident when a parent asked me to convince her daughter

to choose the Science stream because she thought that there was not much future in Arts. Teachers should open up students' young minds without being biased. Let them see and realize what they are capable of and the possibilities that lie ahead of them. Who are we to know what lies in the future? I never thought I would be a teacher and sometimes I still wonder how I managed to stay this long in this profession.

Sometimes though, no matter how much we believe in the fact that we can make a difference, we come to a point wherein we ask ourselves – Really? How? In these times I always think of Mother Teresa's words: "We can do no great things; only small things with great love." It is important to love what we do and care for the people and things around us. Taking small steps at a time and not giving up no matter what, is something I always tell my students.

My teaching experiences varied all these years. Being given subjects I was not very much comfortable teaching, made the task even more challenging. Teaching is something that should not be taken lightly. After I teach a lesson I think about what things worked and what things didn't. When students fail, I usually blame them for not studying hard. Over the years I have come to realize that I must accept some of the blame. When these incidents happen, I often ask myself – have I done

enough to help? It is in these instances that we should question ourselves – have we really done enough?

I have realized a lot of things in the course of my teaching. It is important to look at other people's perspective, by this I mean my students'. I have learned to think, more than twice, before I say something that might hurt their feelings. If I were the student would I want to be told the same thing, in the same way? Correcting them is one thing, embarrassing them is another. There are students who will try to outsmart teachers and if we can no longer put up with them, we sometimes lose our temper. I have encountered disrespectful students. I know that my main responsibility is to facilitate students' learning. But how can they learn when they are not attuned with you? This is when my real 'teaching' comes in, because I believe students need to be corrected right there and then. The values that I have learnt earlier in my life are the ones I try to pass on. This is the reason why I want to continue teaching. It gives me a sense of satisfaction that I am paving the path for their future. It might not be instant gratification but it comes years later when I meet them in the street.

I feel that I have grown over the course of my teaching profession, but I also know that I still have so much to learn. Being involved in so many different tasks gives me opportunities to continue to grow. I think that this growth will enable me to be a more effective teacher and a better person.