Teaching to Learn

Teaching is the most difficult thing I have ever attempted. Never before has such mastery of culture, language, humanities, psychology, sociology, and all life experiences ever been a performance expectation! I consider myself a fairly well-rounded and traveled individual, with an adequate “toolbox” of life experiences from which to draw. In reality, a person knows very little about performance expectations until you attempt to teach.

Artists. That’s what teachers are. They build, sculpt, mold and shape human potential into great works of personal triumph and merit. Teachers are mentors and they are coaches. They infuse students with the strength and acceptance to believe in themselves and in others. Teachers are entertainers. They engage and motivate students to challenge the world around them and to expect an outcome. In short, teachers are magicians. They use these powers to organize and execute this amazing objective we called “learning.”

The only way I shall achieve the honorable title of “teacher,” encompassing mentorship, life coach, entertainer and artist, is if I truly believe in myself; bringing the best version of who I am to my classroom each and every day.

Compassion isn’t a learned behavior, rather, it is an innate quality that allows one to experience empathy for another. It coexists within your personality and is the foundation of the magic of teaching and learning.

Developing a personal relationship with each student you’re privileged to teach is key to unlocking the magic of a successful teacher, as opposed to a mediocre one. But it is not an easy task. One must exude trust, approachability and sincerity. Interest in the student must be flawlessly genuine, for children are experts at detecting frauds. The solution: the gift of TIME. Busyness must be set aside when a child approaches. Time must be invested in each student in order to recognize and celebrate their uniqueness.

My admittedly lofty goal is for every student I encounter to feel comfortable enough, and without hesitation, to be their true selves in my class. Creating an environment where students feel comfortable, safe and accepted is imperative to learning. It seems to me that the best way to accomplish my goal is to model, teach and enforce mutual respect for all. In other words, respect is reciprocal.

At the risk of stereotyping an entire generation (or more), I maintain that respect for others is lacking in this generation. Respect is a value that is emulated by parents and society as a whole. Often, a lack of respect is the result of ignorance and/or lack of positive example. We may have to teach students to first respect themselves before we can expect them to respect anything else. I will attempt to instill the value of respect in each and every student I come in contact with, including adults.

As an instructor, I subscribe to the Constructivist approach to teaching. Students build “off” what they already know about the world to make connections with new material through familiar information. I intend to design and implement lesson plans that optimize my students’ strengths and provide relevant material from which to build upon. Creating lessons that are relevant to students’ lives supports building long-term memory pathways and bolsters higher-order thinking.

My dream is to conduct a classroom of students who truly believe they can succeed; students who take ownership of their learning and set realistic and challenging goals for themselves. There is nothing more rewarding than to experience someone realize their potential by achieve something they only hoped was possible. Personal growth of the student is the awesome outcome and a true self-esteem builder. For the teacher, it is an unforgettable accomplishment.

*“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Maya Angelou*