

## **WHO I AM AS A TEACHER**

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When I think about who I am as a teacher, I think about the different hats I wear daily in school – from being an English Language teacher, to someone whom the students can openly share their problems with, and a person who makes each day worthwhile for others. The fact that I can impact a young person's life is a motivating factor for me to provide the best for them. I want them to remember me as someone who has made a difference in their lives.

Many years back, I was teaching a class with some students from less advantaged backgrounds. It was a challenging year for me, from convincing them to change their behaviour and attitudes for the better to motivating them to do well for PSLE. As I was still a beginning teacher at that time, it was an uphill task for me. I tried many strategies, but the one strategy that made an impact on my students was storytelling. I told them stories that actually happened to me or someone I knew. It came as a surprise to me when I received a handwritten letter from a student one day, thanking me, not just for teaching her, but also for "bringing the world" to her.

"For bringing the world to you?" I asked, probing Hana\* to tell me more after school that day. Hana said that she looked forward to coming to school because she wanted to hear my stories. Nobody had ever told her a story before, much less shared such personal experiences with her. I was perturbed and taken aback. From that conversation, I came to know Hana better and finally understood her struggles at home and why she behaved the way she did in class. Hana added that she was inspired by my personal stories and promised me that she would never give up, regardless of the outcome. This episode taught me a valuable lesson: the importance of knowing your students for who they really are. I still keep in touch with Hana, and she never fails to visit me on Teachers' Day every year since she graduated.

That moment also became one of the defining moments in my life as an educator. It made me realise how powerful our words are as teachers. As Bill Wilson once said, "To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world." The fact that I could impact a student's life and make a difference is a motivating factor for me to teach every day. The storytelling sessions have become an integral part of my teaching and learning, and to me, one of the best strategies to get to know my students better.

### Learning from My Students

Besides learning from my fellow teachers, being a teacher for me is also about learning from my students. I became more aware of the lack of parental support and other family-related issues that could have a huge impact on my students. I hope that I am able to reach out and help every child in the areas he or she needs most. In my years of teaching, I learned that our students need positive affirmation to boost their morale.

A few years back, my students were affected by their examination results despite working very hard. I detected hints of disappointment as they grew less confident of themselves and started to cause disciplinary problems in class. At that time, I needed to decide if I should still continue with my English lesson or use the period to talk to them about this matter. I chose the latter and made them recall how far they had come, from scoring close to U-grades to achieving Cs and Ds. They had also been showing a lot of improvement in their behaviour and attitude. The decision paid off as the students felt encouraged and started to realise the improvements that they had made since the beginning of the year – all they needed to do was to believe in themselves and not to give up in times of adversity. At the end of that year, the students made

me proud by overcoming all odds to go on to the secondary schools of their choice, and to pursue the paths that they had chosen in life.

As educators, we hold power and influence over our students' lives. Our students look up to us not only as their teachers who teach the different subjects in school, but also as their guiding light when they do not have someone to turn to.

Being an educator is a journey, not a destination. Many of the things that we are dealing with now are not found in books or any teachers' instructional manual. We understand it as part of our role as educators. For me, I believe that the more important part of education requires me to do more than just penning down the knowledge learned in a book and transferring that knowledge to my students. It is through my dealings with them that we learn to understand them and connect with them socially and emotionally so as to provide the best for them to do well in life.

*\*Name has been changed to protect the identity of the student.*