

## A Teacher's Ramblings: This Is Why I Teach

I am a teacher. I've taught college, high school, and adult school. I'd never want to be anything else. In this installment of my ramblings I talk about *why*.

In his speech *A Call to Teaching*, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, "Put plain and simple, this country needs an army of great teachers...I think that teaching should be one of our most revered professions."

Sadly, in American society that is demonstrably not the case. Teachers get little consideration. Teaching pays much less than other professions requiring similar levels of preparation. So why WOULD a sane and intelligent person become a teacher?

I 'wandered' into the profession, I suppose. While attending graduate school, I got the chance to teach courses at a local college night school program. The money was an effective enticement, to be sure, but WOW – what a heady experience! There I was, two nights a week, showing off what I knew and how well I could plan and deliver a lecture. When I look back, I realize I probably wasn't a great teacher, but the unshakable certainty of success in me infected my very motivated class, and, by some LUCK, they learned!

I taught in that program for eight years. I did, finally, develop some teaching skill, but, more importantly, I never lost my pure delight in the process!

I had several decades in teaching and curriculum development behind me when I decided to become a High School teacher. Some thoughts I'd had a bit earlier of 'getting into the system' plotted together with 'if not me, then who?', gave me a SHOVE off that ivory tower, and morphed me into a High School English Teacher.

Hundreds of books and dozens of movies illustrate the grim realities of public education: not enough student motivation, not enough resources of any kind, not enough support from administration, not enough family involvement, not enough respect, not enough time, and not enough energy! It's all true, I can tell you.

OK, I'll admit it – I was NOT prepared and probably did a horrid job of it in that first year. I had so MUCH to learn, things that cannot be explained and surely cannot be taught in a teacher certification program. I needed my kids to teach me and the entire two weeks of Christmas break to meditate, repent, and plan a second semester that was only a bit better.

I'm no Super Hero – I can't solve the grim 'not enough's. I can barely explain the roots of them, to be honest, but here I am in the 'trenches' – and happy about it. I survived year one and did improve. I learned to love my students, my classroom, and the toughest, most wonderful job I've ever had!

Here are six things that come to mind when I consider why:

1. I know that education is essential. It benefits each of us to educate EVERY member of the community. *If not me, then who?*
2. I was blessed with great teachers who remain in my memory decades later as models I strive to emulate.



3. Literature is something I am passionate about for myself and something I love to get others excited about
4. Teaching, I have learned, is ALL ABOUT relationships, and each one enriches my life.
5. There is so much I cannot control, but inside the four walls of my classroom I can create an oasis of my three C's: Calm, Contribution, and Creativity.
6. Every day I know for certain that what I do matters. Even when the day goes badly, the students are unruly, and the fire alarm rings twice, even then I can remind myself that at least I might have shown an example of how to keep your head under pressure.

I can't close with "you should be a teacher, too". It is SO not for everyone, and I'd hate to give the impression it was. I have seen great people suffer, and their students with them, when the fit was not good.

But I will say "think about teachers with respect." And kindness. And a bit of envy!

Jo Karabasz

