

I am a teacher because I am a learner, and because I know that connections between thinking people is the essence of learning. It is not enough to just love the kids or just love the content we teach; teachers have to love that nexus where they meet, and we have to intimately involve ourselves in the learning connections that our students make. The best teachers are those who enter into learning relationships with students in which both parties are teachers and learners. It truly takes a partnership between student and teacher for education to succeed. In my life, I have only ever learned from people I trusted, respected, and with whom I had an equal relationship. If the relationship between student and teacher is not in place, learning cannot and will not happen.

Though respectful relationship is the foundation of learning, there is never any doubt that I am the leader in the classroom. That I am a male does not make my job as teacher/role-model more important than my female colleagues' job, but it does make it more visible. More so, my gender offers an opportunity to create different types of relationships with students, especially boys—relationships they might have never had in school or at home. In school, I know that students see everything I do, and I hold myself to a high standard of civility and I expect the same out of every student. The lessons my students learn in the classroom will be the unplanned ones—the ways I responded to a crisis, comments I made about an issue in our school or community, or the way I answered a student's question. In these moments, my expectations about what kind of people I want my students to be will come through most clearly.

My father has been an educator for over 30 years and his key to success has clearly been his enthusiasm. He is smart and good at his job, but his success is because of his high expectations and the zeal with which he goes after them every single day. Teachers do their work everyday, and as such, resiliency and doggedness are important qualities. The best thing I can bring into the classroom everyday is enthusiasm, and over 185 days, enthusiasm can make up for a lot. My lessons will not be perfect, I will sometimes not say the right thing to a child, my classroom management might fall apart one day, my frustration might well up while trying to teach fractions, but if I can bring a large helping of enthusiasm into the classroom everyday, my students will respond with the stamina, engagement, and risk taking that is essential for their achievement.

Perhaps in the 20th century, treating the classroom as a place to prepare students for their future was an adequate model, but our world is changing so quickly that we cannot begin to predict what our students' future will look like. Most likely, the jobs they will hold have not even been thought up yet. Facing such an uncertain future, we must prepare our students to be life-long learners and adapters. While no specific skill set will prepare them for success, fundamental competencies like critical thinking, logical reasoning, clear communication through reading and writing, and collaboration with others will best prepare students to adapt to the realities of the time. Uncertainty is a place of anxiety, but it is also a place of hope, and I have unlimited hope in my students' abilities to succeed. I see their genius everyday, and I know that one of my responsibilities is to recognize and build on the assets that my students bring into the classroom. Out of the students' talents will grow the stories of student learning and achievement, which my curriculum, planning, and assessment will help frame.