

Chapter 3-7

Teaching is a Work of Heart

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It has been said that “We teach who we are” (Palmer, 1997, p. 15), and I could not agree more. When around others, especially students, they catch who we are as teachers and people. Yes, we teach students standards, skills, and curriculum as directed by state mandates. More importantly, I have found that students also grasp the personal nature of our identity, which they see throughout our daily interactions: our smiles, interest in their day, sharing of hobbies, mutual regard for sports, music, etc. Each of these interactions can be an entry point of connection made with students, showing care for them beyond that of only being a student and seeing them as a whole person.

Simon Sinek (2009) often says, “People do not care what you do, but *why* you do it” in his discussion of The Golden Circle. For me—a strong *why*—began very early in my childhood. I only recently realized that my first inspiration to teach came from my mother. Though not a teacher by trade, she instead worked several jobs as a single mother—from humble beginnings in the deli of Kroger to human resources at Centennial Hospital—she was indeed a teacher in heart, spirit, and approach. Always looking for the wonder in the world and ways to explore it with my brother, sister, and me, my mother had a keen and intuitive sense of knowing how to make learning fun. She knew how to connect it to our personal lives and thus made learning natural, active, and everyday occurrences. Learning should be experienced, sometimes by trial and error. My mother had a unique way of creating space for my siblings and me to fail forward in a safe environment. The space was not condescending; she approached failures with understanding and encouraged us to try and try again.

Regarding setbacks or heartache, my mother often said, “In every garden, a little rain must fall.” I printed that quote on my first teaching binder as a reminder that unexpected pain or setbacks will happen. It is not a matter of *if* the pain will come but *when*, so the approach that I take in my response to pain is that it is the key difference maker.

I believe that it is my mother's heart, spirit, and love of learning that became the catalyst for my teaching career. Despite our heavy loss when she passed away in 2022, her inspiration still carries on deep within me and motivates me to serve students well—always rooted firmly in a place of love. My mother genuinely lived out her faith while being 'unnecessarily kind,' often quoting, "Kindness is love with its work boots on" (Wolf, 2008). Her impact on my life is remarkable, and I hope to continue translating and applying her lessons to benefit my students. In this way, I hope to be a champion for student success, both academically and at a more human level—in bolstering their sense of self and nurturing them with the confidence they need to move mountains they encounter throughout life.

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