

## **“Teaching the Leaders of tomorrow”**

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*“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.”*  
– **William Arthur Ward**

These words of William Arthur Ward, one of America's most quoted writers of inspirational proverbs had a great impact on me the very first time I read them. From the day that I entered this profession I always knew that I never wanted to be just a mediocre teacher and being superior seemed a tad presumptuous but to be a great teacher is what I have always hoped and continually strive to become because it was great teachers who inspired me and greatness is what I hope to inspire in my students.

My affinity for the teaching profession was built on a sure foundation of having teachers who inspired the very best in me. As a child I was always known for being outspoken and I was blessed with parents who encouraged those traits at home and subsequently had teachers who saw the tiny embers of greatness in my innocent eyes and fanned them so that they grew and enkindled in my heart a desire to be all that I could be and more. Now one might call me arrogant for thinking that I have grown up into an amazing person, but I only believe this because I have grown up to be a teacher and it is this identity that I flaunt proudly to the world at large. It is only a teacher who experiences the joy of meeting an accomplished young man/woman who was once a tiny child sitting on the last bench and yet who still bows down with respect and gratitude before his/her mentor in remembrance of all that was once taught in a small classroom.

A child's first memory of a teacher is created the day he/she enters a school building for an interview. The teacher conducting the interview has the power to instil in that child a deep love or a great distaste for coming to school just by the way she speaks to him/her in an interview. I write this from first hand experience as I was fortunate to have an amazingly loving teacher who interviewed me and was consequently my kindergarten teacher and as old as I grow I will never forget her words of appreciation and the little pat on my head that made me want to run to school with joy and eagerness each day. Children who are shamed and ridiculed at a tender age or spoken to harshly because they are unable to meet a required standard very often turn out to be troubled learners who look at school much like an adult looks at a dentist's clinic.

As a child moves up the educational ladder in school it is up to a teacher to look out for hidden talents and abilities and bring them to the forefront. Very often the true calibre of countless students remains undiscovered simply because no one took the trouble to look hard enough or maybe in some cases to give them a gentle push in the right direction. For those of you who have had teachers who noticed your ability to sing, dance, speak or act and encouraged you to participate in school theatre and competitions; you were truly blest as was I and are surely forever indebted to your teacher.

Henry Adams, a great historian aptly said that "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell when his influence stops". As teachers we often forget that we have forty pairs of eyes and ears observing our every move and listening to the words we say and even paying attention to the things we do not say and thus we have the greatest opportunity to influence large numbers of the human population either positively or negatively. I once caught a learning disabled student in grade three cheating and after telling him how disappointed I was in him I told him that it was better for him to fail honestly after studying hard and attempting all the questions rather than to pass the subject using dishonest methods. I was shocked to meet his irate mother three years later and hear that she blamed me for her son's poor performance in class as he explained to her that he was still content with his low grades because he had achieved them honestly and with a great deal of hard work. I honestly believed in this case I had moulded a young man who will never resort to unfair or dishonest practices to get his way in the world.

In today's modern violent world our children are constantly exposed to hate, prejudice and evil in every form and so it is vital that we as teachers do our part to help them prepare to face such a world. This becomes difficult because we are humans too after all and it is monumentally difficult to put aside one's own bias when teaching in a classroom, but that is why the teaching profession is not for the faint hearted and the weak of spirit. I believe that every classroom I walk into has a future actor, architect, lawyer, politician, doctor and hopefully a teacher as well. The corporate world measures its success by yearend financial reports but a teacher measures her success by the improvement in her student's emotional and academic behaviour. Some of our country's greatest leaders such as Dr. S Radhakrishnan and Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam were teachers first and it is from them that I have always drawn hope and inspiration when questioned about the efficacy of my teaching and its impact on the society around me.

I always wonder if the many undesirable elements that plague our society had good teachers and if they had a so called good education? Then what is it that made them do the things that hurt and devastate humanity? When I get into such a pensive mood I realize that my calling on this earth as a teacher is not to answer such questions but to do my best with everything at my disposal. To open the eyes and minds of my students in my classroom because I may not be able to go out into the world and save all of mankind but I might be teaching a student who will do just that in the future. This leads me to my next question, what skills does a child of the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to survive? Is it enough to teach him/her languages, mathematics, science and history? Or do we need to start incorporating much more into our lessons in class? The only conclusion I can come to is that as a teacher it is my duty and obligation to somehow incorporate moral values in my lessons. We need to teach our students the value of truth, integrity and honesty to face a world that seemingly has very little regards for people exhibiting such traits. We need to imbibe in them feelings of compassion and forgiveness to co-exist in a global village ever ready to rise up in arms at the slightest instigation and most importantly train them to develop a mind set that is ready to learn, grow and accept change in a constantly evolving world. So first and foremost we as teachers need to decide to be the change in our students' lives using our own years of experience and knowledge while putting aside bigotry in any form; so that we will truly be able to provide them with quality education that will prepare them for life.

In the words of Ronald Regan "The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things." I truly believe that we the 'Gurus' of today may be forgotten by the world in a few years but the children we teach and mentor for greatness, the societies that they build and the world that they transform will be a product of our love and commitment to this vocation of 'Teaching'.

*"If a country is to be corruption free and become a nation of beautiful minds, I strongly feel there are three key societal members who can make a difference. They are the father, the mother and the teacher."*

**- A. P. J. Abdul Kalam**