

VOICES / A FORUM FOR COMMUNITY ISSUES

A Teacher Falls in Love, Over and Over

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Recently, one of my seventh-grade world history students asked me how long I had been teaching. His question was not meant to be disrespectful; it was one of those spontaneous sparks that ignites in a 13-year-old mind and tumbles out before a self-censor can inhibit curiosity.

When I replied, "since 1969," a collective gasp engulfed the classroom, and my students stared at me with a new sense of amazement, as if I were a wax figurine who had stepped out of a Civil War exhibit and was brought back to life for only daylight hours to teach fidgety teenagers. Another child, in shock, blurted, "Then why are you still teaching?" Another gasp.

"I am still teaching," I replied without hesitation, "because how many people my age are lucky enough to spend every weekday with people your age? How many people my age are fortunate enough to talk to you about world issues and the latest music and discuss why you think many Chinese embraced Buddhism instead of Confucianism? How many people can say they laugh out loud every day at work? How many people can drive home every day and smile because a young person they know said something or did something wonderful?"

My students were uncharacteristically silent, but their smiles and their body language told me they understood.

There are many compelling and legitimate reasons to leave the teaching profession and, sadly, many of our best and brightest do. Veteran staff members are all too familiar with the often overwhelming difficulties facing new teachers. We are not surprised, even more sadly, when fewer than 50% remain longer than five years.

There is, nevertheless, the most important reason to stay: Every year you have a chance to fall in love again - with your students and with teaching. To remember why you decided that the classroom was where you belonged. To remember how much that one special teacher influenced your life. To remember the magic in your classroom when your students could do it without you.

Every day for a teacher is one of infinite challenge. No day is the same as the one before. No class is the same as the one that just left. You are not always a model of perfection and rarely everyone's favorite teacher; however, you have the time and the opportunity to try to be one of the best.

I continue to teach because every August I still get butterflies thinking about that first day of school. I hope I will be a better teacher than the year before, and I hope I will remember how profoundly confusing it is to be 13. I also hope that each new teacher will be smitten and stay.

(Kovaric, 2005, June 18)

From the Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-vokovaric18jun18,0,4574070.story>