

**EVOLVING FROM STUDENT TO TEACHER**  
*Ms Khairiah Hairoman, Peirce Secondary School*

***'Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire'. - William Butler Yeats***

**A Childhood Ambition**

I was 7 years old when I knew I wanted to teach. I was a Primary 1 student, wide-eyed and innocent, and I looked up to my teacher. I remember my fascination with the chalk and blackboard then. I always grabbed the opportunity to volunteer responses just so that I could run up to the board to scribble my answers, even if I was unsure of them. I got such a thrill from holding on to the chalk and pretending that I was the teacher. Throughout my school life, not once did I waver in my decision to make teaching my career, though of course my reasons for this career choice started to evolve from just so that I could write on the blackboard to something much more.

**My Philosophy as a Teacher**

I believe that education has the ability to transform lives and ignite passion. It provides students with the ability to get out of the poverty cycle, giving them hope that one is never trapped and that you are truly the master of your own destiny. Students have the opportunity to be filled with knowledge and wisdom, and more importantly, build character. Values such as compassion, integrity, respect, discipline and resilience could be instilled – qualities which are crucial to living a meaningful and worthwhile life in today's society. It scares me to think of a society that is highly intelligent, effective and productive but whose members are uncaring and lacking in empathy.

**Loving Unconditionally**

In my ten years in the teaching profession, I have taught numerous students. There was a Secondary 4 class which I taught and took on as my form class that really made me understand the meaning of unconditional love. On the first day of school, I left all pre-conceived judgments I had outside the door, and told myself to go in with an open heart. That year I spent with them was life-changing in my profession as a teacher.

As a form teacher, I made the effort to get to know each and every one of my students. Through my reading their student profile forms, I realised that some of these students were experiencing financial woes and lacking familial support, which translated to discipline and academic problems. What worried me most was the lack of faith and conviction they had in themselves.

Home visits gave me a better understanding of my students as people and not just numbers on the class register. I talked to them, making them promise to turn up for school and to their parents. During Meet the Parents sessions with the class, I was honest in my assessment of each student. I highlighted their strengths to their parents, putting smiles on their faces. The class realised that I had faith in them, that I was there to support them and not put them down.

Throughout the year, I spent time showing my love and care for them through simple ways. During Character and Citizenship Education lessons, I shared my personal stories, and inspirational videos about individuals who had failed but managed to bounce back up. They started to trust me enough to start coming up to me to tell me some of the problems they had. One of them was not having a conducive space for study after school. Hearing that, I made my homeroom available for self-study and stayed back with them, doing my work as they studied,

so that I could provide consultation and moral support. We worked hard together as a class, and experienced unity and teamwork. The class even won an inter-class competition – we went hoarse cheering and there was such a big turnaround from a class which had never completed anything, not to say winning a competition. I had never felt so much satisfaction in my life as we celebrated as a class.

Slowly, the class started change. They began to work hard. Discipline problems in class went down. I made a deal with them that every time the class was punished, I would also accept punishment with them. Once, when some of them got into trouble for running around the stairs during curriculum time and were sent to detention, I stayed with them throughout their detention. Hence, this gave them the push to behave as they did not want to put me in a difficult spot. I was always there for them every bit of the way, and the love that I received back from them was overwhelming. They decided to have a class T-shirt, and I saw the leadership qualities of my students as they designed the T-shirt, collected money from everyone, liaised with the vendor and finally distributed it just before Teachers' Day. Best of all, they showed their love towards me by making the T-shirt in my favourite colour - hot pink.

The icing on the cake was the release of the GCE 'N' Level results that year. To me, these charges of mine had succeeded in developing themselves holistically. They have taught me how to love unconditionally, make sacrifices, and about the qualities of perseverance, patience and genuine care and concern. They have made me a better teacher and, more importantly, a better person.

I will end with a quote by one of my students from this class. He wrote, 'You have left footprints in my life.' That, I believe is the essence of an educator. As Jim Henson once said, kids do not remember what you teach, but they remember what you are. Beyond that, they will remember the impact that you have made.