



FROM THE HEART

Powerful Stories from Passionate Educators

Michael Pillsbury, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

For more than 15 years, Michael Pillsbury was paid to put people in prison or make sure they stayed there. And it was that experience that led him to become a teacher.

First he served as a member of the Army's military police, where one of his assignments was to work undercover to find people who were selling narcotics to members of the military. After leaving the Army, he worked as a corrections officer in Charlotte, North Carolina for 8 ½ years, followed by five years as the director of a private prison.

Although he was on the other side, Michael was sympathetic to the circumstances that put many of the prisoners he met behind bars.

"People may not understand this, but I could see that these were not bad people," he said. "Our life is a series of decisions, and when they continue to make the wrong choices, they feel that it's too late to turn back."

Through all of these assignments, Michael saw a common thread that connected many of the prisoners: It was right around middle school that many of them started making bad decisions that eventually led to their incarceration. So 20 years after graduating high school, Michael decided to go back to college and become a middle school teacher.



It wasn't easy for him. For instance, he was a good math student in high school, but had been out of school so long that he had forgotten what he learned. He had to take a developmental math class, which sparked a new love of the subject. With the encouragement of his professors, Michael became a math teacher.

He spent nine years at Randolph Middle School in the Charlotte-Mecklenberg School District. His first year, he was assigned a tough group of students, many of whom had behavior problems and were frequently sent out of the classroom. While he was a new teacher, he had a lot of life experiences and knew the key was to make connections with the students.

Michael recalls one student—a football player—who was on his way to being suspended. Michael took him under his wing and mentored him and kept him on track to graduate. When the student signed with Clemson University to play football, the boy's mother posted a message on Facebook thanking Michael for all he did.

In 2013, he was chosen to become a secondary math specialist in the central office, where he has overseen the rollout of Math Techbook.

"These kids are digital babies," Michael said. "We are making all of these connections so students have a deep understanding of math."

And making connections is what Michael's entire education career has been about.

What Michael loves most about Techbook is its flexibility and versatility in providing different pathways for learners of all types to master concepts.

Do you have a story to tell? Share what you love most about Techbook on Twitter @DiscoveryEd using #LoveTechbook.