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Core Belief Essay

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I Am a Teacher Because I Care

My first day as a Paraeducator at Riverbend Elementary school, my desk is next to Special Education Teacher's desk. We work together and sit together, we are a team. A little bright poster behind the teacher's desk caught my attention: I Am a Teacher Because I Care. Just one of these silly posters that people like to present each other. How many of these posters are produced every day, day by day, year by year? How much of this stuff is lying in people's garages without ever being used? This one is kind of pretty and has a meaningful sign. But why do they think that only teachers care? We all are responsible citizens. We all care. I am a policeman because I care. I am a doctor because I care. I am a president because I care. I do not know why the teacher decided to keep this poster. Maybe she likes the poster itself or she likes the person who presented it to her. I do not know and it does not really matter.

The child I worked with was a very cute and smart 7 year old boy. I personally think he looked like an angel. Nobody could even think that this little angel could easily turn to a real evil in seconds. The paraeducator that worked with him before quit. The position was vacant, but was open only for current Juneau School District's employees, experienced paraeducators. A person without experience was not supposed to be able to teach this "evil". Substitutes who came to this position did not stay more than one day. I was the only one who stayed for a week. At the end of this week I was offered a permanent position of Paraeducator. I had very little teaching experience, but I was not terrified and treated this boy as a student with his own personality, not as an "evil".

This was the hardest job I ever had in my life. His unpreferable activities were Reading and Writing. It did not matter how the morning started, he would always have "his moments" during these two activities. This student destroyed our beautiful resource room almost every day.

All our posters had several layers of tape. He ripped everything that he could rip and broke everything he could break, including our personal stuff. Cleaning the room after one of “his moments”, I looked at the poster: I Am a Teacher Because I Care. Teachers are doing such hard jobs. There are easier jobs for the same money and they are still very valid for the society. But somebody has to do this hard job. Why do people choose teaching? Maybe, they really care more than others.

I worked with this student for 7 months. I always got help and support from all my co-workers. I discussed difficult situations with our Counselor and she always had advices for me. I could feel that these people cared about me, they believed in me and I was doing my best to make these beliefs real. I tried different strategies, some of them worked, some not. Some days were good, others were horrible.

One day, my student had “his moment” in the library. He had to check in a book and lined up for recess, but he had his own plans and started to disturb other children. I approached him and gave him the directions. He became very aggressive, this time, to himself. He took a book and started to hit himself on the face and yelled to me: “Are you happy now?” I hugged him and held him tight like a mother holding her baby. “When you hurt yourself that hurts me more. I love you. I care about you.” I did care about him. I thought this student is smart, kind, and capable to be the best student in the class. He just was very scared. I did not know what happened in his life before he came to school, but he was so scared that somebody could hurt him or hurt his feelings that he was hurting first. After I realized this, all my strategies were focused on the fact that he felt safe in school and in class. I treated him like my own child and was teaching him like I would teach my own child in this situation. He became very open to me and we had a lot of conversations about feelings: his own feelings, his peers’ feelings, and

teachers' feelings, and about things that people have to do, even if they do not like to and how these things could be done faster, so he could move faster to preferred activities. I helped him to communicate with his peers, modeling the right communications for him.

Once he had very bad day. He was not safe and was restricted. I did not do this; I was not trained for the restricting part. But I knew it happened. He went home very soon after that and I did not see him later this day. It was on Friday and everybody was sure that he would forget about it by Monday morning. But he did not. When he came to school on Monday he shared with me how this hurt his feelings. He did not want to see teachers who did it anymore. We talked it over, he seemed to understand, but I promised him and myself that I would do my best to make it not happen again. We were sitting on a coach in our resource room. I accidently looked at the poster: I Am a Teacher Because I Care. At this moment I was not caring about anything else except for my student. I wanted to help him. I wanted him to succeed. And he did. He never was restricted again. We worked hard together on different strategies that helped him to calm down. For example, instead of ripping classroom books, posters in our room and other students' art in the hallways he ripped some scrapped paper that I gave him before reading. Very soon he was able to read without ripping anything.

The last week of school, everybody was tired and excited about the coming summer break. My student's class had Writing. He did not throw any major tantrums for a long time already, but I still was aware when he was doing his unpreferable activities. "Mrs.Lana, I am done." "Can you read it for me?" My student's cheeks turned pink, he was embarrassed. I was curious what his writing was about. Usually, if he was done fast, his writing was awfully predictable. It was either "I love mom or dad" or "I hate school." This day it was something totally different. I looked at the whole page of writing about the awesome day he had in school! I

was proud of him! I am a teacher because I care about every single student in my class and know that every single one will succeed. “You choose to care, because you see the value of what you do because you care. You know, that smile, that comment to a kid, and when you become [like] a big sister or an aunty to them...it's not like I have to feel needed, but it's those things that make me know that what I do matters” (O'Connor, K, 2008).

When a teacher cares about his or her student and believes in them, students can feel it and they can feel that it is true. Children are naïve, they act under the influence of emotions and not reason; they can intuitively feel what is false and what is true. If someone really believes in them, they will work hard to make these beliefs real. “I’m here for the kids. And for no one else...I always say [to my students], “I could walk out of here tomorrow if it wasn’t for you guys. If I’m here for you, you’ve got to do something for me” (O'Connor, K, 2008). The last winter at Mandt training, I watched the video about the interesting experiment: the class was formed only from “bad” students and they had the high professional teacher. They were middle school students, they knew each other, and they knew that they were not capable. The teacher told them that she was the best teacher in this school and they were chosen to be in her class because they were gifted students. Some students shared later that the teacher told them so many times that they were gifted and capable that they started to believe it themselves. All students in the experiment showed dramatic improvement.

“Caring” for students requires a lot of emotional efforts from teachers. “Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy” (Hargreaves, A., 1998). Students can show all spectrums of emotions: from joy to anger. Teachers need to remain calm and positive. But teachers are also human beings and they also

have the same emotions. Sometimes teachers feel overwhelmed with negative emotions they received from students during the day. Does this mean that teachers need to stop caring about every single student? My position corresponds with this quote: “People would say to me in the first few years, ‘Ah, you’ve got to toughen up, you’re too soft, you’re too sensitive, you take everything so seriously’. And I’d say to them, even in my first year, I’d say ‘when I get tough and when I stop caring about what I’m doing then I won’t be a teacher anymore and I will stop teaching, so I refuse now ... and my philosophy of teaching has not changed and that is to be a caring and effective teacher” (Hargreaves, A., 1998).

References

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