

I am a math teacher. I am so proud to say these words. It has been a long and difficult journey to become an educator. Now that I am a teacher, I know my journey to get here is over, but now an even more significant journey to become a great educator is only beginning.

I have always wanted to be a teacher, even since before I was a student. When I was a three years old, I wanted to be a teacher so much I played school with my three imaginary friends. And when I was finally old enough to attend school, I always did my best, wanting to impress my parents and the teachers. I was in high school when I decided I wanted to teach math. I had great teachers who recognized my talents and encouraged me in pursuit of my teaching goals. One day, my AP Calculus teacher had a substitute. In the sub-notes, my teacher left instructions that should the substitute have any questions, I was the go-to girl. I remember sitting down to the overhead projector that day, teaching the class while the substitute looked on.

Having fallen victim to the higher pay of a career in retail management, I did not start teaching once I earned my degree. Instead, I spent ten years in grocery management, working long hours, missing family gatherings, and spending holidays with co-workers instead of loved ones. My superiors who had spent a lifetime in the grocery industry encouraged me to leave retail, to utilize my degree and not be sucked into a career that even they didn't want. Finally when some significant changes happened in the company, I decided to be honest with myself and admit how truly unhappy I was in my career. I knew it was time to leave and pursue my lifelong dream to teach.

My first year went like any other first year; not the worst thing in the world, but something I'm grateful doesn't need to be repeated. My second year of teaching (not to be too pun-ny), has been very educational. I have learned the value of technology in teaching. I have learned to connect with my students by being myself. I have learned that there are many great resources available to me, but one of the greatest ones is my own mind, and I have learned that being a good educator means you never stop being a student.

I use a great deal of technology to enhance and extend the learning environment. I use Remind to communicate with students and parents outside of the classroom, and Show Me to extend the learning environment by making videos accessible from home. But this year I have discovered that using technology really helps motivate students to be engaged. I am privileged to have TI Nspire calculators in my classroom. Last year I used these to give assessments, but this year I have gotten creative and use them to increase student engagement. Texas Instruments has several pre-made lessons which have worked out nicely for my classes. Unfortunately, they don't always do what I like them to do. So I studied the programming and coding for the calculators, taken apart and rebuilt TI documents, and figured out ways to build my own lessons in the calculator that fully teach what I want my students to learn. It has been an amazing experience! Not only am I able to teach lessons more efficiently with these calculator activities, I get great engagement from my students when I do.

One of the biggest changes I made this year is that I let my personality show. Students love hearing stories about me as a student. I regale them with tales of my time at Tooele High School, the teachers I had that are still at THS, and even anecdotes of my college experiences. I love being able to

share stories of how I used math in my pre-teaching career, or of my children learning various math topics. Students still think of teachers as non-human and are surprised to find out that we shop at the same grocery stores as they do, text and hang out with friends just like they do, and like to relax and sleep in on the weekends just like they do. Reminding them that I am actually human by sharing my human experiences with them makes me a bit more relatable and makes for a comfortable and friendly classroom atmosphere.

Last year, a veteran teacher retired. I volunteered to teach one of her upper level courses. As soon as I volunteered I regretted it. She was the only one to have taught College Prep and now she was gone. I would be on my own to figure out how to teach this new core. She told me to just use the Algebra 2 text book and left me with a bunch of scantron style multiple choice tests. I don't like multiple choice tests, and I especially had issues with using an Algebra 2 text book to teach an entirely different core. With the help of another first time College Prep teacher, we planned the entire year. We taught all of the standards for College Prep, and we did it all without using the old Algebra 2 textbook. It seemed a rather daunting task, but when we broke it apart and looked at each standard, between the two of us, we had great ideas on how to effectively teach the material. It taught me a lot of about not relying on any one particular resource to teach. We would look at the standards and determine the best way to teach, sometimes referring to resources used in other classes, oftentimes creating our own resources, and rarely referring to the Algebra 2 text. This experience taught me how to teach to the standards, how to effectively plan an entire year, and it taught me to trust my own knowledge and ability to teach.

Effective teachers are perpetual students. Although I haven't taken any formal classes, I attend Professional Development and learn from my colleagues. But learning is more than that. I have learned how to create new calculator documents because I needed to know how to be a better teacher. I thought I taught my students complex number arithmetic until I got feedback on a common formative assessment proving otherwise, so I challenged myself and learned new ways to effectively teach the material. But it's even more than that. I learn from my students every day. They teach me what it is to be a good teacher. Just as I expect them to remember the math from one year to the next, I too will remember these experiences and apply them to be a better teacher year after year.