

Why Do I Teach?

Indraselvi Pararajasingam

It was the final year holidays in my university and I decided to take up a position as a temporary teacher. Little did I know that I was about to find my calling.

I was assigned with a class which was difficult to handle. They whooped with joy knowing that I was a temporary teacher, dreaming up ways to try my patience. They would mimic me, tell jokes at my expense and even openly threaten me before school and during recess. In short, a nightmare! A particular group of boys, led by a young man named Adiq, as he insisted to be called, would wait at the school gate along with his soon-to-be hoodlum friends and refused to let me pass almost on a daily basis. In class, things got worse. They would wait for me to come in and stand to greet me, but refused to sit so that lessons could not start. When they finally did sit, the gang led by Rex would just do nothing but glare, making loud, rude noises to disrupt others who were trying to learn. I turned to my more experienced peers in the staffroom for help. They were very sympathetic of my plight, pointed to a cupboard in the staff room and simply said 'choose one you like'. In the cupboard was a dazzling array of feather dusters, meter rulers, rotan



Birthdays surprises – one of the many joys of teaching!



A group photo after a Trailer Analysis talk I organised. A vibrant young and up-coming film director from the Indian movie industry did the talk. The students were so energised and happy to ask her about the job as well – maybe a budding actor or director for this mix?

in a myriad of length and thickness! I picked a sturdy-looking feather duster and went on my way to class—hoping that this would do the trick.

True enough, the students sat down immediately and the mood of the class was very subdued, yet work was being done. Just the sight of the cane had done the trick and I was delighted!

However, as the lesson neared its end, Rex decided to throw a temper tantrum. He threw his book across the classroom and shouted a few threats for good measure. With a few dozen eyes on me, watching my next move, I had no choice but to call him to the front for a caning. He held out his hand, I raised my cane, but just as I was about to strike, I saw a flash of fear in his eyes. I stopped! I could not do it!

Instead of hitting his hand hard, I tapped it ever so lightly, threw the cane aside, and told the class that they could do whatever they liked, I simply did not have the heart to hit. The next day, Rex was waiting at the school gates, but this time, he rushed forward to carry my bag! It was

amazing. In class, he took over all matters of class control, threatening to beat up anyone who did not listen to me! It was a sheer pleasure to teach when everyone was so cooperative and happy.

In a conversation with the school's discipline master later, I found out that Rex came from a broken home and is living with an abusive father. I realised he was displaying the behaviour he had learned from his home. The compassion showed—which was lacking in his life—went a long way. I truly felt I had made a difference in him and have been teaching ever since.

Biodata

Indraselvi Pararajasingam holds a B. Ed. TESL (Hons) from University Malaya and a M. Sc. Corp. Comms from Universiti Putra Malaysia. A teacher for the last 23 years, Indraselvi credits her job for keeping her active and feeling blessed every day and has interests in hiking, yoga, listening to music and travelling. She continues to keep up with technology and always keen to refresh her pedagogical approaches to remain current. She is presently teaching in Taylor's College.