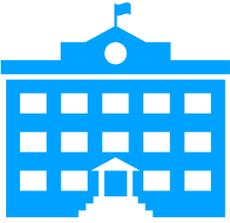

A Clear Reason



People have asked me many times in the past why I became a teacher. My standard answer, that I created long ago, included the words: “someone told me I could influence and change how children feel about people who are different through my presence and teaching in schools.”

I believe I did make differences in the lives of children I taught. I have just realized the perhaps the real reason of why I chose teaching as a career choice was for a different reason. I am proud for the years I gave to education and know that my skills and abilities influenced others. But yesterday I realized my standard answer was not the true reason.

The actualization came to me as I was meeting a group of Grade Four students yesterday who had already been read to them a prod-acted version of my book, *That is Not Me*. When I entered into their class I noticed they had in hand written questions for me to answer. Their faces were welcoming, eager and all were absorbing my words as I shared with them what it was like being a first time author. After sharing my short speech, I planned to hand out post cards that I had signed for each of them. I asked them if they would each provide to me feedback of how they felt about the book as I called their names and presented them the cards. The teachers and the students did not know beforehand I was going to ask for these reviews. What they said was not rehearsed, their words were unedited and true to their hearts.

I sat there listening as one by one students gave their honest insights and I silently thought, “they get me”. For the past six months, I have spoken with individuals and groups of interested readers about my book, but never considered that nine and ten year olds would be the most intuitive. Their reflections included words of feelings and observations. They brought up parts of my book that led to me further shared stories and understandings of my writing.

My heart absorbed their words as my head acknowledged the gratitude for this opportunity. I did not expect these conversations to happen but I am so fortunate they did. The emotions expressed by these students will remain with me for a long time.

The students did have the opportunity one by one to ask their prepared questions. Many of the questions required further thought and explanation. Most though were typical to their age and interests in wanting to know what my “favourites” were. I will have to have my “favourites” prepared if other opportunities come about to meet with students of this age.

As I was walking outside after the presentation, following this noisy group who were interested in seeing my car, I thought for the first time since retiring this is what I miss. Children, who are wiser and sensitive than most, are the reason I devoted all those years to one profession. They see beyond the differences and acknowledge the heart of what is true. They have not yet created those walls of knowing what is appropriate or inappropriate, instead speak without filters. Yesterday's opportunity to meet with this group reminded me of that natural love and trust that is evident in all children.

When I was first asked to meet with these students my initial reaction was judgemental. I did not write this book for an elementary school audience. Some of my themes in the book are not appropriate for younger ears and to me should only be shared with those with higher cognition and maturity. It took me a few days after being first approached to provide a possible solution for me to feel comfortable and support this idea of sharing my book to younger audiences. Providing elementary school age students an opportunity to listen to my written words, while using a prod-acted version of the book, never would have come about without the vision and energy of one interested consulting professional who believed it could happen, and the classroom teacher who trusted it could happen.

I am thankful that my intentions were pushed and those students had an opportunity to not only hear my words but also share with me their reflections. My dream of sharing my story with students has now become a reality. Yesterday gave me a lot more than I expected.