MUSINGS OF A SUBSTITUTE TEACHER

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Letting go can really be painful and difficult, most especially when you have to stop holding on to something you came to love. But what makes letting go even harder is the fact that you didn’t have a choice but to loosen your grip because that’s what you have signed up for – temporary, brief, short assignment – which you knew would end eventually. Take these words from my own experience as a substitute teacher.

According to Wikipedia, a substitute teacher (usually abbreviated as "sub") is a person who teaches a school class when the regular teacher is unavailable; e.g., because of illness, personal leave, or other reasons. When a substitute teacher begins to invest emotions, to make connections to students, to pour his heart out into the teaching profession despite knowing he cannot hold on to it longer than he should, that’s when the substitution becomes bittersweet. Nonetheless, becoming a substitute teacher has become one of my greatest experiences in life. My appointment only lasted for three months, yet those months had been incredibly wonderful. In a short period of teaching, I have amassed memories – fun, exciting, sad, scary, surprising…and everything in between.

Allow me to share a few stories with you.

Story #1: Overwhelming. Yes, at least for a newbie like me, especially when I learned that I substituted for a Master Teacher I, who was assigned to teach 7 sections with over 30 students each during the 2nd Quarter. I cried on the 2nd day of work. I may have shed some tears, but I still took the challenge and I embraced the opportunity to be a teacher and also to be a student at the same time since there’s a lot for me to learn. After
all, the teacher I substituted for was extremely helpful and cooperative. She made my job easy! In the end, she also became my model and inspiration.

Story #2: Meet and Greet. There is more to meet and greet than just an introduction. It was nice knowing students’ names, likes or dislikes. It was pleasant hearing them talk. But I paid more attention to what they didn’t say. I listened to their silence and tried to understand little gestures such as bowing their head, smirking, or even avoiding eye contact with me. Further, with meet and greet activity, I came to realize how poor I am in remembering names. Don’t fret. I have already found a solution to this, though it is still a work in progress.

Story #3: Classroom Management. Teachers’ main role is to guide students and help them learn. But if one student misbehaves and distracts the class during lesson, the classroom turns into a muddled environment not conducive to learning. It is a bit challenging for teachers to define and to instantly attempt to change misbehavior especially at the height of unpleasant emotions, considering that there are laws in the Philippines that favor the students when it comes to school discipline. As a neophyte in the teaching industry, admittedly, I am prone to committing mistakes in managing classroom behaviors or misbehaviors. However, through modelling ideal behavior such as using polite and encouraging language, involving the whole class in setting classroom rules, focusing on rewards over punishment, empathizing and connecting to students, and coming to class prepared with exciting lessons, these will definitely help in strategically and effectively handling the class. These are only some of the handful strategies in classroom management, and I think, these helped me survive the past 3 months of teaching.

Story #4: Diversity. It is all that makes us unique and different from each other, in different aspects of our lives – race, religious beliefs, gender and sexual orientation, political views, age, or social status. It would take one open-minded, critical, compassionate, and grounded teacher to teach the students the value of embracing peers
with views and background different from them. It is never easy. But love and respect is encompassing. And one must walk the talk and lead by example. As second parents, we must take the initiative in knowing our students and in making them feel that they are loved and accepted. We may not see the results real time, but the effects of what we do will translate in our students’ future.

Story #5: Family. I have found a second home at school. Going to work felt like coming home. I was blessed to have been deployed in a school filled with supportive, kind-hearted, humble, fun and out-going co-workers. Yes, they have differences. Teachers also come from varied backgrounds – with conflicting opinions, different views, and diverse teaching styles. But at the end of the day, we are family – and they made me feel I was part of it.

I once asked why good things always come to an end. Then I realized, God is probably preparing me for something better. But for now, cliché as it may sound, let me practice the art of letting go as I bring those wonderful lessons and memories with me. I would not say goodbye; rather, see you around.

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