

Finding meaning in what we do.



by Julla G. Thompson

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Finding Meaning in What We Do

One of the hallmarks of a dedicated teacher is the almost unshakable belief that teachers can change the world. We want to believe that what we do is meaningful. That what we do does make a difference.

Some days, though, it's easy to be so caught up in the papers to be graded, the assessments to be created, and the emails to be answered that we can lose sight of the meaningfulness of our work. And lately, the hateful tone of so many pundits who are not classroom teachers, but who are quick to tell us what we are doing wrong, wrong, wrong is discouraging and degrading. The result? Burnout.

Burnout is different from the insistent plea, "But I don't want to go to school today!" that is the morning mantra for teachers everywhere. Burnout is a pervasive sense that there is not much point to what we do. Certainly, the negative aspects of our work outweigh the positives for teachers who are going through burnout.

One of the surest ways to combat the sense of despair that accompanies burnout is to reconsider what having a meaningful career looks like when you teach. What does it mean when we say we make a difference?

Teachers who stop kids from picking on each other, being rude, and making fun of classmates protect students who are powerless to defend themselves. We stop bullies from winning. We empower kids when we tell them to talk to an adult if they have a problem; and we empower them when we praise them for the right things. We empower them over and over when we use our adult power to stop bullies.

We make a difference when we show kids how to be lifelong learners. We make it okay to be curious. We take them to the library to check out books and show them how to read and write and think and work together. We make it cool to be a nerd in a tough world.

For all teachers, and especially those of us who teach the children of poverty, we find meaning in the way that we try to guide our students to

a better life. Few veteran teachers have not known the despair that comes when we realize that even our most (seemingly) ordinary students can struggle with terrible home situations—an ill family member, an alcoholic parent, or a guardian who has been out of work for too long, just to name a few. For these kids, teachers are a touchstone of normalcy in a rotten world. We show our students how having an education can make a life far more comfortable and easy than a life of ignorance.

We offer comfort and guidance to those students whose lives are chaotic and dysfunctional for whatever reason. We can soothe the edges for those kids and guide them to cope, to make good choices, to succeed somewhere. We give them the encouragement that the rest of the world does not.

We show our students how to read, to write, to think, to have a life of the mind. Without us, many students would not possess any of these crucial skills. When we show students how to read and write, we give them safe passage in the big world.

Finally, perhaps the most important gift that we give students is the one that is most frequently reciprocated; we teach students to believe in themselves. Whenever you doubt that teaching is a meaningful profession, consider that you spend your days encouraging young people to take charge of their lives and to make gigantic leaps of faith—all dependent on the belief that we have instilled in them that the future is theirs for the taking.

About Julia Thompson



As a workshop leader and writer, best-selling author Julia Thompson has taught thousands of teachers how to create student-centred classrooms, thrive during that important first year of teaching, motivate reluctant learners, prevent discipline problems, and sustain

high expectations for the success of their students as well as for themselves.

A practicing classroom teacher, Julia is the author of several resources for teachers. In each of her books, she presents classroom-tested ideas, activities, and strategies designed to make each school day a successful one. Because she is a full-time teacher herself, Julia focuses her advice on the practical aspects of a teacher's busy professional life. She understands first-hand the realities of today's classroom. This extensive experience and the insights she has gained as a teacher trainer have shaped her beliefs about the daily challenges that can confront even the most steadfast teachers.

Julia's dedication to promoting excellence among her colleagues and to helping new teachers translate their dreams into successful practice is the focus of her work as an author of professional development resources and as a teacher trainer.

Books written by Julia and available to order from Amazon:

