

Why I Love Teaching, But Why I May Be Ready to Leave the Classroom



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At dinner with friends last night, I was asked if I still liked teaching. It was an easy answer. “Yes, I still like it, as a matter of fact, I love it.” When it goes right—and that’s not every day in every class—but when the stars align and your students are focused and your lesson is working, there is nothing like it. Hands are up; students are asking questions; you’re all laughing; everyone’s learning...it’s amazing. It’s like hearing a tennis ball hit the sweet spot on the racket, or watching an actor command an audience. Teaching is magic. Who wouldn’t love to spend each day trying to make this magic? I mean *you* are leading students to *learn* and *think*. So, then, why do I want to leave teaching? I am tired. I am tired of the lack of respect from the public, and especially exhausted by the NC General Assembly whose latest pay scale implies that as a veteran teacher I have no worth. The idea that I do not deserve my tenure or longevity pay, frankly, makes me want to sit down and weep.

Prevailing public and legislative opinion implies that a *highly paid* veteran teacher drains school budgets. Experienced teachers, according to critics cited in WUNC’s “Experienced Teacher’s Under Fire” are “one of the *problems* with public education. They get tenure, [critics] say, and ride out the last years of their careers”. In 1998, I received tenure in North Carolina. Since then, I have been a department chair, mentored at least five student teachers, written curriculum, led staff development, served on school planning and leadership committees, received my National Board Certification, earned my master’s degree, presented at professional conferences, attended week-long educational workshops, taken on new teaching assignments, become a mentor teacher, planned lessons, and learned to use new technologies, while teaching 21st Century skills. Hardly “riding out my career”. I don’t mean to imply that teachers work harder than any other profession; we don’t. However, we, unlike other professions, are not rewarded for refining and perfecting our skills. Actually, as *Wall Street Journal* reporter, Steven Brill noted in [“Super Teachers Alone Can’t Save Our Schools”](#), teaching is the only profession “where how talented you are, how energetic you are, how you perform, has nothing at all to do with how you get paid and how you get promoted.” So, we have always depended on our state recognizing that our experience counts, and that we should be paid more because we bring more to the table.

Schools need what veteran teachers offer. Schools “have to have some people who have institutional knowledge,” says Michael Maher, the Assistant Dean for Professional Education and Accreditation in the School of Education at NC State. He notes that we have seen curricular changes and that there needs to be someone to “help these young folks weather those storms”, and veterans have a sense of the community”. My school is full of amazingly talented young teachers; their energy, ideas, and presence rejuvenate me. However, regardless of their talent or vigor, they don’t know the school community like I do. They haven’t seen how it has changed over a twenty-year stretch; they don’t know what our community expects from teachers. Veteran teachers build the bridge between the past and the present. We support and encourage young teachers; we make sure that the profession thrives and continues. It’s an important job; it’s a job that should be respected. My worth in this regard doesn’t “max out” at 20 years and neither should my pay.

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So, where do I go from here? Do I resign? Does my frustration and fatigue finally win out over dedication and commitment? Do I leave the magic behind? Part of me does consider packing up my extensive bag of knowledge, wisdom, and skill and leaving education. However, last week my AP students wrote wonderful argumentative essays and my English I students raised their unit test scores, and I spent a productive day with colleagues at a county workshop, and my student teacher taught a successful lesson. What I do matters, and so I won't let small minded politicians, who devalue me; force me from my life's work. So, tomorrow, when someone asks me if I still like teaching, I'll say I love it, but I will also say that it's time for the public and our legislature to start valuing what I do.

Yvonne Anderson
Teacher, Wake County Public Schools