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Returning to Our Roots as Students

by Sanyogita Padhye

I taught Indian classical dance as an undergraduate. Because I taught beginners' level students, I was required to retrain in the basics, polishing compositions and concepts that I had learned at the beginning of my dance journey. It was during these review sessions that I fell in love with dance again. The teaching mindset, combined with my dual identity as a student, allowed me to register the nuances of every movement. Beauty could be found in the perfect swirl of a wrist movement, in the light, sharp toss of the head at a composition's finale. Returning to my roots as a student let me find inspiration in the knowledge I had gained and to communicate that awe as a teacher.

Now, as an aspiring teacher pursuing a master's degree in English Education, I find myself, again, in the unique position of occupying both a teacher's and a student's mindsets. As a student teacher in high school classrooms, many of my lessons focused on literary analysis: a process in which we return to a text's foundations, examine the elements of its language, and emerge with a deeper understanding of its *implications*, whether an overarching theme, or profound connections to human souls. To teach these classes meaningfully, I was compelled to apply these principles to my practice: to study each detail of my knowledge of both literature and the educational theory. I approached (and still return to) this material in the student mindset, as I had while teaching dance. Studying and deconstructing this material—filling the margins with notes, quizzing myself on plot—while straightforward, familiar, are slow processes; as, arguably, they must be. They require refinement of our grasp of our subject, questioning of our understanding; after all, we are recreating our foundations as readers and writers.

However, they push us to be both students and teachers: to solidify our command of our subject, while consciously admiring what we teach, the beauty that first pulled us to this material. This dual mindset inspires us, as we push ourselves to consider and discuss a writer's use of rich sensory details and imagery, or the manipulation of sounds that turn brief lines into poetry. To be a teacher is to be a student. We reconnect with our ability to wonder at our subject, to achieve mindfulness and insight through reading, and share this with our students.

In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "Live for a while in these books, learn from them what you feel is worth learning, but most of all love them...it will, I am sure, go through the whole fabric of your becoming." The knowledge we have, and questions we seek to answer, allow us to renew and breathe life into our teaching. It is when we choose to be both teachers and students that we find our love and appreciation for English. It rests in the nuances of communication, the perfect turn of phrase, and the astonishing poetry of a detail.

Works Cited

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. New York: Vintage Books, 1986. Print.

Sanyogita Padhye is a graduate student in the five-year teacher education program at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. She is currently finishing her master's degree in English Education (K-12). She graduated summa cum laude from Rutgers University in May of 2016, with a bachelor's degree in English