

## Blog of a beginning teacher

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**She was looking for a job, and I, being the supportive husband was serving as research assistant. We searched hard through the seemingly ever-shrinking font; our finger tips becoming stained with the black ink of fruitless labour.**

To be honest, my mind had been wandering for quite a time. I'd been thinking about school again. Sunday morning, cup of tea and steaming toast in hand and my mind was still trapped in the classroom.

The job ads had me cornered. They screamed at me. They interrogated me, "How are your students being prepared for these opportunities? What are you doing that will get them into these roles?"

I had no comeback. "We read novels" or "I teach them how to spell and how to construct sentences" just didn't seem to cut it.

While she continued to search for the perfect position, I began philosophising about job ads and teaching. I had to get honest about myself, my classroom practice and even my profession.

We can't teach all the specifics these jobs require—not even the fundamentals. There is not time in the day, or space in the curriculum. There are too many niche markets to even attempt it. Instead we search for skills and knowledge that are broadly applicable. "We are generalised instructors", I concluded. "We work to till the soil, to prepare it for the seed planters and waterers of university lecturers and inspired mentors." This realisation made me feel good—my work was essential in preparing students to tackle these bold 'position vacant' headlines. I was suddenly warmed, but it could have been from the hug I had received as she passed by.

I could hear the whispers of the tabloid pages, but there were more discoveries to be made this Sunday morning. I returned to the job ads and looked harder, looked closer, looking for my influence, my answer to these concise ads.

As I looked I came to another realisation. Most of these ads weren't calling for knowledge or specific skills, but attitudes, habits and character. It's not what a potential employee has in their tool bag that counts, but who the tool bag is wrapped around.

Statements such as, "willing to take on a challenge", "works co-operatively in a diverse team environment", "able to work unsupervised" and "has an eye for detail" filled each section from Accounting to Sales.

Again I was taunted by the pages in front of me, "What are you doing to build these traits in your students? How is your study of Shakespeare, your

explanation of onomatopoeia, your 1000 word essay due in two weeks building great, influential employees?"

I savoured the warmth of my second cup of Bushels as I thought. In staffroom discussions we often commend (or lament the lack of) commitment, resourcefulness and drive of students. But how much time is spent explicitly, or at least intentionally, teaching these values and habits?

If this is what employers are looking for in candidates, am I doing all I can to prepare my students? Are the twenty-five young minds and hearts in front of me growing into people that will be successful and happy in the work place? Or am I simply filling their tool bags without building the owner?

The thoughts were getting all too deep for the time and the day. I closed the paper and searched for a distraction, the foot long lawn caught my eye as I passed by the kitchen window (a dutiful husband will wash his own dishes after all—even on a Sunday morning) reminding me that the backyard needed some attention.

It wasn't until later that evening that the haunting questions of the morning paper returned. Was I really building my students' future success? Was my approach to teaching focusing on the head, while neglecting the heart?

We snuggled up as the sun sank low over the steel stacks and warehouses of the Port Adelaide marshland and turned to the scriptures to close the day. Seemingly possessed by infinite wisdom (in addition to beauty), she turned to Micah 6:8 and my musings began to solidify.

She read, "*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*"

"As a Christian teaching in a Christian school, this is the selection criteria I want my students to meet", I thought. She smiled, somehow confirming that she had understood my silent struggles.

There was no mention of active voice, subjectivity or motifs (or titrations, factorisation or meiosis). God is seeking workers who practice justice, mercy and humility—the characteristics, attitudes and habits of success—not necessarily the skills we usually measure in schools. Funnily enough, the employers placing the ads in this morning's paper were after the same thing.

I went to bed a changed teacher. We will still read the novels and still analyse poetry, but tomorrow my classroom will be different.

She has a job now. I still read the job section every Sunday. The lawn needs mowing again. **TEACH**

*“Am I simply filling their tool bags without building the owner?”*