

## One to Ponder

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I can remember my mother waking my brother and me up, one September morning, on what should have been the first day of school. The teachers were on strike. My friends and I were excited. We assumed that we would have an extended vacation. We planned our activities and were looking forward to an enjoyable September break. Mom had completely different agenda. She outlined the exercises that my brother and I would do for that day. Dictionary work, math, writing and reading were mandatory before the television was turned on or any free time could take place. It was understood that everything would be completed before she returned home. Having a mother as an educator had its drawbacks.

I can recall reading a variety of literatures, solving challenging puzzles, playing games, and having meaningful conversations that helped us to grow as learners and as a family. My family valued education. It was encouraged. It was expected. It was required. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, we would attend college. We were expected to get good grades and follow all directions in school. There was no other way to think and no other goals to achieve.

I can recollect a rigid upbringing. I often tell my peers that I was a "crazy" youngster and as a result of my actions, I could have been a poster child for child abuse. A stern rearing kept me from placing myself in major life altering situations. I didn't become a teen parent, attempt to commit suicide, prostitute my body, become a victim of relationship abuse, drop out of school or experience any of the other hardships that many of my childhood friends went through. For this, I am grateful.

Many of the students I interact with seem to come from different worlds compared to those of my memories. Some of their worlds don't have literature readily available, have very little time is spent with family and the television is the main source of information and communication in the household. Often, I find myself judgmental and at times harsh; believing that my students should have been raised in a similar environment to mine. I ponder over what changes have occurred in our society and neighborhoods. My community, church, school and neighbors, was an extension of my upbringing. They were given permission to teach, discipline and rear, if needed. Today, I see less of this community involvement. Has this change impacted they way in, which my students learn? I question how my upbringing, at home and from the community, has influenced the way in which I respond to the students in my classroom.

How can I use and share these early childhood experiences to honor the culture in which my students live in today? How can I reach them on their levels? Can I raise the bar without imposing my personal views on how I think a student should act and work? How can I impact the decisions my students have already made and still encourage positive outcomes? I want my students to succeed. When I reflect on the lessons I present, I wonder if there is a different approach I could have used or am I blind to the needs of my students. My focus is to reach the unreachable". Those that for some reason or another have given up or can't seem to demonstrate what I consider as acceptable behavior or work habits in the classroom. I only want the best that each student can give, collectively and as a whole.