

Rough and interesting. The most common descriptions I gave when asked about teaching. I will never deny the truth—and the ambiguity—of these two words in relating my experience, but my readiness to dismiss my life with these adjectives does an injustice not only to what I have done but, more importantly, to what has been done to me.

To come to any insight about my teaching at Raymond High School through Ole Miss's Mississippi Teacher Corps I feel I must first reflect on my own purpose in attempting to teach, and then maybe, I will be able to see the purpose in my teaching. As my undergraduate degree approached its end, I felt burdened by the idea that I must go out and finally become great. This vague idea circulates my mind, but without any solidity. That is not to say that being great should not be sought after, but that the motivation to be great must be what is truly great. My motivations to teach were primarily selfish. I needed to feel secure, feel like I was an important part of society, and feel like I had an incomparable value. These are not bad things in themselves—everyone should feel these—but an emptiness forms within when they are what is sought after first and foremost. The effect of a true purpose is a deep and profound sense of worth, not the object.

When I began to teach, these selfish desires were not fully satisfied, especially during the first semester. Whatever inclinations I had to focus on myself were strained by the constant demand of the students. I finally found myself in a position where I could not expect to be served in the ways I wanted; praise was seldom, the students did not understand the content matter I already expected them to, and they continually struggled to learn. No immediate positive results, or expected results even over a period of months, came. Constant declarations of “I hate this class,” “I don't understand,” or “How can we move on when we haven't learned anything” put an additional strain on the situation.

At this point, the clearest ways I could have dealt with the situation were dismiss the students as incapable or unwilling and therefore seek to serve myself and reap whatever benefits I could, or just keep trying to teach them as best as I could despite whatever negative responses and circumstances arose. For some reason, I was given the strength to carry out the latter. Only with that strength could the students ever learn from me and with me. This is when teaching taught me.

It is hard to think of teaching as a profession. More properly, it should be called compensated leisure, not because it is simple—it is the most challenging and complex task I have ever taken on—but because in its correct denotation, leisure activities are those that better the human soul. Teaching is not mindless, heartless labor that just aids in human survival, as are activities like ditch digging. Teaching fully involves the heart and mind of the teacher in order to cultivate a knowledge and love of truth in others, so that they may truly live. As a teacher I learned how to patiently love and serve others despite their wants or cries and just focus on what is best for them, not forcing anything upon them, but serving them so they may become what they should become. Teaching taught me this. This is not to say I now have the formula to cure the maladies of the human soul, but I do know I cannot help if I do not serve with a loving spirit and a dedication to truth.

The Mississippi Teacher Corps took someone who wanted to serve others, despite primarily selfish desires, and put him in a place where someone was needed. Now, in retrospect, I cannot view my time in the Corps or teaching at Raymond High as anything other than completely purposeful, not just a matter of chance or circumstance. If you cannot see purpose when teaching, or when serving others, than you must question what you are doing. Beyond any purpose I may have brought into the profession, a deeper

purpose of serving arose that is greater than myself or greater than any purpose I could ever conjure up.