The Ones We Remember

Scholars Reflect on Teachers Who Made a Difference

edited by
Frank Pajares • Tim Urdan

A volume in Adolescence and Education
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Adolescence and Education
Tim Urdan and Frank Pajares, Series Editors
To Saucy.
My best and most patient teacher.

—Frank Pajares

To all of the inspirational and memorable teachers I have had the opportunity to work with and learn from, especially C.M., M.M., P.P., and Mr. Smith.

—Tim Urdan
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The primary aim of our book series, *Adolescence and Education*, has been to highlight the insights of prominent scholars from a wide range of disciplines united by a common interest in adolescence. Our first volume, *General Issues in the Education of Adolescents*, published in 2001, provided an overview of some of the central issues regarding the education of adolescent students. Volume 2 focused on the *Academic Motivation of Adolescents*, and Volume 3 provided much needed *International Perspectives on Adolescence*. In our fourth volume, we identified a number of *Strategies and Challenges of Educating Adolescents*. Last year, we published Volume 5, which provided an overview of *Self-Efficacy and Adolescence*. In all, prominent national and international voices on adolescence and adolescent development have contributed to our series.

For our current volume, we decided to attempt something quite novel and, we hope you will agree, valuable. Paulo Freire wrote that “sometimes a simple, almost insignificant gesture on the part of a teacher can have a profound formative effect on the life of a student.” Sometimes, of course, this formative effect is not the result of a simple, isolated gesture but rather of a proactive and sustained series of gestures on the part of a teacher. Many of us have been deeply influenced by one or more teachers who have exercised a formative effect in our development as students and individuals. We remember these teachers with fondness, tell their stories to our own children, think of them with affection, respect, gratitude, even reverence. Sometimes, we recognized this influence as it was happening, and we grew close to these remarkable individuals, keeping them in our lives even after we graduated from their classes. Often, however, they themselves were unaware of the influence they exerted over us, for it was not until years passed that we realized their effect. If time and distance did not prevent it,
perhaps we found our way back to these educators and shared with them our appreciation and gratitude.

With this in mind, we asked some of the finest scholars in the fields of education, educational psychology, adolescence, and adolescent development to provide us with a short story or vignette describing their most memorable teacher. Our instructions gave authors a great deal of leeway. They could provide the story on its own, or they could follow it with a brief analysis drawn from theory and research in education, psychology, and human development to identify key concepts and principles that would seem to apply in explaining why the selected teacher was so effective and memorable. They could also choose to write a story about one specific teacher, or they could instead choose to write about the qualities that they believed contribute to teaching excellence, including anecdotes from various teachers and experiences to support the qualities they identified. We left it to our authors to decide how to tell the story and how to, or even whether to, conceptualize the analysis. What we emphasized, however, was that we asked our authors to write their stories with an eye toward being accessible to a wide audience of readers. One need not be an academic, or an expert in education or psychology, to understand and find meaning in these stories.

We conceived of “adolescence” as broadly as possible, from middle elementary to the undergraduate years. Some of our authors, however, experienced the sort of teacher we had in mind during their graduate study, and they asked to be able to write about these experiences. We happily approved.

In essence, we were looking for stories and analyses that capture just what it is that makes a particular teacher, as our title describes, unforgettable. Who are these teachers that we remember? And why? But we wanted to hear these stories from scholars who had themselves become experts in education, who were well versed in the literature on teaching effectiveness, and who understood the process of teaching both personally and, for lack of a better term, theoretically. Indeed, in addition to being international authorities in their own academic fields, the scholars we selected are themselves master teachers about whom a future generation of scholars will write about.

Through the stories our scholars tell, we hoped to create a volume that describes and vividly illustrates the critical qualities that make teachers of adolescents both effective and memorable. Culminating the volume is a wonderful and insightful chapter by Professor Marshall Gregory, a scholar of the first rank and a leading authority on teaching who has published widely on the subject. In his delightful treatise, Professor Gregory puts his finger on the very essence that is required of teachers who aspire to becoming effective educators of youth. He asks, also, the humorous and thought provoking question, “Must a teacher be charismatic and sexy in order to be the one who makes a difference?”
It is our hope that these stories, anecdotes, and analysis will prove especially valuable to preservice and classroom teachers who are engaged in the important process of educating our youth. In a sense, we hope it provides a series of templates that help identify the attitudes and behaviors of those teachers who make a difference in the lives of their students. Of course, we believe that these stories about exceptional classroom teachers and professors of adolescents will also further the mission of our series.

Over 100 years ago, William James made the observation that “the teachers of this country... have its future in their hands.” Indeed. But it is the exceptional, unforgettable teachers who best chart that future.

We thank our contributors for their excellent work and dedication in this volume.

Frank Pajares
and Tim Urdan