


A Stupid Letter to My Student

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By Stacy Greathouse, PhD

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Stupid.

This word was spoken triumphantly and repeatedly as self-speak by a talented pre-service, k-12 special education teacher during my course Library Resources for Children. Until I heard her say it several times through the semester, I hadn't seen how one word can hold an entire teaching philosophy. I hadn't considered how the power of that word multiplies when it takes the form of self-speak. I hadn't realized how much it scared me to think that that word might follow her into a k-12 classroom.

When I learned that my own teaching philosophy existed on the pinhead of a single word whenever I've thought it at myself, I needed to send this email to that amazing up-and-coming teacher:

Ahoy [Pre-Service Teacher],

You know, something has been sitting uncomfortably with me. I've heard you say several times this semester, "Now, I just feel so stupid about . . ." I believe you. I especially believe you because I felt that way for a very, very long time. OK—sometimes I still do.

But: Lack of awareness is not the same as ignorance. Ignorance is a choice, a willful turning away from knowledge. That choice is the antithesis of education, and anyone who pursues a teaching career with that kind of mentality defines a form of their hypocrisy.

You are where you belong. How beautiful to challenge our own assumptions when we are presented with perspectives that we have not yet been able to understand. It's the wonder of timing. We get a barrage of information every single second, so now is the time for whatever bit of information to dawn on you as an *ah-HA!* May those never, ever stop happening for you.

It's been so hard to re-orient myself and rejoice in those *gah! What was I thinking?* moments. There's so much empowerment in being reminded that I'm still alive and connecting to others, which is a glorious education both inside and beyond the classroom. It's my cue to "do better."

We're not stupid. We're not ignorant. The biggest lessons with the most powerful punch are smack dab in the middle of the uncomfortable moments—always the clearest indicator that we're present in a perfect storm of learning. The truly brave then know there's an adventure to have if we look for even more information about our perception gap.

I'm finding out that my feeling stupid is also a gut reaction of fear that the person I'm learning from is judging me and thinking less of me. Maybe they are. I suspect that the grading system used by institutional education is part of what creates that fear. But we can be gentler and kinder to ourselves. Now I try to be grateful for those learning moments and to let the fear of judgment go. I don't always do this, but I'm trying to let go of fear and say aloud something like, "Thank you for gifting me this moment of clarity."

Stupid can be such a divisive word. It's such a harmful way of trying to cut ourselves off from the authenticity of the wonderful human being we were before. It's harmful because it rejects the fact that you always had, and will continue to have, the capacity to learn.

Don't worry. You're a better person than you were a moment before, and it's mostly because of the most real form of education. You are already a wonderful teacher because, if we can't teach ourselves joyfully, we'll never be able to teach others joy.

Thank you for making me uncomfortable. Thank you for gifting me this moment of clarity.

Blue skies,

Dr. Pyrate

Dr. Stacy Greathouse is an instructor and Instructional Designer at Texas Woman's University. Her definition of success is to hear or say at least once a day, "I never thought about it that way!"

