

Dear Teachers,

After hearing about the poor state of education and schooling in Slovakia and how your voices have been largely ignored, I felt compelled to write something to show my support.

During my time in Greece, Turkey and Spain I participated in my fair share of strikes in the hope of achieving the bare minimum. I recognise your situation: the need to work 2 jobs to support a family, the lack of respect attached to the profession, lack of adequate resources, no professional development (unless I paid for it) and the absolute necessity to empty your cupboards at home to provide materials other than an out-dated course book. It can be soul-destroying.

What is most shocking is that I have not always worked for the state. Even financially secure, private institutions failed to provide the essentials and meet the basic rates of pay. In Spain I worked for a group of international schools owned by businessmen whose only concern was how many children we could fit in one room at a time. When teachers from one of our sister schools exercised their right to voice an opinion and attempted to get parents on board with a strike, the ringleaders were actually dismissed.

Also disturbing is the way certain subjects are viewed in international schools. Maths, ICT and Science teachers had a little more success in being allocated a budget but our ESL department relied on teachers pooling their personal resources. We were seen as little more than a baby-sitting service for children arriving at various stages of development to follow a British curriculum with little or no English. I also taught Drama and Citizenship, both of which were withdrawn from the curriculum last year as the owners found them 'pointless'. #unbelievable.

So why do we keep going? Because we are teachers. We care. We are passionate about our role and the influence we might have over future generations. We are inspired by each other and this unites us and gives us the strength to insist that those in positions of responsibility should behave responsibly.

Since arriving at this university in the UK I have heard teachers relate countless tales of hardship from all parts of the globe. The one that has had the most impact is that of a friend who works tirelessly alongside teachers in the Kurdistan region of Iraq to re- build education systems in worn torn areas. She describes situations I could not have imagined but she is so positive. Along with her colleagues she battles on a daily basis and every minor step is a major milestone to them. Against all the odds they are winning their fight and considering their circumstances, this should be an inspiration to us all.

In times of desperation or frustration I have always looked first to my colleagues. Just to sneak into a class and watch them inspiring children in front of my eyes is often enough. Then there are the children who are an inspiration in themselves. I cannot imagine reaping the same rewards from any other job.

Some of fiction's most inspirational characters are those children created by Roald Dahl and it is to his words I am drawn now:

I BEGAN TO REALIZE HOW IMPORTANT IT WAS
TO BE AN ENTHUSIAST IN LIFE. IF YOU
ARE INTERESTED IN SOMETHING, NO
MATTER WHAT IT IS, GO AT IT FULL SPEED.
EMBRACE IT WITH BOTH ARMS, HUG IT,
LOVE IT AND ABOVE ALL BECOME PASSIONATE
ABOUT IT. LUKEWARM IS NO GOOD.

-Roald Dahl

No, lukewarm is certainly no good for a teacher.

Please take heart. Those of us showing our support may not be there in body but our spirit is most definitely standing alongside you. We are all part of one community and the fact that ours is a vocation, not a job, means that our collective conscience will always give us the strength to fight for what is just.

I wish you every success.

Very best wishes,

Louise