

## **The Little Teacher and the Big Dream of Mohaddeseh**

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Four years of studying, striving, and absorbing a myriad of educational theories culminated in this moment: my inaugural formal class. To project an air of professionalism and experience, I donned formal attire. I knocked on the classroom door, greeted the students, and stepped inside. Eleven twelfth-grade humanities students regarded me with keen attention. Nervous, I busied myself arranging my belongings for a couple of minutes to regain composure. Then, I gathered my wits and began: introductions, sharing my passion for sociology, which I hailed as the "God of all subjects," and outlining the class rules:

Food and drink were permitted, provided they were shared and did not disrupt the class. Each student was allowed to plead "I haven't studied" twice during the semester, exempting them from a failing grade, but the management of these two sessions was their responsibility.

If you accompany me, I will accompany you.

The students embraced the rules, and the class became a vibrant forum for discussion. We connected sociological theories to the complex world beyond their small village. The school was nomadic and boarding, drawing students from neighboring villages, an old, traditional, and remote area. Yet, in our class, even Marzieh, who had remained silent for eleven years, found her voice.

One day, the school prepared a soup, distributing it among everyone. Teachers were called to collect their share in the courtyard. I stood in line among the students, who graciously offered me their places. As I received my soup, I noticed a penetrating gaze. It was Mohaddeseh, a twelfth-grade humanities student, an Afghan girl with a boyish haircut and an incisive look. She observed me intently, never averting her gaze. Her presence in class was also distinct. She listened meticulously, offered examples, and scrutinized my behavior in the office, the classroom, and the courtyard, everywhere! It was as if she sought to ascertain whether my actions aligned with my words.

This sharp observation slightly unnerved me until one day, she came to the office, sat across from me, and said:

"Madam, in all my time, I have never seen a teacher as knowledgeable and kind as you. My father insists I attend university, but until now, I had no inclination. However, after seeing you, I want to expand the small world of our village."

I smiled. She continued:

"After school, I always speak highly of you at home. My mother has named you 'the little teacher'!"

Mohaddeseh, the class's bright student, had made a significant decision. We stayed connected through the Shad platform, and I supported her whenever she needed assistance. She aced her final exams and was accepted to study sociology at the University of Tehran. She proudly declared that she was now the second Afghan girl to study at the University of Tehran.

At the end of the year, the twelfth-grade students discovered that it was my first year of teaching and that my home was far from the school. They were astounded that "the little teacher" had performed so professionally in her debut year. And most importantly, I learned that professionalism has nothing to do with formal attire.

I hope this translation is helpful.

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## **First Class, First Lesson: How Can a Teacher Be Inspiring?**

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Introduction:

Teaching, beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, is a complex and impactful process wherein a teacher can alter the trajectory of students' lives. Teachers, through their behavior, attitudes, and interactions, play a pivotal role in shaping students' futures, not just through the educational content. The experience analyzed in this article is a narrative of a teacher's inaugural teaching endeavor in a nomadic and boarding school, where they not only managed their class effectively but also enhanced students' academic motivation. This analysis focuses on four key areas: classroom management, motivation enhancement, teaching in underprivileged areas, and the attributes of an inspiring teacher.

Discussion:

### **1. Classroom Management: Balancing Rules and Flexibility:**

One of the initial challenges for any novice teacher is to establish a balance between classroom discipline and student autonomy. In this experience, the teacher successfully created an interactive environment by setting clear yet flexible rules:

Rule 1: Eating and drinking were permitted in class, provided they did not cause disruption. This policy increased students' sense of comfort.

Rule 2: Each student was allowed to declare twice per term that they had not studied, without receiving a failing grade. This rule fostered a sense of individual responsibility.

Rule 3: "If you accompany me, I will accompany you." This statement reinforced reciprocal interaction and mutual trust within the class.

Analysis: According to William Glasser's classroom management theory, students' responsibility and motivation increase when they feel involved in establishing classroom rules.

## 2. Student Motivation: The Impact of the Teacher's Role Model:

A crucial aspect of this experience was the direct influence of the teacher's personality on the students. Mohaddeseh, a student initially uninterested in pursuing higher education, decided to continue her academic journey after observing the teacher's behavior.

Teacher's Behavioral Model: Students observe the teacher's behavior more than they heed their words. Mohaddeseh meticulously examined the teacher's actions to ascertain whether they aligned with their words.

Creating Meaning in Learning: The teacher introduced sociology as the "God of all subjects" and connected it to real-life situations. This approach enhanced students' intrinsic motivation.

Providing Opportunities for Expression: The class evolved into a space where even Marzieh, a student who had been silent for eleven years, began to speak.

Analysis: According to Bandura's social learning theory, students learn by observing others' behavior. Moreover, based on Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation increases when learning is linked to students' individual identities.

## 3. Teaching in Underprivileged Schools: Connecting Education with Daily Life:

This class was conducted in a rural and boarding school, where students came from remote areas. However, the teacher transformed limitations into opportunities through three strategies:

Using Tangible Examples: Sociological theories were related to students' real-life experiences.

Respecting Students' Culture: The teacher stood in the students' food line, reducing the distance between them.

Breaking Stereotypes: When students realized that this teacher was in their first year of teaching, they were astonished.

Analysis: According to Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory, the learning process deepens when the teacher considers themselves part of the students' learning community.

## 4. What Are the Characteristics of an Inspiring Teacher?

This experience demonstrated that a teacher can be influential, even if they are a novice. Key attributes extracted from this experience include:

Clarity and flexibility in classroom rules.

Appropriate behavioral model and consistency between words and actions.

Connecting education with students' real-life experiences.

Providing equal opportunities for expression in class.

Conclusion:

This teacher's inaugural teaching experience reveals that a teacher's professionalism is not contingent upon their teaching experience but rather on their attitude, interaction, and teaching methodology. By creating an interactive environment, establishing effective communication, and providing practical education, teachers can not only enhance learning quality but also alter students' life trajectories. This narrative exemplifies the inspiring power of a teacher who, through human interaction and conscious teaching, expanded a student's world from a small village to the University of Tehran.