

A response to a criticism of the teaching profession

Ruby Schwan
Miami University

Abstract: *The author, a preservice high school mathematics teacher, shares her response to individuals who question her chosen career path. Through her story, the author encourages each of us to (re)consider how we communicate the value of classroom teaching to others.*

Keywords: *teacher preparation, misconceptions about teaching, math anxiety*

Introduction

I'm a preservice teacher, working on my Integrated Math Education degree at Miami University. My program required me to take *Psychology of the Exceptional Learner* (EDP 256) during the Fall 2021 semester. Throughout this class, we critically analyzed differences between students and how to best support each individual accordingly. One of our assignments asked us to "Write one script that can be used in response to a criticism or denigration of the teaching profession or related topic."

Teaching is, in general, an undervalued profession, and many pre-service teachers receive comments insinuating that they will be wasting their potential and ultimately lose respect if they continue on this career path. In the paragraphs that follow, I provide my response to an ignorant remark that a friend made regarding my choice of careers. After some thoughtful research, I crafted a response so that I can be better prepared to respond to a similar type of statement in the future. I'm hopeful that my words will encourage readers to (re)consider how we communicate the value of classroom teaching to others—including friends, family members, and the public at-large.

An all-too-common (and ignorant!) remark

"You're too smart and good at math to be a teacher. You could get a better job and get paid so much more!"

My response

More than a salary

While I recognize that you are trying to compliment me, and thank you for it, I have to disagree. It is true that I could make more money with a Mathematics and Statistics degree than with a degree in Education; however, I am choosing my future career for the type of impact it has on society rather than for a salary.

Teachers are smart!

A study in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* observed the impact of teachers' general cognitive ability, knowledge, and professional competence on student enjoyment and achievement in the classroom and found that none of these three factors had a significant influence on student outcome

over the others (Kunter et al., 2013). This suggests that effective teachers are in fact smart and knowledgeable, so no one's intelligence is being wasted by becoming a teacher. Furthermore, teaching is a vital profession for our society in that educators equip young minds to live and work effectively in society: what a huge responsibility!

Better teachers for a better world!

Math teachers, in particular, play an important role in developing important cognitive skills in students. In a study on Mathematical Inquiry, Fielding-Wells and Makar (2011) state, "By engaging students in open-ended [math] problems, there is potential for them to develop not only stronger content knowledge, but also resilience, flexibility, generative thinking, and persistence." Each of these traits is desirable for job candidates and generally, for anyone living in society who encounters problems of any kind. These skills are not just acquired automatically from taking a math class; the teacher must intentionally develop activities that promote critical thinking in order for students to practice and use these traits.

Additionally, math teachers have an important responsibility that other teachers do not encounter as frequently: subject-related anxiety, or math anxiety in this case. Professors of Educational Psychology Luttenberger, Wimmer, and Paechter (2018) state, "Outcomes of math anxiety concern not only performance in math-related situations, they can also have long-term effects that involve efficient (or not-so-efficient) learning as well as course and even vocational choices." In other words, math teachers can have a significant influence on students' overall ability to learn and their future in school, and therefore have the responsibility of identifying and helping to decrease the influence of math anxiety.

Beyond the obvious roles and duties which you were likely already aware of, I hope that you can now recognize the immense responsibilities of math teachers and the high cognitive ability that is necessary to fulfill them. Math education is an imperative and invaluable aspect of our society, and I am excited and honored to soon become a part of it.

References

- Fielding-Wells, J., & Makar, K. (2011, July). Using mathematical inquiry to engage student learning. *ResearchGate*. Retrieved October 19, 2021, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/43517206_Using_mathematical_inquiry_to_engage_student_learning_within_the_overall_curriculum.
- Kunter, M., Klusmann, U., Baumert, J., Richter, D., Voss, T., & Hachfeld, A. (2013). *ApaPsycNet*. American Psychological Association. Retrieved October 19, 2021, from <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2013-14501-001.html>.
- Luttenberger, S., Wimmer, S., & Paechter, M. (2018, August 8). Spotlight on math anxiety. *Psychology research and behavior management*. Retrieved October 19, 2021, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6087017/>.



Ruby Schwan is a student at Miami University pursuing majors in Integrated Mathematics Education, Mathematics and Statistics, and Music. Her professional goal is to teach mathematics, specifically calculus, to high school students. Other relevant interests include teaching mathematical proofs, reducing math anxiety, and real-world applications.