**Patch Twenty-One: Just Listen** (see last two paragraphs under the sub-heading: Remembering The Subject Matter Is Difficult).

https://openfacultypatchbook.org/classroom-skill/patch-twentyone-just-listen/

“*Ultimately, we have to recognize that we are different people, who are motivated by different things, and some things will come easier to some of us, and other things will come easier to others of us. Most of us teach a single subject or have responsibility for a very narrow discipline. Those students who struggle with what we teach will often thrive somewhere else.*

*Instead of drawing conclusions about our students’ capacities based on a single subject we teach, we need to work off the assumption that we teach talented students, and we need to refine how we communicate ideas in order to provoke understanding in as many of those students as possible*”.

This passage, excerpt, or “nugget” which is a neologism (at least for me), really resonated with me because it reflects for me the frustration students feel when they just can’t seem to *get it*, let alone get it *right*. I recalled as a child being frustrated with math for several reasons: I was never interested in numbers, found that it looked like a foreign language, and never was good at it like my brother who could automatically calculate in his head, which I couldn’t do on paper or even with a calculator!

Then on top of not getting it, students face the stigma of being “stupid”, “slow”, “dumb”, “challenged”, “behind”, etc. which can be emotionally damaging and detrimental to self-esteem.

Reflecting on Elementary School Math….



In high school I was placed in the “dummy class” for math, as it was known to the students. Teachers would attempt to mitigate the harm to us students by stating it’s for students who just “need a little extra help”. When I heard that I thought, “Really? Who are they kidding? I need LOTS of help!”.

Interestingly, I was in the “gifted” class down the hall for English, so that was sort of a buffer and made up for my incompetence with numbers. Just like a sentence in my chosen nugget states, “*Those students who struggle with what we teach will often thrive somewhere else*”. As a social worker, I find it interesting that Positive Psychology teaches us the same is true in that professionals need to focus on people’s strengths and the positive rather than the negative. Many of us are not exceptional students with A’s in every subject, but we definitely all have strengths and gifts in some areas.

Luckily I had a wonderful teacher who spent lots of time with me and I never gave up asking questions. My father inspired me with the words, “the only stupid questions are the ones that goes unasked”, so I asked, and asked, and asked. I thought the teacher would get upset with me, but she never lost her patience and even stayed after class with me some days. She commented one time, “I don’t understand how you can do algebra without knowing other basic math like multiplication and division very well”. I responded, “maybe it’s because there are more letters than numbers” and she laughed!

Reflecting on grade 10 high school math class…..



Grade 10 math was an important stepping stone for me because at the time only a grade 10 math was required to complete a grade 12 and I knew I needed that credit. I thought if I can just get through that one course, everything else will be a breeze. I feel it's important for my students to know that regardless of your grade, just do your best because employers do not need to see your report card with maybe a couple of “D’s” and “C’s”. They just want to see your diploma! I do of course inform them if they want to attend university, well then, grades matter more.

Passing Grade 10 Basic Math….

