

Thank you, Sarah!

This is such a nice honor—I'm very touched! I've been a teacher my entire professional career—as a middle and high school teacher, as an instruction librarian, and here at the iSchool—and this is one of my very favorite moments. So thank you!

It's especially fun that this is happening at graduation time. I've always loved graduations. I love the ceremony of them, the sharing with friends and family, and the pausing to take stock and shift gears. It's a great time...although it can be a scary time too. There's a lot of uncertainty. I remember driving home after my undergraduate graduation ceremonies in tears, because I wasn't quite ready to let it all go. I liked being a student. But now, I love being a teacher.

As someone who has taught a fair amount and gotten as many degrees as they'll let me, one of the things I've learned along the way is that life is about being a student, and about being a teacher, and sometimes about being both simultaneously. You've been students—some of you for about 17 years, and some of you for almost or even more than 2 decades—and no doubt you've gotten pretty good at it. The fact that you're here today attests to that.

Now that you're marking this milestone, it's also a good time to reflect on how you might shift from being a student to being a teacher...and what it is that you can teach others, not just by knowing—clearly you know and have learned a lot—but also what you can teach by being. You can teach a lot by just being.

So I said that I love graduations and I do. But I can't tell you even one thing any of the graduation speakers I've heard have said. Uh, present company excluded. ☺ I'm sure that's due to poor listening skills on my part. ☺ What I do remember from my time as a student are my teachers. Teachers in the classroom...for me the stand outs were Mrs. Jones, Senor Amstutz, Dr. Decker, Dr. Frazier...and teachers outside the classroom—friends and family.

When I think about the teachers that made a difference in me and in my life, I don't think that much about what they knew. Certainly, that was important, but even more important was how they were. How they chose to be. And I don't mean their innate, born-with-it traits. I mean behaviors they adopted—ways of being that we can all strive for.

When I think of the ways my best teachers were, I can easily generate a long list...but for today, I boiled it down to 8 things. My most special teachers—in and out of the classroom—

- Focused on the outcome, the end goal, the target—and they had a plan to get there...to achieve the outcome.
- They had high expectations, but they held themselves to those same high expectations too.
- They shared power; they were fair.
- They were enthusiastic—they had energy and zest—they loved what they were doing.
- They cultivated a sense of humor, especially about themselves.
- They listened, and because they listened, they could explain, and they could demonstrate, and they could change course when it was called for.
- They cared. They focused on other people, not themselves.
- Finally, they never let things get too negative, and they modeled both how to say “I don't know, but I'll find out” and how to get up fast when you fail.

Is this list anything like yours? Do these things describe your best teachers? What else would be on your list? You've observed these ways of being from the perspective of a student for years. And I guess my point is that, as you mark this occasion, as you shift from being students to being teachers too—teaching colleagues, co-workers, and fellow community members, teaching family, significant others, and your future or present children—you would do well to keep those special teachers you've encountered along the way as your touchstones. Do what they do, and you'll have a guide in uncertain times. Do what they do, and you'll be alright.

I'm almost done—but as a teacher, I need to do just one more thing. I need to see if you've been listening. 😊 So we're all going to take a quiz. Everyone—you the graduates and your friends and family here today.

To prepare for the quiz, I want you to think of one of the people that has been a special teacher for you—someone whose ways of being will be a guide to you in the days and years to come. A professor perhaps, or someone in your family, or one of your friends. Maybe someone here today, or someone far away, or someone you hold in your heart.

Do you have this person in your mind? Take a second to think. And in a moment—not yet!—I want you to point to them...or in their general direction. By the way, north is that way. 😊

Teachers shouldn't ask you to do something they wouldn't do themselves, so I'll go first. Mom—you are my first and always teacher. Steven and Nate—you teach me something new every single day, whether it's learning to relax or how to clap for the first time. I love you all.

Yeah, I cheated. I picked more than one person.

Ok, now your turn. Are all you ready to point? On your mark, get set, POINT! 😊

Well done. You all get an A! Enjoy the rest of this wonderful day. We're about to call your names. 😊