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I've been a proud member of KDP since 1990, and I've stayed because of the value it continues to bring to educators like me. KDP gives me access to current resources, curriculum updates, and real teacher support. What I appreciate most is that everything is research-based and timeless. The articles, journals, and professional development programs are all centered on helping teachers grow using best practices. To me, KDP is one of those organizations that truly stands the test of time.

Even though I've retired as a campus administrator, I'm still active in education. Right now, I'm serving as a substitute campus administrator, and this summer I'll be working part-time at Ninja Code Summer Camp. Education has always been a part of my life. It's not something I just walk away from.

My journey into education started with the influence of my high school teachers. Some inspired me by showing me what I wanted to be, and others showed me what I didn't want to be. Overall, it was that idea of serving others that really pushed me toward teaching.

Honestly, based on my SAT and ACT scores, a lot of people didn't think I was college material. Some people even told me that becoming a college graduate wasn't possible for me. But my journey had a lot of twists and turns that built my grit and pushed me to keep going. Those challenges gave me the agency to finish strong.

One teacher who really stuck with me was my 11th grade Latin teacher, Mr. Vernon Lanctot. He would always tell me, *"Get busy, Theodore, or you will get behind."* He was serious about his work, and he truly enjoyed teaching. That made an impact on me.

I started at San Antonio College because my grades didn't allow me to go straight to a four-year university. I struggled at first because I wasn't prepared, and I wasn't even sure what I wanted to do. I thought about becoming a zoologist, but my grades didn't support that path. So, I chose teaching, and it ended up being the right decision.

I went on to graduate from North Texas State University in 1986 with my Bachelor of Science in Education and a minor in Art. I was a first-generation college graduate, and that accomplishment meant everything to me.

My first teaching job was as a 3rd-grade self-contained teacher at Charles A. Gill Elementary. I had 25 students and was their first male teacher, which made the experience even more special. The students and their parents really connected with me, and I loved every moment of it. After three years, I moved to Joseph J. Rhoads Learning Center, where I taught 6th grade science and earned my Master of Science in Education. Eventually, I transitioned into administration and retired as a middle school principal, serving as an instructional leader for both teachers and students.

Today, I'm still mentoring teachers and principals, and I've even authored two books. When I look back, I can honestly say that where I started did not define where I ended up.

If I could give advice to new teachers, I would say this; build relationships with your students, no matter who they are. That is the foundation. Also, find someone you trust, a mentor you can learn from. Do not be afraid to ask questions, whether it is your principal, a veteran teacher, or even another new teacher like yourself.

You are not going to know everything, and that is okay. Do not be afraid to fail. That is part of the process.

I had the opportunity to attend a professional development workshop at the Harvard Graduate School of Education on closing the achievement gap. One thing that stayed with me is the idea of the "*Tripod*" of effective teaching: pedagogy, content, and relationships. If you focus on those three areas, you are on the right track.

You also have to understand how your students learn. Early on, figure out if they are visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners, and adjust your teaching to meet their needs. Every student is different.

And I always tell new teachers this; be fair, firm, and friendly. Students will know if you are not. Most importantly, be yourself. Do not try to be someone you are not, because they will see right through that.

Teaching is a calling. If you are serious about changing lives, this is where you need to be. It is one of the most rewarding things you can do—not just for your students, but for humanity as a whole.