Every day as an educator is an opportunity - an opportunity to inspire minds and engage hearts. It is our duty and privilege to have this opportunity every single day. There is no other profession that has this great responsibility, and that is one reason why each of us should be proud to be an educator.

We were made to be teachers. We are not to just teach the content, but to inspire our students to do more and be whatever it is that they want to be. I try to instill in my students daily that their opportunities are endless and if they work hard and put their mind to something, they can accomplish anything. When I think of inspiring minds, the first thing that comes to mind is building a relationship with students. At the heart of ALL learning is the connection between a teacher and a student—it is something that is truly irreplaceable.

Inspiring students starts with getting to know them as people. Some students come to us and need inspiration just to get through the day. They might show us how much they need that inspiration in the most unloving ways, but as teachers we keep on loving them and keep on telling them they can do it. Because they can. Some students might need inspiration to keep trying when they feel like giving up, so we keep on believing in them and telling them they can do it. Because they can. Some students might need inspiration to try out for that sports team or to make a new friend, so we believe in them, we encourage them, we tell them they can do it. Because they can!

The common denominator here is that for children, their future is a blank slate. They just need someone to believe in them. For some of them, you may be that person.

So share your stories with your kids. Tell them every single day that you care about them. Ask them how their weekend was. Tell them how excited you are to see them every single morning. Tell them you miss them when they are gone. Most importantly, tell them how smart they are and how much you believe in them every single day. Before long, your beliefs about them will become their beliefs about themselves. That is when the magic really starts to happen in a classroom.

We know that when students are engaged in their learning, they learn more. However, engaging a heart goes far beyond getting them interested in a lesson. Engaging a heart means creating a safe, welcoming and supportive learning environment. You start engaging hearts before the lessons begin. It starts each day as you welcome every child into your classroom with a smile. You show them that school is a safe place—a place where it’s okay to make mistakes. Engaging their hearts begins with making a connection with each child and showing them that we care and that they belong. That is what keeps kids coming back every day. That is what it means to engage a heart.

This is why we teach. We teach to empower kids to build a great future for themselves by believing in them. By inspiring their minds, by engaging their hearts, by caring about them, we can have a part in shaping their futures. That’s why teachers matter. That’s why you matter.