



The Most Important Teaching Job

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Eleven years ago, I helped a child with a task, but he wasn't getting it. I gave up and moved on to another child. That child also struggled and didn't get it either. I felt like a complete failure. I kept wondering if there was a different action, I could have taken to ensure success. I wondered if I was cut out for the job.

The task I was trying to complete was nursing. The children I was trying to assist were my identical twin sons. They were born ten weeks early. Once they had put on weight and made

progress, the NICU nurse suggested I nurse them, especially knowing that nursing them was my goal.

Even though I followed the instructions of the nurse and the lactation coach, it wasn't working. They didn't stay inside my body long enough, and I couldn't even feed them. I took this as a sign that maybe I wasn't cut out for motherhood. How could I teach and support other people's children but not my own?

These thoughts lingered until the lactation coach told me what I had once been told by a principal. She reminded me that she knew the job was hard and that even though my children were not getting it yet that if I kept trying, they would. She was right.

That conversation resonated with me even to this day. The education force is dominated by females, and many of those females are mothers. Too many times mothers, who are also teachers, give their all to other people's children and do not do the same with their own children. I was ready to give up nursing my children and go with formula because it was hard and it didn't work the first time. With other people's children, I would try over and over to help them succeed. My children deserve my best just like my students.

I know I am called to be an educator. I know it is my purpose, and I'm unshakeable in that knowledge. However, the most important teaching job is being a great mother. I haven't always gotten it right, but I sure do try. Many times throughout my career I have been called an awesome educator. I have even been recognized. When I transitioned to being a school administrator, the praise followed me in that role.

Last year, when I called a family meeting to tell my sons I was leaving my administrator role and starting my education consulting business and that I would do that full time, they cheered. Honestly, I wasn't expecting a response. Normally when my husband or I call a family meeting, our kids nod and say okay. I expected them to do the same. Then, I inquired about why they cheered. One of my sons said, "You are always working and have to get stuff done for the teachers or the students." His brother started imitating me. "Hold on everyone, I got to take this call from a teacher ... I'll be at the dinner table in a minute. I just got to respond to this email ... I won't be here when you go to bed. There is an event at school."

Although my son imitated me in jest, each reenactment was like daggers shooting through my heart. I was my sons' first teacher, and I will be the teacher who will be handing out life lessons after they finish school and graduate. I wish I could say I have found all the answers

and will not miss the mark again, but I can't. What I can say is that I am clear about what the most important teaching job is. What is the point of sacrificing everything for your students if your own children get left behind?

I don't want my sons to only know me as a good teacher to other people's children, I want them to know me as the best teacher to them.

Jeremiah and James, Mommy is trying. I love you and hope I will be the kind of mother you can be proud to have.



Educator Barnes with her twin sons Jeremiah and James