

VISHNU RAGUNATHAN

Policeman to Educational Therapist



When I first mentioned to my family and friends that I wanted to make the career transition into teaching, that too in special needs, none of them believed that I was seriously considering it.

I wouldn't blame them. I wasn't exactly 'famous' for my gentle, warm and nurturing character. I was a cop and an operations manager in a male dominated environment. So it was a shocker to them that I would choose a job that was mainly female dominated and surprise, dealing with kids.

But, the people around me were supportive and my lovely wife tapped into her creativity to help me submit my application in the form of a fun video. The amount of retakes we had to do just to make me sound less like, The Terminator! My gosh!

No shocker that I got the job because.... I am now writing this article!

But the journey from then till now, has seriously been fun and eye-opening for me. It was a whole new industry for me and I was absorbing everything that I could like a sponge. I had to not only

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focus on the academic part, but also on toning down on my rough and tough look. And I thought I was doing a pretty good job at that, until I went to DAS Bishan Learning Centre for my two weeks of teaching attachment. For my very first teaching experience, my supervisor told me to practice the card drill with his primary school student.

I was excited with my very first teaching assignment and took out my brand new deck of cards and showed her the first card. She responded by slowly removing her spectacles, placing it gently on the table and then crying silently. Apparently, just looking at me scared her and me not smiling did not help the situation in any way. At this point, I had no choice. Me thinking that I was already doing a good job at being warm and friendly, was apparently super wrong. I had to work a lot more on that and I had to begin right there and then on it.

I talked to her as slowly and gently as possible, explaining to her that I was there to learn from her. I was new to the job and I did not really know my sounds well. So her teacher chose her to go through the sounds with me, since she was the best in the class. I told her not to tell the rest this. It was a secret. She liked that thought and wiped her tears. Success! She put on her specs and we completed the card drill a few minutes later.

I was feeling pretty good about myself at that point. But that feeling only lasted a few hours. Later that day, I was in another class with my ST, waiting for the students that would form my informal/formal observation class. The students came and one boy took a look at me and said, "He looks so scary!" He turned and began walking away as fast as he could. The other kids had to run after him and bring him back to class. Bear in mind, they were also equally scared of me.

Right then, I was thinking to myself, "Great! I scare kids! Big or small doesn't matter! I am like their Boogeyman!". Second time that day, I had no choice. I looked very hard for my gentle and friendly side, put on a smile and explained how I was a police officer before joining DAS. And would a policeman hurt kids? No! Definitely not! So should they be afraid of me? Definitely not right?

This somewhat changed their impression about me. But, it was still kind of awkward for the rest of my attachment with that class. They would always be on the lookout to see if I would turn into a 'scary monster'. And I had to always be self-conscious and aware that I come across friendly and warm. Yet firm enough to complete the tasks assigned for the class that day.

And if you have not guessed by now, I successfully completed my attachment at the centre! Fast forward 5 years and counting in this role, I even received "an award" from my student. Written across my teachers' day present was the line, "**It takes a BIG HEART to shape little minds**". At that very moment, I realised that I had achieved what I thought was unachievable.

