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# A PROMISING MISSION

By Stephanie Doyle

*Ten years ago, at the beginning of my career, I made a choice that shaped what I do today.*

I chose to become an urban educator in the most impoverished school district in Southwest Virginia. By making that choice, I knew I would face an uncertain future, encountering societal ills and confronting long-held beliefs. At the time, my

decision was based on wanting to be where I could make the most difference. Now I realize that I am shaping children's lives, which I consider to be a matter of social justice.

My students come from impoverished backgrounds. Their parents work day in and day out to make ends meet. Many were not given educational advantages early in life to give them a head

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## CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

**Fall 2010—Deadline: May 15, 2010.**

**Winter 2010—Deadline: August 15, 2010.**

NTA publishes articles on topics pertinent and practical to teachers new to the classroom that will support them and enable their success. Suggested topics include classroom management, teaching with standards and creativity, first-year tips, and parent-teacher communication/conferences. Length: 500–850 words.

Writers also may submit personal stories and "Aha!" moments from their teaching experiences. Length: 100–350 words.

Send manuscripts, letters, and ideas to [karena@kdp.org](mailto:karena@kdp.org). Visit NTA Online at [www.kdp.org/publications/nta](http://www.kdp.org/publications/nta).

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start (or even a level start). A great number are being raised by a grandparent or other relative because one or both parents are in prison. Many of my students would go hungry without the meals they receive at school. A significant number of my students are labeled “at risk” because of where they come from and who they are.

One could argue that my students have the cards stacked against them; that failure is probable. Many people might even say that there is little hope because of the deficits in these students’ lives.

Failure, however, is not an option in my eyes. I refuse to use the label “at risk.” Instead, I believe my children should be labeled “at promise.” It is what I do in the classroom that can break or build success. I can close my eyes and teach blindly, addressing few needs, or I can open them, addressing and celebrating my students as they are, for who they are. What is created within the walls of my classroom can nurture my students’ souls, encourage their spirits, and move mountains, despite the chaos and lack of experience in their lives outside my classroom.

I know I cannot change the circumstances these children face; nor am I the “cure.” I do know that what I say and do greatly impacts their lives. I can walk into my classroom and wreck or build up my students. I can shatter dreams and break hearts with cross words, or I can mend dreams and lives by forging relationships with my students.

This does not mean I am their best friend or that my expectations are low. My students know that I correct them out of genuine love and respect. The standards for all of my students are high, and I insist that each one meet or exceed my expectations.

I chose to make my career a mission to help “at-promise” children. That choice and what I do today is because I was once an at-promise child. Without the influence of a caring Big Sister, I would not be here today. Because of the inspiration of one person, I learned nothing is impossible. With her caring, I was able to overcome the odds and not end up another statistic.



*Stephanie Doyle and some of her G.R.O.W. girls.*

# G.R.O.W.

## GIRLS RISING ONTO WOMANHOOD

My G.R.O.W. program is heart and soul of my mission: to transform the girls of today into the women of tomorrow. This program is a result of my own personal mentorship with a Big Sister, which changed my life from the time I was 12 to the present. G.R.O.W. is my way of paying forward my Big Sister, Karen, and continuing her legacy.

The goal of G.R.O.W. is to expand the horizons of girls from 7th through 12th grades by providing unique learning experiences that transfer into their lives. Its mission is, as G.R.O.W.’s blog states, “Focusing on building social and academic skills in the girls of today to be the women of tomorrow.” Activities are developed to build self-esteem and self-confidence within each participant, who receives adult support throughout her membership.

Stephanie Doyle

Visit G.R.O.W.’s blog at:

<http://girlsrisingontowomanhood.blogspot.com>.

As you begin your career path, I encourage you, advise you: do not be satisfied with your work unless you invest yourself, unless you are willing to go the extra mile. You must build relationships with students. You have to work cooperatively with professionals who often do not share your enthusiasm. Never give up. Begin with the end in mind. You may not see the fruits of your labor now, but in coming years they will reveal themselves in ways that you probably never imagined. 🍏