



# Spiritual Sustainer

**“The most inspirational teacher I have experienced.”**

Here is an essay I wrote earlier this year for a university subject called: Teaching Principles and Practices. This is part of my Graduate Diploma of Education (Primary) course which I will be finishing in November. As part of this assessment task I was asked to write a critical essay for two topics in a list. Writing about the most inspirational teacher I have experienced was an easy first pick.

## **The most inspirational teacher I have experienced.**

Education is all about inspiring. The process of education is likened to running water flowing into a lake, where the moving water represents learning experiences, and the lake representing one's mind. When learning, experiences make an imprint on the mind, new worlds of possibility and adventure unfold. Inspirational teachers create an environment of natural motivation for learning, likened to clear waterways, free from obstructions. Roefs (2010) noted that “all inspiring teachers have one key thing in common: they know how to create a learning experience that will reach the students in one-way or another” (p. 3.) As a teacher, it is important to inspire students. I myself have had many inspiring teachers; however, the most inspiring teacher is my yoga teacher, Swami Durgananda.

Swami Durgananda is knowledgeable of the learning needs of a wide range of students and caters for this continuously. Rather than teaching through strict behaviourist methods, Swami Durgananda is able to engage the student's interest and motivation levels through mixing up a learning session with relevant activities and complementing the individual's cognitive preferences through the multiple intelligence model (Churchill et al. 2011). Some of the activities that Swami Durgananda incorporates include reading text and sharing thought with the group, experience talks from group members, watching a short video, workshop in a group situation with a member reporting back to the class, worksheets and diagrammatic explanations. By having more of a teaching focus around constructivist theories and incorporating activities around the multiple intelligences model, Swami Durgananda is able to provoke students into inquiry-based learning, which harnesses meaningful learning experiences (Churchill et al. 2011). Provoking students through inquiry method engages students. Dahlstrom & Akerlind (2011) support this idea, “... like hunger, knowledge is a strong desire. By bringing knowledge into life, I want to keep the students hungry to learn.” (p.36). When students are engaged, they are more likely to be open to exploring new perspectives. Roefs (2010) believed that the objective of the teacher is to allow the student to experience how the teacher establishes connections and “offer a new perspective – while supervising learning processes – and therefore to extend their own boundaries.” (p.8) Swami Durgananda has established herself as a powerful educator based on the range of teaching styles and learning activities she incorporates in a class. She continuously caters for students from all age groups and learning style preferences in order for the students to have further opportunities to gain insights and opportunities that broaden their educational horizons.

Swami Durgananda uses her broad life experiences to help teach. I found Swami to be an excellent teacher as she has a broad background, rich in life experience and diversity. She has not only grown in her own disciplines in raja yoga and meditation, but has also gained a broad range of life experience that enables her to link concepts and relate to all her students. Her broad background builds rapport with students especially when relating topics and lessons with stories from her own

past and personal experience. She is a positive influence to her students because she has been a student teacher and understands the pressures students face, therefore she can adjust her yoga teaching to a level and approach that students understand. Her expectations of students are always fair and reasonable, and she treats all students with the utmost respect. When comparing Swami Durgananda to yoga teachers who strictly live, study and teach their modality in an ashram in India, I feel that she is far more effective in teaching students (like myself in the west), because of her broad life experience and the different roles that she has played throughout her life.

Swami Durgananda is always involved in the scholarship of her field. Swami is now 74 years old and is continuously engaged in further learning within and out of her fields of expertise. She continuously publishes articles and books, speaks at conferences and mentors students. She remains open and motivated to learn topics that she is not familiar with. An example of this is in recent times she has wanted to utilise social media and the internet as part of her teachings. To do this she asked people with skills in these areas to educate her in how these operate. She also utilises the expertise of others to present and assist in her classes. A spin off from this example is that members of the class become further engaged in learning as they have an opportunity to have a small leadership role in the sessions. Swami models lifelong learning through her ability to continuously, put herself out in the public and academic domain, be open for discussion on areas that she has not got expertise in, extend her learning through courses and engage her student's skill sets.

Swami is dedicated to self-evaluation and continuous improvement. The sessions that Swami Durgananda teaches are always engaged and relevant. I don't think that this is an accident at all. Along with thoughtful organisation and appropriate planning practices, Swami Durgananda employs a range of evaluation strategies that strengthen the effectiveness of her teachings. Dahlstrom & Akerlind (2011) have a similar philosophy and employ complex feedback strategies. Evaluations from active observations within the classroom, and observing the type of questions raised in sessions proved beneficial to Dahlstrom & Akerlind (2011) in understanding how to modify classes to meet all students learning needs. Also of value were reflections at the end of teaching sessions. Swami Durgananda employs these strategies continuously and is never bland in her approach. Each learning session is fresh, current, and relevant in a manner that is meaningful to students.

Swami Durgananda stands out as the most inspiring teachers for many reasons beyond this essay. Her dedication to continuous improvement, meeting the learning needs of students, utilising her broad life experience and continually participating in further education inspires me to reach out and contribute back to society in the educational field. Without the attributes mentioned, she would struggle to be such an effective, charismatic, professional and inspirational teacher.

### *References*

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