

Joan Tarrant, Northvale School District

Joan Tarrant is a teacher of the Gifted and Enrichment program at the Northvale school district. She has been teaching for a total of 28 years, with the past 23 spent at Northvale. Ms. Tarrant works with students from kindergarten through eighth grade. In her SDL (Self-Directed Learners) program, students in grades 4-8 have the opportunity to explore unique subjects such as engineering, architecture, aviation and forensics.

■ **Are you involved in any extracurricular activities at your school or in the community?**

Within the Northvale school district, I am the advisor of the Student Council for grades 6, 7 and 8. In that capacity, I work with the Student Council Executive Board and Homeroom Representatives in planning and running school dances, fundraisers for the school and other causes outside of the school, and also work with the mayor and town council in the planning and running of Student Council Day, held in June.

■ **When and why did you decide to become a teacher?**

When I graduated from high school, I decided that I wanted to work before starting college. During that six-month period, I realized that I wanted to focus my advanced learning on the education of children. I wanted to use my skills and talents to promote and challenge children to be the best that they could be. I felt that I had an instinctive



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ability and inner drive to be able to convey information in an interesting and diverse manner.

■ **What high school/college did you attend? What degrees, certifications do you hold?**

I attended three high schools in four years, as my father was transferred due to his job. When I was a senior in high school, my family moved to Woodcliff Lake and I attended Pascack Hills High School, from which I graduated. I earned a B.S. in education from St. Thomas Aquinas College with a focus in early childhood education, regular education and art education. I was awarded cum laude for my work there. After teaching five years in a private school, I pursued a master's of science in education with a focus in special education. I was awarded a graduate assistantship from St. John's University and completed the program in 1½ years attending school full time as a grad student.

■ **List any education-related awards or achievements.**

Two years ago, I was awarded recognition in "Who's Who Among American Teachers and Educators."

■ **Do you intend to further your own education?**

Currently, I am advancing my own learning by studying the Spanish language.

■ **What was your favorite subject as a student?**

As a student, I was a voracious reader whose favorite subject was art.

■ **Who has been the most inspirational teacher to you? In what way did he or she influence you?**

While attending St. John's University, I worked with Dr. Venezia as her graduate assistant. I learned about the in-depth components of research and statistics and its application to education. More importantly, I learned that I liked the way she interacted with her adult students. She always showed care and compassion. I observed that she was patient and thorough in her teaching style and that, when possible, she provided opportunities to take classroom learning into a real-life setting. She maintained a professional aura and, yet, exuded humor and congeniality as an instructor. She was demanding, but fair. Her expectations for herself and her students were high, and she was eager to share her knowledge with others. I found her qualities to be admirable both personally and professionally, and ones I wanted to emulate as an educator.

■ **What do you like most about being a teacher?**

As a teacher of the gifted, I like the diversity of the subjects that I teach, and the wide range of ages with whom I interact. The challenge of juggling many components and making them work is very satisfying for me. I especially like to see my students take what I have taught them and apply that learning in a broader setting. I am fortunate to work with the majority of people who work in the Northvale district as well. It enables me to work collaboratively with adults and students. I am constantly on the move, and my job is fast-paced and demanding. While there is always much to do, I also find that the school day flies due to the many activities that take place in the course of it.

■ **What is the most challenging part of being a teacher?**

While the challenges of being a teacher are many, for me getting students to "think outside the box" is always my goal. Enabling students to be independent and self-directed life long learners is what I strive to achieve as an educator.

■ **What is the most important lesson that one can be taught?**

In my opinion, the most important lesson that one can be taught are the skills needed to be a successful problem solver, individually and as a team member. It is imperative to know and admit that even if you do not know something, you know how to find the answer.

Ms. Tarrant makes the grade

By AMANDA C.

Now a senior in high school, I feel as though I've divorced myself from my middle school experience. I can hardly remember my rudimentary math classes and uncomplicated science lessons; sixth grade seems to have happened an era ago. High school has been a blur, even more so than middle school. Looking back, I remember so little from the past four years.

SDL (Self Directed Learning), however, is one of the things I will never forget. When I was invited to become a part of the mysterious, powerful SDL, I was ecstatic. My romanticized fantasies of SDL, however, were quickly dispelled: I was not alone; a large handful of my classmates had also been selected; we met in a classroom across the hall, not a secret passageway; Ms. Tarrant was a kind but firm teacher that seemed no different than all of the other teachers I had already had.

I admit that SDL seemed, for the first year or two, to be little more than extra work added to my apparently massive workload. But as fourth grade melted into fifth grade and faded into sixth grade, the large handful of students dwindled to a mere four or five of us. And, suddenly, SDL was no longer two hours of gratuitous work. Suddenly, what we learned meant something: I knew what a paradigm was and what it really meant to leave my comfort zone.

At 12 years old, I understood politics, illiteracy rates, architecture. I knew how to shake someone's hand and command respect. Through Ms. Tarrant, I learned how to demand respect. I learned how to make an intelligent and cohesive argument. I learned how to collaborate with my peers and how to meet deadlines. I know how to focus, how to apply myself, how to follow through with the projects I begin. I owe all of my efficiency and punctuality to Ms. Tarrant.

But Ms. Tarrant taught me so much more than work ethic. She taught me that no voice should go unheard, and that all thought holds great value. Because of the invaluable lessons she taught me, I recognize the power of conviction and determination. I know that it's alright to be wrong sometimes, and that graciousness is priceless. I know humility; I know honesty and morality. I can laugh at myself and laugh with others. I know the value of friendship and of family.

When I visited her this past September, Ms. Tarrant greeted me with a warm hello and a warmer hug. As I told her about my plans for college – for my future – she smiled widely and said in her distinctly compelling voice, "I am so proud of you." This, in all its simplicity, still means the world to me, because Ms. Tarrant is more than a teacher to me. She is a woman that I will always hold in high esteem; I have an unlimited amount of respect for her and her intelligence. She has imbued me with knowledge that I will always remember. The lessons she taught me in fifth grade have stayed with me all the way through high school, and remain close to my heart.

I say, with unwavering confidence, that I am a better person because of Ms. Tarrant.