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Danny's job log: 4

Written by Danny Smith, December 2010

Danny Smith is a Fine Art graduate. He has a job as a teaching assistant, an unquenchable thirst and a fledgling freelance career.

Does anyone else find it weird that we swap large chunks of our life for money? I'm temping at the moment. Well not at this exact moment. At this exact moment I'm in a pub writing on a laptop that I couldn't afford to buy but couldn't afford not to have. I mean at this point in my life the work that I am swapping bits of my life for is on a temporary basis for an agency. And it gives me enough time off to find the whole concept of work a little weird and jarring.

I'm being sent to schools for special educational needs (SEN), mostly for kids with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). And if you find it hard to resolve the posturing online persona with that piece of information, that makes the two of us.

Working with SEN kids on a temp basis is tough. The money is OK but has to cover the half terms and days where there is no work at all. The agency is good but its staff are insanely chirpy, which is fine in the afternoon but not at seven am when they phone you up with the enthusiasm of a children's TV presenter on methamphetamine.

And the work, well it's challenging. The thing with working with kids with significant autism is that you can see they're in there, they are capable of making very clear when they're scared, happy, hungry and uncomfortable. You just have to communicate with them through a very narrow tunnel of their autism. This can be frustrating for everyone involved but we get to go to the pub at the end of the day and write about it. The kids and their carers have to deal with it every single day.

You almost feel guilty for being able to go home. Once in a while, you'll get through, you will stroke a hand, give them a tickle, or even just make occasional eye contact and they will smile or laugh. In those minutes you will feel guilty you're being paid.

Being a temp can also be frustrating because you have no real idea where you fit into the routine, this is negated by good temps willing to use their initiative and get stuck in. Unfortunately with kids with ASD any change of routine and use of initiative could be met with a child being very upset. I suppose the trick is to be able to ask 'what do you want me to do now?' a hundred times a day and not be too annoying when you do it.

I suppose it helps that I am a male in a nearly exclusive female world and turn unconsciously into Hugh bloody Grant when around middle-aged women: "ultra English accent" errrm... terribly sorry *grin* is this the erm... place where the biscuits...go? *laugh politely*. And perhaps it helps a whole lot more that I love the little buggers, every drooling, biting, smiling, loving, one of them. And I can't think of a more rewarding way of swapping chunks of my life, at least temporarily.

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