

Preface

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.

—Carl Jung

I was born into a family of teachers. My mother taught kindergarten and my father was a junior high math teacher. My extended family, numerous aunts and uncles, my brother and sister-in-law, many cousins, and my son and daughter-in-law, are teachers, plus scores of friends; teaching is literally in my blood. I have been a teacher for the past forty-five years in a variety of capacities, second grade, middle elementary gifted students as well as ninth-grade algebra students. My heart has been and always will be in the classroom.

I am now a teacher of teachers. I have taught over 1,500 students who have gone on to become teachers, teachers who are making the same difference in the lives of students that my family and I have always made.

During the past twelve years, it has become clear that there are key qualities necessary to become a good teacher. We all know a teacher needs to effectively transmit subject matter and to know how to develop and deliver a quality lesson plan. In addition, the teacher must be able to identify and teach to appropriate standards. While all of these strategies are important, missing is the core of what it means to be a teacher: the

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quality of humanness, the ability to touch the lives of students. I have always told aspiring teachers that I can teach them how to develop a good lesson, and I can suggest ideas about better classroom management, but I cannot make them real, authentic people. They, alone, bring that to the classroom, and it is absolutely necessary that, to become an effective teacher, a person needs a soul.

Beyond a doubt, teaching is the best profession in the world. Where else can you find a job where you get paid twice: a paycheck and a chance to make a real difference?

The classroom is a complex place. The teacher is responsible for the nuts and bolts of managing the classroom, developing effective lesson plans, collecting lunch money, addressing the standards, taking roll, working with parents, and collaborating with colleagues. The list is endless. Over the past forty-five years, I have struggled, along with my teacher colleagues, against misleading myths about teaching. In the culture of teaching, there are a number of understood, unwritten rules by which teachers live.

Several years ago, while working with faculty to develop a beginning class for teacher candidates, we came across a wonderful book by Lee Bolman and Terry Deal (1994), *Becoming a Teacher Leader*. In this book the reader is introduced to a series of lenses or frames used by teachers to address the complexities of their world. These frames are commonly used by teachers to size up a situation whether they know it or not. The *human resource* frame emphasizes relationships and the importance of a caring, trusting work environment. Most teachers cite this frame as their favorite. The *political frame* identifies the sources of power, the strength of conflict, a perspective often avoided by teachers. The *structural frame* is exemplified by clear goals and rules, critical strategies for teachers in well-managed classrooms. The fourth lens, the *symbolic frame*, focuses on meaning, belief, and faith; things we know are present in the classrooms of exceptional teachers. As Bolman and Deal (1994) state, "The school becomes a way of life rather than merely a place of work" (p. 6). This book emphasizes the power of the symbolic

frame in the true meaning of what teaching is all about. False myths that abound can only be laid to rest by substituting positive ones.

This book identifies eight myths (I know there are more) widely accepted by many in terms of what it means to be a successful teacher. Mythology is powerful, and teaching is rife with myths. These myths are propounded in films and popular books, and lay a foundation for the common sense that is part of our profession. Mythology cuts both ways; there are good myths and bad myths. The bad myths are like barnacles on the shell of education and too often lead us astray. We lose our way and grope for better practices.

In this book, each questionable myth will be reexamined and then dismissed. This opens the door to creation of new myths. A revised view of teaching comes into view, stressing the importance of the human connection as the teacher makes a difference in the lives of young people.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This book has several intended audiences. Certainly it will find a niche in the training of teachers. The student teaching experience and the introductory course of a teacher preparation program are both key places for its use. As university supervisors work with teacher candidates, many of the questions will arise making a new focal point of conversation for seminars.

A second audience is beginning teachers participating in a 2-year induction program. This book gives insight into many of the first-year dilemmas of a novice teacher. As the beginning teacher works with his or her mentor, the chapters provoke jumping off points highlighting intended areas of growth.

A third audience is undergraduate students completing a subject matter preparation program toward a career in teaching. The positive, uplifting approach of the book gives prospective teachers an idea of the potential and the pitfalls that loom in teaching as a career.

A fourth audience is that of the seasoned teacher in the classroom today. Each of us wants to be seen as caring and gifted with the ability to inspire students in life-changing ways. This book rekindles the idealism we felt when first entering the classroom.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is designed as a portable mentor for use by prospective and beginning teachers. Motivations and reasons for entering the profession are highlighted. It uses stories from the field to expose some misleading myths and to illustrate key lessons throughout the book. This book is more than just another trip along the often-torturous road of academia. In the following review of the chapters, each myth is followed by a reality check outlining more promising approaches.

Chapter 1. "Myth #1: Don't Smile Until December. Reality: You Need to Smile Early On, and as Often as Possible to Build a Healthy Classroom Climate." This chapter looks at building a positive classroom community while still practicing effective classroom management. The focus is on developing relationships with students.

Chapter 2. "Myth #2: Teaching Is a Cushy Job. Reality: Teaching Is Hard Work and Requires Year-Round Planning in Addition to Daily Preparation and Professional Development." This chapter examines the widespread myth that teachers get a 3-month breather in the summer and are home by 2 P.M. every day. This chapter looks at teaching as challenging but rewarding work; the hard work is worth it.

Chapter 3. "Myth #3: Good Teachers are Born, not Made. Reality: Teachers are Lifelong Learners Continually Growing in Their Profession from Their "Aha" Moments Through Their Veteran Mentoring Years." We've all heard the statement, "I know everything about the subject, I love kids, I don't need

training.” Learning to teach is a balancing act, and training is a critical part of keeping your head above water.

Chapter 4. “Myth #4: Good Teachers Don’t Make Mistakes. Reality: Good Teachers Learn From Their Most Dramatic Mistakes.” This chapter explores the concept of lessons learned from falling flat. The best learning comes when fear is driven out of the classroom.

Chapter 5. “Myth #5: Good Teachers Teach Facts. Reality: Good Teachers Teach the Whole Child How to Think and Learn.” Teachers are never off duty. What you drive, what you wear, everything about you is noticed, on campus or off. Teachers need to be authentically enthusiastic for the subject and radiate passion for teaching the whole child. Often the memory of a teacher and the learning that took place has little to do with the information transmitted. It’s more a matter of who you are and how you made students feel.

Chapter 6. “Myth #6: They Can’t Learn; They Belong in Special Education. Reality: Every Child Can Learn and Is Legally Entitled to the Best Education.” This chapter looks at inclusion, and the misguided reluctance to include special education children in the regular classrooms.

Chapter 7. “Myth #7: Teaching Is a Lonely Job. Reality: Teaching Is a Collaborative Profession and Today’s Schools Are Professional Learning Communities.” This chapter supports working together for a common good. In schools, this means getting along with and involving colleagues, administration, and parents. It looks at the role of leadership in teaching.

Chapter 8. “Myth #8: Teaching Is a Dead-End Job. Reality: The Rewards of Teaching Are Unending.” This chapter looks at the rich payback we get as teachers, too often many years down the road.

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I hope you find this book a source of inspiration and a powerful connection to what teaching really means. Wherever you are on your path, may it deepen your contribution to your students and help you keep your eye on the profound beauty that is developed by great teachers.