

A TRIBUTE TO TEACHERS

by
Peggy D. Bennett

We are teachers. We know the importance of our work. We have made a career commitment to helping young people learn. Yet, we know that we'll never finish our quest to be the best teacher we can be. The everchanging faces, personalities, learning styles, needs, demands, and backgrounds of our students require us to adapt, adjust, grow, and stretch, sometimes with pain and personal anguish.

We work long hours at school, maintaining a potentially exhilarating and exhausting level of physical, emotional, and intellectual intensity. Yet, we don't stop thinking of and planning for our students just because the school day ends or because we leave school.

We love our work and we love music. Yet, we must be diligent about cultivating hobbies, quality time for family and friends, and non-school related activities and conversations.

We have achieved success. Yet, we can never rest on our laurels; teaching always asks us to be better than we are.

We must be compassionate, fair, and accepting of each student in our classes. Yet, few other professionals must maintain these attitudes on a daily basis toward so many others with whom they may never choose to converse or befriend.

We know the tremendous importance of our profession and we spend years and thousands of dollars studying to prepare and to renew ourselves. Yet, we often hear colleagues say, "I'm not in it for the money," or "If I wanted to make money, I wouldn't be a teacher." The low priority placed on teachers' salaries can make us feel devalued and our work seem a charity.

We are buoyed by the levels of mood, motivation, and learning in our classes. Yet, the satisfaction that comes from seeing 30 students engaged and excited can be devastated by that one troubled student who sits among the others with a defiant scowl.

We constantly watch for and delight in progress and achievement from individual students. Yet, when we see a triumph, we may not feel comfortable sharing it with other teachers. Our extreme satisfaction and enthusiasm for students' achievements can be heard as boastful by other teachers.

We must constantly separate issues that warrant serious action from those that warrant light-hearted humor. Yet, we know that becoming cavalier, alarmist or cynical can erode our sensitivities and rapport with students and colleagues.

We come in daily contact with those who seem able to know more, do more, and achieve more than us. Yet, we must maintain our own sense of well-being and achievement. Many times we may see or hear only the end product of other teachers' efforts, but the "rest of the story" would give us a more realistic perspective on their accomplishments.

We often must use the materials, methods, lesson sequence, discipline plan, and teaching strategies that the school, district, or state has mandated. Yet, we may never have been asked what we think. And, we know that good teaching requires customizing all lessons and styles to the unique set of circumstances in which we find ourselves each day.

We must be accountable for our students' achieving and maintaining standards set by "experts." Yet, these experts probably have never been in our classroom, worked with our students, or been required themselves to meet the standards they are writing.

We must test student's achievements. Yet, we know that the most important and most lasting learning that can happen for any one student can probably not be measured or identified on a test.

We see documentaries and media coverage that spotlight "great teachers" as those who go to extraordinary lengths (costumes, field trips, entertaining lessons) to capture their students' imaginations. Yet, we know that quiet, non-assuming demeanors can be equally as effective, and, in some cases, more substantive for students' learning than "showy" ones.

We see and hear teachers touted as a model or ideal teacher. Yet, we know that not one teaching style is equally effective for all students, and it is the diversity of teaching demeanors, styles, and content that helps schools reach all students at one time or another.

We know that parents, administrators, agencies, politicians, academicians, and journalists believe they know best what is wrong and what should be happening in our classrooms (even though they have never been there). Yet, if we allow our corp to be bandied about by the special interests of others, consistent, stimulating growth for our students and our own metamorphosis can be casualties. And, if we blatantly ignore or reject others' criticisms and suggestions we risk stifling our own professional growth and teaching effectiveness.

We recognize the benefits of competition for our students and for our programs. "That is preparation for real life," we say. Yet, we see that winning and losing do not have equal impact on all students. The subtle, long-term messages for the student who always loses and for the student who always wins all the time can easily grow out of our control, no matter what gems of wisdom we espouse to soften them. And, the nature of competition requires that there will be a winner and many losers.

We recognize the benefits of competition for our programs and for our motivation to achieve. Yet, similar to seeing a "new" personality emerge from a familiar person during a card game, competition among teachers can bring out the worst parts of ourselves that we may normally keep under control. We can see another's strengths as a challenge to our own self-confidence and fear that another's accomplishments may make us "look bad." The spirit of competition is alive and well in our schools and in our relationships with colleagues; and, that spirit has a dark side that can disease school and community relationships. The statement that "music is not competitive" is true; music educators, however, are. Some of us have not differentiated between seeing another teacher as a model or a standard to which we aspire and seeing another teacher as a model or a standard that we want to "beat."

We know that we should enter class each day with a freshness that peels
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ATTENTION: Middle School Directors

A clinic of extreme importance to all middle school and high school teachers -- Scheduling your band, choir, orchestra may be the biggest problem in your immediate future. Take time to hear Alan Veach, Principal of Round Rock, tell you how to be a part of the middle school concept and still retain ability-based grouping in your performing groups.

Alan Veach is the former principal of Chisholm Trail Middle School in the Round Rock I.S.D. (Texas) and has been appointed as principal of the district's third high school, McNeil, which will open in the fall of 1992. A former teacher and assistant principal at Coronado High School in El Paso,



Alan M. Veach

Texas, Veach has been a trainer for the district's STEP (Supervision of Teaching Effective Practices) Program, a five-day training program that

CONVENTION CLINICS:

Thursday

12:45 - CC South Banquet Hall

Friday

4:00 - CC Fiesta ABC

includes the lesson cycle, effective teaching practices, and developmental supervision. He has conducted workshops on effective teaching practices, school climate, cooperative learning, and grade level teaming across the state and at national conferences. He recently served as a member of the Texas Task Force on Middle Grade Education and has been appointed to serve on the State Task Force on High School Education.

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continued

away our biases and helps us remain open to our students. Yet, we know that openness risks trauma. Managing the myriad of behaviors that are generated in class each day can leave us exhausted, full of self-doubt, and questioning our abilities as a teacher.

We know that every student in our class is special and deserves our individual nurturing and patience. Yet, when individuals' behaviors are compounded into the ecosystem of a classroom, it is all too easy to overlook the quiet student who needs more of our attention and to misinterpret the motives of the boisterous student who is always demanding it.

We know that sometimes what students need most at a given moment is not more knowledge and skills. Yet, we often feel unequipped to accommodate the complex emotional and physical needs of today's students. And, if our lessons become skewed more toward therapy than stimulated study, we are at risk for neglecting the academic skills and accomplishments that can provide such powerful tools for students' personal progress and self-esteem.

We know that leaders call for a unity of purpose and a clearly defined goal from our field. Yet, we realize that even if a unified approach were possible, it would probably alienate some faction of those from whom we need support. And, we ponder whether a nationally unified goal is what we need

for any subject area. The goal may seem clear and simple, but the dissimilar interpretations and applications of that goal are often not.

We want to be treated like a professional and to feel as accepted and respected as any other teacher on our faculty. Yet, we continue to announce that "we are different." We cite the peculiar needs of the "artist in us," the unique problems of teaching a beloved subject so that no one dislikes it, the ever-present fear that our place in the curriculum is not considered essential, the joys and pressures of public performances, and the tribulations of large classes, recruiting efforts, budget shortages, and fund-raising. Maybe some of us have not yet carved out the identity within our schools that would capitalize on our uniqueness while at the same time integrating ourselves with colleagues and school issues outside the music room.

We know that "everyone loves music" and "everyone wants music in their lives." Yet, we also know that not everyone likes to study music and that is our job. For some of any age, studying music, as opposed to simply making music or listening to music, ruins their delight in it.

We are working as hard as we can and trying as hard as we can to do whatever is asked of us and needed from us. Yet, we must reserve some of ourselves so that we have the energy, the stamina, and the desire to continue teaching. Teaching is a constant balancing act. We must see each issue from at least two sides and try to maintain

an equilibrium of wise choices. The choices we make must consider both the short-term effects and the long-term effects and balance the differences between the two. Like the circus act of spinning plates on dowels, if we can get all our plates balanced and spinning, it is just a matter of time until certain ones, often in opposite corners of our lives, start wobbling and need our urgent leap of attention to avoid calamity.

We know that, in order to do our best, we each need to feel supported, respected, and free to make decisions and choices that will be best for our students. Yet, sometimes it is from our own colleagues, who most need this encouragement, that we are the quickest to withdraw it. Teachers are trained to nurture, support, and encourage students, but we are not necessarily skillful at doing this for other teachers. As teachers, we probably know better than anyone what other teachers may be enduring as they invest so much of themselves in their work. Teachers have so few consistent "cheerleaders." Maybe we should perfect our skills in cheering other teachers, or at least, in avoiding destructive rather than constructive attitudes toward them. What better group exists to ensure the well-being of our profession, our schools, and our colleagues than *US*? We already have the skills to encourage people at *all* levels of achievement and development. Why not pay tribute to our work by daily practice of these skills on ourselves and our colleagues? We know how! **WE ARE TEACHERS!**