4TH EDITION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF CRITICAL READINGS

ALAN S. CANESTRARI
BRUCE A. MARLOWE

Educational Foundations

Fourth Edition

"The educator has the duty of not being neutral."

Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*

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An Anthology of Critical Readings

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Editors

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Preface

Since the publication of the last edition of this anthology, Barack Obama succeeded George W. Bush as president of the United States. They both promised a better education "deal" for children and their families. Bush promised to close the "achievement gap" with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), euphemistically referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Eight years later, Barack Obama was elected president in the midst of a recession. As part of a nationwide stimulus package, Obama created a competitive grant incentive program for the states called Race to the Top. States could be granted money if they complied with the prescribed reform and or "school turnaround" interventions set forth in the administration's educational vision. Did much change for children and their families?

Diane Ravitch, a former undersecretary of education in the Bush administration, once a supporter of the conservative educational agenda, has since become an outspoken critic of Bush's "Texas deal" and Obama's "deal." In an interview about her book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System,* she told about her dramatic about-face and remarked, "The Obama administration, although it promised change when it came to office, in effect [has] picked up precisely the same themes as the George W. Bush administration, which are testing and choice—and I think we're on the wrong track."

It is now 2020 and we have a new president who boasts of his "deal" artistry. Is education on the right track now? Does the "Trump Education Deal" signal any real departure from the two previous administrations? If Trump's appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education is any indication, then the answer is . . . no. DeVos, a leading school-choice advocate, has been criticized for her lack of experience as a public school education administrator, a public school backer, or a public school parent for that matter. Her positions are clear. She opposes teachers' unions and collective bargaining, supports the deregulation of charter schools, and favors the expansion of vouchers and continued testing. Status quo preserved.

More than ever, educational decisions are based on political calculations. As you soon will discover, important questions about what schools should look like, about curriculum, and about assessment are being answered, increasingly, by people furthest removed from schools, teachers, and young people. Remarkably, there is broad consensus among those in the political class and

agreement too among membership of the nation's corporate elite about how best to answer these questions. Indeed, when it comes to education policy, there is no longer an ideological clash between Democrats and Republicans.

Since our first edition, the neo-liberal reform agenda has come to dominate American public education. Its "at-risk" mind-set, characterized by an almost singular focus on how our schools are failing, has resulted in narrow directives now firmly embedded within public education. What once appeared as isolated news stories and cause for local embarrassment—teaching to the test, scripted curricula, mindless repetition of facts—is now openly advocated without chagrin by local and state school officials. Yearly test results have emerged as the most important measure of the worth of our schools despite the fact that such assessments obfuscate the complexity of schooling and serve to short-circuit deeper understanding of student learning and high-quality teaching.

Can such an at-risk educational vision serve to renew and sustain our nation, our democracy, and our schools? Does the current model of accountability serve the public interest? Is there another way to frame reform?

Fortunately, there are still many thoughtful, progressive administrators, teachers, and parents. You will read their words in the pages that follow. In different ways, and at different times, they have refused to blindly accept an "at-risk" perspective, questioned uncritical compliance, and challenged the notion that there is, of necessity, a singular path to learning that requires rigid adherence to state directives. We have chosen these authors because, like Thoreau, they worry that public education is in jeopardy of making "a straight-cut ditch of a free, meandering brook."

But how does one begin to walk down an alternative path? Why aren't teachers at the forefront of the debate? How can we prepare beginning teachers to move purposefully in another direction, to ask questions, to challenge assumptions . . . to be involved? What questions should teachers ask? What answers should teachers accept?

We hope that new teachers will consider asking whether their instruction promotes the status quo. How deliberate are their efforts to promote equality and to include the experiences of traditionally marginalized groups in the curriculum? Is their instruction implemented at a transformational, social action level? New teachers need models of critical reflection (and even dissent) to help them develop their own critical questions and voices.

Like the previous editions, the major purpose of this fourth edition is to help teachers develop habits of critical reflection about schools and schooling before entering the classroom. It is for this reason that we continue to select authors with strong views that reflect these particular biases. We hope that these readings will offer a platform for discussion and debate that may be

used by instructors to increase student knowledge of pedagogy and to provide authentic opportunities for potential teachers to think critically about teaching and learning. For example, we are very concerned about the current trend toward standardization of curriculum and instruction, a trend we believe devalues teaching and increases the distrust of teachers. We believe, like Deborah Meier, that this trend has manifested itself in schools organized around testing and that it is imperative for teachers to actively critique such events and recapture some of the control and power over their work.

We assembled this book because we believe the current textbooks written on the foundations of education are too broad and too politically cautious to engage students or help them develop their own critical voices. Such texts do a good job of providing a survey of practices but with limited reference to the social contexts of teachers and their students, without taking a strong stance in favor of one practice or another. In these texts' attempt to cover everything in a curriculum, students have little opportunity to delve deeply into any substantive issues. Instead, they are exposed, in only the most superficial ways, to the important issues facing the field. While the scope of the typical course has become broader in the last several years, the tone has become more dispassionate. As textbook content demands expand, students become responsible for knowing less and less about more and more. The texts on the market, like the textbooks in many fields, are so cursory that they leave professors few options other than assuming highly didactic, teacher-directed approaches to instruction. The texts also tend to promote practices antithetical to meaningful instruction: lecture, memorization, and multiple-choice assessment. Finally, the texts, because of their size, scope, and neutral stance, foster acceptance of the status quo without opportunity for in-depth examination, reflection, and discussion.

What you have in your hands is a book that we hope you will find as exciting as we do, an anthology of critical readings for students about to enter the teaching profession and for students interested in carefully examining schools and schooling. We feature provocative, engaging authors whose views are politicized but whose writing and opinions matter not simply because they are gadflies but because their ideas work and because their achievements as teachers, principals, and policy shapers are so notable.

The fourth edition of the anthology is organized around the following essential questions: Why teach? Who are today's students? What makes a good teacher? What do good schools look like? How should we assess student learning? How does one develop a critical voice? How do we move forward? Our authors' answers continue to be bold and refreshing. They eschew the unquestioning compliance so characteristic of new teachers, and by taking

a hard look at traditional educational practice, they serve as models for the kind of reflective practitioners we hope our students will become when they enter the field. We frame each chapter with an introductory vignette that provides context for the issues the authors' essays address and serves to raise probing questions about teaching and learning.

Since our anthology was originally published in 2004, we have had plenty of feedback from our faithful adopters. While the response to our book has been overwhelmingly positive, we also received a number of specific, constructive recommendations from valued colleagues, critics, and students with whom we have had the pleasure of working. Principal among these were recommendations that essays more directly "answer" the questions posed at the outset of each chapter. To address this suggestion, we removed essays that were only tangentially related to each chapter's opening question and substituted them with essays that more directly address the content of each chapter's focus. In addition to the anchor essays like Herbert Kohl's *Why Teach?*, Ohanian's *On Stir-and-Serve Recipes for Teaching*, and Ravitch's *How, and How Not, to Improve the Schools* contained in past editions, you will now also find some newly commissioned works. For example, Deanna Rochefort and Matthew Rasmussen offer their refreshing views on why one should choose to teach. Bruce Marlowe and Monisa Gardner-Page have broadened the inclusion conversation to include issues related to the LGBTQ community of learners and racism. Elsa Wiehe and Elizabeth Robinson introduce us to the notion of *translangauging* in their work with English Language Learners. Kerri Ullucci reminds us to consider the complexity of labels and their impact on refugee youth. Gloria-Graves Holmes informs us of the importance of leadership in reducing inequities. Alan Canestrari and Amanda Vincenti seek to reshape the discourse around the issue of school safety. Ann Winfield, Alan Canestrari and Bruce Marlowe critique data-driven instruction. We have also added a foreword by Ann Winfield that frames the historical significance of the foundations of education.

How *Not* to Use This Book

If you are a professor that adopted our previous editions and hold our fourth edition in your hands, rest assured that we have not changed our perspective concerning the use of this book. If you are a professor that has adopted our fourth edition and are searching for some guidance in using this book, well, here is fair warning: You won't find any direct instruction here. Instead, we hope that you, like those who have found the anthology useful, will think critically about the most effective ways to engage your students with these

readings and the issues they raise, without simply telling. Let's once again be clear: Simply walking through the table of contents, chapter by chapter, and expounding on the views of the authors contained in these pages is not what we had in mind.

If you are a student, you hold our fourth edition in your hands for the first time; we challenge you to ensure that your professors practice what they preach about instruction. Are you sitting through long and boring lectures about why teachers should not lecture? Are you engaged in discussion? If not, perhaps it is time to ask your professor, "Why not?"

Acknowledgments

Our thinking regarding teaching and learning continues to be shaped, reshaped, and supported by our colleagues and our work with children. Like previous editions, this fourth edition of the anthology is composed of the writing of those who have had a profound influence on our understanding of what is most important for learners, teachers, and schools. We thank our colleagues Ann Winfield, Kerri Ullucci, Elsa Wiehe, Elizabeth Robinson, Amanda Vincenti, Deanna Rochefort, David Rasmussen, and Monisa Gardner-Page for agreeing to write new pieces for the fourth edition of this book.

Great teachers and writers, however, are not our only sources of inspiration or support: Special thanks to Pam and Nancy for their criticisms of the manuscript at its various stages. We are also grateful to Candice Harman for her artistic sense and input regarding the design of the book's cover, and for the final product.

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About the Editors

Alan S. Canestrari is a veteran social studies practitioner and professor of education at Roger Williams University. He earned his EdD from Boston University. He has had a long career in public schools and universities as a history teacher and department Chair, as adjunct professor at Rhode Island College, and as mentor in the Brown University Masters of Teaching Program. In 1992, he was recognized as the Rhode Island Social Studies Teacher of the Year. He is author (with Maureen M. Gillis and Margaret M. Thombs) of *A Culturally Responsive Approach Using Webquests in the Social Studies Classroom* (Corwin, 2009). He is also the editor (with Bruce Marlowe) of *Educational Psychology in Context: Readings for Future Teachers* (SAGE, 2006) and *The Wiley Handbook of International Foundations of Education* (Wiley, 2019).

Bruce A. Marlowe is the author (with Marilyn Page) of *Creating and Sustaining the Constructivist Classroom* (Corwin, 1998) and a six-part video series titled *Creating the Constructivist Classroom* (The Video Journal of Education). He is also the editor (with Alan Canestrari) of *Educational Psychology in Context: Readings for Future Teachers* (SAGE, 2006) and *The Wiley Handbook of International Foundations of Education* (Wiley, 2019). He earned his PhD in educational psychology from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, where he also completed two years of post-doctoral training in neuropsychological assessment. He has taught at the elementary, secondary, and university levels. Formerly professor of educational psychology and special education at Roger Williams University, Bruce currently serves as chair of the Education Department at the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

Alan and Bruce have both taught courses in the foundations of education; neither is satisfied with any of the foundations texts currently available on the market.

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Robert DiGiulio (deceased), former professor of education at Johnson State College in Vermont, was the author of numerous books, including *Great Teaching: What Matters Most in Helping Students Succeed* (2004), *Educate, Medicate, or Litigate? What Teachers, Parents, and Administrators Must Do About Student Behavior* (2011), and *Positive Classroom Management: A Step-by-Step Guide to Successfully Running the Snow Without Destroying Student Dignity* (2006).

Monisa Gardner-Page is an early childhood education major at the University of South Carolina Beaufort. She enjoys writing and tutoring children and has written, and published, several books.

Henry Giroux is a professor at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, where he currently holds the Global Television Network Chair in English and Cultural Studies. He is a prolific writer. He is author of *Youth in a Suspect Society* (2009).

Gloria Graves Holmes is a professor emerita from Quinnipiac University. In her book *Justice in Search of Leaders: A Handbook for Equity-Driven School Leadership* she makes a powerful case for equity-driven teaching and learning. She is particularly interested in the preparation of educational leaders who seek to identify and disrupt inequities in our system of public education.

Stan Karp taught English and journalism to high school students in Paterson, New Jersey, for 30 years. He is an editor of *Rethinking Schools.*

Herbert Kohl's *On Teaching* remains a classic response to the perennial question: Why teach? He is the author of more than 40 books on education. He and his wife, Judy, were the recipients of the National Book Award in 1978 for *The View From the Oak.*

Alfie Kohn, a self-described "gadfly," was described in *Time* magazine as "perhaps the country's most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades [and] test scores." He writes and speaks widely on human behavior, education, and parenting.

Deborah Meier is currently on the faculty of New York University's Steinhardt School of Education as senior scholar and adjunct professor, as well as board member and director of New Ventures as Mission Hill, director and advisor to Forum for Democracy and Education, and on the board of the Coalition of Essential Schools.

Thomas Newkirk's most recent books include *The Art of Slow Reading* (2011), *Holding Onto Good Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones* (2009), and *Teaching the Neglected "R"* (2007, coedited with Richard Kent). He is a professor of English at the University of New Hampshire.

Susan Ohanian, freelance writer and former teacher, is an outspoken critic of "stir and serve recipes" for teaching. In 2003, she won the National Council of Teachers of English George Orwell Award for Distinguished Contribution to Honesty and Clarity in Public Language.

Marilyn Page, a former professor of education at Penn State, consults on novice teacher mentoring, school reform, classroom management, and technology issues in education. She is the author of *You Can't Teach Until Everyone Is Listening*.

David "Matthew" Rasmussen is a sophomore at the University of South Carolina Beaufort studying early childhood education. After graduation, his goal is to teach at the elementary level in his home state of South Carolina.

Diane Ravitch is research professor of education at New York University and a historian of education. She is also a nonresident senior fellow at the Brooklyn Institution. She is an outspoken critic of the charter school movement.

Elizabeth Robinson is an assistant professor of education and director of the Educational Studies Program at Suffolk University in Boston. She is author with Patricia Paugh of "Keeping a 'Vigilant Critique': Unpacking Critical Praxis as Teacher Educators."

Deanna Rochefort is a Marine Corps veteran from Maine who is double-majoring in early childhood and elementary education at the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

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Ann Gibson Winfield is professor of historical and philosophical foundations of education at Roger Williams University, Bristol, RI. Dr. Winfield's research focuses on curriculum history and the history of education with a specific focus on eugenic ideology and its influence on our modern system of public education. Her book *Eugenics and Education in America* (2007) is considered a seminal work by eugenic historians.

Darlene Witte-Townsend is a former professor of education at Johnson State College in Vermont. Her research has included examinations of children's play, literacy, language, spirituality, and development, as well as educational philosophy, communication, practices, and the effects of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Foreword

ANN G. WINFIELD

When it comes to school, too often we fail to ask why. Daily school experience for teachers, students, and administrators is awash in rituals and practices that have a source, but few of the estimated one quarter of the U.S. population who are inside school walls on any given day know or think about the origins of what they think and do. Given that these daily practices and rituals are both derived from and serve to perpetuate the ideologies from which they are derived, it is important to examine the history, philosophy, and sociology of the field of education as it has played out for nearly two centuries. None of us, I am sure, want to participate in inculcating our youth in unexamined assumptions and biases. This, then, is the rationale for what is widely known as the *foundations of education*. Where to begin?

Generally, educational historians recognize education in the United States as having undergone four eras of reform: the *common school* era from roughly 1770 to 1890, the *progressive* era from 1900 to 1950, the *civil rights* era from 1950 to 1980, and the era of *standards and accountability* from 1980 to the present. Familiar debates about education in American schools, issues passionately argued across the country, were nearly all present from the earliest years of the American colonies and have risen and fallen in perceived importance over the course of these eras of reform. Issues like poverty, language, access to quality schooling, race, gender, curricular content, pedagogical approaches, religion, funding, taxes, and politics are not new; they are the very essence of what is often called *the American experiment* in democracy. What follows are some brief examples from each era, offered with the acknowledgment that there are innumerable examples and no right or wrong way of tracing the history. In addition, the following recounting illustrates that for any currently debated issue one might choose, it is possible to trace it back through time, come up with much-needed insight into why we do what we do in American schools, and conclude that change is possible. While it is true that when we do things over and over in a ritualized fashion those things become normalized and we stop asking why, it is also true that unmasking the ritual reveals possible flaws in the implementation of what may or may not have been an otherwise sound idea. In other words,

you, dear reader, have the capacity to weigh in; to evaluate with your own insight, knowledge, and experience; and to envision schooling as the site where young people go to discover their talents and passions and are given opportunity to realize their aspirations.

Literacy, or the ability to read and comprehend text, is often regarded as the preeminent starting point for any education. Though the Puritans are generally credited with the genesis of this notion because of their belief that individuals should be able to read the Bible themselves and not simply rely on the clergy to interpret scripture, the story has become more nuanced with new research showing that there were a number of groups working to spread the notion of education as a right, not a privilege. Mostly, though, the common school era is known for Horace Mann's proclamation that school should be the great equalizer of society—the widely held view that social class should not be an impediment to a successful life and career because school is there to put everyone on the same playing field. We are a rags-to-riches society, our story of ourselves goes, founded by self-made men who started with nothing. We learn in our earliest years that the only we learned to success is our own willingness to work hard, dream big, and stay out of trouble and that conversely, those who are poor and struggling must not have tried hard enough. This, as it turns out, is hardly as simple as it sounds. The institution of slavery, the idea that women were inferior to men, and the expectation that children will generally follow in the footsteps of their parents are obvious obstacle's to Mann's aspiration for public education. Other obstacles include the philosophy of individualism, the rediscovery of Mendelian genetics, racial hierarchies of intelligence, and nationalistic xenophobia: All contributed to a deeply foundational yet unspoken resistance to equal access to all in America.

By the end of the 19th century, the rationalization for tracks in school—special schools for domestic servants, factory workers, and indigenous peoples—and institutions for the disabled, the poor, and the wayward—were outward expressions of the influence of Charles Darwin's famous book *On the Origin of Species* wherein he articulated the concept of survival of the fittest. Social scientists of the 1880s and 1890s applied this concept to human society and put forth the notion that the wealthy and successful of the nation were simply better, more highly evolved humans. As you can imagine, the whole idea of school as the great equalizer faded away as quaint and old-fashioned, and the new "science" of eugenics overtook what had been known as social Darwinism.

The turn of the 20th century brought with it a whole host of progressive proposals: the end of child labor, compulsory schooling, the argument

that women should be allowed to vote, the uplifting of the poor by women like Jane Addams in Chicago, workplace safety, and a continuation of the survival-of-the-fittest notion—the eugenics movement. Eugenicists argued that we should all want to rid society of poverty and disease and be ruled by the wisest and best people possible and that the way to accomplish this was through forcible sterilization, severely restricting immigration, and laws governing who could marry whom. Intelligence, linked to race and class within this belief system, grew into an extensive intelligence quotient testing frenzy to which we can trace our current obsession with testing. Schools began to track students by categorizing them into groups based on preconceived ideas about what they were capable of (based on race, social class, and gender) and offering them a specialized curriculum. The famous American philosopher John Dewey was writing in this era, and developed his notion of *child-centered learning* in direct contrast to the dominant trends of the time, but was no less a product of those times. The result was a cementing in the American mind-set that when it comes to intelligence and ability, there was no possibility of equality and therefore no point in educating all students equally. Resistance to this had always been there, but by the end of World War II, the gears began to engage and the civil rights era was born.

Between 1950 and 1980 American education experienced dramatic change as people watched segregation in the southern states start to crumble under the weight of nonviolent protest led by the likes of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. Modeled after early achievements by blacks resisting segregation in southern states, groups formed to agitate for the rights of poor people, disabled people, women, and those for whom English was not a first language; Supreme Court decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education*; and legislation such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act transformed the landscape of public school availability and forced compliance to the notion that all students in America have a right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Driven by the first wave of the post–WWII baby boom, young people marched in protest of the Vietnam War, pushed hard against the edicts of society and their parents, demanded voting rights legislation, and sought a vision of schooling as emancipatory and supportive. Much was accomplished, but eras don't last forever, and as many have said, we rested too soon. What followed is the current era and a fixation on standards, accountability, and testing.

One thing about testing is its ability to reduce human beings into numbers, which in turn become data. The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980

ushered in a vehement, long-lasting rebuttal to the previous decades of reform. Reagan's *A Nation at Risk Report*, one of the first written with sound bites for newscasts in mind, declared that "if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). What the report called "mediocre" was that test scores had gone down overall, precisely because test scores among all the previously excluded groups that were now included had themselves gone up dramatically. Data-driven school reform has been big business for decades now, largely as a result of the dramatic policy shifts articulated in Reagan's report. Young people graduating from high school today are among the most tested generations in human history. School reform proposals are almost exclusively judged by the extent to which they reflect data, and data rationalizes day-to-day practice on even the most microscopic levels. The result is a decades-long withering away of all school curricula that don't test well—music, dance, theatre, and even history and science all receive a back seat on the priority list for school reformers. Recess and naps are now the exception rather than the rule for kindergartners and first graders. Children are now working on material in kindergarten and first grade that they used to start doing in second and third grade. Knowledge is imparted in bite-sized pieces and assessed in multiple-choice exams while the trajectory of students' lives is decided by the results of eighth-grade math examinations.

The essays in this book all enter into this conversation in different ways and on different subjects. Pick any topic, from homework requirements, grouping students by age, or separating subject disciplines to the questions about why girls are underrepresented in math and science or boys shun English and writing, trace that idea through time, and you will come up with the same reflection of our history. To ignore the influence of our past while trying to reform the present ensures that we may unwittingly perpetuate beliefs about human capacity that are not our own. We may reject many of the ideas we encounter in our study of history, but to then determine you will reject history altogether is an approach doomed to fail if your intent is to think outside the ideas you are rejecting. To ignore history is to be harnessed by ideological structures that have governed the lives and the education of each of us. Learning to think outside these imposed structures requires that we pay close attention and study with a critical eye, but it also requires a leap of faith and asks that we operate in a kind of suspended animation between past and present. The faith is in unlimited human capacity, in instinct, insight, acceptance, and in an approach modeled by the love

you have for your own family and friends. Your challenge will not be easy, especially when for generations we have been trained to view all knowledge as either right or wrong. On behalf of future generations, it is worth it to continue to strive toward an analysis of the present that fully accounts for, yet is not defined by, the past.

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PART

I

Why Teach?

Students file into a crowded lecture hall at a small liberal arts college in the Northeast. The class, Foundations of Education, is a prerequisite for acceptance into the School of Education program, and it is enrolled at maximum capacity. It is the first day of class. Students are expecting that the syllabus for the course will be distributed and read aloud, and if no one asks any questions about the requirements of the class, then the students can cut out early and enjoy the warm September sunshine. After all, nobody bought the book yet.

The professor arrives and greets the students.

"Good morning. So, you are all interested in becoming teachers? Wonderful. We need bright, energetic, young teachers in the profession today. Teaching can be a very rewarding career, but I must warn you that it is a challenging time for teachers, especially beginning teachers. Teachers are under tremendous scrutiny. There are also increasing concerns about the deplorable condition of our schools, the lack of parental support, the disturbing behavior of the children, and the general disrespect for teachers by the public at large. So, why teach?"

A long silence fills the hall.

"This is not a rhetorical question. Tell us, why do you want to teach?"

More silence . . . long silence.

Finally, Jennifer offers, "My mom is a teacher. So is my aunt. I guess I have grown up around teaching, and ever since I can remember, I've wanted to teach, too."

Then Erin says, "I just love kids. Like, I just want to make a difference in their lives. I want to teach elementary school. The kids are so cute at that age."

Robert adds, "I work as a camp counselor in the summers. My cabin always wins the camp contest. I really connect with kids. I mean, I just know what they like. It is not so hard, plus teachers have summers off."

Sound good? Do Jennifer, Erin, and Robert have it right? Are these reasons to teach?

CHAPTER

1

My Need to Teach

DEANNA ROCHEFORT

A day in the life of a teacher is difficult to adequately describe. At times I will feel as though my sanity is hanging by a thread as I question whether the job of teaching is really worth doing when my paycheck is minuscule. The balancing act of trying to please everyone while doing what is best for my students will overwhelm me and seem impossible. I will have sleepless nights spent worrying about my students and weekends consumed with grading papers and writing lesson plans. The needs of my students will be numerous and different, but I will have to find a way to meet them all. This will result in hectic days as I try my best to maintain order. Scrutiny of my teaching will frequently come from those who know nothing of its challenges. I will be told to teach in ways that do not match what is best for my students. Standardized tests will loom over me as a deciding factor that determines my worth as a teacher. Parents may be quick to place the blame on me for their child's failures, but they won't know that I may already blame myself. There will also be times where I think quitting would be easier because the task of teaching just seems like too much to bear. And yet I want to teach. I need to teach.

Despite all the challenges of teaching, there are dedicated teachers who spend countless hours helping children prepare for their futures. Those on the outside looking in will frequently question why these individuals are teachers. Sometimes, even for the most dedicated teacher, answering the question of why they teach can be difficult. My answer to this question has evolved the more I've learned about teaching. I started out years ago as a person who would have told you to avoid teaching at all costs. I would have told you this despite my own desire to teach. I had been conditioned to focus on the negatives of teaching and to see it as a career for those who couldn't do anything else. After four years in the Marine Corps, I realized that going to college for a degree in something that I wouldn't actually enjoy would be a waste of my time so I ignored the naysayers and applied to colleges to pursue a degree in education. I entered college majoring in early childhood education with the idea that I wanted to teach because I like kids, like the

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act of teaching, and thought it would be easy. I was naïve to everything that teaching in America entails and realized early on that my idea of teaching was seen through rose-colored glasses. After two years of college classes, my rose-colored glasses have been retinted, and my desire to teach has only strengthened. I now want to teach not because it is easy but precisely because it is challenging, requires intelligence, is one of the most important jobs one can do, and I believe I am capable of being a good teacher. And good teachers are very much needed.

There is a common misconception in American society that teaching is easy. The first thing that I quickly realized when I really started learning about teaching is that it is not easy. I know that this seems obvious, but for many, it is not. When I was in high school, I ran a volunteer program where high school musicians weekly went and taught young children how to play instruments. I thoroughly enjoyed doing this, but the mention of pursuing music education as a career was treated by my high school teachers as a horrible decision that they needed to steer me away from. It seemed preposterous to them that one of their star students would give up their promising future of being a doctor or scientist to instead be a music educator. Even the music educators that I interacted with would be quick to name all the negatives of their own careers in order to save the naïve high schooler from following in their footsteps. Teachers themselves tell students who are high achievers in school that teaching is beneath them. This frequently seemed counterintuitive to me. Why would teachers insult their own profession? Why would they lower the standards for future teachers? Why would they demean themselves in this way? As Meier (2000) expresses, "What kid, after all, wants to be seen emulating people he's been told are too dumb to exercise power, and are simply implementing the commands of the real experts" (p. 15). This led me to not really know what I wanted to do after high school because teaching had been made out to be a career I should not go near.

About the time that I was busy procrastinating with my college applications, I received a phone call from a Marine Corps recruiter wanting to talk with my twin brother. Thankfully for me, my brother was not home and I quickly became hooked on the idea of becoming a Marine Corps musician. This decision came with the voices of many more teachers, each of whom felt compelled to tell me that I would be wasting my intellect if I joined the military and played an instrument. I even had one English teacher who insisted I needed to write a spoken-word poem about departing for college despite the fact that this was not my plan. Instead, I wrote a critique aimed at my teachers that explained why they should be advocating for their students' happiness and success, instead of pushing college like it was the only option to succeed.

In the Marine Corps, I was surprised to find that the band field was filled with many former music educators. They too were quick to demean the profession and speak of it as a waste of time. I was told daily by my fellow Marine

musicians who had left the education sector that it was the last thing they would ever go back to doing. I frequently heard about how if I was smart I would not become a teacher. I respected my fellow Marines more than my former teachers, and their daily critique of their former profession slowly wore me down to view teaching as a career that garnered little respect and was not worth doing if you were smart enough to do something else. This idea that you need not be smart to teach seems to stem from the misconception that teaching is easy.

Now that I've learned more about teaching, I question how anyone can see it as easy. Valle and Connor (2011) describe teaching as "a complex act that requires constant shifting among multiple and simultaneous skill sets" (p. 2). Teaching not only requires one to know content but also how to teach that material to a wide range of learners all while managing a classroom full of diverse individuals who may or may not be developmentally ready to learn that content. Moreover, at times teachers need to act as stand-in parents, nurses, janitors, and even bodyguards. There is nothing easy about any of this, and to say that it is beneath those who are smart is diminishing the many different kinds of skills and intelligences that teachers use daily to complete their jobs. I want to teach *because it is so difficult*.

I can now admit that if my naïve idea that teaching was easy had been true, I would not have wanted to continue pursuing it as my career path. The short hiatus I took after leaving the Marine Corps made me long to return to something that demanded more from me. I was actually relieved to discover that teaching would not be an easy task. To many of my fellow classmates, the revelation that I enjoy the challenge is shocking to them. In contrast, it surprises me that all people pursuing a degree in education don't share the same outlook. Teaching is extremely hard, and I feel it is important for teachers entering the profession to have a strong desire to embrace that challenge. If teachers enter the profession without wanting to be challenged, they will frequently become script readers who do the bare minimum.

You may wonder why being a script reader is such a bad thing. After all, there are few teachers who would not jump at the chance to have a classroom management and instruction plan that was guaranteed to work for every one of our students. This does not exist. I am confident that it never will. The students in our classrooms are not robots, which is why there will never be a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching that will actually work. Sadly, the American education system is becoming increasingly like a factory where the instructions for making citizens are uniform, test-focused, and narrow in their focus. Such a focus removes all the joy from both student and teacher. As Meier (2000) reminds both aspiring and in-service teachers, a script provides no room for "whimsical discoveries and unexpected learnings" (p. xi). While reading from a script is easy, it is not teaching. In part, this is true because even the best scripts rarely reflect teaching practices supported by science, and they rarely account for the numerous other roles that a teacher

must take on in the classroom. Even if the best scripts aligned with what the science of teaching tells us is most important—that is, they focused on student discovery and engagement—they would still fall short because there is more to good teaching than scientifically supported "best practice." As Ohanian (2013) observes, "Teaching is too personal, even too metaphysical, to be charted like the daily temperature" (pp. 122–123). Of course, teaching is a science. But it is also an art.

Teachers need to be willing to face the challenge of creating their own dynamic lessons and need to be strong enough to turn away from the lure of the easy one-size-fits-all scripted instruction. This is why I view wanting to be challenged as a reason to teach, because without that desire it would be all too easy to comply with the standardized scripts. Teachers need to embrace the challenge for the benefit of the students; if they don't want to be challenged then they shouldn't be teaching.

The desire to be challenged, however, is not sufficient and does not constitute, by itself, a strong enough reason to teach. Teachers must also be intellectuals. This starts with teachers viewing themselves as scholars—of students and their development, of art, science, literature, mathematics, and history—who see themselves as something more than information dispensers, agreeing to pass their days by filling empty vessels. Teacher work needs to be examined "as a form of intellectual labor" (Giroux, 2013, p. 193). If we continue to act as though teaching does not require someone to be an intellectual we will further devalue teachers, and teaching and the education of children and young people will continue its mundane downfall. Being an intellectual does not mean that one needs to be a genius as defined by a test in order to teach. Instead it means that you must be knowledgeable; you must seek knowledge, possess many skills, and be continuously willing to learn from others. Giroux (2013) states the case most strongly and emphasizes that teachers need to be *transformative intellectuals* who "must take active responsibility for raising various questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and what the larger goals are for which they are striving" (p. 194). It is not enough to be an intellectual; one must also advocate for the continued betterment of America's education system. My desire to continue to grow intellectually, embrace the intellectual aspects of teaching, and advocate for positive change are also reasons why I want to teach.

Teachers must also have a desire to help children and young people. While teachers are frequently inundated with criticism regarding whether they are actually helping their students, the reality is that "educators often find themselves in a position to help kids who are in distress" (Greene, 2008, p. 53). While this is sometimes seen in a purely academic context, there are also many instances where teachers are confronted with helping students in other developmental domains. The healthy development of children and young people can only occur if teachers consider the development of the whole child.

This is ignored frequently in schools, and students are often deemed a problem if they have some kind of lagging skill in the social or emotional domain that is impacting their academic success. Ross Greene (2008) stresses that all kids want to do well and that "kids do well if they can" (p. 10). When teachers don't help children develop in all developmental domains we end up failing some as they can't keep up in an environment where help only comes in academic forms. I believe that teachers need to view children and young people as always wanting to do well, and if they experience a situation where a child is not doing well, then they need to find out what help they need to provide so that the child can succeed. If someone does not desire to help children in any way other than academically then teaching is not the correct path for them. While fulfilling the demands of the standards has become a necessity in America's schools, helping children develop dynamic skills that they will use daily as adults is more important.

Most teachers will identify that the most important goal they have for their students is to become empathetic individuals who have a desire to do their best and work hard. There is rarely a teacher who views meeting all the prescribed standards as the most important thing they will help their students learn; many also question the purpose of the arbitrary standards. Further, the learning environment is also threatened by the increasing dependence on standards as it "decreases the chances that young people will grow up in the midst of adults who are making hard decisions and exercising mature judgement in the face of disagreements" (Meier, 2000, p. 5). To cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving in children, adults need to demonstrate these skills. The overreliance on standards to dictate instruction leads to classrooms where critical thinking does not take place because the teachers are not thinking critically. There then comes the question of who is actually creating these standards. The standards are almost always created from a perspective so far removed from the classroom that they fail to directly relate to the students and focus highly on what politically is deemed important to learn. This makes the standards not relevant to the students themselves, thus making the information learned from them not useful. Unfortunately, meeting the standards has become almost the sole focus of school administrations and lawmakers. This leads to teachers who are limited in the amount of help they are able to offer their students outside of strict academic deadlines. I view this trend toward only helping students meet standards and not helping them develop as a whole child as a dangerous one. It ignores the many differences among children and instead focuses teachers' help on those students who are already set to succeed. Instead of helping children when they are in distress, we now see teachers who ignore the children who desperately need their help because to help them with anything but meeting academic standards is to distract from the apparent necessity to teach to the test.

I personally have witnessed this change in the type of helping that teachers provide and have seen the damage that it can do to a child. In a pre-K class that I recently observed there were many children who did not fit the ideal mold of the easy-to-teach student. The student who struggled to name letters of the alphabet was treated as if they were wasting the teacher's time and not worth the extra help. The student in visible distress when one of their classmates walked in on them in the bathroom was told to be quiet because a math lesson was occurring. The student with autism who was mostly nonverbal was kept at arm's length from all other students in the class and thought of as a nuisance. Helping the student to be a part of the class or to learn was seen as too much of a distraction from the main objectives the rest of the students needed to meet. What did this teach all the students in that class? It taught them to ignore people who need extra help and that needing help isn't something you want because it will not be given to you. This example is one illustration of how the state of schools is contributing to the current "crisis in human relationships" and "absence of any sense of responsibility for one's community" (Meier, 2000, p. 13). To really understand why this can have devastating consequences to society, it is vital to reevaluate the purpose of school. Too often schools are just viewed as a place to instill a bunch of knowledge into children about the core subjects. When schools are instead viewed as places to create citizens who will positively contribute to society then how much America is failing at creating a sense of responsibility for the community becomes much more alarming. Schools are where students should be learning how to build strong human relationships that emphasize helping others. Teachers need to help their students in more than just academics and create a classroom community to cultivate these qualities in their students. When teaching is viewed as being vital to creating future citizens and building the foundation for a democratic society then the impact that a teacher has is thus viewed as formidable. While there are other occupations that help children, teaching is one where you can help children beyond what any other profession can do. It is because of my view that teaching has the potential to have the greatest impact on children that I want to help children by teaching.

In my opinion, teaching is one of the most important jobs there is. This is because "the experiences we provide for our young people today will shape how they see themselves, one another, and the world" (Sapon-Shevin, 2007, p. 236). How we teach children will greatly contribute to the outcomes they have as adults. I sometimes joke that I want to teach to make sure that when I am older and in need of care by the younger generations that there are individuals I will trust to care for me. While it is a joke, it is rooted in a reality that how our education system teaches our youth greatly impacts society. An individual teacher has the ability to contribute to the outcomes of anywhere

from 20 to 200 students a year. Nearly every single child in America will attend school at some point in their life and have a teacher affect their life outcome. This job should not be taken lightly because of the impact it has. Americans have slowly started to realize that our education is not up to par with many other first-world countries. We see the societal impact of that, and many fear for what will happen if we continue to perpetuate our education system's problems by confounding them with more of what does not work. As Greene (2008) emphasizes, the continuance of practices that do not work is "an exercise in frustration for everyone involved, and it's time to get off the treadmill" (p. 9). If good teachers do not step off the treadmill and facilitate a change toward better education practices, then the result will be a society that continues to fall behind those of other first-world nations. It is extremely important for teachers to be advocates for this change because of the impact that our education system has on student outcomes. My desire to help facilitate this change and positively contribute to the future of society through teaching children is one of the biggest reasons I have found that I not only want to teach but feel I need to.

To recognize that teaching is something you feel you need to do is a vital realization that teachers and future teachers must have. Wanting to do something can easily change over time, but a desire to do something because you feel you need to do it is much harder to get rid of. There is no question that good teachers are needed now more than ever. Nearly half of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching, and many who stay quickly conform to the teaching-to-the-test mentality. We need teachers who understand all that teaching entails and are willing to persevere when things get tough because they know that doing their job well is vital to not only the future of the students in their class but also the future of society. It is by no means an easy task to teach, but it is one that requires vigilance. A good teacher is a hero in disguise, and if dedicated individuals don't don a cape and teach, then students will suffer. I feel I can not only handle this burden but want to, and that is why I am becoming a teacher.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

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CHAPTER

2

Why Teach?

HERBERT KOHL

THERE ARE MANY reasons that lead people to choose elementary and secondary school teaching. Some people choose teaching because they enjoy being with young people and watching them grow. Others need to be around young people and let their students grow for them. Teaching for some is a family tradition, a craft that one naturally masters and a world that surrounds one from childhood. For others teaching is magical because they have had magical teachers whose roles they want to assume. Teaching can be a way of sharing power, of convincing people to value what you value, or to explore the world with you or through you.

There are some cynical reasons for going into teaching, which were much more prevalent when getting a job was not difficult. For example, for some people teaching becomes a matter of temporary convenience, of taking a job that seems respectable and not too demanding while going to law school, supporting a spouse through professional or graduate school, scouting around for a good business connection, or merely marking time while figuring out what one really wants to do as an adult. For others teaching is a jumping-off point into administration, research, or supervision.

Many student teachers I have known over the last five years are becoming teachers to negate the wounds they received when they were in school. They want to counter the racism, the sexual put-downs, all the other humiliations they experienced with new, freer ways of teaching and learning. They want to be teachers to protect and nurture people younger than they who have every likelihood of being damaged by the schools. Some of these people come from poor or oppressed communities, and their commitment to the children is a commitment to the community of their parents, brothers and sisters, and their own children as well. Others, mostly from white middle- or upper-class backgrounds, have given up dialogue with their parents and rejected the community they grew up in. Teaching for them becomes a means of searching for ways of connecting with a community they can care for and serve.

There were a number of reasons that led me to choose elementary school teaching. For one, I never wanted to put my toys away and get on with the serious business of being an adult. I enjoy playing games, building things that have no particular purpose or value beyond themselves, trying painting, sculpting, macramé without becoming obsessed by them. I enjoy moving from subject to subject, from a math problem to a design problem, from bead collecting to the classification of mollusks. Specialization does not interest me, and teaching elementary school makes it possible for me to explore many facets of the world and share what I learn. My self-justification is that the games I play and the things I explore all contribute to making a curriculum that will interest and engage my students.

I guess also I became a teacher of young children initially because I thought they were purer, more open, and less damaged than I was. They were the saviors—they could dare to be creative where I was inhibited; they could write well because they didn't know what good writing was supposed to be; they could learn with ease, whereas I was overridden with anxiety over grades and tests. I never forgot the time in high school when I was informed that I missed making Arista, the national high school honor society, by 0.1 of a point. I went into the boys' bathroom and cried, the first time I had cried since being a baby. Neither Hitler's horrors nor the deaths of relatives and friends could cause me to cry because I was a male and was too proud to show sadness and weakness. Yet 0.1 of a grade point could bring tears and self-hatred and feelings of inferiority. And what if I'd made it—would I laugh at my friends' tears because they missed by 0.1 of a point just as they did at me? There is no reward on either side of that cruel system.

When I became a teacher, some of my dreams of free development for my own students came true—they could be open and creative. But they also could be closed, destructive, nasty, manipulating—all the things I wanted to avoid in the adult world. It was important to sort out the romance of teaching from the realities of teaching and discover whether, knowing the problems, the hard work and frustration, it still made sense to teach. For me the answer has been yes, but there are still times I wish I'd chosen some easier vocation.

Everyone who goes into teaching, even temporarily, has many reasons for choosing to spend five hours a day with young people. These reasons are often unarticulated and more complex than one imagines. Yet they have significant effects on everyday work with students and on the satisfaction and strength the teacher gets from that work. Consequently, it makes sense, if you are thinking of becoming a teacher, to begin questioning yourself and understanding what you expect from teaching and what you are willing to give to it.

It also is of value to understand what type of children, what age, what setting is most sensible for your temperament and skills. Simple mistakes like teaching children that are too young or too old can destroy promising teachers. I had a friend who was teaching first grade and having a miserable time

of it. The class was out of order, the students paid no attention to what she said, and she couldn't understand what the children were talking about. One day in anger, she blurted out to me that her major frustration was that she couldn't hold a good conversation with her class. She wanted to talk about civil rights, racism, about ways of reconstructing our society, about poverty and oppression.

She wanted to read poetry with the children, expose them to music. She prepared each class for hours, put herself into the work, cared about the children—and yet things kept on getting worse. What she wanted and needed from her six-year-olds was simply beyond them. I suggested that she try junior high if she wanted dialogue and challenge from her students. First grade was a mistake. The next year she transferred to one of the most difficult junior high schools in New York City, where she immediately felt at home. She was in the right place—what she offered could be used by the students, and therefore they could reward her with the exchange she needed.

There are a number of questions people thinking of becoming teachers might ask themselves in order to clarify their motives and focus on the type of teaching situations that could make sense for them. These questions do not have simple answers. Sometimes they cannot be answered until one has taught for a while. But I think it makes sense to keep them in mind while considering whether you actually want to teach and then, if you do, during training and the first few years of work.

1. What reasons do you give yourself for wanting to teach? Are they all negative (e.g., because the schools are oppressive, or because I was damaged, or because I need a job and working as a teacher is more respectable than working as a cab driver or salesperson)? What are the positive reasons for wanting to teach? Is there any pleasure to be gained from teaching? Knowledge? Power? As an elaboration on this, there is another similar question:

2. Why do you want to spend so much time with young people? Are you afraid of adults? Intimidated by adult company? Fed up with the competition and coldness of business and the university? Do you feel more comfortable with children? Have you spent much time with children recently, or are you mostly fantasizing how they would behave? Before deciding to become a teacher, it makes sense to spend time with young people of different ages at camp, as a tutor, or as a playground supervisor. I have found it valuable to spend time at playgrounds and observe children playing with each other or relating to their parents or teachers. One day watch five-, ten-, fifteen-year-olds on the playground or the street, and try to see how they are alike and how they are different. The more you train your eye to observe young people's behavior, the easier it will be to pick up attitudes and feelings and relationships in your own classroom.

Elaborating on the question of why spend so much time with young people, it is important to ask . . .

3. What do you want from the children? Do you want them to do well on tests? Learn particular subject matter? Like each other? Like you? How much do you need to have students like you? Are you afraid to criticize them or set limits on their behavior because they might be angry with you? Do you consider yourself one of the kids? Is there any difference in your mind between your role and that of your prospective students?

Many young teachers are not sure of themselves as adults, feel very much like children, and cover over a sense of their own powerlessness with the rhetoric of equality. They tell their students that they are all equal and then are surprised when their students walk all over them or show them no respect. If students have to go to school, if the teacher is paid and the students are not, if the young expect to learn something from the older in order to become more powerful themselves, then the teacher who pretends to be an equal of the student is both a hypocrite and a disappointment in the students' eyes. This does not mean that the teacher doesn't learn with or from the students, nor does it mean that the teacher must try to coerce the students into learning or be the source of all authority. It does mean, however, that the teacher ought to have some knowledge or skills to share, mastery of a subject that the students haven't already encountered and might be interested in. This leads to the next question:

4. What do you know that you can teach to or share with your students? Too many young people coming out of college believe that they do not know anything worth sharing or at least feel they haven't learned anything in school worth it. Teacher training usually doesn't help since it concentrates on "teaching skills" rather than the content of what might be learned. Yet there is so much young people will respond to if the material emerges out of problems that challenge them and if the solutions can be developed without constant judging and testing. I have found that young people enjoy working hard, pushing and challenging themselves. What they hate is having their self-esteem tied up in learning and regurgitating material that bores them. Constant testing interferes with learning.

The more you know, the easier teaching becomes. A skilled teacher uses all his or her knowledge and experience in the service of building a curriculum each year for the particular individuals that are in the class. If you cannot think of any particular skills you have, but just like being with children, don't go right into teaching. Find other ways of spending time with young people while you master some skills that you believe are worth sharing.

Here is a partial list of things one could learn: printing; working with wood, plastic, fabrics, metal; how to run a store; making or repairing cars, shoes, boats, airplanes; playing and teaching cards, board, dice, ball games; playing and composing music; understanding ways of calculating and the

use and construction of computers; using closed-circuit TV; making films; taking pictures; understanding history, especially history that explains part of the present; knowing about animals and plants; understanding something of the chemistry of life; knowing the law; understanding how to use or care for one's body.

These subjects are intrinsically interesting to many students and can be used as well in teaching the so-called basic skills of reading, writing, and math, which are themselves no more than tools that extend people's power and make some aspects of the world more accessible. Too often these basic skills are taught in isolation from interesting content, leaving students wondering what use phonics or set theory could possibly have in their lives. It is not good enough to tell the class that what they are learning now will be of use when they are grown-ups. Six-year-olds and ten-year-olds have immediate interests, and reading and math ought to be tied to these interests, which range all the way from learning to make and build things to learning to play games and master comic books and fix bicycles and make money and cook and find out about other people's feelings and lives—the list can go on and on. The more time you spend informally with young children, the more you will learn about their interests. Listening carefully and following up on what you hear are skills a teacher has to cultivate. If students are interested in paper airplanes, it is more sensible to build a unit around flying than to ban them and assume police functions.

5. Getting more specific, a prospective teacher ought to consider what age youngster he or she feels greatest affinity toward or most comfortable with. There are some adults who are afraid of high school– or junior high school–aged people (thirteen- to seventeen-year-olds), while others are terrified at the idea of being left alone in a room with twenty-four six-year-olds. Fear of young people is neither unnatural nor uncommon in our culture. This is especially true in the schools, where undeclared warfare between the adults and the children defines much of the social climate. As long as young people feel constantly tested and judged by their teacher and have to experience the humiliation of their own or their friends' failures, they try to get even in any ways they can. Teachers who try to be kind often find themselves taken advantage of, while those who assume a strict stand are constantly tricked and mocked. It takes time and experience to win the respect of young people and not be considered their enemy in the context of a traditional American school.

It is very difficult to feel at ease in a classroom, to spend five hours with young people, and not emerge wiped out or exhausted at the end of the day. This is especially true if one is mismatched with the students.

Great patience and humor, an ease with physical contact, and an ability to work with one's hands as well as one's mouth are needed for teachers of five- and six-year-olds. A lack of sexual prudery is almost a prerequisite for

junior high school teachers, while physical and personal confidence and the love of some subject make work with high school students much easier.

This does not mean that an adult shouldn't take chances working with students whose age poses a problem. I know this year has been one of the most fulfilling of my teaching years, and yet I was full of anxiety about my ability to be effective with five- and six-year-olds after working with twelve- to eighteen-year-olds for twelve years. I taught myself to be patient, learned to work with my hands, to play a lot, to expect change to develop slowly. The students' ability to express affection or dislike openly and physically moved and surprised me, and initially their energy exhausted me. I must have lost fifteen pounds the first month, just trying to keep up with them.

One way of discovering what age youngster to begin working with is to visit a lot of schools. Try to find teachers you like and respect, and spend a few days working alongside them. Don't visit for an hour or two. It is important to stay all day (or if you have time, all week) to get a sense of the flow of time and energy working with that age person involves. Of course, your rhythm as a teacher might be different, but it is important to have a sense of what it is like to be with young people all day before becoming a teacher.

6. Before becoming a teacher it is important to examine one's attitudes toward racial and class differences. Racism is part of the heritage of white Americans, and though it can be mostly unlearned, it manifests itself in many subtle ways. Some white teachers are overtly condescending toward black and brown and red children, giving them crayons instead of books. Others are more subtly condescending—they congratulate themselves on caring enough to work in a ghetto, choose one or two favorite students and put the rest down as products of a bad environment. They consider themselves liberal, nonracist, and yet are repelled by most of their students while believing that they are "saving" a few. There are ways of picking up racist attitudes in one's own way of talking. When a teacher talks about his or her pupils as "them" or "these kind of children," or when a favorite pupil is described as "not like the rest of them," one is in the presence of a racist attitude. Accompanying this attitude is usually an unarticulated fear of the children. I have seen white kindergarten teachers treat poor black five-year-old boys as if they were nineteen, carried guns and knives, and had criminal intentions at all times. Needless to say, this sort of adult attitude confuses and profoundly upsets the child. It also causes the adult to ignore acts that should otherwise be prevented. Many white teachers in ghetto schools claim they are being permissive and believe in allowing their students freedom when it would be closer to the truth to say that they are afraid that their students will beat them up and that they are afraid to face the moral rage their students have from being treated in brutal and racist

ways. When a student destroys a typewriter or brutalizes a smaller student, that is not an acceptable or humane use of freedom.

Young teachers have a hard time knowing how and when to be firm and when to be giving. This becomes even more complex when the teacher is white, of liberal persuasion, afraid of physical violence, and teaching a class of poor children who are not white.

However, fear is not limited to white-nonwhite situations. Many middle-class people have attitudes toward poor people in general that are manifested in the classroom in ways very close to the racist attitudes described above. Poverty is looked upon as a disease that one does not want to have contact with. Many teachers have a hard time touching poor children, as if somehow the poverty can be spread by physical contact. Then there are the condescending liberal attitudes toward "saving" a few good students from the general condition of poverty, as if the rest got what they deserve.

Prospective teachers, especially those who might choose or be assigned to work with poor or nonwhite students have to examine their own attitudes toward class and race. If these people come from isolated white middle-class communities, I would suggest they move into a mixed urban community and live and work there before becoming teachers. Then they might be able to see their students as individuals rather than as representatives of a class or race. And they might also develop insight into the different ways people learn and teach each other and themselves. Good teaching requires an understanding and respect of the strengths of one's pupils, and this cannot develop if they and their parents are alien to one's nonschool experience.

7. Another, perhaps uncomfortable, question a prospective teacher ought to ask him or herself is what sex-based motives he or she has for wanting to work with young people. Do you want to enable young boys or girls to become the boys or girls you could never be? To, for example, free the girls of the image of prettiness and quietness and encourage them to run and fight, and on an academic level, mess about with science and get lost in the abstractions of math? Or to encourage boys to write poetry, play with dolls, let their fantasies come out, and not feel abnormal if they enjoy reading or acting or listening to music?

Dealing with sex is one of the most difficult things teachers who care to have all their students develop fully have to learn how to manage. Often children arrive at school as early as kindergarten with clear ideas of what is proper behavior for boys and girls. The teacher has to be sensitive to parentally and culturally enforced sex roles that schools traditionally enforce, and be able to lead children to choose what they want to learn, free of those encumbrances.

There are other problems teachers have to sort out that are sexual rather than sex-based. Many male teachers enjoy flirting with female

students and using flirtation as a means of controlling the girls. Similarly, some female teachers try to seduce male students into learning. All these exchanges are covert—a gesture, a look, a petulant or joking remark.

Children take adult affection very seriously, and often what is play or dalliance on the part of the adult becomes the basis of endless fantasy and expectation on the part of the child. The issue exists in the early grades, but is much more overt on the high school level, where young teachers often naively express affection and concern, which students interpret as sexual overtures (which in some cases they might actually be, however unclear to the teacher).

Entering into an open relationship with a student is another issue altogether. Obviously, love is not bound to age or status. One should be wary, however, of confusing love with conquest and manipulation, but these problems are not limited to one's life as a teacher.

A final question that should be asked with respect to sex in the classroom: Do you need to get even with one sex, as a group, for real or fancied injuries you experienced? Do you dislike boys or girls as a group? Do you feel that the girls were always loved too much? That the boys brutalized you and need to learn a lesson? That somehow you have to get even in your classroom for an injury you suffered as a child? There are many good reasons for not becoming a teacher, and the need to punish others for a hurt you suffered is certainly one.

It might seem that I'm being harsh or cynical by raising questions about motives for teaching and suggesting that there are circumstances in which a person either should not become a teacher or should wait a while. If anything, these questions are too easy and can unfortunately be put aside with facile, self-deceiving answers. But teaching young people—i.e., helping them become sane, powerful, self-respecting, and loving adults—is a very serious and difficult job in a culture as oppressive and confused as ours, and needs strong and self-critical people.

There are other questions that ought to be considered. These might seem less charged, but are not less important.

8. What kind of young people do you want to work with? There are a number of children with special needs that can be assisted by adults with particular qualities. For example, there are some severely disturbed children—children whose behavior is bizarre, who are not verbal, who might not yet be toilet-trained at nine or ten, who might be engaged in dialogue for hours at a time with creatures you cannot perceive. My first experience was at a school for severely disturbed children very much like those described above. I liked the children, but lasted only six months since I didn't have the patience. I needed them to recognize and engage me, even through defiance. I couldn't bear their silence or removal, their unrelieved pain. As soon as I changed schools and began to work with normal, though angry and defiant, young people, I felt at home.

My wife, Judy, is different. She has the patience to live with small increments of change, is calm and gentle and nonthreatening to remote and scared children. She feels much more at home in silent or remote worlds than I do, and is an excellent teacher of disturbed children. It is a matter of knowing who you are and what the children need.

These same questions should be raised by people thinking of working with deaf, blind, or physically damaged people. Who are they? What is the world they live in? How can I serve them?

Let me illustrate a perverse way of going about deciding how to serve people in order to point toward a healthier way of functioning. For a long time most schools for deaf children were controlled by nondeaf teachers, parents, and administrators who advocated the oral, rather than the manual, tradition. The oral tradition maintained that it was necessary for deaf individuals to learn to speak instead of depending on sign language. Many oralist schools prohibited their students from using sign language, and some professionals within that tradition maintained that sign language was not a "real" language at all, but some degenerate or primitive form of communication. All these prohibitions were to no avail—deaf children learned signing from each other and used it when the teachers' backs were turned. Many deaf adults trained in oralist schools ended up despising the language they were forced to learn and retreated into an all-deaf world where communication was in signs. Recently things have begun to change—sign language has been shown to be an expressive, sophisticated language with perhaps even greater potential for communication than oral language. A deaf-power movement has developed that insists that teachers of the deaf respond to the needs of deaf adults and children. It is no longer possible to tell deaf people what they must learn from outside the community. To teach within a deaf community (and, in fact, in all communities) requires understanding the world people live in and responding to their needs as they articulate them. This does not mean that the teacher should be morally or politically neutral. Rather, it means that being a teacher does not put an individual in a position of forcing his or her values on students or community. A teacher must engage in dialogue with the students and parents if he or she hopes to change them—and be open to change as well. Many teachers have been educated in communities they initially thought they would educate.

9. Some people get along well in crowds, and others function best with small groups or single individuals. Before becoming a classroom teacher, it is important to ask oneself what the effect is on one's personality of spending a lot of time with over twenty people in the same room. Some of the best teachers I know do not feel at ease or work effectively with more than a dozen students at a time. With those dozen, however, they are unusually effective. There are other people who have a gift for working on a

one-to-one basis with students no one else seems to reach. There are ways to prepare oneself for individual or small-group work—as skills specialist, remedial teacher, learning disabilities specialist, and so forth. There are also schools where it is possible to work with small groups as a teacher. Once you decide how you want to begin to work in a school, then you can look around and try to discover a situation in which you can be effective.

10. A final, though complex, question is what kind of school one should teach in. This is especially difficult for people like me, who believe that almost every school in the United States, within and without the public school system, contributes to maintaining an oppressive society based upon an unequal distribution of wealth and a debasement of people's sense of dignity and personal worth. In the next section I will elaborate on this and suggest some ways of infiltrating the system and struggling to change it. It is my conviction that teachers who comply with the values and goals of this culture can only do so at the cost of stripping their students of self-respect and substituting violence in the form of competition in place of knowledge, curiosity, and a sense of community.

Getting a Job. There are not many teaching jobs these days. If you still care to teach, broaden your notion of where you might teach. The schools are only one possible place. Try businesses, social agencies, hospitals, parks, community service organizations. It is, for example, possible to teach literacy to hospitalized children; to use an art and recreation program as a means of teaching most anything; to become associated with a job training program or a prison program. It is possible to set up a childcare operation in your home, or turn babysitting into a teaching situation, or set up an afterschool tutoring program. Often there are federal or state monies available for reading or childcare or delinquency prevention programs. It is important to know how to get access to that money. If necessary, go to the county board of education, to Head Start offices, to regional offices of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and ask about the programs they sponsor. Often a few weeks of research may open up a number of unexpected possibilities. The Grantsmanship Newsletter is an excellent source of information and is worth having (for subscriptions write to Grantsmanship Center, 1015 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90015).

Also think about teaching children with problems—the severely disturbed, retarded, physically handicapped, deaf, or blind. Remember, children are children despite the way in which society labels them. Basically the same techniques and belief in the children's abilities work with all kinds of children. If there are special things one need learn, they are easy to master. The more one thinks of teaching outside the schools, the more imaginative one can be in searching for a job that will allow one to teach, or in defining a job and convincing others that it is worth supporting.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

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CHAPTER

3

Becoming a MISTER

MATTHEW RASMUSSEN

Perhaps it goes without saying that teaching is no longer a profession of choice, that the disincentives far outweigh the benefits, that there are questions about whether it is even a *profession*. Why would anyone do this?

The evidence, accumulated over the last several decades, has been clear and abundant: education is falling to the wayside. That doesn't mean that the education of American children is seen as unimportant. Rather, I fear the true purpose of education is being lost, and the ability of those who educate is being hindered by the regulations placed on them. Teachers have less freedom in *how* they teach nowadays, and educators are no longer the facilitators of what they teach, being delegated, instead, to simply pass on what has been deemed important by some distant others. Despite the lip-service given to the importance of respecting educators, teachers are increasingly considered to be like blue-collar workers of a distant age: clock-punchers, directive followers, data recorders. Too often, teachers are provided with a ready-made curriculum from which they must not deviate, even if stepping off the well-worn path would help their charges explore their own passions and interests. In short, teachers are losing their voice, a worrisome prospect for someone like me looking to enter the field of education.

It is perhaps also important to mention here that if one's focus in life is on social or financial status, teaching is clearly not the right path. One only need sample from a wide variety of recent media offerings to see how teachers are portrayed in the popular culture. They are rarely portrayed in a positive light; oftentimes they are the villain of the story (think about Severus Snape or *Matilda*'s Miss Trunchbull). Yet many continue to pursue teaching anyway, often for the wrong reasons.

For example, one should *never* teach as a mere stepping-stone to another goal. If you just want to teach to create a stronger résumé and do not see it as a calling, then it is not the path for you. In fact, I would urge you to take your talents elsewhere where they can truly blossom. Being a teacher can almost be akin to a calling for some. It requires care and dedication to help

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your students, and yourself, to blossom. Without proper care, a garden will wither instead of bloom.

I know there are some people who see becoming a teacher as simply a necessary step to being some form of a sports coach. There's nothing wrong with wearing two hats—but you must bring equal passion and energy to the classroom and to the championship game. In the early days of teaching in America, many men would teach in order to climb the ladder and become a lawyer or some other similar goal. No doubt there were those who found themselves in the classroom with no educational training or interest in learning how to teach. How many students didn't get the education they could have because their teacher wasn't fully present? It's perfectly okay to have other goals and aspirations, but when you are in the classroom, it is crucial for you to put in your all. Because you as the teacher are a very significant contributing factor to your students' development and education, and you are largely responsible for their growth for an entire school year.

Now, I don't say all of this to scare you away from working with children and young people. My point is that you know you can have other goals in life but that when you teach you need to be fully present and ready to give your all to the children who are with you. Little in life can compare to the moment when you realize just how much you mean to a child and the impact you have had, no matter how big or small. It's one of the best feelings I've ever had, and I hope you will have the opportunity to feel the same way.

Why do you want to teach? What draws you to step into the classroom and the lives of the students that enter the door? I cannot answer that question for you, but perhaps through explaining my answer to this question, I can help you start to explore the question for yourself. Or maybe you already know, but there is a lot more to consider than one might first think. Focusing on what drove you to the field is extremely important, and getting in touch with this motivation will serve you well in hurdling the many obstacles you will soon face. Because those like me, with a drive to teach, aspire to be in the classroom for larger reasons than following a prescribed curriculum or teaching students isolated academic skills so that they will be prepared for the next round of standardized tests. Being a teacher, for me, means learning creative ways to maneuver in increasingly narrow spaces in order to reach students, to get them as excited about learning as I am.

Actually, I came to teaching because of reading, one of the biggest loves in my life. For as long as I can remember, books have held a very special place in my heart. When you really fall into a book, it springs to life inside your mind. Not only can books open new worlds to people, but they open up new ideas, show new perspectives, and allow the reader to explore possibilities for the future. Books are more than paper and words; they are windows to other lives and possibilities and they underscore for me the importance of stories. I want my students to experience this magic, to go places they might otherwise never travel. If someone has a unique and fascinating story to tell, I can truly

fall deep, explore, and come to appreciate the words and images, each one a portal into a new world. Truthfully, I feel sometimes like I've learned more through stories than any classroom has taught me.

Children have their own stories to tell, stories unique from anyone else's, stories that will never be repeated again. I want to teach because I believe everyone has a truly fascinating and unique story to tell, and if as a teacher I can be a positive chapter in children's lives that makes their story a shining light for others—only then can I claim success as a teacher. Today, students are, more often than not, being pushed to simply know, in the narrowest ways, how to pass an exam or master a skill. But without stories, without a focus on their stories and the connection of their stories to the stories of other children in whose presence they find themselves, or the stories of the children who came before them, we limit their understanding of the world. It is these stories, those lived and those between the covers of books, that have the potential to light up our students' imagination. Even students with limited exposure to books and stories seem to know this.

I saw this recently when I had the opportunity to distribute books to children at an elementary school on St. Helena, one of the historic Sea Islands of South Carolina. The communities of the Sea Islands are largely rural and poor, the students are often thought to be less than; worse things are said about their teachers. None of this was foremost on my mind as I began passing out books to eager children. There was a contagious elation among the children; it was indescribable. I met them once, and they had no way of knowing if I would ever see them again, but they called me by name and hugged me on their way out. In a small way, I helped create a lot of happiness that afternoon about . . . books! Because students know, even students with limited exposure, that there is power in stories and the written word. For me, this experience also confirmed my drive to become a teacher.

It also validated my decision to become a MISTER. The Call Me MISTER (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) program was established to diversify the population of educators in South Carolina by providing support for minority males pursuing education. It brings together groups of individuals from similar backgrounds to support each other in a field traditionally made up of people very different from themselves (i.e., white, middle-class women). I believe it's a very important goal—for some people it is the reason why they teach. Cultural diversity is severely lacking in a significant number of schools and classrooms today. It's important for children to see people like themselves in schools; just as much as representation in the media is important to kids, so too is it important in everyday life and in the classroom. Seeing people that look like them succeed in all kinds of ways inspires kids to do the same. Diversity is not often thought about as a core motivation to teach.

While the core of why I want to teach is firmly rooted in my belief that children need stories to expand their minds and spark their passions,

I also strongly identify with the goal of the Call Me MISTER program to bring diversity into the classroom. I joined the program to become part of a community that shares my aspirations about teaching and emphasizes the importance of diversifying the teaching force. I didn't have a male classroom teacher until the sixth grade; I never had a Hispanic male teacher. I had, and have, a wonderfully supportive family that taught me how important education is, how valuable teachers are. But I wonder how different the experience is for children who look like me but do not have the supports I had growing up.

I joined the MISTERS not only to build relationships with others like me but because I now realize the impact I can have on children to see someone who looks like them in the classroom. As numerous studies continue to demonstrate, white children—and perhaps more distressingly, even children of color—associate lighter skin tones with positive traits and negative traits with darker skin. It broke my heart to hear one little girl, no more than six or maybe seven years of age, declare on an Anderson Cooper special (CNN, 2012) in no uncertain terms that her dark skin was "nasty." I have come to see how incorporating diversity in my classroom—just by *my* presence—is an integral part of educating students. But if nothing else, I want to make certain I *never* hear one of my students say they or anyone else is anything less than unique and valued; I want them to understand the power, importance, and contributions of the stories *they* have to tell, not in spite of their skin tone and situations but because of them.

In the end, the central question that must be grappled with, the one I think is most important when one considers entering this field is this: *Why* teach? No teacher, no system can ever be perfect, can ever meet the goals the question elicits. And I understand how and why our education system is the way that it is, how it often does not appear to have our students' best interests in mind. But I am not writing here to argue about politics. This is more personal, and it requires personal commitments. You must be able to understand and articulate *why* you want to teach. That answer helps to guide you and can be an anchor in the storms life will bring.

Teaching is, in many ways, a sacred duty. Choosing to teach means that you must be willing to assume the responsibility for your students' well-being and how *their stories* will unfold. And you must keep in mind too that as many stories as have been told, many remain untold or, worse, have been squelched because of the color of a student's skin or the background he or she brings with them to the classroom.

I want to teach because I love stories and I want to become a positive influence on the stories *my students will tell*, stories that will feature their unique and wonderful contributions, stories that represent people who look like me.