

Foreword

Years ago, teaching was a noble profession. Teachers were respected for who they were and how they made students feel. The rewards were usually not immediate. Some came later in life when students realized what they owed to a teacher who believed in them and nourished a spark that became a beacon to their career and life. Some never came. But, somehow, most teachers sustained faith and hope, believing that they were making a difference. Then somehow education seemed to lose its way. Students became empty vessels to be filled with information dispensed by their teachers. Even worse, many people demanded evidence that the facts were successfully implanted. Teachers were no longer trusted to do their jobs, nor rewarded for the subtle influence they made in students' lives. We have now reached a point so poignantly captured by Yogi Berra years ago: "We're lost, but we're sure making great time."

The moment has now arrived when teachers need to reclaim what has been given or taken away. Our country is now spending billions to improve education. But, for the most part, reform efforts are scaling a ladder affixed to the wrong wall. Well meaning intentions are not reaching the classroom nor touching the core of teaching.

This is where Peggy Redman's book enters the picture. It's the right message, written at the right time, authored by the right person. She's not an aloof, head-in-the-clouds academic; she's a hands-on, reality grounded student of the true art of teaching. Even better, she's a gifted teacher with years of experience. She is now a teacher of teachers and doing the job that should have been done all along. She provides proven pedagogical techniques, coupled with a large dose of the true spirit

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of teaching. I know this because I have seen her in action. I have also followed her career closely for many years. I am her cousin, proud as punch of what she's doing at the University of La Verne to restore teachers' pride in an essential profession.

Peggy's book exposes several myths that have been perpetuated over the years without a close look at the consequences. Myths are important because they give meaning to life and work. But myths cut two ways and can protect worn-out beliefs as well as give zest, buoyancy, and meaning to things we do everyday. The genius of Peggy's book is its ability to debunk misguided myths while, at the same time, reviving and promulgating traditional images that portray teaching as a sacred profession. The spirit of the book's core message is captured in a short quote from Tracy Kidder's (1989) *Among Schoolchildren*:

Teachers usually have no way of knowing that they have made a difference in a child's life, even when they have made a dramatic one. But for children who are used to thinking of themselves as stupid or not worth talking to or deserving rape and beatings, a good teacher can provide an astonishing revelation. A good teacher can give a child at least a chance to feel, "She thinks I'm worth something. Maybe I am." Good teachers put snags in the river of children passing by, and over the years, they redirect hundreds of lives. Many people find it easy to imagine unseen webs of malevolent conspiracy in the world, and they are not always wrong. But there is also an innocence that conspires to hold humanity together, and it is made of people who can never fully know the good that they have done. (p. 313)

Peggy Redman's book shines light on a hopeful path to help teachers find their way again and reclaim the moral ground that once set their calling apart from other jobs.

—Terry Deal