

Those Who CAN...Teach By Dorothy Rich

The T Shirt at the Teachers' Meeting says it all: "The Flogging Will Continue Until Morale Improves." The truth is this: Many people just don't like teachers.

Kids get lower than hoped for test scores...teachers get blamed.
Kids don't do homework...teachers get blamed.
Teachers assign too much homework or assign too little.
Teachers are boring and unfair.
Teachers don't work 9-5, get summers off and are lazy.

Teachers know this litany. But there's a new edge to it today.

Everyone seems to know more about teaching than teachers. There is a lot of anger and disappointment about education.

Contrary to a lot of popular thinking today I believe that teachers (and I see a lot of them in action) are working harder and better than ever. I say this from a perspective of 50 years in the field. Of course some teachers are better than others and so are some lawyers and doctors. Teachers are facing problems today brought into the school never faced before.

It's not spitballs that demand discipline today. For many schools, there are issues about security, and even occasionally, guns. And beyond all that, teachers are trying to educate more children than ever before including bilingual children and children with special needs. Everyone is in the classroom needing to be taught.

And the world outside the school, including some parents, are sending messages to children—Do It Now! Have It Now!—that undermine the slow, often grinding process of education.

Teaching is an extraordinary job. In an ideal world, it would be done only by extraordinary people. Yet, even to teach in an ordinary way takes a lot more than what most people have to give on most jobs.

Think of the daily multi-tasking for classroom teachers: do the paperwork, actually teach subjects, keep the entire class engaged for entire class periods, manage discipline, mediate disputes, counsel troubled children, nurse the sick, contact parents –and all before lunch.

Since I was a little girl (a long time ago), I kept hearing this message, often delivered with a smirk: “Those who can, do. Those who can’t teach.” I went into teaching anyway.

My father said that teaching was money in the bank, not much, but you can count on it. After all this time I am still teaching and I am not sorry. Teaching is more than a noble profession. Teachers, with parents, help create the future. Even when it is hard, teaching makes me feel that I have made a difference.

You'd think that the message about "Those who can't teach" would be over and done with. But not so fast. An experienced teacher told me recently about Sam , her grown son. A special education student all through grade school, he was determined that when he went to college that he would not major in education, even though it was the field he liked and was good at. He wanted to show that he could really do something...so he majored in economics.

Now, out of college , having proved himself, he is ready to become a teacher, even though it means taking education course he could have taken in college.

We hear the dreaded " Those who can't" ...message less these days. Is it because investment banking hasn't turned out to be so terrific after all? Or is it because, as I hope , that there is growing recognition that teaching is a very complex and difficult job and it takes people who "can."

Teachers need what the rest of us need: support, training, trust. That's the tried and true road to improvement. It starts in every school and in every home.

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