

Preface to the Third Edition

The third edition of *On Being a Teacher* has been prepared to provide preservice, beginning, and veteran teachers with resources they will need to provide caring and competent instruction, as well as guidance, to students of all ages. As teachers interact with their students and colleagues, establishing and improving their relationships are critical to achieving and maintaining success in the classroom. Students want teachers who care about them and demonstrate their care. With the ever present need to attract new teachers and keep veteran teachers in the profession, we hope to support and nurture positive interactions. Building and sustaining relationships are the basis for the rewards of the teaching profession.

One of the most discouraging trends of present times is that about one third of all teachers are leaving the profession within three years. The need for minority teachers is even more critical considering the increasing diversity of our classrooms. We also find many veteran teachers are finding their enthusiasm for serving young people eroded and are leaving the teaching ranks. Most of these unhappy teachers began their career filled with optimism and enthusiasm for teaching. They were just like you—excited, eager, and passionately committed to making a difference in others' lives. They were certainly not lured by promises of high wages or annual bonuses. So, what happened to tarnish the professional aspirations of these beginning and veteran teachers? What caused them to walk away from their commitments to our nation's youth?

The third edition of this book explores the human resources you need as a teacher, not only to survive in this work, but to flourish. Our aim is to help you renew each day your commitment to

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reach and teach each of the students committed to your caring and competent instruction.

AN OVERVIEW

There are many books written in the field of education that speak to practicing teachers and prospective educators about the methods and materials of instruction. Such texts and manuals address every facet of instructional methods, environmental control, motivational strategies, behavior management, discipline, curriculum development, assessment, and technological resources that are available. Yet, the single most important human resource is a teacher's own personal qualities—his or her unique style of interaction and personality.

All great teachers have been influential and inspirational to others not because of their training in materials and methods, but rather because of the internal human resources they were able to call on to give life to their meaningful messages. The best teachers are those who are able to translate their knowledge, wisdom, and experience into a form of communication that is compelling and interesting. Although teachers know that content is important, students couldn't care less what teachers are teaching; what matters most to students is the style in which such knowledge and wisdom are imparted.

On Being a Teacher is designed to address the neglected but crucial aspect of what makes educators most effective. It is a book that speaks directly to students and practitioners of education who wish to become clearer about what being a superlative teacher is all about—not the mechanics of instruction, but the essence of what has made all great teachers so powerful in commanding attention, respect, and devotion from their students. It is about those unique human resources that others find so inspirational, that motivate people to go beyond their perceived limits and help them to find answers to the questions that are most significant.

The following themes contained in this book are designed to inspire newcomers to the profession in a number of ways: (a) Good teachers take care of themselves, as well as their students; (b) given the appropriate classroom environment, students can learn to take care of one another; (c) greater awareness of cultural and individual differences helps teachers to be more responsive to the needs of an increasingly diverse population; (d) teachers are often called upon to

do so much more than impart knowledge—they influence children through the quality of their relationships and the power of their personalities; (e) a reflective perspective can help teachers to create the image of the kind of teacher *they* want to be, creating an impetus to help them reach their goals; and (f) all educational practitioners, no matter how uncertain they are about their potential, can learn to become more effective as communicators and more responsive as professional helpers.

THE AUDIENCE

This book could be used as a text in a variety of teacher education classes, beginning as well as advanced. The previous edition has been adopted by instructors in courses ranging from introduction to elementary or secondary education to a variety of teaching methods classes and teaching practica; it has also been used as a resource for those in early childhood and higher education.

Another arena in which this book has proven useful is in the context of teacher induction programs for beginning teachers. It is addressed as well to administrators who wish to inspire their staff members to become more invigorated in their daily work. It also speaks directly to practicing teachers who have longed to find ways to access more of their own humanity, compassion, and creativity. Most of all, it is directed to those professional educators and those who aspire to such a calling who wish to mobilize their greatest gifts—their caring and compassion—in service to others.

THE CONTENTS

In Chapter 1, we describe the essence of what makes a teacher truly great—those human qualities and characteristics that inspire others to go beyond their limited expectations. It is our contention that to achieve excellence in this profession, it is also necessary for teachers to be personally effective in their own lives. If you believe that it is important for your students to be inquisitive, creative, hardworking, constructive risk takers, and compassionate and moral citizens, the question to ask yourself is how you are living those same qualities in your own life.

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Being a fully functioning human will be the primary resource you will call upon daily to demonstrate to students those concepts and skills most crucial to their learning. In Chapter 2, we discuss how this modeling process takes place in the human dimensions of learning. Our job is to teach people, not content areas. To do this well, we must help children to integrate what they are learning into their own lives—to make material meaningful and personally relevant.

Chapters 3 and 4 are about verbal and nonverbal communication, the core of all effective teaching. We invite present and future teachers to explore their own strengths and weaknesses in relating to others. These chapters aim at assisting teachers, regardless of their present levels of confidence and proficiency, to construct a plan to improve their effectiveness as communicators and experts in developing helpful relationships.

Whereas the previous chapters focus on the more general subject of reaching others through verbal interaction, Chapter 5 concentrates specifically on the skills of helping. We review for teachers those behaviors that are most likely to help them to reach students on multiple levels. We cover the basics of dealing with student problems and emotional pain as well as handling conflict and confrontation. We urge teachers to become experts not only in the methods of pedagogy and in the content areas of the curriculum but also in the art and science of guiding human beings, their moral and emotional maturity as well as their intellectual and physical development.

Chapter 6 focuses on what teachers struggle with the most: the obstacles that make this career so challenging. These include such things as the limitations of the school environment; sabotaging elements in the child's home environment; the stresses of interpersonal relationships with administrators, colleagues, and difficult children; and esteem issues, as well as the lack of teacher efficacy.

Chapter 7 is about the predictable stresses and strains that teachers often experience in their careers. Rather than "burning out" as a flame might die, many teachers slowly, inexorably "rust out." We deal with the subject of staying vibrant and impassioned about teaching in order to avoid turning into an embittered and frustrated veteran who counts the years until retirement. This preparation begins now, early in one's professional career, not after oxidation has already worn away morale.

Chapter 7 also offers advice to beginners and experienced teachers alike on ways to remain passionately committed to their

calling. We suggest ways for teachers to keep learning and growing, to take constructive risks, and to take care of themselves so that they will flourish in this wonderful field of education. In Chapter 8, we continue this theme by challenging practicing and prospective teachers to become more reflective as they grow as persons and professionals. What we know about the best teachers is that *they* make it a priority in their lives to ask themselves continuously what they are doing and why, and what builds meaning for them and for others.

Finally, in the last chapter, we ask teachers to create an image of the persons and professionals they want to be one year from now and 5, 15, and 30 years from now. It is only through constructing such goals for yourself, and working hard to reach them, that you will ever become the truly great educator you would like to be, the kind of teacher children will remember throughout their lives.

This edition features the addition of Ellen Kottler as a third author since Stan Zehm died before the previous edition could be completed. Ellen's contribution in updating the book has been to include a variety of specific teaching strategies for practitioners to consider in their classrooms, as well as suggested professional development activities at the end of each chapter.

There have been a number of additions throughout the book. New to Chapter 1 is the introduction of No Child Left Behind legislation and its impact. Chapter 2 has been lengthened to include a description of the diversity found in today's classrooms with sections on learning styles and multiple intelligences. Chapter 3 now features a discussion of how and when to make a referral to a specialist and an identification of relationship specialists in the school. The Chapter 4 focus on building relationships now includes the process for holding morning meetings for elementary school teachers and structuring democratic classrooms. It also has a segment on communication with parents and guardians with an in-depth look at how to hold a parent/guardian conference. Chapter 6 has been expanded to include a look at the demands on teachers' time. Chapter 7 features a section on research-based strategies for classroom management. New to Chapter 8 are guides for individual reflection and for group reflection. The book ends with an emphasis on commitment. Chapter 9 is updated to review benefits of induction programs and ways for teachers to become involved in their schools and districts and seek professional development through further education as well as professional organizations.