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A Message from the MRA President: Thoughts on Teaching

This informative issue of the Michigan Reading Association Journal explores reading programs in the elementary school. There is much to consider in determining what is an appropriate program for your students and I am confident that the articles contained herein will be of assistance to you in planning and implementing the best program for you and your students.

Whatever approach to the teaching of reading that is used I believe the most important ingredient in making that program work is the teacher. So I would like to share some thoughts with you about teaching.

I believe teaching is the most rewarding, challenging, and interesting calling one could ever practice. As teachers, we are dealing with the most valuable resources this country has to offer the human mind, and particularly the young human mind. It has unlimited abilities and potentials. It is eager, receptive, and intent. However, I am not saying that it is an easy calling.

There are great demands put upon us. We are expected to be scholars, psychiatrists, diplomats, philosophers, accountants, referees, and nurses. We must know all there is to know about reading, writing, arithmetic, baseball, grasshoppers, Halloween parties, young love, and how to live three months of the year without a paycheck. We must be committed, tolerant, compassionate, flexible, and sensitive. We must be creative, organized, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable. We must have these qualities because we must be what we want our students to become. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "the true textbook for the pupil is his teacher." We must be adept at teaching blends, putting up bulletin boards, collecting milk money, and recapturing gerbils. We must broaden horizons, identify opportunities, and point out new goals and directions for our students. In short, we are responsible for bringing each child over the threshold of youth to responsible, productive maturity.

As teachers, our days are filled with school bells, young chatter, occasional tears, notes, chalk dust, mimeo ink, waving hands, and load of papers to correct. Although we could get discouraged because so much of our time is consumed by meetings, reports, and playground duty, we do not because we know what we do. We know that teachers are builders, but they don't build bridges. They build the builders of bridges. Sitting in our classrooms today are the leaders of tomorrow. That's what Henry Adams realized when he said, "Teachers effect eternity. They can never tell where their influence stops." That is so true, for long after a teacher leaves this world, their work lives on in the people that they nurtured.

Few human endeavors require more wisdom, labor, and dedication than teaching. Even fewer offer the joy and satisfaction that a teacher feels when a student says, "Now I get it, teach me some more!"

Mary Bigler

President

NOTE TO READERS:

Because of MRA's current financial condition, the Board of Directors decided to limit Volume 16 to two issues.