

Foreword

For as long as there have been schools in America, there have always been children who have been left behind. As I think back to my school days beginning in the 1950s and extending through the early 1960s, I wonder what happened to all those students who just fell by the way. I remember Randy, a wonderfully talented baseball player who had the misfortune of being born on the wrong side of the tracks. He struggled in school and dropped out before he had the opportunity to display his talents as a member of our high school team. The last time I saw Randy, he was driving a taxicab. I can still picture him slouched way down low in the front seat of his cab while taking a long drag off of an unfiltered cigarette. Randy hadn't shaved in several days, and he had put on a lot of weight. He looked bad—nothing at all like the gifted, young athlete who had vanished many years before I saw him wasting away in the front seat of his taxicab on that bright, sunny spring morning long ago.

Lots of kids like Randy suffered the same fate. I remember a brother and sister, Jack and Mary, who were in my grade in school. They were tough kids from out in the country who left school when they were twelve or thirteen. I heard that Jack became a tree surgeon, but I have no idea what happened to Mary. I can still recall a beautiful young girl, Faye, who left school and married in the ninth grade. Somebody told me she died quite young of cervical cancer, but I don't know that for sure. And there was Neil, one of my best friends up until high

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school. Neil was bright, but lacked direction in his life. He dropped out of school after the ninth grade, and I have no idea what happened to him after that. Truthfully, I don't recall very many, if any, special needs children who became somebody. Nobody knows because back then they never even got started. The point is that there are now, and have always been, countless children who have failed in school and, at the same time, have been failed by their schools. Since there have been schools in America, these children have all been left behind and are still falling between the cracks. And every single one of them is a tragedy. Haunting images of these wasted lives influenced my decision to become a teacher.

Given that most Americans have had school experiences like mine, where they witnessed so many of their schoolmates shunted to the side, it is little wonder that a federal education initiative billed as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) would capture the imagination of a nation. After all, who among us would want to see even a single child left looking helplessly lost and forlorn standing alone by the side of the road that leads to future happiness and success? With their flowery language, the champions of NCLB have skillfully painted a beautiful picture of an idealized American school system where every child succeeds and goes on to live a happy and productive life. But sometimes legislators seem to forget that the bona fide job of preventing kids from tumbling from the precipice is carried out in local classrooms—not in national or state capitols. It is classroom teachers who stand sentinel and pull children back from the abyss.

On July 1, 2007, I retired from a career as a professional educator that began as an English teacher at a rural junior/senior high school in north central Florida in the late 1960s. I have always felt extremely fortunate and privileged to have spent my professional life in education. If asked why, I always tell people that I have never had a day that I didn't want to go to work. Although when I'm being totally honest, I have to admit that there have been some days I have enjoyed a good deal less than others!

I took a position teaching English to sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth graders at the school where I had student taught and have never really looked back. The reason I have never looked back is that once I started teaching *for real*, I soon discovered something that has drawn so many to a career in teaching. I discovered that my students really needed me to help them learn what they needed to know to live happy and productive lives. I guess one could say that students taught me that *the most important thing in life is living a life that matters!* Teachers matter because their lives have a profound and lasting impact on the young lives they are privileged to touch each and every day. I couldn't help those left behind in my early memories. But I did make a difference for those I taught during my classroom career.

Now, in my semiretirement I conduct workshops. Often I ask participants to list the eight or ten people who have had the most impact on their development as human beings—a sort of de facto “Personal Board of Directors.” Then I ask the members of the group to raise their hands, in turn, if they have a medical doctor on their personal list, an engineer, an attorney, or a business executive. For each of these categories, one or two hands may go up in the room. Then I ask the group how many have a teacher on their list. Without fail, every person in the room raises a hand. Then I ask how many have two or more teachers on their list. Again, all, or almost all the hands in the room go up. In any group, there will always be those with three, four, five, or more teachers on their lists of people who have mattered. This is a powerful illustration that teachers live lives that count because they have such a powerful and lasting influence on the lives of others. It's an irrefutable fact that this influence goes far beyond the teaching of content knowledge.

In *Revoiving the Soul of Teaching: Balancing Metrics and Magic*, Terrence E. Deal and Peggy Deal Redman do a brilliant job of deciphering exactly what it is about teaching that gives it such power to change lives. They caution the reader that masterful teaching should not just be recognized—it must be cherished,

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protected, and preserved. Terry and Peggy remind us that we must not lose sight of the magical essence that is the hallmark of masterful teaching in our quest to raise standards. They argue eloquently for a balanced approach to raising standards that also acknowledges the fragile nature of teaching that borders on the sublime.

In all honesty, I simply can't imagine two people who are better equipped to tell this particular story than are Peggy and Terry. Both have won numerous awards for their masterful, magical teaching over long and distinguished careers in K–12 public schools and higher education institutions as well. I've personally been mesmerized watching Terry Deal work with students in various settings and have often said of Peggy that "[i]f I could pick one person in the entire world to teach me how to teach, that person would be Peggy Deal Redman!"

Reviving the Soul of Teaching: Balancing Metrics and Magic is one of the most readable books I have read in a very long time. These two writers are accomplished "tribal storytellers" and do they have a story to tell! The language is beautiful and compelling, but at the same time, the words ring true. You will find yourself nodding your head in agreement as Deal and Redman peel away the layers of NCLB to reveal the veiled underbelly of the legislation that could effectively erode the very essence of teaching—unless we are careful to balance the drive for standards with respect and appreciation for the art and magic of teaching in its purest form. You will laugh at the description of Walter F. Myers performing the magical rituals that are at the heart of masterful teaching. You will sigh when you read the words of master teachers who have become frustrated and disillusioned by being forced to teach in a manner that deprives children of the best that these teachers have to offer them. And you will feel sorry for the children who are missing the most important lessons that could ever be learned in school while they are being mindlessly drilled and tested. But most of all, you will feel inspired by Deal and Redman's clarion call for teachers to take a more active leadership role in helping to shape the future of the profession to ensure that the

magical essence of teaching is preserved for and revered by future generations.

This is an important book for anyone who genuinely cares about children and what happens to them in schools. The central message is that good teaching is much more than a science. When teaching is performed at its highest level, it is mystery, magic, and majesty all rolled into one. The authors' words will inspire any teacher who desires to "teach the way my heart and soul tells me is right."

This book makes it clear that while standards are important, we must be careful to seek balance lest we destroy the essential fabric of an educational system—magical teaching—that has made America the great nation that it is today. Peggy and Terry remind us that "to a good teacher, a child is more than a test score" and offer the admonition that "schools don't need more reform, they need a good dose of revival to reconnect with mystical beliefs about the ennobling of purpose, greater cause, and higher calling within this profession." Deal and Redman end with an eloquent entreaty to all of us who are called to teach to demand the respect we deserve as teachers in order to "restore the magic and soul of teaching and learning that is our primary challenge." After reading this book, I realize more than ever what a lofty privilege it is to be "*just a teacher!*"

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