



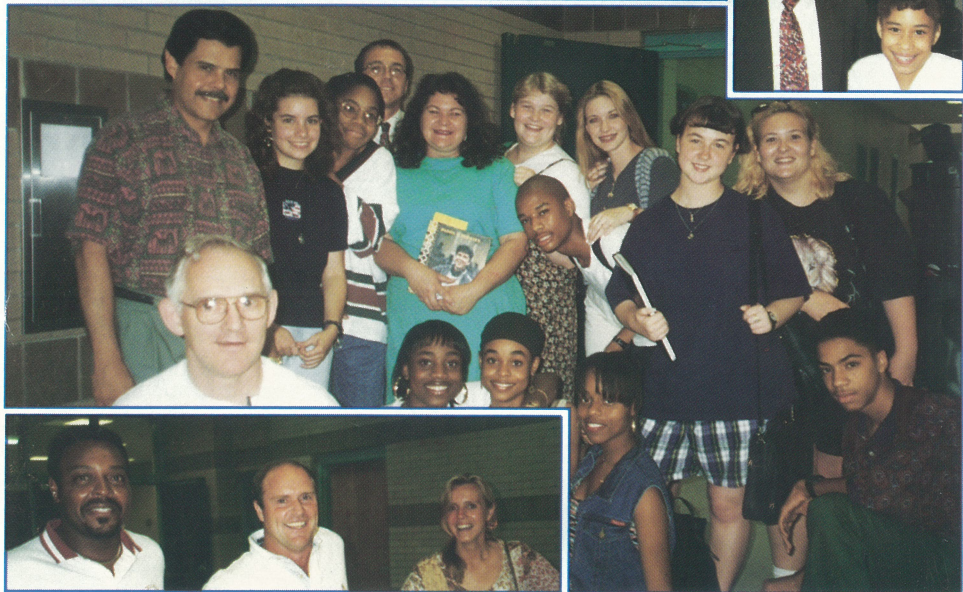
# The Teacher's ADVOCATE!

EMPOWERING CLASSROOM EDUCATORS

"Why should we listen to teachers? Why should we pay attention to their concerns? Why should we be bothered with their needs? Why? Because teachers matter."

--Dr. John Trotter

**BECAUSE  
TEACHERS  
MATTER.**



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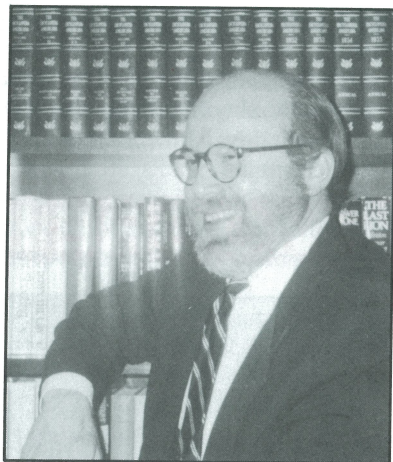
# For Kids' Sake, Let Teachers Teach!

*Classroom educators* are not expendable. They are not replaceable. They are not incidental to the enormous task of educating all of the children that society sends to the public schools. The public schools are not and cannot be selective as to which kids are allowed to attend. *All* have a right to attend. *All* includes the abused, the unloved, the undisciplined, the thugs, the criminals, the unmotivated, the drugged, the spoiled, the gifted, the disabled, the hopeless, the homeless, the different, the defiant, the average, the charming, the gung-ho, and the respectful. The task of educating *all* -- the masses -- is indeed an ambitious undertaking. Through the years, as our society has become more deviant, more decadent, more undisciplined, and more litigious, the task of educating the masses has become an even more difficult proposition. At this juncture in our nation's history, the classroom educators of our public schools need more support, not less.

Besides the parents, classroom educators have more direct contact with our children than any other adults in society. In an age when our young people are constantly tempted by illicit drugs, sex, violence, negative peer pressure, and malignant media images, the professional teacher has the gargantuan task of establishing a positive influence in the classroom, serving not only as instructor but also as counselor, doctor, nurse, psychiatrist, detective, security guard, probation officer, referee, social worker, and surrogate parent. What is perceived by many in society to be a rather genteel career, is, in actuality, a rather daunting undertaking. The classroom educator faces other nemeses which often make his or her job frustrating: Bureaucratic red-tape and voluminous paperwork (which often seems irrelevant to the job of teaching children); unruly students; lack of parental concern; student apathy; overcrowded classes; incompetent and insensitive administrators; unprincipled principals; unfair evaluations; and a lack of administrative support in disciplinary matters, just to name a few.

Does this sound dismal and hopeless? Well, it could be. However, the classroom educators keep inspiring, keep motivating, keep teaching. Why? Because, despite the daily frustrations that the teacher encounters, they are energized by the quality interaction that takes place between them and the students and by watching a child's eyes light up when the child finally grasps a concept. Most of the rewards for being a teacher are intangible by nature: A

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Dr. John Trotter  
Publisher

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hug or a note from a child, expressing thanks for the help that a teacher has given; the appreciation expressed by a parent; the nod from a principal or a colleague for a job well-done; and, or course, a feeling of personal satisfaction for knowing that, as a teacher, he or she made a positive difference in a student's life.

In a sense, the classroom educators are the only *real* educators in a school system. (Supervisors and central office administrators are sometimes called *educrats* because they function within the bureaucracy but do not interact daily with students in a learning situation.) Teachers are in the trenches and on the front-line every day. They interact with children every day. They know what works and what doesn't work. They know which theories and methodologies are good and which are bad. They know what works for them and what doesn't work for them. But too often they are mandated to teach from the same "cookie-cutter" method or from the same theoretical base. (A theory is only an *attempt* to explain phenomenon and if the phenomenon in which one teacher teaches is different from the phenomenon or reality of another teacher's situation, then to impose a particular teaching method or structure on a teacher that doesn't fit that teacher's classroom situation is not only an insult to the teacher as a professional but also has negative implications for the students.) The teacher is not a tall child; the teacher is a professional who, according to Georgia law, should be accorded "*all similar rights, responsibilities, and*

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*privileges accorded other recognized professionals; and this part [law] shall be liberally construed so as to accomplish the foregoing purpose*"(OCGA 20-2-791).

A professional is not told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Obviously, as with other professions, there are standards to which a professional must adhere, canons of ethics by which to abide, and a prescribed content -- or, in a teacher's case, a curriculum -- within which to practice. However, professionals practice within broad parameters, exercising professional judgment, discretion, and wisdom. A study conducted by the Rand Corporation concluded that *"...professional judgment is a prerequisite for good teaching, because unless students are treated according to their particular learning needs, they will be mistreated. Standardized practice is, in essence, malpractice. The need for diagnosis of individual situations and for judgments about appropriate strategies and tactics is what defines a profession"* (Linda Darling-Hammond, *Beyond the Commission Reports: The Coming Crisis in Teaching*, The Rand Corporation, July, 1984, pp. 15,16).

Teachers are professionals. They are educated and certified as professionals; they are recognized by law as professionals; and, they are recognized by society as professionals. But, are they always treated as such within the school systems? No. Their advice about the learning conditions within the classroom is often ignored and is seldom sought. They are the only educators in their classroom every day. They know what works with their students but are often not allowed to exercise their professional judgment. Rather, they are often treated very brusquely and in a heavy-handed manner by a top-down management system. This may work on an assembly line (although this type of management has even fallen in disrepute in industrial settings) but it has devastating effects within the classroom.

Classroom educators should be respected and esteemed, not threatened and undermined. Teachers need to be supported, not snoopervised. Administrators should facilitate the teacher's needs instead of ignoring or belittling those needs and the administrators should lead by inspiration, not intimidation. A teacher knows what he or she *needs* to do to be able to create the positive, facilitating classroom environment which enhances the learning conditions. But, a teacher who is forced to teach in a hot or cold or overcrowded classroom will constantly be concerned with his or her *physical* needs. An administrator who constantly manipulates and intimidates his or her teaching staff with the implied threat of punitive evaluations and retributive assignments will end up with a teaching staff that is inordinately concerned with its own *security* and *esteem* needs. But, an administrator who fulfills or satisfies his staff's *physical, security, social, and esteem* needs will surround himself or herself with teachers who are happy, upbeat, inspiring, motivating, creative, and risk-taking. The teacher's persona will help establish a positive ambience in the classroom and the students will be impacted positively. Why? Because the teachers will be more acutely sensitive to the students' needs. In fact, a satisfied need no longer motivates. So, if a teacher's needs are satisfied, the teacher will not be motivated about his or her personal needs; the teacher will, in the words of Maslow, be self-actualizing, i.e., concerning himself or herself with the *students'* needs. ("So far as motivational status is concerned, healthy people have sufficiently

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