

Teachers Make a Difference

Some time ago a friend passed on a story to me that I want to retell. Whether it was a story that actually happened she didn't say, but as far as I'm concerned its message is true.

Diana and Andrew had invited some friends and family members to dinner. One of Andrew's friends was a CEO from a company nearby. He carried much of the conversation sitting around the dinner table. Eventually, he turned the conversation to education. He started off reminding everyone of a cliché people had assigned to various professions. "I guess it's true," he began. "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach. What's a kid going to learn from people who decide their best option in life to make a living is to become a teacher?"

Diana's sister, Marianne, seated across from him, was a teacher. She taught a grade seven class of kids from all backgrounds. The CEO turned to her with a smirk on his face. "You're a teacher, Marianne. Be honest. What do you make?"

Marianne had a reputation for honesty and frankness. Her students and their parents also considered her to be a caring and effective teacher. "Well, let me see. What do I make?" She let her eyes sweep around the table looking into each person's eyes for a second before she focused on Frank, the CEO.

She started to speak slowly, but no one missed the conviction in her words. "I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could do.

"I make struggling students getting a C+ on an exam or on an assignment feel like they just did a wonderful thing.

"I make thirty kids sit through forty minutes of class time, when their parents can't make them sit through five minutes without an I Pod, Game Cube or movie rental.

"You want to know what I make?" She paused briefly and then continued more forcefully. "I make kids wonder. I make them question. I make them criticize opinions in order to learn to think abstractly. I make them apologize for hurting another student and mean it. I make them have respect and take responsibility for their actions."

She smiled at Frank and continued. "I teach them to read, read, read and to write and to love doing both, and to recognize good writing. I make them show me all their work in math.

"I make students from other countries learn a new language and become proficient using it while preserving their unique cultural identity.

"I make my classroom a place where all my students feel safe and appreciated."

"I make my students value our country and believe that our laws are important for our society and to all of us.

"Finally, I make them understand that if they use the gifts they were given, work hard, and follow their hearts they can succeed in life and make a difference in other people's lives."

Marianne looked around the table once more before letting her eyes fall on Frank again. "Then, when people try to judge me by what I make I can hold my head high and pay no attention to ignorant questions. You want to know what I make, Frank? I make a difference. What do you make?"