

Torrington Public Schools 2004 Teacher of the Year Speech
Wayne Spletstoeszer

"Making A Difference"

Dr. Riccio, Dr. Coffin, Mr. Lyons, Mr. Kelly, Mr. Reichardt, Administrators, colleagues and friends. I am honored to be selected as the 2004 Torrington Public Schools Teacher of the Year. I have stood on this stage numerous times conducting the Torrington High School Band but this time it is special.

As I was trying to write this speech I really didn't know what to talk about. Should I talk about what teaching means to me? Should I talk about my students? I was really stuck. Then I went to a former student's wedding and saw many of my past students. During the reception all of the students came up and talked with me. Some were talking about their colleges and others about what jobs they have. Then a couple of students came over to me that I had in Music Technology Class. So I start talking to them and they were telling me now they are in a band, have a recording contract and have future hopes of owning and operating their own recording studio. After about five minutes into the conversation, I said to them "That's great that you continued on into music." Then one of them said, "Mr. S. you made music fun and that made a difference for us". Then it hit me. As teachers we all make a difference in our student's lives.

We each bring into the lives of children a love for learning and a passion for their passion. Those who teach literature and writing teach children to hear laughter in a babbling brook, and to experience life through living words. Those who teach math teach children that problems can be solved, that life is full of absolutes, and that sometimes in life, you have to prove what you believe.

Science teachers teach those with inquiring minds that all good hypotheses begin with a question. They can go toe to toe into the 20 powers of "why" with the child who is terminally curious, and have patience beyond measure. Social studies teachers are the first to reveal that we are a tiny planet of human beings who are more alike than different, but that we will all leave a mark in this world that cannot be duplicated. They teach us that if we drop the ball, our mark will be missing; and the big picture will be left unfinished and wanting. We plant the seeds of art and music, carefully tending the mind's soil and fill our senses with sound, color, texture, and depth.

In teaching there are good years and bad years, rewarding years and costly years. There are times that go by when teaching is so hard and success too seldom, that teachers find themselves hanging on the hope that one child will be reached, and that reaching that one will be reason enough to go on teaching. We seem to give away more than we get back. Some of us are called to the profession because we have a heart for young people, and a belief that we can impact the world one little wide-eyed child at a time. Others of us come in to the profession and find that the children impact us in much the same way.

No matter how long you have been teaching, everyone in this room went into teaching for the same reason, to make a difference in a child's life. In closing, I would like to paraphrase

Rod Paige, United States Secretary of Education...,"We can give students as many material resources as we want, but none of that will make any difference without the one thing that makes a classroom work...teachers."

Thank you.