

**Sandra A. Mangan**  
**Torrington Teacher of the Year**  
**2009**

Thank you Dr. O'Brien, Dr. Campbell, Mayor Bingham, Mr. Cavagnero, Board Members, colleagues, and friends.

It is an honor to be standing here today in front of all of you. To my Torrington family ~ you are the best!

A few of my family members have joined us today. I'd like to thank them for sharing this honor with me. Their support and encouragement mean the world to me. They are patient, understanding, encouraging, and most of all, wonderful listeners. Sometimes, they probably feel like they've actually spent the day in my classroom. I wouldn't be where I am without them. My mom, always the best listener, is cheering me on from above. I'm certain she is quite proud.

We gather here today, ready to begin a brand new school year. We always begin the year refreshed, full of energy and hope for all that we can achieve. As the year progresses, paperwork, deadlines, assessments, and thoughts about preparing for the "test" take over. We soon lose the energy and hope that we had at the beginning of the year.

Let's make this year different. Let's focus on keeping a positive attitude, inspiring our students, our colleagues, and ourselves. Our attitudes are contagious. They set the tone for our classrooms and our buildings. We need to bring the joy and passion back to our teaching!

How can we achieve this goal? I believe we can maintain our positive energy by focusing on our students and the reason we became teachers: to make a difference in the lives of children.

We need to be flexible and responsive to the idiosyncrasies of our students and our colleagues. (Collins, 2008)

No one-way of thinking is the right way. Debbie Miller, an educator I admire, believes success in the classroom depends on having a set of beliefs that guide us in our day-to-day work with children. (Miller, 2008) We don't all have to have the same set of beliefs to be good teachers. However, we all need to have the same goal: students that are independent and empowered readers, writers, and thinkers. Take the time to make

thoughtful choices and develop your own belief statements about teaching and learning. The most effective teachers have a passion for what they are teaching.

Take the time to share your thinking and/or teaching with a colleague. Our teaching needs to become more social. We were not meant to teach in isolation. Too many days go by that we are in our classrooms "alone". Talk to colleagues ~ create a learning community/build a support system. Collaborating with colleagues may help to push your thinking in a new direction and challenge you with new ideas. Also, make time for those social conversations that are about life beyond school. Despite what our students think, we do have "real" lives.

As we strive to make our teaching more social, we also need to make student learning more social. Teach your students to be wide-awake readers, thinkers, and talkers. (Collins, 2008) Children who can talk about their learning continue to grow as learners. Children who can't talk about their learning can't retain their learning.

We, as teachers, are lifelong learners. We need to make sure our students become lifelong learners who choose to read, write, and think for knowledge and pleasure, not because they have to. In order for this to happen, our lessons need to be meaningful and relevant to our students.

We need to make learning rigorous and joyful. We want our students to be inspired, appreciated, and challenged. Challenge them to be more than they believe they can be. We need to set high expectations for all students. If students know that we believe they can achieve, they will. As I tell my students at the beginning of each year, "Be the best you can be. Always give your best effort. Never give up on yourself."

Take time to reflect. At the end of each day, find something that went well and build upon it. We are always looking at our students' strengths and building upon those. It is time to do the same for ourselves.

Finally, remember to make time for yourself. As I've been told, it is okay to say, "No". It really is a word and comes out as easily as "Yes". Make the time for the things that nourish you. Read a book for pleasure, take a walk, or watch a movie.

Before I end, I'd like to share a short story that my Aunt Ginny included in our family book years ago. It may help us to maintain our positive energy this year.

### *Mud Puddles and Dandelions*

When I look at a patch of dandelions, I see a bunch of weeds that are going to take over my yard. Kids see flowers for Mom and blowing white stuff you can wish on.

When I feel wind on my face, I brace myself against it. I feel it messing up my hair and pulling me back when I walk. Kids close their eyes, spread their arms, and fly with it, until they fall to the ground laughing.

When I see a mud puddle, I step around it. I see muddy shoes and dirty carpets. Kids sit in it. They see dams to build, rivers to cross, and worms to play with.

I wonder if we are given kids to teach or to learn from? Both, I believe.

Enjoy the little things in life, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things.

I wish you big mud puddles and sunny yellow dandelions!

(Unknown)

Thank you and have a great year!

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