

## WATCH: How A Teacher Encouraged Her Students With An 'F'

Rita Pierson -- May 6, 2013

Teachers don't make a lot of money. They are usually not deemed worthy of news coverage unless there is a scandal or a strike. Most of the time, their major accomplishments are shared only with colleagues and family members and not the media. The celebration is often cut short by some catastrophe the next day. Yet, in spite of the highs and lows, many teachers cannot think of another profession that brings them both joy and challenge on a daily basis.



In the spring of her career, Rita Pierson found herself questioning the choice of her life's work because the students did not appear to be motivated, the paperwork was overwhelming and the constant change of educational direction was discouraging. Still, Rita could not seem bring herself to do anything else. "Next year", she would say. "Next year I will switch jobs, make more money and have far less stress." Next year just never came. She am now in year 40. And while Rita is no longer in the classroom or at the schoolhouse, she remains an educator. Pierson, "*it finally dawned on me that there was no other profession that would let me change children's minds and have an impact on their future, long after the school day and school year were over.*" For every student that finally "got it," for every rookie teacher that said, "*you inspired me to stay,*" Rita explains that this affirmation was more rewarding than anything else.

Pierson: I was on a plane recently and the flight attendant asked my name. When I told him, he said, "I knew that was you! You taught at my elementary school. You made me take my cap off in the building and told me I was handsome." He then paused and said: "I think I kept my hat on until you saw me, just so I could get that compliment. Thank you for making me feel special." I don't think he realized how special he made me feel that day. There have been so many former students over the years that have made me realize the sustaining power of relationships.

I most certainly realize the extreme importance of being a competent teacher. Unfortunately, far too many in our ranks are unqualified and poorly trained. Many are

working tirelessly to rectify that. But while we address what we teach and when we teach it, we must not forget to include how we deliver those lessons. Unless there is a connection between teacher, student and lesson, learning becomes tiresome to all involved. Veteran educator, James Comer, states that, *"No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship."* Yet, the value of relationships is often downplayed or ignored completely in teacher preparation programs. Even more disturbing is the lack of useable information on the relationship building process. There is the belief among some that camaraderie between teachers and students leads to unprofessional familiarity or places the teacher in a weakened position in the classroom. Nothing could be further from the truth. Strong relationships encourage learner exploration, dialogue, confidence, and mutual respect.

I made it my business to know everything I could about my students. Where they lived and with whom, how often they changed schools, how many siblings they had, whether or not they lived in a house or an apartment, whether there was trauma or drama in the household. I went on home visits and shopped in the neighborhood stores so I could be certain to run into my students and the folk they lived with. (Some of my best parent conferences were held on the produce aisle at the grocery store). Many may consider my actions extreme. I called it *"preparation for what might lie ahead."* Teaching and learning is often hindered by the details not found in school records. There is an African proverb that states: *"The best time to make a friend is when you don't need one."* I was being proactive. It is advice I always give to others.

The more you know about a person, the easier it is to develop an alliance (if that is your intention). Positive, healthy relationships rely on clear communication. Without it, misunderstandings occur and intentions are misinterpreted. I wanted an open pathway to learning, so I was open to their questions, as well.

We have now entered an age where nothing is private and secrets are hard to keep. Your *"friends"* are counted by simply clicking a button. Face to face interactions are seen by many as unnecessary and time-consuming. Of course, we can do just about anything online, including teaching and learning. But I guess I am just old school. I want to look into your eyes when the answer finally dawns on you. I want to hear that inflection in your voice when you are angry with me. I want to see the smile on your face when you forgive me. I want to share in the joy when we both realize that we make a good team.

Rita F. Pierson

Every successful student had at least one teacher like Rita Pierson. I had several teachers who believed in me to the point that it inspired me (*"that I am somebody"*), to believe in myself.... I wish that we celebrated our great teachers to the same degree that we celebrate great athletes, as this might encourage more teacher to reach out for greatness and thus inspire more students.... I urge everyone to take time to view this

video, just so teachers like this know that their dedication is appreciated and that they too are *Somebody*..... **Greg Brown**

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rita-f-pierson/student-teacher-relationships\\_b\\_3203159.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rita-f-pierson/student-teacher-relationships_b_3203159.html)

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