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OVERVIEW

TIME FOR REFLECTION

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In his classic book, *The Art of Teaching*, Gilbert Highet (1963, p. 9) observed that an advantage of the teaching profession was the amount of leisure it afforded. Highet was a professor of Latin, and he wrote several decades ago. He surely was not talking about teaching in 1991 at Spring Valley Elementary or Jefferson Senior High.

Today's teachers have so many concerns and responsibilities, assigned and self-imposed, that many see their highest priority as just surviving from day to day. They plunge from one lesson into the next and hurry from a brief student conference to an inservice class. Caught up in continuous activity, they have few opportunities for the reflection Highet found so rewarding.

Several of the authors in this issue are trying to provide more such opportunities. Claryce Evans (p. 11) describes the Educators' Forum, an organization in the Boston area that encourages teachers "to give serious attention to their own work and their questions concerning it." The format seems simple enough—at each meeting several teachers present results of their inquiries—but there are some interesting guidelines, including a requirement of confidentiality, which allows participants to investigate issues that might otherwise be "personally risky."

On the other side of the continent is Washington State University's Project LEARN, where the participants are teams of teachers who define a problem at their school and then work on it together. Richard Sagor (p. 6) explains that each team receives assistance from a "critical friend" as the team members conduct their action research project.

Some school systems have also begun to encourage teachers to ask and seek answers to questions about their own practice. In Colorado's Adams County District 12, Joellen Killion and Guy Todnem (p. 14) have developed "reflection-for-action" as part of the district's staff development program. The idea of "action research," which in the 1950s was a primary focus of ASCD (Bostwick 1986), is in the ascendancy because at a time when teachers are

often regarded as semiprofessional "employees," self-initiated inquiry helps them regain ownership of their school and its programs.

Action research can be a powerful stimulus to reflection, but other approaches can also be helpful. For example, in an effort to engage prospective teachers in thinking about the social and moral aspects of education, M. Carrol Tama and Kenneth Peterson (p. 22), of Portland State University, have their undergraduate students read and discuss works of literature portraying teachers and their students.

Perhaps the most widely used process for inspiring reflection—among students, teachers, and administrators—is journal writing. In an unusual application, Jerry Diakiw and Neil Beatty (p. 47), a superintendent and a principal, decided to learn more about the process and also to model it for others by exchanging views via a dialogue journal. In their article they present a few samples of the resulting written "conversation."

Everyone needs opportunities for self-renewal, but those responsible for developing other human beings need them most of all. Thinking deeply about what we are doing leads us to ask better questions, break out of fruitless routines, make unexpected connections, and experiment with fresh ideas.

I regret that education is no longer the leisurely calling it apparently once was—for some, at least—and that we now must consciously create spaces in which to think about the meaning and purpose of our work. Still, just as busy parents now find it necessary to schedule "quality time" with their children, it is undoubtedly better to plan for reflection than to do without it □

References

- Bostwick, P. (1986). "ASCD and Supervision: The Early Years." In *ASCD in Retrospect*, p. 29, edited by W. Van Til. Alexandria, Va.: ASCD.
- Highet, G. (1963). *The Art of Teaching*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

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