

Reflection Through Writing

With a desire to learn to communicate clearly, this principal found his writers' group a safe environment for clarifying his own thoughts.

The year is 1982, and I am sitting through a series of lectures offered through the Principals' Center at Harvard University. Someone mentions that a writing course is being offered. *Write?* I think. Write for an audience of other educators? Someone must be kidding! Writing workshops are only for those folks who write poems or short stories, not for some new-to-the-profession short-time principal who just wants to have a place to put pen to paper and record his thoughts about what happens during the long, lonely hours of the job.

So I wandered about the fringes of the writing group, trying to find out what went on there. After some internal struggle, I admitted that one of the many challenges ahead of me was to learn how to communicate clearly. I signed up for the next year.

A Catalyst for Change

In September 1983 I showed up at the Principals' Center intimidated by the writers and the magnitude of the task before me. I was not only naive but also almost illiterate about such terms as *freewrite* (spending 10 minutes writing about whatever is on your mind from the days' pursuits), *synthesis writing* (thinking-through-writing on a particular topic), and *active listening* (providing feedback to a writer). Nonetheless I went forward into the fray, and at this juncture, almost seven years later, I am still there, making journal entries about my thoughts and experiences as a professional educator.

The writing group is a catalyst for change and a foothold on the treach-

erous, ever-changing slopes of educational theory and practice. It is a safe environment for my thoughts, far from the scrutiny of harsh critics. The uninitiated may see it as a place to prepare one's writing for publishing, but most of the time nothing could be farther from the truth. Some of us do publish, but the majority labor along in our endeavors, growing—and marveling at the words we coax out of our minds.

Writing in reflection takes us through the dilemmas of the profession and helps us develop a position and a direction for our work with children. No other medium provides this growth and empowerment. Writing in reflection bridges the void, creates the opportunity, secures the risk, and ensures a response.

Growing Beyond Doubts

As a practitioner and as a writer, my developing emotions are something I face everyday. My writing is always bubbling within me; the words always take on new forms and meanings. When I moved from the position of assistant principal to principal, I confided to my journal the following entry, which allowed me to grow beyond my doubts:

The trauma associated with waiting. Expectations run up the roller coaster of emotions one day and down the next as the deadline of notification draws near . . . What are they waiting for? Answers to the future only lie in the future, so you move on with an ear cocked for the phone.

You've got your first day planned, as well as your last. "Why?" has been an-

swered from every corner, the time is right. More opportunity, a step forward, self-actualization, and fear . . .

Children are children regardless of place and time. No sweat—one third the size, more money, smaller staff, opportunity to create and effect some change—leadership is the theme. Lead and manage, love, care, and listen. The time is yours, the call will come, the job—whether it's here and now, or there and later—will, in the end, deal with children and all the events surrounding them.

Serving Ourselves

All of us within the profession feel we serve more than one master. In the writing group those masters retreat, and the personal satisfaction of sharing with friends overpowers the compulsion to satisfy others. The dynamics of the group are always interesting—we all listen to each other, to our grapplings with words. We commit our shortcomings to paper without hesitation, but we seldom resolve them. Our words serve as a release valve. Our attempts at problem-solving prompt solutions we may use back in our schools.

Writing for reflection has propelled me through a series of revelations, crises, and thoughts that helped me grow. Without this exercise I couldn't see my environment very clearly. The practice of writing in reflection is more than a promising method for growth and development—it is the one secure personal place I can go where no one will intrude. □

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