REFLECTING ON HOW WE LEARN, TEACH, AND LEAD

To me, summer has always seemed to be filled with opportunities. The weather gets warmer, the days are longer, children are on break from school, holidays are celebrated, and families and friends gather and go on vacation. Summer, particularly for educators, is also a time to look back on the past year—and look forward to the coming one. What worked, what didn't, and what can be improved?

This summer I had the opportunity to observe educators in three settings as they extended their learning through professional development, connected and reconnected with each other and their passion for teaching, and strengthened their leadership skills. At ASCD’s Conference on Teaching Excellence in June, attendees were driven to learn about the latest trends in education and more in-depth discussion of proven strategies.

In July, ASCD’s Whole Child Network met at its summer institute to bring teams from each school together to share their experiences, delve deeper into how to support change in their classrooms and school communities through a whole child approach, and continue the planning process for the next school year. That same week, ASCD leaders gathered at the annual Leader to Leader (L2L) Conference to collaborate and strengthen their personal and professional leadership skills.

The educators at each of these events took the opportunity to reflect on why they teach and took action to improve how they best serve their students and each other. I asked a few of them to share their thoughts on what reflection means to them as learners, teachers, and leaders:

• “I want my preservice students to be forward thinking and plan for every student all the time. It is not easy to do, and I am constantly looking for better ways to instill this mindset in my students.” —Christina Yuknis, assistant professor at Gallaudet University, 2011 emerging leader, and professional interest community facilitator

• “By reflecting on our actions and decisions—both effective and ineffective—we have the opportunity to ensure that every decision we make or any action we take is truly with the best interest of children at heart.” —Patrick Miller, superintendent of Greene County (N.C.) Schools and North Carolina ASCD President

LATEST PODCAST

Make and Take the Time to Reflect, Refresh, and Recharge

Download the summer 2013 Whole Child Podcast to hear host and ASCD Director of Constituent Services Kevin Scott and our guests discuss educators’ need to reflect on the past school year, refresh their passion for teaching, recharge their batteries, and look ahead to next year.

As educators, what strategies do you use to reflect, refresh, and recharge?

IMPROVING SCHOOLS

In the latest “Improving Schools” column, ASCD’s Sean Slade discusses the importance of preparing students for the future by teaching them the skills they need for the world of tomorrow. He emphasizes the centrality of creative thinking, flexibility, and collaborative problem solving. Students should no longer simply memorize and reproduce information; they must be able to analyze and apply what they have learned in new and innovative ways.

BLOGS WE LIKE
"Reflection is an essential aspect of the learning process for all of us. Failure is simply a starting point—our first attempt in learning." —Matthew Mingle, director of curriculum and instruction for Madison (N.J.) Public Schools, 2011 emerging leader, and New Jersey ASCD Board Secretary

"As I reflect on my years as a teacher, I have seen many changes and new innovations. Being able to watch my students gain new information and assimilate this knowledge in the real world is one of the greatest rewards of being a teacher." —Verneth Patterson, Bahamas ASCD Executive Director

"My decisions and my actions are purposeful and result from lessons learned personally and from best practice of others." —Sue Kessler, executive principal of Hunters Lane Comprehensive High School in Nashville, Tenn., and Outstanding Young Educator Award honoree

"Reflection is the compass that charts our path and guides our journey." —Mary Beth Luttrell, Japan ASCD Executive Director

Educating the whole child and planning for comprehensive, sustainable school improvement requires us to be whole educators who take the time to recharge, reflect, and reinvigorate. How did you reflect on your practice this summer and what goals have you set for the new school year?

Over the summer months, we looked at educators' need to reflect on the past school year, refresh their passion for teaching, recharge their batteries, and look ahead. Listen to the Whole Child Podcast hosted by Kevin Scott—a former history teacher and current director of constituent services at ASCD—and featuring guests Peter Badalament, principal of Concord-Carlisle High School in Massachusetts, and Jason Flom, director of learning platforms at whole child partner Q.E.D. Foundation. Read the Whole Child Blog to hear guest bloggers and experts share their thoughts on the importance of reflection.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION ON THE WHOLE CHILD BLOG

In "Reboot and Recharge: The Power of Technology-Infused Instructors," former teacher and current assistant principal Rich McKinney—a self-proclaimed technology neophyte—reflects on his year and decides to "reboot" his teaching methods to include learning how to use social media to develop students' skills. Learn how he came to his decision and how he got started.

Certainly when we plan, we are thinking about what we hope to achieve. But we need to go beyond that. We need to think about why we teach. Writer and teacher Kenneth Bernstein shares the path he has taken to develop, understand, and reflect on the practice of teaching.

No one wants to find himself sitting in a boat too small to handle the shark encircling it. In "You're Gonna Need a Bigger Boat!", ASCD's Walter McKenzie discusses personal capacity building and what we need to push ourselves to take risks, learn, and grow.

There's so much out there to experience that, while busy with our day-to-day-lives, we need to remember to stop periodically and look around. ASCD's Kevin Scott shares a recent experience that changed his perspective and urges us to take a few minutes to record memories.
reflections, or inspirational moments from this summer to look back on when the next tough day comes along.

In order to remain effective educators, we must frequently engage in deliberate reflection. As summer comes to a close, this is a time to rejuvenate by gathering our thoughts and developing an intentional plan for personal growth. In "Braving the Common Core Waters: Reflection as Our Raft," teacher and district leader in literacy Celina Brennan urges educators to not jump on the raft by yourself or dive into the waters alone. Gather colleagues and brave these waters together.

REFRESH YOUR LEARNING WITH EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The digital summer 2013 issue of Educational Leadership magazine gives you instant access to nearly 100 pages of practical tips and advice on how to refresh your personal learning, recharge your professional development, and ready yourself for the first days of school. Access these articles and videos—and many others—to help you make the most of your summer learning and prepare for next year. Download the free Educational Leadership app in iTunes, Google Play, or the Amazon appstore. In addition to articles, the app shares updates from social media feeds, including the Whole Child Blog.

If you do not currently receive Educational Leadership magazine, subscribe now to stay informed about new ideas and best practices for educators.

"The summer is the time to really dive into those areas where we as professionals want to grow and hone our craft, or to learn something new, and it's that reinvigoration of that passion for learning that begins to stoke the fires for the following year."

—Jason Flom, a former elementary teacher and current director of learning platforms at whole child partner Q.E.D. Foundation, on the Whole Child Podcast