



Personal and Professional Development: A Lifelong Process is an excerpt from *What It Takes to Be a Teacher: The Role of Personal and Professional Development* by Penny A. Frepponn.

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## *Personal and Professional Development: A Lifelong Process*

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In this closing chapter I touch on a few important aspects of this book. The rest I leave to you and to me as we continue to learn about what it takes to be a teacher and the role of personal and professional development in effective teaching.

The teachers in this book show that they learn from literary resources, conversations, and conference experiences. Their practices demonstrate that effective teachers learn from and with the students they teach. The teachers' interior reflective dialogue, their sense of justice, and their view of teaching as a moral endeavor show how the personal and professional become one in learning to teach. In all their professional learning there is personal growth and change, which generates the learning cycle. It takes a lifetime to learn to be fully human and to learn to teach (our human and pedagogical vocation). In the teaching moment we learn and find our humanity.

Just as we adjust to life events with family, friends, colleagues, economics, health, and a myriad of other things, we adjust to our teaching lives. Each new year we learn about new students, new materials, and more. Teachers thrive and renew their energy and themselves in learning and practice.

### **Attributes and Principles**

I began in Chapter 1 with the idea that tension is a valuable experience that often leads the way to personal and professional growth. Teaching tensions are clearly evident in every teacher's classroom life. However, rather than remaining frustrated or becoming defeated by tensions, effective teachers face the mountain before them. They continually work hard on their development

as human beings and as professional educators, thereby confirming the axiom that teacher change is key to teaching change. Rather than seeking answers, effective teachers seek to understand the paradoxes of teaching and the mindset of living well in the imperfect world of human learning.

Simultaneous personal and professional development is rooted in the teacher attributes discussed in this book (Ayers 1993). Effective teachers are principled people with a strong sense of responsibility. They enjoy children and have compassion for them. They search for their own strengths and give to themselves ways of using their strengths to be better teachers. Deep within the being of effective teachers is self-respect. For principled teachers, nothing less will ever do for their students.

In similar ways the five principles of effective teaching (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, and Yamauchi 2001) reveal important elements. Responsible, compassionate, and personally strong people are those fully able to do the following:

- Engage in joint teacher and student productivity.
- Provide contextualized studies that connect to the lives of students.
- Promote language development.
- Create cognitively complex instruction.
- Use instructional conversations that teach complex thinking.

Exemplary scaffolding is shown throughout this book. Such scaffolding is also necessary for teachers' learning and is embedded in the ways teachers learn. Tharp and Gallimore's explication of scaffolding provides a valuable lens through which it may be examined. They hold that joint problem solving and being meaningfully involved, learning by doing, working toward shared goals, attributing competence with warmth and responsiveness, and creating a positive emotional tone are essential. These scaffolds are evident in the instruction shown in this book.

## **Reflection and Its Importance to Effective Teaching**

One of the most salient aspects of the teaching featured in this book is the synergistic and inseparable nature of reflective thinking and action. As noted in Chapter 1, the term *reflection* is echoed throughout teacher education and professional development protects and professional literature. However, the personal and professional experience of reflection is not well understood. Its very nature and structure are unclear.

In their review of the literature on reflection as an object of study, Rosko, Vukelich, and Risko (in press) found that reflection is described by properties

of the phenomenon such as teachers' use of it to link theory and action, to move beyond teaching as a field of technical expertise, and to socially construct acts of making decisions and taking responsibility. A complex mix of factors occurring in various professional contexts shapes reflection. Thus, the ability to learn and become more adept at reflection is accessible through a range of professional experiences, such as study groups, action research, professional development work, and university courses.

Deep reflection, however, is far more challenging than one might imagine, because it's one thing to learn to think about aspects of teaching and learning and quite another to develop this thinking into an increasingly effective practice. The concept of reflection as a process of inquiry, or a problem-solution cycle of ongoing thought and action, is essential. The following quotations from some of the teachers in this book help to show some key aspects of reflection.

An excerpt from Donna Ware's journal demonstrates reflection's generative power in helping teachers acquire new ideas.

Today I read a great book on friendship (in class). We discussed the book and talked about other books on friendship and listed them on the board. Everyone seemed to enjoy it. I gave a suggestion to write a "Friendship Is" book. But it [the enjoyment] didn't last long. I look around the room at my writers and see Conner making a face, Terry staring in to space, Tim staring at the bookcase, and Mitchell, who doesn't have any paper on his desk. Helen Jane, Chris, Tabitha, Michael Aaron, and Jenny are writing, but Tracee is playing with a bottle of mouthwash. Where she got it is a mystery to me—time for me to try another way.

As Donna learned to teach writing, she discovered the ultimate value of children's self-selected topics *and* she learned to provide the explicit support needed for children to succeed in topic selection and use.

This quotation from Phyllis demonstrates the "reframing" that Schone (1987) holds as fundamental. It shows the investigative nature of effective teachers' reflections.

At one writing workshop conference, Donald Murray taught me one of my most significant lessons about teaching and learning. He asked the participants to free-write, stop, reread our work, and raise our hands if we have written something that we had not originally intended to write. As hands filled the air, he explained that writers, "write to discover what they have to say" (Murray 1967, 9). I was excited about this notion. . . . And it has influenced my teaching ever since. . . . Later I learned to apply this idea to writing about math and science. . . .

When teachers reflect, they do not ignore their beliefs and current knowledge base, but rather . . . “expand on them to take on new perspectives and problematize situations and ideas” (Rosko, Vukelich, and Risko, in press). Knowing that reflection is based on concepts of reframing (seeing ordinary things in a new light) and investigation (studying problematic events) promotes teachers’ personal growth and empowers them in practice.

## What’s Ahead?

If we are to ensure the growth and development of children, teachers’ growth and development should also be at center stage. The concept that the best investment in children’s learning is in their teachers’ learning is of utmost importance.

Beyond teacher education at the university level and the professional development project, the success of teacher learning also depends on the restructuring of the school day and the school itself. Schools no longer house technicians who disperse knowledge to rows of quiet, orderly children. But the majority of schools retain the attitudes and structures of that bygone era. Teachers must have structures and time for growth and development in their place of practice. Teachers belong in graduate education and professional development projects, but they belong all the more in their schools. To be effective, teachers must have opportunities to learn in schools. High-quality, long-term, school-based professional development projects provide an excellent beginning. Then personal and professional development becomes part of the school culture. Once embedded in the everyday life of classroom teachers, clinical study and affirming support on the job will be routine. This will help move classroom practice from the concept of “training” to that of developing the professionals teachers want to be and children so deserve.

Teachers who become effective educators necessarily engage in personal development. They are those who, through struggle and challenges, become satisfied in their work and become the lifelong learners the profession demands. The journeys of the teachers in this book demonstrate this. They also demonstrate that personal and professional development become a self-sustaining and synergistic process in which intrinsic motivation is a central aspect of even the most difficult teaching period.

Although many individual teachers follow the path of personal and professional development shown in this book, it’s vital that every teacher make the journey. Our era demands school reform. Improvement is needed, and this is especially true in low-income urban and rural schools. Children of poverty are the major concern. It is this population that is falling behind while middle- and high-income children do well. A vital step toward school im-

provement, especially for at-risk children, is in making each teacher's learning as important as each child's learning.

The "improvement movement" of today is more than the rational desire for providing better learning opportunities. This movement is part and parcel of a politically driven threat to public education. Charter schools, voucher schemes, and efforts to expand funding to nonpublic schools undermine the public system that sustains and grows the nation in countless ways. Unfortunately, incorrect bad news about test scores and the achievement of public schools abounds, and it has made an impact on the collective consciousness (Berliner and Biddle 1995; Gee 1999. Also see the following web cites for more information.

[http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/read\\_new\\_find\\_avgup.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/read_new_find_avgup.asp)

[http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/reading\\_trends\\_natl.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/reading_trends_natl.asp)

The good news is that there is a strong research base on which to draw, many dedicated teachers, teacher educators, parents, administrators, and some state and federal legislators and state offices working hard for school reform through teachers' professional growth.

## **Emphasizing the Personal Aspects of Learning to Teach**

Preservice and inservice university courses promote personal growth and development in many ways. Most important are courses that include dialogue on teacher development and classroom community. The rationale and action needed for this kind of dialogue is not sufficiently embedded in typical preservice and inservice experiences. Yet, efforts to improve discourse in the educational community are evident.

Also evident are professional development projects that emphasize the personal. For example, use of Cooperrider and Srivasta's (1990) appreciative inquiry (AI) work provides interesting opportunities. The AI model demonstrates how we can bring possibilities to life and develop our capabilities (Cooperrider and Srivasta 1990; Hammond 1998). The AI model is used in the Ohio CORE professional development project (Rosko 2001). Based on the concept that we get what we focus on, teachers focus on the moments when they felt the most effective and connected in relationships and in the profession. Through an interview process AI taps into "peak" experiences teachers have had in their lives. Interview techniques draw out stories of the best of the past. Interviews set the stage for visualizing what might be. Cooperrider's work promotes:

- Inquiry into "the art of the possible" in teaching life should begin with appreciation.

- Inquiry into what's possible should be applicable and provocative.
- Inquiry into the human potential of a teaching life should be collaborative.

One-on-one interviews increase mutual interest and trust between lead teachers or literacy specialists and other teachers. Teacher-to-teacher interactions generate conversations that contribute to personal and professional development. (See the Appendix for more information and sample interview questions.)

## Conclusion

In the preface of this book I wrote that effective teachers are unique in their individual and sociocultural differences. With all their differences, they are people with common goals who enjoy belonging in the profession. When schools become places for teacher learning, the more teachers will learn and the more they will become teacher researchers.

School size, structure of the day, and attitudes cannot be permitted to limit teachers' ability to sit around a table and discuss their feelings and their practice. School culture must provide the milieu in which teachers engage in structured professional discussions throughout their careers. This is accomplished in other cultures admired for educational achievement.

The Japanese believe that teachers need two periods a day to talk about their learning and teach one another (Jim Gee, personal communication, March 2001). This approach is well worth considering on a large-scale basis in U.S. schools. In addition, professional development projects can provide the structure and leadership needed to support teachers in courses or study groups in schools that are more fruitful than most "planning periods." At the heart of it, the idea of teachers sitting around a table and talking about students and their own learning is fundamentally social. Recognition of the necessity of social contexts functioning to support personal and professional growth is key to effective teaching.

To conclude our conversation, the teachers and I think out loud about some of our teaching experiences and how we feel about other teachers featured in this book.

Reading Donna's journal was an eye-opener for me. How important administrators are. They can make or break a teacher. I've realized through my writing that I learn best through being actively involved with students in the process of their learning. As I've read some of the chapters I am struck by the deep sense of commitment and determination to succeed in spite of some powerful negative forces.

I once spent a week with Carol Avery in a writers' workshop, and she changed me forever as a teacher. With her gentle nudging, she opened doors, some only a sliver, and gave me license to go through with my own writing.

Donna's piece made me think about how I to struggled to cover everything. Not until I gave myself the right to take "baby steps" did I begin to feel the kind of success I wanted. Karen made me stop and think when she wrote, "Children feel safe because tasks were designed with success [built in]. For some children, school is the best place she or he will be in all day, every week, every month, and every year. For that reason alone we have an ethical and moral obligation to work from this understanding.

I use this quotation, "If you are really comfortable with what you are doing, you have probably stopped growing." Teaching is a wonderful way to spend your life; it's never a solo act. It seems we all began with big ideas and a "bag of tricks," rode the waves of success and eddies of failure, and evolved as better teachers as we deepened our theoretical base, became risk-takers ourselves, and eventually empowered our own students.

In reading Karen's piece I am drawn into her description of the tapestry of growth. We are all tapestries, woven by the threads of experience. Effective teachers question the how and why of teaching.

It does us no good to get angry with a child who is not learning or seek reasons outside our control for why the child is not learning. We must not fall into the trap of placing blame on others when it's up to us to teach this child. Ruth uses the words *curiosity* and *in search of*. This reminds me that effective teachers are like pioneers, curious seekers of a better way. In reading various chapters, I'd venture to say that the word *learn* is used more than the word *teach*. We all learn from the children who show us the inadequacies of prescribed curriculum and from the children who sometimes tell us directly what they like or don't like. We learn from many sources, but we always learn from children. We've all experienced our growing pains, but we remain hopeful and have found joy in composing our teaching lives. Our students and we are works in progress.

## **For the Instructional Conversation and Reflective Thinking and Action**

Divide into groups of three to five and have each group choose a different scaffolding premise from the preceding text. Research one teacher of your choice (and her or his comments in Chapter 1). Identify instances from this teacher's personal and professional learning in which your group's scaffolding premise is evident. These instances may be listed and some of them elaborated

on by different members of the group. Elaboration may include the member's rationale for choosing a particular event and a deeper discussion of its scaffolding properties.

Engage with one or more of the following topics:

- attributes of effective teachers
- teaching tensions and challenges
- reflection
- ways in which teachers learn, discussed in Chapter 1

As you conclude your discussions, consider ways in which schools might be structured to better support teacher's development of desirable attributes. Are such things innate, somehow preset and fixed, or can the social or cultural world of the school have an influence? Include in your discussion how schools and colleagues could work together on teaching tensions, on respecting teacher's individual strengths, and the kind of reflection that counts in effective teaching. What are the roles and responsibilities of teachers in all this and in their personal and professional development?

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