
Preface

“The truth knocks on your door and you say, ‘Go away I am looking for the truth,’ and it goes away.”

—Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

Five years ago, I retired as an elementary school principal. Since that time I have read and written a lot, and I am fortunate to still spend some time in schools, allowing me the great opportunity to be among students and dedicated educators.

Every time I visit a school, I recall what my first supervisor many years ago told me: “Never forget that the people who know the most are the people who are the closest to the students.” That single piece of advice guided my professional career before retirement and it continues to guide me today.

As a result, when I present to educators or write something for them to read, I do not pretend to know more than they do, because I don’t. I engage with them because I have something that I didn’t have for thirty-five years—more time to read, think, and reflect.

What I discovered from all my reading wasn’t surprising; it didn’t tell me anything I didn’t already know from my experience with students and educators. Yet, what it did was to help me get the *right words* to understand what I had learned. So, when I stand in front of a group of educators I confess that since I don’t have the daily experience of being in school with students, I know less than they do. I add, however, that because of the time I now have, I can offer them some ideas that just might help them reflect on and understand what they already know from their experiences. I ask them to take advantage of me, or to use me in a good sense, knowing that I can share some ideas or research that they probably would have eventually discovered, if only they had the time. I extend that same invitation to anyone who reads this book.

I share these thoughts, not out of any great humility, but because I am disturbed by the trend in education policy and practice to tell the people who know the most—the ones who work every day with students—that somehow they don't know enough. To convey to them that they have been doing things the wrong way and they need to do what other people, the experts, have determined is correct. Educators in schools who are closest to the students are now told to let others do the thinking for them. Unfortunately, too many educators believe that message and have accepted the idea that doing their job requires them to follow a program, a protocol, or a script that will make certain that they get it right. Consequently, time must be devoted to doing what others tell them to do, which leaves little or no time to do their own thinking.

Time constraints have always been and will always be a problem for any educator, but I am also disturbed by another current trend. This development was summed up by one school administrator who honestly admitted that because of all the mandates and regulations and the little time allocated for implementation, it was harder and harder to be kind to students and teachers. Today, not only do educators have no time to think on their own, now they have no time or freedom to do what their heart tells them to do.

These disturbing trends remind me of that quote about truth knocking on your door. After almost forty years of reflecting on that quote, I can step back and reflect on what is happening in schools and state what "truth" would say if you stood long enough at the door to listen to it. It would tell you that the truth is indeed inside and you were right to look for it, but the problem was that you were wearing the wrong glasses, somebody else's glasses, glasses that prevented you from finding your own truth. It would tell you that you can really only find the truth, when you look for it with your own eyes because it is in your own heart and mind.

Regardless of these trends and the mandates to change or *else*, I am convinced now more than ever that the **truth** for how we need to educate our students is already right inside the hearts and minds of the people who work and live in the schools: the students and the educators who serve them.

The truth in our minds is what we find when we think, reflect, share, and listen to ourselves and to our colleagues. The truth in our hearts is what we find when we act toward others with empathy, compassion, and kindness. I have written this book to help educators find their own truth about what it means to educate students.

This book is practical because it is *not* a program, protocol, or a set of procedures to follow to change or fix a school. It *is* a guide for thinking, reflecting, and sharing with others. It is practical because I believe that meaningful and lasting change requires people to change people. It is practical because it supports the type of change that happens when people's hearts and minds connect, the type of change that affirms people and brings them closer together.

What I offer in this book is what I discovered when I looked into my mind and my heart using forty years' experience in education as my database. It is filled with stories that helped me make sense out of what I have seen, heard, and felt in schools. It is meant to help you use your own eyes and to use your own database of experiences to help you make sense out of the truth in your own heart and mind.

I hope it encourages you to explore your stories and those of your colleagues, but even more importantly to create new ones that your school community can write and tell every day. I hope and believe that your school community can create new stories filled with good times together and filled with enough time to think and to share and to be kind.