

Conclusion

Robyn Ridgley and Pamela Kramer Ertel

As described in Chapter 1, our intention with this monograph was to compile a collection of educators' stories that would inspire new individuals to the profession while celebrating the work of current educators. To this end, the authors provided valuable insight into the varied paths to entering the profession, impactful experiences influencing their career trajectories, and what they have learned from mentors, their students, and others. Reflecting on the authors' words and experiences offers several key ideas that individuals considering entering or leaving the profession should contemplate to inform their decision.

THERE ARE MANY PATHS TO THE PROFESSION

Robyn Ridgley

In Chapter 2, several authors shared their stories about their journey into the teaching profession. A key takeaway from their stories is that individuals can enter the profession at varying times of life and in various ways. Individuals who have never experienced formal education through public or private schools can consider and become successful teachers. Life events may interfere with attending college to become a teacher immediately after high school, but individuals find their way to the profession over time. Individuals may choose to embark on other occupations yet find that teaching is their true calling. Challenges within other careers may inspire one to become a teacher. These are common paths to the education profession, but everyone's journey is unique.

Furthermore, individuals sometimes "fall into" teaching. For example, opportunities can arise that encourage one to explore the profession. No matter the prior experience, life journey, or encouragement provided (or not) by others, people who feel teaching may be an option should find ways to explore this profession. As demonstrated by our authors, educators may experience joy, personal satisfaction, and numerous other intangible benefits from teaching.

THE POWER OF HEROES AND MENTORS

There were many stories about heroes and mentors in Chapter 3. The field of education has built-in systems to provide mentors and mentorship for new teachers. However, these educators told stories about mentors who emerged from daily interactions, including those outside the workplace. These interactions were with other educators, family members, employers, and others who modeled, encouraged, and inspired. The stories demonstrated that one person mentoring and inspiring another can change the trajectory of a life. Listening, asking questions, and providing opportunities were specific actions taken by mentors. These stories should encourage current educators who are not mentoring others to do so. Prospective educators should feel comforted that people are willing to mentor and support them as they embark on the complex teaching profession. When starting new positions or working in new settings, educators should look for those willing to mentor and seek their support and inspiration.

IMPACTFUL EXPERIENCES AND PIVOTAL MOMENTS

Throughout the stories, especially in Chapter 4, the authors discussed impactful experiences that influenced their decision to become teachers or encouraged them to continue teaching. The teaching profession encourages educators to both teach and learn. Teaching students, hearing their stories, and striving to support them with learning content requires educators to be learners themselves. For example, to meet the needs of students, teachers must learn the latest research-based practices, curricula, and approaches for addressing the unique needs of students or curricula.

Teachers also must be adaptable. Multiple authors shared that they had changed specialty areas, grade levels, or schools throughout their careers. Similarly, some were involved in situations where the curriculum changed or were asked to take on a new responsibility. These changes were unplanned but energizing. Being open to change and “going with the flow” provided new growth opportunities. These opportunities translated into pivotal moments, which shaped the trajectory of many educator careers.

One author noted the power of intentionally working with others. When teachers identify a colleague (or two or more) who can work alongside them, they realize the power of community. The community supports problem-solving, managing stress, and realizing that, as educators, we are better when we work together. Educators must share these stories of impactful experiences to highlight how teaching is a profession centered on students, is ever-changing, and is best done in collaboration with others.

Finally, through the collection of stories, this monograph provides many windows into the world of education. The lived experiences shared by the authors provide readers with details about what the life of a teacher can encompass. We encourage current teachers, higher education faculty, and education leaders to use this monograph to motivate themselves and others to enter and stay in the profession. We hope other educators will

tell their stories about why they entered the profession and what inspires them. Stories help us connect with one another and learn things we do not know or have not experienced.

It is essential to share educators' stories widely with all who will listen. By doing so, we can help others recognize and appreciate the invaluable contributions of those who teach. This effort aims to enhance the public's perception of the education profession by highlighting the benefits alongside the risks and challenges. It is essential to provide a clear understanding of the viability of the teaching profession by highlighting both its rewards and challenges. This approach will help foster a robust community of educators who are dedicated, compassionate, and effective—qualities every student deserves. By presenting this balanced perspective, we can inspire and support those entering the field, ensuring a bright future for every student, as well as every educator.

A CALL TO ACTION

Pamela Kramer Ertel

If you had a teacher who positively affected you, I strongly encourage you to reach out to that teacher and share your story of how they impacted your life. You will be glad you did, as will they. In authoring my story, I contacted two of my favorite heroes and mentors. One was Dr. Frank Spera, a former principal who had a tremendous impact on my life. While we have managed to stay connected intermittently over the years, he was very moved by my decision to write about his influence on my life. The other person I contacted was one of my former professors from Marian College, Sister Claire Whalen. It took some effort to locate her, but she is now 95 years young and still actively engaged in teaching and learning. She was humbled and pleased that I even remembered her and was happy to learn of her impact on my life as an educator.

If you are a teacher, take a chance, tell your story, be honest, be vulnerable, and know that YOUR story matters! If you are thinking about becoming a teacher, start talking to teachers about their stories and prepare to begin drafting your own story!