

Foreword

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BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

The recurring crisis in American education, which is now a political problem of the first magnitude, has resulted in educators' work becoming incomparably more complex, challenging, and important than ever before. And, similar to our children's inalienable civic right to an education, American teachers arguably have a right to premier ongoing professional education and development that sharpens their skills and enables them to grow in their ability to address the myriad learning needs of diverse children in today's increasingly demanding educational environment.

Although it has long been an axiomatic assumption that professional growth is a predictable effect of educators' development programs, teachers in this, the most advanced and modern country in the world, are still finding that professional growth opportunities are underdeveloped and, at times, of little or no use. In the midst of what, to some, appears to be a multitude of weak and ill-formed professional development programs, we are still erroneously inclined to believe that teacher development programs automatically translate into expert classroom teaching as soon as staff development sessions end, that we can substitute professional development sessions unrelated to assessment and action research for true teacher development and learning, that age-old contradictions between teachers' needs and wants are inconsequential, that we must uncritically and slavishly accept mediocrity and an astounding hodgepodge of sense and non-sense in professional development programs, that teachers are incapable of facilitating their own professional growth, and that we are everlastingly stuck on the horns of political-economic-social dilemmas when it comes to financing and implementing teacher development programs. One obvious symptom of the estrangement of teachers' professional growth programs from the daily work of education is the chronic overload American teachers suffer, often an overload brought about in part by extraneous work caused by bogus "development" or "improvement" programs. The difficulty can be summed up as a contradiction between our ideal development

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programs and our everyday experiences, a sad and glaring contradiction for too many American teachers in too many American schools.

In fact, the frightening illusion of widespread weak professional development programs is doubtless stronger than reality, but the destructiveness of our basic assumptions about professional development and our inability to escape the cycle of those poor programs that do exist is obliterating the distinction between wasteful activity and true professional learning, change for change's sake and growth, inactivity and directed action. As common sense disappears, stagnation creeps in and occupies the space meant for human development, and like a dragon lying in wait for hapless teachers trapped in a hopeless enterprise, the whole attempt can become a sort of fraud. We have lost our way, at least in part, and now is the time to replace such pernicious, ruinous programs with programs designed to ensure that teachers' individual learning needs are met. This is a tall order, but in this book, Vicki Husby has methodically and comprehensively filled that order.

Thus we are indeed between past and future. We cannot simply go on in unreflective perseverance, offering feeble and irrelevant staff development programs. The demands of society in the form of accountability and our veritable future are before us. It is now a self-evident truth that we must shed old-world thinking about professional development programs and rebuild our common professional world. We must eliminate the danger of pointless programs and involve teachers in meaningful and productive professional growth. We are brought to the puzzling question of how to do this.

In Husby's book, the first step in creating effective and meaningful new professional development programs, that of "seal[ing] the proverbial crack in contemporary professional development of educators," is a fait accompli. Developed around an unassailable conceptual framework of adult learning theory, self-directed learning wherein learner control is significant, action research on the effectiveness of practices and programs, critical reflection on ingrained beliefs in order to transform and grow, and group learning in trusting environments (hence, the development of a professional learning community), Husby pointedly addresses the interests and standards of society; her individualized professional development program provides for professional accountability because individuals' goals must impact student achievement, and it adheres to professional standards as explicated by the National Staff Development Council.

Refreshingly, Husby trusts in the infinite perfectibility of professional performance as she insists that individual focus areas in self-directed professional development programs must relate to professional responsibilities, align with school and district goals, and impact student achievement. Learning modes for teachers in the program include self-instruction, cooperative learning, and team learning, and flexible methods and time frames are embraced. Features include step-by-step directions for developing the program, agendas for implementation, materials for mini-lessons, examples of learning plans, materials for use within reform model

professional development programs, and a revealing collection of teacher comments in response to the program. Structural concerns and facilitator behaviors are addressed in an accessible do/do not format.

Husby also captures and defines a space wherein American teachers can pursue this vital development together. In this space, “a venture to empower adults to develop themselves,” teachers have a right to speak and be heard. In this space, dialogue between and among fellow teachers as well as the inner experience of reflective dialogue with oneself is paramount. The result is that teachers explore new beginnings and perceive unlimited probabilities; each teacher knows “I can” and “I will.”

Freedom to explore, enhanced with security, is ascertainable for teachers, and in Husby’s self-directed professional growth program such freedom is shielded yet not outside the political realm of the world. Through the twofold gift of freedom and action in this program, both of which are essential for dynamic learning and professional growth, teachers establish a finer reality of their own; through their own conscious attempts to grow and collaborate, they escape the oppression that belies democracy and learning in schools.

Now is the point at which we decide whether we love and trust teachers and their students enough to share with them the responsibility for their growth. Now is the point at which we refrain from excluding teachers from participation in their own growth and leaving them to their own devices. Now we can and must respond to the opportunity that has opened up for us with the excellence of Husby’s new world, one of self-directed and responsible teacher growth previously impossible to conceive of, yet not a mirage. Husby urges us to empower the hidden source of great and beautiful things in education: teachers. Let us begin with the book in your hands.