

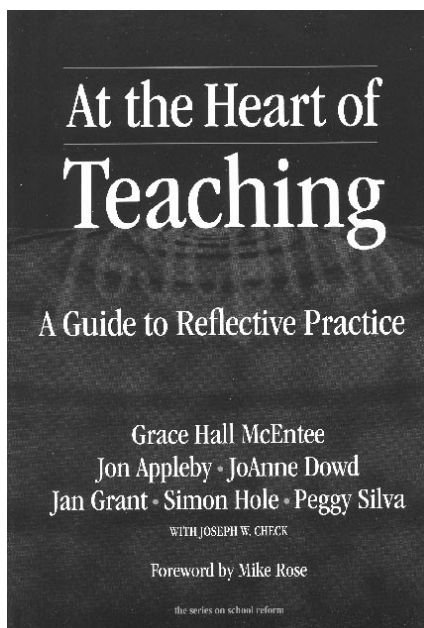
At the Heart of Teaching: A Guide to Reflective Practice

A Book Review – Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Whether you're facilitating a session for new coaches, attending a retreat with colleagues, or planning for your classroom and school in the fall, this new book by Educators Writing for Change is a must read! Authors Grace Hall McEntee, Jon Appleby, JoAnne Dowd, Jan Grant, Simon Hole and Peggy Silva draw us into their hearts and classrooms as they share their stories and their tools in the pages of this small book that speaks volumes for anyone working with students and families.

I was hooked from the start when JoAnne shared her desperation after returning from a conference to learn that her class had behaved horribly for the substitute teacher. JoAnne doesn't just share a sad story, she goes deeper and shares the process she used to unpack the problem with her kids. Her honest reflections about what worked, and what did not, in "Changing the Blame Game" will be useful for anyone who has ever wondered how their classroom community became a chaotic circus in their absence.

Jan Grant's chapter on "Examining Students at Work" spoke to students' needs for authentic purpose and their innate desire to celebrate their learning. I was transported into her school's cafeteria as I read about students "Coming from Truth" and their demonstration of the depth of their understanding in "The Focus Question" protocol.



"Student Centered Meetings: A Protocol for Working with Families" by Peggy Silva gave me new ideas and energy for my work with colleagues around the possibilities for greater student voice and family engagement.

I was moved by the honesty of Simon's approach as he described the way that he and his colleagues move beyond congeniality through the "Art of Reflective Conversations" with their stories. "Learning to listen to our little voices," and use reflective tools with our colleagues and kids will press us beyond the latest lunchroom laments. Simon reminds us that "telling our stories is hard...but worth the effort."

Grace and Simon share two other approaches for reflection, one for times when we're on our own, and one for use with a group. Depending on our preference or our circumstances, either should help us peel back the layers that can obscure our vision when things aren't going as planned.

In the context of holding Socratic Discussions with students, Jon writes of the dilemma we face as we work to empower our kids to take ownership for their learning. This resonated with me. While it may never get easier as we work to empower our students, Jon's sharing will help us embrace the ambiguity together.

The book is rounded out by discussions of Critical Friends Groups in action and the value of Mini Retreats, complete with suggested protocols and writing activities for all of us to use as we continue to "polish the stone" of our work as reflective practitioners.

With a little help from our friends and their stories, I'm looking forward to a summer of renewed learning, and I hope you'll join us.

You can purchase At the Heart of Teaching: A Guide to Reflective Practice at www.tcpress.com. Connections encourages anyone who reads/uses the ideas in this book to share their experiences in our online conversations and in future pages of this publication.

Debbie Bambino can be reached at [<dbambino@earthlink.net>](mailto:dbambino@earthlink.net)

NSRF Mission Statement

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

CONNECTIONS

is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty. Published three times per year by the Harmony School Education Center, it provides a forum for CFG coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

Editors — Debbie Bambino & Katy Kelly

Layout & Design — Sarah Childers, Camellia Cosgray

Our special thanks goes to the Foundation for Educational Renewal for its support of this journal.

If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to *Connections* contact us at 812/330.2702, <kkelly@harmonyschool.org>, <dbambino@earthlink.net>