

"It Just Did My Heart Good"

In this issue of *Principal* we'll be taking a look at some of the instructional and managerial adjustments veteran principals have had to make, faced with more diverse student populations, ever-changing state and federal mandates, and the ever-moving target of technology. Many of these veteran leaders also have taken on significant new roles as mentors, advisors, and turnaround specialists.

These are important changes, especially for those of us who entered the profession in a more "innocent" era, when it looked like things would go on forever just as they were. But old dogs like us need to learn many new tricks, and this is as it should be.

The Human Needs of Veterans

But here I'd like to talk about a different set of needs us old dogs have as we approach the top of the hill and begin heading down the other side. I'm speaking of the very *human* needs that keep veteran educators facing forward and keeping our faith in human improvement alive long after we leave our schools. I'll let one of our past NAESP presidents, Tony Harduar, describe how meeting these needs has kept his flame alive and burning brightly over the years.

Tony has been in education for 30 years, which certainly makes him a veteran. He has spent 25 of those years as a principal, first in Alaska and now in a small town in Washington state. Tony's career is by no means over, but in talking with him recently I got the idea that he is well into the "beginning-of-wisdom" phase. Like many of us, he can now look backward as well as forward. And in looking back, he and the rest of us veterans begin to gather together those sparks—the moment of light in a child's eye, the "thank you, Dr. Riggins," and the "I get it"—that make our careers worth remembering.

"I went back to visit my old school in Alaska a few years ago," Tony told me, "and I saw six or seven teachers I had helped develop." These were teachers he had nurtured and



strengthened until they became successful leaders who can make a difference in children's lives.

"They were each doing a great job and it just did my heart good," said Tony, recognizing another spark in meeting human needs over his long career.

I asked him if things had improved for children over the years, because that's another need for veteran principals—the need to know that we've played some part, small as it might be, in children's lives. "Yes," he said, noting that children who used to be ignored or shunted aside are now being paid attention to as never before. Helping teachers achieve this goal is another spark Tony and I share in reflecting on our careers.

Battles Won and Lost

But Tony is also worried—very worried—about another direction that education today is taking: the narrowing down of the curriculum at the expense of some of the wonderful things we used to be able to teach. Even as we draw together the memorable sparks of our careers, we shouldn't forget some darker images of battles and children we've lost. So, we also have a human need for the knowledge that others will continue our work, correct our mistakes and—let us hope—do better than we have done.

Finally, as veteran principals we have a need to visualize a future that will still include the eager faces and happy chatter of children learning long after we've gone. We need to gather together thousands of moments like those experienced by Tony when he goes into a classroom "just to see them grow." And we need to know that generations of children will be growing long after we've retired.

It's a good need to have. ■

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