

Activity : Sudden Literature

1. Read over the selections.
2. Identify the selection you find most intriguing with a "+". Note one or two reasons why.
3. Mark the selection you found least interesting with a "0". Note one or two reasons why.

① One of the qualities that make us fully human and distinguish us from other species is our capacity to invent and discover both knowledge and beauty and to pass our understanding on to successive generations. ... As I said, teaching is about the ability of each generation to build on the previous generation's understandings and creations to sustain our humanity. So if teachers are not themselves lovers of wisdom, of beauty, and of the values that make these subjects worth pursuing, then I worry about their ability to be effective. That's why at the heart of my work on good teaching is the notion of a teacher as an enlightened, passionate intellectual.

② The next generation of teachers faces a very different teaching context. For one thing, more career options, particularly for females, are available; women can more easily enter other career paths. For another, beginning teachers may not even see teaching as a life career but as a first career, possibly a first step toward other kinds of jobs such as administrator, curriculum developer, or college-level teacher. A profession outside the field of education might be an ultimate goal... . New teachers are entering the profession at a time when public schooling in particular is under public scrutiny. These changed social and political circumstances mean that for teacher education to matter it too will have to change. It will have to offer new teachers a fighting chance to both survive and thrive in schools and classrooms filled with students who are even more dependent on education to make the difference in their life circumstances.

③ Professionals make meaning from complex situations, creatively use specialized knowledge, generate new knowledge, and expand their own teaching repertoire. Professionals' conceptual knowledge, palette of practical experiences (craft knowledge), and effectiveness are far greater than teachers trained as skilled laborers. Developing craft knowledge without reflecting leads to the practice of teaching as skilled labor. It is shortsighted and ultimately limits the teacher and the profession. While craft knowledge takes a long time to acquire, early staff development practices can accelerate teacher movement toward professionalism.

④ I believe that to give up on our ideals for universal public education is to give up on our democratic way of life and because I believe that real improvement is possible. Schools can improve when their leaders turn them into organizations where change is embraced as an opportunity rather than coped with as a problem. Improvement must be continuous and must be embedded in all systems a school comprises. Schools can improve when school leaders learn how to build a supportive community, respecting diversity but healing divisiveness. Schools can improve when school leaders, including teachers, focus on their business and have properly understood the nature of that business.

⑤ I find the life of a school person akin to that of a tennis shoe in a laundry dryer – congested, convoluted, lumpy, dark, and endless. These are not conditions hospitable for contemplation, for finding meaning, for learning. Reflection is precisely the capacity to distance oneself from the highly routinized, depleting, sometimes meaningless activities in which we are engaged, so that we can see what's really going on. ... Personal reflection on our experience is how we learn from experience. Reflection contributes to the refinement of subsequent action and to the building of a repertoire of professional craft knowledge. And, of course, reflecting on practice – by observing practice, by writing about practice, by engaging in conversation about practice, by embracing differences we encounter in practice – builds a school culture hospitable to both learning and community.

⑥ It is paradoxical that, although teachers spend most of their time facilitating for student learning, they themselves have few people facilitating for them and understanding their needs to be recognized, encouraged, helped, supported, and engaged in professional learning. Perhaps this is what we mean by "professionalizing" teaching and "restructuring the work environment" of teachers. Maybe the opportunities for participating in the leadership of schools, and the structures created as a result, are the means to break the isolation of teachers and engage them in collective efforts to deal with what surely are large and complex problems... . What we have, then, is a new leadership role that can help in the creation of new collaborative structures. It appears that a combination of these new roles and structures is necessary to professionalize the school culture and to bring a measure of recognition and respect to teachers – who may be, in the final analysis, the best teachers of teachers as well as children.