

Foreword

It's always a treat when I pick up an educational textbook, and because I can't put it down, I end up reading it from cover to cover in one sitting. That's what happened when I first read the manuscript for *Conversations About Being a Teacher*; I was totally captivated by the engaging story of a young teacher and an aging professor.

Dr. McGuire has blended the ingredients of a traditional textbook with the elements of a contemporary novel, creating a "nextbook" that will leave you wondering why more textbooks don't adopt this novel (in both senses of the word!) format. Before you think that the book has been written to appeal only to the MTV generation, I should offer that, having shared and talked about it with a wide range of young and experienced teachers, everyone has been enthusiastic about both the content and the delivery.

Each chapter of the book you are about to read consists of a charming conversation between the eager but inexperienced Tonya, and her chosen mentor, the irascible education professor Dr. Michaels. The conversations are animated, insightful, smile-producing journeys into what it takes to be a teacher. Note taking is optional, but you may find yourself underlining a statement or two or putting a paper clip on a page for future reference. The dialogue contains powerful strategies for understanding and tackling the complexities of teaching.

While Tonya and Dr. Michaels are only two members among a cast of thousands that we could call upon to converse about teaching, their story showcases the critical factor associated with teacher effectiveness: *building relationships*. At every level and within every dimension of education, from kindergarten classrooms to school board meetings, from preservice classrooms to professional development seminars, we know the importance of effective relationships. Granted, relationships are always a work in progress, as Tonya

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and Dr. Michaels' story illustrates, but, as their story also shows, once a relationship is established, teaching and learning blossom.

The book speaks clearly to today's prospective teachers as well as to reflective and introspective veterans who seek further development within their chosen field. For those working toward teacher certification and for the newest members of the profession, the conversations provide a refreshing introduction to many critical elements of teaching. Teacher educators, principals, supervisors, and other leaders in education know that caring, respect, and commitment are critical, but they are removed from the situations in which Tonya must apply them as a beginning teacher. For more experienced teachers, the conversations will be a walk down memory lane and a reminder of why they decided to become teachers in the first place. Those memories will reinforce what they have grown to believe is important and rejuvenate them as classroom teachers.

Does this "nextbook" really work as a textbook or is it more faithfully a novel about education? Well, it is both. Either way you slice it, the result is good: Dr. McGuire's book will promote much needed reflective conversations about teaching. Those in the textbook camp can use the topics to discuss the essential elements of effective teaching, brainstorm other factors that improve teaching, talk about which aspects make sense to them and which are questionable, and write down their beliefs about teaching. Those in the novel camp can reflect on the story, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the characters, project what kind of teacher Tonya will be, and even begin their own sequel to the story, perhaps imagining Tonya as an aging professor meeting a young teacher for the first time—thirty-five years from now!

With *Conversations About Being a Teacher*, Dr. McGuire has taken a bold stand in defining what he believes to be important. He has started the conversation; now it is up to us to continue it!

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