

Book Review

*For the Love of Teaching
and Other Reasons Teachers Do What They Do*

By Ira D. Shull

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In an era when 50 percent of our public school teachers leave within five years of being hired, we would do well to think more often and more clearly about those individuals who do stay in the profession—and love it. One book that readers may have overlooked is *For the Love of Teaching and Other Reasons Teachers Do What They Do*. It is not a book that is widely advertised in our mailbox literature, but it belongs in our classrooms and on our bedside tables. Author Ira Shull is a professional journalist who gathered teachers' stories and insights as he traveled throughout all fifty states. His volume presents fifty teachers' personal professional portraits, bringing them alive through anecdotes told in their various voices. Shull understands the intense caring and hard work of good teachers; he is married to a special education teacher.

For the Love of Teaching captures the nuances of each teacher's individuality and presents the sincerity of their passions in a straightforward, very readable volume. Shull's interesting cast of characters come from a variety of towns and cities across the nation, and their tales of why they began to teach and why they stay are fascinating and often very touching. Some teach at the college level, some work with young children in preschool and kindergarten, and others instruct students of all sorts in between, including prisoners. Shull demonstrates that he has listened carefully.

Readers will come to see qualities that all the interviewed teachers

share: intellectual depth and breadth, infectious excitement, and lasting commitment. They are bound by their strong senses of caring. Their individual definitions of good teaching and their advice about teaching are inspiring. Shull also makes clear how the various educators' personalities affect their teaching. He has arranged their stories within themed sections, pointing out that the teachers' motivations are centered upon a variety of inspirations that may include, but certainly go beyond, a love of teaching.

Not only do the teachers' individual ways enrich their professional roles but their work enriches their lives. Readers can see that the work of teaching is not only beneficial for the students; it is also highly educational and rewarding for teachers. Exciting things go on in these classrooms. One group of students creates a "real" river in their room. Another class writes letters to themselves and places them in a sealed time capsule that will be opened when they leave high school. Dyslexic adolescent boys learn through humor and young children examine owl pellets. Prisoners learn the power of literature and third graders show insight as they discuss "What Is Art?"

For the Love of Teaching helps to answer the question, "What is a teacher?" It helps readers see that effective teaching is a laminate of telling and listening and doing in the co-construction of meaning. Explaining known information to students is an age-old part of the instructional process, but teaching is also a highly evocative art—a "calling" in many ways. The term *educate* has, for ages, meant the process of leading out, and the best teachers provide opportunities for their students to "bloom."

Teachers—not methods and not textbooks—make the real difference for students. Their talent and creativity, motivation and perseverance, as well as thoughtful words and careful listening all bring excellence to education. Ira Shull's book can certainly help educate the public about the dedicated individuals who serve our nation's learners. Teachers, and future teachers, who have the pleasure of reading his book will be inspired and proud.