

## Connecting Communities and Colleagues

Christina R. Zaker

A WEALTH OF WISDOM

When I began in Field Education, my predecessor, who was retiring, left me several shelves of books. One shelf was filled with past copies of *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*. In those first weeks settling into my new office and school, I found myself sifting through the volumes - highlighting articles, folding page corners, and writing notes in the margins of a journal that I had not even heard of before. I can remember thinking, "Thank God! There is a wealth of resources here!" As a new person in field education, *Reflective Practice* helped me find my footing and learn from wisdom figures in the field; eight years later with a bit more acumen around the world of field education, I still look forward to each new volume of *Reflective Practice* for the wealth of wisdom and resources that abound in its pages.

Each new volume of *Reflective Practice* is filled with articles that tap the wisdom of a diverse group of authors. There are shared best practices, research that explores new questions and forges new directions for our work, poems and prayers that are insightful and easy to adapt for repeated use,

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and great intersectionality between field/contextual education and clinical pastoral education.

The journal feels like a community affair. The Association of Theological Field Educators meets biennially to gather and network with one another. It is there that we make connections, share our research and find out how others are adapting and growing. At my first ATFE Biennium I was delighted to meet in person several of the authors I had come to know in the pages of *Reflective Practice*. And the community that is formed through this guild extends into the pages of the journal. The articles are penned by colleagues, the research efforts are jointly produced by collaborators from various denominations and geographic locations. *Reflective Practice* is uniquely focused on the work of supervision in ministry which is critical in bringing together educators both within and outside of academia for the purposes of accompanying our students as they discern their ministerial identity. And during this time of the covid pandemic when ATFE has been unable to gather in person, *Reflective Practice* and the editor's requests for collaborative writing projects have kept us woven together.

#### "A JOURNAL FOR US!"

It is not only academic field educators who find value in the wisdom of *Reflective Practice*. Site supervisor-mentors based in the community play an important role in field/contextual education and they find the journal as a rich resource as well. Every year during our new site supervisor orientation, I make sure they realize that *Reflective Practice* is a resource available to them. Site supervisor-mentors balance the needs of their ministerial communities with the expectations of our curriculum and student outcomes. *Reflective Practice* helps them strike this balance and find signposts for navigating the terrain of field education. The fact that *Reflective Practice* is accessible online and free makes it a welcome addition to their continuing education and commitment to field education. Many have commented on how the resources they find in *Reflective Practice* are useful for their supervision not only of our students but of their other staff as well. One site supervisor called me after taking a look for the first time and said, "This is amazing, I didn't realize there was a journal for us!"

## CARVING OUT THE TIME TO WRITE

Finally, within the Association of Theological Field Educators, there is a Research and Publications committee that encourages field educators to research and publish their important work. Field educators are busy people. As practical theologians we constantly have our feet in the classroom and in the streets of our communities. But that too often leads us to leave the publishing and research to other theologians. However, much of what we know through our interactions with students and the wider community is critically important to share in our churches and in our schools. Field educators are steeped in dialogue and reflective patterns that shape how we teach and engage the community. This is important wisdom to share. Our ATFE Research and Publications committee has a constant refrain of encouraging field educators to carve out the space to write and to share our wisdom with the academy. *Reflective Practice* gives field educators the opportunity to focus our writing and research in areas that pertain to our field, to write for audiences beyond the academy, and to network with other authors on work that is pertinent to the field. *Reflective Practice* offers an avenue for writing and research within a peer reviewed guild, with peers who understand the value and complexity of contextual theology and bi-vocational ministry.

## FLOURISHING

In each of these ways, *Reflective Practice* contributes to the flourishing of field educators. Not only does it provide a wealth of wisdom, but it invites us to recognize our own voices and share our wisdom with others, and it provides relevant resources for any ministerial supervisor whether they educate field education students in conjunction with a seminary, or they simply supervise their own pastoral staff. *Reflective Practice* is not only a journal, but a space carved out for collaboration, synergy and connection, a thread that is woven connecting communities and colleagues. In this digital age, where covid has sidelined much of our ability to connect, *Reflective Practice* feels like one of the constants that has held us together and kept us pushing our field further to address the signs of the times.