Concerning This Issue

Michael D'Andrea & Judy Daniels

To paraphrase Dickens, one could arguably point out that "these are the worst of times and these are the best of times" for public education in the United States. Continuing cutbacks in state and federal funding for educational and mental health services, criticisms regarding the general condition of our educational system and specific attacks directed against institutions of higher learning make this a particularly difficult time for professional educators.

Despite these difficulties, many educational and mental health professionals continue to demonstrate their commitment to human development by originating and implementing creative educational counseling projects in their schools and communities. These efforts are having a positive impact on large numbers of children, adolescents and adults across the nation. The successes that result from these efforts are rooted in an unwavering commitment to human development and educational excellence that perseveres during difficult times. It is in this committed spirit that the "best of times" are found. It should also be noted that in the "best of times," a spirit of collaboration and cooperation characterizes the way people interact and work with one another. In the "best of times," individuals strive to make more meaningful and constructive connections in ways that promote human dignity and development.

The articles included in this special issue of Educational Perspectives report on some of the ways students and faculty members in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa reflect this sort of commitment, collaboration and cooperation as they strive to create constructive connections with others. As the title of this issue suggests, the articles describe various projects that have been initiated to make meaningful and productive connections within school and community settings. Positive outcomes resulting from these collaborative connections are reported in each of the articles published in this issue. Several of the authors also discuss the ways in which the connections they made in these projects stimulated their own professional and personal development.

Three students provide the lead article which examines a community research-based project initiated by faculty members in the Department of Counselor Education. Bryan Kim, Dorothy Gaughen and Darryl Salvador describe the important roles, graduate and undergraduate students played in providing career development services to over 3,000 poor adults in Hawai'i.

Patricia Pier, a recent graduate from the Department of Counselor Education and Judy Daniels report on their efforts to learn about homeless children and their families. They discuss a fascinating approach to conducting research among this group of at-risk group of youngsters and their families which can be replicated by other professional counselors in the field.

Michael and Sharon Omizo join Kiaka Gaughen, another graduate student in the Department of Counselor Education, to discuss the effect of a classroom-based project which was aimed at increasing youngsters' self-esteem. The project involved providing students opportunities to take part in a number of interesting music and art activities which were specifically designed for elementary school students. These authors emphasized the importance of using educational and counseling activities that are culturally-appropriate when attempting to promote the development of students from diverse cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. This important point is further underscored in the succeeding article in which Judy Daniels discusses a classroom-based intervention that was specifically designed to enhance students' respect of human diversity.

By developing new "interdisciplinary connections" among faculty in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i, it was possible to develop and recently implement a new master's degree program which was designed to stimulate the leadership potential of experienced teachers in the State of Hawai'i. Michael D'Andrea and Joanne Cooper explore the process that culminated in the development of this new interdisciplinary master's degree program.

Although all of these articles focus on different types of school and community-based projects, they share a commonality in that each required the development of new connections and collaborative links between faculty members, teachers, administrators counselors, students, and/or parents to achieve their successes. We are very grateful to all of the authors who contributed to this issue of the journal. Also, we want to extend special appreciation to Professor Morris Lai for his computer assistance, to the Office of College Development in general and particularly to Joyce Chun, Marcia Little and Professor Alexander Pickens for their technical assistance and consistent support in preparing this issue.

In conclusion, it is our hope that the reader will get a sense of the excitement and optimism about the future which these contributors communicate in their work.