

## Reflection: The Real World of the Classroom

*Dr. Elaine Decker*

I have been a teacher for 39 years, in the K-12 system, in post-secondary institutions, in industry. I have spent time in a lot of classrooms each providing a physical space for a fascinating array of human activities. People in classrooms read, construct, write, think, argue, analyze, sing, dance and wonder – among other things. They work alone or with others, they experience success and frustration, they examine the contributions of previous scholars and performers and they invent their own ways of knowing. They honor their teammates, and they receive recognition for their unique accomplishments. They mourn; they celebrate. With the guidance and support of teachers, they “make an appearance in the world” as Hannah Arendt would say.

My classroom years have been joyful and challenging, helping me to understand my own appearance in the world, and giving me endless chances to appear better. The struggles and lessons of the classroom are the struggles and lessons of the world. There is no classroom bubble, no environment saved from the world, no place exempt from the responsibilities of being human, of learning, of appearing.

I cringe – no, rather I am annoyed – every time I hear someone try to separate the classroom from the world, usually by denigrating the former as not real. Buddhist writer Jon Kabat-Zinn reminds us, “Wherever you go, there you are.” You might be thinking in a classroom in the morning, creating in an office in the afternoon, coaching at a Little League at twilight, and chatting with a friend at home in the evening. Changing your physical location does not change your obligation to appear, nor your opportunity to be real.

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