Learning from the Fog

When I head out for my morning run through the Bloomington, Indiana, subdivisions, the fog that surrounds me is authentic stuff — thick, wet, and mysterious. The hills of southern Indiana are exceptionally good at capturing that early morning mist and holding it within their grasp. The houses on my route are ghostly images tucked behind towering trees. The sidewalk and my surroundings share the same shade of gray, and that often slows me down until I can be certain where the sidewalk ends and the street begins. Sometimes, I can see the color of the clothing worn by the folks walking their dogs; sometimes, I hear the panting of the dogs before I see their walkers. Always, I am a bit shaky and uncertain. Fog and I have an interesting relationship. I am scared and nervous when I encounter fog and yet strangely thrilled by the mysteries it hides. Always, though, I am anxious to discover what I will see when the sun finally burns away the mist.

When I reach my office at PDK, the air is a lot clearer, but my work right now is no less foggy. I was honored by PDK Executive Director Bill Bushaw’s invitation to become editor of Kappan. The history and influence of the magazine makes this an enticing job for any journalist who cares about education. And I am thrilled by the mysteries it hides. The history and influence of the magazine makes this an enticing job for any journalist who cares about education. And I am passionate about both journalism and education.

But moving into the Kappan editor’s chair brings with it a unique set of challenges. How do you build on a tradition like Kappan while also edging it into being a more compelling publication? How do you honor the history of an institution while also making it relevant for a new era? How do you respect the generations of readers who have supported Kappan for decades while also attracting a new generation of readers who will dominate the field for the next several decades? How do you make Kappan provocative and lively while not falling into the trap of making it colorful without substance?

I’m at the point where I can see clearly now how the magazine has been produced. But I am not yet able to see clearly where Kappan is going. I am building the proverbial bridge while walking across it.

As we move farther into this year, you will start to see some small changes. Each issue of Kappan will include news about the organization in which you are a member. Instead of writing letters to the editor, we’re inviting you to make those comments online and create an ongoing conversation with one another about what you read in Kappan. Beginning in November, we will print Kappan on a different paper that will enhance the look of the magazine. Each month, I will interview the author of at least one Kappan article and post that podcast online.

Since you are hardly an uninterested party, I invite you to share your ideas about the future of Kappan. Tell me what you’ve valued and what you wish would go away. Tell me what you think about every change that we make and how we can do our work better. Every idea you share is a light that will burn away a bit of this early fog I’m in. I look forward to listening and responding in some way to everyone, and I’m confident our collective ideas will quickly take Kappan into a bright future.

I just wish I could say the same about the fog of my morning runs. — JR