Director’s Corner: Potential New Paths

The second step in learning *The Art of Possibility*, according to Zander and Zander (2000) is to move beyond the constraints of our world of measurement and “Step into the Universe of Possibility.” In the world of education, excessive focus on assessments, grades, norms and comparisons creates an emphasis on competition between children, classes, schools, etc. as each strives for the highest rank in a system that restricts the label of “success” for the top few. Setting measurement aside opens the possibilities of each one’s potential so that we can imagine what can be. This stance allows us to use the first practice to invent a positive and productive narrative. Zander and Zander suggest that, “We decide that the essence of a child is joy, and joy she is. Our small business attracts the label, ‘The Can-Do Company,’ and that is exactly who we are.” Basically this practice is about how we think about the people and situations we encounter. By orienting ourselves to the abundant possibilities, we can risk being cooperative, including everyone, and together being the best we can be.

Keith Baker’s children’s book “L, M, N, O, peas” is “for pea-ple everywhere – young and old, large and small, green and round.” The book includes an alphabet of characters (all represented by peas) contributing their talents to the world. The acrobats, artists, and astronauts are all valued, as are the quilters and quarterbacks, the scientists, swimmers, and sailors. Both the text and the illustrations emphasize the uniqueness of each pea character, and the book ends with an invitation to consider, “Who are you?” Helping each other identify ourselves as helpers, listeners, friends, explorers, etc. will help each of us live into the possibilities that fit our unique potential.

The third practice “Give Yourself and Others an A” starts from an affirmation that everyone has potential and focuses all the energy on helping each individual to shine. By assigning an A grade at the outset, we can then seek meaningful ways to support each person’s progress. When the inevitable mistakes occur, we respond with openness to learning from them. The authors suggest an initial reaction of, “How fascinating!”, which then prompts positive and proactive problem solving.

One of the books we discovered while reading *The Art of Possibility*, “You Are My I Love You” (MaryAnn Cusimano Love, 2001), has become a staff favorite! The poetic book starts with, “I am your parent; you are my child. I am your quiet place; you are my wild.” The book continues in similar fashion to highlight the ways that parent and child could view each other’s qualities as valuable contributions along life’s journey, rather than as nuisances, weaknesses or failures. As I continue to parent an adult child and prepare to become a grandparent, I particularly appreciate the line, “I am your way home; you are my new path.” While supporting my daughter’s choices has led me to learning about different lifestyles, foods, and birthing practices, I also find that my openness to doing so enables her to seek connections with our family traditions going back generations. When parenting challenges you, try to free yourself from expectations and comparisons so you can take a fresh look at your child and at the situation. Look for the possibilities open to you, be bold in exploring them, and appreciate the resulting growth in both you and your child.