Director’s Corner: The Heart of Work

When we adopt the playful and positive attitudes toward our learning, as advocated by Zander and Zander's practices of "Rule #6" and "The Way Things Are", then we experience the freedom to engage fully in our life and work. This freedom is the foundation for The Art of Possibility's next two practices, both of which resonate very well with the learning culture at the Children's School and at Carnegie Mellon University. Our work here is guided by Andrew Carnegie's motto, “My heart is in the work.” Our new leader, Dr. Subra Suresh, has altered the phrase slightly to “My work is from the heart” as a way of emphasizing his inaugural theme of “Crossing Boundaries, Transforming Lives.” Both visionaries embrace a passionate sense of possibility, which is exactly what Zander and Zander advocate when they talk about their practice of “Giving Way to Passion.” In fact, they suggest “actively surrendering our boundaries” so that we can participate wholly with an urgency and momentum to our efforts. This passion yields a “spiritedness in going beyond where before [we] might have stopped” (p. 121), which then inspires others to also do their best.

Karen Lynn Williams’ book, “Painted Dreams”, demonstrates the possibilities envisioned by Ti Marie when she refuses to have her passion for art limited by her Haitian family’s poverty and her need to help with daily chores and caregiving. With only a small amount of found materials, she secretly creates a mural that attracts the attention of her entire community, improves her mother’s market sales, and even impresses the revered elder artist in town, all of which change the way her parents view and value her unique talent so she is free to develop it further.

The next step, of course, is that passion freely embraced and expressed results in “Lighting a Spark” of possibility in others such that they eagerly enroll themselves in similarly passionate endeavors. “The practice of enrollment is about giving yourself as a possibility to others and being ready, in turn, to catch their spark.” Amazing learning is possible when our educators are free to share their passions. For example, our cooking program and renovated kitchen became a reality because Miss McMichael's passion for cooking sparked the interest of our staff, children, and families. In the same way, our involvement in woodworking, our gym classes, our choice of unit topics and related activities, our success in raising scholarship funds, our unique professional development opportunities, etc. all result from passions shared and connections made.

The book, “Extra Yarn” by Mac Barnett “is the story of how a young girl and her magical box of yarn transform a community” from a black and white world of isolation to a colorful world of connection. Annabelle simply enjoys knitting and sharing her knitted garments with everyone and every thing in town, including pets, trucks, and houses. She quietly persists despite disbelief and criticism, and she steadfastly refuses to accept millions of dollars from a powerful person who seeks to control the never-empty box of yarn. In the end, passion trumps power and Annabelle’s spark brightens others’ lives.

As we together strive to facilitate each of our children’s development, let us aim to awaken their passions for learning and be open to the sparks they have to share with us at school and at home. By opening ourselves to the possibilities that they inspire, we will find our own hearts more fully in the work of teaching and parenting.