



Why “ _____ ” Matters



Chapter 4 I Wonder...



Image by Giulia Forsythe <http://gforsythe.ca>

WHY THE ARTS MATTER



A story shared by Stephen Hurley at Northern Edge Algonquin on August 7, 2011

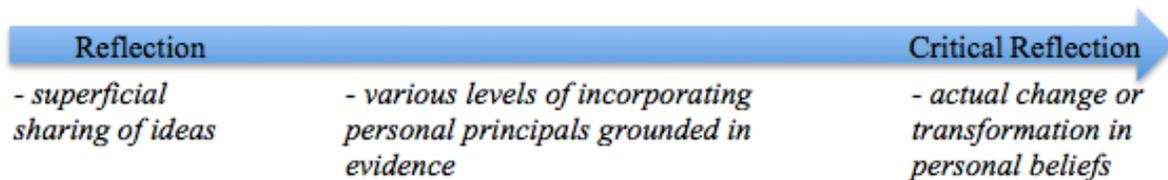
WHY CRITICAL REFLECTION MATTERS



by *Kelly Power*

There is a distinct difference between reflection and critical reflection. It always intrigues me when I hear someone talk about how they reflect. I can't help but wonder what their true purpose is.

I've come to an understanding that there is a continuum of critical reflection that begins with a lower level of reflection and advances forward to the deepest level of critical reflection that involves some sort of change in actions.



So you say you blog or journal as a means of reflecting and archiving your reflections. Have you deeply reflected on what your main purpose may be? Are you simply sharing information for the sake of sharing or are you a critically reflective practitioner for deeper reasons, for improvement of self?

Signs that it might be ego-driven:

- You feel that the more you write, the more others will learn from you
- Writing makes you feel good about who you are
- You constantly share your reflections with others and take pride because others read, comment and think you are so deep
- You check your blog statistics each day to see how many are now tuned into the “gospel of you”

Signs that it might be for personal transformation:

- You make your reflections private for awhile, between you and yourself
- You reflect on “what” you have learned today
- You understand “why” your experiences can bring you to a higher version of yourself through challenged principles
- You consider “how” to incorporate feedback from others
- You change what you do tomorrow based on what you have learned today
- You share your reflections when you are ready to be vulnerable and admit the transformation you have experienced

So where are you on the continuum? When you reflect critically, it must go beyond simply describing an experience. When you reflect critically there is action. And change. You cannot say that you critically reflect at the deepest level without some sort of change occurring that challenges your assumptions and beliefs.

Words on a computer screen or in a hand-written journal are just words.
But words do not define beliefs. Actions do.

I wonder where my critical reflection will bring me?

WHY FEAR MATTERS



by *[Alana Callan](#)*

Why fear matters?

“Fear. Good place to start.” ¹

As I was writing this essay and getting ready for the [unplugd.ca](#) weekend I found I was full of anticipation and a little bit of fear... heck a lot of fear!

“Why am I going? Why did I get selected? What can I contribute?”

Fear can be a debilitating emotion but it can also be a strong motivator... so I’m trying to embrace my fears and not let them get in my way.

My artifact for submission was in the form of a story, a simple narrative about my learning journey and it included descriptive words such as: sharing, collaborating, thinking, participating, modeling, and reflecting. These are all words that I use, understand and believe in. These are the words I usually use when I start to talk about what learning means to me.

Learning is a personal journey; it has to be owned, it has to be authentic and meaningful to the individual, and one has to be willing and able to take the chances necessary to follow their heart/mind and be open to what new opportunities bring. Fear and discomfort can be a big part of the journey.

I say this as an adult who has come through the formal education system, works in it and supports the development of other adults (teachers) who are looking to develop their skills, refine their teaching techniques and/or design learning opportunities that go beyond the classroom walls.

And...

I am also a parent of a school age child who challenges my thinking and my confidence sometimes (most times) in what I know and what I mean and what I understand.

She makes me slow down, pay attention, play, show, share, listen, talk, animate, question, inquire, feel, cry, laugh and wonder.

Things happen very fast sometimes and you have to proceed more by feel and instinct rather than by common sense or common procedures. Sometimes things take longer than you planned or you go in a direction that you hadn't anticipated.

<http://youtu.be/oE4vKl2Y5No> or [here](#).

I wonder what learning and sharing would like if we let fear get in the way.

WHY TRUST MATTERS



by [Jeannine St. Amand](#)

As a parent involved in public education governance I've learned there is a lot of mistrust in our system - in our vision, our beliefs, our decisions, our actions, and our desire for change. I've learned:

Some parents don't trust that teachers are delivering the right mix of content and skills and giving every child in the classroom the attention needed to reach their potential.

Some parents don't trust that administrators are ensuring teachers are equipped with the right resources and training to deliver the curriculum.

Some parents don't trust that bureaucrats have designed a curriculum that balances breadth and depth and respects the past while preparing for the future.

Some parents don't trust that policy makers have the education of children as their primary goal when allocating funding to programs.

And some parents don't trust that students are responsible enough to lead their own learning.

With so much mistrust what must we do so that parents will come to understand our desire for change? We must build relationships. We must communicate in an open, honest and respectful manner. We must be transparent in our own learning. We must discuss our fears and recognize the fears of parents and work together to overcome them. We must share our struggles to break the habits of how we learned to do things and encourage parents to see how knowledge can be constructed in new ways. We must show the power of networks to improve the lives of adults, and then show them the power of learning networks for their children. We must be transparent in our actions, honest in our words and accept parents for where they are in their learning journey.

Imagine if we respect parents enough to connect, communicate, collaborate and create with them so that they may understand the power of our vision, our beliefs, our actions and our tools.

I wonder how I can use my voice to build more trust and include parents in transforming learning?

WHY JOY MATTERS



by [*Dean Shareski*](#)

Today, more than ever our students often experience of a lifetime of heartbreak, disasters and disappointments before they even arrive at school. When school could be the best part of their day, it's simply another negative experience. I wonder if we ever ask ourselves, "Where's the joy?"

I've been in too many schools; too many classrooms where smiles and joy are hard to come by. The pressure and business of learning seems to be sucking the joy out of our schools. While there is much that needs to be done in our institutions and curriculum to address this problem, there is much that can be done in classrooms and by teachers that can bring joy back into our classrooms.

Alfie Kohn talks about joy being not a means to an end, but an end in itself. As a classroom teacher I recall having students in my classroom whose files were filled with a myriad of problems and challenges that quite frankly overwhelmed me. Academically they had mountains to climb. I wasn't sure I could help the children meet all those challenges but I also noticed that joy was certainly missing from their school experience. So even if they came late to school, or were non-compliant, my goal was to ensure they knew that they mattered and that my classroom was a place to smile.

It has become more and more difficult to consider the role of joy in our schools. Teachers have been told other things matter more: test scores, new curriculum, district initiatives and other data that suggests deficiencies.

Is anyone measuring for joy? A joyful learning environment might be the most important thing you create for a child. If indeed the much used phrase "lifelong learner" is a major goal for schools, could joy be an ingredient for that?

Maybe we ought to start counting smiles. If at the end of the year, you can honestly say your students leave as joyful learners, you'll be among the best teachers I know.

I wonder what I did today to bring joy into my world?

WHY VIDEO GAMES MATTER



by Jen Deyenberg

What if there were a tool that guided you through challenges and quests at your own pace?

What if the tool scaffolded learning through hints and clues available to you just when you needed them?

What if the tool assessed how you were doing and didn't let you progress until you have sufficient tools, skills, and preparation to go on?

What if the tool provided a safe environment for you to fail in, but encouraged and motivated you to keep trying?

What if the tool was full of rich narrative driven content?

What if the tool had characters that drew you in and inspired you to create, wonder, and play?

What if you were rewarded automatically for progress and success?

What if the tool could simulate things that weren't possible?

What if there were puzzles and challenges that played to the most critical thinking and problem solving skills?

What if there was rich, descriptive text, with more words than most novels, which you were eager to read to keep progressing?

What if there was beautiful art, rich texture, colour, and pattern to inspire your own creations?

What if you absolutely loved the tool, and played with it every chance with you got?

What if the tool were available in many platforms, portable, accessible, affordable, already in many homes, and had more choices of content than you could ever imagine?

What if you could develop your own challenges and share them with others around the world?

What if you could create new levels, characters, worlds, and write all about your experiences, create stories about these new worlds, and write how to guides to help others?

What if you could share your creations in online communities and even play with other people from around the world, connecting with others?

What if we brought it into the classroom? I wonder...

WHY THE ARTS MATTER



by *[Stephen Hurley](#)*

We live in a period where our schools have become somewhat calcified by an approach to learning that doesn't leave a whole lot to the imagination. Fortunately, passionate conversations are beginning that wonder out loud about the role of arts education in helping to make our schools more responsive to the needs of all students.

Put aside the idea that quality arts programs can be a source of engagement for students who may be otherwise disconnected from the school experience. Put aside the idea that the arts can help boost academic achievement in students. And put aside the notion that exposure to the arts can affect brain development in people of all ages. While all of these reasons are part of a resurgence in arts advocacy across many jurisdictions, they don't capture the one really compelling reason arts education should matter to those who are interested in quality education.

Above and beyond everything else, the arts open the door to imagination and creativity, and offer them a place at the table! Engagement in visual arts, drama, dance, music and media production provide students rich opportunities to see and think about the world in new and inventive ways. In this way, the arts offer us a way to nurture imagination; when that imagination is given a voice and is communicated to others in some form, we move into the realm of creativity.

The arts not only offer students a safe place to explore their world from a variety of perspectives, but quality arts programs also provide the skills necessary to communicate those perspectives to others in powerful ways. In a very real sense, the arts represent a dynamic set of languages that enable us to read and write the world in ways that extend beyond traditional text.

For some of our students this will deepen and enliven their literacy lives. But for the many students who do not effectively connect with the more traditional text forms that tend to define school success, strong arts programs will become a critical part of their literacy lives.

The work of imagination and creativity creates an open space for possibility and alternatives. At its very core, it is work that is hopeful and forward-looking.

In this process, new possibilities are born, new ideas and practices take root and the connection between schooling and education becomes stronger.

I wonder what will emerge when we allow ourselves to expand our conception of literacy to embrace the language of the arts.

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