

Balancing Responsibility, Relationships, and Grace as we Strive to be Resilient

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**“We are relationships, we cannot dissociate from them.
Our relations with others shape us and give meaning to our world.”**

~ Scherto Gill, Ph.D (August 2020)

As I sit down to write to you this month, I find myself gripped by distractions. Although only the first of October, my 2020-21 school year ‘to do’ list is already long and growing by the minute. The realities of supporting teachers and schools as they try to do their important work with students during a pandemic is complex.

Each of the particulars I have chosen to jot on my ever-growing list has already made it through the filters of ‘important’ and ‘urgent’. I have tried to carefully curate so as to make the best use of my most precious resources ~ time and energy. The feeling that there is work that urgently needs to be done suffuses.

Despite all best intentions, I become stalled in my efforts to ‘get at it’. I am distracted from my ‘tasks’ by ‘other’. *Distraction* (noun) is defined as:

1. a thing that prevents someone from giving full attention to something else.
2. extreme agitation of the mind or emotions.

I quickly become frustrated and the inevitable negative self-talk begins...*if only* I were more disciplined. *If only*, I was more organized. As I ruminate on all of my ‘*if only-s*’, I make attempts to categorize and rationalize. How can I be more productive? Maybe I need to practice more mindfulness or meditation? (well ok...maybe actually start the latter?)

I finally resort to asking myself, “What IS it that is competing for my precious and limited commodities of time and energy aforementioned?” WHAT is draining me? Why did I not seem to have as many such vexations during my educational leave which also happened during the pandemic? Inevitably, it eventually dawns on me. Most of the ‘annoying’ interruptions or ‘other’ preventing me from getting to those ‘tasks’ have to do with ‘people’ and ‘relationships’. During my leave, my circle of ‘people’ was exponentially smaller and therefore my level of distraction was as well...

Let me be clear, I AM a PEOPLE person. I chose my career as a teacher because it is centered in developing HUMANS. I also

really enjoy and like the people I work and live with...most days at least. That said, those PEOPLE I love, come with needs, emotions, unpredictability and the general ‘messiness’ of life that can torpedo my daily plans faster than an MK 54.

As is often my experience, when I am struggling, the universe finds a way to send me wisdom...this time, it came in the form of a book by Parker Palmer gifted to me by a dear friend and mentor...as I randomly flipped open a page these words jumped out at me:

“A vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I must live – but rather the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life.” (Palmer, p. 4)

Parker’s words reminded me immediately of a robust discussion I once had with a prominent New Brunswicker who had very strong opinions about the limitations of our teacher certification system and how all would be ‘fixed’ within public education if we simply found a way to assure that every teacher could ‘prove’ they were ‘expert’ in their subject area...annually. Our conversation eventually took a more positive turn when I was able to convince him that in order to be a truly effective teacher, our ‘subject’ expertise is not ‘math’ or ‘technology’ – it IS our students. Our professional training makes us experts in the complex processes of human development, teaching and learning...our students ARE our curriculum. We also happen to use subject matter to achieve our most important curricular outcome – watching our students flourish.

...and then it hit me.

My **real** work isn’t found on my ever-growing ‘to do’ list. My **REAL** work is found in the daily conversations and interactions of the very people I have mistakenly allowed myself to temporarily think of as ‘distractions’. Supporting them as we all struggle to survive (let alone thrive) in this unknown abyss of leading learning in the midst of a pandemic is the most important task.

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~ Parker Palmer

Realizing that most humans are barely achieving the most basic needs as identified by Maslow's hierarchy (1943) right now and adjusting accordingly is imperative...some of the items on my list will just have to wait.

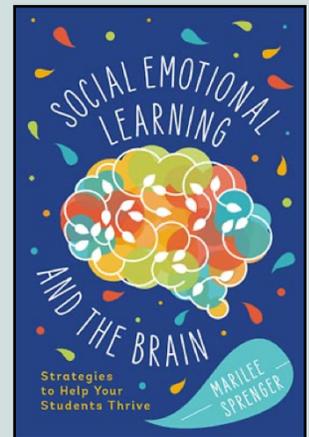
Thanks again Palmer! I'm going to close with a commitment to put my 'to do' list aside and give myself a break....I'm going to get better at being OK with ending my work day knowing I'm doing the best I can under the circumstances while learning LOTS of important lessons that will hopefully help inform tomorrow. I hope you can offer yourself that same grace...I think it's the only hope we have to be resilient enough to last to the end of this test!

Take care,



Book Give Away:

Congratulations to last month's winner, **Nathaniel Steeves at Riverview East School** in ASD-East. Up for grabs this month is a copy of **"Social Emotional Learning and the Brain: Strategies to Help Your Students Thrive"** by Marilee Sprenger. Sound intriguing? Send me an email at ardith.shirley@nbta.ca with 'Book Draw' as the subject line!



Works Consulted:

Gill, S. (2020, August). Approaching Educational Evaluation from a Relational Perspective. (R. Stratton-Berkessel, Interviewer)
Hall, K. V. (2019). *Relationship, Responsibility, and Regulation: Trauma-Invested Practices for Fostering Resilient Learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
Palmer, P. (2000). *Let Your Life Speak, Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

May 7, 2021

Virtual Council Day 2021: Altogether Different

