

The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up: Time for a 'Purge' of Practice?

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Like many New Brunswickers (according to CBC), I recently ended up with one of the worst colds I can recall. Completely zapped of energy, I spent an entire weekend in my pyjamas feeling sorry for myself and mentally listing all of the things I should be doing while at the same time unable to find the oomph to begin even the smallest of tasks.

In my fevered, lethargic and Sussex Ginger-ale fueled state, I searched for comfort. I eventually found it in my fuzzy blanket, cozy couch and Netflix. The "Trending Now" options on my screen highlighted that Marie Kondo, bestselling author of "The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up", had a new series. I mindlessly clicked. Three episodes later, I found myself standing in my closet as I surveyed and scrutinized my belongings. The temptation to start purging captivated me.

I would love to tell you that I was so inspired that I immediately dove in and began applying the 'KonMari' method of organization throughout my entire home and that it is now a complete Zen-like retreat. Alas, the cold was real and we are not even close to that fairy tale ending...yet! That said, I have found the petite Marie and her 'joyful' approach to our belongings occupying premium real estate in my mind - "What might it look like to apply a 'KonMari' approach to our professional practice?"

For those of you who have yet to be exposed, here is a quick summary of this tiny Japanese organizing expert's philosophy. Firstly, Kondo suggests that you collect everything you own in a specific category and you heap it into an enormous pile on the floor. As you stare at the mountain of stuff accumulated, you become acutely aware of the sheer volume you have gathered. In doing so, it is hoped that it becomes obvious how unnecessary much of it is due to duplication, poor fit or perhaps even being a bit worn out. As you sort through your pile one item at a time, Kondo suggests picking up each thing and you asking yourself, "Does this spark joy in my life?" If so, keep. If not, thank it for being part of your journey and set it (and yourself) free.

Perhaps it is our perennial environment of under-resourced schools and classrooms, or our daily interactions with children and families living in poverty, but I think most teachers are in a constant battle not to be hoarders. Many a teacher has filled their trunks to with "treasures" that someone might need. Odd mittens or socks? Someone may need an extra next time we are on playground duty. About to throw out an old Pringles can, paper towel roll or bread tag? Those will make great math manipulatives in next week's lesson!

The same goes for teaching and learning practices if we aren't careful. There is literally no end to the wonderful ideas and strategies that are available to us. The next BIG idea is always just around the corner. Unfortunately, trying to introduce all of them into our environments will result in cluttered confusion for ourselves and our students unless we intentionally consider and curate each of them first. John Hattie's meta-analysis and research in Visible Learning reinforces this point. After studying over 800+ meta studies he concludes that there are well over 200 strategies and approaches that show promise that when it comes to teaching almost everything works. The question becomes, what works best, given these students, at this time in my classroom? "Know thy impact!", is Hattie's refrain.

I think that for teachers, in order to find Marie's 'life-changing magic', John Hattie would suggest a shift in mindset. This would include acknowledging that less is actually more and giving ourselves permission to realize that every bright shiny new thing is not always for us. Honouring the fact that the 'tidying' (teaching) process is an individual journey - no one else can do it for you. Likewise, you can't do it for anyone else. What works in one closet (classroom) will not necessarily in another's. Teaching ourselves to become more intentional about what 'things' we bring into your space in the first place is magical... and after careful consideration, being able to toss away without guilt is where the real joy is found.

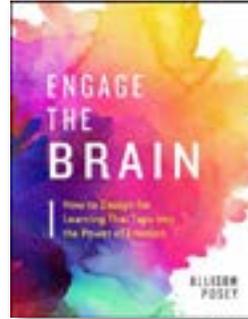
"We need to show consideration for others by helping them avoid the burden of owning more than they need or can enjoy."

- Marie Kondo



Book Give-Away!

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Sound interesting? Send me an email (ardith.shirley@nbta.ca) with the subject line **'Book Draw'** before March 10th!

“Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.”
-Socrates



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