

Perfection: A Flawless and Boring State

The Educator's Guide to An Imperfectly Perfect Classroom

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*“Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.”
– Leonard Cohen*

The Back Story

One Sunday afternoon I attended an event for ladies who like to drink tea and talk about meaningful things. A lovely afternoon, replete with scones, Early Gray and reams and reams of pearls of every color, shape, and size. You see, the theme of the afternoon fete' was “Pearls of Perfection” and attendees wore jeans and pearls to celebrate the idea of seeking perfection.

Of course the story of perfection was not straightforward. As the poet says above...“That’s how the light gets in”. So let me share this provocative anecdote. The keynote speaker at the event shared the story of a young teacher who had gone to serve in an orphanage in China and encountered a little girl whose heart defect kept her from being adopted. It seemed nothing could be done to help the sick child. One day as the young teacher walked in the market she saw hundreds of jars of pearls, being sold for mere pennies. Curious about these seemingly valueless pearls she was told that they were “imperfect”; fit to be ground up for cosmetics.

The creative young woman bought many jars of these pearls and sent them home to her own mother, who began a campaign to use the imperfect pearls to make jewelry and crafts then sold to raise funds to bring the sick child to the US for surgery. The rest is history and jars of imperfect pearls became the vehicle to save a life and bring a child home to a forever family.

The question for us : “Are we too quick to dismiss imperfection?” Can we reframe situations to become “light” ? Opening paths to creativity and resiliency.

We Are Our Own Worst Enemy

Individuals drawn to the work of teaching set high standards for themselves and for others. We like things to run smoothly, to proceed without glitches, in short, to be “perfect”. Inevitably, we will be disappointed.

Systems are inconsistent. Human beings fragile. Things happen. Every day. Even, it seems, every hour. Our response is disappointment. Disenchantment. If things don't go perfectly, we have failed and the entire idea, event, program, or relationship is not worth our time. Are we too hard on ourselves?

Strategies

I would like to submit 10 strategies to allow creative imperfection.

- 1.*Slow down. When we rush, we limit our ability to fully appreciate the subtext.
- 2.*Turn on the light. Beauty can be hidden and must be illuminated in order to be appreciated.
- 3.*Ask quality questions. What might seem imperfect might just be incomplete.
- 4.*Ask for feedback. We are often too quick to judge.
- 5.*Consider multiple viewpoints.
6. *Take a break and try it again. It might be the perfect activity at the wrong time.
7. *Try it again, in smaller parts. Pacing is powerful.
8. *Re-frame the scenario. “How can I grow from this?”
- 9.* Re-purpose the activity or event. Take it apart and put it together in a unique way.
10. *Apply the 5 to 1 formula. For every one negative that you use to describe the activity, search out 5 positive attributes.

Conclusion

Perfection. When one searches the dictionary for a meaning, interesting phrases emerge: 1) Without flaw; 2) A state or condition that cannot be improved; or 3) Flawless. Intense. Even boring? Perhaps perfection is over-rated? In the teaching world, there is probably little need for perfection. Instead, there is a great capacity for creativity, ingenuity and novelty. Give yourselves and your students a break. Who needs perfection!

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