

One Year: What I've learned about love, kindness and being human.

By Cat Clara, CAP Coordinator



I have a difficult job. I don't think anyone would disagree, but I think many would choose not to do it. My staff and I work with the neediest population of students in the district. Not only do they face academic challenges, they also face major challenges in their everyday existence. While I am a certified teacher, I also do the work of administrator, social worker and sometimes parent. All of these roles require me to be level headed, fair and most importantly, compassionate.

Our program is built on second, third, fourth...chances. I believe that it is all of our collective responsibility to ensure that our learning community is caring and respectful and that we explore every avenue possible to help our students move forward in healthy and positive ways. This is true, not only for our program, but also in our district as a whole. On a daily basis, I must revisit the Buddhist concept of 'loving-kindness.' I must look within myself and remember that my job as a teacher and a human being are to embrace others, empathize with their difficulties and accept them for who they are. Every single one of us makes mistakes. We don't always have the right answers or know where our journey in life will lead us, but it is within our power to make choices that will help build individuals up, rather than tearing them down. Brene Brown states, "We are biologically, cognitively, physically and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we're meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick. There are certainly other causes of illness, numbing and hurt, but the absence of love and belonging will always lead to suffering (Brown, 2010, p. 26)." As educators, we have the power to relieve suffering or inflict it.

We are in a difficult time when it comes to education. I often lament that we don't have enough resources to meet the needs of our students, to educate them in the ways we think will best move them forward in their lives. What I must remember is that I, as an individual and a member of an educational community, have the power to make a difference. The reason I became a teacher was because I loved working with young adults. I can choose to use the power I have to love, care and educate these kids. I can choose to work towards making change without placing blame on any individual or collective. I can choose to see myself in the

challenges of others and walk beside them, rather than ahead or behind them. I often think of the Margaret Mead quote, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." What I have learned in a year as CAP's administrator is that the collective we (me, my staff, all staff in the district, our students) are obligated to working towards creating a more humane society, regardless of our circumstances, we are in this together.

Brown, B. (2010). *The gifts of imperfection: Let go of who you're supposed to be and embrace who you are*. Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden.