

Do What Makes You Human

“I’m sitting with a principal colleague of mine in a coffee shop after school one day. He’s telling me a story about his daughter who has been desperate to make one of the school’s Jump Jam Dance teams. This year has been her third year of trying. Each year of rejection she’s taken the news on the chin and looked forward to the next opportunity. She arrived home with the news that this year she had missed out yet again. This time it was because of a scheduling conflict and she wasn’t able to get to the try outs. For a ten year old this must be quite a setback. She went to the teacher in charge to see if there was another opportunity to audition. The teacher told her that she was sorry, but this is just how things go.

To be honest, my heart breaks a little to hear this. Our schools are full of little people just like this. For many their whole lives revolve around their schools and the opportunities that come their way. They live and breathe their schooling. It’s these sorts of kids who make your world as a principal all worth it.

My colleague continues, there is more to this story. His daughter arrives home the next day all excited. She’s made the Jump Jam team after all! Somehow all the planets have aligned and the teacher in charge of Jump Jam has found a way to make it work. Awesome!”

Not only do I want a school full of pupils like my colleague’s daughter, but I want a whole school full of people like the Jump Jam teacher who can see a passion, and who can find a way!

These types of stories make up the goodness of our schools every day. They are everywhere if we care to take a look. Stories of kids really giving a damn; really caring about the little community that is their school. Our schools are also full of adults; teachers, support staff, and parent helpers, who see schools as much more than strategic plans, data driven requirements, and meetings for the sake of meetings. They see our schools as their stories, as their opportunity to be human and show humanity.

Unfortunately, we often find ourselves distracted from this humanity by an educational world full of acronyms, new language to explain old ideas, and figurative ambulances too close to the bottom of societies cliffs to make any real difference. We are resourced by a number eight wire mentality and a she’ll be right attitude. We are judged on data that demands acceleration and that has little time for the notion of playing the long game. All distractions.

Meanwhile, in our playgrounds our little people are basing the success of their lives on whether they can do cartwheels like Maggie, score goals like Phoenix, or whether Sione will be selected for the Spelling Bee team.

Our schools should be a plethora of opportunities and positive challenges. We should be judged on our ability to provide excitement and inquiry in the lives of our children and on our ability to light fires in their imaginations.

So, a question is, “what are you doing in your school to make this happen?”

The front part of the *New Zealand Curriculum* is an excellent place to start. The Key Competencies are great for developing ideas around building your community. Luckily, they aren't age dependent or level based, which means you can build into your school lots of opportunities and positive challenges that meet the human needs of those you serve.

Equally so, we need to embrace the creative parts of the curriculum. If you haven't read Sir Ken Robinson's book, "*Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*", then start with his TED talk, "*Do Schools Kill Creativity?*"² In it he argues that "we don't grow into creativity, we grow out of it" and that "creativity is as important as literacy and we should afford it the same status."

Creativity is at the root of what makes us human. No other species on the planet is as creative as us. Our ability to be creative extends itself everywhere. It isn't confined to our art rooms, dance studios, music suites or sports fields. You'll find it anywhere that you care to look.

And you need to talk to your little people. What do they see as being important? What do they get really excited about at school? What are the things that they look forward to and what would they like to see more of?

Make sure that your Charter reflects these things.

It's a well-known truth that no ex-pupil ever walked up to a teacher in the street and said, "thank you Mr Bryant for the worksheets you gave me in Year 4."

Embrace those things that make your school human.

²https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en