

Kathy FLADAGER Principal SD34

The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are

by Brené Brown
(2010)

Courage sounds great, but we need to talk about how it requires us to let go of what other people think, and for most of us, that's scary. Compassion is something we all want, but are we willing to look at why boundary-setting and saying no is a critical component of compassion?...Belonging is an essential component of Wholehearted living, but first we have to cultivate self-acceptanc (pg. 5).

I am honoured to submit a review on behalf of a book that has transformed my life, both personally and professionally, to our Principl(ed) Magazine. I have now read Brené's book for the second time in two years, and with each reading, I come away with a renewed sense of purpose, and confidence in what has become an increasingly challenging world. I suspect that, like myself, there are many of my colleagues across this province who hold themselves to a very high standard of behaviour, especially in the work that we do on behalf of our province's children. We are accountable to so many, and when we do make mistakes, which we will, we carry this weight around with us. How do we, and how CAN we, manage the multi-faceted perceptions that exist around us, our inner need to achieve on behalf of our students, and do all of this in a constantly in-motion world? Brené's work, based upon her years of shame and wholehearted living research, lays out some inner-work steps that



we all can take in support of embracing ourselves which may aid us in our quest to do our best (and not strive to be perfect!).

"Practicing self-love means learning how to trust ourselves, to treat ourselves with respect, and to be kind and affectionate towards ourselves" (pg. 27). First, we must practice compassion for ourselves, in terms of how we talk to ourselves, both when we make a mistake, and when we do something worthy. We are, by nature, a humble profession, and we forget to take a breath, and to reflect upon the good work that we do to support our students, our staff, our parents, and our colleagues. How we speak to ourselves will, indeed, influence how we speak to and treat others. And although Brené speaks to practicing compassion for ourselves, and for others, she is also insistent that we must set boundaries, and hold folks accountable (in this

Have you read a book that changed you, challenged you or surprised you?

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way we practice respect). This is key in the work that we do to support students.

Brené goes on to exploring, in depth, how to live a wholehearted life with her 10 guideposts. She frames her Chapters in terms of Cultivating: Authenticity; Self-Compassion; Resilient Spirit; Gratitude and Joy; Intuition and Trusting Faith; Creativity; Play and Rest; Calm and Stillness; Meaningful Work; and Laughter, Song, and Dance. These guidepost Chapters include Brené's trademark stories, humour, questions, and tools to support us in some very personal growth.

I would recommend that if you are planning on reading *Dare to Lead*, or if you already have read it, that you read *The Gifts of Imperfection*. Both books go hand-in-hand in helping us to practice courage, compassion, and connection (must-haves when we are in a leadership role). In fact, some current work that our District — under the leadership of our Assistant-Superintendent, Carla Danielsson — is doing with our Elementary Administration team is based upon Brené's book, *Dare to Lead*.

If you wish to go beyond the Brené Brown quotations that appear to be all over social media currently, and you wish to rediscover your purpose, joy, at home and/or at work, I cannot recommend this book enough.

Kathy is celebrating her 30th year in education!

She taught in California for 6 years, and then moved to her current home/District in Abbotsford. She has been an Administrator for the past 12 ½ years.

Kathy is currently working alongside the fabulous team of children, staff, and parents at Blue Jay Elementary School in Abbotsford. Kathy is a Grandma to two, and loves teaching, art, reading, and can spend hours in bookstores (*her husband is a very patient fellow*).

Sue Tonnesen
Vice-Principal SD62

Make Learning Magical

by Tisha Richmond
(2018)

I recently read *Make Learning Magical* by Tisha Richmond, a former culinary arts teacher and now District Tech Instructional Specialist. Her book is an inspirational look at how she transformed her classroom into a gamified environment which includes fun, laughter and a healthy dose of competition. It is an experience that keeps students running into her class to eat it all up!

Make Learning MAGICAL...

Magical is an acronym:

Memorable beginnings that build excitement and relationships

Authenticity and Agency that empowers students

Gamified experiences to engage learning on a higher level

Innovation that makes learning exciting and relevant

Creation, collaboration, and curiosity to equip learners for real life

Authentic audiences to bring out your students' best work

Legacy built through meaningful experiences

Memorable Beginnings (Excitement and Relationships)

Tisha is a great storyteller and brings these stories into each of the elements of the acronym MAGICAL. During the first part of the book, she speaks about the magic of hospitality beginning with a warm welcome, an entertaining hook as well



as passion and enthusiasm. In creating a hospitable environment, she brings in the elements of décor and the importance of colour, and the effects colour has on students. She touches on some of the specific elements that she has in her own classroom — a coffee bar, music, aroma — and how she, the teacher, can make a huge impact on the students she teaches through simple things like greeting students and making everyone feel special and welcome.

I especially liked the 'Favorite Things' activity explained in Chapter 2. Like Tisha, my favorite movie of all time is *The Sound of Music*. As this is one of the first activities of the school year, it has an impact on the students in her classroom. During this activity, students are asked to write down three of their favorite things and discuss them with their neighbor. Once that activity is complete, Tisha then shares with them *her* favorite things, her 'passions', through the use of a slide show. She then takes her cue from Dave Burgess' book *Teach Like a Pirate* and has her class sculpt one of their favorite things from homemade playdough. This example is a great way to start off the school year with a hook rather than with the typical "rules" and a course outline. And, of course, she includes a recipe to make your own playdough!

Authenticity and Agency

Being authentic and getting to know those we serve is the idea behind this Chapter. Once we get to know our students, we begin to see the light that radiates from within them. Finding their inner beauty and sharing it with others is the focus Tisha has for her students.

This part of the book also talks about the "Magic Attitude" which Tisha describes as more than just a habit: she describes it as

a mindset or an attitude of gratitude! Gratitude is looked at in depth and #Gratitudesnaps are described, as well as the cultivation of a culture of kindness. You really get the sense that Tisha creates a classroom environment where we share our fails, where students can shine and where students have agency over their work.

Gamified Experiences

Throughout this next Chapter, Tisha talks about gamification deconstructed where one *"takes the most motivational techniques of games and applies them to non-game settings like classrooms."* (M. Matera) Once you have found a game or game category that appeals to you, Tisha encourages you to ask yourself the following questions:

What do I enjoy about those games?

What can I learn from them?

What are the motivational aspects of the games that get people hooked and make us want to play again and again?

This how-to Chapter is quite in-depth and provides plenty of explanation as well as gamified examples Tisha has used in her classrooms. It ends with the assurance that games and gamification go beyond just the playing of the games. Challenge, collaboration, creativity as well as critical thinking are outlined in this Chapter and bring a complexity to the game that goes much deeper than scores, badges, points and winners.

Innovation

Tisha states that *"thinking about things differently, shaking up the status quo, and devising new and better ways of teaching – is how we make learning magical."* She says *"to get there, we have to have the mindset of an innovator."* She then talks about George Couros' eight

characteristics of an innovator's mindset in terms of herself as an educator. You can find the eight characteristics and much more in George's book *The Innovator's Mindset*.

1. Empathetic
2. Problem Finders/Solvers
3. Risk Takers
4. Networked
5. Observant
6. Creators
7. Resilient
8. Reflective

Creativity, Collaboration, and Curiosity

Throughout this Chapter, Tisha provides examples of opportunities that her students have engaged in to go above and beyond the classroom experience. She elaborates on creativity through the following topics:

- Bakery Missions
- Video Creation
- Stop-Motion Animation
- Sketchnoting and Reflection

The point she is making in this Chapter is the importance for educators to model what it looks like to try new things. Tisha says that students appreciate a teacher who is continuously trying new things, and being creative in their teaching and learning.

Collaboration has always been a part of the culinary classes that Tisha has taught and the most important piece of this is to create powerful teams and build relationships. This building of relationships allows the students to develop trust and because of this, they feel safe to take risks and the result is a deeper learning.

Tisha wants her students to become excited about the possibility of creating something amazing in her classes. She states that *"When we tap into curiosity, we experience the sheer joy of discovery. Creating an atmosphere of curiosity where students feel safe to explore and play is vital to building confidence and ownership of learning. The magical classroom is one where students are safe, valued, immersed*

and empowered. There is curiosity and wonder. [A]ll it takes is a little mystery and wonder to take a lesson from ordinary to amazing." These are just a few of the quotes that spoke to me throughout this part of her book.

Authentic Audience

Through connections with community partners, Tisha creates relevancy for her students. She states that *"Creating learning experiences that are meaningful and relevant is essential for keeping the integrity of our programs."*

Tisha talks about how the power of reflection and that making time and building reflection into her class time has been one of the best decisions she has made as a teacher. She highlights #Foodsnaps and Flipgrid as two platforms for reflection and leaves the reader with the question: *How can you use reflection to enhance your students' learning experiences?*

Legacy

We are making a difference and leaving a legacy with every interaction we have with students. Tisha states that she will continue to shine her light bright because she is going to make an impact on students one way or another! This Chapter highlights stories and examples of ways you can leave a legacy and how these examples have the power to transform students' lives. The important question Tisha leaves us with is: *What kind of a legacy will you leave?* She is a hard act to follow with her stories and examples, but her humbleness gives agency to every reader to...GO MAKE LEARNING MAGICAL!

Make Magic Happen...My Little Bit of Magic

Two years ago, I happened to write a blog post *"Make Magic Happen."* In it, I have my own acronym for the word MAGIC. You can find it here

suetonnesen.com/2017/07/21/make-magic-happen

Sue Tonnesen has been an educator for 28 years and an administrator for 11 years. She has a passion for reading, cycling and gardening. Sue has taught in SD82, has been a Principal in SD62 and is currently a Vice-Principal at David Cameron Elementary. She is also a peer mentor for the BCPVPA.