

LOVE LEARNING-LOVE LIFE

For Educators & Parents

September 2012 Volume I



SPONTANEITY:

Making Way for 'First Snows'

∞ EDDY PRESS ∞

5762 Hwy 7 East, P. O. Box 54099, Markham, Ontario, Canada. L3P 7Y4

Copyright © 2011, 2012, 2013 by Shelley Richardson

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-9876867-4-9

Books and Articles may be ordered through booksellers or from:

www.eddypress.com

SPONTANEITY IN LEARNING

“First Snows”

by **SHELLEY RICHARDSON**, College Professor, AMI Ed.

How do we offer children the richest learning opportunities that fully engage the mind, body and soul?

When we address the embers of curiosity in everyday life and give them ample time and opportunity to ignite, we are opening the door to the most meaningful learning opportunities with many benefits to the overall well - being of the child.

First snows of winter, for example, bring an irresistible tidal wave of excitement and curiosity to the learning environment. With the spotting of the first flake fluttering by the window, the dynamics of the learning flow in the room suddenly change course. An uncontrollable surge of inquisitiveness rises among the children as their attention is drawn to the wintery spectacle outside. Any attempt by the educator to redirect attention toward unrelated learning activities is futile. Nobody wins. The teacher, in an effort to re-champion the moment, expends a great amount of energy trying to overcome the surging wave of excitement as it eagerly weaves its way through the room; the learners, forced to abdicate the object of their awe and redirect their focus on tasks not presently calling to their hearts. Not only are they deprived of an in depth learning experience but they tragically risk making a subconscious association between learning and tedium.

When we fight the wave of excitement that ensues over ‘first snows’, what are we really fighting?



In essence, we become ensnared in a battle with our natural impetus or motivation for learning. When we attempt to shut down the natural flow of curiosity, our fuel for learning rapidly depletes. On the contrary, when allowed to pursue our fascinations, a quickening in our hearts ensues that sets up a joyful, rhythmic pace, leading us merrily along a path of exploration and discovery. The stage is set. We are intrinsically motivated to venture forth and inquire with all our eagerness and attention.



Intrinsic motivation in the learning process can be described as riding the wave of one's own inner impetus and desire. When we are allowed to spontaneously explore that which intrigues us, this gives rise to a great many benefits:

- We delve more deeply into a subject area because we are interested in exploring all avenues: who, what, where, when, how and why?
- As we are more deeply focused, we naturally build essential concentration skills.
- By following our own inner will, we are also naturally acquiring self-discipline.
- Our learning becomes integrated as we reach for threads from a variety of subject areas in order to further fuel the exploration process.
- We are building self-esteem and confidence in taking initiative and responsibility for our own learning process.
- We are fostering a love of life - long learning.
- We are affirming a sense of awe, wonder and appreciation for the world.

Halting the joyful, rhythmic stream of exploration in order to redirect our focus toward anything of non-interest leaves us begging for an extrinsic reward....perhaps the almighty sticker, the numerical or letter grade? Our attention reluctantly but obediently shifts from the spontaneous, internal river of inspiration within to an external prompt, directing us toward a less appealing, prescribed activity.

This is not to suggest that a well - rounded curriculum built upon a solid foundation of knowledge should not be addressed in the learning process – or that curriculum should emerge entirely from the children - only that in the interest of preserving spontaneity in the learning environment, a set curriculum should never entirely take over the helm of the ship. The adult educator, who has travelled the seas of life more extensively than the child is certainly aware of the practical elements of knowledge that need be imparted. However, it is the timing and circumstance of the imparting that is of concern. When merged purposefully into a stream of natural and spontaneous learning, these elements of knowledge are more effectively absorbed because the child is fully engaged when the object of their learning captivates their attention. The child sees these learning threads as a necessary means to understanding and knowing what they are inspired to know. Spontaneous learning opportunities such as ‘first snows’, offer meaningful explorations that strike a chord in the learner’s heart. It is the savvy educator who seizes the opportunities to draw in practical threads of learning from the core curriculum in order to extend and

fuel the exploration and discovery process. Under these circumstances, the most ideal learning opportunities unfold in all their richness and glory.

Quick adaptation may be required when spontaneous learning opportunities arise. We may, for example, unexpectedly find ourselves suiting up in winter gear and heading outside to be one with the snowflakes. Yet, at the same time, we are opening the door to a myriad of lessons and activities that draw threads directly from the core subjects of learning: Mathematics: Graphing, Averaging, Percent, Ratio-Proportion, Decimal and Common Fractions. Arts: Painting, Drawing, Sketching, Crafts. Geography: Weather Study, Climatic Zones, Map Study, Water Cycle, Ecology, Cultural Studies. Language: Creative Writing, Literature Study. Geometry: Linear Measurement, Volume, Area, Symmetry...and the list goes on.

It may be a challenge for educators to loosen up on the reins in a teacher directed environment. After all, the majority of us have been trained out of our own spontaneous reflexes – learning from an early age to divert our eyes from the wondrous spectacles of ‘first snows’ and get on with dictated tasks at hand. As educators, many of us have been groomed to be ‘stars of the show’ equipped with scrolls of prescribed content and standardized grade level outcomes. It may require a little more agility on our part, a quick step or two, but the benefits of allowing curiosity to run rampant on a more than occasional basis infuses the learning environment with zeal and the happy hum of passionate discovery.

Elements that Stifle Spontaneity:

- rigid schedules – stop and start times divided into individual subject areas
- competition
- collective learning pace
- emphasis on outcomes rather than the path of discovery
- emphasizing external motivating factors – such as grading and competition
- textbooks as primary guides to learning
- overuse of technology and 2D learning materials.
- learning detached from real life experiences
- learning detached from Nature
- top-down learning taking primary directive from a mandated curriculum: emphasis on imposed learning versus inspired.
- role of teacher as director

Elements that Foster Spontaneity:

- large blocks of open, uninterrupted learning time
- integrated subject areas
- mixed age groupings
- fostering innate sense of curiosity: inspired learning versus imposed
- individualized learning pace
- student initiated projects
- using resources such as text books as supplements and discovery tools rather than scripts
- reality based, 3D, hands-on learning to create meaningful educational experiences

- integrating contact with and exploration of Nature throughout the learning process
- supportive, nurturing, non-competitive environment
- role of teacher as guide and co-learner.

Making way for spontaneity in the learning process may mean taking slower strides and not being in such a rush to meet standard bars and guidelines. Addressing the embers and giving them an opportunity to fan into full flame takes patience. We are natural beings, best suited to a learning pace that grants us the freedom to unfold at our own rhythmic pace as opposed to taking directives from bells and artificially imposed schedules. Education in its ideal, draws in the meaningful threads of knowledge as the needs arise along the way, allowing for the pauses between the breaths that give way to the spontaneous sprouts of awe, wonder and appreciation for 'first snows' – those same sprouts that blossom into a deep love of life...the noblest objective of any pedagogical practice.



Recommended Authors for Further Reading:

1. Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention [1996]
2. Montessori, Maria. The Absorbent Mind [1949]
3. Montessori, Maria. Spontaneous Activity in Education: The Advanced Montessori Method [1917]
4. K Rathunde, M Csikszentmihalyi. "[Middle School Students' Motivation and Quality of Experience: A Comparison of Montessori and Traditional School Environments.](#)" American Journal of Education [2005]



SHELLEY RICHARDSON has over 30 years of experience in the field of education as a College Professor, AMI Montessori Educator and Curricula Designer. Shelley is the author of **SOPHIE & The Magic of Dance** for middle readers, and **RIVER: WE ARE EVER THE MASTERPIECE** as well as ***“THE EDDY”***, a monthly inspirational newsletter for a growing global audience. Shelley is a passionate inspirational speaker and workshop facilitator on the subject of Education.

SHELLEY RICHARDSON
College Professor, AMI Ed.

For more information about **EDDY Press** publications
or to contact the author:

www.eddypress.com

shelley.richardson@eddypress.com

EDDY Press
5762 Hwy 7 East, P.O. Box 54099,
Markham, Ontario. CANADA L3P 7Y4

