



“Non scholae, sed vitae discimus!” Not for school, but for life we learn!”

ON THE STRENGTH OF A DREAM

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No one goes into the field of education to make money; it is a *‘calling’*.

As a teacher and most recently a school superintendent, I’ve always been a little unusual, searching outside the system for new opportunities to develop the school and encourage and motivate both my teachers and our students. In recent years I’ve come to realize the urgency of eradicating fear in all its overt and covert forms, this leading to my knowing that we as teachers cannot suppress what our own hearts say, nor can we afford to ignore what the children are saying.

Never, has my personal inclination been so well supported by a happy fate, as when in July 2003, my wife and I met Lynnclaire Dennis while on an overnight visit to Assisi, Italy. An extraordinary person, you can’t but help recognize a luminous energy in her, one that inlightens one’s own capacity for vision. Less than five minutes after trying to communicate with words what our hearts immediately recognized, my English poor at best, and my wife Maddaly speaking no English whatsoever, we spontaneously invited Lynnclaire to spend a week with our family! Incredibly, she honoured our knowing as well as her own and said “Yes!”

Three weeks later she arrived in Venice, and the experiences we shared made an impact on our family that cannot easily be put into words. As soon as she arrived it was as if a new light came into our home, one that compelled us to each begin to inquire deeper into the depths of our own lives, our

feelings and our thoughts. I quickly realized that as a human being, a son, a brother, a husband, a parent, and a community leader, that I needed to cultivate skills *beyond* listening--- I had to be willing to *hear* what others were saying, listening to their words, their silence, their actions as well as their inactions.

The second night Lynnclaire was in our home, we were sitting at the dinner table, a typical Italian Family, we were loud and *noisy*, everyone talking at rather than to one another, when she very courageously made herself heard above all the noise. Then and there, she bravely introduced the concept of a 'talking stick', meaning that if you are not holding the 'talking stick' you cannot talk! I can assure you that this was the beginning of a cultural revolution!

But it was exactly what we needed and that evening we began to experience first-hand her incredible ability to communicate a remarkable understanding, really a Meta-philosophy that transcends cultural boundaries. She showed us how to integrate this knowledge into our everyday lives so to more fully express our humanity through human-*kindness*. We didn't talk about philosophy or religion or even spirituality; we talked about principles of love. By having Lynnclaire in our home we quickly began to come to a new understanding of the holistic aspects of relational dynamics.

In getting to know her that week, and learning of her vision for education to become a space for and a place of transformation, I knew that this was and remains the fundamental message of thought aimed at setting humanity free. I immediately thought of my teachers, and realized I wanted to give them the opportunity that I and my family were going through. I also wanted them to give them a role in co-creating the world she was helping to envision and manifest. I felt that meeting her, coming to understand the vision she was developing was a unique opportunity, a chance for me to grow personally, a benefit for my family, and it could also help my colleagues. I wanted to be part of making a positive difference in the world.

My intuition has been loudly affirmed. Now two years into this project, what TeamPlay has become and is becoming in Mirano is almost unimaginable. After first training eight of my 'English as foreign language' teachers on five separate occasions, courses in Italy and Switzerland, we realized it was time to bring this amazing work to a larger cross-section of our school system. So it was that September 27- October 1, 2004, thirty-six additional educators from communities surrounding Venice came together, responding to a new call to educational action. What drew them was the possibility of discovering a powerful process that fostered authenticity and regenerated understanding of and respect for others. Lynnclaire facilitated the course, demonstrating again the artistry of a true visionary, implementing it with the mind of a scientific pioneer. Her belief that teachers are the unsung heroes of the world has renewed the commitment of the educators in Mirano, what began to happen, an awakening. She encouraged and re-inspired everyone, sharing simple, universal and inclusive methods that helped us understanding ourselves, and then deepened a 'remembrance' that began to help us better understand not only our colleagues and our students, but our family and friends.

The response from these teachers, school directors, psychologists and others working in the educational system was remarkable. As they awoke to a new understanding of themselves and their colleagues, beginning to see their role as social architects, a significant transformation in attitude and actions became visible.

In the autumn of 2005 with BELONGING implemented in 32 classrooms with children age 3-11, we were walking proof that education is the soul of planetary sustainability. Lynnclaire built this project on the first principles from a powerful meta-philosophy known as the Mereon Matrix. It is deeply grounded in subjective meaning and rigorous scientific logic, and for this reason we are quickly learning to recognize the difference between *natural* and normal. We are experiencing that *natural* is

the clearest and most direct path to opening our minds and hearts, all surprised when we quickly realize in these courses that it is through our willingness to be *real* with one another, to be vulnerable rather than shielded, that we most powerfully discover our shared humanity. This willingness to be honest with each other is what has 'inpowered' us to free ourselves and to together, begin to evolve the spirit of something that is greater. TeamPlay has given us a knowledge that transcends information.

Lynnclaire has developed and continues to deliver powerful new tools and methods that are easily learnable and readily available, assisting us in developing ourselves first as individuals and then to take them to our worlds. What we are learning is enriching our lives and affecting our classrooms, our schools now reaping the benefits as we continue to learn how to moment-by-moment harmonize our inner-actions without interpersonal interactions. Our experiences are proof that what we are learning in these courses quickly spills over into every aspect of our lives, powerfully and positively impacting the dynamics of all our relationships.

I want to especially express a deep appreciation for how the BELONGING program is utilized as a methodology for classroom organization, something beyond 'management'. Clearly, this process aims at sustaining the idea of education as a dynamic environment of self-realization for the individual; it does so by honoring his distinctive subjectivity and acknowledging his relational dimension within a group. The ancient Romans used to say: "*Non scholae, sed vitae discimus!*" *Not for school, but for life we learn!* To make this maxim true, we need for school itself to be perceived as an experience that is authentically lived, not passively endured. We need to create schools that are consciously and coherently organized as a space within which the students increasingly experience being the makers of their own identity and co-protagonists in elaborating a group identity which is significant for them. The methodology of BELONGING is doing this and is exceptionally useful as a means for growing and sustaining the teachers' commitment to education and renewing their original desire to help children reach the fundamental aim of self-knowing. On the basis of my lifelong experience as an educator, and the current conditions in schools as a whole, I am persuaded that the need for precisely this methodology is widespread, not just in Italy, but the world over. If we are to solve the truly problematic situations now happening in classrooms, we must assist in the facilitation of healthy dynamic interactions among students, and work to enhance positive relationships between teachers and students.

Countless interviews with clinical and educational psychologists have led no solution to these problematic situations. While the institutional task of school is traditionally oriented to the formal dimension of structured learning and teaching processes, BELONGING Cards powerfully address the informal dimension of school life, the emotions, affections and relations that are not so easily attended to. To be able to nurture these essential needs makes BELONGING a tool of incalculable benefit. It unites the learning and teaching processes, making them integral aspects of a global process of dynamic and holistic communication that takes aim at self-realization and self-organization.

The ten main purposes that BELONGING addresses as part of a new call to educational action, start with "authenticity", and end with "the experience that generates respect for others". This rings with crystalline clarity. In Lynnclaire's taxonomy of educational purposes I feel that every word has been thought with enlightening inventive and communicative happiness. I feel that with wisdom and simplicity she has allowed for the deep and inalienable right for every student, teacher and educator rise to the surface.

Inevitably, I recall Guilford's *cognitive cube*, Bloom's taxonomy of educational aims, the scale of the fundamental needs of man according to Maslow and Vandevelde's analysis of teaching/learning situations, the analysis of class dynamics according to DuPont. All were fascinating and fundamental contributions to the sciences of education, but I believe Lynnclaire's contribution goes beyond all of them for originality, essential organicity and realizability. Moreover, I believe BELONGING and her

‘inside-out’, inner-as primary driven curriculum is the only one of its kind, aimed at presenting the role of the teacher as a facilitator of the class dynamics. This work is powerful in that it essentially orients students and teachers alike toward a fundamental principle of self-organization and from there to cooperation.

Every opportunity to work with Lynnclaire focuses us on deepening our learning, exploring new methods of communication based on what is natural in a holistic system. She continues to impart an understanding of how we say what we say, our tone, is what has the power to link our hearts and minds. Every single participant, teachers, parents and community leaders, report that they have come to see new perspectives of themselves and others, experiencing the unity that is the foundation beneath their obvious diversity. The week was an occasion to celebrate as we came to feel and reflect a new harmony, honoring the essential beauty and unity within one another.

We continue to discover new skills for self-organizing, individually and as a member of a group, while learning innovative ways to collaborate and accept both solo and joint responsibilities for planning. Claire has designed different interactive exercises that allow us to experience how simple it is for the deep and inalienable rights of every teacher and student to rise to the surface. In learning anew how to nurture and improve the informal dimension of school life, the emotions, affections and relationships with colleagues, we as course member began to link our intuitive and cognitive intelligences, honoring our subjective feelings and the objectively shared reality, recognizing aspects of ourselves that are simultaneously spiritual and human.

Every time Lynnclaire is in Italy, the courses spill over into lunch and dinner, as she invests hours in nurturing our authenticity and helping us balance our analytical, organizational skills. Every moment flows together, the time evaporating as we experience a lasting harmonizing of our relational dynamics that lead us ever deeper into new levels of self-respect and appreciation for others. The benefits are personal as well as for us as educators and human beings; TeamPlay has made us better educators, parents, spouses and friends. By reconnecting with our individual authenticity, we continue to expand our own creativity while reinvigorating the remarkable spirit of co-creation. The joy that comes in this work is based upon Lynnclaire’s insistence that elementary principles of organization and education be FUN, ‘fun’ being the first syllable in the word *fundamental*. In her requiring that *fun* come before the ‘mental’, we have incredibly found the cure for ‘burn-out’!

The children jump with joy as whenever they prepare for Lynnclaire to visit their classrooms!

As Director of the Mirano Elementary Public Schools, I am proud of our community for recognizing the vital importance of this work. Every opportunity has proven to be a chance to grow personally and thereby to become an effective catalyst for assisting our children, helping them to see how by working as one, in our wholeness we each can play a significant part in making a positive difference in our world, both inner and outer.

It is an honor to work with Lynnclaire and inaugurate this new and fascinating adventure in education. We look forward to hosting other educators and sharing with them what is happening in our lives as well as our schools. Imagine, parents calling to tell me that their children are happy to come to school! Imagine what it is for me as a director to hear parents say that they want *all* of the children to be involved in this project! It is incredible to walk down the halls of my schools and feel and see the changes; smiles on everyone’s faces. Even the school auditors from Rome have asked me, “Why are your schools so different? What is making everyone happy?” (Lynnclaire had been with us the week before that’s why!)

As educators we *are* social architects, and must now work together to design a new civilization. It is time to learn to care for our children so they can learn to be and take care of themselves. It is time to stop coercing them, and in a new way, begin to respect them as human beings. BELONGING’s impact

in education is moving from Mirano into the world! Here in Mirano we are inaugurating a new kind of literacy program; one that teaches us the languages of the heart and mind; TeamPlay shows us how to read our own emotional and mental languages and those of others; it is showing us how to write new truths into our physical worlds by mastering skills that allow us to with wisdom and discernment, support personal transformation that leads to holistic global sustainability.

Working/playing with Lynnclaire and my incredible teachers has led us all to a new commitment; we are dedicated to understanding. BELONGING continues to bring deep honor to us as people, to our families, our schools, our community, and to all Italy. By bringing our different experiences together, we have opened the rare gift of understanding, discovering the energy that continues to deeply unite our minds and hearts.

The assessment at the conclusion of the 2004-2005 school year was written by the BELONGING Commission and says, "BELONGING *has led to "learning by doing, by thinking and by loving."*

I want to express all my abiding gratitude to Lynnclaire for continuing to share her logic, her creative insights, and her *inlightening* thoughts with us, individuals, educators and community leaders of Mirano, Italy.

"We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want."

Lao Tzu