

Giving an A

This journey into possibility leads to the next practice of **Giving an A**.

The Zanders propose that a student be given the A that you know he is capable of even before he begins. The understanding behind such a practice is that the anxiety arising from being graded diminishes the true creativity and learning of a person. It may also lead to a person striving to get the grade for the sake of the grade and the opportunities it opens to him rather than for the intrinsic learning.

"In most cases, grades say little about the work done. When you reflect to a student that he has misconstrued a concept or has taken a false step in a math problem, you are indicating something real about his performance, but when you give him a B+, you are saying nothing at all about his mastery of the material, you are only matching him up against other students....

Michelangelo is often quoted as having said that inside every block of stone or marble dwells a beautiful statue; one need only remove the excess material to reveal the work of art within. If we were to apply this visionary concept to education..., all the energy would be focused on chipping away at the stone, getting rid of whatever is in the way of each child's developing skills, mastery and self-expression....

When you give an A, you find yourself speaking to people not from a place of measuring how they stack up against your standards, but from a place of respect that gives them room to realize themselves. Your eye is on the statue within the roughness of the uncut stone."

Of course there will be those who decry this, saying that once the student knows he will get such a good grade, he will stop trying. However the Zanders counter this by requiring the student to map his own progress towards the A where continual self-improvement, not imposed improvement, is the key.

Often, as the teacher or school leader, we occupy a place of power (especially when giving grades) that makes students (and teachers!) feel powerless. The Zanders address this :

"The practice of giving the A allows the teacher to line up with her students in their efforts to produce the outcome, rather than lining up with the standards against these students. In the first instance, the teacher and the student become a team for accomplishing the possible; in the second, the disparity in power between them can become a distraction and an inhibitor, drawing energy away from productivity and development."

There are some wonderful stories the Zanders tell, Ben from his experiences with music master classes (remember, he is a renowned music conductor) and Roz from her experiences as a psychologist. Stories can't be distilled and still keep that essence of wonder and discovery, so you really should get the book.