
Except from:

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Teaching Passionately with Action

Look, my friends, there is no possibility for greater achievement without running risk. Without freedom you cannot risk. When you are not free, you have to risk in order to get freedom. Education is a game like this. Constantly teaching is not to spend a weekend on a tropical beach. It is to be committed to the process of teaching and committed to the adventure and creation, both teachers as teachers and students as students. (Paulo Freire, 1993).

Personal and professional excitement and energy strengthen one another. Personal passion and professional passion cannot be separated. Each is intimately interwoven to the support or detriment of the other. Excitement is contagious. Students are drawn into its wake despite themselves when the teacher brings genuine curiosity and enthusiasm into the classroom. We, as teachers, know there are two main ways to do this: be genuinely excited or fake it. We've all experienced both. We also know that pretending to be excited, especially for extended periods of time, is exhausting. Feigned enthusiasm ranks as a significant component in teacher burnout.

This chapter is a guide to infuse passion and energy into life and teaching, making teaching and learning a dynamic and meaningful process for both teacher and learner. This can sound quite abstract and unattainable. This process is broken down into pragmatic and practical exercises and insightful reflections that can be implemented in life and in the classroom *tomorrow*.

The Plan for Practical Passion

.... Passion is not just a personality trait that some people have and others lack, but rather something discoverable, teachable, and reproducible, even when the regularities of school life gang up against it. (Robert Fried, 1995, p.6)

This section covers two complimentary approaches to bringing joy and passion into teaching and learning. First are the four quests, which are individual, reflective processes designed to guide teachers in energizing curriculum by infusing the classroom with joy and passion. Second, the creation of passionate pedagogue circles, collaborative processes, designed to help teachers and learners discover and/or recover those powerful human connections that are at the heart of schooling.

All activities connect to the spiral of learning and link to concepts present previously in the book.

A word of caution before beginning: To teach with passion, it is necessary to have a desire for this change in life and in teaching. To risk is essential: to risk the joy and heartbreak that come with creating a life and teaching career full of passion, in all of its gorgeous messiness. On the following pages, theory becomes action as we turn passion into a concrete pedagogical plan.

If the will is not there the quests and the circles are a waste of time. If the aspiration is there, though, the quests and the circles provide a way to tap passion and use it as a vehicle for a deeper and more joyful approach to pedagogy.

Work is love made visible.
Kahlil Gibran

A Life Transformed

Sally came to one of our workshops in a funk. Life wasn't bad, teaching wasn't bad, but she felt she was going through the motions instead of *living* life. We saw this in her, though she didn't seem that aware of her situation herself. She had experienced this state of uninspired living for so long that she didn't appear to even be aware how flat her life had become. Slowly, throughout the course of the day, we witnessed her dawning realization that life could be more and better than she had understood.

As Sally worked through the exercises and heard other teachers' stories of passion, she blossomed before our eyes. At the workshop's beginning, she entered the room very politely and smiling, but subdued. As the day progressed, her eyes lit up and began to twinkle, her polite smile became an infectious laugh, and she radiated an energy of excitement and hope. We watched the shift take place as she began to think with her heart instead of her mind. The mind does have a place in our quest, "...but as the servant of your heart, not as its master" (Beck, 2002, p. 112).

Sally drew the whole class into her excitement as she held her action plan in hand, animatedly describing her curriculum plans for the upcoming year. By the end of the day she stood straighter, looked people directly in the eye more, and carried herself with a confident and upbeat ease. She glowed with a contagious inner joy.

The object of this chapter is to create a personal plan toward passionate pedagogy. Far from being a gift some people are lucky enough to be born with while others are not, to teach passionately is available to all.

Goals

To teach with passion, our life must be grounded in passion. Individual passions are the axis around which the spokes of the rest of our life turns. This is not to say we base life on what we feel we *should* be passionate about or we're *supposed* to be passionate about. Here we are going to explore genuine passions, be it comic books, impractical shoes, fishing, or funny-faced dogs. While this plan is very practical, passions frequently are not. Here we will not only respect that but encourage it and have some fun. Teaching infused with passion makes learning more stimulating and fun to both teacher and learner.

Passionate teaching encourages relationships within the classroom to thrive. Teacher-student, parent-teacher, and student-student relationships grow to be grounded in mutual respect in the pursuit of learning and discovery. Teaching and learning turn out to be journeys to be explored.

Returning to the metaphor of the spiral, another loop of the journey winds through this section. This loop is divided into four main segments for further exploration: first, *identification* of personal goals for teaching and learning; second, *prioritization* of actions working toward the goals deemed most important; third, *application* of these ideas in the classroom; and fourth, a *completion* of the original goal set. The following pragmatic exercises lead from goal identification to how concise actions can accomplish these ideals. (See Figure 9.1.)

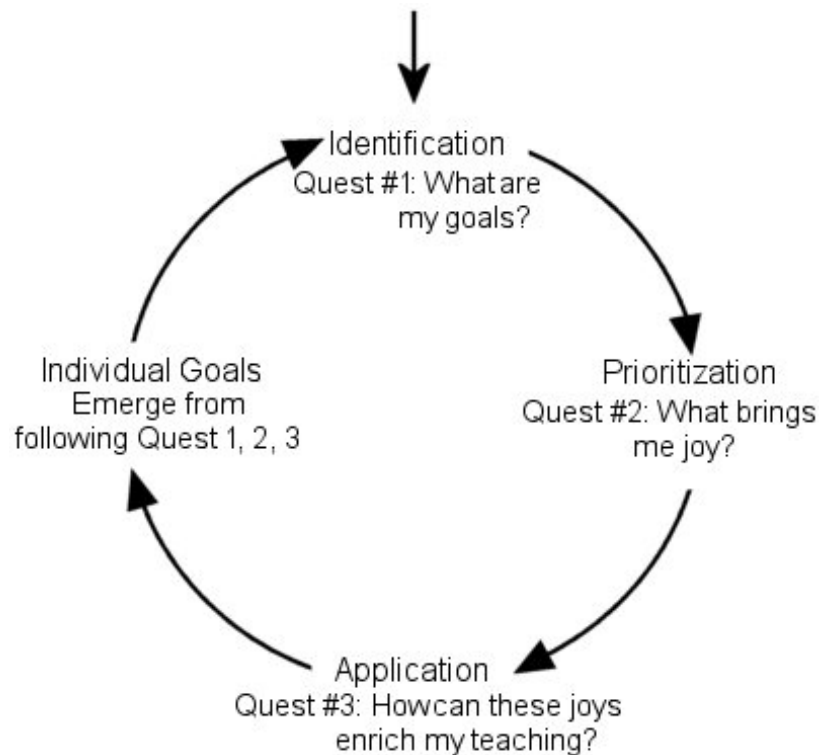


FIGURE 9.1 Goal Spiral

Quests

First Quest—Identification: What are my goals? How do I envision the teaching and learning environment for my classroom?

First, we'll first focus on the teaching and learning experience you would like to create in the classroom. We're going to do some dreaming here. Imagine yourself in your ideal world where you have absolute control over your teaching environment. You control class size, you control the curriculum, and you control the literature, we're dreaming here! Don't hold yourself back from dreaming because a little voice says in your head, "Oh, my principal would never allow that" or "Well, maybe in my dream world, but there's no way this could ever happen in the real world." Push those voices aside just for now. Goal and dream making are the first step in creating our world. Use your imagination. What would you create?

Cluster Exercise: On a blank sheet of paper write "teaching and learning experience" in the middle of the page and then draw a circle around it. (See Figure 9.2). The key to this exercise is not to overthink, but to write and get ideas down on paper as quickly as possible. Think of your own expectations of the ideal atmosphere surrounding teaching and learning experiences for you and your students. Be wild, be crazy, dream! Whatever you do, don't edit yourself at this stage. Don't trip the baby who's trying to walk! Let those dreams out. Let them fly!

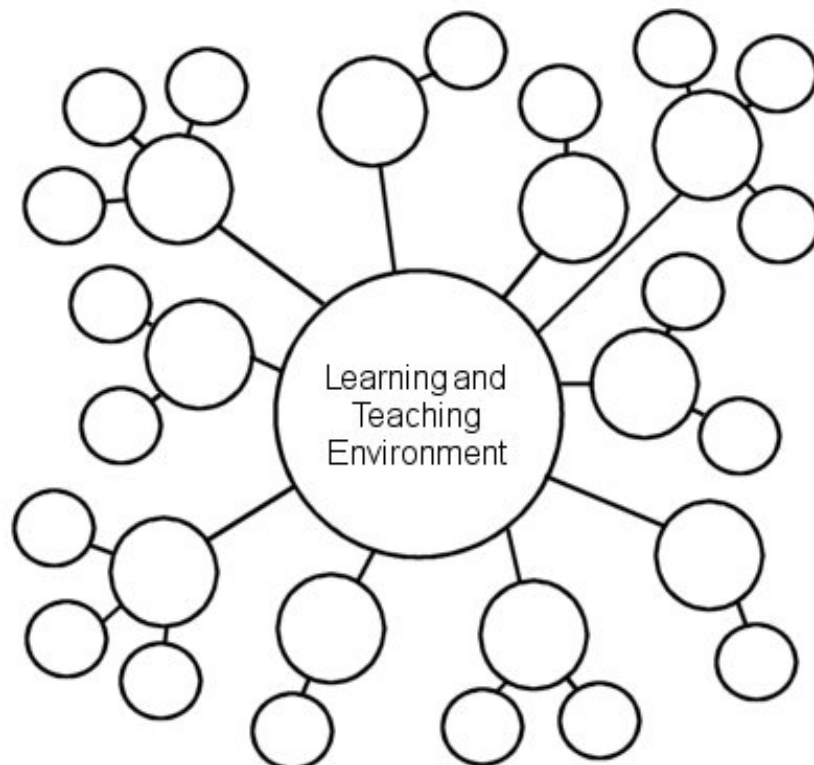


FIGURE 9.2 Teaching and Learning Cluster Exercise

As ideas come into your head of what you would like to create in your classroom, write these ideas down as quickly as you can, drawing a circle around each and then connecting it to the whole with a line. Keep your pen moving. Don't allow yourself to edit your thoughts or kill off your dreams as they're taking shape. Don't stop writing until you have at least ten added clusters of ideas surrounding the main idea.

After you've finished writing, and you have at least 10 secondary idea clusters, review your clusters briefly. An organic organization will begin to take form in your mind as you muse on what you wrote. As this inherent organization begins to form, with the cluster in sight, begin to write these thoughts down essay-style in the order they come. Again, write quickly without putting too much thought into the organization or what you write. If you slow down or begin to overthink the content or organization, the flow of ideas slows. Write quickly and easily.

Congratulations! You now have tangible goals of the teaching and learning environment you would like to create. The act of recognizing, writing, and organizing these goals has already alerted your mind to be aware of actions and possibilities that will bring these goals about. Goethe reminds us, "Whatever you think you can do, begin it, because action has magic, grace, and power in it."

Second Quest—Prioritization: What brings me joy? What am I passionate about?

To pursue pedagogical passion is to articulate its importance in life. Many of us consistently block out inner joy from our lives because "we don't have time." We ignore our inner joys for so long that when the time finally comes to identify what brings passion to life, we are left with a blank stare, literally unable to remember. We do not allow ourselves these joys because we falsely deem them unproductive. We successfully callus ourselves from our own feelings, indeed, from our souls' life directions. This illusion of a lack of productivity could not be more false. It is in the act of listening and pursuing our passions that we are most productive.

Treasure Map Exercise: Write down in a list as many things as you can think of that make you happy. Anything, *anything!* Don't hold back. Don't think. For heaven's sake, don't be practical! Go for it, let your mind go where it will and don't censor, just write. What brought you joy as a child? Close your eyes and let your mind wander—what activities, what colors, what experiences, what textures, sounds, and smells make you feel peaceful?

If it has been a while since you've let yourself entertain these thoughts, you may only come up with one or two—as each of us did when we first did this. Now, that's a sobering thought, isn't it? The harder it is for you to think of things in life that bring you joy, the more you need to do them. Two years ago when Dawn did this for the first time, the only joyous thing she could think of was reading. Clearly, it had been a while since she'd focused on basing her profession on what brings her joy. After three years of centering her life on joy, here is a tiny portion of her current list: bright, vibrant colors, the desert, sunsets, books, running, good friends, family, textures, sunlight, jelly beans, Mexican food, Celtic music, travel books, wildflowers, words, fabric, laughter, sunshine yellow, blue doors, good coffee, and saguaro cacti. It is no coincidence that during these same three years, her professional life bloomed.

Ready? Write. (See Figure 9.3).

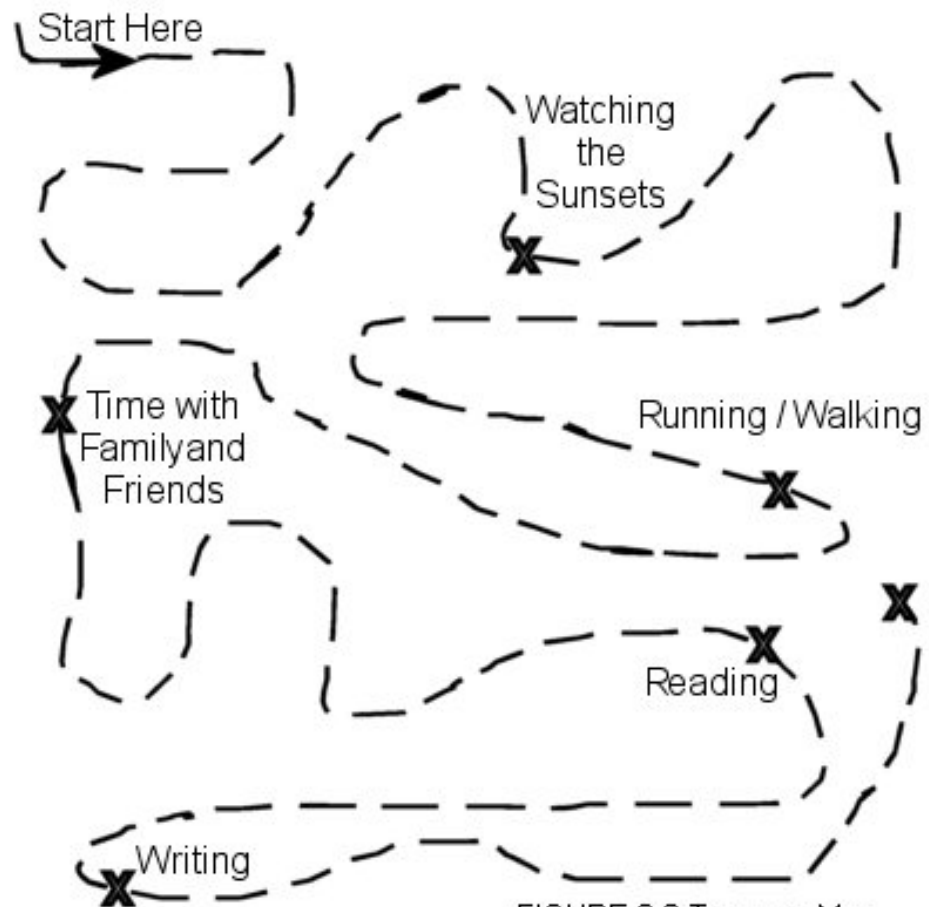


FIGURE 9.3 Treasure Map

Look at your completed list. Before you lies your own personal treasure map. From here we will salvage those passions ignored due to the busyness of life, studies, families, and jobs. Think of your list as a trove of treasure full of clues that we shall sift through in the next exercise.

Third Quest—Application: How can these joys enrich my teaching?

Infusing your days with passion enriches life. Colors become brighter, textures become richer, and life is expanded. The little nuances and subtleties of life that make up our days gain significance that might otherwise have been missed. In today's current exhausting political climate in education, as teachers we need to find our grounding, our center to strengthen ourselves personally, as well as professionally. The strength and wisdom gathered from this sense of center, of strength, brings a steadiness to the day. We gain strength from within and go forth into the hectic giving of our days.

How do we do this in a pragmatic way? There are two main ways: (a) to make time, and (b) to bring joyful activities into the class.

First, we need to commit to make time for our personal passions outside of the school. Their inclusion in our life *outside* of school energizes and fortifies us *inside* of school. One teacher we know rises at 4:00 am to write in her journal, another to work on his current watercolor painting. It is about making time to go for a good run even if the house is a disaster, getting out on the mountain bike sitting dusty in the garage, or getting together with friends you have been too busy to see. Even if it is only 15 minutes a day, the time is well spent. To consistently deny yourself the passions that bring you joy and energy is the surest road to fatigue and burn out. In simpler terms, as far as productivity, you're shooting yourself in the foot.

"What is the difference between an obsession and passion?" Norton (1996) asked the class in a recent writing workshop. People voiced a variety of thoughts. Our own interpretation is that a passion enriches life and an obsession detracts from it. There are those activities that walk a fine line, however. For Dawn and Joan, writing would be one –not that it detracts from our lives but because it so dominates our thoughts and actions. But it clearly makes our lives better. Perhaps for those activities that walk a fine line, instead of saying "We're obsessed!" we might change our terminology and say, "We're impassioned!"

Remember the teacher in the beginning of this book who missed watching the sunsets? By taking time each day to watch the sunsets, to revel in the joy and peace that brings, she directly influences her teaching. If we are fulfilled, our teaching is better. Beck (2001) applies two rules to charting a course for the passionate life intended for us.

Rule 1: If it brings you joy, do it.

Rule 2: No really, if it brings you joy, do it. (p. 208)

Try it. We think you will be amazed. Since reorganizing our thoughts and actions around our passions and joys, both professional and personal magic has come tumbling into our lives in ways it never did before.

Commitment Exercise (Part One): Bring out your treasure map. Quickly, scrolling down with your eyes, pick out three passions you have that you have not been including in your life lately. Three passions that are out of doors, quiet and reflective, artistic, whatever calls to you. Now fill these three passions in Figure 9.4.

The second way to energize teaching is to bring elements of joyful activities into the classroom. When we bring our passions into the classroom, our enthusiasm is infectious. Students intuit this.

Commitment Exercise (Part Two): Now, we expand on bringing your passions into the classroom to enrich teaching and learning. At the end of this quest you will have a pragmatic and surprisingly concise blueprint how to energize yourself, your teaching, and your students. We love what we teach when we teach what we love.

Refer to your treasure map. Read it quickly through once more. Certain words inherently carry an extra charge of energy for you. Circle those words quickly and move on until you have read to the bottom of the list. Write those words in the column on the left hand side of the page under *Passions*.

I commit to making time each day to include these passions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

FIGURE 9.4 Commitment Exercise

Now, think through the curriculum you're going to cover in the next week, month, or semester. Not the details, rather the main themes you've planned. Write those down on the right side of the page under *Curriculum*. For example, some of Dawn's passions include colors, textures, wildflowers, and blue doors. The curriculum she needs to cover includes social studies (the history of California), language arts, and spelling. (See Figure 9.5.)

Passions

Curriculum

Colors
Textures
Wildflowers
Blue Doors

Social Studies (History of California)
Language Arts
Spelling

FIGURE 9.5 Commitment Exercise

Now, complete a cluster exercise for each curriculum theme. Place the curriculum topic in the center circle. Surround this circle with connecting circles with one of your chosen passions in each circle. Then let your mind fly. What ideas come to you as you link your curriculum and passions in your mind? As these ideas start flowing, continue to cluster around each of the passion circles. Soon, you'll have to add other passion circles to complete your ideas, and you will have ideas about how you'll impassion your curriculum clustered all over the page. Complete each curriculum/passion cluster in one sitting. At the end of this exercise, you will have specific ideas linking your passions to each curricular area. (See Figure 9.6)

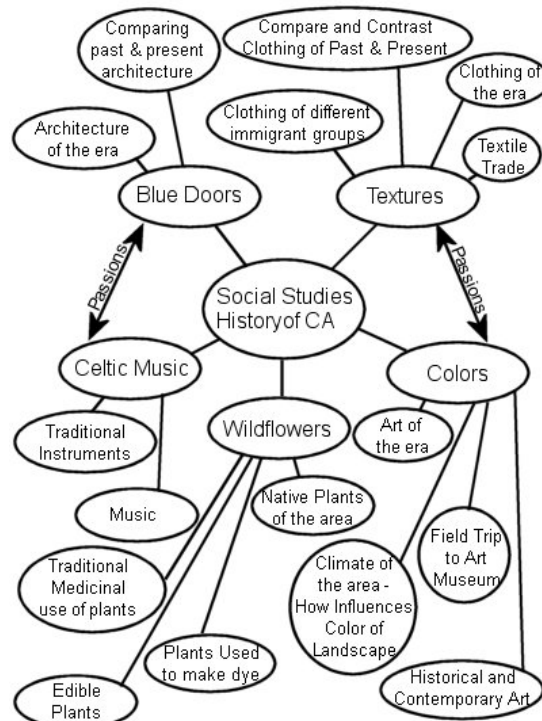


FIGURE 9.6 Cluster Exercise, Dawn's Example

You can also reverse this process to stimulate ideas of connecting curriculum to passions. Place your passion in the center circle and your curriculum in the surrounding circles and start clustering. Soon, you will have pages filled with ideas. (See Figure 9.7)

Fourth Quest—Return to Goals: How can I implement more change toward my vision of teaching and learning?

Plans and dreams remain useless until we incorporate them into our lives in practical ways. What good are all of these wonderful ideas on how to infuse your teaching with passion if they stay clustered on the piece of paper, tucked in some dark drawer somewhere? Not one bit of good at all. In the fourth quest, you will focus on turning those great ideas into reality.

Scheduling Exercise: In the following exercise, you will create a practical and usable schedule of how to implement your passions into current curriculum plans. Lay out all of your clusters before you. Now, using the outline of the weekly and monthly schedule in Figure 9.8, schedule your upcoming academic topics and corresponding curriculum from the cluster exercise.

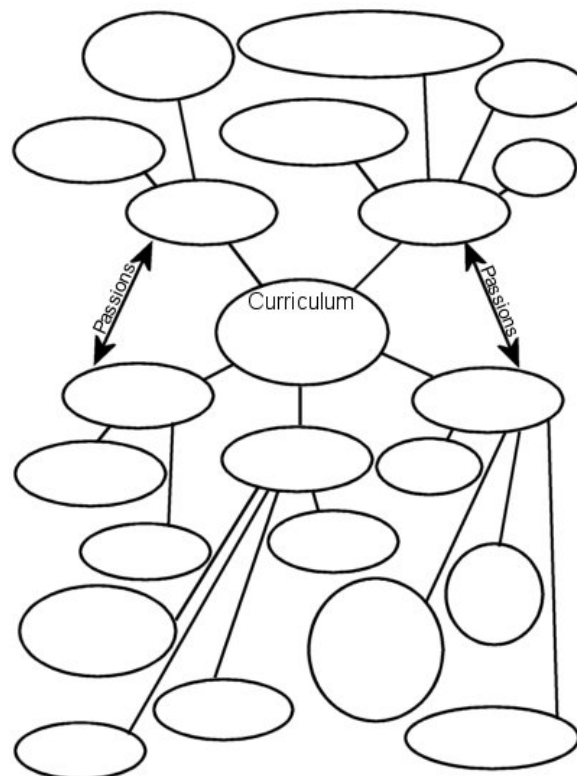


FIGURE 9.7 Blank Passion to Curriculum Cluster

	Month	Month	Month	Month	Month	Month
Week						
Week						
Week						
Week						
Week						

FIGURE 9.8 Blank Curriculum Schedule

Congratulations! You have just created your own action plan for passionate pedagogy. Hopefully, we never fully attain our goals, because as we move along the spiral our hopes, dreams, and goals continue to shift and grow as we do. As one goal is being accomplished, another goal is in its early stages. Optimistically, the clusters and curriculum schedule will be constantly in motion, being revised, changed, and expanded.

Passionate Pedagogue Circles

A passionate teacher is a teacher who breaks out of the isolation of a classroom, who refuses to submit to apathy or cynicism.

Robert Fried, 1995, p. 1

In addition to the individual quests, collaborative passionate pedagogue circles call us into a community where we draw strength, courage, and love from other teachers and learners. Now, more than ever, we need this. Whereas graduate classes, credentialing processes, and inservicing used to be a place of continuing the cycle of learning about pedagogy, today, in our experiences, professional development has become a place of anxious administrators and tired, frantic teachers. We marvel at how it has affected our own professional work in the last few years. Now, when educators come together, we need each other. We need a safe haven. The quests and passionate pedagogue circles are designed to heal and strengthen, as we continue to challenge injustice.

Passionate pedagogue circles are collaborative groups of pedagogues (teachers and/or learners) who come together to infuse passion into the teaching and learning processes. These are groups of educators and community members who have made that initial, challenging decision: They want to find their passion and bring that joy to the classroom. These groups are founded on the assumption that we cannot always control the outside forces in our environment, but we can individually and collaboratively influence how we live, learn, and teach. As the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, the goal is to tap into the combined inner strength of each person to enhance each member and the group.

Guidelines for Passionate Pedagogue Circles

- The primary purpose is to mutually support one another in pursuit of passionate living and teaching.
- How to begin: Form a group of people interested in impassioning their lives and teaching. Although any size works, a group of 8 people seems to work well. The group is small enough to be intimate and large enough people to stimulate discussion. A wide variety of life experiences among the group works well. The most positive and powerful groups are those full of people who are independently passionate and interested in being around others who have a love of ideas. When forming the group, look for positive people interested in life, ideas, and teaching. Stay away from those people who ooze bitterness.
- We cannot stress enough: This is *not* the appropriate place to invite the teachers on your staff who rarely have a good word to say about anything. Although you might want them to be inspired, chances are they'll just poison the atmosphere for the rest of the group.
- Initial decisions to be made by the group: where and when to meet. In addition, during the formation of the group, we recommend that the group discuss options for the group's discussion format.
- Possible format and discussion ideas: Members share their own experiences with passion in life and in schools, discuss ideas how to enrich curriculum, discuss current frustrations and possible ways of handling them, encourage and strengthen one another in individual pursuits and academic life, or talk about relevant books and their ideas.

As you begin your own individual quests and join with others in passionate pedagogue circles, you create and control your own future in the classroom.