

The Power of Commitment

Nancy Oelklaus, Ed. D.

“Whenever one definitely commits oneself, All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issue from the decision, raising in one’s favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would come his way.” W. H. Murray

The Invisible School

When people think of school, the image that comes to mind are the buildings, the classes, the activities, the books and lessons, the students and teachers. But beyond all that is the invisible school—the billions of neuronal patterns that each of us is carrying around inside our heads. How we think about school. How we feel about each other. The electromagnetic fields that each of us is sending and receiving. This is the invisible school.

When two or more people come together for a common cause, a third entity or being is created--the *relationship*. The relationship is greater than any of the people who are in it. Among the participants, responsibility exists to nurture and protect the relationship so that the common cause benefits.

Difficulties arise when human imperfections surface. These imperfections may be invisible to the person who has them; they are imprints from previous experience that haven’t been rigorously examined or forgiven. When these difficulties arise, it is tempting to try to fix the other person or people—to point out to them the exact nature of their wrongs. This rarely works, even if we only think it without saying it.

Another temptation is to mentally analyze why other people are how they are and “put up with it,” allowing their behavior to determine our own course of action.

Flaws in others that particularly outrage us are often those that lie within us, undiscovered. When another person demonstrates that which we detest within ourselves, we are especially upset. In these cases, it’s good to ask, “What am I upset about? Where, within me, is that flaw?” Then wait for the answer. When the answer comes, we forgive ourselves. Then we are better able to have compassion for the other person who has the same or similar flaw.

Transcending and Transforming the Invisible School

We can also transcend the difficulty through our commitment to the cause. This is the course that makes others’ defects irrelevant. In such cases, it is useful to have a script to follow—a script that reflects the highest and best within us—a script that enables us to take the high road. A script that is neither self-righteousness nor aloof. A script that accepts human nature and focuses on the best and highest within the relationship—the pact—the commitment that we have made to the cause.

Since we are susceptible to the phenomenon of mirror neurons—being influenced by another person’s state of mind—we need to protect our brains from invasion by negativity. A starting point is to write or draw or create in some visual form our commitment to our relationship with ourselves, parents, students, and colleagues. Following are some examples. My hope is that these words inspire you to write your own commitments, read or write them every day, and have a more peaceful and rewarding experience in education.

Educator to Self

With gratitude for those who have helped me, I stand today fully prepared and confident in my preparation to teach and lead others. I know I’m not perfect: I’m an unfinished work in progress. But who I am and what I know are enough for today. Most important, I am willing to learn and grow with my students, parents, and colleagues. I open my mind and my heart to understand and appreciate.

I focus on today, putting aside worries about the future and the past. I have no pity or disdain for others. I know that it is possible for them to learn and that life’s difficulties are great teachers. My job is to be the best me I can be for myself first and then for others.

I pause when I feel the flutter that’s about to fly me away from being grounded and calm. I am not ruled by crises or someone else’s anxiety—I see beyond it and raise my voice of wisdom and peace or not lift my voice at all.

I see simplicity, not complexity, and focus on my part—to be guided by the question, “How may I serve today?” And then let myself be led.

I am in touch with my heart as I serve, integrating what I know with the wisdom of my heart, so that my heart and my head are working together for good.

Educator to Student

I make learning fun—to honor that which you already know and the beautiful strengths you bring to my classroom. I do not bear down so hard on your weakness that I make learning awful for you so that you don’t want to do it. When you get tense and uneasy, I smile and say, “You’re not having enough fun! How can we make this more fun?”

I monitor my thinking about you. I’m carrying my own neuronal patterns, too, you know, and some things in my life have conditioned me to make judgments about how you look or what you say or how you behave. I catch myself when I go into judgment and stop. Then I focus on your strengths, your inner beauty. I say to myself, “Look beyond the surface. See this beautiful heart!” Instead of trying to control you, I ask myself the silent, internal questions, “How may I serve? What might I do to create an environment for this child to develop as fully as possible?”

When things that affect you happen, I speak up. I question rules and guidelines and even laws that don't serve you well. I do my homework before I speak up so that I'm not so emotionally loaded that others can't hear or understand. I say what I truly need to say on your behalf until your voice is strong enough to speak for yourself.

I respect what you already know. I never put down your family, your previous teachers, your friends—not even silently, in my mind. I promise not to blame anyone when you don't respond as I wish; I find the scaffolding within your mind to link new learning, no matter what it takes. I challenge you, respecting your ability to excel. I want your best performance, and I will work with you until you get it.

I'm not perfect. Some days I might be tired or overwhelmed. In these cases, I promise not to take it out on you, but to stop and say, "I'm taking a time out. I need one minute of silence." Then I'll close my eyes, take four long, deep breaths, all the way from my navel, and internally focus on a favorite mantra, one that feeds my soul. Then I'll come back to you, refreshed.

Educator to Parent

Very carefully, I listen as you tell me about your child: what she likes, what he does well, the challenges you have had in parenting. I listen with the ears of my heart. I see the beauty in your relationship with your child—how much you love. I understand that you've been an imperfect parent, yet I know that children are resilient and will "make it" in this world if at least one person gives them unconditional love, which means patience, kindness, and forgiveness. I am one of the people who give your child patience, kindness and forgiveness.

I also see the light in your child—what she does incredibly well. I encourage his strengths and strengthen his weaknesses with focus and unwavering belief that he will achieve. Maybe not as fast as someone else. Maybe not even as well. But she will achieve what it takes to be successful in the world and live an enjoyable life, confident in her skills and abilities.

I promise not to judge you. I know you're distracted and might not be aware of how fast the time is passing. I have compassion for the times you'll look back in regret and sadness, realizing the opportunities you lost. I see you through eyes of kindness, understanding, and compassion.

I promise not to be a know-it-all, making you feel uncomfortable with me. I have a learner's mind, always open to new understanding and revelations. I promise not to get hardened in "my way" and come across to you as a closed door. I promise not to think I have all the answers and you don't know anything.

Your child is precious to me. My job is to weave new learning into the neuronal patterns that are already there. I accomplish this with fingers of kindness, acceptance, patience, and forgiveness of his—my—your shortcomings.

Educator to Colleague

You are my valued colleague. I value you because you see things differently from me, so you have the potential to teach me. I listen and take seriously what you say. If you speak strongly, I promise not to let you overpower me just because it's late or I'm tired. If I can't find the words, I'll simply say something like, "This doesn't feel right to me. I don't know why. I'd like to sleep on it and say later what I need to say because right now I don't know."

I speak well of you to everyone—my family, my friends, parents, administrators, and students. I focus on what you do well, affirm you for that, and let the rest be irrelevant.

I say what I truly think and feel, respectfully and transparently. Truth and professionalism can coexist, and I promise not to deny or repress what needs to come out in the guise of professionalism. When I must say something I think you might not like, I will not speak until I'm calm and have a true feeling of respect.

You and I are on the same team, in different positions. If I see or hear you say something that is not in students' best interests, I will speak up. I promise I won't think something like, "Well, what do you expect? She's a _____." I will know that, just as the best and highest is within me, it is also within you, and I will give you the respect of wanting the best in you to come out. I will cooperate in bringing out your best.

I am willing to walk alongside you in the high calling of teaching our children. My constant and only guiding question will be, "How may I serve?"

*Nancy Oelklaus is an executive coach and author of **Journey from Head to Heart: Living and Working Authentically and Alphabet Meditations for Teachers.***

Nancy@HeadtoHeart.com

512-431-4946

5400 Mt. Bonnell Rd., Austin, TX 78731

www.HeadtoHeart.com