

## Lighting the Fires of Enthusiasm

Little flames caught, reaching hungrily for the tiny twig tepee arching over them. In a moment the wee kindling shelter had burnt into ashes, the flickering dying into embers. “Quick, quick, Get more tinder,” came the shout. One child scrambled into the trees near by searching for the dry twigs they had used to start their little camp fire. Another busily shredded a handful of paper thin birch bark, that oily, resinous bark which takes a flame so readily. Kneeling over their almost lost fire, they carefully placed the fuel over the coals, blowing them up into those tiny flames once more. “Quick, quick,” came the shout again. “More kindling. More tinder.”

And so the cycle goes around and around. I have watched this process countless times working with children in the forest. Isn’t it so like everything else with which we struggle? Round and round we run, ever more anxiously, trying to keep the “little flames alight,” feeding them frantically with the same old stuff. It takes a leap in awareness and confidence to begin placing heavier sticks upon the little fire, breaking out of the cycle of desperately maintaining what you already have to move onwards.

Adventure activities are always a great thing to do with kids. They are exciting, demanding, challenging and there is a terrific sense of achievement that follows. But the activity becomes something much more for the growing child when it is not just about skill development, not simply another challenge ticked off the must-do list.

Children are born with almost all of the 100 billion neurons we will ever have. “After birth the physical development of the brain is largely a result of the growth of connections between these brain cells.”

Learning is about inter-connectivity, joining-up-the-dots, some might say. In fact the connections that are

well used in our lives become ever stronger. “Good lessons are about helping kids to see connections and making conceptual leaps.”

## **Fires...2**

When we take the experiences children have had and connect them to deeper, cultural ideas, we help them to understand something about real life, maybe not for the present but for when it may matter even more.

Rushing about, managing to support a tiny ever hungrier little fire and not being able to move on to the next level should not simply remain as a memory. It can become much more, about life in general and how we deal with it.

As parents and teachers, we need to oversee this hugely important learning process. We need to draw the connections, at first in story-like and gentle ways, planting seeds which will develop independently over time as each child explores a widening world.

Could there be a better way of teaching the values of never giving up, of self belief, the “I can” attitude? You see, education is not only about lighting the flames of enthusiasm, courage and imagination. It’s about building them, step by step into heart-felt fires to last a life-time.

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