

Believe

When Someone Believes in You

By K. Meagan Ledendecker

I've never considered myself a swimmer. Twenty years ago, I struggled to do laps in the pool. I couldn't catch my breath; constantly felt like I was fighting the water. I found any excuse I could to avoid parts of the workout: bathroom breaks, talking to people in my lane, stretching.

When I observe in a classroom, I often see students engaged in this kind of struggle or avoidance. Like me in the pool lane twenty years ago, they are hopping up a lot to use the bathroom, or always needing to sharpen a pencil, talking instead of focusing, or regularly finding something else to do instead of tackling the challenge at hand.

With some encouragement and support, these children make progress. They learn some focus. They master some skills. They improve.

But I'm beginning to think that it takes a little something more to really flourish.

Over the past year I've been working incredibly hard to become a better swimmer. I've been swimming multiple times a week. I've watched videos to hone my stroke. I've stepped outside my comfort zone to swim in open water. I have improved.

Then something happened that I couldn't have foreseen. Something that helped me thrive.

I decided to take a few open water swim clinics to learn some techniques, like sighting to swim straight, or at the very least just to feel more comfortable in a lake.

The clinic instructor was a character, a little rough around the edges and unpredictable at first, but he clearly loved open water swimming and wanted to help others do the same. So I came back.

In just a few sessions, I felt like the instructor really saw me. He could translate how my approach to swimming was relevant to my approach to life. Feeling seen was incredible. Then, as if that weren't enough, he made a comment – the essence of which will stay with me for life. He said I was made for moving through water.

In that small, perhaps even off-hand statement, I felt like he believed in my ability. And it changed me.

I was getting better at swimming, but it wasn't until I felt like someone really saw me, believed in me, and then shared that belief, that I began to soar. Not only has my confidence skyrocketed and my motivation increased, I have become more resilient when facing challenge or struggle.

Think about a time when someone really believed in you. And told you so. How did you feel? How did it change you?

I've been thinking a lot about how to help others feel this kind of success. One step that's pretty simple – I spend a lot more time being sure that the young people in my life know that I believe in them completely.

Sometimes I kneel down, look deeply into a child's eyes, and communicate the belief directly: "You are really mastering multiplication. You must be feeling like a true mathematician." Sometimes I'll make sure someone overhears me talking about that belief: "At some point, she'll be ready to sweep up after herself. I know she'll get there. Right now, let's help clean up the space together." Sometimes I'll celebrate with others: "Look at how well these two have cooperated this morning! They found so many ways to work together. Let's acknowledge their good work! They are collaborators!"

My hope is that I can help young people move from just getting better, to feeling like they can find personal success.

I'm still not a great swimmer by any means, but whenever I start to doubt myself or feel old tensions creeping in, I hear the instructor's words. I remember that someone believes in me. The result? I believe more fully in myself.

Remember a time that someone believed in you. Cherish that moment. Then together let's help the young (and seasoned) in our lives believe in themselves, too.

~ As cofounder of The Montessori School of the Berkshires and long-time educator, Meagan loves to find herself in the role of novice so she can reconnect with the experience of learning something completely new. www.berkshiremontessori.org

