

Ed Notes for September 2011

I bet we all can remember multiple times in our elementary school years, when we were asked to write some sort of essay about “How I Spent My Summer Vacation” on the first day of school. It’s a natural bridge from summer to fall, easing the transition back to school by sharing some of the positive memories from summer. I’m sure that many of our Merriam students either talked or wrote about their summer experiences when they arrived back in school on August 30.

It’s in that spirit that I want to share one of the great experiences of my summer. I went to a three day conference in July that left me feeling inspired, nourished, and part of a wonderful professional community. The “Courage to Lead” Institute, held in New Hampshire for about 35 school administrators in the Northeast, is actually part of a larger organization. “Since 1997, the national Center for Courage & Renewal has helped foster personal and professional renewal through retreats that offer the time and space to reflect on life and work. These retreats, called Courage to Teach, Courage to Lead, or Circles of Trust, are led by skilled facilitators... Developed with author, educator, and activist Parker J. Palmer, Ph.D., and the Fetzer Institute, this approach was initially created to renew, sustain, and inspire public school teachers. Educators are at the heart of its mission...” (Quote is from the Courage literature).

Two of the main Courage facilitators in Massachusetts, Pamela Seigle and Chip Wood, are involved in other important activities. Pamela was one of the founders of Open Circle, a social skills program utilized in every classroom at Merriam School. Chip helped to develop the Responsive Classroom approach, another very useful program that many of us are familiar with.

The administrators who I met in those three days were generous with their ideas and their spirit. It was so helpful to hear the perspectives of my colleagues in other districts; we realized that we could be important resources for one another. I’ll be hosting a meeting at Merriam in late September for eight of these school leaders who work fairly close by. I will be visiting several of these administrators’ schools throughout the year and will bring back all sorts of things for us to think and talk about at Merriam.

After a great summer, I’m looking forward to a great year with you and your children at Merriam.