Jazz and Professional Development

Most of you reading this will not be surprised by the idea that jazz has something to offer to our professional development. Business and leadership experts have looked to jazz (as well as basketball and improv theatre) for understanding and inspiration on how we can work and learn together to find and build upon our strengths. Brian Fraser, who calls himself the Lead Provocateur of the business consulting group Jazzthink (www.jazzthink.com), believes that jazz “is a rich and robust metaphor for the kind of teamwork that will take organizations to the next level in satisfying all their stakeholders.”

Taking ourselves and our organizations to the next level is why we share our professional development stories and practices. It is a way of spurring others into action. In this issue Margaret Macmillan invites us to consider coaching as a positive and effective way to engage and support staff; Tanya Rogoschewsky provides the framework for a successful presentation from idea to delivery; and the team of Julie Johnson, Juanita Germaine, Diana Maliszewski and Renee Keberer report on their collaborative bi-school project that used the Wii to support the development of social skills for a select group of boys. These diverse stories and practices can be read as encouragement and as a professional challenge. These calls to action are what Scott McDowell, in his essay “What Jazz Soloists Know about Creative Collaboration”, calls “‘comping’ (an abbreviation of ‘accompanying’) when one instrumentalist plays a phrase or group of notes to support or provoke the soloist” (par. 6). According to McDowell,

There’s a point in a live version of Miles Davis’ “Seven Steps to Heaven” (at 4’39”) when the drummer Tony Williams, listening to George Coleman lay down an unremarkable tenor sax solo, abruptly cuts the tempo in half, briefly turning the song into a drowsy ballad. Coleman steps up his game, plays with more invention, and is on high alert for the rest of the concert (par. 6). According to McDowell,

There are a variety of ways in the library world to nudge, provoke and support each other to perform a little better. With that in mind, I encourage you to read, and pass along to others, this issue’s Professional Development articles.

And if you haven’t already, enjoy some Miles Davis. http://www.milesdavis.com/us/videos

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