

The Joy of Empathy

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In class, we usually do exercises where students can feel the pain or sadness of another person. Adults can easily feel the suffering of others by reading the daily newspaper. I often take a newspaper fast, avoiding the horror stories of children separated from parents in immigration centers. The evening news on television can make me cry as I see how refugees in camps barely survive from day to day.

I turn on the television to check the score of the final game of the World Series between the Houston Astros and the Washington Nationals. The

Houston team won more than 100 games in the regular season, while the Washington team had lost 31 out of their first 45 games. Obviously, the Houston team was favored to win this final game of the series, especially since they were playing on their home field where their fans would cheer them on.

At first, when I turned to the channel on which the game was being broadcast, I saw images of ball players hugging people in street clothes and embracing each other. As I looked more closely, I realized those were Washington ball players wearing World Series hats. The Washington team had won the final game and were world champions.

The joy was over-flowing on the screen and I found myself feeling a similar joy watching the celebration. The smiles, hugs, and embraces brought great good feeling to me as I watched the jubilation on the screen. I felt my spirit uplifted and wanted to embrace someone. The T-shirts they wore revealed the motto of the team: "Stay in the Fight". I could reflect on challenges in my own life, and I felt the hope that I, too, needed to stay in the fight.

I am a New York Yankee fan, and I know nothing about the Washington ball club. In fact as a child it was common to hear the chant: "Washington: first in war, first in peace, and last in the American League." The name of the Washington team I knew was the Washington Senators; I didn't even know that their new name was the Washington Nationals. So, there was no reason for me to be so happy about the Washington victory - except seeing very happy people on the screen. "Resilient, relentless bunch of guys," manager Dave Martinez said, "They fought all year long."

At The Principled Academy we try to encourage students to feel joy as they learn, as I do when I learn something new. We also encourage them to participate in a positive feeling when another student does exceptionally well in a school project. We are a learning community, and we can generate positive feelings when someone in our community excels. A victory for one is a victory for all.

Just as we can find empathy for those who are suffering, we can nourish our own souls by participating in the success of others.