**Student Voice**

“Not every activity lends itself to competition, and some of my students cared more about winning than others. But for those that wanted to be “number one, the best,” rivalry fueled a drive to keep on practicing.”

Is competition a good motivator for students? Is competition something that we want to promote in order to increase student motivation? Is competition not opposed to collaboration, and isn’t that what we really want to promote? I have always had trouble with this debate. I do not believe a competitive atmosphere at schools is beneficial for students if it is the dominant motivating factor, and especially if it is at the price of collaboration. I do feel that some level of competition is healthy. Finding the line between the two is the trick.

“You’re overcoming something of yourself and you feel proud of yourself for doing it.” – Dan

This quote struck me because of the unusual phrasing the student used in describing overcoming challenges. The phrase, “overcoming something *of yourself*” really struck me, because it seems to express the inherent battle within us all between being motivated to take on a challenge and being fearful of not being able to accomplish something. One must truly overcome something *of* him or herself – namely fear – in order to continue in the pursuit of something difficult. In many ways I feel like this was the crux of the book, although it did not explicitly name it. What are those motivating factors (mentors, authenticity, practice, experts, community, and others discussed in the book) that will allow us to become our best selves? It can be a scary thing trying to live up to one’s potential, because that potential is truly vast. Yet creating spaces where we can listen to students and incorporate those things that allow us to “get over ourselves” may be the real trick to education.

“Piano is just a hobby, but it’s good practice—it can help you become stronger, because there’s larger obstacles in life that you have to face, where you must stick with it to move on.” – Janiy

Teachers can sometimes fret that particular students do not like (or feel motivated) by a particular project or text or activity. It is good to question why students may not feel motivated, but it does not necessarily mean that what is being studied is misguided. It may not always be possible to find even an array of choices in a particular content area that all students feel is exactly the thing that they want to be doing. Sometimes students need to engage in content or skills that are not at the center of their interests. But it is possible to make connections for students about the importance and authenticity of the activity in which they are engaged. In Janiy’s quote above, she does not want to be a concert pianist. In fact, she mentions earlier that she does not necessarily love playing. But she sees the value in it. For her, piano is something that will teach her skills she feels are necessary to do the things she wants to do. If we can help to make these connections with students (not artificial connections, but true ones), then motivation will follow, even when dealing with content that is not loved by all. Much of this again must begin with listening and knowing students well, so that connections can be authentic to who the student really is.