

## Principal Thoughts October 2005

This past summer, my son, Hunter, his grandfather, and I went fishing in western New York. It was the first time that four-year old Hunter had gone fishing in a boat. The grown-ups were well prepared – life preserver, lots of snacks, a back-pack full of coloring books, puzzles, and games to ward off the boredom that we anticipated for Hunter. We even brought the cell phone and had a plan for his mom to meet us back at the dock to pick him up if the boredom became too great.

When we reached our favorite fishing spot, I recited the preparatory lecture.

“Okay, this is different than fishing in the fire pond. You probably won’t catch a fish every time that you drop your line in the water.”

“Okay, Okay, Dad! Can I fish now?!”

“Sure, just remember, we might not catch anything right away, you have to stick with it for a while.”

Okay, Okay, can I fish??”

Fast-forward thirty seconds.

“Dad, I think I’ve got something!”

“Oh, it’s just weeds, give it a good pull and it’ll loosen up.” I look away to work on my own line which isn’t yet in the water,

“No, DAD, it’s really something!!”

As I hear the line zip from Hunter’s reel, I realize that I was wrong! Ten minutes later as we’re bringing in a 41-inch Musky and Hunter is yelling in a frantic voice,

“GET THAT MONSTER FISH AWAY FROM ME!”

I realize that I’ve really set the wrong expectations. I should have given the Big Monster Fish lecture, not the boredom lecture. Two weeks later, as Hunter is correcting his pre-school teacher saying proudly,

“No it was bigger than me – I’m only 40 inches tall.”

I realize that he’s made the monster fish his own. It’s no longer boring or frightening, it’s something to be proud of. It’s become one of the great stories of his life, a fish story that he (and I) will probably be telling for years.

Fast-forward three months. It’s September at a Douglas family dining room table. Kids are working grudgingly on a math journal, or a writing assignment. Parents are giving the lecture about the importance of homework, and that sometimes it can be hard or boring. Kids are rolling their eyes saying, “I don’t want to do this,” or, “Just let me finish so that I can go out and play.” These moments will most likely not be one of the greatest stories of their lives, but the work that they do may lead to one. I learned from Hunter this summer to meet him where he was. To ask when he needed help, what he thought was going on, and when to leave him alone, when he

just needed to fish. He made the experience his own and that's what we need to help our children do. They have to do the learning, they have to make the work their own. We can provide the tools, we can help them when they ask for help, but we have to keep the end in mind – we all have to learn how to learn and when we do, we walk away with some of the best stories of our lives.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Whitbeck