

Reflections on DI

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I volunteered for DI last year because my daughter wanted me to be her coach.

The whole experience at first was a little overwhelming because until you “do DI” you really don’t know exactly what it is.

This will be short and sweet. Perhaps I will add to it later as time permits. I write it in the hopes that new coaches and new parents to DI may gain a little better sense of what it involves.

From a Coach’s Perspective:

First off: I had no idea what this was really about. Sally Norton helped us organize and had some great introductory meetings. I still didn’t know. She gave us some “challenges” to read. Still didn’t know. Went to the coach’s workshop. Had some inkling, but still didn’t know. Had our first meeting with my team. Then I knew!

Break!

Thoreau wrote: It is only when we forget all our learning that we begin to know.

Translation:

Have you ever heard people say that no amount of training could prepare you for X? Where X could be “being a parent” or “performing surgery”. Well being a DI coach is in that category. It’s different from being a soccer or baseball coach. Way different.

I’ve been involved in education for many years, but never have I done something like this. It was a really good experience for me.

I don’t remember exactly what we did at our first team meeting. But two books really helped me structure what we were going to do. The first: *On Stage* by Lisa Bany-Winters. The second: *More Team-Building Activities for Every Group* by Alanna Jones.

Basically your “challenge” as a coach is to come up with challenges for kids. Our beginning meetings were structured with a couple of “instant challenges” which are problems that the group should solve together in a short time period. In the beginning, everyone gravitated towards the oldest kid and let him “run the show”. As the year progressed all kids contributed and we truly became a team. It was absolutely amazing!!!

To be honest, I was so naive about this that what I did was copy my older daughter's meetings challenges that her "seasoned" coach used.

Then a few meetings later I started doing my own things.

And now I think of things all the time to do with my own kids and it's a way of life. So in many ways, DI changed my life!

So if you are on the fence about whether you want to be a coach but are concerned it may not be a high payoff, it is!

You just have to work a bit at it and make sure you have the time.

So our meetings were challenges like: OK, here's a put together lego model. Here are the pieces all taken apart. Look closely at the model. Study. Now one child sits blindfolded in front of the lego pieces. Try to put it together. OK. How long did it take? And what does it look like? Do the two models now look the same?

Now have another model. And more pieces. Now do the same thing. Except the child blindfolded is "guided" only verbally by his or her peers. OK. Now, how long did it take? Now, what does it look like?

That's basically the essence of DI.

There are other details like "NO COACH INVOLVEMENT!"

Advice to other coaches:

Plan your meetings several days ahead.

Have a schedule. Print it out. Hand it to parents when they pick up kids.

How I worked it was that I had kids come to my house. This was a K-2 group. We met about 1 complete hour per week at 4pm. We told people they could arrive 15-20 minutes before the hour. But we had to start RIGHT ON THE HOUR! Then parents could pick up ON THE NEXT HOUR. And we had 15-20 minutes to talk with parents, tell them how it went, hand out the schedule for the day. My goal: 1 EXACT HOUR WITH THE KIDS. TIMED EXACTLY TO THE MINUTE. Think that's anal? Maybe.

That system worked PERFECTLY.

I know it was draconian. No parents are allowed for our meeting. It was just me and my wife as coaches. We were the team. Sorry parents. You want to see what happens, become a coach.

I made a simple webpage for our team at www.stowdi.org/di/ Put up digital images so parents could see what happened. I felt badly that parents couldn't come. So that's why I did that. It was very important that I had the 15-20 minute cushion at the beginning and end.

Then as we started working on our central challenge (after Christmas break) I kept a running digital journal of our work.

At first we had refreshments. Our very first meeting was a "get to know us" session with parents and kids (including siblings). We modeled a challenge and the kids did it. And I went through a modified information packet for parents. Went over schedules, etc. Organizational stuff. We got to know names.

After the parent meeting we stopped refreshments, because of time and distraction. I wanted kids to realize that this time we spent (exactly 60 minutes each week) was about working. Fun work (we laughed and had a blast). But work nonetheless. I wanted them to take it seriously and not too seriously at the same time. That's a somewhat difficult balance to strike. And I wanted them to respect the time.

What did I learn? I learned how to teach. I learned how to facilitate. I learned how to pose creative challenges that would bring out skills of children. I did a lot more. And it was fantastic for me.

From a Parent's Perspective:

I cannot speak for the other parents in our group. But I saw immense change in every kid. Kids learned about group dynamics. They learned to play to the group's strengths by putting the GROUP ahead of the INDIVIDUAL. They learned to BE CREATIVE! THIS IS NOT TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS FOLKS!!! They learned to use their imagination. They learned to THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX!!! They built confidence. The kids who were confident in the beginning were confident at the end. And the kids who were quiet and shy at the beginning were confident in the end. Everyone ended up more or less at the same place. How is that? WE WERE A TEAM! They learned PROJECT MANAGEMENT! They learned HOW TO DO RESEARCH! They learned HOW TO IMPROVISE AND PERFORM. THEY USED THEIR IMAGINATION!

OK. Now reread the above paragraph. And tell me that isn't worth 1 hour of your child's time per week for a few months in the dead of winter.

I dare you!

Do it for your kids... JOIN DI!

