

## Thoughts from Mary French, Director of The Dictionary Project



Education needs to be relevant, engaging, charming and attractive to be effective in the current circumstances we are living in today. Words connect people— they are the only thing that connects civilization. We have a rich and expansive language generated by the technology we create and use to communicate with each other. People without an education become bored, disconnected and frustrated because they think no one is listening to them. This is because they do not have the words available, imprinted in their minds to express their feelings and thoughts that help them associate with other people because they have not been exposed to them.

Learning is fun. Everyone who visits schools to present dictionaries to children will tell you it is their favorite project. The students truly *appreciate* the new books and the time the donors spend with them learning new words. One girl exclaimed, 'This book smells like knowledge!' as she fanned through the pages. Another child remarked, 'Now I don't have to use a computer to look up a word.' Another said, 'This is better than Google!'

Technology cannot replace the compassion and shared experience of people spending time together to help each other. Today, there are a variety of resources that are changing the world at a rapid pace because new tools inspired by technology are making it easier to share information and sell it, making people a commodity. Print, paper, and handwriting still provide proven benefits and play a necessary role in educational development. The ability for children to produce letters, numbers, shapes, legible, and beautiful handwriting by hand is a complex job. Writing by hand at an early age supports the ability to read by engaging the eyes and the hands in recognizing and forming letters and words and expressing thoughts. Children who write by hand produce words more quickly than they do on a keyboard when they express their ideas on paper at a young age. California has mandated cursive writing in the state because every study shows that handwriting stimulates the mind. Students remember more details from stories they read on paper than from ebooks. These facts are well documented- According to Hanho Jeong's Changshin University in Seoul, South Korea a department of education study compared the effectiveness and efficiency of print versus paper reading "Print has key advantages: print readers read more quickly, experience less mental fatigue, find it easier to concentrate, retain and comprehend more of what they read.' The ability to form associations and empathy can only be developed by reading and helping others.

The Dictionary Project provides something special: the opportunity for a child to own a dictionary— something tangible that encourages learning. Most students tell sponsors this is the first book they have ever owned. We consistently see great pride in ownership among children who have a dictionary of their own and can sense, often for the first time, that they can hold the English language in their hands. A TDP board member, Dennis Brovarone points out, 'The Dictionary Project contributes at least two essential elements to the common good. First and foremost, providing beginning readers with a tactile, fundamental gateway to literacy, a dictionary that is theirs to keep and often treasure for years, can be a fundamental event of life-long learning. In addition, The Dictionary Project's collaboration with civic organizations is an excellent example of Americans working together to meet an important societal need of supporting education.'

While the benefits of dictionaries seem apparent, we still hear people ask. 'Why bother when they can find the answer on the internet?' The idea of shared humanity is created with words. The

connections made with one another make life worth living and make people feel valued. People need dictionaries now more than ever, they think that they know what they mean but when asked to define the word or explain what is being discussed, they are speechless and ask Siri. Nothing has been created to replace a dictionary as an essential learning tool in the hands of a child. The bedrock of knowledge is in printed books. Words leave an indelible effect on people. We need to choose words carefully because they define who we are and the impact we have on the world, language is the expression of ideas. An important role of language is to create connections with one another. We all come from different backgrounds, and we see things from where we stand which is a unique place in our world. This contribution is of great value when it is shared to make the world a better place for everyone.