

April 21, 2016
Embassy of Italy
Chocolate Inspiration 2016 – 20th Anniversary Celebration
Remarks from Aleta Margolis and Jane Dimyan-Ehrenfeld

Aleta Margolis:

Thank you all for joining us tonight and for supporting Inspired Teaching. Inspired Teachers ask big questions, and I have some big questions tonight: What if we based our schools on the idea that young people are innately curious, that they want to learn, that they are born with the ability to grapple with complex problems and invent solutions?

This is not fantasy. Research shows that young people (and old people too!) learn best when they get to engage with complex, interesting problems.

What if we go even further and base our schools on the belief that young people can come up with ideas that can actually transform communities? What if we viewed students not as empty vessels, or empty heads to fill up, but as the owners of powerful minds who come to school excited to learn how to use those minds well?

This is the work of Inspired Teaching. This is why we're here tonight. This is why you're here tonight.

I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to some very important people:

- the Embassy of Italy and Donatella Verrone;
- Inspired Teaching's Board of Directors;
- our Host Committee;
- event planner Claudia Ades and Eventfully;
- our 20th anniversary supporter PNC, and all of tonight's event sponsors;
- all the amazing chefs who have contributed to this evening;
- Occasions Catering;
- Jonathan Bradley Hunt, who created and edited the video we are about to see;
- Deborah Dantzer Williams and the her leadership team at the Inspired Teaching Demonstration School;
- Inspired Teaching's partners and co-instigators over the years;
- Inspired Teachers everywhere;
- all Inspired Teaching staff members, most notably Mara Duquette, Bria Stephens, Pam Greene, Steve Brown, and the incomparable Sammy Magnuson;
- Kate Keplinger, who started this journey with me 20 years ago;
- and finally, my family, for their constant support.

For 20 years, Center for Inspired Teaching has been teaching teachers to be *Instigators of Thought*. To challenge their students to grapple with important problems—in academics and in their own communities—and devise solutions.

I can think of no greater *Instigator of Thought* than tonight's honoree, Jonathan Kozol whose books shine a light on the complex and urgent problems facing our nation's most vulnerable children and families. Jonathan is a true Inspired Teacher, who challenges his readers to step outside their comfort zones and confront the complex problems of poverty, racism, and educational inequality. And he is relentless in his commitment to making change for the people who need it most.

To introduce our honoree, I want to bring to the stage my colleague Jane Dimyan-Ehrenfeld. Jane is Inspired Teaching's Director of Teaching and Learning. Like most of my Inspired Teaching colleagues, she started her career as a classroom teacher. Early in her career, she came to know Jonathan Kozol, who was so moved by her joyful and engaging approach to teaching that he became a regular visitor in her first grade classroom in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, where Jonathan had started his own career as a teacher. He even wrote a book about his visits with Jane and her students--and we have some copies of his book *Letters to A Young Teacher* available at our silent auction, which Jonathan will inscribe for the winners.

Jane Dimyan-Ehrenfeld:

It is such a pleasure and honor to introduce my friend, mentor, and hero, Jonathan Kozol. Jonathan and I met 16 years ago this week. I was a new teacher, trying to balance being in love with my students and in love with their dreams with the terrible realities of the schools and neighborhoods in which they were growing up.

In Jonathan I found a kindred spirit - someone who was dedicating his life to taking on what he called the “savage inequalities” in the system. Someone who was also promoting happiness and joy and mutual respect and whimsy in the classroom - not as nice add-ons, but as the bedrock foundations of the kind of education that each of us would want for our own children and the kind of education that each and every one of us *should* want for *all* children.

Eight years after meeting Jonathan, I met Aleta, another kindred spirit who has dedicated the last 20 years to the work of empowering teachers to make their classrooms - and their schools - places where imagination, inquiry, and integrity are given equal footing with intellect as educational priorities.

This work is not “soft” work. Imagination and inquiry and integrity are not “soft” skills, but rather the essential ingredients to being a thriving human being in our complex and challenging world. Jonathan believes this; Aleta believes this; I believe this; and I feel sure that all of you here tonight believe this as well.

I had the opportunity to interview Jonathan a few weeks ago about his experience as a teacher, his concerns about inequity and the status quo in education, and why he is passionate about empowering teachers and students.

As we sat and talked that day, Jonathan said: “I’m in the business of raising the morale of teachers at a time when they are treated...as a ‘tired’ mediocrity. I know so many marvelous teachers, and I don’t ever want them to lose that spark of joy.” As you’ll see in a moment, Jonathan then went on to say that one of the most important things a teacher can do is to nourish the individual sparks of joy, curiosity, wonder, whim and “unimaginable ideas” of the children they teach.

The spark of each teacher helps keep the flame each student carries alight. This is Jonathan’s vision and the vision of Inspired Teaching as well. Jonathan, would you please join us on the stage?

On behalf of all of us at Inspired Teaching, I am thrilled to present you with the Inspired Teaching Changemaker Award in recognition of your commitment to building a better school experience for all children