



IT WORKED!

I Have Math Tools, Now What?

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I became a first-time math coach in a district that had never had a math coach. As I observed and visited classrooms I began to discover that many of them did not have basic math tools (manipulatives) necessary for building number sense and conceptual understanding of math. Some classrooms had manipulatives but they were in closets or stored in boxes somewhere. Other tools were in a hallway meant to be shared with several classrooms.

Initially I made a list of basic math tools for elementary classrooms, located what we had, and got approval to order items that were lacking. My goal was that each classroom would have what they needed and have them be easily accessible to both teacher and student.

We soon had well-stocked classrooms with an abundance of new manipulatives and I thought we were on our way! However, as I continued to visit and observe, I noticed that some teachers were still not using them on a regular basis and some manipulatives had never even been opened. My first thought was rather critical toward those teachers for not using their new material. As I talked to them, I realized many of them did not know how to use them. My focus then changed to teaching the teachers. The next step was going into the classrooms and modeling lessons in which the tools were used or simply sharing ideas for their use with teachers. I modeled using linking cubes and ten-frames in first grade to build number sense. Those same tools were modeled in second grade to practice addition and subtraction strategies and in third grade to model multiplication and division.

I began to see a change in lessons as I visited classrooms. Teachers were becoming more comfortable using them and even began to have new ideas for their use. They no longer felt intimidated or afraid to branch out and use these tools. We have seen student understanding improve as well as an increase in interest level and motivation.

On reflection, I would begin with having a professional development with teachers to model uses for basic math tools. Instead of overwhelming everyone with an abundance of manipulatives, I would start with one or two items and model their use and let teachers become comfortable with those before adding more. I would continue to model lessons in the classroom and co-teach other lessons to help teachers become comfortable using these invaluable tools.

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