



IT WORKED!

Importance of Purposefully Building Classroom Culture

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As a teacher, I hosted classroom embedded learning opportunities for teachers who were taking Extending Children's Mathematics (ECM) and Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) at our local Educational Cooperative. When debriefing student thinking and mathematical learning after a classroom visit, one question was always asked by observers and to my dismay it wasn't about math! They instead began with questions such as "how did you get your students to talk like that", "how do the students know when it is their turn to talk," or "how do you get the students to ask questions of one another?" The first year, I answered by saying, "I don't really know," "I think it's just the combination of students," or "a really good group of kids." The next year I was departmentalized and I taught two different sections of students. These students were able to do the same thing, but better. My experience from the previous year led me to investigate further what I did to get students to interact with one another. This made me more purposeful in paying attention to what it takes to create a classroom where students listen and respond naturally to ideas. As the second year progressed, I realized that teachers are hungry for how to create a student led environment.

In response to the need in our region, I partnered with our state specialist and together we created a professional development for teachers where they learned to construct a purposeful plan for how to establish a classroom culture. During this professional development, we focused on teacher moves that foster student communication, collaborative work, and develop students' ability to have empathy for others. We taught teachers to anticipate what socio-emotional skills they wanted students to learn and then created learning experiences that evoke students to practice the use of those specific interpersonal skills. As students explore and engage in these lessons, teachers were taught to professionally notice specific behaviors that are necessary for a student led environment. We then guided teachers in how to facilitate a conversation among the students with the goal of teachers noticing student behaviors that made the learning effective and which behaviors hindered the learning experience. The debriefing of the conversations were the heart of the culture-building lessons.

The outcome of the professional development has led to more vibrant classroom cultures throughout our region. As a result of this work, I am now an Instructional Facilitator and work daily to help teachers foster and sustain a student led environment with love for math. Within our district we have trained other coaches in how to lead professional development with a focus on purposefully building a classroom culture. We also host the Knowledge of Classroom Culture professional development yearly and typically have 40 to 50 participants. In the book, *A Storyteller's Secret*, Carmin Gallo speaks to the importance of emotional intelligence. My favorite quote to leave you with is "Whether we plan it or not, culture will happen. Why not create the culture we want?"

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