



IT WORKED!

Building Relationships

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After 17 years in the classroom teaching various grades from Kindergarten to 5th, I was offered a position as a math facilitator. Over the past 7 years I have also been a Cognitive Guided Instruction (CGI) math trainer for the state, in which I led professional development helping teachers understand children's thinking while deepening their understanding of mathematics. Being a classroom teacher gave me the opportunity to use what I taught other teachers in my own classroom. I was hesitant to take the facilitator position because I have a passion for teaching children and making an impact on their lives, and I was afraid that I would not have the gratification that I received working with kids with adults. But at the same time, I also was drawn to the idea of impacting more children's lives through impacting teachers and their understanding. As I accepted the position, I was nervous. The previous facilitator was amazing and well loved by the faculty, so I had big shoes to fill. Before school started, I sat down with her to get a "feel" for the faculty that I was about to meet. This helped me begin to decide what my focus would be throughout the year. I decided that for my first year, I needed to primarily spend time building relationships. I knew that if I spent the time gaining the teachers' trust and respect, it would be a huge benefit in future years.

Over the first few months of school, we met weekly in PLCs, and I worked hard to set a tone of teamwork and build trust within the groups. As I got to know each grade level more and more, I realized that they didn't trust each other either. The teachers did not readily share how their kids were doing. I spent time helping to change their thinking from "my" kids to "our" kids. With the help of google documents, we began to share data as a grade level, and I noticed that the teachers became less and less about "me" and more about "we" and our bond began to grow. As the year progressed, I continued to build relationships with the teachers by offering to model lessons for them. Being a CGI trainer, they were constantly asking me to come and teach in their rooms. It was a way to help them see how I taught lessons and compared it to what they were doing. I also supported them by helping with intervention groups at times. I think that this was key to helping the teachers see me as approachable and a team player. Soon teachers were asking me to plan with them weekly. By December, teachers were coming to me on a daily basis asking me my thoughts on lessons, instructional paths to take, etc. I could tell that I had gained most of the teachers' trust and respect. For some of the more skeptical teachers, I made a point to go to them to ask advice and feedback, lend a hand, and ask them if I could try some things in their classroom. This helped to develop a relationship with them as well.

At the end of the year, I devoted our last PLC to give the teachers time to reflect on the year and how to improve for next year. It was powerful! There was such good feedback and the teachers felt at ease to share their thinking. It was evident, through the teacher reflections, that the teams had developed relationships and no longer saw the kids as "mine" but "ours." As I reflect on the year, I have come to the realization that the impact that I have made is much larger working with teachers than just working alone on my own class of kids. I am looking forward to the next steps next year!

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