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Learning Community Inquiry Project

My fifth grade team consisted of 54 students, two general education teachers, and one special education teacher. My students came from mostly middle to upper class families and there are a variety of ethnicities within my classroom. The majority of my students are Caucasian; however we had a growing population of Japanese, African American and Indian students that we have welcomed into our classroom throughout the school year. Additionally, we have 10 students that receive special education instruction based on their IEP. These students received help inside the general education classroom for science and social studies and were pulled out for math and literacy instruction. Overall, my classroom consisted of unique students that were all capable of learning.

Throughout the school year the enactment of our classroom learning community has been successful. However, we still needed to work on deepening classroom discussions. In the beginning of the year, class-wide and peer discussions seemed to lack higher level thinking and engagement. The majority of students relied on a few of their peers to dominate discussions in all curricular subjects. In order to deepen the level of discussion and encourage participation, we frequently discussed connections between activities, knowledge, and experiences.

Based on data collected from *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, the article, “Comparing Classroom Enactments of an Inquiry Curriculum: Lessons Learned From Two Teachers” discussed how teacher-led discussions helped students gain a deeper conceptual understanding of science-related concepts (Puntambekar, Stylianou, and Goldstein, 81). Based on this philosophy, I thought it was necessary to implement a plan

that would enrich our classroom discussions. In order to implant a plan of action, Puntambekar, Stylianou, and Goldstein suggest two necessary components to that will create a more successful classroom community that will stimulate discussion. First, it is imperative to "...[help] students make connections between activities," they further explain that "classroom discussions and structuring of activities help build connections between activities in the unit..." Secondly, "...helping students make connections between concepts..." is another necessary component for structuring a successful classroom. Further, it is important to note that "...teacher facilitation supports the making of connections between concepts during each of these activities"(84). Therefore, I believe that I am responsible for creating a classroom environment in which the instructor facilitates student learning by presenting concepts and supporting student learning by posing questions and cueing connections which will lead to deep discussions about learning.

Based on Puntambekar, Stylianou, and Goldstein's article, I have made multiple changes to create a more successful classroom by deepening discussions. To do this, I taught a lesson on connections. We practiced making connections throughout one whole school day across the curriculum by clapping over our heads whenever we could connect learning to our lives. Additionally, we carried connections throughout lessons the rest of the year. During this time, I found my role as a facilitator of discussions by revealing my own personal connections with curriculum. I believe that "Well-designed science instruction plays an important role in enabling students to connect science ideas for deeper understanding so that they can apply them in different contexts (Linn, Eylon,& Davis, 2004), and teacher-led discussions are an important aspect of such instruction"

(86). It was my plan to create a rich classroom environment that fostered student communication about the learning process while making connections to prior experiences.

Based on this article, I know that incorporating deeper level of discussions contributed to success in my classroom. Data from “Comparing Classroom Enactments of an Inquiry Curriculum: Lessons Learned From Two Teachers” proved that facilitating discussions and allowing students to talk about their learning significantly improved assessment of “open-ended items and the concept-mapping...” which “...indicat[ed] that [students] had a better understanding of the connections between science concepts and principles” (94). In order to track my students’ success during science, I thought that comparing test scores and observations was appropriate evidence of student success in the classroom.

I know that my own students significantly in science understanding based on the incorporation of deeper discussions. I know this based on their test scores. In the unit prior to the research and implementation of discussion, students achieved an average of 82% on their unit exam. After one month long unit of incorporation of discussion and connections, students achieved an average of 88% on their unit exam. Also, observations from my mentor teachers and field instructor proved that students were more engaged and invested in learning when they led conversations, while you facilitated the discussion of concepts.

This year has taught me a great deal about learning communities. I have learned that fostering a successful learning community takes time, practice, and patience.

Specifically, incorporating deeper level discussions, including connections, fostered an engaged and successful body of students.

Source:

Puntambekar, Stylianou, and Goldstein. "Comparing Classroom Enactments of an Inquiry Curriculum: Lessons Learned From Two Teachers" The Journal of the Learning Sciences. 1 (2007): 81–130. 5 Apr. 2007
<www.leaonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/s15327809jls1601_4>