

Title of Session: Teaching Teachers

Moderator: Dianne Allen

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Room: Teaching Teachers Group

DianneA: Welcome to the Teaching teachers group

DianneA: our session is due to start in about 20 minutes time

DianneA: sometimes I am an earlier bird ..

DianneA: and today is one of those times

EmilyVA: I always think that's a good thing. I wanted to join in early as well.

DianneA: as you scroll down in the main window Emily you will see a whiteboard with today's discussion topic/s

DianneA: a session in Teaching Teachers tends to respond to participants needs on the day

EmilyVA: I see. So we will be discussing classroom management?

DianneA: so those topics are in case others who come and join us don't have particular things on their mind and plate and need to get them off their chest ... to spin a host of metaphors

DianneA: have you another practice issue you would prefer be discussed?

EmilyVA: Not at the moment. If something arises, I'll let you know.

EmilyVA: I will return in 5 minutes.

JeffC: isn't that what MacArthur said? or was that Arnie?

EmilyVA: That was I shall return and I'll be back.

DianneA: and the question is, is Emily 'back'?

EmilyVA: yes

DianneA: good

DianneA: so we usually start a session like this with introductions ...

DianneA: where are you from and what area of teaching is your key interest?

DianneA: I am from Wollongong NSW Australia, and my teaching area is professional development

EmilyVA: I am from San Diego, California and I teach third grade, all subjects.

DianneA: Thanks Emily

DianneA: BJ, Jeff?

BJB2 waves hi. I'm in Pennsylvania and teach remedial communication

DianneA: thanks BJ

DianneA: we are rather small in number today

DianneA: and that may mean Emily like you feel 'under the microscope' ...

DianneA: that is not the intention

DianneA: the idea is to share teaching concerns and to try and work with some of those issues

DianneA: so from the three items prospectively on our agenda today do you have a preference of one to focus on?

EmilyVA: Well, I think number one and two are closely related. We can start with number one.

JeffC: ennui

DianneA: OK, now in my process of reflective research the first step is to ask ...

DianneA: can you think of a recent teaching incident that demonstrates that, and that you are willing to share .. and this question gets opened to all participants ...

DianneA: tell your story ...

DianneA: for instance .. about three weeks ago I was moderating a session here and 36 people turned up

DianneA: I had no idea how to manage that size group to get the best experience for them

BJB2: that session was kind of unproductive with so many people talking

DianneA nods to BJ

JeffC: yup... I loved it!

DianneA: it wasn't quite that any of them were 'naughty' - but each one had their own agenda

DianneA: OK Jeff why did you love it?

JeffC: well... only one here today... so the chat should be easier to handle.

JeffC loves chaos.

DianneA: what do you love about chaos

JeffC: anyhow... conflict in the classroom... not necessarily a bad thing.

BJB2 . o O (after I edited that discussion I told a new member that chatting skills were fine, it's LISTENING skills that need to be developed!)

JeffC: well... take the other day... I was subbing for a language arts class, teaching a book called "joyride."

JeffC: which is about a white kid who is forced (because of vandalism he did) to work in a strawberry field during the summer with Mexican workers.

DianneA listens for more details

JeffC: he's prejudiced because his parents are.

JeffC: now... the class itself is about half white and half Mexican.

JeffC: and I basically opened the door and asked who considered themselves prejudiced.

JeffC: one white kid openly admitted it as did one Mexican kid.

JeffC: and things got pretty interesting after that.

JeffC: there wasn't really a direction other than to get the kids communicating... and... thinking.

DianneA nods to Jeff

JeffC: their teacher was loathe to discuss it... which is sort of weird considering the main theme of the book is overcoming racism.

EmilyVA: That chaos turned into a teachable moment.

DianneA: did you at any stage think about trying to help a direction form?

JeffC: but if you don't get down to the personal level, the students won't buy in... and... if it's not relevant to their experience... then ennui sets in... which is the worst form of conflict... inner conflict and boredom.

DianneA nods to Jeff

JeffC: I told them I couldn't get them to overcome a lifetime of racist belief in one period.

DianneA: do we always need chaos to generate interest however?

JeffC: but I did get the white kid to understand that just because all members of the sureno gang are Mexican, doesn't mean that all Mexicans are members of the sureno gang.

JeffC: (sorry... don't remember how to do a tilde).

JeffC: I don't think *always*... but for the most part, classroom management emphasizes *order*.

JeffC: the opposite of order and control is chaos... and these kids basically need to explode at some point.

DianneA nods

JeffC: so yeah... I think having an element of chaos is important.

DianneA: so, would part of your approach to teaching include the view that some teaching practice is over-controlling, and consequently unproductive?

JeffC: yes

DianneA: Emily is that how you see it?

EmilyVA: I agree with you both.

DianneA: and BJ?

JeffC: it's unproductive because in the long run you drive the inner motivation to learn

out of the kids.

EmilyVA: I had an incident today.

DianneA nods to Jeff

DianneA listens to Emily's story

JeffC: and education becomes externalized... so that they're just there for a grade, or to take a test and move on.

BJB2 thinks it's a matter of semantics...a food fight would be chaotic. A teachable moment allows students to compare and contrast...and divulge prior knowledge

JeffC listens as well.

EmilyVA: My third graders have been reviewing for the State test the past couple of weeks. And I decided to try something new.

EmilyVA: I turned the review into a game. Sounds harmless so far, right>

BJB2 smiles and nods

DianneA nods harmless can be quite dangerous

EmilyVA: It started off really well. The kids were competitive and I've never seen them think so hard.

EmilyVA: My highest students started to feel discourage when they were getting a couple questions wrong.

EmilyVA: They started saying, "I hate this game!" and "I don't want to play anymore." I was surprised.

EmilyVA: After I thought it about it more, I realized that "GATE" students I have weren't always getting the answers right like they're used to.

JeffC: hehe

JeffC: yeah... they like winning and expect to always be right... welcome to the dark side kids!

DianneA nods to Jeff

DianneA wonders what else Emily got from thinking about the situation, and what she did next ..

EmilyVA: I had to stop the game.

JeffC: that's good Emily... "cognitive dissonance" comes to mind... bright kids get lazy because they're never challenged... you raised the bar for them.

EmilyVA: Thanks. I can't believe they wanted to give up. They're my bright ones

JeffC: I'd go back to it and have the GATE kids think about it.

DianneA: OK Jeff can you elaborate some more ..

JeffC: well... make them think about what it's like being a student who *always* has to struggle to find the right answer.

JeffC: at least those kids try... right?

DianneA: what do you mean by using 'cognitive dissonance' as a learning spur?

JeffC: at least some of them do.

JeffC: it's a matter of feeling comfortable being uncomfortable and out of your element.

EmilyVA: I'll have a talk with them tomorrow. I'm definitely going to bring it up again.

JeffC: sometimes learning is a struggle.

JeffC: the bright ones have grown up *never struggling*.

JeffC: and the first time they have to... they give up.

DianneA: and at what stage does discomfort become unproductive?

JeffC: get them to reflect on that.

EmilyVA: Very true.

JeffC: when the task is completely unrealistic and irrelevant.

DianneA: so how do you suggest to kids in those circumstances to deal with the unrealistic and or the irrelevant?

DianneA: i.e. how do you help kids learn to learn in all sorts of situations?

JeffC: I suggest that in today's world of NCLB Standards and high stakes mandated tests where curriculum is directed at the top of the bell curve, that curriculum is irrelevant to

the high end kids because it is completely unchallenging.

JeffC: they need different and challenging curriculum but never receive it... or very rarely.

DianneA can understand that

JeffC: and when they do... they whine and moan and give up.

JeffC: and that's the kind of student that we are raising today.

DianneA wonders what solutions are then offered to those kids, and in a diverse capacity class group

JeffC: status quo doesn't see a real need to "find a solution" since those kids receive straight A's.

EmilyVA: In my school, not much is offered to them.

DianneA nods to Jeff, but then we lose those kids!!!

JeffC: yup... to an extent... of course we really lose *all* kids with test based curriculum.

EmilyVA: My school is in the middle of restructuring our staff because we haven't met our goals in four years.

EmilyVA: "those kids" are moving away

DianneA nods but we are also faced with having to live with it and to transcend it if we can so what kinds of ideas and teaching strategies can we design to do better than the status quo

JeffC: how many really have fun learning? how many enjoy challenges that stretch them? how many have individualized learning plans? how many have kept the thrill of learning that all first graders have?

JeffC: right... so now Emily your school is in the morass of remedial teaching... of the curriculum.

JeffC: your whole goal is to raise test scores... and the result is counterproductive to student learning.

EmilyVA: yes. all we talk about is the state test.

EmilyVA: yes

JeffC: absurd... and blindly surreal.

DianneA: that is the very thing that then stops us thinking about the other issues!

JeffC: I taught outside the box, and raised test scores of inner city kids so much that I received a bonus.

JeffC: it's the other issues that if taught will raise test scores.

DianneA remembers the old adage that those things that get measured get managed, but those things are not really what the business is about, and very rarely make the profits that keep a business going

DianneA: and now teaching is finding this out with testing!!

JeffC: well... this year's "Teacher of the Year" in America (from Oregon btw... a science teacher whom I've invited to the Science Resources group) told GW to rethink NCLB.

DianneA: Now Emily, when else did you teach outside the box and become surprised?

JeffC: of course... I don't think GW has really thought about it at all in the first place.

EmilyVA: We rarely get to do anything besides teach the state standards. So I decided to try a different approach to homework.

DianneA listens to Emily

DavidW: Well, especially with NCLB tied to funding, it becomes a BIG motivator for teaching to the test

EmilyVA: I have the students do projects: Research an Animal, Recipe, Career report...keep in mind they're in third grade.

JeffC: Emily... consider this... in Texas... the "foundation of NCLB and the lovely TAKS test"... 80-90% of black and Hispanic students *drop out*.

EmilyVA: They love it,

DianneA: and what surprises you about it?

EmilyVA: I read about Texas. So interesting.

JeffC: it demonstrates *quantitatively* how counterproductive NCLB is.

DavidW notes that in international comparisons of education the US does pretty well up through 4th grade

JeffC doesn't agree with David's assessment.

EmilyVA: I've had kids come up with fantastic projects, except the ones who get no help from their parents.

JeffC: If it has to do with test scores... I'd argue that our K-4 "standards" for math and reading are appallingly low and the test scores therefore artificially high.

DianneA: so how do you try and help the kids who get no help at home?

EmilyVA: I try to help them after school.

DianneA: in what way Emily?

EmilyVA: I have them use the computers and research their topics on the internet. (most of my kids have no computer)

EmilyVA: I provide any poster board they might need. I think I do almost anything that a parent may do for their child.

DianneA nods sometimes projects only expose social disadvantage

BJB2: have you taught how to search and how to identify reliable sources?

EmilyVA: We've talked about the encyclopedia websites.

EmilyVA: I need to know how to keep the interest of my low students.

BJB2: do you do project based lessons?

EmilyVA: I think they are only told they need to learn and work harder.

BJB2 . o O (or problem based lessons?)

DianneA: do you arrange for children to work together in mixed groups?

EmilyVA: I have them work in mixed groups some times. I'd like to do more project based lessons in class.

BJB2: you also can create a classroom in the Tapped In K-12 Student campus, Emily

DianneA nods to BJ

DianneA: would you like to elaborate that a bit more BJ

DavidW: Is it possible for students to team with others who have more resources at home?

BJB2: the student campus is a safe and secure place where you can bring your students

EmilyVA: I've never thought of that.

BJB2: you assign usernames and passwords and the students land in their classroom when they log in

BJB2: Jeff leads a tour of the student campus every Saturday

DianneA: and something like KEEP would allow them to build a poster using web resources without costing money they may not have ..

BJB2: you can have your students post to the threaded discussion board.

DianneA: though there are probably other web based places for building up posters

BJB2: and store their resources in the classroom

EmilyVA: true. although I do wish they had a computer at home.

EmilyVA: this sounds like a really good idea that I could present to my principal. She's always up for something new with technology.

BJB2: Emily, you could collaborate with another teacher and have the two classes work together...

DianneA: and does Midge's electronic scrapbooking stuff fit in here BJ?

BJB2: compare cultures, biomes, have a literature circle, etc

EmilyVA: but if she doesn't agree with me, and doesn't enforce it on the entire staff, I don't know if I can really do it. There's not much flexibility in our schedules at my school.

EmilyVA: this sounds really good.

BJB2: Emily, you can collaborate with another teacher from anywhere in the world ;-)

DianneA: even Wollongong

EmilyVA: I'm sure the kids would love that

BJB2: The scrapbooking thing would be a way to construct a web site of artifacts

DianneA: although time zones make that a bit more difficult

DianneA grins at BJ

BJB2 winks at Dianne

DianneA: Emily, let me recap for a bit ...

DianneA: what we have done today is ask you to think about something that is an issue in your practice

DianneA: to share a story and to listen to other stories

DianneA: and then to be engaged in comparing your experience with the experience and suggestions of others

DianneA: and from that ideas for teaching seem to develop

DianneA: that's one of the things that we frequently do here at Tapped In

BJB2 agrees.

DianneA: from my point of view it is one of the ways to go about developing professional expertise

DianneA: do you do anything like this at school amongst peer teachers?

EmilyVA: All of your ideas have been nothing but helpful. Thank you.

EmilyVA: No, we talk during lunch.

BJB2: Emily, you may not have time to collaborate with colleagues in your school, but you can always join the Tapped In calendar events

EmilyVA: Sounds good. Thanks for your time.

DianneA: Ok, then thanks for coming and joining us today

BJB2: there are discussions on cybersafety, global project based learning, language arts...lots of interesting discussions

DianneA: Bj can you show Emily about the Calendar of Events ... or have you dealt with that earlier?

BJB2: Thanks, Dianne, for taking the time to lead this discussion

EmilyVA: I think I found it. Thanks.

BJB2: I think Emily knows how to do that, but just in case: Go to the Tapped In tab at the top of your screen and then click on calendar in the blue menu bar

DianneA: Good, then you know where to find this sort of stuff again

DianneA: Thanks Bj, David, and Jeff

DianneA: catch you both again soon

DavidW waves to Dianne