



Welcome fellow Recovering Traditionalists to Episode 163: Helping Your Students to Be a Successful Student

Before we get into the episode, this week's positivity comes from the Build Math Minds Facebook group. As of today we have over 76,000 people in that group. It is a place to ask questions about the teaching and learning of math and to ask advice for activities to get your students engaged with mathematics. Serena had asked for advice and this was her post she made after using the suggestions that educators in the group gave her:

“My most difficult class was just the most well-behaved ever and it was thanks to ideas from here. We used the duel cards which took me TWO HOURS to print onto card and cut and they were so successful beyond my wildest expectations, the students LOVED them, we were able to solve them together and wanted to take them home. And the Cake Walk is seriously the best game, thank you to so many of you for suggesting it. The kids thanked me at the end of class. Like ACTUALLY THANKED ME!
I am not going to get ahead of myself but this was the BEST start to 2024.”

Serena, I'm so glad you got some great ideas from the group. If you aren't a part of the Build Math Minds Facebook group you can join by going to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BuildMathMinds>

I was looking at the Table of Contents in the book *Teaching Problems and the Problems of Teaching* by Dr. Magdalene Lampert recently and the chapter titled **Teaching Students to Be People Who Study in School** caught my eye. I had just recently talked with a teacher about how kids don't know how to study and we were specifically talking about studying for tests. So I flipped to the chapter and quickly learned that Dr. Lampert isn't talking about studying for tests but learning how to study a subject in general...basically how to help your students become learners. Which is a bigger, and I believe even more important, topic than helping students learn how to study for a test.

As I read through her chapter about Teaching Students to Be People Who Study in School, these pieces from the beginning of the chapter called out to me:

P. 265 *“They did not choose to be in this class or in this school, or even to be in school at all.*

Although some students show up at school as “intentional learners” — people who are already interested in doing whatever they need to do to learn academic subjects— they are the exception rather than the rule. Even if they are disposed to study, they probably need to learn how. But more fundamental than knowing how is developing a sense of oneself as a learner that makes it socially acceptable to engage in academic work. The goal of school teaching is not to turn all students into people who see themselves as professional academics, but to enable all of them to include a disposition toward productive study of academic subjects among the personality traits they exhibit while they are in the classroom. If the young people who come to school do not see themselves as learners, they are not going to act like learners even if that would help them to be successful in school. It is the teacher's job to help them change their sense of themselves so that studying is not a self-contradictory activity.

One's sense of oneself as a learner is not a wholly private construction. Academic identity is formed from an amalgamation of how we see ourselves and how others see us, and those perceptions are formed and expressed in social interaction. How I act in front of others expresses my sense of who I am. How others then react to me influences the development of my identity."

She goes on to say on page 266:

"What students are willing to do with one another and with their teacher in the public space of the classroom constrains their capacities to study and to learn. If a student does not see himself or herself as the kind of person who is going to learn, it seems unlikely that learning will occur. Even if such a person were tricked into acquiring some knowledge or skill, the chances that such learning would ever be used in public are probably slim.

On the surface, the work of teaching entailed here could be thought of as "classroom management" or "discipline." It is about what the teacher does to keep students on task, to keep them from "fooling around" or otherwise interfering with productive activity. But if we view students' productive or unproductive actions in the classroom as expressions of who they think they are, then classroom management merges with something that might be called 'academic character education.'"

Throughout the chapter, Dr. Lampert talks about three 'problems' with trying to teach students to be people who study in school. The one I'd like to spend time on today is **Doing What It Takes to Know Your Students as Mathematical Learners**. This to me is where it all starts because you can't help them learn to study a subject if you don't know who they are as learners.

As I read through the chapter these ideas came to mind to help you get to know your students as you teach them to be successful students who can study mathematics.

1. Connect with and build relationships with students. It isn't just about their personal interests but also who they are as a learner. Some kids like to engage as much as you'll let them, while others want to quietly listen and absorb information. Get to know how they learn best. It isn't that you need to cater to all the different styles of learning, but when a student is being 'unproductive' during a lesson you may reflect back on the fact that this style of lesson isn't the best for them and that may be why they aren't being as productive as you'd like them to be. And just you acknowledging that to them, saying something like "Hey, I know working independently isn't your favorite but today I'd really like to see how you think about these problems so please do your best to show me what you know," can go a long way with helping your students feel seen.
2. Change up the structure of your math activities. I love organizing a math time by doing a Number Routine, Word Problem, and then some form of Practice. But if I started to notice that students weren't as productive during the Practice portion of the math time, then I might switch it and put the Practice part first where we would practice things we learned the day before then go into the Word Problem and save the Number Routine for last because often those are a bit more fun and sometimes don't take as much focus on mathematical topics so it might work better for the students to do that last. I like to have a consistent set up but we need to be flexible based upon what we are seeing with the students.
3. Change up the structure of the social interactions. Some kids are unproductive when seated next to their friends but for others that might make them more productive, especially if you are asking students to work together and share their thinking. If you were in a PD setting and the facilitator grouped you with other people you didn't know, or didn't like, would you want to engage? As adults, our safe place is with our friends. We are more willing to open up and share our thoughts and we are more willing to make mistakes because we know our friends will be kind and we all know learning happens when we make mistakes but

some kids won't put themselves out there in a position where they could make a mistake if they aren't comfortable with the people they are around.

4. Provide lots of manipulatives. So many students need the visual aspect that manipulatives provide to help them with the study of mathematics, but we often only bring out the manipulatives when the *lesson* calls for them. I want you to know your *students* are calling for them even if the lesson doesn't...they are calling for them silently in their head. To help students be more productive, create a space for them to easily access any manipulative they need. It can be a physical space or making sure they know how to access the virtual manipulatives available through places like [BrainingCamp.com](https://www.brainingcamp.com) or [PolyPad](https://www.poly.com) and then encourage students to go use the manipulatives during their work.

There are two other "problems" with trying to teach students to be people who study in school. She addresses them throughout the chapter but I'm not going into them here because it's such intricate work. The other two areas are: *Influencing Who Students Can Become* and *Being the Adult Who Both Respects Others and Places High Expectations Upon Them*. So if you want to learn more, I'll link up the book at the show notes page.

I hope this gives you some practical ideas to help you get to know your students better as you find ways to help them see themselves as a person who can learn math, because once they believe they can (and they believe YOU think they can)..they will.

Until next week my Fellow Recovering Traditionalists, keep Building Math Minds.

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