

Building Thinking Classrooms: Six Years Later

[Global Math Department](#)

(Parts of the webinar notes are incomplete due to technical difficulties.)

What has changed?

- There were 11 practices. Now there are 14. Assessment was originally bundled into one practice. There was no homework practice.
- There are changes within individual practices, especially in homework and note making.
- Consolidation is more clearly communicated.
- Some of these more recent innovations around homework and note making are available [here](#).

Homework

- Homework is so complex because the disconnect between the goals of students and teachers is greatest around homework over anything else we do in the math classroom.
- Homework comes with so much baggage, so it's rebranded to Check Your Understanding questions.
- Mild, medium, and spicy clusters - We ask, "Where are you going to start?" We don't say, "Which ones are you going to do?" or "Choose which ones you want to do."
- A small shift can be the difference between accountability and responsibility.

Leadership Tips

- A teacher's professional autonomy is really important. We have to accept the fact that some teachers aren't going to do what we think they should do. We need to respect that teacher's professional autonomy. That's not to say that we may not have things to say to that teacher to help them.
- You cannot change a teacher. Only a teacher can change themselves.
- There is an art and craft to teaching. There's an art and craft to working with teachers.
- Teachers don't best learn how to teach by being told how to do it. Teachers need opportunities to construct meaning in meaningful situations.
- Every teacher who is the process of change is either moving toward something or moving away from something.
- The thing they are moving toward or away from is something they have to notice.
- Try to shift a teacher's attention towards something they can notice.
- Use the pronoun "I" a lot. *This is what I am doing. This is what I am seeing. This is what my students are doing.* Invite them into your space instead of pushing into their space.

Mindfulness While Circulating

- What is their conversation currently about? How can I extend their thinking from where they currently are? This is different from how to extend their thinking for where I want them to go. What is the natural extension or hint for their thinking right now?
- Does this group actually need my intervention right now? Stop pushing in unless a group really needs it.
- If I am going to step in, what will I say? Be clear. Have a plan.
- How long will you stay with a group? Be mindful of how long you're there. The longer you're there, the worse it gets. You have ten seconds.

Planning For a Task

- Non-curricular task: It should have rich potential. Kids should get stuck and think and use innovative ways to solve it.
- Figure out how to back the task up so that everyone can enter into it.
- Is the floor sufficiently low for everyone? You can always go up.
- Pay attention to how the students enter the task. Be attentive to what students are doing, so you can enter into the conversations.
- The way we prepare for a task is to use the task and then pay attention to what happens. The task improves each time you use it.

Thin Slicing

- Thin slicing is a subset of how we move through curricular content. Students are constructing understanding through repeated experiences with gradually increasing complexity and slight variations so they can start noticing things. We notice change against a backdrop of consistency.

Small Classrooms

- Students don't feel like groups are random anymore, so use groups of two.
- Put two groups of two close to each other.
- There's a lack of diversity with smaller numbers, so randomly write things on empty whiteboards. Seed the space with ideas that seem to be missing.

Buy In From Stakeholders

- Recognize who the stakeholders are in this situation.
- Students: Implement first three practices all at once. It disharms students and disrupts the norms of the classroom and helps them adapt to the change.
- Colleagues: Use the word "I" a lot.
- Administrators: Bring them in. They love things that are research based. Present yourself as a professional.

- Parents: Teachers are not afraid of parents. Teachers are afraid of administrators who don't support them in the face of parents. How many adults out of 100 have negative experience with math or are terrified of it? Those are the parents of your students. They worry that something will happen at school and then they'll have to pick up the slack at home. When a parent expresses concern, often the thing that they're saying is not the thing that they're saying.

Think about Building Thinking Classrooms as a problem for you to solve. Work on it. Tinker with it. Play with it. Gather resources. Get ideas from others. It's a problem to solve. You all have the professional capacity to do that.