Peter Liljedahl

Center of Excellence Webinar Series

An introduction to Building Thinking Classrooms

- Everywhere Peter went he saw that students were not thinking. Thinking is a necessary precursor to learning.
- Is it true that students are not thinking? If it is true, then what are they doing?
- Kids were busy, but over 80% of students were not thinking. 20% of students were thinking 20% of the time.
- Some students were:
    - Slacking - they care what you think about them
    - Stalling - they care but hide behind legitimate off-task behaviors
    - Fakers - they pretend to work
    - Mimickers - Mimicking is not thinking. It's a production behavior. MImicking is what they do to produce what you asked for.
        - It's SO effective in the short term.
        - It is 100% ineffective in the long term. They will start to struggle at their inability to remain productive as the curriculum becomes more challenging.
- Students are a product of their teacher. Teachers are a product of their students. If students are not thinking, it changes the way the teacher is teaching.
- The fact that classrooms look alike has been true for a very long time (170 years).
    - Goals - conformity and compliance
    - This is where mimicking comes from.
    - Overall teachers have said that they don't want their students to mimic.
    - Students say that their teachers definitely want them to mimic.
    - They don't listen to what we say. They listen to what we do.
- Break norms and increase student thinking. Can we get more students thinking and get them thinking for longer?
    - Norms keep students in a static non-thinking space.
- We don't teach students to think. We liberate them to think.

Tasks

- We need to give students something to think about.
- Good tasks DNA
    - Low floor - every student can start (access)
        - Every teacher is working on equity, and equity is hard. Equity is not a practice. Equity is a goal and an outcome. The day-to-day practice that helps us achieve equity is access.
        - A task shouldn't immediately exclude ⅓ of the students. Back the train as far back into the station as necessary so everyone can get on the train. Then keep everyone on the train as you leave the station and pick up steam.
    - High ceiling - every student will meet challenge

        - Challenge is where the learning happens. That's where productive struggle begins. It's a state, not a trait. Students meet challenge the heels of success
    - Novelty

Visibly Random Groups

- 80% of students were unlikely to offer an idea prior to random groups.
- The optimal group size is three but starts with two in primary grades and certain demographics.
- Diversity is a strength.

VNPS

- Thinking requires risk. Writing on erasable surfaces reduces risk.
- Everyone is oriented in the same way at a vertical surface. No one owns it.
- They can see each other's work. The smartest person in the room is the room.
- The teacher can see everything and be more responsive.
- It's not that standing is so good. It's that sitting is so bad. Sitting students can feel more anonymous and disengage.

Where do we start?

- Toolkit #1 - random groups, VNPS, and tasks implemented all at once
- Toolkit #2 - five practices one at a time in any order
- And so on…