



Significant Episode: There Is A Boy

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Finding 1.5: Individual

Know that each student is an individual and has his or her own preferences for learning.

Background

There is a boy (J) in my Mad Maths Monday group who is also in my maths group. J is an Aboriginal boy who is very capable in maths, yet has a very low perception of what he can do. He often says, "I am just dumb" during maths groups and Mad Maths.

Story

Each week my maths group does a quick maths challenge which consists of 4 –12 questions related to our learning for the week. He usually gets overwhelmed by it (I assume this is because it is a written piece of work) and refuses to complete it because he "doesn't know how to do it". This used to worry me; however I would not pursue the point because I already had enough data on his learning without the challenge. Instead, I would tell him not to worry, but if there is something on the sheet he thinks he can do, to have a go.

As time went on I kept trying to help him complete his challenge to no avail.

Result

One week, I went over and he said he would try the questions if I stayed and helped him. This was a huge breakthrough for J. For the next few weeks I would sit beside him and 'help him' (this usually included reading the first question because he already knew what to do and writing in the answers that he said to me).

Then, I asked him if he needed help with his maths challenge and he replied, "No, I know what to do". For J to come from never attempting his maths challenge to completing it independently was a very significant event for me.

I can't say for sure what exactly made the change, but I think one factor may have been the fact that I stepped back and didn't force him to complete something he didn't want to when it wasn't essential to his learning or assessment. I used to make sure I had enough observations on him throughout the week because I knew I may not have the written assessment at the end.

As an Aboriginal boy I think he was not as confident at written work as he was problem solving and oral work. However, he was able to gain this confidence in his own time.

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Some questions to prompt discussion:

1. *What are some of the reasons J might have felt that he was "dumb" in mathematics?*
2. *Kate felt that "stepping back" was effective in helping J. What might have been some other factors?*
3. *What other interesting or important aspects are in this Significant Episode?*