

Moving from “I can’t” to “I can”

Educator Story

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Context: My Literacy and Numeracy group consists of 19 children: 13 boys and 7 girls, 4 of these students are Aboriginal.

My initial focus for this year was teaching maths through Higher Order Thinking Skills and Technology. Our whole school timetable means that all classes are involved in Literacy and Numeracy at the same time. This quickly became a problem when trying to teach through technology as there was high demand for the computer room, and I did not want to ‘hog’ the time needed by the other fourteen Literacy/Numeracy groups. I put the focus back on HOT (High Order Thinking) Skills. I used a variety of tools to help me do this including graphic organisers, Bloom’s Taxonomy, open questions, word problems, creative thinking tasks, etc.

For some of the students the tasks fitted perfectly. The competitive nature of the boys in my class meant that they were challenging themselves as well as each other. They wanted to do things bigger and better than anyone else. But for the four Aboriginal students (Denise, Jenny, Alice and Stuart), this challenge was beyond the skills that they had to achieve success. I tried many different tasks and ways to support these children to achieve success, but it just wasn’t working.

I will reflect on one student in my class, Denise, to show her attitudes and feelings towards maths from earlier in the year to now.

Typical maths lesson – term 1 and 2

| LOOKED LIKE | SOUNDED LIKE | FELT LIKE |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| Head on the desk, book on the floor | “I need help” before beginning or even sitting down | No risk taking |
| Tears | “I need to go to the toilet” | Safe zone |
| Sometimes removing self from group | “I can’t do this” | Confused |
| Refusal to participate in certain tasks | “ I don’t know what to do” | Low resilience |
| Face in hands | Crying | Fear of making a mistake |
| Crawling into a corner | | Giving up before beginning |
| Only chose to learn with the teacher | | Avoidance |
| | | Did not enjoy learning |

At the end of Term 2, I decided to change my approach to teaching maths. I asked the children “What are your interests outside of school?” The children listed a whole range of activities that they engage in outside of school. I then told them that we would vote on the most popular and would incorporate this into Literacy and Numeracy for the following term.

“I was amazed at how eager the children were to learn. They were researching at home, engaged in all lessons and excited about learning.”

The shortlist was: games (consoles), cooking, craft and sport. The children voted and the winning interest was cooking. The children then decided they wanted to do Junior MasterChef. incorporate this into Literacy and Numeracy for the following term. They then listed all of the learning activities that could tie into Literacy and Numeracy time. I took on board all of their ideas and planned an entire unit on Junior MasterChef.

When we began the topic in Term 3, I was amazed at how eager the children were to learn. They were researching at home, engaged in all lessons and excited about learning. Following is a record of the attitudes and feeling that I saw in Denise while learning maths through Junior MasterChef.



| LOOKED LIKE | SOUNDED LIKE | FELT LIKE |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Sitting up | "Don't help me yet, I want to try by myself" | Risk taking |
| Focused on learning | "Hey Laura, I didn't go to the toilet at all today. I'm getting good at that aren't I!" | Having a go |
| Smiling, happy | "What are we learning about today?" before numeracy time begins. | Proud |
| Excited | "Come and look what I did" | Excited |
| Participating | "Can I share this with Mr Plastow or Vicki?" | Eager to learn |
| Learning in a variety of ways: independently, collaboratively (group or parent), with the teacher | Talking about her learning with the teacher and other students | Enjoys learning |
| Laughing | | |

Next year I will follow the same process from the beginning of the year, asking students what their interests are and planning learning experiences and activities from their ideas. I am excited about the prospect of doing this for a full year and hope that the high levels of engagement and eagerness to learn will translate into improved mathematical outcomes for students with a positive view of themselves as mathematicians.



Finding 3.1: Experiences

Design mathematical learning experiences that have family and community significance.