

My Significant Learning Environment

Dr. Tony Bates said, “You put in the environment for them, but they have to do the learning” (ChangSchool, 2015). This resonated with me because all too often I feel that my students need to take ownership of their own learning experiences...but do not seem to nor does anyone encourage them to. Now, I’ve come to understand that although that feeling is correct and can be shared by others, I, as the teacher, do play a major role in how that occurs. One could reply, “Obviously! You are the teacher!” I now view my responsibility as the facilitator in my student’s learning rather than a provider. As the facilitator, it is my responsibility to provide my students with significant learning environments (SLE) where they can do the learning on their own.

“Play is an emergent property of the application of rules of the imagination” (TEDxTalks, 2012). According to Merriam-Webster, though, that definition does not reflect the word “play” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). I find it interesting that the one place that includes every word in the English dictionary is putting constraints around us. There lies the problem. My innovation plan focuses majorly on blended learning, but what lies within my blended learning classroom is what matters most. Play-based learning is one component that I want to incorporate within my classroom. Providing my students opportunities to grow and fuel their imagination using play will create a significant learning environment where they will crave learning. I no longer want to be the focal point of my classroom, but the facilitator that guides my students to their own questions and answers. Creating an environment with these crucial aspects will empower my students to learn by doing, learn by exploration and learn to question everything around them.

As with any new idea brought to the table, I face many challenges successfully implementing this new learning environment that I want to give my students. Although I have not been an educator for many years, it has not taken long for me to see that many teachers do not like change. In hindsight, no one likes change. We are creatures of habit. We like things that are predictable and expected. Change rattles our environment and that’s exactly what I set out to do. I expect my administration to be wary of my choices. I plan to address this challenge by slowly emerging my students into the type of environment that I want them to be a part of. For example, my innovation plan has not been completely won over by a lot of other teachers or administration even though we are already doing some form of blended learning within each of our classrooms. We call it a different name is the only difference. Some refer to it as centers, stations, the daily three or daily five. All of those titles are still a form of blended learning, so if they feel more comfortable calling it one of the previous titles, that’s fine by me. I want to pick and choose my battles strategically. Regardless of what

my admin or fellow colleagues call it, it is not the name that matters, it is the environment it's in and how the learning is taking place. Notice I chose the word learning, not teaching. I believe this is another challenge that awaits me. I'm the teacher, but not teaching? I have no doubt I will be looked down upon and referred to as lazy. I can accept that because I know that I will be giving my students power of their own learning. I do not want to be the center of their education and I'm okay with others not being fond of that. I am fully aware that providing my students with a significant learning environment and becoming a facilitator instead of a teacher will prove itself in the long run. Slow and steady win the race. Despite the obstacles I face, I know my purpose is providing my students with the tools and strategies they will be able to forever use in their life, not only within the square footage of my classroom.

The school that I am at sends out a weekly memo with important dates and reminders that deem important to teachers. One thing that is always on this memo is a bullet point with student-led classrooms next to it. I find this interesting because although it is something that we are reminded weekly to do...I have rarely seen it done. I feel that most of the people on my campus truly believe they are doing this with fidelity and are not aware of the disconnect between teacher-led and student-led. I have seen multiple times where teachers throw students into station time and call it a student-led classroom. The more I sit back and truly dissect what is happening in their room, I find that it still isn't student-led. The teacher is giving. The teacher is doing. The teacher is answering. The teacher is exploring. The teacher is grading. The teacher is leading the classroom, not the student. I bring this up because I think if teachers on my campus would see a successfully functioning student-led classroom, then they would be able to manipulate what they are already doing into a better process. I dream of the day where our weekly memo doesn't have the reminder of creating a student-led classroom because that will be the norm for us all.

"You put the soil in, but the plants have to do the growing." states Dr. Tony Bates in his YouTube video synopsis of building effective learning environments (ChangSchool, 2015). I feel that allowing other people to make these types of connections in a more relative and broader aspect will hopefully make them think in a broader fashion. I feel that society upholds the teacher to the highest level, until we are asked to do our job. When the reference is made with agriculture...the farmer tills the land and fertilizes it, but the crops do the growing. Most people would agree with this example and not give much, if any, backlash on it. It becomes unclear to me why when this analogy is used in the education setting that the idea is murky. My approach to gain people's trust in creating their own significant learning environment in whatever organization they are a part of will be to provide them with resources such as myself and my fellow colleagues in this program to show them that not only is working for me in

my classroom, but it's also working for every one of these fellow people world-wide. Lastly, I want to encourage someone who is doubtful of how important creating significant learning environments are to take a look at my how, why and what statements. After reading them, I think they will have a greater understanding of where my heart lies, and how I plan to be successful despite any obstacle. These statements combined with a growth mindset will hopefully allow others to think outside of the parameters that we all too often fall into.

Although teaching and learning are two very different things, I do believe that they go hand in hand. I would not be practicing what I preach if I thought I learn best in these significant learning environments, but not provide them to my own students. It would be a disservice to do such a thing. SLE is a new concept for myself as a learner, but I want it to be a normal concept for my own students. Teaching kindergarten gives me the opportunity to establish a proper foundation for these tiny humans. I want them to own their learning. I want them to be an active participant in their learning process. I want them to be able to tell me what works for them and what doesn't with reasons to stand firm on that decision. I want to give them the power they already have by fostering it in a significant learning environment. Both my students and I will be learning together, and I will remind them of that daily. I am a lifelong learner just as I want my students to be.

References

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