

Draft #1

getting ideas  
down

# Changing Attitudes: Gaining Skills

Inexperienced, nervous, unprepared, excited, I faced my class of 13 students who were squished together in a corner of the library. This was definitely not the ideal learning environment. How was I to create a sense of community in this small area <sup>and</sup> when I only saw them <sup>students</sup> an hour a day? By the end of the first week of school I realized that the students I was working with had a strong dislike for school. They would say things like may-day may-day, I can't read/write, and I hate reading/writing. I needed to find a way to change their attitudes and subsequently improve their skills since 11 out of the 21 students were non-readers and all but two of the others were reading below level.

Soon my class grew to 21 students and I was given more time to work with them. It was at this time that I began collaborating with Brenda on a Books and Buddies program which was designed to develop reading and social skills through peer tutoring. I thought that this program accompanied with a great deal of encouragement and praise, fun activities in the classroom, and little homework would help to improve the students view of school. (Why I assigned little homework is linked to one of the reasons the children disliked school.)

A few months into the school year I was discouraged. I was still hearing from the children that they hated virtually everything at school including physical education and art. I discussed this with Brenda and she thought that there was a discrepancy between what the children were saying and what we were seeing in the classroom. They said they hated things but once they had began the task they seemed to enjoy themselves. (Old habits die hard.) This is when I began having the students write in a buddy journal, as Brenda had suggested. In this journal they were allowed to express things they disliked enjoyed, or thought needed to be improved on in the buddy program. It was in this journal that I began seeing that many of the students actually enjoyed taking part in reading buddies. They were having difficulty, at times, getting their buddy to listen and work. So we began sharing some of the difficulties and the successes we were having and how to solve some of the problems. The students shared a great deal and began helping each other solve problems. A real sense of community had developed in the classroom.

I really saw the improvement in my students' attitudes in March when a new student arrived in my classroom. She was having difficulty reading. When she came to read to me she said "I can't read, it's too hard." It was at this time that I sat back and realized that I hadn't heard those words in such a long time. The students had come so far. They were saying things like "don't tell me that word I can figure it out myself." One girl's public speech was titled 'I Love Books.' The students had really began to understand what reading was about. (See reading strategies and what is reading) The students had developed confidence as readers. This confidence was apparent after we tested their reading ability again in June. All of the kids were readers.

Now I had done my job in May when the student who had believed firmly all year that he hated all aspects of school, came up to me and said "I'm a good writer". I knew then that he had opened himself up to learning.

I reported this at the ITCR in April not really knowing until after I heard Jean Clandinin's speech.

Why is community important? - where I grew up - my family

think to imagine conductor of an orchestra

Japs - see of importance of reflection on instruction to late

realized I had done action research only at the conference

A safe place to learn and take risks

I have a strong belief that children must feel safe before they can really learn. Is this also a claim?

I gave them a place to have a voice.

I also shared some many of the problems they were having honestly were problems I also had in the classroom. I think this helped them see themselves

(support for my claim)

Process comes w experience Not until did I realize how valuable and reflection journal

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sense of community in classroom

move into school then town

2 months - observe other classrooms - neg. pos &

2 months - observe playground

video tape own class throughout year & analyze (before - during - end)

- global community

- what is community? what is my place?

- community night - present for community member sharing others

Kids search out members to come & share 1/month com. afternoon

(5 people each month) - videotape

Kids go out to participate & report on community events.

what is missing in our community why? what can we do about it?

Report to Council

explore record - visit record - current events - ? write for record

Individual Attitude - Classroom to School to Community

Attitude toward Learning

\* parent support

Events

- Clubs, Brownies
- Church
- dances - courses or event. Tellers
- musical, art, story tellers
- museum
- authors
- community member
- understanding
- kinds
- resources
- natural geography