

I often wonder if anyone else has ever experienced the same dilemmas, or experienced the same challenges in the classroom as I? And if so, how could I learn from their experiences? Thanks to the open source movement we are able to download templates and resources online for free. We can use free versions of expensive software to create access to tools and resources that may have once seemed unattainable. Organizations across the country have opened their doors and shared their professional knowledge gained by experience, their "craft knowledge." In 2014 Tesla even shared their patents stating that, "Tesla Motors was created to accelerate the advent of sustainable transport" (Musk, 2014). So, why is it that we as educators don't do the same? My excuse for not asking is that I am busy, that I have way too many items on my checklist, and when I get home I seem to forget who I needed to ask and what I needed to ask them. Plus, I don't want to bother anyone. More to the point, I'm afraid that if I ask about something I should've known they might think I am incompetent at teaching.

Well, I'm happy to say that I think I found a solution to some of these questions! It all started with an interaction after a morning meeting where one of my colleagues expressed how he longed for more opportunities to share our "craft knowledge." I had not heard anyone use those words at our campus and it reminded me of Roland S. Barth's "Improving Relationships Within the Schoolhouse" (2006). I had read this piece several times before and when I revisited it after this interaction I read it through a new lens. Barth talks about the extraordinary insights we each develop in our practice and how we become adversaries by withholding this knowledge and not sharing it with others. He also claims that, "If one day we educators could only disclose our rich craft knowledge to one another, we could transform our schools overnight" (p.2). With that, he had my undivided attention. My colleague was craving opportunities to share a success from our classroom, an anecdote about something we did, a celebration of a student, a new activity or structure that worked for us, or anything positive about our practice. I began to wonder if we could start our All-Staff meetings with this sort of sharing? Could we have a running list so that everyone, new staff and old, could have the opportunity to share a success? Who would present? Would my colleagues listen or roll their eyes? So many questions, but feeling adventurous I proposed the idea to my director and here's what I pitched:

A two to three minute segment in our morning meetings next school year where volunteers share a success as a model. At least two of the first five volunteers should be new staff so that it doesn't feel like only the veterans get to share. The idea is to build a sense of community amongst all staff members and create opportunities for those that don't usually share to do so.

I wasn't prepared for the response. My director said, "Sounds good, can you come up with a catchy name and start our next All-Staff Logistics meeting with this?" Immediately my mouth opened and said, "Yes, of course, thank you!" But in my head a million things were happening and none of them were saying anything about being prepared to do this! I had a week to get ready. I started thinking of a name, how I would hook my colleagues into the activity, who could present, and how was I going to get this all done in time. Then it happened. The name came to me in a flash as most of my ideas for art pieces do. I named it Lil Bits of Magic or LBOM (*pronounced: el-bäm*), as the cool kids say. Now I had to find someone to present. The goal was to get colleagues who don't usually speak up to participate so I asked someone who rarely shared their thoughts and who was within their first three years of teaching. (*A time when most teachers are still figuring things out and don't always feel like they have much to contribute*). My colleague hesitated. "Hmmm, I don't know..." So I quickly sweetened the deal and offered him a t-shirt in exchange for their participation! (*During my free time I like to design and print custom shirts*). He agreed and all I had left to do was figure out how I would present this new activity. In many ways this was like launching a new project in my classroom. You have to get your audience bought in and energized. A round of call and response was in order, just like the great MC's do it. So now I had it all, a name, a presenter, and a hook.

The day came and my heart was jumping in and out of my chest. I stood up at the front of the room and presented the idea to my colleagues. All eyes were on me. Then I went for it, "Okay to get us started, everyone repeat after me. *Mecca lecca hi, mecca hiney ho.*" I think one, maybe two people repeated after me. So I went for the second verse "*Mecca lecca hi, mecca chiney ho.*" It didn't do much better, but it got some laughs. I dated myself and told my colleagues that this call and response was from an old show I used to watch growing up called "Pee-Wee's Playhouse." Of course my friends in the room started laughing again. I went ahead and introduced my first presenter and when he was done sharing their magic (and after a round of applause) I presented him with the t-shirt I had promised. At that moment I also looked around the room and announced that anyone else who volunteered to present would also receive a t-shirt. I could finally breathe. After the meeting three colleagues approached me to volunteer as presenters, but all three added "I just don't know what to share." This would become a common theme amongst colleagues within their first five years of teaching.

This new challenge made me think about how I could help colleagues acknowledge that they *did* have contributions to offer our community. It made me think about what we were doing to work towards establishing "trusting, respectful and reciprocal relationships" (Le Cornu, 2013) on our campus. These kinds of relationships are crucial when cultivating an environment of adult learning and continuous improvement. In Le Cornu's research she found that new teachers flourished when they were able to participate in relationships that acknowledged them as professionals who had something to offer. This made it possible for teachers to become active

participants not only as learners, but as contributors within their learning community. This is an empowering experience for teachers, and one that helps them establish an identity within their setting. The confidence gained through relationships that are empowering and encouraging could certainly decrease, if not eliminate, feelings of isolation amongst our staff and increase the opportunities for the sharing of craft knowledge. With this in mind I continued pushing forward by putting myself at the front of the room leading a silly call & response (that still wasn't very successful), and proving that even the shiest person on staff could do it.

You're probably wondering, "*What IS Lil Bits of Magic exactly?*" Well, as I mentioned earlier it's a two to three minute segment in our logistics meetings which are scheduled once or twice a month throughout the school year. Because the call & response piece was not happening as I had originally envisioned it, mostly because I would get really nervous, I began creating a video that presented the staff member and allowed me to hide behind my computer. The video is a clip from Pee-Wee's Playhouse where Jambi the Genie grants Pee-Wee Herman a wish. After Pee-Wee makes his wish, Jambi engages the audience with the call and response. Participation in this modified version has been truly magical and full of joy! I edit the clip so that there is a voice over where I make a link to the craft knowledge being presented and then at the very end call for the staff member who has volunteered to step up and share her or his magic. Everyone usually claps and when I scan the room I see lots of smiles and excitement for what's about to happen. Our volunteer stands at the front of the room and they present a *lil bit of magic* from their practice as a resource that others can then implement and/or adapt into their own. They share a resource handout with the following details:

- Name/Title for the Magic
- Category (*e.g. Assessment, Culture Building, Math, Reading, Writing, Science, etc.*)
- The Purpose
- Materials needed
- Procedure
- Variations
- References

This resource is then posted online where colleagues can access, download, and put it into action. The process is not perfect but has already proven to be successful. When asked about LBOM colleagues have stated that it is fun, a great way to build culture and community, something to look forward to in staff meetings, a great way to spotlight "best practices" and new ideas, and that it is a great opportunity to find potential collaborations with others. It was great to read my colleagues' positive responses to the structure, it gave me motivation to continue this work and reaffirmed my passion towards creating opportunities for these exchanges. It was also great to read areas for improvement that were identified, these helped me think bigger about LBOM as a

structure. The most striking of these was a request for more variety in the resources shared. Specifically, resources and strategies for classroom management and the cultivation of positive environments, areas that most educators struggle with at first and that arguably are the hardest for teachers to admit that they struggle with because doing so “*proves I am a bad teacher.*” It was refreshing to see this request made as it was not something I had encouraged previously. It also highlights that as educators we often fail to acknowledge the practices that help our classrooms run smoothly. A suggestion that I had not considered was to have our staff experience the presenters’ magic by actually *participating* in the activity. I love this idea! Another suggestion that was made, and the one that has made me think the most, is creating alternative opportunities for staff to share their ideas and reduce the anxiety of presenting to the whole staff.

While the LBOM segment of our Logistics meetings has become something that is entertaining, informative, and beneficial to our staff community, it is not for everyone. Not everyone is comfortable standing at the front of the room sharing their ideas. Just how many of us like to sing, but very few of us would actually do it on a concert stage. Much like our students require unique access points to the learning experiences offered in our classrooms; educators need a variety of opportunities to receive and exchange new knowledge. This helped me realize that the sense of safety & trust required to share the dilemmas and challenges we face in our classrooms is closely linked to the depth of the relationships we cultivate as a staff. Dedicated time and space are needed for the development of what Judith V. Jordan (2006) calls “growth-enhancing relationships.” Relationships that not only offer support, but “also provide an opportunity to participate in a relationship that is growth-fostering for the other person as well as themselves” (p. 88). When we are engaged in positive relationships we tend to thrive by finding a better balance in our personal and work lives or, as Daniel Goleman (1995) says, “resonant relationships are like emotional vitamins, sustaining us through tough times and nourishing us daily” (p.4). In a study looking at building teacher resilience and the role of relationships Rosie Le Cornu (2013) states:

A key insight from the study was that in order for the new teachers to feel confident and competent they needed to be sustained by - and be able to sustain - relationships based on mutual trust, respect, care and integrity. (p. 2)

When we trust, respect, and care about the people around us we tend to be our true selves. Lil Bits Of Magic appeals to our sense of humor and pushes staff to participate as one through the call and response. Those two points along with the quick five to ten minute format help towards the building of trust and respect amongst our staff. However, for us to reach the level of resonant and growth-enhancing relationships that facilitate shared experiences we don't need magic, we need time and willingness to share. Do you have any?

References

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