

November 7, 2008

5H News

Happy November!

It is hard to believe it is already November. Our bridges are built, financial reports complete and bridges tested. 5H students are well into reading, writing and analyzing Langston Hughes poetry. We began our third math unit, are completing book groups and are about to start studying Egypt.

This week I also greatly enjoyed meeting with 5H families. I know it was a busy week for all. Thank you for all your support!

Effective Effort

5H has had many conversations about effective effort during the first two months of school. It is even one of our core values at Hunnewell, E - Efforts toward Excellence.

As adults, we constantly tell children to “try hard” or “do your best.” But what does that really mean to a child? Children often see things in concrete terms, of “fair and unfair.” It is not the same for everyone and children often have a hard time understanding those differences, “why do I have to write more than she does? Why does he have only half of the math problems? Why do I need to redo the assignment?”

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5H

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Effective Effort Cont.

On Tuesday, November 3rd, we played a game in 5H - Chip Toss. Children could choose anywhere to stand along a line 12 feet long. The object of the game was the same in the first round - to land your chips in a bucket. During the second round risks and rewards were added, (the distance that you stand represents the points received for that toss.)

During another round children were allowed to stand at different places for each of the three tosses. During our final round some children received positive feedback, others negative and some no feedback.

In debriefing we discussed choosing a place on the line that is an “appropriate challenge for me right now.” We talked about how if the goal you set for yourself is not challenging enough, you are left unsatisfied. Likewise, if you take too great of a challenge without being prepared, you won’t ever experience success. The ability to readjust your stance on the line was a chance for children to assess where they “stand” in completing activities in life. Do you choose to stand in a location that is too easy for you? Do you need to back up and try something again that is more challenging? Or are you too far out of your realm? Do you need to come a little closer to the target?

We discussed how it felt to never make a shot - is it frustrating? Does it make you want to just give up if everything is too hard? Conversely, if you are standing too close you never feel any satisfaction from stretching yourself.

The children who played during the third round talked about how positive feedback can make you feel better and be willing to take greater risks, while negative feedback can make you want to just “give up.” Children that received no feedback said that at times it was nice to have the silence and reflection time, but that it is also helpful to get constructive feedback to help you improve.

Before the final round of the game, we reflected on all the things that are helpful in experiencing success, choosing an appropriate level of challenge, watching others, taking a task seriously, seeking constructive feedback, having quiet, reflective work time, being able to make “midcourse” corrections and not choosing tasks based on what is the right challenge level for someone else.

Our final players had the advantages of the game experience and all of the above components. These players had the greatest success. After playing the game I showed the class a “road map” for this game.

There is an analogy to life - which road do you choose to “drive on?” The three streets are “Too Easy Street” “Just Right Road” and “Too Hard for Now Street.” The goal is to have students working in that middle zone, occasionally pushing onto the Hard Street and resting a bit on Easy Street when needed. We looked at two places between the roads. The ZAP lane, (Zone of Acceptable Performance) and ZOD lanes (Zone of Development.) ZAP is the place where you are doing just enough to get by, as I say, to avoid the phone call home. You may complete a task, but not extend yourself. The ZAP lane is a place where you are comfortably challenged, able to rest a bit but push your thinking.

As the year progresses we will continue to make comparisons between the streets and the places that children choose to work. It makes for a great topic of conversation! Concrete examples of tasks that fall into each of those three categories help determine where a child should be pushing or pulling back a bit. I encourage these conversations at home with your child about the intermediary steps learners need to take and why it is important to push and challenge yourself but also to pull back at times for rest and reflection!