Defined Academy

LAUNCHPAD ACTIVITY
Building Classroom Culture

OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING PRACTICE

Students often get the message that mistakes are bad. In class, they don‘t want to give the “wrong” answer to a teacher’s question. They cringe when their work is returned to them covered in red ink. When they work with their peers, they feel bad when they think they’ve messed up. And the word “fail” strikes fear into their hearts.

This is not the case in a classroom where a different kind of culture has been built – where mistakes are seen as a learning experience. This is especially true in project-based learning and in design thinking, where ideas and products are tested and revised if they don’t work. Students get the message that mistakes are to be expected, and that’s OK.

In today’s modern workplace, the culture reinforces the idea that we can learn from mistakes. They’re even seen as vital to the process of doing high-quality work. Some businesses call it “failing forward” – which means success only comes after we try, fail, learn, and try again.

A classroom culture that values learning from mistakes also encourages a growth mindset. Instead of seeing mistakes as a sign of weakness and giving up, students can learn to see them as opportunities for growth. Teachers should celebrate students’ successes, of course – but think about how to celebrate every kind of learning experience!

EXPLANATION OF THE ACTIVITY

TITLE: Saluting “Oops”
GRADES: K-12
TIME: 5-20 minutes

PURPOSE: To create a classroom culture in which students know it’s OK to make mistakes; they are natural and expected, and we also learn from them.

OVERVIEW

This is a circle-based activity, but can also be a popcorn-style share out. Students take turns sharing things that happened when they were working or learning that they didn’t expect, and what they learned from it. The class comes together to celebrate this.

STEPS

1. Before the activity begins, if you wish, arrange the classroom into a circle where students can see one another.

2. Explain the purpose of the activity to students. Note that while it’s important to celebrate successes, we can also learn from thinking about things that didn’t go as

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planned. Point out that even mistakes can be learning experiences – so they're both expected and OK!

3. Give students 2-3 minutes to reflect on a specific period of time: either the present class period or a few recent class periods. Ask them:
    - Did something happen that you didn't expect?
    - Did something go wrong or did you make a mistake?
    - What do you wish you had done differently?
    - What did you learn from the experience?

    Older students can record their thoughts in writing. Very young students can think to themselves or talk with a partner.

4. Open the circle time by asking students who might like to share their answer to the question(s) first. Students who are not sharing should be listening to one another.

5. After a student shares, they should conclude their statement with a salute. You might need to give them a few moments to think about what they will say. For example, "It took me longer to build the model than I expected, because I didn't have all the materials I needed. Next time, I'm going to make my materials list before I begin. A salute to creating a plan!"

6. The entire class should echo the salute, with enthusiasm. ("A salute to creating a plan!")

7. The student who shared should then call on another student to share, and that student will repeat the process. Continue until every student has shared, or until you sense that it's time to move on.

NOTES

- If you move on before every student shares, explain that you have limited time, but you'll honor what they learned in the near future with another circle.
- If you're short on time, you might modify the activity to a quick popcorn share with 3-5 students.
- Feel free to mix up the salute phrase - be creative! Some teachers prefer to call it a toast and others call it shoutouts.

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