Broken Airplane

Education Blog and Resources

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Presentations of Learning Keep Us All Informed and Accountable

Twice a year, we take a break from our normal curriculum and classroom schedule in order to have Presentations of Learning (POLs). This is a week long event in which every student shares with their classmates, teachers, family, and community members what they have learned over the last semester.

The word "learn" always needs clarification for the students and so I am sure it is important to define it here. When we are referring to learning, we are not necessarily referring to "book smarts" or testable learning (although sometimes that is requested as well). Many of us focus the conversations around the Habits of the Heart and Mind but others use other similar themes or essential questions.

We ask the students to reflect and present upon the previous semester and to describe the challenges they have experiences and the growth that they have seen in themselves. They can provide evidence through project artifacts, their Digital Portfolio, anecdotally, or other various means of convincing us that they have used their time well this semester.

Remember, this is not a focus on things we have already graded them on because that would be a waste of time. I have other ways of assessing that. This is a chance to have a conversation with them and realign my perspective and goals with theirs. It is so rare that we have the time to get a student's perspective and I consider this a critical part of heading into the second semester.

The presentations last for about 10 minutes with a few minutes for question and answer afterwards. If we do not feel that the presenting skills meet our criteria or that the reflection is honest and has depth then we ask them to redo the presentation. We explain to them that this is not a "failure" this is a "not yet". Every student eventually passes but it takes refinement and time for some more than others.

We invite teachers, students, and family members to come see them because it provides a great opportunity to see a student in a different light than they may be used to seeing. It also gives a powerful opportunity to immerse themselves in our classroom/school culture. Since our entire school conducts POLs, we also ask our students to see POLs from the 10th, 11th, and 12th graders. This is an eye opening experience and they get to see the huge amount of growth and maturity that our students gain over 4 years.

How could you start implementing POLs in your classroom or school? Create an essential question of what you would like the students to reflect upon. Make it clear that this is not about grades necessarily and that honesty is honored more than brown nosing (telling us what we want to hear). Then take 3-5 days depending on the schedule and listen to what your students have to say. It will definitely be worth your time. Invite others to come see the presentations and help ensure that this is taken seriously and given great importance.

Do not be lax or go easy on the students. Refinement requires honesty and growth will not come if you are not willing or able to say the things others might never have before. But also be open to hearing a new perspective on a student and perhaps insight into how you can better help that student and what they can do to help themselves.

Do you conduct Presentations of Learning? What criteria do you use to assess their learning? How has it impacted your students/school/community? Leave a comment and tell us how.

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