

## Episode 16 | Pay Attention To What STUDENTS Are Paying Attention To

Becca (00:01.646)

We recently hit a hundred days of kindergarten, which is a really big deal, Ruth. It's so big. Yes. And you do all the fun things on the hundredth day and you count to 100 more than you ever thought you could. And one moment at the end of the day that I had never experienced before was hearing one of my students say, I have 99 stickers. And at first I was like,

Ruth Ayres (00:06.752)

A very big deal. 100 day is so important.

Becca (00:30.7)

what's he talking about? And I turned and realized that as he picked up, we call them Mabel notes at the end of the day. And I have to like part of our school PBIS initiative is I have to communicate home about if they were safe, respectful and responsible every day. And if they were all of those things, there's a positive reinforcement. So I try to keep this like as low key as possible, knowing that like something that happened five hours ago should not impact what

they go home telling their parents about at this age. And so like, I just do like this small little piece of paper. And if they have all three checks, they get to pick a sticker and like, that's the end of the conversation. And it's never been a bigger conversation until all of a sudden I was in the middle of this conversation with one of my students who knew that he had gotten 99 stickers. And, and that that meant

for 99 of the 100 days of kindergarten, he had gotten all three check marks. And two more students piped up around him like, oh, I have 99 too. And I sat there like, wow, like I have no idea how many stickers each of you would have. I probably could guess the kids who were around 50 versus closer to 100, right? But I would never have known that they knew how many stickers they had gotten.

And then like the kid who piped up and said, well, I have 76. The child who started the conversation said, well, I have 99. That means I more, I got three checks on more days than you. And I found myself in the middle of this conversation with these kids who are like so empathetic and aware, suddenly like in competition with each other about like who got all three checks on this little piece of paper. And for me, it was shocking and it felt really kind of

gross to hear and there was no mal intent, right? Like they weren't trying to hurt each other or to even sound better. They were just like, this is something that is done every day in our classroom. We have to do this every day. And I just felt stuck.

Ruth Ayres (02:42.146)

Yeah, well, it's the tension between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. When you say, you've said it a couple of times, I have to do this every day. Would you say more about why you're saying that?

Becca (02:57.11)

Yeah, I don't think that it's something I would choose to do if it wasn't a school initiative. Because it does bring this level of awareness to it. Kids are aware of like, like, if a kid has to go away from a situation, they'll say something like, that means you're losing your responsibility check. And I work really hard to diminish that as fast as I can at the beginning of the year.

And you don't hear it as much like at this point in the year as you do at the beginning. But they know, like the kids who probably aren't getting three checks every day and the kids who are and it others, it others them, right? There are the kids who almost always have three checks and the kids who don't and I hate that. And I've tried this in like a huge variety of ways and

in order to meet the expectation of communicating home to families. I like I have to do something. And no matter which way I've done it, unless I do like individual messages to families every day, which is a really big undertaking, it comes out sideways sometimes. And that hurts my teacher heart because the kids who are not getting the three checks are probably

kids who have worked even harder than the kids who did get their three checks that day. And it's really hard to not let them have those three checks.

Ruth Ayres (04:27.374)

Becca, I just think you're being so real and authentic right now. And I'm glad, because there's so many of us that feel this way. We're in school. There's things that we are asked to do, because we're part of the school community. And kind of where the rubber hits the road, it's feeling crummy. And we're like, so what do I do about it?

And I don't know that we have a good answer, right? I think it's more of a like, hey, we're here too. The thing that we talk a lot about and part of the reason why it's feeling crummy, as you mentioned, like it feels like we're othering people. It sometimes also feels like we are kind of leveraging.

Becca (05:04.024)

Yeah.

Ruth Ayres (05:24.756)

shame to see if that's going to change people or change behavior and what we know is that although it might it doesn't do it in a healthy way at all.

Becca (05:25.933)

Yeah.

Becca (05:39.384)

Right. It's not a part of how we want our kids to live well nourished lives. And I think like, because we're doing this work together when I sat in that moment on the hundredth day of

school and realized like, here's a point in my world with these kids that I'm not supporting the most well nourished living for them.

And I haven't figured out how to do that yet. Like that's part of why it felt crummy. I don't know the answer still. And so I did what, what I do, which is, I dug into research and I started reading as, as much as I could. I went back to some books that I've read by Dr. Dan Siegel and how he talks about supporting kids with their intrinsic motivation and their extrinsic motivation.

and how to balance the two and the importance of the two and how shame-based parenting or shame-based teaching really does not do what we think it's doing when we see the positive impact, right? When public shaming is involved and even just shame in general, it's not having a positive impact on the child's brain and instead of teaching them

what they should be doing, it's teaching them that they're not welcome the way that they are, right? It's changing their self identity and making them feel like they have to be different to be accepted instead of when we're able to use tools and strategies and connection and relationship to really build up their intrinsic motivators and

like gently using extrinsic motivation, because there is a place for extrinsic motivation. And that's a huge part of the conversation too, is like, where's that balance and that tension. But when we're able to do that, well, we are able to help kids build resilience and build self identities with confidence that allows them to navigate this world in a well nourished way.

Ruth Ayres (07:51.852)

Like I was thinking back to episode 11, where we were talking about uncertainty and learning to be friended. And that's what I'm seeing here in action, right? like the just the gritty part of it. And so what I don't hear you saying is, I'm not going to do that anymore, because that wouldn't be right either. Like this is an expectation of the school. And so the question that you're

Becca (07:58.158)

Mm.

Ruth Ayres (08:20.79)

you're wondering about is, how can I use this to help kids live a really well-nourished life? And then there's that curiosity that's leading you. the truth of the matter is, you don't know what you're going to get to. But it's going to be something that is feeling right at the end of the day. And so I think the invitation.

that I'd like to offer people is to do exactly what you're doing and pay attention to what kids are paying attention to. And then how's that sitting with us?

Becca (09:00.928)

Yeah. Yeah, and as much as I don't like uncertainty, I know those are the moments, these are the times where I learn the most as a teacher, right? When I turn and notice what my students

and my kids are paying attention to, it pushes me to sit in that uncertainty with them and and to learn something new alongside them. And that's my hope for for everyone else to is to sit and notice what kids are paying attention to and then kind of decide does anything need to be adjusted, right? Do I need to consider, if they're really focused on how many stickers they've gotten in their entire kindergarten year, like maybe, maybe I need to adjust the focus that we're giving the stickers or something, but it helps as a reflection tool to help guide your thinking and learning alongside your students.