

## Episode 18 | Using Bias for Good

Ruth Ayres (00:02.68)

I'm still thinking about the conversation that we had with Amy last week. The author of *The Sound of Kindness*, Amy Ludwig Vanderwater had joined us. It's well worth the listen if you're just looking to feel warm inside and just be reminded of the good in the world. But she was joining us because you used her book as inspiration for a door decorating contest in your school.

And then you were noticing some things about your students.

Becca (00:36.348)

Yeah, it was really incredible to see what we ended up calling like this kindness momentum. And it really like as time went on made me consider like the bias that I was kind not nourishing but like helping them to build. Like it was like the lens they were seeing the world through was building their bias but like in a positive way.

And the attentional bias that they were building was really beautiful to watch because it was something that I could harness in moments where they started to go down the path of wanting to tattle on each other. I could switch them right back. And it made them super aware of each other and also their own actions. And that was just a really cool thing to watch.

Ruth Ayres (01:28.47)

It's about paying attention to what we're paying attention to, right? We talked about this in episode six. I think it was one of the first times that we talked about pay attention to what you're paying attention to. And, I still love you were sharing about getting the new car. We're like twinsies every time they saw one, I like your car. So that was episode six. And definitely I can see our thinking and learning expanding. They hear what we...

we're really curious about is, okay, so can we leverage this for good? Right? Like how can we leverage what we're paying attention to? And something that Amy said last episode, she was talking about how her husband, Mark, loved bird watching and loved birds. And so now she does too, because the people we care about or the people that we're close to in community, what they care about, what they pay attention to influences what we pay attention to. And we saw it with your door.

Becca (02:02.045)

Miss.

Becca (02:24.532)

Right. you know, weeks went on. kids wrote their kindness things on, like the things they noticed that were kind and the phrases on sentence strips and they were taping them to the door. So we had 103 at one point and kindergartners taping things to doors. Like they fall every morning I would come in and there would be like the sea of sentence strips on the ground and I would be taping them back up. And eventually it was time for...

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Becca (00:00.000)

the door to come down and like that was a sad day. And when they came back, they were that morning after I had taken it down, they were very bothered that I had taken it down. And like originally its purpose was for this door decorating contest. It had ended a week and a half ago. So in my brain, I was like, okay, it's like, it's okay. I don't have to do this every morning and take these back up. It's time for it to come down. But it really bothered them that I had made our door blank.

is how they were talking about it. And it was surprising to me because they started to talk about how like, people don't know who we are anymore.

Ruth Ayres (03:33.326)

So the door, they definitely had this identity of people who are finding kindness. But I just want to back up a little bit and let people kind of get an image of what this door is. And we posted on social media. So if you're following Sticky Hope on Instagram or Facebook, you'll be able to see it there. You can see it at our website on this episode page. it's like you let every student write their own.

Becca (03:38.056)

Yes.

Ruth Ayres (04:02.762)

observation as they were kindness detectives and finding things. it's, it's a very developmental. I noticed that you, were letting them write in a purely developmental way. So it wasn't like they were tracing. You hadn't like written it in highlighter and had them trace it. You weren't making them do it again. It was definitely where they were at, at that time.

Becca (04:30.708)

For sure, and that completely embodies who I am as a teacher, right? I celebrate where they're at and show them where they can go. And their voice matters, right? Like that was such a part of this whole project is I turned to them when it was time to decorate our door and I was like, ooh, what are we gonna do? But Willow had a plan and off we went. And.

having their handwriting and their noticings be what was on that door wasn't a question in my mind, but watching the power that it had for them was beautiful, right? They were empowered by the fact that it was them doing it. And it clearly meant even more than I realized to them to walk through that door every day and see their own handwriting on the door.

Ruth Ayres (05:23.982)

Yeah, and it's very public. So everybody that walks past can see it. this was like more than 20 years ago, right? Where I was first learning about how do we really help students, how do we uplift their voice in writing? And at that time, like 20 years ago, when you'd walk through a school, everything would be perfect. All student handwriting was conventionally correct. And I was in a study group.

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just about developmentally and how important it is to let students writing show that represents where they are developmentally. And so the second grade teacher had put writing out on a bulletin board and that not when she came home the next, when she came back to school the next day, somebody had taken an orange Sharpie and had corrected the whole bulletin. I mean, it was a giant bulletin board, floor to ceiling, had corrected all of it.

Becca (06:20.508)

What?

Ruth Ayres (06:23.19)

It ended up that it was like a nighttime custodian that had done that. And so I hold onto that story because one, like for you, it feels appalling. But two, I think like we carry that with us. So when we're thinking about your door, it was five and six year olds who were writing it. It was not conventional spelling. Some of it was. Some was very conventional.

Some of it wasn't. Some are using spaces like they will for the rest of their lives. And some of them haven't learned to do that yet. Like we're seeing this whole gamut. But the bravery that it took for you to put it out there, I know that you don't see it as brave, but it is because I think we feel a lot of pressure. So that story was 20 years ago and I don't know that we'd see that now.

But I think we see the pressure to be perfect when we're looking at Pinterest and Instagram and all kinds of social media where we're seeing these perfect kind of classrooms or perfect classroom doors. So when you were sharing about like, this is what kids are thinking now, like, where's our door? Who are we? I think like, let's not.

let's not gloss over that they were able to develop that identity, not because you created a pretty door, but because they were involved in it. So you take it down and it's blank. And there was like this moment of, don't know, like, what did you just do? How dare you?

Becca (08:07.592)

Right. like they were, they were bothered. And I was like, okay. And I, I had to decide like, well, what are, like, I could just say like the contest was over, right? And, and there would be some balking back at me and I would be like, okay, it's time to do rotations and, move on. And, but that's not who we are in my classroom. And so I said like,

Ooh, I'm noticing that like you're feeling bothered that I took the door down. And like I didn't tell you I was going to I'm sorry. that like maybe that should have been a conversation. Like I was just taking it down. They kept falling off. And like, of course, they're like, we should we could have used glue sticks. We could have like put more tape on right. Like they were adamant that that door and then they were like, where is it? Like where are all of us? And I was like,

Ruth Ayres (08:55.054)

you

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Ruth Ayres (09:03.116)

In the trash. What message are you sending?

Becca (09:04.116)

Yeah, we won't answer that question. I will include that one. Right. We won't answer that question. And then I said, okay, like, you're telling me that this is something that... Sorry, that's Nimbus.

Ruth Ayres (09:10.254)

you

Ruth Ayres (09:24.758)

Yeah, like just stop for a minute and we'll come back. So what you were going to say is, okay, so you're telling me.

Becca (09:34.706)

No. See, I told you he's annoying sometimes.

Becca (09:45.406)

Just start again.

Becca (09:49.47)

So I was like, okay, so you're telling me that it matters to you what's on our door. And now that there's nothing on our door, like people don't know what kind of things happen in here. So what should we do? And, you know, they had lots of ideas. They said like, we could put it back up. And I was like, no, we can't, gone. I was like, what else could we do?

they started to talk about what they wanted people to think. And, you know, I was prompting them a little bit through this, but I said, like, when people walk past our door, like, what do want them to notice about our door? Like, and I even said, right now, they're probably thinking, like, they'll walk past our door, and they're just thinking, like, boring. And then Rex in the front row on the rug is like, no, they're not thinking that, Mrs. Burk, that would be rude. And I was like, ooh, like.

Just got checked by a five year old. Okay.

Ruth Ayres (10:52.29)

Yeah, you sent me this recording of them. And it was really striking that this experience, right, of the door and the identity that they had, they were really recognizing that if we put something on the front of our door, then people are going to expect something when they come in. And we can, what message do we want to send really to the rest of the school community?

based on our door. So they made a plan.

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Becca (11:24.766)

They did, they made a plan, they wanted messages on our door, and they wanted a message, words of kindness and support on our door, because if someone was having a hard day, they could walk by our door and feel better and know that it was a safe place inside. They even said like they wanted, one of them wrote, we started redecorating our door already. And one of them wrote, remember, if you need help, we'll help you. And

because he wanted them to know like we're the kind of people who will help and like we'll figure it out, right? I was like, we might not be able to help with every problem. He's like, Mrs. Burke, we figure it out. Like we'll find the person who can help. And it is just this beautiful reminder that they take ownership and have a much wider view of things than we expect a five or six year old to.

Ruth Ayres (12:19.672)

I agree. So I want to just kind of step by step. So if you're listening, what can you do? Kind of an invitation for this work. So I think like one of the first things, a really interesting exercise, and I've done this with a few groups of instructional coaches. We've just walked through like a walking tour of the school, not going into classrooms.

And we've just paid attention to the messages that the doors and the bulletin boards are sending us. And so I think this is something we can do, like no matter what school you are in, just during your prep or when you arrive in the morning or you're walking out the door, just start paying attention to the messages that doors are sending.

Becca (13:05.756)

Yeah, and I think that it is super helpful to then kind of take a step back and look at your door, right? Step back and see what's the message your door is sending and what message do you want to send?

Ruth Ayres (13:23.938)

Yeah, so it's really like thinking a little bit about your core values. So we're going to share a link to a list of core values from Brene Brown that just will help. If you're like, are my core values? It's several. It's a list of many, many. So you have to go through it. But what that list does, and when I've used that list, is it really helps me just kind of narrow things down. Because there's a lot of things that we would say are important. But if it's your core value.

Like what two or three things are extremely important? Do you want to send a message to everybody else? Like this matters when we come into our classroom. So for me, one of my core values is belonging, is making sure I have a space where everybody feels like they belong, no matter their age, whether they're an adult in the room or in the school or a student. Like this is something that matters to me. So when I think about what's on my door,

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what people see, you know, first thing I'm thinking about, how do I send that message right away?

How do we send those messages? I think that's something else to think about. So, Becca, you have used student handwriting and they've been like sent in strips. What are some other ways? Did your kids kick around other ways to send the message or do you have some other ways that you're thinking about?

Becca (14:47.142)

Yeah, they talked about things like putting pictures up or like taking pictures of things that we're proud of and putting that on the door. They like had the idea of drawing pictures. They they settled on on more words, they wanted their words back up on the door. And so that's what they did. But I've been more intentional about like what

as I walk them to specials or around the school to pay attention to what other teachers are doing. And there's just so many amazing ideas out there and things like what the teacher's currently reading or there's an upper grade teacher who does like a math problem of the day, which like is so not my cup of tea. And I was like, I wonder if that's ever used. And then like several times I've seen kids like reading the word problem and figuring it out. And there's like extra paper there. And I was like,

like that's amazing. Like we need people excited about math. And I've noticed that like sometimes they put like a poem on the door and like now I'm like watching like when's the next one coming? And it just tells you so much about what that community is. And I'm also excited to like see how that changes like with the next group of kids, like as the kids change, do the doors change and things like that.

Ruth Ayres (16:06.926)

So we would love to see your doors. if you're post them, tag us at Sticky Hope. We're on Instagram and we are on Facebook. I'm on LinkedIn. So feel free to tag those and show us what you're thinking. We'll be sharing some pictures of doors on our social media feeds and would love just to hear your thoughts.