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A Connection to Consider

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As math educators, we are very much aware of connections within our content area, whether it is the connection between early skip counting and linear relationships or simple surveys and quantitative analysis. We spend time making connections between mathematics and the real world, allowing students to explore rigid motions and connect them to spatial transformations in context. We make these types of connections and make additional efforts to connect to our students on an interpersonal level. We ask them about their lives. We take interest in their sports and hobbies. As educators we look beyond the realm of mathematics and seek to educate the whole child, knowing what a positive impact this effort can make for individual students.

The Professional Learning Community model (Dufour & Eaker, 1998) piques our awareness of the professional connections we can make while focusing on student learning. As practitioners, we become dependent upon interactions with our colleagues around the teaching and learning of mathematics. We discuss big math ideas, levels of questioning and cognitive demand in the context of tasks we ask of our students. We review and plan for formative assessments, making connections between teaching and learning. Should our connections stop there? Why not take the time and give the same concerted effort to make the connections with our administration?

When we think about the action steps and the support educators need, we should be looking toward our principals. The implication that supervisors should be viewed as active collaborators (Nolan & Francis, 1992) connects to current supervisory practices as well as to Michael Fullan’s (2004) leadership component of knowledge creation and sharing. Traditionally, supervision practitioners take on the role of critic or judge. As students’ roles have transitioned to constructors of knowledge, so have teachers’ roles shifted. Teachers construct knowledge around teaching, learning and assessment. As we strive to enhance the learning experience for students, it becomes clearer that the support we can receive from those who “evaluate” can be transformed. Observations are only one element of the evaluation process. We can place more emphasis on collaborative problem solving, deepening our understanding and management of the learning process.

The challenge, then, is to connect with our administrators in order to build supports that strengthen the connections in the classroom and the community. To make these ever-important connections, consider a few simple invitations to administrators. Offer an opportunity to attend grade level, department and/or math committee meetings. Ask them to observe in the classroom and then discuss the teaching and learning they saw. Plan for conversations with administration around content and pedagogy, and take from these opportunities a new view of strengthening your teaching practice. From these small overtures, a connection is created and strengthened which will enhance the overall effectiveness of your mathematics education efforts.

References

