

## **Unfreezing**

Though the staff of my school has shown capacity for making large changes towards a shared vision, these shifts have taken place over the course of months and years and have required considerable effort on the part of teachers and school leadership. As I move forward with the vision I have for creating meaningful math curriculum within our school, I must be prepared for this shift in thinking to take time and require thoughtful planning. Evans (2001) suggests that using Schien's "unfreezing" concept is a realistic and thoughtful method for effecting change. A more specific look into unfreezing and each of the four challenging aspects of change are outlined below as they pertain to the shared vision I have for my learning organization.

### **Lessoning the Fear of Trying**

Evans (2001) describes unfreezing as a case of decreasing the fear of trying by increasing the fear of *not* trying. The author explains that it is the nature of our systems and people to stay stagnant, while innovation requires new learning. The central features of unfreezing are disconfirmation, generating appropriate anxiety and guilt, and developing psychological safety (Evans, 2001).

In order to facilitate effective change in my school, it is important to "disconfirm" some of the ideas that have become part of the status quo among teachers who will hopefully be implementing shifting towards a more meaningful mathematics curriculum. For example, through the extensive work our school has done under the leadership of a renowned leader in the movement towards math workshop, many teachers have learned the prescribed structure and do not believe that there is room for any flexibility in this structure. While I am also a proponent of math workshop, I see the gaps that this structure allows for as students who have negative math attitudes or anxiety are not equipped to use the independent work time effectively when they are

doing work that is irrelevant and anxiety-inducing for them. The identification of this gap and matching the faces of students who are falling through the cracks due to this inflexibility will create an appropriate sense of anxiety and guilt in a psychologically safe space. As this is a school-wide issue related to a previous shift in vision, there is no blame or due humiliation. The proposed shared vision is simply a proposed solution to this recognized need that can be adapted as a school family. As the change agent in this shared vision, I recognize the importance of coming alongside the teachers in a supportive role and making my commitment to helping them as they transition to this new way of thinking visible.

In order to “unfreeze” effectively, it will be important for me as the change agent to have really worked through this process in my own classroom first. Being able to share what I learn along the way with own students will be invaluable in developing the appropriate anxiety and guilt. Sharing my own successes and failures in creating a more meaningful curriculum to support the development of positive mathematical identity, teachers will be able to see the results of the efforts and hopefully come to realize that *not* trying will be more damaging for their students than trying will be for them as teachers. This will be another opportunity for us as a faculty to flex our Whatever It Takes muscles as we move towards more meaningful math for our students.

### **From Loss to Commitment**

When considering a shift to a more flexible math workshop structure to allow for authentic, collaborative problem solving to take place, many teachers at my school may feel a great loss associated with the familiar schedule and structure that we have grown accustomed to as part of our school expectations. These teachers have spent countless hours creating beautiful schedule boards, color coded games, and creating lesson plans around the current math curriculum and structure. Simply suggesting that an added component needs to come into play and schedules may

need to become more flexible will be an incredible loss for some teachers, particularly given the time and resources that have been committed. Evans (2001) finds "...we must be able to make sense of the loss caused by change. Meaning is the core issue that determines how people cope" (p. 59). As I aid teachers in this shift from loss to commitment, it will be imperative for me to help the stakeholders in my system make meaning from the shared vision. I will need to acknowledge the dedication they have put into what they are currently doing in their classrooms and help them find meaning in the shift. This will likely look different for different stakeholders and involve my own commitment to making personal contact with the teachers in my school as I support their instructional shift but also their emotional adjustment.

Evans (2001) posits, "When we seek genuine commitment and changes in belief, the people doing the changing, not us, are in control of the transformation" (p. 61). Ultimately, the changes required for my personal vision to become a shared vision will begin with what is happening in classrooms around our school. Those teachers will be in control of the transformation and as the change agent, I will be there to support them along the way as they move from loss to commitment.

### **From Old Competence to New Competence**

Clarke & Roche (2017) suggest that the instructional decisions teachers make are critical in the mathematical learning of their students. When making these crucial decisions, teachers likely will need support. In order to successfully create and implement a more meaningful mathematics curriculum in our school, training will be necessary. Evans (2001) characterizes training effective in moving from old competence to new competence as coherent, personal, and continuous. In my experience at my school, the training that has been most effective for our faculty, and the most well received, in making big shifts in our practice have certainly met each of these criteria. This is

encouraging to me as I consider how the faculty at my school may move from their current practice to a new, more meaningful curriculum. Through a sequential, timely, and coherent set of professional learning opportunities that are personalized to our staff and continuous over the course of a couple of years, our teachers have the potential to make a complete shift for the benefit of our students. I envision this training as short training sessions during PLC time at first to pique the interest of the critical mass, then half day trainings once per quarter. This training will include model lessons, co-teaching opportunities, and co-planning of one lesson, then one week of lessons, and finally one unit to give teachers the opportunity to shift their practice over time and to the degree that they are comfortable.

### **From Confusion to Coherence**

A critical component of the success of this vision lies in the clarity of the roles of those who will be impacted by this curricular shift. Evans (2001) says:

Whatever the nature of the improvement effort in a particular school, all those whose roles will be affected need to become clear about the new structural alignment and its implications for responsibility, authority, and decision making. They need to know what will be expected of them and what they can expect from others. (pp. 66-67)

As I process through how this shared vision will impact the faculty of my school, I realize how crucial it is to be on the same page with the school leadership team. As a classroom teacher leader working as change agent, having the support of administration and the school leadership team will be vital in helping the participating teachers embrace this change and move towards a cohesive shared vision. By starting small within my own classroom and then grade level team, with support of our numeracy coach and administration, I will be able to work out the kinks that can come in making a curricular change before bringing this vision to the whole school. This will also allow

me to figure out exactly the roles of the classroom teacher and the support staff in making this vision work. Then, when teachers are presented with this vision, their roles will be well defined and expectations will be clear.

Evans (2001) points out the need for both an “on paper” structure and the time to process through and practice are important in helping members of a system work through their confusion and move towards coherence. In order to address this within my school, I will use our Google Suite for Education tools to share structural components, sample lessons, videos, etc. to support teachers. The use of Google tools is already part of our school culture and will be an easy way to provide resources for teachers when they are ready. Research shows that teachers who feel confident in their ability to teach mathematics will plan for more math instruction, and instruction that is appropriate for their students (Geist, 2015). By providing professional learning opportunities, clearly defined roles, and resources to support teachers to clear confusion, the teachers in my school will have the opportunity to increase their confidence in their own ability to teach math, and therefore impact the learning of their students in a positive way.

### **From Conflict to Consensus**

When considering a shift in mathematical curriculum, I anticipate some conflict within our faculty for a while. Over the years, our school has become a leader in our district in terms of our current math curriculum. The idea that this curriculum may need to transition will likely create confusion and conflict among teachers at first. Evans (2001) finds that innovation requires confronting conflict and developing a critical mass of proponents. This is one of the biggest goals I have in transitioning towards a more meaningful curriculum. I hope that by trying this first in my own classroom and finding what works to provide the best results, then working with my own grade level team who trust and support my vision, I will be able to have the results to help develop

a critical mass of supporters who are willing to learn more and try this new curriculum. I envision this critical mass forming from my grade level team, our numeracy coach, and member of our Math Vertical PLC.

As a school that truly functions under the assumption that we are a family, we all know that families don't always agree with one another, especially when confronted with change and newness. This has been proven over and over again at Riverview as we have transitioned over the years towards toward various shared visions. What also has proven true, though, is that eventually we come together as a family with a common goal – supporting learning with a Whatever It Takes attitude – and do what is best for our students.

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