

How OCDE Project GLAD® Transformed my Students' Academic Journey

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As a teacher in a Title I elementary school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, most resources and strategies only scratched the surface of what my students truly needed, both within school and in their home lives. The students attending the elementary school where I spent 9 years teaching were typically multilingual learners who came to us with a multitude of assets that we, as their educators, had the privilege of unlocking.

Illuminating their assets was sometimes relatively easy via thought-provoking topics, multiple modalities for learning, and sentence stems. These strategies were enough for some but not for others.

Certain students came to me with a degree of trauma that they carried with them like a heavy backpack to school every day. Different, more in-depth, adjustments of teacher behavior were needed to convince students to hang up their protective armor on their coat hook so that learning could begin. In this article I will discuss how OCDE Project GLAD® allowed my classroom to adopt a climate and culture in which students from diverse backgrounds and with a multitude of adverse childhood experiences felt that their contributions were not just meaningful but imperative to the classroom, which eventually translates to society.

From what my students have taught me (yes, I was listening intently) kiddos in our public school system are no strangers to the adverse aspects of society. In fact, many students as young as kindergarten navigate societal issues such as discrimination, racism, low SES, food scarcity,

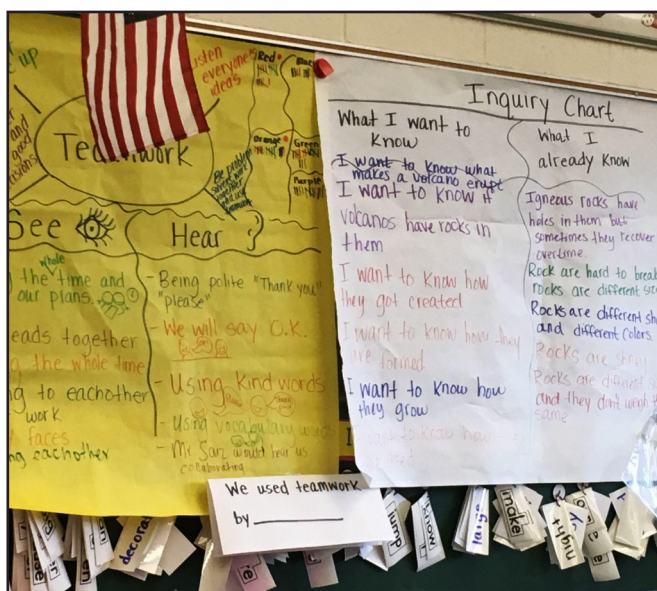
and lack of consistent living situations. Despite often-heard “single stories” about kids and families from a low SES school community, our elementary students showed us the enormous complexities of who they are and what their lives were all about, which in turn helped us make better connections. To this end, building relationships with students was the absolute best way to ensure students were more motivated to learn in the classroom, and ensure they felt a sense of

belonging in the classroom and in an academic environment. We were convincing the students of their capacity as learners.

We didn't get this effect by providing lists of rules to our students that mimic the oppression of our society. Instead, we did so by valuing our students' thoughts and ideas and allowing them to express themselves within three simple parameters: make good choices, show respect, and be a problem solver. I learned I could not assume students knew what respect should look

like from my perspective and at school. I often used a T-Graph for Social Skills to unpack words like these which can hold different meanings across cultures, discussing what they look and sound like.

How does GLAD® help cultivate a student's sense of belonging within the classroom? GLAD® starts with classroom climate and culture. Note how this is not referred to as “classroom management.” This difference brings to mind a concept I learned in my Educational Leadership program at New Mexico Highlands University. In leadership, we have the technical and the transformative approach. In this metaphor, classroom management is the



Project GLAD® charts like the T-Graph for Social Skills and the Inquiry Chart allow students to contribute meaningfully to class discussions.

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technical approach, which has its place and is useful in some instances. A technical problem has a straightforward answer. Students' act up, they may be asked to clip down, pull a strip, or another variation of a behavior modification strategy. While there is nothing wrong with these approaches, they don't work as effectively when faced with an adaptive problem. Adaptive problems don't have a clear answer and the answer may need to be "teased out", if you will, over a period of time. For example, in my classroom one year, I had eight students on a behavior intervention plan. This was one of my most challenging years in teaching, but what kept that in perspective is the challenges that my students faced. These students experienced what we frequently call behavior problems because of trauma. They learned to react to certain situations out of a fight, flight, or freeze response. It wasn't their fault they were experiencing these issues. It was my job to make sure that despite what they were going through internally, they had access to the Common Core State

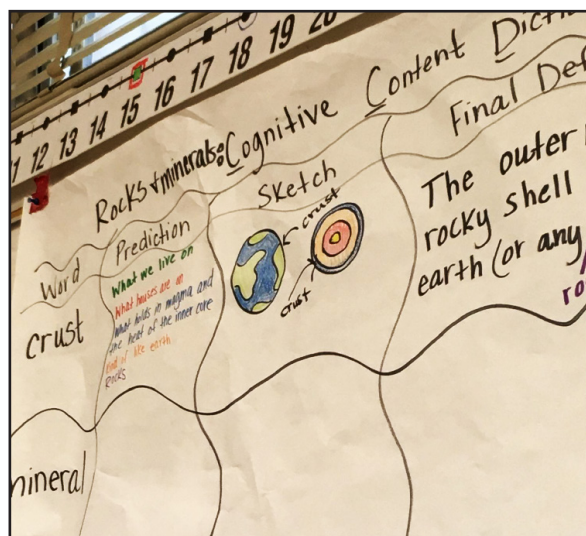
Standards and left their 2nd-grade year with what they needed to be successful in the years that followed. No pressure, right? With GLAD® and the environment that it fosters, my students with the most challenges succeeded. They were picked to be scouts and were given the task of watching their peers for behaviors that reflected their ability to make good decisions, solve problems, or show respect. This gave them the control they craved and built upon their self-worth. The structure of GLAD® and how the framework truly honors student thought and contribution allow students to feel seen, despite their barriers. I had students come to my class with a plethora of warnings from their past teachers. They would come to me and say, "Oh be careful..." and "don't let them get away with..." I got a lot of unsolicited advice. I smiled and nodded but let that go in one ear and

out the other. Not because I didn't value what my colleagues said, but because I knew my classroom was different. I had GLAD®. I had the strategies that I knew worked. The learning environment that GLAD® created supports students through their adaptive challenges. There is no clear-cut prescription to address the issue and the practitioner must engage in a series of responses to help the student find success. When a teacher engages in the art of creating a positive climate and culture within their four walls, they are utilizing transformational leadership, and those

positive effects will stay with students long after they leave the classroom. Healthy classroom climate and culture is developed from the beginning of the year and modified and adjusted throughout the duration of the year in order to be responsive to the needs of the individual student and the collective.

One of the most empowering components of GLAD® is accepting student responses and writing those responses verbatim on anchor charts, complete with

their initial next to it. It's not about whether the child was right or wrong, or whether they code switched or not. Rather, it's about validating and affirming their ideas. When we value students' ideas, we value their identities. We are telling our students that the ideas that currently exist in their heads are important to what we are currently discussing and what we will discuss. This, in turn, helps create a collective thought cloud that we are constructing throughout the duration of the GLAD® unit. Through this approach, we are creating space for students to show up as their authentic selves in the classroom. GLAD® also sends the message to students that misconceptions are building blocks essential for gaining a solid grasp of the concepts they are learning. If we don't take time to unearth, discuss, and process our misconceptions as a group, then

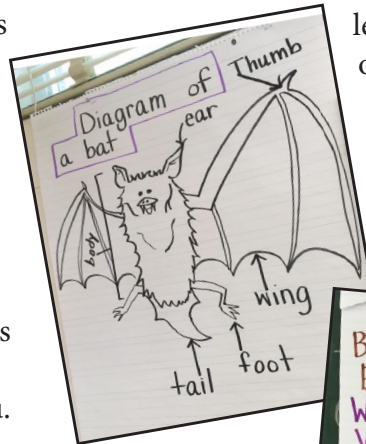


The Cognitive Content Dictionary allows students to explore the meaning of key content vocabulary by making predictions, deciphering its meaning, and developing hand motions that amplify the word's meaning.



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we are not respecting the learning community of “young scientists” or “junior mathematicians” we are creating. This kind of exploration of ideas often engages students in conversation that forms kinship with their peers and can provide the teacher with an early look into the students’ metacognition. Amplifying student voices untranslated into the dominant dialect, regionality, or language sends a very strong message to the students that we are all in this together and we need to hear from you.



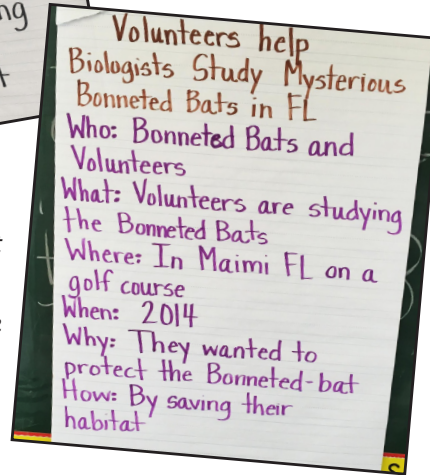
Project GLAD®’s many strategies amplify students’ voices, support them in accessing their prior knowledge and experiences, and provide them with the skills and confidence to wrestle with new concepts.

Once students become comfortable wrestling with and discussing new concepts, GLAD® encourages students to start building upon their existing prior knowledge with help from the Inquiry Chart. With a freshly lowered affective filter, students are ready to become experts in the content. They can do this via Pictorial Input Charts, a Cognitive Content Dictionary, Narrative Input Charts, Comparative Input Charts, Expert Groups, and more. These processes not only build a linguistic repertoire for students but also curate a variety of resources to fuel student thinking throughout the duration of the unit. As students learn to reference the charts around them, they are gaining experience in how to utilize educational resources and cite the current research, while also thinking analytically about how different facts are correlated and connected to bring about new and unique perspectives and ideas.

Nothing brought me more joy as a teacher than giving my students “the signal word” and watching them intrinsically recite the definition back to me in a chorus of expertise, typically, a definition that they created themselves through the work of the Cognitive Content Dictionary. Rather than being given a definition to the word, the students themselves made predictions,

deciphered the meaning, and came up with the hand motions to go along with the words in a brilliant display of comprehension. When we afford these opportunities for multilingual learners, we are changing internalized notions of self that have been largely shaped by the sociopolitical landscape. We are telling our culturally and linguistically diverse students that they are scholars, investigators, and brilliant analysts of literature. Academic success is not getting the right

question on a test, it’s using critical-thinking skills to ask “why”. No matter the complexity of a topic, GLAD® creates an environment in which information is easily accessible to students.



Through GLAD®, we are developing confident leaders who will become agents of change. When we offer rigorous content to students in this way, we are telling them that we know they are capable of synthesizing this information and making it their own. As students engage in this collective effort, they are capturing knowledge that will live in their hearts forever.

For more information about OCDE Project GLAD® and Dual Language Education of New Mexico’s role as a Regional Training Center, please visit dlenm.org/what-we-do/instructional-support-and-resources/ocde-project-glad.

