



“Chalk and Talk” to Makerspace

By Julia Carlson, Ed. D

Early reports from the Greater Fall River Early Intervention Group show that 45-50% of kindergarten students are arriving with significantly limited skill sets. In years past, our students were proud to identify their letters and shapes on the first day of school. This is no longer the case as half are unable to do either. Our children no longer experiment with crayons, scissors and words. Instead, they are masters of technology. They need to point their finger and swipe across a screen. This is having dramatic effects on their academic career.

So what are we doing about it?

The days of chalkboards and teachers standing at the front of the class are in our rear view mirror. In its place – hands on learning. Education leaders have moved to a new way of thinking called “Makerspace.” A makerspace is an educational space in which students learn with their hands. They actually get to build, create, and invent utilizing resources located in one room. These areas are not only about the physical task of producing an item but a shift in the mindset. No longer are students just consumers of knowledge but now they are also the creators.

On a recent learning walk at Tansey Elementary School, I toured one of the district’s first makerspaces. Christopher Audette, the principal, says, “Our Makerspace has become the heart of our community at Tansey. We have our share of high-tech gadgets like robots and 3D printers, but it's really the low-tech materials that students gravitate towards in design challenges. Families drive the space by sending in recycled materials like cardboard, coffee cans, and egg cartons. Students transform these items into solutions to real world problems, like: How can we build a more inclusive recess yard? or What can we do to restore an endangered habitat?” I absolutely saw this. Upon entering the room, I immediately wanted to start touching everything. The walls were made of Legos where students could build. Different tables had all types of materials. I sat down with a 2nd grade student who was using construction paper, flexible ties and tape to create a flower garden. She explained that she was presenting on what happened to flowers when the weather changed. At another table, students were manipulating their bodies in front of a green screen. Their hope was to perform about seasons.

Following their time in the makerspace, students returned to class to write about their findings. All I saw were smiles. I don’t think they knew how much learning was taking place as they created.

As our world changes, so does our role in planning and delivering lessons. No longer do we have teachers working in silos, but collaborating and providing opportunities for students to explore and create. Mr. Audette summed it up best when he stated, “there are no behavior issues in the Makerspace. Our most challenging students consistently thrive and shine in this space. Students are truly engaged when given opportunities to make as design thinkers. It's not the magic of the space, but it's the magic of the maker mindset of students as design thinkers.” Our students are not looking for THE right answer, but instead are discovering solutions. Through this process they fail often but persevere to see success, even if it is a construction paper flower garden.

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