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## QUIET: Teacher in Progress! Mrs. Mimi puts down the stickers and listens

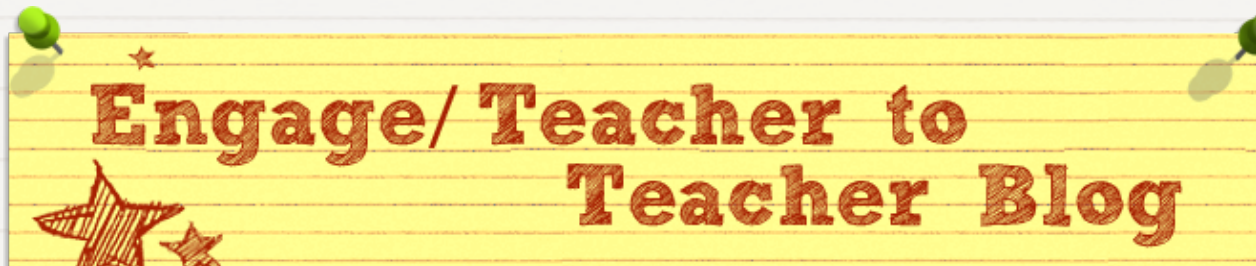
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## It's Raining Stickers By Mrs. Mimi



*Being a teacher means embracing constant change. Yet all too often, teachers are told when, how and why to change. In this monthly column, Mrs. Mimi takes on creating change for herself by rethinking old practices and redefining teaching on her own terms.*

Elementary schools can be aggressively positive places. You turned in your homework on time? Gold star for you! You remembered to push in your chair without me asking? Here's a scratch-and-sniff smiley face! You raised your hand before shouting out? Three cheers for you! Wait...did you just pass the eraser nicely to a friend? Someone get the prize box!

We, the teachers of the small fries, are so ready to celebrate any and all successes, that we occasionally turn a blind eye to those not-so-perfect moments.

I know we all have high aspirations for our students. We want them to meet the goals we set for them and more. We want them to feel successful, be lifelong learners, and all the stuff of deeply nerdy teacher dreams.

However, there were times in my classroom where I realized that these beautifully lofty visions for my students got in the way of seeing or hearing what was actually coming out of their mouths.

Let me give you an example from the early days of Mrs. Mimi's teaching.

The scene: My classroom. My little friends are gathered on the carpet. We are halfway through my annual reading of

CHARLOTTE'S WEB. We have just finished reading our chapter for the day and are deep into discussing connections to the text.

Friend: I can totally connect to Fern because I really love my cat and my mom doesn't.

Me: Say more about that.

Friend: Well, Fern loved Wilbur a lot and fought to keep him even though her parents wanted to give him away because he was a runt.

Me: Yes! (Insert self-satisfied grin here...my kids are *nailling* this!) I like where you're going. How does this connection help you to better understand the character?

Friend: Well, my mom doesn't like my cat at all. But I do. Because she is really crazy and chases her tail and that makes me think that Fern thinks Wilbur is really funny when he chases his tail too.

Me: ???

Friend: So Fern and me both love our pets because loving your pets is important. I understand Fern better now.

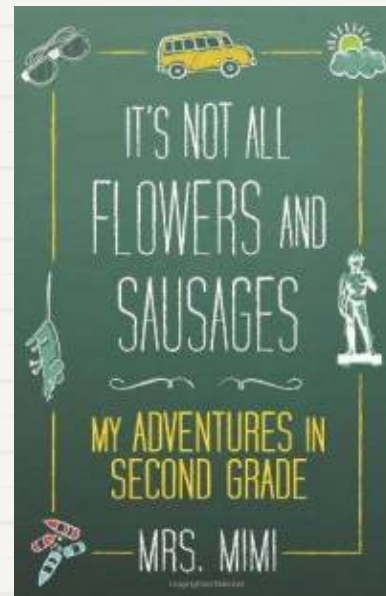
Me: (sigh)

Frustrated, I moved on. Afraid to shut down this friend, I moved on. Unsure of how to handle this, I moved on. Unwilling to negate such an enthusiastic reply, I moved on. I made a mental note to address this issue with my friend at another time and...(you guessed it!) I moved on. And by moving on, I demonstrated my passive acceptance of this response.

The message to my friends? This answer is okay. It is acceptable and if I wasn't holding the book and in the middle of a lesson, I would high five you and take you out for ice cream. When really? This is just a hop, skip, and a jump from saying, "Fern is wearing a blue shirt and I like blue shirts too!"

I realized that I was so ready to see my students as lifelong readers that I was willing to accept many responses that just weren't quite up to snuff. I was so ready for them to be successful, that too often I let moments like this slide by rather than holding my friends accountable for giving a solid answer. I was so ready to be positive and supportive of their thinking that I didn't adequately teach into their misunderstanding or miscommunication.

One day, after giving out more stickers than there are stars in the sky (and it was only 9:00!), I challenged myself to rethink these moments and found this bit of reflection had a profound impact on my teaching practice. Rather than





simply state that my classroom was a place where all students were safe to try, experiment, succeed and sometimes fail, I had to actively *make* my classroom a place where these things could happen.

I had to take those I-have-a-pet-too moments, turn them on their head and model for students how to think through and respond to questions accurately and clearly. I had to push my friends to express themselves clearly rather than rely on what I wanted to hear them say or where I thought they might be going with a particular comment. I had to separate who I thought they could be from who they were *in that moment*, put down my stickers, and listen.

**Mrs. Mimi** is a pseudonymous teacher who taught both first and second grades at a public elementary school in New York City. She's the author of ***IT'S NOT ALL FLOWERS AND SAUSAGES: MY ADVENTURES IN SECOND GRADE***, which sprung from her popular **blog** of the same name. Mimi also has her doctorate in education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

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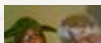
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I love this anecdote! It is an awkward moment when students share a totally enthusiastic yet totally off the mark response. It's about finding the way to redirect and push for deeper thinking without crushing the soul out of the students! haha

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