

A Conversation with Elephant in the (Class)room Learning Experience Participants



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The Elephant in the (Class)room Professional Learning Experience, which ran from October through December 2023, was an adult learning experience we offered to NTC partners grounded in The Elephant in the (Class)room's Anchors for Equity and building support and community for teachers, teacher leaders, coaches and mentors so they can support their students and the teachers who support their students. We followed up with two participants, Janelle and Anna, who were especially vocal about the challenges and opportunities the learning experience evoked for them.

During our conversation, we discussed how The Elephant in the (Class)room Professional Learning Experience supported educators to co-create the conditions so every teacher and student can grow, thrive, and shape their futures. Part of this experience involved viewing the [Profile in Practice videos](#) to see how practitioners across the country have worked towards implementing the Anchors for Equity that are foundational to these conditions.

Q: How did hearing from other practitioners across the country in the [Profile in Practice videos](#) support your learning and understanding? What were some of the main takeaways you had about these model practices?

Anna: Watching them through different perspectives and different lenses really helped me to reflect on myself and ask myself: can I do better? Of course, I can. I can bring those ideas to the teachers that I support and the administrators that I support and deliver them in a fashion that is my own and learn about their thinking on these ideas. It put me into a deeply reflective mode about my current professional practice.

Janelle: It gives me hope and it gives me joy to see that student- and equity-centered teaching and learning can happen. So many times I think we're in systems that were designed to do what they're doing and they're doing it quite well, right? They're ranking, they're sorting, they're doing what they were designed to do. When you actually see these videos of real teachers and administrators and learners...it gives me a lot of hope and joy, like Anna said, to bring this back to our learning communities.

Anna: This is my 24th year in education and I've seen a lot of changes, and unfortunately, a lot of them have been negative. And it's been a challenge for me at times to be positive about my role and how I'm serving students and how I'm serving educators. Watching those videos brings me hope and re-energizes me because I think it's really easy to get lost in the negativity these days, especially since we see it in the media all the time, and we read about it on social media, and education just isn't given a good name anywhere.

Q: A key challenge of the change the anchors invite is that of shifting from teacher-led to student-centered classroom communities. It can be overwhelming for educators to operationalize the adult learning experiences that may be necessary to execute this shift, and so I want to ask you both: What are the key takeaways from the PLC that you want to share with others in your district? What questions do you want to bring back to your colleagues? What problems of practice do you want to explore further and why?

Anna: [I want to ask my colleagues:] What are we teaching and how is it relevant? Because kids ask that: why am I learning this? When am I going to use it, and what value is it going to bring to me now or in the future? And I feel like a lot of the things that we do, we do to them, but we don't show them how they can use them in life and how using this knowledge can make them a better person and help them thrive in the real world. We step away from that because we're focused on the data, the assessments, the curriculum, doing this unit in the six weeks that we have and meeting all the deadlines and all of that. But I feel like a lot of the pushback that we get from our students is because they want to know, why am I learning this? What is the relevance of this to me? And I think that's something that I try to focus on, but I need to do a better job of that.

Janelle: I'm going to turn this around [from a problem of practice] to a problem of possibility. I see taking one of our anchors and just thinking of that as a way of centering on the problem of possibility. For example, with the [Expand anchor](#), you could center on expanding what the community looks like for your school, who the stakeholders are, where other adults may be supporting students in crucial ways, and where those connections are, and then we could start looking at the problem of possibility for each of these layers in our school. [But] if we're not all thinking about the possibility, and taking a strength and asset-minded approach, if we're not all supporting where we're going [in all aspects of the system], having other's backs and [ensuring there is] the time and resources, the possibility is never going to come to be.

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