

Ep #296: The Student Journey Experience



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 296.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly Robeck.

Well hello, my empowered leaders, and welcome to the beginning of the school year. It's the end of August. I'm so happy that you are ready to start your most empowered school year ever. Today I'm going to share with you an exercise that I developed with one of my clients at the end of last year.

We were talking about her plans for the upcoming school year. She has finished her first year of school leadership. We were reflecting on the year. I asked her what are your goals and dreams for next year? What would you like to accomplish for year two?

In our conversation, she was saying, "I want to learn how to coach teachers the way you're coaching me." I said I can definitely help you with that. So if you want to learn how to coach by being coached, you want to become a better mentor, a better coach for your teachers, join the Empowered Principal® Collaborative.

You're going to learn everything you need to know. You're going to have access to all my tools, all my strategies. I'm going to teach you how to coach by being coached and getting comfortable with coaching as a client and then as a coach. Okay.

So I am going to share with you this exercise and this experience that my client and I created together. I gave her the idea, we kind of talked through it, but then I fleshed out the details. It was so powerful that I want to share it

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with you on the podcast so that you can take it and run with it in your own way. Okay.

So this is an exercise that you can run through with your staff at the beginning of the school year. So right here, right now. It's an awesome way to set the tone for the year. You can do this with your entire staff. Or you can have them do it in grade levels if you want or departments depending on how your school is organized.

But you want to think through this as you're going through this exercise, listening to what I'm saying, jotting down the questions, and thinking of your own questions. You can design this however you want. But the purpose of this exercise is to bring our focus as the adults back to thinking about and planning from the perspective of who we are here to serve, which is our students.

You can also do this exercise with your site and district leaders about the teacher journey experience. So I'm going to take you through what I call the student journey experience, but you could apply this to the teacher journey experience. If you're planning at a district level, some of you who are listening are district leaders, that's amazing. You can do this with your teachers, okay.

So you can apply this exercise and this journey experience to any type of journey that you want to map out from beginning to end and understand every step of the way, the perspective of that person and what needs to be in place in order for them to be successful.

So if you're looking at your student's journey as a student and the process they are going to go through, the experience that they're going to have at your school, you want to start with the end result that you want to create for your students. So what is the progress you want students to experience this coming year? How is that progress going to be measured?

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Consider progress that goes beyond test scores. I know you do a lot of measuring, cognitively, academically, all of those test scores. You have a lot of data to look at. Also consider the progress you want students to make from a social perspective, emotional progress, physical progress, mental and cognitive progress, psychological progress.

What I mean by that is how they're developing their psyche, their self-concept. We're going to talk about that more in a minute. But we want to expand and grow our student's self-concept of what they think about themselves and grow and expand what they believe is possible for them. Okay.

So once you've decided the end result, what is the progress that we want to see students make? How are we going to measure that progress? Then you want to think about where are they coming in day one? Where are they currently at developmentally? So you might need to do this based on their age or based on their developmental milestones, or based on their grade level. What should we expect as educators?

What is the reality of what we should be expecting? Not what we wish they would come in with, or we think they should be coming in with, but what is the reality of where our students are when they walk in the door day one? Let's just decide to drop all of the expectations of where we wish they were or what they should be or what we don't want to deal with. Let's talk reality. Where are kids at when they walk in the door?

Let's just start with the truth. Get honest with ourselves, and talk about the reality of where kids are. We're not blaming COVID. We're not blaming parents. We're not blaming whatever, anything external. We're just going to accept them for who they are as they're walking in the door. Thinking about where they're at, what is the expectation of progress we want them to have and experience throughout this year?

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Now, if you've followed this podcast for a while, you understand what I'm talking about when I say the STEAR cycle. So what is a student's STEAR cycle when they're entering into a particular grade level or a particular class? What are their thoughts? What are their feelings? What are their actions when they enter into class? Then what do we want that steer cycle to look like when they exit our class or our grade level? Okay?

What might students be thinking and feeling as they enter into your classroom or to your grade level? What do you want for them to think and feel? Then what can you, as the teacher, put into place to invite them to think and feel this way? We want to set up our classroom environment and the culture of our classroom to invite students to think in certain ways and to feel in certain ways about themselves.

Some questions that your teachers can ask of themselves is what is the most immediate action I want them to take? What on day one do they need to know how to do? Then what is it that they need to know in order to be able to do that effectively? How am I going to teach them to take these actions? What are the first five things that they need to know about the school year? What are the routines and procedures I need to teach for our classroom to run smoothly?

You want to take this step and you want to map it out with great detail. You want to sell your teachers on the value of slowing down and ensuring smooth routines before jumping into curriculum content.

Oftentimes, our teachers want to skip over the part where they spend a week or two really dialing in every routine and procedure and expectation they have and modeling that and teaching that and introducing materials, classroom materials, and then also not forgetting to teach school wide procedures and routines.

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But really slowing down and taking the time to teach kids exactly what they expect of them and to teach kids they are capable of it right off the bat. No matter what their past has been, no matter what experiences they've had. In this day, in this time, they are capable, and we want to teach them that they're capable and show them that they're capable.

Once they feel capable, our year is going to go so much faster, right. So give your teachers permission to take the time they need to set students up for success. Do not rush through the first week or two of school and demand that they get on the pacing guide and get into curriculum and content. Because you know what happens. When you try to go fast, you end up having to go slower. So go slow to go fast.

For those teachers who actually drag this process out, like they don't want to get into teaching, I've had a few of those. You can actually have a conversation ahead of time and give them a timeframe for easing in from modeling the routines into instruction.

I would talk about this as I plan. What is an appropriate time frame? Ask your teachers how much time do they think they'll need to get their kids trained on every routine and procedure that they believe will make that student successful?

It might look different for students of different ages. For example, I taught kindergarten. We spent a great deal of time with kindergarteners teaching all of the routines and procedures. There were so many things to teach. Versus my fourth and fifth grade teams, they were maybe at it within a week or two, they were going full on. With kinders, it took a little bit longer. Okay.

So I also want to add that any grade that is a first year in a new setting. So the first year they go into middle school, the first year they're in high school. Those first years, you want to set aside additional time because those

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teachers need to also cover the logistics of the entire school wide experience and those procedures in addition to their own classroom routine. So please keep that in mind. Okay.

Now, when we're thinking about creating a successful experience for students, we have to think about the students' mindset. Because so much of a student's rate of progress comes from their self-concept as a student. How they self-identify in their ability to learn and make progress, what they believe about themselves, if they think they're capable, if they're curious about learning, if they trust that they can do hard things, if they know they have permission to try and fail without making it mean that something is wrong with them or something negative about themselves, or negative about learning.

We think that when we feel bad that learning sucks, or that teaching is hard, or that we're not going to do it. We have very all or none thinking as humans. So when things are easy and good, we like it. When things feel like a struggle or a challenge, we hate it. So we want to show kids there's a middle ground. That things can be hard and fun. That they can take some time to learn, and that's okay. We don't have to learn it all at the same rate at the same time.

Every student is on an individual student journey. You want to think about that and think about students as individuals because here's the truth. Children are similar to adults. They doubt themselves. They fear what other people will think of them. They sometimes blame outside circumstances for their results. They don't want to experience failure basically because of what they've been taught that failure means about them. But that's how we feel, right? They get frustrated, and they get embarrassed when they don't understand something. They have the same emotions that we do as adults.

Reminding ourselves of this helps us better understand and be able to relate to our students. Keep in mind, they have little STEAR cycles going

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on. They have thoughts. They have feelings, and they respond through their actions to those thoughts and feelings. It's the same process. Same human brain. They're just younger. They're just a little less developed in terms of number of years on the planet, but they think and they feel and they respond to those emotions.

The more we learn and understand how we, as adults, react and respond to our emotions and to our thoughts, the better we're going to be able to understand why children think, feel, and behave the way that they do.

So what STEAR cycle does a student need to have to have an exceptional student experience on our campus? What are the thoughts they would need to think about themselves, their teachers, their peers, and the process of learning?

How do we want them to feel about themselves, others and the process of learning? Then what is our plan as the adults to support students with the emotions that come up with learning new or difficult things? We have to teach the skill of processing emotion and acknowledging that emotions are a part of the learning process, and celebrating the fact that we're able to handle difficult emotions, painful emotion, stressful emotions, embarrassment, all of those things, right?

What do students need to know when it comes to the emotional aspect of school? Talk about that with your team. Bring this up. This is going to be such a fascinating conversation to have with adults because we haven't been talking like this in our schools, especially the adults in our schools. It will be fascinating to see how your teachers respond to these questions. It's going to make them think about their own emotional reactions and their own thoughts. It's such good work.

Another question that you can ask your teachers is who is responsible for the results that we want to create? This might not land well because the

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truth is that we are the adults, and we want to take ownership and responsibility for the results that we are trying to achieve.

So when we have a goal that certain number of students or a certain percentage of students are going to excel or progress at a particular rate. We're looking at percentages, or we're looking at test scores. Whatever it is, that is our goal. That's not student goal. That's our goal. We're responsible for creating that result. So what is in our control as adults to create that result that we are the ones who want it? Right?

Students aren't thinking I want to go up by X percentage points. Most students aren't. Maybe the older ones are. But the littles, they're not thinking that. They just want to play and grow. They're excited and curious. They're fascinated by learning. We want to expand a student's self-concept as a learner.

So what is in our control as the adult? Then what is in the students control? How are we going to teach them how to exercise the control that they do have? Okay. As the school leader, this is something fun that you can think about. What is the easiest, simplest, and most fun way to approach the year? Ask your teachers that. What would make this year simple, easy and fun? What's one thing we could do to make this more fun?

Because above all, what we want to question is what are the experiences that we are creating for the year? For ourselves and for our students? What is the one priority or what is the value that we are headed for? What's the decision lens we are using to make decisions?

You have to have that primary focus in place, which is why that I talk about creating that school vision and having that one priority focus for each 90 Day segment of your school year. Okay.

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So when you join the Empowered Principal® Collaborative program, we break this down into three month plans. We make that plan very simple, easy, and doable. This process, this exercise in taking students through the journey, I think it's one of the most powerful things you can do with your staff because it reminds them why they're there and that we're going to focus on the student journey.

In doing so, we also focus on the teacher journey and the experience that we are creating for ourselves as educators. So I am so curious to hear how you implement this exercise, how it works for you. Please join the program so that I can help you and support you with any hiccups, any pitfalls, and any obstacles that you come up with. That's what we do in this group. We coach through them, we solve for them, and we support you so that you can keep your vision up and running. Keep everybody on track and keep moving in a forward direction. Let me know how this goes. Talk to you guys next week. Take good care. Bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit angelakellycoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.