2017-2018 Professional Development Grant from Ellison Foundation

Rainier Elementary School – 2nd grade team

Our interest in implementing cooperative learning into our classrooms stemmed from a conversation that our students were active and wanting conversation all throughout the day. We wanted a way to tap into that energy and use it to ignite and foster learning. The grant was applied for in order for us to turn what we considered a problem that was standing in the way of our student’s academic success into our solution by using cooperative learning (Kagan structures).

Being on a military base, our turnover rate is very high. We have new students enter our classrooms all throughout the year. Producing an environment, where all kids felt safe to share in their learning, was key to a successful learning classroom. We did our research on Kagan Cooperative Learning and felt that the conference and resources they offered would be a great way to implement this in our classrooms this year.

Four teachers participated in the week-long conference and brought back structures that we could implement into our classrooms immediately. We began on day one of school using their method of grouping students and working on team building and peer relationships. Community building as a class went right along with the teams and was done in such a fun way, students were excited about taking part in each activity.

During the year, the Kagan structures have been a great tool to aid in developing social skills as well as assisting with processing of new material.  My students love to use structures such as Rally Robin and Stand up-Hand up-Pair up as it allows for academic conversation with peers that keeps them engaged.  We use Rally Robin on a daily basis to quickly summarize thoughts and generate lists that are relevant to our topic.  Kagan structures have been helpful to allow students that need to move more frequently to do so while staying productive.

Students have become accountable for their learning and have become experts and teaching their peers.  While doing collaborative learning each student has a role to play and their partners hold them accountable for that piece.  There is no way for them to hide and avoid the task at hand.  If there is ever a situation where a student does not want to participate due to lack of confidence in the materials, my students have become excellent teachers where they are becoming comfortable explaining how to do something rather than just giving an answer.  Students that are low-performing get extra assistance in the material and students that are high, develop more self-confidence and solidify their knowledge.  Kagan has truly been a wonderful tool to reach all levels of learners.

There is more student lead instruction now versus teacher lead. The kids are always asked to engage their prior knowledge before starting a new unit or lesson and the cooperative learning teams allows each child to have a voice even my shy students. They turn and talk, work with partners, or in groups, and we use talking chips to allow all students a chance to provide their thoughts. Kagan has really enhanced my teaching ability and with students actively involved in their learning, my class runs a lot smoother.

In our building’s professional development, we talk a lot about engaging students and academic conversation. This led directly to our Kagan structures and we were asked to share what we had learned at the conference with K-5 teachers. We saw this as an opportunity to get these structures into all of our classrooms, and teachers responded favorably. We put teachers in teams, gave them a problem to solve and had them role play the structures just as they would in the classroom with their students. We taught them cheers to do after a learning activity and also gave them positive praise phrases that they would go back and teach their classroom so all contributions were valued.

The grant helped us accomplish bringing cooperative learning into our classrooms and throughout our school. It helped build community and give students ownership into their own learning. We are extremely grateful for the opportunity and resources that the Ellison Foundation Grant provided and we are certain that our teaching practice has been changed for the better.

Sincerely,

Michele Lewis

April Moody

Kimberly Boyajean

Ashley Berry

Elementary Teachers

Rainier Elementary

JBLM, WA