LET GROW

Let Grow Project

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CASE: ACADEMICALLY INSECURE STUDENTS WEREN'T SPEAKING UP IN CLASS

SOLUTION?

Have them do something in the "real world" by themselves that they can discuss.

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BACKGROUND

Students who felt anxious about their academic abilities weren't participating in class discussions, mostly for fear of "messing up." James assigned them **The Let Grow Project**: *"Go home and do something new, on your own, after discussing it with your parent(s)."* Then the student fills out a little form saying what they did and how it went.

SLOW START

"At first, only a couple of kids chose to do The Project. But they came in and they were sharing what they did — they helped cook dinner, or mowed the lawn — and the other students were like, 'Maybe I can do that, too.' Kids hearing what their peers are doing makes them more inclined to go home and try things. One thing I realized I had to explain is that what one kid might do for their Let Grow Project could be something another kid has been doing forever. I didn't want any chuckles like, 'So-and-so took out the garbage but I've been doing that for four years!' So I explained we're all in different spots. They understood that, and enjoyed sharing without feeling shamed about whatever they'd achieved. The kids were cheering each other on."

HOW DID THE PROJECT HELP THE SHY OR STRUGGLING STUDENTS?

"They really enjoyed doing something that they were better at [than traditional schoolwork]. Maybe they're not the fastest reader, but now they were willing to share, because they were doing something that made them feel good about themselves."

ANY SNAGS?

"After a while we had to brainstorm new ideas beyond the ones in The Let Grow Project materials. Everyone wanted new ideas to try. We divided these into:

- Things you can do if you're home alone
- Things to do with your parents' help
- Things to do with a sibling
- Things to do outside.

We made sure that the ideas worked for kids in apartment buildings as well as houses. For instance, not everyone has a tree they can climb."

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS DID THE STUDENTS DO?

"One kid worked on his dad's car and legitimately helped. A few fixed things. One got to cook for the first time. The big takeaway for me was realizing how much they knew — and didn't know. Like, after you cut the grass you have to dump the bag. You don't know that till you do it. Seeing them handle things that I was doing at their age — that was great."

HOW DID THE PARENTS REACT?

"The kids started asking to do more things and getting more independent. Sometimes you know your kid can do a task, but it is so much more work for YOU — it'll take longer and you know you'll have to clean up. But by letting go — letting grow, so to speak — the kids started doing more things on their own. The parents liked that."

ANY SURPRISES?

"Some of the parents who don't speak English, once they understood that they could send a photo of your child doing their Project, they did. It's not that they hadn't wanted to participate or be involved before — it's just the language barrier made them uncomfortable. But here they were able to share something — just send a picture — so they did!"

HOW DID YOU DISPLAY THE STUDENTS' PROJECTS?

"They each got a paper leaf that they wrote their project on. We put these on the hallway walls."

WHAT CHANGES ARE YOU MAKING TO THE PROJECT NEXT YEAR?

"I'm going to have a check box next to some of the activities and let them check it three times. You're not the master of cutting the grass after just one time."