



IS INTEGRITY THE NEW FIDELITY IN THE MATH CLASSROOM?



ALL LEARNERS NETWORK

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If we are going to truly honor the students in front of us, we need to base our instructional decisions on their developing understandings. In many cases though, our school districts require teachers to use a primary resource, often a published math program. We want to encourage teachers to think about how to use the math program with integrity, not fidelity. We know that programs cannot respond to our students' instructional needs- only educators can. Because of this - it is critical for us as educators to always be thinking about how to get more math to more kids. When we are talking about integrity over fidelity with math programs, what we are really talking about is considering the needs of ALL students in front of us. This means making sure that teachers are not just supported but fully empowered in their pedagogical decision-making. Leaders and administrators need to position educators as the authority rather than the math program.

Let's take a moment to consider the differences between a math curriculum and a math program. A math program is a set of resources that sits underneath the umbrella term curriculum. The curriculum is ALL of the resources available for use. A math program gives you commonality across a system through a scope and sequence, vocabulary, models, and strategies. The rest of the resources that you use to respond to the needs of all students, fill out your curriculum.

Implementing math programs with fidelity is usually interpreted as doing all of a program exactly as it is written. In doing so very few teachers 'get through' all of the units of study provided by the program because there is just too much provided by any given program. How does that align with this idea of fidelity? Fidelity refers to how



closely prescribed procedures are followed and, in the context of schools, the degree to which educators implement programs, assessments, and lessons exactly as they are scripted.

Implementing math programs with integrity is all about empowering educators as responsive decision-makers. Implementing programs with integrity elevates the math target for each lesson and finds the most robust problem-solving tasks within the lesson that allow all students to productively struggle with a grade-level concept. In many cases, a problem from a math program's lesson will need to be modified, or scaffolds planned and ready if necessary, for access. The math in main lessons needs to provide opportunities for rich problem solving for all students. Teaching with integrity means using the resources to support a common scope and sequence, common models, and common language while finding the most beneficial tasks within each lesson that allow all students to access the math. Educators are the most important resource in a classroom space because it is the teachers who can respond and adapt to the students in the room. Programs can't. The art of teaching is about human beings, not turning pages.

There is a place for fidelity, but not when it means following a static program over responding to the dynamic needs of the students in front of us. Placing emphasis on the instructional decisions that teachers are making every day to engage students as the thinkers and doers of mathematics is more important than if teachers are using every part of a program the way it is scripted. Fidelity to high-quality teaching practices is more impactful and more supportive of the complex craft of being an educator.

Many times when we talk about fidelity to a program, the interpretation is that you have to use every single resource that the program provides. Teaching with fidelity forces a teacher to go through every single page of that workbook and every single part of a lesson. This makes lessons span multiple days. Teaching with this type of fidelity causes intense pressure for educators as achieving the full scope and sequence feels impossible. We call that pressure - program pressure. Math programs regularly provide educators with way more than what can be used in our classrooms.

What we often hear from educators is that this program pressure ends up driving many of the decisions that teachers make. What we know is when the program pressure and fidelity expectations are high, educators feel less and less empowered and less able to respond to the students in front of them. In fact, many talented educators make instructional choices that are not good for all students because of this pressure.

Most programs target the middle or "average student" while educators need to be able to target the needs of all students in a classroom. This means that those resources within the program need to be modified. We want to make sure we are focusing on rich



problem solving for all students and not just completing exercises. It is critical to remember that the educator is the most important resource in the classroom space because of their ability to respond and adapt.

Implementation with integrity elevates the math and honors teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills . But - what does that really look like to use a math program with integrity? The math program can provide a helpful scope and sequence. A math program can provide resources and materials. Now our job with integrity is to elevate the math by finding the most robust problem solving within those resources that allow all students to productively struggle. A math program often has a lot of great materials from problems to exercises to games to number sense routines. Educators need to be empowered to apply these resources to the human beings in front of them in the most meaningful and impactful way.

For more information on this topic and specific examples, check out our recording of the hour-long workshop, Using a Math Program with Integrity, Not Fidelity.

What Now? Scan the QR code and scroll to the bottom of the post for links to next steps



1. Watch the Using a Math Program with Integrity and Not Fidelity recording and access the slide deck from the workshop here.
2. Read the blog Countering Teaching Through Telling with 4 Inclusive Math Instruction Strategies
3. Bring All Learners Network (ALN) into your school or district for embedded professional development.

