

Teacher Story: Tiffany dos Santos

Like most teachers, I knew very little about GO Math! going into the school year. I had my books, I had sat through the brief orientation in Nashville, and I had questions. The first few weeks were a little rough as I tried to navigate the program and make it work for my 25 students and myself, making sure that the 3rd graders and 4th graders in my classroom were able to get through the lesson and get the instruction and help they needed.

Yet, within a few weeks, I started to notice that we weren't taking as long, that students weren't looking lost as I guided them through the Unlock the Problem and Share and Show sections, and –my favorite – light bulbs were turning on.

One of the major differences between this program and the older program that was used in my classroom was the number of word problems. And I was concerned. Word problems in the past had been limited to no more than three or four, and now they were the bulk of what was being asked to be done. As time went on, however, I realized that the students were depending on me less to help solve these problems and relying on the skills the book had laid out for them – underlining what needed to be solved, circling the information to be used, crossing out unnecessary information. No longer were word problems a thing to be feared, but a challenge to be tackled, confidently.

That is the strength of this new program. We are no longer looking at numbers in isolated incidences, random things that do random things with. To my 3rd & 4th graders, they now have a meaning and purpose.

At the end of last year I sat in an IEP meeting for a little girl coming into my class. Among other things, I was told that word problems would be too challenging for her, that I would need to break them down into number-only problems, and just assess her on that. Yet this same little girl, who could not do any word problems at the beginning of the year, was able to *independently* accomplish her

assignments and pass the word-problem-only-tests with 80% or higher for the past four months. I asked her, “Honey, how come you don’t need me to help you anymore?” And she answered, “Because I can do it on my own. I just think, ‘What do I do with Mrs. Dos Santos there?’ and then I do that.” She can do it on her own. What a victory!

And the rest of my class? They love Go Math. Yes, it takes extra planning and extra time, and yes, I realize that with only two grades in my classroom I can make that happen, but for those 25 children who sit at my feet on the rug each morning, working together to discuss and solve bigger problems than I thought possible as a teacher, and who walk away feeling confident in math, this is a victory as well. Now we don’t just know how ‘do’ math, but we understand ‘why’. And when you can understand ‘why’, I believe that skill will stick around for a much longer time.

(Grades 3,4)