

New Year's Resolution: Everyone Will Have a Lunch Partner

At the heart of Four-Blocks is the philosophy that we can nurture and support all students without labeling or ability grouping them. Mainly because of this belief, most of us see Four-Blocks as a literacy approach with sensitivity and compassion for all children. In this New Year of 2005, let's think about taking this belief one step further. Think about what a difference the following actions might make in our elementary, middle, and high schools:

What if we made it our business to identify the kids who are bullied, ostracized by other students, or who are loners? Find the kids who don't have anyone to eat lunch with. Notice the kids who are alone on the playground.

I was in an elementary classroom recently modeling the Writing Block. Part of the block was spent with the class "talking" to each other and with me—but only "talking" on paper. For about 20 minutes (the kids begged me for extra time after only allowing 10 minutes to start with!), we feverishly wrote notes to each other. I had a great time getting to know them. One note still haunts me, though. I received a note from one of the third graders who asked if I would be his friend. He said, "The other kids say they'll be my friend, but then they laugh. I don't have any friends." He was one of those kids who was like a little man—a little wiser, more introspective and serious than most—in other words, he was different. So often, we're

compassionate when we recognize that a child doesn't feel accepted. But, often we don't do anything about it.

What if we identified the loners and got them involved some way in school? I think we could find some way to get to know them and their interests. Then, we could use that interest to connect them to a club or to help start a club that might appeal to others. If possible, we could give them some status through this involvement.

What if we organized a student advisory board on which some of your "discovered" students could serve? So often schools only have representation from the popular kids who've won elections. Your school really will have to be stronger with the input of students who definitely have a different perspective. Schools shouldn't exist merely for the conformists. These other students could share valuable insight into our drop-out, violence, and underachievement problems.

All schools—not just Four-Blocks schools—should be teaching appreciation of our differences, not merely tolerance of those characteristics that set us apart. I've loved Four-Blocks from the beginning because it has so clearly stated that we all have personalities, learning styles, and have had experiences that make each and every one of us unique. So, what do you say—let's make a resolution to carry it a step further. Let's not only recognizing the differences, but also teach our students to appreciate those differences.