

The Amazing Skyhawk Shake: Real-Life Education

There is that awkward moment where you meet a new person—you introduce yourself, give a firm handshake, make eye contact, and begin a conversation to ensure a great first impression. Are you memorable? Do you draw that person into your circle?

You are called upon to stand in front of a group and make an impromptu speech. You think on your feet and enumerate great things about your organization. Do you show your poise, knowledge, and enthusiasm? Do you have that certain “Je ne sais quoi” (that “it” factor) to engage your audience?

You are in a job interview with important officials. You present yourself in an optimal light to show the skills and talents you could bring to the organization, preparing for unknown questions. Do you know how to listen to a question and give a thoughtful answer? Do you know how to ask clarifying questions to get information you need?

As adults, we have faced these situations and more, but how does this work when you are 8, 10, or 12 years old? How do you even know that these are important skills to be learned? The students in our Title I school are fortunate to have teachers who know that kids need social and relationship skills to get and keep jobs in the future, in addition to academic skills. It is our mission to put learning first at Layton Elementary, but academic success is just one of our goals. The “soft skills” students need are also explicitly addressed and taught and students love it!

When I arrived at Layton Elementary in 2016-17, the previous administration had worked hard to develop a culture of learning. Our teachers were well-versed in using PLC’s to establish a collaborative environment. They were well-trained in methods of explicit instruction and intervention for students who were not succeeding. We were performing reasonably well on standardized assessments. A needs assessment revealed a need to focus on developing an understanding of the growth mindset and the power of the individual to take responsibility for his or her own learning and personal development. We began with the Power of Yet, with an eye to the future.

In our quest to provide greater opportunities for our students, I took a trip to Atlanta to check out a private school started by acclaimed educators, Ron Clark and Kim Bearden. Their school is built on a platform of rigorous instruction, with structure, discipline, and respect, balanced by creativity, passion, and enthusiasm. After my visit, I used Title I funds to send 19 of our teachers to the school in several small groups to learn about it first hand. Students were excited by the rejuvenation of the teachers who came back eager to learn and apply the many engaging practices they had learned there.

One unique component of school is the Amazing Shake. This is an event designed to prepare students for the professional world. Ron Clark explains it this way: “By teaching students about the mechanics of giving a proper handshake and conversing with professionals, RCA aims to provide the tools for students to present themselves exceptionally well for opportunities today

and in the future.” That was just what we wanted for our students, so last school year, a team of teacher leaders designed the “Amazing Skyhawk Shake.” Administrative involvement is on the support side, both financial and physical, but the planning is done by teacher teams.

Teachers first created a structure to teach the social skills. We used the SPECIAL approach to help students remember the skills needed for social introductions: Shake hands; Posture; Eye contact; Charm; Introduce yourself; Lean In/Listen. A rubric was created to measure students’ skill in carrying out the SPECIAL skills. This rubric (in English and Spanish) was shared with families, who also helped children practice the skills at home. We taught the importance of physical appearance and grooming in making a good impression.

The Amazing Skyhawk Shake is a three-round competition for students in two categories: Kindergarten-Third grades and Fourth-Sixth grades. This is where we reach out to the community for help in judging the competition. This is a great public-relations tool for our school. The elementary students arrive in best-dress which is so much fun to see. Anyone who doubts that children act differently when they are dressed in their best would be able to see the difference in the way our students present themselves on Competition Day. They take pride in knowing that they are putting their best selves out there to be seen and heard.

Junior Competition:

Younger students compete by showing off their table manners and social skills. Judges are seated at a table when students arrive and three students spend about ten minutes chatting with their two judges. After the initial conversation, students and judges go to the breakfast buffet set up in the faculty room and show their manners as they choose and eat breakfast. Judges have the SPECIAL rubric they use to score the round.

Senior Competition:

Round One is judged by the Latinos-in-Action from Layton High School. The teacher leaders train the students in the SPECIAL techniques and rubric, then the high-school students judge one class at a time. Students each have two rubrics; they are instructed to introduce themselves to an LIA and make a short conversation with the high-schooler. After the brief conversation, the LIA will score the rubric. We challenge them to be tough on the student when completing the rubric; they are assured that the student will never see the evaluation. The teacher leaders score the rubrics. Three winners are chosen from each class to compete in Round Two.

Round Two is judged by the administrators*. Students again dress in their finest (which for some may be in their nicest jeans and t-shirt and others in a new outfit). They enter the office one at a time and shake our hands and we have a brief conversation using the same rubric. This is usually done in about three two-hour sessions during a week. The judges tally the rubrics and grade-level winners are announced for Round Three. Students. Finalists are recognized at a short school assembly. All students who competed in Round Two are also recognized and the whole school cheers wildly for everyone who represented them so well. (*Note – After seeing how

seriously the students feel about the competition and judging that takes place, administrators will not be judges next year. Some students who were not winners in the round have felt rejected by the administrators and it has damaged the relationships we have so carefully made with students. We will ask outside judges to assess students in Round Two.)

Round Three is a BIG DEAL! Teachers recruit judges from the community who hold important leadership roles in their organizations. We have business owners, government officials, county employees, education leaders from our District, bankers, realtors, retired executives, and others who are eager to help us prepare students to be their future employees. Judges are given a brief orientation to the Amazing Skyhawk Shake and receive information about the scenario they will be running. Each scenario is a social situation to test the students' composure, creativity, and social awareness skills. This year, we did a job interview, a Shark Tank with a bogus product the students had to sell to the judges, and a series of timed questions about various topics of interest.

Students then come in to "work the room". Their goal is to meet the judges and dazzle them with a great first impression. After about ten minutes, judges are escorted to their venues and students draw a number to identify them in the competition. Students compete in all three events and return to class. FaceBook Live has become a fun way to involve the rest of the school and community in the event. One of our teachers visits with students after they have come from a scenario and she interviews them. Some teachers will allow students to watch live, while others save the video for a convenient time.

Celebrating the Good!

The next morning, a school-wide assembly is held to announce the winners. We do it up right, with a red carpet, disco lights, and confetti guns as winners are announced. All the contestants come to the stage and receive the congratulations and adulation of the studentbody. Each student receives a certificate and a small gift. As winners are announced to a knee-slapping drum roll, they take their places on a special awards podium the teachers created from their classroom stages. This is also broadcast on FaceBook Live for the community.

To take it to the next level, we partnered with three other schools and held a Davis School District Amazing Shake competition! Each school sent their top three students in each category to compete in a District event with new scenarios to challenge students. It was fun and exciting for our students and families.

This wonderful event has brought a unity to our school and an expectation for good manners and excellence. We teach students that it is always important to present your best self, not just to impress others, but to gain a sense of confidence in themselves. FaceBook Live videos can be found on our Layton Elementary School FaceBook page and we would love to share specifics with you, if you are interested in joining us next year! Who knows? Maybe there could be a Utah Amazing Shake Competition next year!

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