

MIA BULJAN: And sort of, like, testing back at you a little bit. And I think when you walked away, I stayed and watched them, and as soon as you walked away, Rosa Linda pulls out her notebook and she turns to this page. Now, you had been talking about 3 divided by 100.

ERIKA ISOMURA: Right here. Where you marked.

MIA BULJAN: Yeah, it was here actually.

ERIKA ISOMURA: Okay.

MIA BULJAN: So she opens up her notebook and she says, "Federico, look-it. When we did 3 divided by 10, it was three-tenths." So the whole time that you're talking, she's connecting it to this theme that you've already done with each other. Sorry, Mark. And she immediately makes a connection to, like, "If this is what it looks like when I write, you know, 3 divided by 10 is three-tenths," and she has a story that goes with it and her little work here. Then she's listening to your story that whole 3 divided by 100 and she's saying, yeah, that's the sort of non-commutative nature. Like, "It has to go in that order because this is how we've done it with tenths, and hundredths work the same way."

ERIKA ISOMURA: Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

MIA BULJAN: And so I was really -- wanted to talk to you about this idea of -- yeah, it was a heavy-handed explanation in the sense that you were leading the discussion. It was a beautiful piece of teaching in the sense that everything you were saying was connected to an experience or an idea that kids already had. You really didn't introduce any new information, and in fact they're the ones -- Rosa Linda was the one, who went back and connected it wholesale to something that was structurally similar but really mathematically different, right?

ERIKA ISOMURA: Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

MIA BULJAN: Like, three-tenths is not the same as three-hundredths, but she had this idea.

ERIKA ISOMURA: Right.

MIA BULJAN: So can you -- what we were doing today, so just with that idea, where else do you see that happening with your students, where, like, they take your choice of using these sort of anchoring activities, or these sort of, you know, almost model activities and then use it.

ERIKA ISOMURA: Well, today it was happening with kids using this poster. So one of my math groups that -- their math understanding goes back and forth. There's some behavior issues with that particular group that sometimes interfere with the math. But they have enough knowledge and experience that they know this is open, go use it. So, actually Najee asked, partway through him working with Lizzie -- Lizzie was very focused on the fractions, and Najee was very focused on the decimals, and they were feeling like they were maybe saying the same thing, but they couldn't confirm it. So, he actually said, "Can you turn it back to this poster, because we need to go talk about it?"

MIA BULJAN: So this poster was not there.

ERIKA ISOMURA: It was not showing.

MIA BULJAN: And -- but he had this in his head?

ERIKA ISOMURA: Yes.

MIA BULJAN: Like there's -- there's a place value -- this is where he learned about the explanation for place value, and he knew that he could go back to this artifact.

ERIKA ISOMURA: Right.

MIA BULJAN: Okay.

ERIKA ISOMURA: So he had been saying, "You know, like the poster." And then finally he goes, "Ms. Isomura, can you just put the poster up?" And I said, "Sure." So we did, and he came up, and he was showing it. And then I saw at a few points, all three of them were up here at different points, you know, kind of going back and forth with their work and with the poster and what that meant and how that connected with the fractions. Other people were going back into their notebooks and saying, "Hey, look. We did this yesterday." Or, "Hey, look. We did this last time." The -- there was a group that -- well, actually, quite a few of the groups, when they were working on proving to me that their fractions and decimals matched, they were going back and using common denominators. And some of them did go back and double-check, "What does that look like? Oh yeah," and then showing me, "This is what it looks like."

MIA BULJAN: And that was in their notebook?

ERIKA ISOMURA: Right.

MIA BULJAN: Okay.

ERIKA ISOMURA: So we're big fans of going back into the notebooks and going back and checking our posters.

MIA BULJAN: They all do it, yeah.

ERIKA ISOMURA: Yeah. And, we don't understand why state testing doesn't let us do that.

MIA BULJAN: Yeah, I love the way you said they were angry that they couldn't use their notebooks.

ERIKA ISOMURA: They were furious. They said, "That's really ridiculous," because they said, "It's not like we can cheat. We don't know what questions are coming, but this helps us to, you know, kind of rethink how we were thinking when we did that work."

MIA BULJAN: Well, and I mean, being able to go back to their own notes and find this single piece of information that going to -- that they connected to this problem is probably a better skill than some of the skills they're trying to test.

ERIKA ISOMURA: Yeah. And in our classroom, all tests are open notes -- it's open anything you can find in the room, except for another person.