

Source Material

EPISODE 1 • KEY TAKEAWAYS

By Design, Not By Accident

Building a Classroom Culture for Inquiry in Social Studies

with special guest **Cornelius Minor**
Educator and Author, The Minor Collective



Key takeaways

- **Culture forms whether you plan for it or not.**
Every classroom builds beliefs, language, and practices over time. Decide on yours from the first day and teach them explicitly, including what collaboration looks and sounds like on each task.
- **You can reteach culture.**
If a routine is not holding by October, pick the one creating the biggest barrier to inquiry. Make the expectation visible, practice it, and follow through consistently.
- **Plan the recovery, too.**
Cornelius expects every plan to fall apart at some point. Before a lesson, decide how you will guide students back when it does.

Cornelius Minor's three pillars of an inquiry classroom

PILLAR 1

Curiosity

Every child is born curious, and school can socialize it out of them. Open the year with activities that rebuild the habit of asking questions.

PILLAR 2

Conflict

Ideas, behaviors, and identities will clash in any classroom. Build routines with enough “flex and sway” for students to work through disagreement.

PILLAR 3

Change

Teach students how to change their minds when they learn new information, and that doing so is okay. Build and prune these rituals all year.

“I am simply reminding kids that they were born curious.” Cornelius Minor, on the first weeks of school

Test an idea before you ask for change

When district tools reward compliance, Cornelius turns to action research. His middle school team saw that the students who spent the most time in the hallway also struggled most with reading. They rewrote the first seven minutes of class with more hands-on, collaborative work, tested it for 10 days, and found students were more likely to stay.

“We’re not approaching the principal with complaints. Actually, we’re approaching the principal with data”

Cornelius Minor, on bringing test results to the principal

Try it: a 10-day action research cycle

- 1 Name a problem in your classroom.
- 2 Document an idea to address it.
- 3 Make an implementation plan.
- 4 Test it for 10 days, about two weeks of school.
- 5 Bring the results to your principal as data.

Top advice from Cornelius for coaches and leaders

Ask what they need

When a teacher resists something new, ask: ***“Does this person need time? Does this person need a study partner? Does this person need flexibility?”***

Rehearse hard lessons

Practice with a colleague in the hallway before class, so when you reach students ***“it’s our fourth or fifth time teaching it.”***

Be the lead learner

Principals can show staff ***“what it looks like to not know in public,”*** then adjust their stance as evidence comes in.

Questions to take back

For teachers

Which pillar does your classroom need most right now: curiosity, conflict, or change? What problem would you name for your own 10-day test?

For leaders

Where will staff see you not know something in public this month? When a teacher resists, what does that person need to try something new?

“Nothing on the album was planned, but everything on the album was intentional.”

Cornelius Minor, on the inquiry-based way Miles Davis led his band on *Kind of Blue*