

Rooted in the Marigold Effect: Lessons in Growth, Community, and Purpose

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Back in 2023, I had the privilege of being interviewed for the *10/10 Teacher Spotlight* in the *NCMLE Journal*. At the time, I was still finding my footing, learning how to balance passion with perseverance, and figuring out what kind of educator I wanted to become. I shared what helped me survive those early years, the lessons I was learning in real time, and the incredible educators who stood beside me when I needed guidance most.

Now, just three years later, I realize that while my roles and responsibilities have grown, my core values have remained the same, only deeper and more intentional. At the center of everything I do is the Marigold Effect. It's the reminder I come back to often: *who you surround yourself with matters*. The people in your circle influence how you see yourself, how you show up for students, and how you continue to grow.

This idea has become my root. When days feel heavy or decisions feel hard, I think about the educators who protect, encourage, and challenge growth, just like marigolds do in a garden. They've shown me that thriving in this work isn't about doing it alone, but about being intentional with the community you build and the values you hold close.

The reflections that follow are five values shaped by that belief. They are lessons I've learned through experience, growth, and grace, values I carry with me daily and ones I hope every educator can plant in their own garden as they continue their journey.

Plant Yourself Near the Marigolds

Success lesson: Who you surround yourself with matters.

I have learned that thriving as an educator isn't just about teaching ability; it's about proximity. Proximity to people who are hopeful, student-centered, and solution-oriented. These are the people who keep me grounded when the work feels heavy and growing when the work feels uncertain.

Marigolds do not just survive, they protect and strengthen what is planted around them. In the same way, I've learned to be intentional about the people I surround myself with. I seek out colleagues who uplift, challenge my thinking, and remind me, especially on the hard days, why this work matters most.



Pull the Weeds Early

Success Lesson: Address negativity and barriers before they take root.

The Marigold Effect has taught me that poisonous walnuts- negativity, burnout, and resistance to change- can quietly remove the joy and purpose from this work. I value identifying barriers and areas to problem-solve early, refusing to let unproductive mindsets take over my classroom space, my leadership, or my joy, and setting clear boundaries around what I allow to influence my energy.

I have learned how important it is to protect my work, to intentionally block out what drains me so I can stay present, hopeful, and focused on what truly matters.

Tend the Soil before Addressing Growth

Success lesson: Relationships come before results.

I have learned to prioritize relationships first; relationships with students, colleagues, and families. No flower grows in poor soil. In the same way, students, educators, and families need trust, safety, and connection before any meaningful change can truly happen.

I was reminded of this when I advocated for a student in a separate setting classroom to be a part of my cheerleading team, something that had previously gone against the norm. This opportunity mattered deeply to her and her family, and I only understood the weight of that because of the relationship I had built with them. Because there was trust, there was honesty. Because there was connection, there was courage to advocate.

Taking time to understand stories, strengths, and needs is not extra work; it is the work. When the soil is nurtured with care and intention, growth follows naturally, and sometimes that growth looks like opening doors that were once closed.



Bloom Where You're Planted

Success lesson: Stay grounded while continuing to grow.

I have learned to honor my current role, my students, and my responsibilities while continuing to learn, reflect, and push forward. I've come to understand that I can be present and effective right where I am while still striving to be better.

I try to take advantage of every opportunity to grow; professional development, observing others, serving on committees, coaching, etc. I've learned to say *yes* to experiences that stretch me, knowing that we owe it to ourselves and our students to invest fully in the work we are doing. Growth, after all, doesn't happen in isolation.

I also take seriously the responsibility to support those around me, within my department and throughout my school. Every educator grows when they feel supported, and I want to be someone who contributes to that sense of encouragement and possibility. I hope to

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have an impact on others that they remember, value, and carry with them as they continue to grow.

Leave the Garden Better Than You Found It

Success lesson: The work is bigger than one classroom or one year.

Ultimately, the Marigold Effect has taught me that success in education is measured by impact, not recognition. Every decision I make should contribute to a more inclusive environment- one that supports students and colleagues while fostering a love for learning and growth.

Advocating for my classroom, my students, and my school is at the heart of my role, and it is what makes this work bigger than what I do each day. I strive to protect, encourage, and advocate in all that I do. If I can say I am doing that, then I know I am doing this work the right way.

serves as a cheerleading coach, mentor teacher, leadership team member, and leads the schools culture committee. She values strong relationships and inclusivity and works to create a supportive environment where all students can thrive daily.
