Conversations for Learning

Project Description:

In this video resource, we follow a classroom inquiry as students investigate a range of global issues that are of interest to them. By using multiple sources of information, they seek to understand diverse perspectives and what actions might be appropriate to tackle problems. They dig deep for meaning, question their sources and try to come to a clear understanding through conversations with their peers. Students come to the dialogue ready to participate in an intellectual exchange, willing to listen with an open mind and possibly create newer, stronger knowledge.

It is not only information that they are analyzing, but also what that information means to them and what they need to do now that they have this new knowledge. Paolo Freire called this type of learning “becoming purposefully literate.” In effective classrooms, students develop communication skills and the disposition to think and act critically with the intention to make the world a better place. That is the outcome we want for our students. We want them to be globally-minded, critical-thinking, action-oriented citizens. To achieve this goal, our students need to navigate vast amounts of information, analyze, synthesize and talk with others to construct meaning and to decide on a course of action.

The students and teacher in this Grade 3 classroom are co-learners engaged in inquiry-based learning that is rooted in an integrated approach to the curriculum. The safe classroom culture is intentionally created to be one of respect, collaboration, challenge and engagement. The students and teacher assume a critical stance, consult multiple sources of information, question and think independently. Each member of the learning community has a voice and each believes that what he or she thinks and does matters.

Deepening comprehension through conversation invites all students into the learning. Small-group conversations allow for students to practise their ideas before sharing in a larger group. They hear how other students are interpreting text and that sparks new thinking for them. All students have a voice and gain confidence through support from their peers. Students begin to respect other points of view, draw on multiple sources of information and expand their own points of view. Since students are exploring an issue of concern to them as well as their role in addressing the issue, they begin to believe that their ideas and actions matter.

The topic of the classroom inquiry explored in this video is the plight of a group of un-contacted people who live in the rainforest of South America. Students discover what
“un-contacted people” means and investigate the impact of loggers on them and their environment. During their investigations, students learn about the techniques for effective communication using all types of texts.