

QUEST 2016

Heidi Siwak Current challenges

HEIDI: I had a conversation with one of my students about that last year, and she said the hardest part was that she had learned a certain way to do school and, coming into the classroom where things were so very different and realizing that it's a new world of learning, and that the things that they'd understood about how to be successful in the past no longer applied in this new model of learning, that was really hard for the students at the beginning to get used to. And then figuring out what the expectations are, what does success look like in this model, those really were, I think, some of the challenges. I think you probably need to speak to the students directly to ask them because I was a learner at the same time so I was as confused as they were at certain points. We figured out together what it meant to be successful, and the interesting thing about this work in the classroom is, because a lot of it initially is very much about collaboration and big conversations, as we think our way through problems, the level two kids, the level one kids can find their place in that, whereas in a typical classroom they may not find their place, but in an Integrative Thinking classroom, they might be the one with the really great idea that everybody needs to solve the problem. So that's a little bit different, that's one of the strengths of this approach to learning. Eventually you reach a point where you're still producing things that require the achievement chart and the typical indicators of success around writing and those kinds of things, they're still there, it's recognizing that they're there in a slightly different way, and I think once you, the kids recognize that, perhaps it's at that point that they could become comfortable with, oh okay, it's still school, just a little bit different.

We have lots of conversations, it's more, I think that at the heart of all of this type of learning idea in my classroom it's all about students discovering their insights. The way I work with students is very much they're engaged in these activities and I'm constantly shifting through the classroom and having conversations with students, and I'm asking them questions, you know, what have you learned from this, what do you notice, how have your skills improved? So I'm asking them to make explicit their observations of their own learning, and they begin to recognize that oh, yes, I am making progress in this and I'm developing confidence in this, so it's more of a conversation kind of support that we get out of that. And sometimes this is really hard, this is challenging work, this is sometimes probably some of the hardest thinking these kids will ever have to have done at the school, and it's not easy and there's tensions and there's conflict and there's, those kinds of things emerge from that, but they learn to work their way through it. You can measure success in different ways with this. So, for example, we use a certain set of tools, one of the tools is the Ladder of Inference, another tool is Causal Modeling.

So you could measure success in terms of seeing how well the student is able to work their way through thinking by using that tool, and success would then be measured, or evident, in the final product because the thinking expressed in that product would be so much richer than what they would have done previously. So that's one way you could look at success with Integrative Thinking. As we're working our way through Inquiry, the achievement chart is a living document. And that means that I first of all turn it into kid-

friendly language that kids can actually understand what that achievement chart is, but then, as we're working and discovering things when we're producing our writing, the student writing goes under the document camera for example. And then we put it up there and we look at oh, look this kid's had a breakthrough, nobody in the class is doing this yet, what do you notice in their writing? And then the kids talk about it and they break it down and let's add that to our achievement chart that good writing looks like this. So we discover through our work what achievement looks like. So it's still within the confines of the achievement chart, but the kids are articulating what success looks like.