

Student Panel
Relevant Learning

>> You know, one of the nice things as a teacher is when they've moved on and you hear them talking and you think, "Okay, they got it." Something that you left with them, something that you've tried to instil into their minds.

So how has it changed? In my case I've -- I come from the business world for 20 years in marketing and advertising. I had my own company. And I'm a new teacher, relatively speaking. And it's more that it fits what I believe the pedagogy should be. Not the worksheets. Because when I worked 20 years, no one ever gave me a test or a worksheet. And it was solving problems and working with people in your department or within the entire company. And so I think knowledge-building, it facilitates the kind of learning that I think the students need for real-life success.

Whether as an employee or as the owner of the company, I looked for people, whether it was the person in the shipping department or the person as the vice president, who would actually bring value to the company. And somebody who brings value to the company is somebody who looks critically at something and says, "How can I make this better?" And it goes to the question Marlene asked, "What makes that question a better question?" Well, the answer is, How much new knowledge are you creating? How much innovation are you creating? And knowledge-building allows us to do that. Because there isn't just one set answer. And it is a group dynamic.

>> What changed is understanding the capacity the kids have for asking really good questions. And going with those questions and learning very deeply with them. I mean, when I first started teaching I was a traditional teacher. That was 25 years ago. And I guess we, you know, to some degree we still do a little bit of traditional teaching. That's fine. But to watch the kids work in that fashion blew me away. Especially when -- and it was only recently when I started the knowledge circles. And that's when things started taking off. And I remember when first doing it in the classroom, I thought, Okay, I'll just get them together and they can talk about, you know, where they want to go and so forth. So I just gave them three statements. You know, where were your deepest learning gains, where were the shallowest, where do you want to go next? I couldn't shut them up. I thought it was just going to be a short little five, ten minute conversation. And now my world is physics, but they were talking about black holes are made and how this goes into that. And, "Oh, yeah. I remember that idea!" and wormholes and this and that. All these things. And I'm walking around and I wished I'd had a video camera and I would -- just to see what you guys talk about. Regardless of whether it's building subway platforms or whether it's black holes and the big bang of the universe. You just give them that opportunity. That's how it changed my way of looking at the students as being these real agents for thinkers -- thinking and change.

>> If I can just --? Quick, very quickly. It -- we spend the first hour of every day -- it's at Hawk, and it's this knowledge-building talk. What's in the news. It empowers them. It really -- and, you know, you see three very bright, well-spoken students here. But in a classroom, as we all know, we have that wide, wide range. And knowledge building does allow -- when you think as a teacher, you're trying to get that one student who maybe was on that IEP a few grades back.

The behaviour student. I see it, especially this year at my new school. I have the plethora of different types of students.

This -- the circle, the building of knowledge, the sharing of knowledge, all the things they talked about, it allows me as a teacher to actually reach and activate the minds of all those people. Whereas the traditional method, it still silos them into the corners.

It's creating that community and that environment of inquisition. Of questioning the, "So what, why, and what if?" And so we begin each day -- it's either -- I have the Toronto Star subscription come to the school. And we start of the day, the kids read the paper. And we say, "Okay, what's in the news?" Whether it's a hot topic or whatever. And we just roll with it. And that rolling with it is not for me to sit down and have my coffee, it's to facilitate -- I don't call myself a teacher -- it's to facilitate their questions. To value their questions. And that means everybody. And there is no stupid question. I just might guide them. But sometimes it goes 20 minutes, sometimes it goes for an hour and my lesson plans get thrown out the window. But you finish and go, "Oh, that was good." And the kids are just hungry for more. So they look forward to coming into the class every day.

>> Going to work in a knowledge-building school and -- is exciting. And it's challenging. And when you see innovation around you, it makes it a pleasure to walk through the door every day. And so I think you had asked what the biggest change was, but for me that is what I would say. Is that I can't wait to come to work because I don't know where we're going. And that's really exciting to me.