

Insights into an Inquiry Classroom

Authentic Learning

>> Introducing students to big ideas and getting them interested in the curriculum that they're going to be learning about, just prompting them to come up with their own questions is the start. Behind me, you can see the world map, and pictures of all of our students and where their families have immigrated from and their stories. And this naturally let itself into inquiry. Our history inquiry this year began with just looking at, again, looking through the curriculum and looking at the big ideas and connecting to what's personal to students, what's happening right now in the world.

>> I worked on a project which was the Plains of Abraham.

>> Why did you pick this question? Why were you interested in the families of the soldiers who went away?

>> Because I have four ancestors that left their family to join the war.

>> The first mini assignment was for students to go home and speaking with their families to research what brought their families to Canada.

>> I sort of got information from my dad's grandmother.

>> She said, "Well, guess what, hundreds of years ago, four brothers came to Canada from Scotland to fight for the British in the battle of the Plains of Abraham." So Marcel was, like, "I'm going to inquire about the Plains of Abraham."

>> There was a war between French and British, but even the Amerindians as well. I learned that if the British didn't win, then we would be speaking French right now.

>> The traditional method of teaching history, very information, knowledge-based, there's no authenticity to it. They're not able to always apply that knowledge. And it's always the teacher directing the learning. This is what we're going to learn today, this is what our textbook is saying. But this year it's been different. The students are in the driver's seat. They now have a control over their learning that they never had before. They're propelling their learning.

>> I know that I'm learning, because I have a brain to have great questions.

>> And that's a huge shift, for them to see themselves as learners that way. So it's not simply confidence, it's a redefining of how they learn. They have the control. They create the question with the guiding influence. And the teacher is now the facilitator.

>> With his inquiry, it just began again from a conversation that he and I were having. And it evolved into how did soldiers who had left to go fight for the war communicate with families?

>> People sent multiple copies of the same letter on different ships. This way the message had a better chance of reaching the person. It could take months or years for letters to make their way from Europe to Canada. This made it very hard for families who had relatives in the war, because they had no way of knowing if their kids were okay.

>> How does this compare with how we communicate now?

>> We, like, emailed someone, text -- not really text, or you could call them. But we mainly used to email our letter.

>> Okay, so we've used email letter. What about when we were communicating with a different class this year? We were able to talk to them, we would see them right on the screen. So that communication happened like that.

>> We're consistently establishing success criteria, in terms of what do we need to do next? And as that's moving along, I can conference and meet with groups, saying, the last time we talked, this is what we were looking to do. How have you done it? And then asking them. On a four points scale, of one, two, three or four, have you gone above expectations, or are you meeting expectations? Have you not fulfilled your commitments? So for students to understand how they're learning, what's expected of them, and then be able to articulate to me to tell me why they are achieving something, how they're succeeding, how they're achieving that success criteria, or the problems they're having with meeting it. I don't map out the exact route that I'm taking students. And I'm not saying at the end of this year, we're going to end up here. I know that with student-led projects, that they're going to take ownership, and they're going to, with my support, lead to somewhere positive and accomplish something incredible.