

## **Innovations in Thinking and Learning**

### **Mubina Panju and Angela Hoffman – Grade 1 Teacher Reflecting on Knowledge Building**

ANGELA: Mubina and I spent a lot of time talking together about how we could start this in our classes. She was teaching kindergarten at the time, and I was teaching grade one, and we just really talked about what are we going to do? How are we going to start this journey?

So we decided we'd look at our curriculum. So we looked at the kindergarten curriculum as well as the grade one curriculum, decided we would start with Social Studies. And we started with, what is a community? We thought we would bring that question to our students, and see what they came up with. From there, we brought our classes together, and we facilitated a conversation with our students about what a community is, and what they thought. Then we decided to take a look at some of their questions and their answers that they had. We brought some parent volunteers into our classroom, and they did a presentation on what their jobs were in the community. From there, we decided we were going to take a look at one student's particular questions, and it happened to be around, what happens to recycling?

So from there, we looked and we thought, what a great opportunity. We could take a look at what happens to our garbage, what happens to the recycling. And we looked at things in our school, in a wider range out into the community, what happens to our garbage. It was really hard with a big group of students with two teachers to try and facilitate the discussions, and we used the knowledge building forum, and to be able to get their ideas down. One teacher was typing away furiously to add their ideas to the knowledge building forum, while the other teacher led the discussion. So that was a big challenge that we faced. And trying to make sure that we had all of our students engaged and participating.

One of the things that we really looked at was the idea of diversity. We wanted to focus on that and to make sure that all students knew that all of their ideas were important. And we would add their ideas to our knowledge building forum.

I think probably at the time when we did it, we weren't sure if it was a success or not. But when we looked back afterwards, definitely, I think that we could look through the whole process and see, wow, what a success, especially when we looked at the outcome.

As we went through our knowledge building journey, we started with recycling and garbage. And then that led us to -- we started to switch directions, and we went in to talking about energy and electricity, and saving energy. And the students just, like, grasped talking about renewable energy, non-renewable energy, ways that we could save energy. And when you think about we've got five, six-year-old students talking about different types of energy and forms of energy, and what sort of objects use these kinds of energy, it's pretty amazing to think about that. It's a big change in my role as a teacher. Instead of me standing up there giving my students the information and sort of just telling them this is what we do, this is how it's done, they're the ones that are the ones learning and then sharing. And I'm sort of just facilitating, I'm in the role of directing conversation, maybe directing them where they could find some information. But they're the ones that are coming to me with their learning, which is pretty amazing.

One of the things that as a teacher is always in the back of my mind is time. Do I have enough time to cover the curriculum? Do I have enough time to do the things that I want my students to learn? That's a big challenge. But I think if as a teacher I can just let go of some of those ideas, and just let my students be the guides to where they want to go and what they want to learn and be open to that, most definitely, I think that's a big thing.

I think parents are really pleased with the things that we're doing in the classroom, the things that their children are coming home and telling them that we're doing. I've had parents say, "I can't believe some of the things that are going on in the classroom; in grade one that this is what you're doing and what you're talking about." And I think parents are excited to see the things that their children are coming home with.

When I think cross-curricular, knowledge building can be in all areas of the curriculum. So whether it's a Math initiative that we're involved in, you can throw knowledge building in anything. And I love that we can bring it into all areas of the curriculum, and that kids don't even just have to do it at school. It could be something that they could do at home, that they could do with their friends.