Focus: Learning

Rosa Fazio, Principal, Vancouver's Norma Rose Point School, writes about unleashing student curiousity with a focus on learning.



Watch the video: http://bit.ly/2DLsTcI

I ran into a high school teacher who wondered what the result of our experiment would be like and how the students would eventually do in high school – a real school. "What experiment?" I thought and, "How is our school not real?"

Aside from refocusing the way we think about learning, the culture shift from teaching to learning is one of the most important aspects in our school philosophy. This means that our school culture is about teachers learning together for the benefit of improving student learning conditions. Our goal for learners is that they pursue their passions and interests rather than pursuing teacher curriculum. We start with student curiosity, listen to student questions, and introduce aspects of the world based on those questions.

Inquiry is a challenge for educators, students, and administrators. My experience tells me it is infrequent in traditional settings. It's messy and, for most a lot more work.

For teachers, it's because it puts the focus on what the students are asking instead of what the teacher has planned or has taught for years, if not decades. It asks that teachers be adaptive experts, often deviating from their journey and travelling unexpected roads.

In a traditional setting, administrators do just that, administer. Principals who view themselves as instructional leaders or learning coaches (as they do in New Zealand) have the courage to lead by example, to be supportive while tackling the many policies, parental pressures and restrictions to let the learning happen in an atypical way.

Students in traditional schools, in general, have been trained to sit and behave. The curiosity of many students has been suppressed for a stand and deliver type of teaching. Students are more worried about getting an A and doing what the teacher expects rather than learning. Even though students should be more interested in learning as they grow older and become more capable, it's often the reverse. Student disengagement is often the result as their curiosity is zapped. If we were to measure a student's desire to learn instead of measuring grades, then that would be an indicator of success.

A child, new to our school, stated to a visitor, "At my other school, I studied for the test and got As. Now I can't remember what I learned so I'm not sure how valid the A is. At NRP we do project-based learning. We don't get grades but I remember what I learn!" If we are to sustain this type of learning, our school culture needs to be committed to focusing on learning, not teaching.

What a shame that some see our innovative learning space, our pace, and our passion to involve students in their learning as risky. Don't we risk much more by not doing? bcp vpa