

I wanted to take a moment to share an experience that I've had in my classroom. I have to provide some background information here: I have been teaching for six years and though I consider my classroom to be a fun, interesting and hands on classroom (and hopefully my students feel that way, too!) I admit that I sometimes fall back into the mode of teaching how I was taught (where we all get caught sometimes): in other words teacher at the front writing notes on the board and students reading or copying and pulling together information on a unit. I am fully aware that this is not the most effective way of teaching (though it has its benefits at times) and try to be a much more hands on, discovery based, project oriented and collaborative approach kind of teacher. Part of the reason I am in the OLTD program is that I believe in the benefits of using technology in the classroom to engage and excite learners and I want this program to force me to think (and work) outside the box and stretch my own comfort zone in the classroom. I want to improve the quality of my student's education while building a larger repertoire of activities and understandings that I can bring to the classroom.

So – to take some of the examples and lessons from our coursework into my own classroom has been a goal for me – and I just had an amazing talk with my class today about our experiences so far. Based on the projects we saw in 501 by Avi Luxembourg's class on inquiry based and self-directed learning projects I challenged my class about a month ago to change the world. Using the language Avi used, I asked students what bugged them and how would they go about changing it. Their responses were amazing – and showed compassion and empathy that I hadn't seen in them before. We also watched a video by Adora Svitak (http://www.ted.com/talks/adora_svitak.html) where she relates that adults see limitations in what they can do, however children aren't constrained by thoughts of funding, ability or support – they just dream big. Ms. Svitak believes that children should be listened to and that their ideas can help to change the world. After watching and discussing the video I then tasked my students to dream big and create an action plan to change the lives of people in our school, community or world. Each student is now somewhere in the process of planning, pulling together, promoting and pursuing their own project.

Initially I wanted to lead their projects and I had to remind myself to step back and just let them go (feeling like the parent of an independent child here...). I am simply a resource for them and a sounding board to provide ideas and support. What they've come up with has amazed and impressed me (and based on the discussion today – they've impressed themselves, too!). So far I've only had four groups of students ready to start their projects (the rest are still planning their course of action) but in the last two weeks I have had students start an angel tree (to distribute presents to needy kids at our school), start a hot chocolate and muffin sale at recess (to raise money for Children's Hospital), start a penny drive (to raise funds for Chilliwack Hospice) and organize a garbage collection afternoon complete with prizes (to make our little corner of the world a little nicer). We are supporting each other in our projects and doing what we can to make a difference.

Today we had a chance as a class to reflect and talk about our successes, our struggles and what we would do differently from here on out or if we were to do these projects again. Their learning has surprised me! Some students were surprised (as was I) with the response to their projects and how many people are eager to help out. Other students were already planning how to improve and re-do their projects and heading back to the drawing board to rethink it and start again. And other students

who haven't had a chance to start their projects were excited and motivated to get back to working on their projects in order to help even more people in our community. I was blown away!

This is my first foray into inquiry based learning and I'm sure I'm not even doing it right....but I'm impressed so far! Students are excited, engaged and motivated to do good in our community, going through the stages of planning, doing and reflecting on their actions and showing huge gains in their insight and understandings of where change is needed and how to make an action plan like this work. As we progress through the year my goal is to turn this momentum into helping shape our own learning in a specific area of the curriculum (originally I planned to do an inquiry based action plan to help others and an inquiry based approach to learning about an area that interested each student (individually) – when I posed it to the class they decided they wanted to do the action plan first).

I've been rethinking the discussion around standards and using them as a baseline, not the measurement of achievement (Sorry - I know this is a bit after the fact but I've had a few things keeping me busy and had to leave this line of thought for a week or so). In Randy's response to my comment on November 25th, he stated "Goals are something to strive for beyond meeting a baseline standard. If we stop at a standard we do ourselves a disservice. I want to strive for a goal, not meet a standard." For me this was a bit of a shift as I am often looking to the standard as an end result – not a jumping off point. In looking at this specific project as a reference, I can now see more clearly how the PLOs could work as a starting point. And in terms of reporting on their progress, that is easy. The grade 6 Social Studies curriculum includes the following PLO: implement a plan of action to address a selected local or global problem or issue. In every case my students are meeting that standard baseline expectation. However, for the most part, students are far exceeding my expectations, setting goals, reaching them and reworking them to achieve even better results. Instead of an end goal, they are looking at this as just the beginning and taking their learning and experiences way farther than I thought they would when I posed the question to them a month ago.

I am so very proud of each of my students and will (tearfully) cheer them on as they grow and learn and take their own lead in their learning tasks (though I'm sure they'll still need me....somehow, somewhere!) As for my own teaching and learning....I'm reflecting on my own practice, making gains on doing things a different way and getting more comfortable on the other side of the fence...