

Ask Yourself: So What?

Deep Learning isn't just about teaching what is relevant or building skills to prepare for a changing world. It's about reminding the students of their relevance in the world and how they can make a difference. Teachers who shift to an activator stance have created a habit of asking themselves an important question: "So, what real difference will this make?" In Terri Kirkey's classroom, learners drive their own sense of learning and purpose. Let's take a closer look at how she cultivates this.

Creating an interactive and mutually respectful learning environment is foundational to Terri's work. Terri creates a culture of inquiry by reviewing the purpose and practice of knowledge-building circles. Protocols that reinforce collaboration, growth mindset, and curiosity set the tone for asking questions, wondering, and exploring. This past year, their big question centred around "How can we use our learning to make a difference?" From the get-go, the message to students is *this learning matters and you matter*.

To feed this question of making a difference, students turn to various resources and partners beyond the teacher. And they are regularly reminded that they, too, bring critical experiences and knowledge to contribute to the classroom dynamic. Terri explains, "Student curiosities, questions, and ideas drove the direction of the learning. We "shared our brains" and celebrated the experts in our very own room. Students had many opportunities to share their personal knowledge and connections. Students played an active role in the documentation on our Learning Journey Wall. They helped create printable slides to be posted and students facilitated the connections we made. Students were also involved in the learning goals and assessment by co-creating the success criteria." A strong sense of student ownership pervades the classroom.

Students in this class see themselves as partners in the learning design and also as agents of change. Terri sums it up: As we approached new learning, we often asked the question *So what?* Why are we learning this? Can we connect this new learning to our past learning and/or experiences and how can it shape our learning for the future? We celebrated connections between what we already knew and what we learned. We began to recognize that these connections help us to deepen learning. We also noticed that it is better to learn collaboratively because we all have contributions to make. Through knowledge building and sharing, we learned that we can teach one another many things and together, we learn more!

When students see themselves as efficacious, they feel confident about sharing their learning more publicly. Terri explains, "Our learning journey has been shared and celebrated on our classroom blog but also on the school Twitter feed and in the school newsletter. Making our experiences visible to others helps initiate and then expand the conversation for students, their families, and our school community. It also shows that our learning experiences are linked to our schoolwide commitment to make a difference locally and globally."

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