Student Assessment in Inquiry

Male: **[00:00]** What is then the role of a teacher if it's not to design that path directly towards those big ideas, is question one. And then question two, how do we know the children are learning? How do we assess while—the fact that the, you know, as—if we're determining the path as it's happening in, in an organic way …

Female: Mm.

Male: … in response to their ideas and questions. How do we know that understanding is happening?

Female: So, I think those are two really different questions there.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: I would say for the first one, in terms of what is the role of the teacher. The role of the teacher is there to keep the kids on track, but in a, in a broader sense of what on track means. First of all, we have to constantly be thinking about, about the skills that are being built, the foundational skills. So—and I think it—as, as Ben would say, the huge misconception is that when you get caught up in these big ideas and you have these huge discussions and, you know … When we started talking about astronomy this year, we, we started with a story. We just started with a story about Raven stealing the sun.

And, and that's the way that I contextualize what was going to be a big astronomy unit. And when I finished it, and at the end Raven had stolen the sun from the Sky Chief, and he throws it up into the sky to give light to the people. And I asked the kids to close their eyes and say, "I want you to imagine that you were Raven. You've been able to fly that high that you could throw the sun into the, into the sky to stay. And I want you to imagine looking back at the earth and think about what that looks like. And I'm going to ask you to draw, right there."

And the drawings were beautiful. But in, in truth, what was so interesting, what the most interesting thing that came out of that, beside these incredible drawings and their ideas about the earth and that it has layers or that it's round or that it has oceans or continents or all these different bits of knowledge that came out.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: I was constantly gathering that kind of knowledge. I was finding out, what are these early conceptions they have about it?

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: So that's a bit of the assessment piece. But then one of the children came to me just quietly and tugged on my shirt and said, "Can a bird fly higher than the sky?"

That's my moment as a teacher to say, "P—thank you so much. That is the perfect question. Let's bring that back to the group." That became a discussion that shaped probably the next six weeks of what happened in the class.

Male: Mm.

Female: This huge discussion where these five year olds were talking about—and literally, we only had one child that had turned six at that point. And these five year olds were talking about, no, a bird can't fly higher than the sky. Why can't it? Because there's no oxygen. So there's oxygen in the sky …

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: … but there isn't oxygen higher than the sky? Yes, and there's no light there, there's no light there. And they've—and they wouldn't fall down. You fall down if you're in the sky, but you don't fall down if you're in space.

Male: Mm.

Female: You have to have things tied to you and to the spaceship to keep you from disappearing. When you're in space you would just float away. In this conversation that came up from this one question, that came up from this one story, that shaped our next six weeks. We started looking at all these layers of the atmosphere. And when did it switch? If I as a teacher had sat back and thought about, "What do we want to learn about astronomy?" I would have never imagined that we would be talking about stratospheres and tropispheres and …

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: **[03:14]** I would not have imagined that we would be doing any of the things that we ended up doing. It would have been so much smaller.

Male: Yeah.

Female: So my job was to figure out where are these big ideas that are coming from them? How do I bring them back to the group so it becomes really f—fruitful and really rel—relevant …

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: … for the whole group sitting around the table?

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: How do I make sure that each one of these kids can feel part of this story and this journey knowing that they're not all going to be at the same page? And I think that's another really big part that people—they assume that when we talk about knowledge building, that we're saying that all the kids are going to end up with the same understanding.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: Well, they're not.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: Just as they wouldn't in any other path that you take in education. They're all going to have their different levels. So, to answer more of that second question, we embed that kind of assessment in the activities that we're doing, and we watch really closely.

Male: Hm.

Female: Who are the children who are asking the questions that galvanize the group? How are they phrasing them? Who's acting upon them? How are they de—h—how are they devising these experiments? What are there observational skills like? How are they building upon the ideas that they either see coming out through the experiments or that are coming up from conversations or that they're getting from books, all these experiences that we're providing as the teacher. We're watching how they utilize it.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: And then we're just gathering reams of data. And because they're so engaged, they are writing. They are wri—I mean, we've been doing these wind machines …

Male: (Inaudible).

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: The kids have made vehicles that are being blown by wind. And we have been measuring with metre sticks, which is not an SK expectation. And here are kids, because of their experience, saying, "It's a three, a five and a seven! 357 centimetres!"

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: Because they're so engaged, those skills are, are building enormously.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: Which I'm keeping track of. But also, they're understanding that they can follow their own questions. That's the, that's the deep part, that regardless of the content that you pick, that's being built no matter what.

Male: Mm-hm.

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