

Transformative Change in Practice

Teacher: [00:00] So if I was to think about my teaching practice from when I first started to—my career to what's happened over the past five years, there has been a huge transformation. And I think when I first started my, my career, teachers were very much isolated in our classrooms, running our own show, doing our own thing, thinking that the answers very much lay within our own little world of what we did in our schools and what we did in, in our practice.

I—my classroom was very teacher-directed back then. I was very much in front of my classroom teaching my class. You would have seen children all doing the same project at the same time, the projects turning out very similar because there was expectations that they had, had to follow. And I don't think you would have seen as much conversation in my classroom between students as they were learning.

Probably the changes that have taken place have been made because I was mandated to make those changes. And I would say as a teacher, when I—when all—the ministry first brought in these changes and we began working in our classrooms and we were asked to start doing these things that none of us understood why we were being asked to do them. Because we already thought we were good teachers. Kids were performing well. They were producing high-quality work. We didn't really understand what it is—was we were being asked to do. But there was no choice but to begin trying things out in our classroom.

So I would say myself, at the beginning I was one of the resisters. And I certainly am no longer a resister. I'm very much on board with, with the changes that have taken place. When I look at what I have done in my own classroom, I think I recognized about four years ago now, that the world of education was changing. And the world that the children that I'm teaching, are going to be adults in, is changing rapidly. And that if I didn't begin to make fundamental changes in how I did things in my classroom, that I was going to not prepare these students for the world they're going to have to be adults in.

And it started with, with technology. With my own—I was a Luddite. I thought if I taught word processing, my kids were prepared for life. And when I saw my own children and my husband who's involved in technology and the kinds of things they were doing and the interest that kids had in the classroom about technology, I knew that I had to start learning this in order to become relevant to the world they were in.

So I—I began by learning how to blog. And it used to—oh, it took me forever to learn just how to embe—put a pic—post a picture or post a, a, an entry into a blog. And I—and then I discovered the world of social media and Twitter. And I realized that there was this incredible group of educators. And not just educators, but people with an interest in learning connected globally around the world who were interested in advancing and putting good practices into our classrooms. And that was eye-opening to me, because I could suddenly see into other people's classrooms. And I could see what different teachers were doing. And I could have access to current research. And I could have my questions answered when I wasn't sure how to proceed. I could put it out onto Twitter and somebody would have an answer for me that I could then bring back to my classroom and begin experimenting with my students.

[03:00] So this new world of teaching that we're in is very collaborative. It's very global. And it's with the goal of putting really good practices into, into our classrooms. So the technology piece was huge, and over the course of that year, my kids did some amazing things. They worked with programmers in Australia and Finland and digital media artists in New York City. And they designed a tourism app for the iPhone. My kids—when classes were not very present on Twitter, my students hosted the first student-led global Twitter chat on Hana's Suitcase and the Holocaust. And what was key and different about those projects compared to what typically happens in a classroom with projects, so often what we do in the classroom, we do because it's school. And kids would not be doing that unless they were in school.

But the kids—the projects that my kids became involved in, and that I recognized we could do now, because we had access tech—to technology and global communication, was we could engage in learning, engage in the world in a way that has relevance and meaning outside the classroom. And the kids could effect change in the world outside the classroom. So through the, the app project, what my kids—they—my kids were very much working as adults in a classroom on a team project, producing something that they know people were going to use, so it had to be high in quality. So the motivation by having a real audience and knowing that they had to be at a certain standard in order to make it to the app store, was enormous for my kids and drove their desire for excellence in the classroom.

With the—Hana's Suitcase global Twitter chat, that really was about risk-taking. Because we were entering into a world in real time that normally kids aren't allowed to enter into in a very public way. And they had to participate in the world in real time and people could observe and see what they were doing. So again the standard and the quality of what they had to do, because they had that global audience, and it wasn't just other kids or just a f—you know, programmer and a few people, it was people at the board who could be seeing that. People at the ministry, their parents could, could be seeing what, what we were doing. That motivated the kids to be more successful in that. And they had to figure out everything from how to build an audience, how to amplify their message, what tools are best for communicating the, the information about Hana.

They got a lot of recognition for that, but their long-lasting achievement, because it was a real world project, is that the author of Hana's Suitcase, Miko, who is in Japan, George Brady, who was her brother in the book, they entered into the world of social media. And they opened Twitter accounts. And so now they're able to communicate with a larger audience. And people are able to find them because of the work that my students did.

And that's something that's lingering. They're beginning—they continue to be able to do their work in a larger way because of the work my kids did in Grade 6. And that had a huge impact on my Grade 6 students that year, because they could see that they could create change in the world, not just do a project on the Holocaust that we talked about in the classroom.

[END OF RECORDING – length, 06:04]