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# School Notes: In one class, taking time to watch and think

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Thursday, February 25, 2010

EASTHAMPTON - Gazing out the window may be a no-no in some classrooms. But Kerry Mackenzie encourages her students to do it.

One recent winter afternoon, the first-grade teacher at Center Street School asked her students to look through the glass and observe what she calls "mood snow" - gently-falling flakes in various shapes and sizes that slowly make their way to the window pane, tree branches or ground. As the snowflakes came down, schoolchildren took note of what they saw, what they thought and what they wondered. In one narrative, a student said the snowflakes looked like ballerinas.

The visual "helps them to flow" linguistically, Mackenzie said.

Mackenzie's activity coordinates with curriculum by Project Zero, an educational research group from the Harvard Graduate School of Education that seeks to understand and enhance learning, thinking and creativity in the arts and humanistic and scientific disciplines.

Since the start of the school year, teachers at Center and Pepin Elementary schools have integrated one part of Project Zero into their everyday lessons - "I see, I think, I wonder."

Principal Rob Orlando brought the curriculum to Center and Pepin thanks to his online research last summer. Every year while students are on summer vacation, Orlando steps back and evaluates the schools' curriculum and instruction. He studies issues brought forward by MCAS results and other evaluations, and identifies ways to develop student skills in those areas. Last summer, Project Zero - a free guide - seemed a solution to improving student answers on open-ended response questions.

"Our students have a very difficult time, especially in math, explaining how they got an answer," Orlando said. With this curriculum in place, he said, "our hope is students will be able to talk about how they're thinking and coming to conclusions a lot more thoughtfully."

Mackenzie's nature-themed classroom is filled with items that make a child see, think and wonder. Over the years, she's accumulated items like a bird's nest, stuffed animals, artwork of clouds and tree branches. Classroom discussions range from life cycles and animal habitats to color and shape patterns to pairs and prints.

"This new curriculum lends itself beautifully to the stuff I've been doing," Mackenzie said. "You can tie

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Students at Center School describe their responses in an exercise, "I see, I think, I wonder," which encourages observation and reflection. Above, Alexa Kerr wondered "if war is ever (going to) stop."



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it into science, art or social studies."

At a staff meeting this month, teachers shared how they're using the curriculum in their classrooms and bounced ideas off one another.

"The consensus was that the kids really were learning a lot from it," Orlando said. "It's a way of helping to promote thinking in students without conducting separate (critical thinking) lessons."

Mackenzie reports the curriculum will train students to think analytically before and after the school bell rings, too.

"What's nice is they'll begin to do it on their own," Mackenzie said. "They'll notice the geese flying overhead or the squirrels outside."

### Hampshire Regional on TV

The As Schools Match Wits team at Hampshire Regional High School will be appearing on WGBY-TV Saturday at 7 p.m. A recording of the episode will also be available for viewing after the broadcasts have taken place on the WGBY-TV Web site, [www.wgby.org](http://www.wgby.org).

Produced at the studios of Westfield State College, As Schools Match Wits delivers a classic high school quiz show and introduces a new generation of high school students to one of the few public competitions that stresses knowledge over physical ability.

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