

# MT. PLEASANT BUILD

Written by Maria Rantanen

Everyone was wearing protective glasses. They'd been briefed on the safety rules. Then they set to work, carrying two-by-fours, drilling holes, operating a chop saw and hammering nails, building a series of garden boxes for their own elementary school.

The kids at Mount Pleasant Elementary – primary students paired up with intermediate students – were behind caution tape and under the watchful eye of Tupper Tech teacher Russ Evans and his students to ensure nothing went wrong.

This is a typical project that Russ oversees throughout Vancouver School Board schools and the goal is simple: to teach kids that they can make things with their hands.

As a teacher, Russ believes that you have to let kids try things and build in an allowance for mistakes in the learning process, because, he says, students don't learn if they're immediately successful.

"In the trades, kids learn by doing – they don't talk about it. You have to build in some 'oops, that really didn't work for you, why don't you do it this way,'" Russ explained. "Learn by making a mistake, find a solution – then tell someone about it. Take a shot at it, and then fix it."

This is sometimes described as the "design circle" – you come up with an idea or challenge, think of a few solutions, try them, find some new problem, come up with creative solutions again, try it out, and so forth.

In the trades, this is how learning works.

For almost a decade, Russ has been working with schools on different builds, but a key element is involving his own students in the process. He meets with the elementary students a couple days before the build to lay out the ground rules so that, on build day, the students know what to expect.



They set to work, usually working through recess so the other kids in the school can see what they're doing. Throughout the day, the elementary students form bonds with the Tupper Tech kids and at the end of the day, have learned they can make things with their own hands and have a new community garden where more learning will take place.

Three phrases encompass Russ' philosophy of teaching:

"We learn by doing."

"Lose the fear."

"It's all connected."

"That's what I want the kids to take away from a build day – that's my motto for everything."

A day at Mount Pleasant Elementary is all about giving back and spreading the word about trades. From time to time, a student he's met at an elementary school build will show up several years later in his Tupper Tech program, having gotten the spark for the trades long before high school.