Learning Through Inquiry

by

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Bachelor of Education, UVIC, 1996

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTERS OF EDUCATION

In the Area of Early Childhood Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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University of Victoria

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

British Columbia began implementing a redesigned curriculum for grades K-9 in September of 2016. Within this curriculum is the necessity to include inquiry as a process of learning across all grades and subject areas. Inquiry-based learning is an instinctual way to learn and its roots can be evidenced in the early works of social-constructivist theorists such as Dewey. Currently many curriculums worldwide include inquiry as an essential part of their pedagogy. The reason for this universality is found not only in the quality of learning that is achieved but also in the attitudes and mindset it helps develop. The goal of inquiry is to develop students who will be life-long learners. Yet, many BC teachers are unfamiliar with this method of teaching. This project aims to address some of the difficulties teachers may experience when attempting to bring inquiry-based learning into an early childhood classroom. Through educating and engaging parents in inquiry-based learning, parents are able to support their child’s learning in authentic and meaningful ways. In turn, teachers can more easily access their young students’ funds of knowledge and therefore be able to support a deeper level of inquiry in the classroom.
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I would like to thank my husband David for his encouragement throughout this journey and my parents for the support they provided. I also want to acknowledge the guidance of Chris Filler as I worked through this project. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this project to my three boys who inspire me to become the teacher I would want for them. I hope your curiosity continues to grow and guide you through your life.
Chapter 1

Introduction

British Columbia began implementing a revised curriculum in September 2016. One of the new components of this curriculum is the inclusion of learning through the process of inquiry. Inquiry-based learning is an approach utilized by children of all ages and is not considered a new pedagogical approach worldwide. Yet, in BC, inquiry-based learning is a new approach to many educators and parents who may be familiar with a more traditional method of direct instruction.

Understanding what inquiry-based learning is and how it can be supported by teachers and parents is important not only in being able to implement this important part of the curriculum but also to fully develop the skills of an effective learner within all children. Teachers need to be aware of the challenges this method of teaching entails to address and avoid these pitfalls while also understanding that implementing an inquiry-based approach takes time and a collaborative effort. Parents, if knowledgeable, can be a part of this support system in both an early childhood classroom and throughout their child’s schooling.

Rationale

It was when my boys were little that the process of inquiry became how we spent our days. I never thought to define what we were doing or map out the steps because it was just a natural way of being. We never knew where we would encounter something intriguing. Once it was the first time we encountered dragon fruit at the grocery store that sparked an inquiry into Thailand. Another time, a special dinosaur book from an uncle at Christmas sparked numerous inquiries that lasted for years. Inquiry was something my boys did naturally as soon as they became aware
of the world around them. As they grew older they began asking questions that made me stop and wonder. As an adult, I began to feel curious about the world in ways I hadn’t for a very long time and together we would try to find answers to our questions.

I think myself very fortunate to be a primary teacher. Young children possess abundant curiosity and by encouraging them to share their wonders with me, we can learn through investigating our world. In my undergraduate classes, I was taught that a teacher should plan all their units of study and learning outcomes before the school year begins. Many teachers I later worked with would also map out what learning outcomes would be taught each week and were amazingly able to stick to their yearly plan. I began each school year determined to do the same, but I never could. Sometimes I couldn’t even stick to the mapped-out units of study. For example, when the Snowy owls made an unexpected appearance to our area, we began an intensive inquiry as to why they might suddenly be here. That led an inquiry into what owls normally lived in our area. We never got to the bear unit and the Grade Two teacher was not very pleased because she always taught the unit on owls. Last year worms were of great interest to one boy in my Kindergarten class. This little boy, although very new to the formal school system, already did not find much value in what we were doing each day. He participated reluctantly throughout the day and was happiest digging for worms by himself on the playground. We set up a terrarium in the classroom for his worms and he began asking questions about what he was observing. The more questions he asked, the more others became interested too and soon worms were a big part of our classroom. Their superior worm finding skills were later used in supplying the newly established school garden. At that point, they could explain to the Grade Two students why the worms were so important to the garden. Worms were not on my plan for that year, but a question asked by one of our early instructors in our graduate program
kept echoing, “How do you know what you are going to teach this year if you haven’t even met your students yet?” At the time she asked, I thought the answer was, “We will teach the curriculum.” Now I recognize the wisdom in that question. We still covered the prescribed curriculum but they also asked great questions and discussed ways to answer them, listened to each other, worked collaboratively, and shared their learning within the school community. The little boy who instigated the project began interacting with his classmates and looking forward to our days together at school. As a teacher, I enjoyed the process and could appreciate the depth of their learning, but the moment that will forever remain within my heart is when that little boy asked me one day while gazing at the worm pictures on the bulletin board, “Is this because of me?”

**Theoretical Connections**

From a theoretical perspective, my explorations into inquiry-based learning at the primary level is influenced by both social constructivism (Dewey, 1956) and socio-cultural theory (Rogoff, Turkanis & Bartlett, 2001). Social constructivism provides a theoretical basis for inquiry-based learning and socio-cultural theory is the influence that not only supports inquiry-based learning but the rationale for the importance of parental support for inquiry in an early childhood classroom.

Social constructivism is based on the idea that knowledge must be actively constructed through personal experiences rather than acquired (Vygotsky, 1978). Whereas the socio-cultural theory proposes that students bring experience and knowledge to each learning situation and it is through the active process of social interaction that students challenge their preconceptions and construct deeper and longer lasting understandings (Rogoff et. al, 2001). Learning requires being
involved in exploring ideas and being engaged within the process, not simply receiving and remembering information (Rogoff, 2001).

Dewey proposed that education should be a life-long process that is accomplished through living (Dewey, 1859). He believed that educating solely through the transmission of knowledge does not adequately prepare the child for a future still yet unseen. Education should provide individuals with different ways to view the world, communicate about it, and successfully cope with the questions and issues of daily living (Dewey, 1859).

A key aspect of social constructivist theory is the idea of the agentic child. The agentic child is not powerless and innocent, but is an active participant in creating their curriculum through collaboration with the adults in their life (Sorin, 2005). Dewey did not define it as such, but wrote of how the child should be a co-creator of their educational experience (Dewey, 1956). The Reggio Emilia approach to education has further developed and popularized this image of the child (Sorin, 2005).

The Reggio Emilia approach, while not a theory in of itself, is guided by social constructivist theory in which the agentic child actively engages in the process of inquiry to make meaning of their world (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). It has successfully integrated the learning theories into their teaching philosophy within their schools and community. Inquiry is an important part of their pedagogy. Education through inquiry is not seen as a linear process but more like an open-ended spiral with each concept developing a deeper understanding each time it is re-visited (Edwards, 1998). Like Dewey, the development of relationships are also key to the building of knowledge in the Reggio Emilia schools (Dewey, 1956; Edwards, 1998). Relating to one another through a mutual interest is an important aspect of this relationship building and inquiry-based learning helps provide for this (Edwards, 1998).
Significance

The young child is a natural inquirer into the world around them. They ask questions, test out their ideas, and are constantly adjusting their understandings (Thornton, 2003). Yet surprisingly, this has not been a large part of our curriculum, until now. BC’s redesigned curriculum implements learning through inquiry throughout the subject areas and it is prominent within the new strand, Applied Skills and Technology (BC, 2016). Teachers who are unaccustomed to teaching through an inquiry-based approach may encounter challenges due to a restructuring of their role as teacher and with the time constraints of the school day (Engel and Randall, 2009; Hertzog, 2007; Pozuelos, Gonzalez & Leon, 2010).

Parents too, should be aware that learning activities within school may look different than the teacher directed ones they may be used to. Assessment of inquiry-based learning will not be the product based assessment of the past but will focus on assessing the process of learning (BC, 2016). Parent involvement in their child’s education is a significant influence on the child’s future success (Harvard Family Research Project, 2003). As inquiry-based learning relies heavily on the teacher uncovering the interests and knowledge of their students, early childhood teachers can more efficiently and effectively achieve this through collaboration with their student’s parents (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011). The new emphasis on inquiry in our BC school system coupled with the ideas introduced to me throughout this master’s program have inspired me to learn about inquiry-based teaching and to effectively incorporate it into my pedagogy. To do this effectively in my kindergarten classroom I have come to recognize the necessity of educating parents about this teaching approach to create a collaborative community to better support my young learners.
Project Overview

In this chapter, I have introduced inquiry-based learning, not as a new concept in learning, but as a pedagogical approach that is new to many BC educators and is now part of BC’s recently redesigned curriculum. I shared a few of my experiences that have convinced me how powerful this method of learning can be because of its responsiveness to individual learners. Then I looked at how the theory of social-constructivism intertwines with the socio-cultural theory to create support for inquiry-based learning and how they both necessitate parental support.

In the next chapter, I provide a review of literature on learning through inquiry. I further explore what inquiry-based learning is and how it differs from more traditional teaching techniques. As inquiry is curiosity driven, I look at research that explores the relationship between parents’ and teachers’ reactions to children’s curiosity and how that impacts future curious behaviour. I look more in depth at why inquiry-based learning is particularly relevant to learners today and consult research to identify challenges teachers encounter when including inquiry-based learning in their teaching practice. I then look at examples of inquiry-based learning in international curriculums and then in our own BC curriculum.

In Chapter 3, while considering the benefits and challenges of inquiry-based learning, I will discuss the importance of educating parents about inquiry-based learning and including them in the process. Using research into how best to garner parental support, I will suggest several approaches to be used throughout the school year that would gradually introduce parents to inquiry-based learning and suggest ways to support their child’s learning. The approaches I will suggest are based on a school-wide inquiry question: What if a school community looked like a place where teachers, parents, and children shared equal responsibility for providing insight into
a child’s interests and needs?

In Chapter 4, I will reflect on how my practice has been influenced by the research and ideas I have explored throughout this project. I will comment on how accessible this project would be for other teachers to implement and then make recommendations for establishing future support for inquiry-based learning.
Chapter 2

Learning through inquiry is nothing new. From the moment we are born we strive to make sense of our world through exploring, testing, and evaluating (Thornton, 2003). A child questions everything and as we grow we even learn to question ourselves. Our curiosity, or need to find out, motivates us to continue learning throughout our lifetime. A well-known quote from Picasso about artistic ability in children could be easily applied to our innate abilities driven by curiosity: “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.”

The ability to be curious has been found to significantly decrease over the years a child is in school (Engel, 2006). Why is that? Does it really matter? If it is important, how can we, as teachers and parents, support and encourage this natural ability of children to inquire in children once they begin school? These questions are what guided my motivation to learn more about inquiry and brought me to create a method to impart this information to parents as a way to learn more about my students and support their own curiosity outside of school hours. Inquiry-based learning is about more than just what happens between the four walls of the classroom, it involves and influences family and community as well. As such, it is key to involve both family and community in the development of an inquiry-based environment.

In chapter one I gave an overview of why inquiry-based learning is a pertinent topic for educators currently in BC and why it is of personal interest to me. I introduced the overlying theories of social constructivism and sociocultural theory, explaining how they pertain to inquiry-based learning as well as directly influencing my project.

In this chapter I will describe the characteristics of inquiry-based learning and how it can be supported by teachers and parents. I will include some examples of inquiry based curriculums internationally and within Canada to demonstrate how BC’s curriculum reflects global values in
education. I will then discuss, as a foundation for my project outlined in chapter 3, the importance of teacher-parent collaboration in supporting children’s education and specifically inquiry-based learning.

**What is Inquiry?**

Teaching through an inquiry approach is popularly grounded in the early work of Dewey (1938), Bruner (1966), and Vygotsky (1978). These constructivist theorists proposed that through the process of inquiry the student must do the heavy cognitive lifting, to gather and analyze information, make connections and gradually build an understanding of a concept. This is compared to the more traditional methods of teaching where the teacher presents the information with examples and the student’s role is to replicate what they have been told (Murdoch, 2015). When information is presented without any direct relationship to a child’s reality, the child’s opportunity to make meaning of the information is reduced and results in a lack of motivation as there is no feeling of a need to know (Dewey, 1938). A student’s agency, or the feeling of control or mastery over their learning, is developed through the process of inquiry (Bruner, 1966). As inquiry begins with student originated interests and questions in close collaboration with their teacher, their learning develops in a way that is tailored to a student’s Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). The Zone of Proximal Development being the level of learning the student is capable of with scaffolding and support. With the teacher’s guidance, students learn to ask quality questions, actively gather and analyze information and develop a gradual sense of control and responsibility for themselves as a learner (Murdoch, 2015). In studies that compared children who participated in units of inquiry to children who learned through more traditional styles of direct teaching, mastery of knowledge was found to
rate similarly but learning through inquiry was found to lead to higher rates of motivation, curiosity and higher level-thinking (Engel and Randall, 2009; Hertzog, 2007; Samarapungavan, Patrick & Matizicoloulos, 2011). Studies that followed students throughout the school year found higher level thinking skills were demonstrated through increased connections made throughout the year and more complex questioning (Hertzog, 2007; Samarapungavan et al., 2011).

Curiosity Driven As the motivation to inquire is driven by curiosity, it is important first to consider why curiosity should be cultivated and supported within the classroom. Children are naturally curious from a young age. Parents play an important role in supporting and encouraging this natural tendency during the early years before a child enters school (Saxe & Stollak, 1971). According to Schraw (1994), children learn more, remember longer, and demonstrate higher levels of perseverance when they are encouraged to ask questions and seek out answers about ideas and topics that are of interest to them. Bruner (1966) wrote of curiosity being the will to learn and the satisfaction of curiosity as the intrinsic reward of learning. Yet, researchers have found low levels of curiosity expressed at school (Engel, 2006) and that the rates of observed curious behaviour diminish as children age (Knodt, 2011). A study in a US kindergarten found that on average two to five expressions of curiosity were expressed in a two-hour period, whereas on average less than one was recorded in a fifth-grade class (Engel, 2009). It was found that it wasn’t because children’s ability to be curious diminishes as they age; when the fifth-graders were provided with materials that were of interest to them, in conjunction with adult encouragement to explore and investigate, the incidences of expressed curiosity were high (Engel, 2006). Other researchers found the role of the teacher had a direct influence on the students’ levels of curiosity (Hackman & Engel, 2002). When teachers reacted to their students’
divergent thinking in a supportive and encouraging manner, the students demonstrated greater levels of curiosity, as seen through their willingness to investigate the unknown and through incidences of exploratory behaviour (Engel, 2006). Students begin their school career with abundant curiosity, yet each year fewer expressions of curiosity are observed. Is this a natural outcome of maturation or are we not effectively supporting the development of an important trait needed in our modern society?

**Why is Inquiry Important to Education Today?** Educational theorists (Bruner, 1966; Dewey, 1938) have been proponents for change to our educational system throughout this past century to prepare students for a rapidly changing postindustrial society rather than create a workforce of factory workers. The 21st century is very much an age of information, information can be found anywhere and at any time. Remembering and regurgitating information are skills that have little to do with real learning. Costa (2009) provides a powerful framework of dispositions held by effective learners in his Habits of Mind, encompassing skills such as collaboration, self-regulation, questioning, risk taking, reflection and flexibility of mind. The following table lists and describes these sixteen traits (Costa, 2009, p. x).
Figure 1. Costa’s Habits of Mind.

These skills are echoed in the needs of today’s employers, in modern educational advisors such as Sir Ken Robinson (2006), and in some modern educational curriculums around the world. The goal of all the curriculums I later review is to prepare students to become life-long learners who are reflective and collaborative.

What is the teacher’s role? When I read the article “Your Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins” by Loris Malaguzzi, founding father of Reggio Emilia schools, I found that his ideas about children and schooling resonated deeply. Recognizing how our image of the child shapes our teaching and interactions with our students daily was so obvious, yet it was not something I had previously considered or consciously based my teaching on. The ideas embedded in this article became my underlying motivation for this project. Ideas that inspired
me from this article include: the adults in the child’s world collaborating and sharing expectations while developing relationships, becoming comfortable with the unknown, not teaching the child something they can learn on their own, and believing the child is strong, intelligent, and capable. Malaguzzi wrote, “What we want to do is activate within children the desire and will and great pleasure that comes from being the authors of their own learning” (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 3). These ideas were further echoed by Sorin (2005) in which educators are challenged to consider their view of the child and how it affects their practice and consider the view of the agentic child. An educator who holds this view of the child strives to co-construct the curriculum with the child. The teacher is a guide who collaborates with the child to discover what they already know, what they are wondering about, and develops the curriculum from there (Sorin, 2005).

The teacher’s role when teaching though an inquiry approach is no longer the traditional deliverer of knowledge that we may associate with our view of the teacher, but one of a co-constructor. The teacher plays a critical role in enabling learning through inquiry, a role unfamiliar to many teachers trained in traditional methods (Engel and Randall, 2009; Hertzog, 2007; Pozuelos, Gonzalez & Leon, 2010). When teaching through inquiry the teacher must be able to question, prompt, observe, name, scaffold, guide, and listen throughout the process. The teacher becomes an inquirer as well, an inquirer into their students. The plans the teacher makes are based on the ongoing assessed needs and interests of their students. The responsive inquiry teacher also knows when to provide information to the student as not all lessons are most effectively taught through an inquiry approach (Hertzog, 2007). Even experienced teachers who have taught for many years may encounter difficulties in incorporating inquiry into their teaching practice. Jardine and Kraemer (2011) found that
It is possible to have taught for many years and not be ‘experienced’ in the sense inquiry requires. In fact, it is quite possible to have taught for many years and to have become less and less experienced – less and less open to new experiences (p. 2).

As the teacher’s role during inquiry may be unfamiliar to even experienced teachers, recognizing possible challenges may help teachers better overcome these obstacles before they occur. Perhaps the challenges could be viewed as the beginning of the teacher’s own inquiry into incorporating inquiry teaching into their practice, rather than reasons why this approach to teaching is unsuited to their teaching environment.

**Challenges** Inquiry by nature is a process driven approach to learning. The processes of observing and asking questions, planning an investigation, reflecting, and sharing and discussing findings are what the teaching is supporting and guiding. There is not always a product created. This process is what creates inquiry’s authentic learning outcomes but also creates the potential for barriers to its success. In their study of eleven primary teachers, Pozuelos et al. (2010) found that there were many challenges faced by teachers. The authors followed these teachers for an entire year as they attempted to understand what barriers teachers meet when they plan lessons with an inquiry based approach and what factors facilitate this approach.

As the process is not predetermined but involves an emergent curriculum, it was found that some teachers experienced difficulties in implementation as they did not fully appreciate the shift in teaching rationale this approach requires (Pozuelos, et al., 2010). Similar to Pozuelos et al., Hertzog (2007) found in her research into two early years educators, that implementing inquiry based approaches often created the feeling of a loss of control over the learning process and was
difficult for many teachers to reconcile (Hertzog, 2007; Pozuelos et al., 2010). Time was also an issue of concern to teachers (Hertzog, 2007; Pozuelos et al., 2010). According to the study, to develop deeper understandings, more time is needed. When teachers tried to break their day up into subject areas, they found it difficult to decide what subject area inquiry fit into as it encompasses many subject areas. Time in relation to the sheer number of students in one classroom was another barrier as inquiry requires more student-teacher collaboration (Hertzog, 2007). These findings exemplify the need to provide appropriate professional development for teachers when attempting to implement this approach (Hertzog, 2007; Pozuelos et al., 2010).

Challenges to implementing inquiry-based learning were not always due to factors controlled by the teacher. Flexibility in daily structuring of the day and in curriculum are areas often controlled by higher organizational levels than individual teachers. If schools and school districts were focused on the mastery of knowledge over developing life-long learners, teachers’ practice reflected this priority (Van Deur, 2010). Even the subtlest change of language when communicating expectations to teachers was shown to have a significant influence on how teachers responded to students’ curiosity (Engel and Randall, 2009). Even if teachers are skilled and motivated to teach through inquiry-based learning, the curriculum and school culture need to reflect an attitude that values this style of learning (Engel and Randall, 2009; Hertzog, 2007; Pozuelos et al., 2010; Van Deur, 2010).

**Inquiry Driven Curriculums**

When looking internationally at curriculum and educational approaches, evidence of inquiry is evident. I will first discuss examples within Canada, specifically Alberta and Ontario, leaving the redesigned curriculum within BC for a more in-depth discussion. I will then discuss
how inquiry is utilized in the Reggio Emilia approach which began in Italy and in the International Baccalaureate curriculum which is found worldwide.

Canada

Alberta Inquiry has been a part of the pedagogical process of learning in Alberta since 2004. It is clearly stated in the Focus on Inquiry document that inquiry based learning is not considered an “add-on” but a way to achieve the goals of the Alberta curriculum (Alberta Ministry of Education, 2004). The Focus on Inquiry document is essentially a “How to” manual for teachers and administrators from Kindergarten to Grade 12. It explains what inquiry is, why it is a beneficial process, how it can be applied across the curriculum, and how to teach and assess the various steps of the inquiry process. It thoroughly describes what inquiry is and how it can be implemented across the curriculum. The following instructional model demonstrates the cyclical nature of the steps involved in the inquiry process and what students may be doing during each phase (Donham, 2001 as cited in Focus on Inquiry, 2004, p. 10).

Figure 2 The Inquiry Cycle.
The Focus on Inquiry document then breaks down each phase of the inquiry model further and gives examples of how to teach it for different age levels. Areas such as evaluation, troubleshooting challenges, and areas of professional development are also addressed. This document was designed to transcend the current curriculum; in this way, it will still be relevant regardless of the changes in curriculum.

*Ontario* Beginning is September 2016, Ontario implemented a new Kindergarten Program to reflect changes needed in pedagogical approaches as a result of creating full-day kindergarten for four and five year olds. The aim was to move from a traditional pedagogical approach to one centered on the child. The document recognizes that “today and in the future, children need to be critically literate in order to synthesize information, make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and thrive in an ever-changing global community.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 4) The pedagogical approaches upon which this program is based call for establishing relationships, learning through inquiry and play, teacher and students as co-learners, documenting the process to make thinking visible, and a need for teachers to engage in collaborative inquiry with parents and other educators. Through an inquiry approach the Ontario Kindergarten program strives to promote the development of higher-level thinking skills through capitalizing on children’s innate curiosity and drive to make sense of their world. This document provides many examples of what inquiry looks and sounds like in a Kindergarten classroom. The following table breaks down the inquiry process into four main stages and describes what students and teachers will be doing during each stage (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 23).
### The Inquiry Process in Early Learning–Kindergarten Classrooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of the child’s inquiry process</th>
<th>When children are engaged in the inquiry process they:</th>
<th>When team members are modelling or supporting the inquiry process they:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Engagement</td>
<td>• raise questions about objects and events around them</td>
<td>• observe and listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noticing, wondering, playing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>• explore objects and events around them and observe the results of their explorations</td>
<td>• act as facilitator to guide children with thoughtful, open-ended questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exploring, observing, questioning</td>
<td>• make observations, using all of their senses, and generate questions</td>
<td>• encourage children to observe and talk among themselves and to the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigation</td>
<td>• gather, compare, sort, classify, order, interpret, describe observable characteristics and properties, notice patterns, and draw conclusions, using a variety of simple tools and materials</td>
<td>• provide a rich variety of materials and resources, and strategically question and observe children to clarify, expand, or discover the children’s thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planning, using, observations, reflecting</td>
<td></td>
<td>• model how to plan, observe, and reflect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>• work individually and with others, share and discuss ideas, and listen to ideas</td>
<td>• listen to the children to help them make connections between prior knowledge and new discoveries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharing findings, discussing ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 The Inquiry Process from the Ontario Kindergarten Document.

Examples of questioning included within this document to promote inquiry include:

- “What would happen if…?”
- “How would we find out?”
- “What are the places in our school yard where we might find worms?”
- “What ways can you use to get the water from one container to another?” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 22).

Video clips of the actual inquiry process being taught, visuals breaking down the process into observable behaviors and how to engage children in each step, and sample questions make this document accessible and a great resource for early childhood educators.
**International**

**Italy** The Reggio Emilia approach was developed in Reggio Emilia, Italy shortly after the second world war. Resources and materials were in short supply, but a small group of residents led by Loris Malaguzzi were determined to build a school were young children were valued as citizens who have the right to develop their full potential. (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). The view of the child as agentic along with strong constructivist beliefs form the foundation for the development of curriculum within Reggio Emilia (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Teachers take cues from the children and often follow their lead into avenues of inquiry (Edwards et al., 1993). Parent involvement and support in the classroom is another aspect of the Reggio Emilia approach that is key to the successful use of inquiry as part of their curriculum (Edwards et al., 1993). Parents share their funds of knowledge, to enable their child’s teacher to better understand their strengths and interests and share their own skills and interests to enrich learning for all students (Edwards et al., 1998). Consistent with a sociocultural approach the concept of “funds of knowledge ... is based on a simple premise: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (González et al., 2005b, pp. ix, italics in original).

**The International Baccalaureate Program** The IB program has long recognized the important role of learning skills and dispositions. The IB diploma program was established in 1968 to provide students with the skills and attitudes they would need to understand and manage the complexities in our world. The Primary Years program (PYP) was introduced in 1997 and the IB Learner Profile followed. The IB Learner Profile is an overlying set of skills and attitudes that continue to be developed throughout the student’s school years. Inquiry-based learning is a
key aspect of their program and is further explained in the PYP curriculum framework:

In the PYP it is believed that this is the way in which students learn best—that students should be invited to investigate significant issues by formulating their own questions, designing their own inquiries, assessing the various means available to support their inquiries, and proceeding with research, experimentation, observation and analysis that will help them in finding their own responses to the issues. The starting point is students’ current understanding, and the goal is the active construction of meaning by building connections between that understanding and new information and experience, derived from the inquiry into new content (p. 29).

Inquiry within the IB program works in conjunction with action and reflection to enable learners to become life-long learners who are able to work independently and in collaboration with others.

BC’s Redesigned Curriculum

In September 2016, British Columbia began a two-year implementation process of its redesigned curriculum for kindergarten to Grade 9 with Grades 10-12 to soon follow (BC, 2016). The Curricular Competencies weave together with the Big Ideas and Content Learning Standards to develop an understanding of the concepts contained within our curriculum, as illustrated below (BC, 2016).
Core competencies are sets of intellectual, personal, and social/emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop to engage in deep, life-long learning. The 3 core competencies are: Communication, Thinking, and Personal Social. The first two competencies relate directly to skills developed through inquiry. Within the Communication competency, students are called upon to connect and engage with others, access information and present it once it is interpreted, explain and reflect on their experiences, and collaborate with others to plan and carry out activities. The Thinking competency is broken into two subsections, Critical and Creative thinking. In both areas, a student’s ability to analyze, critique, question, develop and design is encouraged.

Within the curriculum strands of mathematics and science, inquiry is also apparent. Sample questions to support mathematical inquiry with students are provided within the mathematics strand and the science strand contains the Scientific Method which is essentially the inquiry cycle, as early as kindergarten. The inquiry process is evident once again in Social Studies as a method to question, collect, organize and present information, and then to make inferences and draw conclusions. Yet, the most significant change to the curriculum strands is
the addition of a new strand, Applied Design, Skills, and Technologies. Within the Kindergarten program, children are expected to create an idea, follow through to produce and revise a product, and then share and reflect on its success.

Like Alberta and Ontario, inquiry-based learning is no longer an “add-on” in BC curriculum, but a way to achieve the goals of the curriculum. Although supporting documents are limited in comparison to the other two provinces, teachers have now been given the permission to pursue this way of learning, an important first step. Challenges include the unfamiliarity of this learning style for many educators who have been educated in more traditional styles of teaching. However, as the implementation period encompasses two years, teachers have time to learn.

**The Importance of Families in Early Childhood Inquiry**

Inquiry-based learning has been shown to be a powerful process of learning that encourages the development of skills and attitudes that prepare students for a lifetime of learning. It is a process of learning found throughout the world, and is now a requirement of our own curriculum in BC. Through communication with my colleagues I have found that many are not familiar with the inquiry based approach to teaching. I have come to realize parents may be equally or even more unaware of how inquiry can enrich their child’s learning. As research has shown, parents, as their child’s first and most consistent teacher, play a crucial role in developing and supporting their child’s natural curiosity (Saxe & Stollak, 1971). Teachers also play a critical role in sustaining this natural drive once children enter school. Yet, the reality of high student to teacher ratios make it difficult to provide adequate support for individual provocations towards personal pursuits of inquiry. When teachers collaborate with parents they are able to discover
their students’ funds of knowledge in a way that is more efficient than within the day to day classroom experience in early childhood.

**Funds of Knowledge** Within the funds of knowledge framework of learning, social-constructivist theorists view learning as occurring with intent participation, or learning through participation in ongoing shared endeavors (Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez, & Angelillo, 2003). Since much of a child’s learning occurs outside of the school walls, informed instruction is possible only if a teacher is able to access this “fund.” At the early childhood years, this is accomplished most efficiently through collaboration with parents. Researchers found that teachers who engage with parents to develop a deeper understanding of children’s experiences and understandings are able to engage their students in learning that is intrinsically motivating and complex in understanding (Hedges et al., 2011). As inquiry begins with uncovering children’s curiosities and previous knowledge, the inquiry process is strengthened through collaboration between teacher and parents.

**Parent Communication and Support** As the nature of parent-school communication changes when children leave preschool and enter kindergarten, the importance of parent involvement in their child’s education remains strong (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). The frequency of communication decreases and the nature of the communication becomes more formal, from informal day-to-day chats in preschool to lengthier sit down conferences in kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005) Researchers consistently report the positive correlation of parental involvement with student achievement (McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Studies often focus on the importance of mothers in their child’s education but a father’s role is of equal importance. A study by McBride et al. (2005) found that students with fathers who were more involved experienced educational success more
frequently than their peers whose parental involvement just included their mothers. In the document, Family Involvement in Elementary School Children’s Education, produced by Harvard Family Research Project (2006/2007), the cumulative review of research demonstrates the importance of families in their child’s academic achievement and social development. It found that family involvement made teaching more effective as teachers were better equipped to create learning centered environments suited to the individual interests and needs of their students (HFRP, 2006/2007).

**Conclusion**

In this Chapter I have described the characteristics of inquiry-based learning and its benefits for learners in developing the habits of mind needed in our modern society. I brought awareness to examples of inquiry-based learning internationally and within Canada. I then discussed the role of teachers and parents in working collaboratively to support effective inquiry learning in early childhood.

In Chapter 3, while considering the benefits and challenges of inquiry-based learning, I will discuss the importance of educating parents about inquiry-based learning and including them in the process. Using research into how best to garner parental support, I will suggest several approaches to be used throughout the school year that would gradually introduce parents to inquiry-based learning and suggest ways they could help their child’s learning. The approaches I suggest are based on a school-wide inquiry question: What if a school community looked like a place where teachers, parents, and children shared equal responsibility for providing insight into a child’s interests and needs?

In Chapter 4, I will reflect on how my practice has been influenced by the research and ideas I have explored throughout this project. I will comment on how accessible this project
would be for other teachers to implement and then make recommendations for how our curriculum document could better support inquiry-based learning and how teachers could establish their own community of learners.
Chapter 3

Throughout this Masters program, two themes continually reappeared to challenge my thinking and my practice. The first was the idea of the emergent curriculum and the second was the concept of funds of knowledge. Those two ideas interwove with the emphasis in BC’s new curriculum on learning through inquiry, a process of learning that was instinctual in nature to me but unfamiliar as a pedagogical approach. Learning through inquiry has been strongly supported by social-constructivist theorists since the early 1990’s as an authentic process of learning that develops the skills needed to become a lifelong learner (Bruner, 1966; Dewey, 1938).

Sociocultural theorists lend further support for this style of learning, as the goal of learning through inquiry is to extend learning into real life situations within the presence of others, not to keep learning contained within the walls of the classroom (Rogoff, 2001). The child within these two theories is seen to possess a sense of agency and is an active participant in creating the emergent curriculum (Dewey, 1956; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993; Rogoff, 2001; Sorin, 2005).

As I discovered, learning through inquiry is not a newly developed educational methodology and is utilized in various educational systems worldwide, for example in the curriculums of Reggio Emilia, the provinces of Ontario, Alberta, BC as well as the IB Program (Alberta, 2004; BC, 2016; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Ontario, 2016; IB, 2012). The desire to learn about one’s world is evidenced at an early age and as children grow, so does their curiosity (Bruner, 1966; Thornton, 2003). Curiosity is the driving force behind inquiry but research has shown that the expressions of curiosity diminish as children progress through school (Engel, 2006; Knodt, 2009). Parents are the primary supporters of their child’s curiosity during the early years and once children enter school the teacher’s reactions were found to have a direct
impact on future expressions of curiosity (Hackman & Engel, 2002; Saxe & Stollack, 1971). Sadly, studies have found children’s rate of curiosity diminish as they advance through formal education (Engel, 2006; Knodt, 2009). Yet studies also found that when teachers were directed to encourage the student’s inquiries, the expressions of curiosity increased (Engel, 2006; Engel & Randall, 2009; Van Deur, 2010). Teachers face challenges when striving to incorporate inquiry based learning in their practice, for example, the feeling of not being in control and a lack of time in relation to the number of subjects needing to be taught or to the number of students one is responsible for (Hertzog, 2007; Pozuelos et al., 2010).

**BC Curriculum Connections**

As inquiry based learning is now a requirement in the BC curriculum, I have sought to better understand why it is an important way to learn and how I might better incorporate it into the learning experience for my kindergarten students. I have experienced inquiry based learning with my students in previous years and was invigorated by the motivation I observed in my students but was often left with the sense that it could have been a much richer experience. The full day kindergarten program allows for great flexibility in time so I have never felt lack of time as a limiting factor. With a class of 22 students, however, learning about each students’ funds of knowledge takes a considerable amount of time. Time for individual conversations as the main way to get to know my students is difficult to find while managing 21 other children, especially early in the school year. What if I could enlist parent support to nurture their child’s inquiries at home and aid me in uncovering their child’s funds of knowledge so that I might create a richer inquiry experience at school?”
School Conditions

The school in which I work has grown considerably in student numbers in the last five years. With that, has come increasing hurdles parents must overcome to become more involved in their child’s education. One hurdle is that all people who enter the school building, other than students and staff, must sign in and out of the office. Part of the cause for this is due to increasing numbers of contentious child custody orders that require supervision, possibly due to the sheer increase in population. This is now just accepted as a part of school life, but I have found it does limit teacher-parent informal communication. Another hurdle, from the school district level, is that anyone who visits the classroom must first have a criminal record check completed. It is free of cost and relatively easy to have done but it does pose a barrier to some parents due to the organizational aspect of having it completed. The last hurdle is due to the reality of the demographics of the community. Most parents in my class work full time out of the home. In my classroom of 22 students only two mothers do not work out of the home. If parents experience anything similar to what I do as a working mom, it is often difficult to be available to come to the school during the school day and time together at home can be busy during the most tiring part of the day. School celebrations such as the Fall Harvest and Christmas concert are well attended at my school, yet parent information nights, such as the recently held night to inform parents about our revised curriculum, are generally not well attended. As studies have found parental involvement in their child’s schooling to be an important indicator of school success, I would like to assist parents in understanding how they can support their child’s learning in an effective format that would reach even the busiest families (Harvard Family Research Project, 2003).
Using Research to Guide Best Practices

My goal is to inform parents about inquiry based learning, suggest ways they can support and encourage their child’s curiosity, while allowing me to learn more about my students’ funds of knowledge to enrich their learning. In order to accomplish this, I turned to research to guide me towards the best method in which to do this. In the research conducted by Lasky (2000) one negative experience can create the conditions in which a parent is no longer willing to communicate with the teacher or school. I found this to be a serious implication as a kindergarten teacher as I will be the first experience for many parents with their child’s teacher. This study also called attention to the fact that common understandings about education are developed through shared activities over time (Lasky, 2000). In a study conducted by Adams and Christensen (2000) home-school communication was identified as the primary way to develop trust in the family-school relationship. It was found that it was the nature of the communication between home and school, rather than the frequency, that was crucial in developing this trust (Adams & Christensen, 2000). Both parents and teachers were found to desire information from the other about ways in which to better socialize and educate the child and like Lasky’s research (2000) poorly planned or negative interactions may be more damaging than no interactions at all (Adams & Christensen, 2000). This then leads to the research by Hancock and Starker (2013) that focused on the most effective and appropriate methods of teacher communication. This research was in response to the requirement of schools in the US to develop ways in which to better involve parents in their child’s education through the signing of The No Child Left Behind Act (Hancock & Starker, 2013). It was found that one attribute that contributed to efficient communication was the teachers’ ability to “be real” or not have to appear to be the expert and their ability to ask for help (Hancock & Starker, 2013, p. 4). This study also found that multiple forms of communication were most effective with face to face communications being highly
effective in garnering parental involvement and communication via text being rated as medium
to highly effective (Hancock & Starker, 2013). Drawing from what this research shows and as
potentially being part of the first experience many parents will have with our education system, I
would like to create a format for informing parents about inquiry-based learning and what role
they can play that is easy to access, different from other modes of communication I already use,
and will hopefully be received in a positive spirit.

**Proposed Project**

In order to accomplish the goal of reaching most parents in a positive and accessible
format I am suggesting using a multi-formatted approach beginning in September that would
continue throughout the school year.

**Introductory Newsletter and Questionnaire** At the beginning of the school year I will send
home with my new students an introductory newsletter introducing myself and the basic routines
of the school and classroom. Within this newsletter, I will introduce our classroom as an inquiry-
based classroom, including a basic description of what that means and why parent support is
beneficial. This description will link to the importance of filling out and returning the attached
questionnaire. The questionnaire will inform me of their child’s interests, strengths, and areas
they find challenging. The questionnaire will also ask parents to share information about their
own areas of interest and ways they may be interested in being involved with their child’s
kindergarten year.

**Meet the Teacher Night** This school-wide event typically occurs several weeks after the first
day of class and is well attended at our school. There is a short period of time at the beginning
(abut 20 min.) for parents to visit their child’s classrooms followed by a general welcome in the
school gymnasium. As this will be the first time I will meet many of the parents of my students
face-to-face, I want to use this research proven, highly effective method of acquiring parent support in the best manner that I can.

During my brief introduction to the group I will introduce myself, our classroom, and invite them to view the display in the classroom dedicated to inquiry-based learning. Displayed will be document panels from inquiry projects of past years that explain the process of inquiry as well as showing how parents and other members of the school community were involved. A sign-up sheet will be available for parents to list topics they are interested, materials they have access and skills they would be willing to share with the class. By this time, I will have had time to read through returned questionnaires and will have information about parent interests and skills from those questionnaires already added to the sign-up sheet. This is to give other parents ideas about how they could be involved and realize I am not asking for “expert” help. I will also have a book that I have created, *Learning Through Inquiry*, displayed.

*Learning Through Inquiry Parent Book*  I am also proposing to create a book through the online website Blurb. This book would go a little deeper into explaining inquiry-based learning, while remaining visually attractive to not only the parents but their children as well. The students in my class would take this book home to share with their parents and then return it so it can be sent home with someone else. It is my hope that students will find the visuals interesting since the pictures are from their school and classroom, prompting them to share this with their parents. In this way, even though the written part of the book is meant for parents, the book is more likely to make it out of the child’s backpack and be viewed. Figure 5 shows the cover and the back of the book and Figure 6 shows the Table of Contents and accompanying photo. Several available copies would shorten the time required to reach all families and allow for a backup copy if a copy was inadvertently damaged or lost.
Parent Information Night Later in the school year, most likely around the end of January and before the Open House held after the second term reports, I would host an information night for parents who would like to learn more about inquiry-based learning. This would be for any interested parents, not just the parents of my students. At our school, these events have been
shown to be successful if childcare is provided, food and drink is available, and there are door prizes. This event would be advertised through teacher’s various methods of classroom communications, through our school PAC, and through the school newsletter. Invitations could also be extended to other school communities. It would be held at our school with the gymnasium being the usual location within the school. I envision this event happening within the next few years as inquiry-based learning is a new part of our revised curriculum and still largely unfamiliar to many. Yet, I feel a year of gradual introductions to this style of learning for parents coupled with increased confidence with this teaching style for teachers would lead to more interest in this type of event and a more interesting event to attend as actual examples and experiences could be shared.

This event would focus on inquiry-based learning in the grades at our school, kindergarten to grade five. Document panels from various inquiry projects would be displayed around the gym. The PowerPoint presentation would include the following:

- General Welcome and outline of evening.
- What is inquiry-based learning?
- How does it differ from how I learned at school?
- Why is it important?
- What is my child learning?
  - Kindergarten example
  - Upper primary example
  - Intermediate example
- How can I support my child’s learning?
The presentation would begin with an informational PowerPoint about inquiry-based learning. It would include examples of inquiry projects from my own classroom as well as examples from classrooms of different grades. If the other teachers were willing, they could explain their own projects. Older students could also share one of their or their class’ inquiry projects. Then the parent’s role would be discussed such as; encouraging curiosity, offering expertise, providing extra adult assistance, helping with research, or even just sending in interesting artifacts or found objects that would get children wondering. Particularly involved parents from past years could be invited to share their child’s experiences, as well as their own, when they were able to be part of the collaborative experience. In this way a variety of information, examples, and experiences could be shared. To conclude the evening door prizes could include; family passes to the museum, books such as *The Curious Kids Science Book* by Asia Citro or *I Wonder* by Annake Harris or art supplies. Door prizes could be donated from local businesses or through the PAC who is always very supportive of these events.

**Fresh Grade** I have been using this program as a portfolio throughout the school year to document our inquiry journey as well as other happenings in the school and classroom. All the students in my class are entered on the program and their parents can view their individual portfolios. I am able to post photos or comments to individual student portfolios or to the entire class. It is a visual and easy way to allow parents to have a “peek” inside our day which they can access on their computer or through an app on their phone or device. I have begun using Fresh
Grade to document our journey through an inquiry project. It allows parents to have conversations with their child about what they are learning at school and possibly extend the learning into time at home. It is also a way for me to connect with the parents and ask for support. Below is an example of a post I made at the beginning of a recent inquiry project that was inspired by some bones we found outside in the rocky area of our school ground.

![Sample Fresh Grade post during inquiry project.](image)

As the project progressed, we acquired moose and deer skulls from our principal. One of the deer skulls we were unable to identify using our books on deer so we wrote down our questions and posted them on Fresh Grade.
Figure 8 Sample Fresh Grade post of our questions.

We received answers from several parents, one who asked their friend who is a conservation officer. Another parent, upon seeing the post, sent in a bear and raven skull and it continued from there. Our First Nations coordinator upon seeing our collection as she passed by our classroom came and shared traditional aboriginal stories about these animals with us. As we neared the end of our journey we still did not know what animal the original bones were from. In response to a post about the continued mystery, one parent commented that another parent in the school was a veterinarian and might be able to help us. We invited her in and learned they were bones from a turkey, sadly not a Pterodactyl! In summary, this example shows how Fresh Grade can be used as a window into the inquiry process for parents. It allowed the parents to see the process of learning that was taking place which was important because there were very few products
produced that the students could take home to share. This form of documentation also allowed parents to become involved when they felt comfortable and able, whether it was at home looking at the bones left from their dinner or joining us in the classroom to share their expertise.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have connected the importance of parental involvement to their child’s academic success to the need to educate parents in new ways to support learning, specifically inquiry-based learning. This not only helps ensure the success of our students but also aids our ability to provide a richer and more connected learning experience. To achieve this I have described a comprehensive approach to providing this information to parents. As studies have found, face-to-face interactions followed by text delivered information were the most successful in garnering parental support. As such, I have sought to utilize these methods in multiple formats throughout the school year. I have adjusted already existing methods of communication within the school and my own classroom to address the need to inform parents about inquiry-based learning as well as proposing the addition of two other methods that allow a more in depth sharing of information.

In chapter 4, I will reflect on how this project will affect my future practice and limitations that may exists. I will also make recommendations into additional areas that should be addressed when implementing inquiry-based learning into the public-school environment.
Chapter 4

This Masters project grew out of my own inquiry into how inquiry-based learning could best be supported in an early childhood classroom. It began with BC’s new curriculum that calls upon teachers to utilize inquiry-based learning as an instructional approach across the subject areas and in all grade levels. I have since learned inquiry-based learning is not a new approach to learning and is currently being used in curriculums worldwide. However, our curriculum does not provide much support or clarification into how it could be incorporated into classrooms. Because of this, I have explored ways inquiry-based learning is supported in other curriculums to develop my own supports within my classroom and school community.

Even though I have been including this approach unknowingly throughout my years of teaching, I have felt I have been missing out on learning opportunities due to a lack of experience and knowledge. I have felt my lack of ability to articulate why I am teaching this way to parents, colleagues, administration, and even my students, has inhibited my ability to fully utilize its potential. This inquiry led me to explore the theoretical frameworks that support inquiry-based learning as well as the societal considerations in educating children for the future.

The reactions of my colleagues to this new aspect of our curriculum also inspired me to research what limitations or difficulties may exist as teachers plan to incorporate this style of learning in their pedagogy. The lack of time available to spend with individual students to uncover their interests and develop their inquiries was a recurrent concern of many teachers. As my area of focus is an early childhood classroom, I felt engaging parents in our inquiries would help alleviate this limitation as they would be a valuable source of information about their child. As parents are their child’s first and primary teacher and a strong connection between home and school has been shown to promote school success for children, I chose to begin with how I could
best utilize parental support to enrich inquiry-based learning in the classroom.

Reflections

I have never enjoyed including parents in the classroom as I have often felt judged. This is due to my own insecurities and not a result of experience. I have included parents in superficial ways to satisfy their desires to feel involved in their child’s schooling but have usually felt these ways were more work for me and in hindsight did little to help the parent support their child. I knew the importance and value of having parents involved in their child’s education but was unable to facilitate that in ways that were mutually beneficial. When I began teaching at my current school, the school administration had recently enacted new school policies regarding parent presence within the school. This was due to the increased number of contentious custody orders requiring the need to account for who is within the school building. Also, the sudden increase in school population made it necessary to reclaim space being used by parents to congregate during school time. As a result, parent involvement within the classroom needed to be for a legitimate educational outcome involving significant preplanning.

I also realized that if inquiry-based learning created stress within my colleagues due to its unfamiliarity, parents were quite likely just as unfamiliar with its processes. Since the benefits of inquiry-based learning lie in the process and not in a cute product at the end, something parents of kindergartners often expect, I needed to educate parents about this and find a way to allow them to observe and share in the process. In doing so, I felt I would not only be able to begin the educations process for the new parents to the school, but also engage them in authentic ways to be involved in their child’s education that would benefit their child, themselves, and me as their child’s classroom teacher.

I feel most aspects of my project, apart from the parent information night which I will discuss later, would be easy for most teachers to utilize once they are familiar with the process of
inquiry-based learning and have begun to incorporate it into their teaching. I have begun to use these approaches this year and have been encouraged with the results. I do realize limitations lie in the gap between the level of many teachers’ experience and knowledge of inquiry-based learning and their ability to put these ideas into practice and I will address this in my recommendations for the future.

The book, Learning Through Inquiry, would be easy for most teachers to pick up and send home for parents to browse and serve as an easy introduction. It could also be a starting point for many teachers beginning to learn about inquiry-based learning. Yet, its effectiveness lies in its connections to the other aspects of parent education that occur throughout the year, as well as how it is reflected in one’s own teaching.

The parent education night, I believe, as an isolated event could be the most effective way to educate parents about inquiry-based learning as it goes more in-depth into theory, reasoning, and examples. It would reach a wider range of parents, not just the ones of my students. This event would be most effective if it involves multiple teachers and classrooms throughout the school and if parents school-wide have already heard of inquiry-based learning through their child’s classroom teacher. If parents have evidenced how motivated their child was while engaging in learning through inquiry then their interest in such an event would be greater. Once inquiry-based learning become more commonplace this event would not be necessary as parent’s familiarity would begin when their child enters kindergarten.

**Recommendations**

As I became familiar with our new curriculum and explored other curriculums, I came to realize that our curriculum is lacking in its description, examples, and support for inquiry-based learning. I feel if we are supposed to be including inquiry-based learning in our teaching
practice, then support should be included within our curriculum, especially since it is presently unfamiliar to many. My first recommendation is there should be a supporting document that explains the process of inquiry, how to incorporate inquiry into teaching the concepts of various grade levels and subjects, explains the role of formative and summative assessment throughout the inquiry cycle, and suggests ideas of how to create a supportive community of learners. I would recommend that video clips be included that show different stages of the inquiry process so that teachers can see and hear real life examples of how this is used. I have also had teachers ask for examples of how this process can be used with the current reality of large class sizes. The document should also include ways to develop good questions. All examples should cover various grade levels as the different stages would look quite different in a grade four class than they would in kindergarten.

My project addressed ways to include parents within a community of inquiry learners but as I have progressed through this school year with my project always in mind, I have realized the importance of creating a community of learners within one’s own school. I would recommend for further exploration, ways in which inquiry-based learning can be supported through collaboration with one’s colleagues. One suggestion is to focus learning and collaboration through a book club. As many of my colleagues were wanting to find out more about inquiry-based learning, I began a book club centered around the book, *The Power of Inquiry* by Kath Murdoch. I appreciated the balance of theory, practice, and examples this book provides. When we meet, we bring a quote from the designated chapter that resonated with us. Through this book club we have had many conversations that have continued throughout the week. We have also helped each other with problems we were having, for example, “How do we teach our students to ask good questions?” We have shared connections that have assisted others with their inquiry
projects and most importantly provided support and encouragement for one another. Another suggestion is to bring in guest speakers that could conduct a group workshop or work with individual teachers. If administration know this is an area people are interested in, they may be willing to provide the funds to make this happen. Our principal, knowing this was an area staff were interested in, was willing to use staff development funds to make this happen. I would suggest that creating a community of learners among one’s colleagues be the first step in creating an environment that supports inquiry-based learning. Collaboration is a powerful tool when learning how to incorporate inquiry into one’s teaching. It would allow teachers to develop their skills and knowledge and gain confidence in the benefits of using inquiry before sharing them with the larger community of parents.

This brings me to my final idea or dream, creating a school in which learning through inquiry is built into the foundational principles of the school. Our school district will be opening several new schools within the next five years. I wonder what it would be like to design a school from the building and surrounding grounds to the mission statement that provides for and values inquiry-based learning? Independent schools have accomplished this, but what if it could be done within the constraints of public funding and public school requirements? I wonder how this would affect learning success for its students over the years?

This project began as my own inquiry into how I could improve inquiry-based learning within my own classroom but instead of ending there has led me to wonder how can I contribute to my own school community and support my colleagues in learning about and teaching through inquiry-based learning. It is my hope that by using these approaches to engage parents in the inquiry process, teachers will be able to facilitate inquiry-based learning more easily and effectively within their classrooms. It is now not surprising to me that this project, which became
my own inquiry, does not signify the end of my journey into inquiry-based learning but a
beginning as I have learned that often the richest inquiries never really end. My final thoughts
are echoed in the following quote; “Learning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow
us to go further more easily” (Bruner, 1960, p. 17).
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