

NETWORKS OF INQUIRY AND INNOVATION
2011-2012

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Leadership Team

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School Inquiry and Action

School Question

Can young children learn and use the skills and processes of inquiry through structures embedded in a play-based primary curriculum with a focus on self-assessment of the learning process rather than the product?

Strategies

I began my inquiry by asking teachers and students to describe their experiences with inquiry learning and from this information identified some common concerns. It was generally agreed that while the ideas sounded fine in the planning stages, successful implementation was more difficult, often due to many students' lack of the necessary skills. Students themselves agreed that while they liked having choices, they were often at a loss as to how to proceed. Many early primary teachers felt that this type of learning was very difficult for emergent readers and writers, and that there was simply too much curriculum to cover to add something else. I felt that it should be possible to overcome these concerns by looking at ways to integrate beginning inquiry skills into the commonly used routines and structures in primary classrooms, so that teachers can begin with the familiar while exploring ways to comfortably integrate the concepts of inquiry learning.

Documents such as the Primary Program, the I.R.P.s and the new full-day kindergarten materials all identify the importance of developing enthusiastic and independent learners who are not afraid to take risks and ask questions, who understand how to think about their own learning processes and who can work effectively with a variety of people in a variety of situations – inquiry learners!

The skills of questioning, exploring ideas, discussing and being actively engaged with the ideas of others are key. This year I have worked to design strategies and materials to incorporate these skills into familiar daily routines such as sharing and other circle activities, conflict resolution strategies such as class meetings, play-based learning centres, field trips, and home-school communications. Introducing these skills as a natural component of daily learning and then applying them to favourite early childhood themes, gives students the chance to practice the skills over and over while developing confidence in their ability to identify their own progress.

Plans for 2012-2013

Over the coming year I hope to have a number of primary teachers try some of the materials and strategies in their classrooms to see if they are effective and easily useable. Another step will be to incorporate the performance standards and assessment for- and as- learning strategies into all the activities. Strategies for multi-age inquiry cycles will also be a focus.

Reflections and Advice

- think about what you value the most in learners
- think outside the “curriculum” boxes – focus on the processes
- be an inquirer yourself and let the kids see how it works for adults as well