

## Teachers Reflecting on Student Inquiry, Gr. 7

Female: [00:00] I can understand, you know, you're saying, a lot of teachers are a bit reluctant at first. But it just—I think, for me, you know, what, what makes me sort of want to try, you know, new things is that I just—when I researched this inquiry approach and I looked at it and I realized what it was about, I just feel like it's—it just, it sort of breaks down all of those traditional roles of a teacher and what you're supposed to do and you're supposed to be the bearer of all knowledge at the front of the class. You never make mistakes.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: But I don't think that's real life and I think it's, it's realistic to show the kids that you make mistakes, and the whole process of it as you learn together. So I think when we did our first inquiry and, like you said, we made some mistakes, we told that to the class.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And we were candid about it. We said, "You know, these are some things ..." We, we, we told the class. "I think we, we, we sort of pigeon-holed you a little bit with that learning goal and, and we think now, this time when we try this science inquiry, we're going to, we're going to start from scratch. We're not going to ... We're, we're just going to put the learning goals up there, put the expectations up there and you sort of see, you know, what it is you have to learn, what success criteria you have to do to attain that goal." And, you know, I—I don't know. I just think, I think it's so important to show the kids risk-taking.

Female: Yeah.

Female: It's not just, you know ... I feel like it's not just covering, you know, my geography expectations or covering my science expectations. But I'm teaching these students life skills. So to the people who might say, "What if, you know, inquiry is happening in this year or this classroom in this space, but maybe not so much in the next year, how is that effective?" I feel like you've left them with really key skills.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: I—the inquiry process teaches students to be critical thinkers, teaches kids confidence, teaches kids that—to be risk-takers ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: To be vulnerable, to not know the answer but if it—to find—collaborate together and to find the answer together. And it's okay to make mistakes.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And these are skills we're teaching them to carry on, you know, as they, as they ...

Female: Go off into the world.

Female: ... go off into the world. Yeah.

Female: With this inquiry process, what I've noticed is—is that the kids are really engaged.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: They're taking ownership for their learning. They're involved, they're asking questions that they're interested in and, and are relevant to them. So I think that that's really created a whole other dynamic in the classroom.

Female: Yeah, that's been huge. And if you think of ... You know, one of the students one day came in and said, "Oh, I went home and was reading the Grade 8 textbook." And it's a student that doesn't always have it—his work done, sort of thing.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: So that kind of—it really engages the kids and gets them involved in their learning, cause they want to do it.

Female: Yeah. And I was talking about this, I think with you earlier. You know, I think the worry about inquiry is, you know, will this work with a, a stu—a, a classroom of all different sort of dynamics and personalities?

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And this classroom has everything.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And, you know, behaviour is one of them. And, and students' engagement level is one of them. And I find what, what really works in the inquiry process is, you know, when the students sort of naturally form in their groups, it ends up working out that it's not even me holding the kids accountable to doing their work and keeping the focus. It's actually their group members, which is much more effective, I'm finding, than myself. So, you know, I—I'll come in, and I, and I—you know, we start our inquiry and I see the group, the groups working in, you know, different areas of the classroom. And I look at that student who normally wasn't engaged, normally I would have—need constant reminders. And he's right in there, working with his, his group members. He brings his homework in everyday because if he doesn't, he's going to have to answer to his group members. So ...

Female: (Inaudible). And the kids are taking a lot of responsibility, but you built that up over time. There was a lot of stuff that was done sort of ahead of us starting an inquiry. You've, you—I can see anchor charts on, on accountable talk.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: **[03:53]** And the first time I sat in on the knowledge building circle, it came out. Like, the kids were saying, "Oh I agree with what Mary Ann said." Or, you know, "I disagree with what Nancy said, and here's why." So obviously work had been done. So the culture was set up already. You've done the work to set up the culture—the culture of inquiry, where people are okay to, to take a risk and okay to, to suggest what they're thinking and what their ideas are. And are, are okay to, to rely on each other and trust each other. And I think as teachers, we have to trust that the kids are able to do that.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And we have to trust that the kids know, know stuff or could find out stuff on their own.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And you become less of a leader of the classroom. One of the students was saying, you know, "I've learned leadership skills from this." And, and I think you set that culture up for that to happen. And that's one of the most important things, to allow this to happen.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: You know, it's not going to happen if the kids are not comfortable at taking risks so that the kids have not experienced accountable talk or have ex—not experienced thinking for themselves and thinking about information that they found. So a lot of things have to set in—be set into place before this can work.

Female: Mm.

Female: Mm-hm. And I think, you know, the whole process of inquiry is, you know, we're teaching twenty-first century, you know, learners, and they've got information everywhere. So it's, you know, it's not difficult to find the information.

Female: Mm.

Female: I think the whole point to this whole process is to teach them to be that critical thinker. So, you know, we're pulling in aspects of the matrix, so we're bumping up their thinking and we're getting them to do the retell, the reflect. But really sort of look at the intent of what the text is that they're reading and look into making a critical stance. Look into making—if it's not a critical stance, an innovation. And sifting through all the information and pulling out what's the most important ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: ... and then bringing that forward in their research.

Female: That's right.

Female: And in their answering their inquiry.

Female: And also in, in, in their inquiry and in their presentation of, of information, they've also got to learn to write for the purpose that they're writing for. And if it's a critical stance, they're trying to persuade their reader or their audience to, to be persuaded to agree with them. So they've got to adopt those tools and, and, the, the tools of writing a persuasive text and—do you know what I mean?

Female: Yeah.

Female: Like, it's, it's that they've got to adopt some of the ideas that we're teaching them in their own writing and in their own presentations of ideas. And I think—I can't remember exactly what you said but you're really teaching them to empathize with the things that they hear and the things that ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: Other people's thoughts. So they're being taught to be open to hear what other people have to say before come up with their own ideas, right?

Female: And I think that's really critical, that they are able to listen to each other, to respect and appreciate other opinions. You know, that's really a key factor there. Because in life, that's what it's all about. They're going to go out there and really have to deal with different personalities and different opinions and ... It may not be their way of thinking, but at least that they're respectful of other people's ways.

Female: And I know those are some of the skills of the twenty-first century.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: You know, that that's—that people are going to be expect—or—our kids are going to be expected to be able to collaborate and know how to negotiate their ideas and negotiate with other people and be creative. You know, so these are the skills that they're getting out of an inquiry. You know, and I think one of the things that—we were watching presentations yesterday, and, and I turned to Nancy and I said, "You know, we've really taught them nothing but look how much they've learned."

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: You know, like, our work ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: ... was all the work ahead of time.

Female: Right.

Female: Setting up the big idea and then learning goal and that sort of thing. But we were amazed at the information and their ideas and their thinking around what they had learned on their—not, not on their own, but had developed over the course of the inquiry from each other.

Female: And what was interesting too is, yesterday, you know, we did our three—three—the, the first three presentations. We had our expectations up out, we were looking at them. And, you know, the first three presentations we were looking at, we thought, "Oh my god, they hit Grade 8 expectations."

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: You know, it's a Grade 7 classroom, but the li—the information was not limited to the Grade 7 textbook, right? And that's—you know, in the traditional style of, you know, teaching where you're not looking at an inquiry approach, it's—the—it's the Grade 7 textbook, it's analyzing the Grade 7 textbook or whatever grade specific it is. And that's sort of it. But in the inquiry approach, it's—you know, when we did—when we generated our wonderings, you know, and some of the wonderings were coming out as, "Why do things float?" or, or ... And these were Grade 8 top—topics. We pulled in a Grade 8 textbook. We put it on the table and we let them, you know, research what they were interested in. And not only did they cover Grade 7, but they're now ready for Grade 8.

Female: [08:24] Right.

Female: I thought that was, that was big.

Female: And if you think of—just something you said that, that tipped me off about the, the learning goal and textbooks. So if we're using a Grade 7 textbook and that's our program, then that's all they're learning.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: You know, but they're not—we're not allowing them to go beyond that and to, to find out other information. When one of your students started quoting the periodic table to me, and I said, "Okay, wait a minute."

Female: Mm.

Female: "It's been a long time since I've been in Grade 12 Chemistry."

Female: Right. Yeah.

Female: But she wouldn't have seen that in a Grade 7 textbook, you know?

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And the inquiry has allowed her to, to find out all kinds of things that we wouldn't have been able to teach her.

Female: Yeah, and I—I just think—yeah, going back to that. That whole point of, you know, a non-inquiry approach is there's a ceiling on their thinking.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: Right? And, and I don't think teachers realize this, but, you know, when you move to that other approach and you go into inquiry and you get—let the kids sort of explore their wonderings—within a, within a con—sorry. Within a, you know ...

Female: Context. Mm-hm.

Female: A context, right. The, the research and the knowledge that they come back with is ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: ... it's astounding. It is. Like, to see the information that they were—you know, that they s—that they presented on yesterday ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And to, to reflect and look back and think, "We didn't, we, we were, we were facilitators."

Female: Yeah.

Female: We didn't really, you know, bring the knowledge, teach them all the information. We, we just let—gave them the information. We left, you know, the, the textbooks. We,

we gave them a laptop available in the classroom and they went ahead and researched and the things they brought back was, was—it's inspiring to see.

Female: You can lead a horse to water.

Female: Yeah.

Female: You know, you know, we, we have—and, and we're saying that we didn't teach them anything but we taught them the skills.

Female: Yeah.

Female: We taught them the skills ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: ... through the matrix, through your ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: ... your lessons on accountable talk and that sort of thing. We've taught them the skills that they need to respond and react to the information all around us. I worry that, you know, we said, "Oh they were doing Grade 8 expectations, but it's a Grade 7 classroom." And teachers might think, you know, "But I'm supposed to do Grade 7 expectations in Grade 7."

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And the topics that came up in the inq—in the knowledge building circles, when a Grade 7 topic came up, you made sure to, to, to listen to their thinking around that.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: And they were learning from each other.

Female: Right.

Female: So they might not have been pursuing that expectation for their grade level. But that expectation was covered. You know, it was, it was addressed.

Female: Right. Because they did go back. I think if—they were looking at, at why do things float, once we sorted into—to the appropriate Grade 7 expectation, they—once they created their success criteria for that expectation, if they were exploring floating or buoyancy, they also knew that they had to come back and—to successfully, you know, I guess, conquer that goal, they had to talk about pure substances and mixtures. They also had to talk about the particle theory. And then they could go into an explanation of ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: ... of buoyancy. And, so that's where we—we did. We always, you know that—we, we were al—always making sure they were covering that Grade 7 expectation.

Female: Mm-hm. Right and as a teacher, you need to, to have a very good understanding of your grade's expectation in order to do this, right?

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: Like, you, you have to know what your curriculum is asking of you and what you, you need to be teaching your students or providing for them. And, I mean, that's a big thing. And even in—when we were watching their presentations, if you were not aware of what the curriculum was, you wouldn't have had that lens of picking out ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: ... the, the things that they—the students had learned that met the expectations, you know what I mean? Like when you're watching the presentations, when you're listening to the knowledge building circle, you need a particular lens ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: ... to be listening for the things that they're saying and how they fit into (inaudible) expectations.

Female: Right. And that's—I guess, goes back to the role as a facilitator.

Female: Mm-hm.

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