An Inquiry Approach, Gr. 6 & 7

Female: [00:00] So the workplace is changing, and—the work world outside is dema—is asking us to produce a different kind of student because they differ—need a different kind of person in the workplace. So we need to answer to the fact that eventually our kids will leave us. Eventually our kids will leave us. They'll go out to the world and we need to prepare them in a way that will allow them to be successful in that world.

Female: I think inquiry based learning is critical for kids who are maybe not traditionally not the ones who are successful in school. Kids who are disengaged or who are struggling benefit tremendously from this type of learning. And we know that human beings, as a species, we're naturally curious. Kids come to school when they're little, when they're four and five, and they're, they're excited to be there. They want to know, they ask why all day long. And it seems as kids get older, we, we sort of lose some of that magic of, of the, of the questioning and the wondering. And what we want to do is really think about fostering that, that natural curiosity and, and fostering that enthusiasm for learning. And by carrying inquiry through from Kindergarten up through Grade 12, it's, it's hopeful that we'll have students who maintain that love of learning, that passion for learning.

And when kids are, are engaged in and love learning, they are—they don't—we don't have referrals to the office. They, they want to be at school. They want to be here.

Female: Mm-hm.

Female: They don't want to miss a class or, or miss the, the next lesson or the next installment of, of their project at school. I think also it—what it doe—what inquiry based learning—it, it provides equity. It gives every key—every kid a seat at the table of learning. And kids who maybe have been disenfranchised or tuning out or are pulling away from school, their voices matter. Because there's not, not ever a right or wrong, particularly in, in inquiry based learning. There's no need for someone to make—to be—to feel as if they're not capable or not able. So that allows our struggling stu—student to feel engaged and to feel successful and to feel like a learner.

So that engagement and equity can only lead to a better achievement for those students as well. I think what it also does, it builds a community within the classroom. And I know that you've done a lot of work with that, in terms of creating, creating a dynamic where all voices can be heard, that students can trust each other to give each other feedback or to comment on each other's work. And, and, and everyone feels included. You build a, a community allowing students to feel safe and, and comfortable here. And I think that's pretty important for all of our learners.

Inquiry also allows for students to have differentiated instruction and, and, and teachers to differentiate it in a much, much easier way. It, it, it requires a lot more tracking, and a lot more organization. But differentiation occurs, I believe, more naturally.

Teacher: [03:03] What does that look like in the classroom, right? Because that, that's the question that the teachers have. And so I think about work that we've done this year. One of the major inquiries that my students did was on the War of 1812 and Napoleon. And it was very much driven by a question that one child had in the
classroom, which was, “Why do people know more about the war that took place in Europe rather than the war that took place right here, even though we live right here?” And they were curious about that. It cau—prompted a discussion in the classroom, and so, “Let, let’s find out.” And then it led the kids to discovering Napoleon and then just finding out what a powerful force of man he was and the transformation of Europe and, and ultimately, what took place in North America.

That inquiry was very much driven by the interest of the kids within—that. And so what I would see in the classroom as the kids were researching that topic and accessing tools and information—there’s a much broader sharing of information. So when, when you watch the dynamic in the classroom when they’re engaged in that, it’s fluid, kids are up out of their seat, they noticing—they learn something, people have gathered around as they share information. So the sharing of the information causes everyone to get the learning anyway, even though I’m not up in front of the class teaching about Napoleon and the War of 1812.

And then because students could, instead of everybody needs to produce this pro—product in this particular way—although we did all end up using the same tool. What was more significant was the demonstration of learning. So kids could choose to focus on what they considered significant or what the ultimate message should be that they wanted people to take away from what they had learned, rather than me testing everybody on—“At the end of this unit, you need to know this, this and this.” So they could develop—they were free to develop their own insights, and every child in the class did. They were free to share in ways that were me—meaningful to them, so it was low-risk to get up and talk about what they were noticing.

There were ongoing conversations as people learned things. And then we discussed it and reflected about that as, as a class. And then students could choose to go to the level of depth that they were able to, based on their own interest. At the end, I mean every single student was engaged throughout the process, every student was learning and the retention of knowledge was greater. So that then, when the inquiry ended, we were not able to get to the exhibit on Napoleon until two months later. And we really had not talked about anything we had learned past the point of where they had presented. But every single student in the class could talk informatively about what they had learned and, in fact, knew all—a—quite a bit more than the tour guide even knew.

[END OF RECORDING – length, 05:42]