

The Power of Inquiry, Gr. 8

Female: **[00:00]** We started on a pathway of looking for a teaching model that engages these children so that they want to be in school, they're happy to come and they're engaged in the activities. They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Well, I think I'm the old dog. I've been teaching for twenty-five years, and the program that I'm teaching now doesn't look anything at all like the program I would have taught twenty-five years ago, or even ten years ago.

The teaching practice is based on the needs of the children and the interests of the children. The program content and delivery that I deliver changes every year. As new things are happening, as we connect to the world around us, the program has to change.

I sort of came up with the title for this video that—"That Was Then and This Is Now". The focus of today is not on the "then" because I think we all know what that looked like. It was about students sitting in rows, quiet classrooms, teachers delivering the program, the program becoming very teacher-centred as opposed to children-centred. So we would teach the children, they would take notes, they would do some practice and then we would test. And then that would be the end of the instruction on that unit and we would move on.

The program looks nothing like that at all anymore. Students work in groups. Students work together collaboratively and it's very much the same as the workplace. And that's what we're trying to teach children, is that together we come up with good solutions to problems. Individually, yes we can come up with good ideas but together the ideas are a lot stronger. That deeper understanding is much easier for the children to grasp when they're working together.

The program that I'd like to talk about is basically twofold. The first part of the planning would go into my classroom motto, "I know you don't know, neither do I. What do you think?" And the other part, it's not about knowing; it's about thinking. Just about everything that happens in my classroom is about thinking. It's about developing questions, it's about taking a piece, say, in the literacy program, a piece of reading, developing questions, inquiring and problem solving. And then making critical judgments.

In the past, I think students basically just took the information that teachers gave them and regurgitated back what the teacher said or what they thought the teacher wanted to hear. And that's how they were evaluated. That's how they got their marks. In my classroom, I always say to the students, "It doesn't matter what I think. What do you think? What is your evidence and how you—can you support your opinion?"

So at Spencer Valley, we've been engaged in this model of learning that involves posing these deeper level questions, developing problems that have no right or wrong answers, and having the children inquire, find the resources. In 2013, students can get knowledge. Students can go to the Internet, students can read books, they can get facts, they can get knowledge. For us to be delivering that kind of a program in this day and age is not particularly beneficial. So the program is about developing thinking skills.

[02:56] In the past, we would look at curriculum expectations. We would see, “All right, this is what I need to teach.” We would decide how we’re going to teach it, and then we would deliver the program. My backwards mapping idea is starting with the resources that are engaging, starting with resources that we think children will be interested in, whether it’s a novel, whether it’s a newspaper, whether it’s a YouTube video, and taking the program from, from the resource backwards to the activities then that we’re going to do. And I say “we” because a lot of those activities are co-planned with the students, not necessarily something that I come up with and tell the students, “This is what you’re doing.”

Very often, we’ll look at something, as I say, whether it’s a YouTube video or a piece of literature and I’ll ask the students, you know, “Here are the things that we’ve discovered as we’ve talked about this together. What would you like to do with this?” So there is a lot of co-planning that can go into the activities that they do as a specific piece.

Then we connect it to the curriculum expectations. An example of that would be the piece that I did with my students at the beginning of January called Rewind 2012. When the students came back in January after the New Year, we talked about New Year’s and why that’s so important to many people. We talked about optimism and pessimism and the idea of some people are looking forward to the New Year, while other people are looking forward to seeing the old year out. We did a little questionnaire with the kids, and had them map out exactly what they thought.

The curriculum expectation ended up being Writing 1.2. I didn’t start out by saying, “All right boys and girls. Today we’re going to generate ideas about more challenging topics.” They came up with the topics and it developed into a graphic organizer of the students listing the things that they felt were the most important events of 2012. And then we got, through the reflecting, the relating, their points of view to a critical stance of why they were important. And again, they worked in groups and we were—after our curriculum expectation that really didn’t fall into place. I knew that I wanted to do something about Rewind 2012. I knew I wanted to do something with current events, because we talk about them in our classroom all the time. And then the curriculum expectations came out of that.

So that’s what I would consider the backwards mapping.

[END OF RECORDING – length, 05:17]