

## **Innovations in Thinking and Learning**

### **Jodie Howcroft – Family Engagement**

JODIE: So, as you know, we do inquiry in our classroom. And this last one we did about community, the kids thought that it would be a great idea to give parents homework. They thought it'd be, you know, the ultimate thing to come home and say, "Ha! Mom and dad, you've got homework." And so we wrote this -- these lists of questions up together, and you were asked to write answers with your children at home. And I'm just wondering if there were some rich conversations at home that happened? Did it help you in any way, sort of, know how to extend your kid's learning by seeing, like, the questions? "What is a community?" "What makes a great community?"

ANGELA: Lily was excited to bring homework home. Absolutely. And as soon as she got home she set it down, and we started talking about community starting here at school. And then just to see what she was aware of in the community. And then she started inquiring about all the other players in the community. The farmers, the volunteers at school. And then across the highway to the other communities and how they connect together.

JODIE: Good. So you had a conversation at home about it, which is wonderful. What about your family? Did you have a conversation at home about community?

TRICIA: We did. Ella's very passionate about inquiry. And she came home running off the bus saying, "You have homework! You have homework!" And we had a conversation that community's just not buildings or things, but it's really about people. And then the different types of people. So I loved having that conversation going beyond "How was your day?"

JODIE: And even as a result of this note that went home, we had a lot of people volunteer to come in with some expertise, to the classroom. And the knowledge-building circle that we had after these forms came in -- after the parent homework came in -- were so much richer because the kids had talked at home with their parents about it, and brought in that -- even that greater, deeper knowledge. And it was just so powerful when we sat down and talked. And they came with so much more, I guess, background knowledge. Much more schema, much more information than they would have just got from us having the conversation in the classroom. So it was wonderful that, you know, we were able to connect that way about our community.

What I'm finding in my classroom is the kids are constantly coming in and bringing things in that they've done at home. Not directed by me to do so; they just seem to be

very self-directed and motivated. And they have so many questions and so many things they want to learn about. And so they're going to home, and with the help from their families, they're doing their own research and bringing it in and sharing it with the class. Which is pretty amazing.

So Ella is one of those students that comes in quite often and tells me things that she's learned at home. And why do you love inquiry?

STUDENT: Because you can learn about types of different things. And it's very interesting.

JODIE: And what kinds of things have you seen Ella do at home? Or have you done something together at home for inquiry?

TRICIA: As we were going through one of her notebooks, we were talking about how we know where we get information. So I talked about going back through the notebook and saying, "Do we remember where we got this information?" So it was a good lesson on recording where we get information so we can go back and recall that later. We've made a couple trips to the library. The penguin project -- we went and got different books on penguins. And we've also done some learning on the internet about how we find good information.

JODIE: When you're done learning about one thing, you already know what you want to learn about next. It's great, though, to have that connection because at this age it's hard in class, sometimes, for them to get information from text or online. So the parents going and helping the kids find age-appropriate information is amazing and so wonderful. And just having conversations with your kids at home.

But Ella's so self-directed. She's always bringing in something and thinking about what she wants to learn about next. And really enjoys sharing her learning with the class. So, I have this wall behind me, and that's where I kind of honour all the inquiry that students have done at home. And she's had some -- many, many pieces that have been put up on the wall there. So, way to go, Ella.

TRICIA: I just -- I love to see it. I love to see her so excited about learning. And I love the fact that it's not restricted; that she can just kind of go where her interests take her. And I think that's part of the reason she loves it so much, is that it kind of seems limitless for her.

But I've just noticed sometimes her thoughtful comments and her processing and critical thinking has really, like, surprised me at this age. I mean, we're talking Grade 1. I really am so happy with her progress.

JODIE: Yeah. I think it's been good for Ella. I see, you know, just a lot of self-confidence, self-directed, she's motivated and engaged. And I think, like you said, it is because she -- there's that openness, and she has the choice and her voice is heard. So it's been great for her.

TRICIA: As a person that is employed as a researcher myself, I am ecstatic that my daughter comes home so passionate about wanting to learn and inquire about different topics.

She comes home and she is getting through her school bag, so excited to show me what the topic of her inquiry is for that day or that week. She is -- She never -- I mean, she's always been a good learner and excited to learn, but I've really noticed a spike in that type of behavior this year. And I really do believe it coincides with this inquiry-based learning that they're doing. And I don't have to prod her at all to want to learn. She just is so self-motivated to do it.

JODIE: So Lily's a student that has really benefited from inquiry. She just -- I think that her favorite aspect of inquiry -- or the favorite C for Lily -- is creativity. She's allowed to -- or she's enabled to show her learning in a creative way.

She made this wonderful box about global warming that had many, many admirers. She brought in this. This was completely done at home, not anything that we did at school, on whales. And those are just two of the many, many things that she's done this year to show her learning. And I think I've just seen so much self-confidence grow from her. She's become very self-directed. And loves sharing her learning. And it's just really kind of made her blossom as a student.

ANGELA: Yes.

JODIE: I don't know if you've found the same at home. It's --

ANGELA: Absolutely. I noticed her not only collaborating at home, but talking about how much she enjoys working with the other students to gather information. And to be able to express it not only with writing it down and talking about it, but to be able to physically create something.

She's been teaching us a lot actually. And opening up conversations that just grow and grow and grow.

I am noticing her confidence level rising up. And her longing to learn more.

JODIE: The other thing I've noticed about Lily is her citizenship. She has a real deep care for the environment and people in the world. And this has given her an opportunity to really explore that citizenship within her, and really deepen it.

Lily, you're really showing a lot of citizenship and care for the environment. Can you tell me of some things that you've been doing at home?

STUDENT: I've been planting more trees so we can have more fresh air.

JODIE: Wow, that's amazing. And did I hear that you were planting a special kind of tree at home?

STUDENT: Mm-hm.

JODIE: What kind of tree is that?

STUDENT: It's my avocado tree.

JODIE: An avocado tree!

STUDENT: It's about this big!

JODIE: Wow.

Do you guys remember talking about -- a little bit about community at home together? Did you have a conversation?

STUDENT: Yeah.

JODIE: Yeah? And did that help you understand a little bit more about what a community is?

STUDENT: Mm-hm.

JODIE: Yeah? And did that help --? Does it help you --? Do you find knowing a little bit about what we're talking about in class, are you able to make connections at home?

ANGELA: It's funny. It kind of zig-zags into environment, into animals, into the situation with the earth and pollution, to community and how our community is helping with all these things. I think it's really opened her eyes to how community does help with the schooling and the -- everything. The connections are strong.

JODIE: Yeah. Yeah, when you mention it, everything we kind of do kind of is culminating together. Coming together.

ANGELA: I love this because what I'm seeing is her driving herself to find the solutions and the answers to the questions she asks. And you know young kids, the questions are endless. So she is seeking answers before even coming to us.

Her confidence level has risen up. She has just got this spirit to learn. And she doesn't just stop at home -- at school. She races home. There's this need to learn more. Right? There's no time for TV; she is so busy, delved into these research projects. Whether they be as simple as seeds and how plants grow. Or is it --? It gets into bigger -- pollution. How the community works together. She's bright and eager.

It's remarkable. And it's been very quick, the transition too. From just Christmas. So this has been four months. Amazing.