



Enhancing Instruction in Inquiry-Based Early Literacy Classrooms

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Abstract:

Ontario's Kindergarten Program document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) advocates for student-directed and inquiry- and play-based pedagogies to support four- and five-year-old children's learning. In practice, educators' understanding and implementation of inquiry-based pedagogies varies considerably. Our study sought to bridge theory and practice through collaboration between a faculty of education and a local school board to support pre- and in-service educators' understanding of inquiry-based pedagogy. It also sought to help these teachers integrate opportunities for embedded literacy instruction. We used classroom observations, pre- and post-surveys and workshops to determine educator and teacher candidates' understanding of inquiry and early literacy. Overall, educators expressed a positive inclination towards inquiry-based pedagogy and early literacy instruction; however, their implementation of these varied. Through concrete learning experiences, reflection and

facilitation, educators' understanding improved and they began to implement ideas from the workshops into their practice. Our results highlight the need to improve training and support for kindergarten educators to enable them to implement inquiry-based pedagogies effectively and build vital literacy skills through embedded learning. This has direct implications for local and provincial policy and for children's ability to learn, build skills and become successful readers.

Keywords: kindergarten; inquiry; literacy; teacher education; professional development

References

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Biographical Notes

Meridith Lovell-Johnston is Associate Professor and Chair of Graduate Studies and Research in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University. Her research interests involve reading development, reading pedagogy and assessment, and educational technology.

Sonia Mastrangelo is Associate Professor and Graduate Co-ordinator in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University. She is also Editor of the *International Journal for Holistic Early Learning and Development*. Her main areas of research include self-regulation, mental health, cognitive-developmental systems theory, special and inclusive education, and developmentally appropriate practice.

Tracy McPhail has been a school and system principal for 18 years with the Simcoe County District School Board. She leads work regionally and provincially: in the early years, curriculum implementation and student success. Her focus is on fostering leadership and monitoring the impact of initiatives under her leadership.

Becky Kennedy is an early years facilitator with the Simcoe County District School Board. She has been teaching grades K-8 for 15 years and has a passion for integrating play and inquiry-based learning into all aspects of classroom programming.

Crystal Carbino is a registered early childhood educator and currently works as an early years facilitator for the Simcoe County District School Board. With 20 years of practice in the early years, Crystal has gained an enormous amount of experience teaching young children and facilitating professional development for educators.

Kelsey Robson is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University. Her research interests include early childhood education, the Reggio Emilia approach to education, child participation in research and Ontario's full day kindergarten program.