

## **Inquiry Buddies**

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**October 1, 2017**

### **Preamble regarding the objectives of TMC5 and Culturally Relevant and Responsive School Library Learning Commons:**

Our teacher inquiry related to three of the four pedagogies of New Pedagogies for Deeper Learning (NPDL.) Learning partnerships, learning environments and pedagogical practices were prominent in our group and partnership decisions to make learning relevant and responsive to students. Learning Partnerships were formed between teachers and their classes and between their Inquiry Buddy classes. Learning environments included hallways, split classrooms, local forest areas and our library. Challenges (provocations) were given to students where they had to decide how to achieve successful results. Pedagogical practices continued our school's tradition of involving teachers who wanted to take part in our inquiry, involving administration to share what we were doing and to consider the 'principal' point of view and involving students through classroom discussions and individual feedback.

We learned and confirmed better ways to have students work and learn together. A key finding (that we expected) was learning would be most relevant when students could make choices regarding their own learning. Regular feedback to students (individual and partners) and whole class discussions and pre-meeting planning further demonstrated to students that teachers observed and listened to them to be responsive to what they were working on. Our study didn't connect to addressing specific cultural backgrounds. However, by getting down to the individual students, we demonstrated that we valued students as people and as learners.

The reader could read the **Introduction** and jump to the **Summary**. However, the **Inquiry Buddies Recount** section provides the contextual stories and golden evidence that explain where we drew our conclusions and recommendations from.

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## **Introduction:**

This **Inquiry Buddies** paper details evidence in anecdotal form from teachers, administrators and students regarding collaborative inquiry and challenges primarily in the 2016-17 school year at Ardagh Bluffs Public School. This paper demonstrates that varied approaches can lead to positive learning and social/emotional achievements for students and staff.

Inquiry Buddies was meant to be relevant and responsive to the individual student. The program provided opportunities for students to work with peers and younger/older students in engaging STEAM and environmental challenges. Another one of our goals was to get staff and students in Grades 2 to 5 who had taken part in classroom inquiry based learning but had not gotten their "hands dirty" in terms of being Inquiry Buddies with other grades.

Khai Ma attained Teacher Learning Co-op (TLC) funding through Ontario Teachers Federation, through a proposal that outlined our objectives for the school year 2016-17:

Reflecting on our collective experiences, we identified that for our older students to learn and enjoy their partnering with primary students we had to provide them with experiences where they could create and take away learning at their own level, while still working along with their younger peers.

By providing materials and STEAM challenges for creative expression of knowledge and problem solving we will create environments where students are encouraged to "think to learn and learn to think." These inquiries will provide students with opportunities to further develop essential life skills such as collaboration and critical thinking. Through their investigations we believe older students will provide a rich model for problem solving and inspiration for the younger students. We envision both sets of students will be engaged and enjoy their relationship.

**Ma:** The Kindergarten program is in its 5th year with inquiry and play based learning at Ardagh Bluffs. The Intermediate division was also exposed to the inquiry based learning through the Heritage Fair projects and the 2013 Social Studies, History and Geography curriculum and wider adoption of inquiry throughout the curriculum. Pairing older students with Kindies seemed to be a right fit seeing as they are well immersed in the process. One of our goals was to get staff and students in Grades 2 to 5 who had heard of the inquiry based learning but had not gotten their "hands dirty" in this student driven, ever evolving process.

**Harris:** When we started planning this inquiry, I thought I could be in demand by my colleagues to work with them and their classes and that the library would be booked for a lot of these meetings between the Buddy classes. About half way into our first Teacher Collaborative meeting, the teacher partnerships kind of ‘disappeared’ to work together. However, this was NOT the teacher librarian being shut out.

**Ma:** Certainly NOT. Harris and Justin Weller, Grade 7 teacher initiated student inquiry through Heritage Fair when Ardagh Bluffs opened in 2010. The Intermediate division was further immersed into inquiry based learning by wider applications of inquiry throughout the curriculum. The Junior division also began exploring inquiry through Heritage Fair participation and with the 2013 Ontario Ministry of Education Social Studies, History and Geography Curriculum they began spreading inquiry to other areas of curriculum. This document helped Primary spread inquiry too. The Kindergarten program is in its 5th year with inquiry and play based learning at Ardagh Bluffs. With support and encouragement from Harris and our Principals, my colleagues and I had the confidence and understandings about inquiry over the past years to go ahead on our own.

Support and encouragement from the teacher librarian continued through our Inquiry Group debriefs and planning meetings and discussions about ongoing student engagement in their challenges.

Depending on a school’s comfort with inquiry processes, there may be a much greater need for teacher librarian supports as we appreciated in our school’s beginning inquiry works.

**Harris:** From the following recounts, the quality and purposefulness of reflection and communication between the partners stood out. When the Inquiry Buddy team’s teachers met to share and debrief together, they then moved on ready to plan new challenges for their students and ready to adjust as necessary. It was clear that changes and redirects for some students was done during feedback sessions and during student work on their challenges. This was feedback as learning at its finest.

Our school, Ardagh Bluffs, has a rich history of introducing inquiry into many curriculum areas. As Ma mentioned, this enabled our team to start where they did. The teachers didn’t need to listen to me tell them stuff they already knew.

## **Inquiry Buddies Recounts**

### **Observations of classroom teachers, support staff and students**

**Dana Croteau - Kindergarten teacher, Sarah Ruscica - DECE (Designated Early Childhood Educator), Jamie Taylor - Grades 8, 5 and 7&8 teacher**

#### **Dana Croteau, Kindergarten teacher:**

In 2015-16, Jamie Taylor, Grade 8 teacher, started our buddies inquiries by using a ‘wonder box;’ a random item was placed in a box and students asked questions to guess it was. The Grade 8’s then brought in an item and hid it from their buddies and the little buddies worked on trying to guess the item by asking questions about it. (We progressed from simple Yes/No questions to questions with greater details and modelled open ended questions throughout the year.) We moved onto other activities such as nature walks with observations and questions to big buddies teaching little buddies simple coding games and using robots such as Dot and Dash.

Regularly, we focused on the student relationships and adjusted partnerships when required.

The biggest negative issue for some students was that some Grade 8s would ‘take over’ the activities, resulting in some of the Kindergartens acted immaturely (almost baby like) to gain attention from their buddy. We had to discuss these situations individually and as a group and come up with strategies such as asking the younger buddy what they thought needed to be done and physically moving back to let the younger buddy get hands on with the activity.

During the 2016-2017 school year we partnered with Taylor’s class again; now it was a Grade 5 class. We moved to challenge based tasks. For example, create a bridge for a toy car using the structure blocks. (Editor: Dana and Jamie decided to have both buddies work on the same challenges. They decided it would be too difficult to come up with similar/parallel challenges.)

**Harris:** Technically, this partnership did not meet the objective of having parallel challenges at student levels. That was a very small consideration. We were thrilled that these teachers took on a new challenge for themselves at their level of comfort. Taylor and Croteau adjusted as required. They focused on student well-being and academic achievement. And importantly, they developed confidence to further their own risk taking and professional development. In the spring of 2017, Taylor submitted and received approval for a TLLP proposal for Phenomenon Based Learning. Implementation with Intermediate students began the first school day of 2017-18. This is an excellent example of what can happen when we create the environment where teachers are encouraged and supported to experiment and push their comfort zones to better the learning environment and achievements of students.

**Croteau:** A new issue was some Grade 5s acted immaturely and argued with the Kindergartens over materials. We worked with these individuals, and in one situation Taylor had to regularly monitor and provide appropriate feedback.

Thinking about it now, it would have been more beneficial to create a challenge activity where they could work together but each have a specific separate task. That way the Kindergarten students would have been challenged and would have been more likely to participate than watch and look.

Inquiry Buddies was beneficial in terms of working on collaboration as well as problem solving for both little and big buddies and for their teachers.

**Harris:** Collaboration to solve problems in the work environment are highly desirable qualities in future employees (World Economic Forum 07 March 2017 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/in-the-workplace-of-the-future-these-are-the-skills-employers-want> ), AND they are important qualities for children to have now because they live in an environment with challenges and problems that require solving.

**Harris:** While Croteau and Taylor noticed some poor behaviours, these incidents reflected specific individuals and the teachers took appropriate actions. The benefits for the many far outweigh the classroom management requirements of a few. Weller and Taylor commented that for many of their behaviorally challenged students, this inquiry approach greatly reduced inappropriate behaviours. Some of their students commented how they really enjoyed working with the younger/older students.

**Ruscica:** A highlight was with the Grade 8s while trying to teach and learn about how to ask good open-ended questions. We placed different pumpkins and gourds in the yard. After finding something of interest, the partners had to come up with descriptions and open-ended questions. While walking around I heard a Grade 8 student telling their Kindergarten buddy that there were seeds inside. I asked, "How do you know there are seeds inside?"

He said, "I'm guessing."

I said, "How could you find out what's inside?"

He sarcastically said, "Smash it."

I said, "Ok."

The look of shock on the student's face was unforgettable. After several times of making sure I was ok with him smashing it, he did, and it opened an entire new set of questions from the Kindies. I had the Grade 8 explain to the Kindy when and why it was ok to smash the pumpkin.

This helped to show there are multiple choices/strategies to solve problems and to learn.

**Taylor:** A couple of my kids showed exceptional growth. Like Croteau said, a handful didn't seem to have the emotional maturity to deal with conflict with Kindergartners, but a couple really stepped up.

For some, they seemed to act differently, a little more responsible, a little calmer, and a little more mature while working with the Kindergarten students. They carried that back to the class as well. There were three students in particular that had a transformation whenever they entered the Kindergarten class.

One would work with a younger kid and always be on task and be good at working together and helping the younger kid to stay on task. However, he couldn't do this for himself for 10 minutes in his own class unless he was engaged with computers or other technology.

Another, was very kind, encouraging and supportive with younger kids, but with peers and self he lacked self-regulation. He needed support with being empathetic to his peers, so he didn't see them as competitors.

For another, buddies provided an outlet where he demonstrated 100% empathy with younger ones. With his peer group, hands on behaviours were inevitable. I believe the buddies experience encouraged him to be a lunch helper with Kindergarten students this year. Ma, the Kindergarten teacher says this student is excellent in terms of responsibility, helpfulness, gentleness and using humour. This was totally unexpected and is amazing to see him involved in this way.

**Harris:** Upon reflection and discussion, Taylor and I see this as enacting the mission of Roots of Empathy. <http://www.rootsofempathy.org/> Roots of Empathy's mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults. Part of this is accomplished by focusing on children interacting and engaging with babies and young children and the positive experiences instead of focusing on bullying and aggressive behaviours of the same children. We will be sharing this insight with staff soon.

**Justin Weller, Former Grades 6, 7 & 8 teacher, now Vice Principal, Khai Ma, Kindergarten teacher, Kendall former Grade 7 student:**

**Weller:** I had several classes where my students and I muddled through inquiry based learning together. We explored, evaluated, discussed, questioned, learned, and thought about the paths we took together. Our combined effort of student and teacher made problems less daunting. Stress was reduced rather than increased. Motivation improved. Learning increased. Then we paired off with a younger class to help them through the process. Introducing inquiry to

Kindergarten students creates a generation of students far more prepared to think and learn than the one previous. When they progress to the older grades, they in turn will work with the next generation.

**Ma:** Pairing older students with Kindies seemed to be a right fit seeing as they are well immersed in the inquiry based learning process.

At the beginning of the year we provided our Kindies with opportunities for STEAM activities through provocations (centres) with Keva blocks, Lego, and Wooden Hollow Blocks. Then we incorporated simple team challenges amongst the Kindies to introduce the concept of working together with a friend towards a goal. Our next step was to match up individuals who normally wouldn't play together (Year 1 with Year 2 for an example) and give them a STEAM challenge like build the highest structure possible with 20 Keva Blocks.

Our first meeting with Weller's class (Grade 6 and 7) involved a hike to the forest next to our school to look for a Geocache and garbage pickup. We gave students the choice of choosing their partners, monitored their progress and made changes accordingly. The neutral setting of the forest gave the kids an opportunity to establish connections while working towards a common goal. I had worked with some of Weller's students in the previous year as their SERT. It was very surprising to see that some of the self-centered students I had worked with last year were suddenly empathetic towards the Kindies.

In the winter we had a sudden snow storm. The intermediate classes were going out to shovel neighbourhood driveways. They invited us to join them and it was something that very few of the Kindergarten had ever experienced. They came back with lots of questions mostly about "What are we doing this for?" "Why are the big kids shoveling other people's driveways?" This started a discussion about helping our others in the community. It was funny because one of the students in my class lives on the street that we shoveled that day and he received first-hand knowledge of the rewards of helping others.

**Weller:** At first, Inquiry Buddies wasn't really inquiry for the Kindergarten students at all. The older students took over and were simply telling the younger ones what to do. They had become smaller versions of myself, imparting wisdom to the masses. That is until we had a further epiphany. What if the older students weren't actually working on the same tasks as the younger ones? What if they had similar parallel tasks that the older students may in fact not have experienced before? Now both were responsible for their own similar projects that allowed discussion, but prevented the older students from hijacking the project. It would force the younger students to think as well. The older students

needed to be trained how to share and talk with the younger students, but now both groups were responsible for their own tasks.

**Ma:** At one meeting, we had planned for a parallel challenge for both groups. I challenged my Kindies to build a bridge of Keva Blocks that would be built over strip of construction paper 10 cm wide. Weller's class was challenged with the task with building a bridge over a river that was 8.5 inches wide (width of standard printer paper.) We let them choose partners again, and they seemed to gravitate to the same partners as before. The partners worked in parallel, giving each other feedback, sometimes redirecting each other. Most groups were successful with the Kindergarten task while fewer were successful with the more difficult challenge. Some older students decided to help their partners with the easier task, then they tackled the bigger challenge. This was to solve the problem of the limited number of blocks available (we had only a few boxes of Keva available in the school), a few groups using this strategy were met with time constraints. I saw one group using the same construction methods for both challenges, just in different scales. Looking back, I would allow more time and resources (use of Keva, Lego, and Hollow blocks in this challenge).

**Weller:** Thinking was being modelled rather than knowledge projected. The younger students were learning skills that would serve them for the rest of their lives; skills that they in turn would model to the next generation. The system was changing, using the massive resource that sat in front of us every day; a resource that many teachers, including myself, ignored for generations; the students themselves. Individually they are smart, resilient, creative, and eager. Working, together, helping each other, questioning collaboratively, and investigating jointly they are incredible. Let them try, you will see.

**Kendall, as an involved Grade 7 student:** I liked how we went out to the forest bonding with little ones, showing what we would do. One of my favourite activities was geocaching - sort of an outdoor scavenger hunt. It was neat to do. I think we should do Inquiry Buddies more because it's important for younger kids to see what it's like to be older. It's important to connect with others. It went so well, holding their hand going across the street. I think we inspired, encouraged, and helped younger kids progress in a way that teachers don't -- teachers are the ones in front of the class saying stuff, writing stuff on the board ... We are hands on and describing real things in the real world with our younger buddies.

Teachers don't normally do this out in the woods stuff with their class because the little kids take off everywhere, but with the older buddies, the teachers knew we could be trusted to care for the Kindergarten kids and keep them with us -



they like us, and I think they may be kind of scared of us even though we don't scare them.

I learned that little kids look up to the older grades a lot. We have a big impact on little ones. For example, we dabbled and then they did. (Editor, dabbling here is the dance move.) When we showed them a good example, they followed that too. I liked this.

Even with dual tasks, I thought we had already learned most of that in the past (e.g., structures) so I was more focussed on helping the younger buddies. Why wouldn't you want to do that more often?

**Ma:** From a Kindergarten educator's standpoint, the Inquiry Buddies project helped me and my DECE partner, Amanda Webb address the Four Frames of the Kindergarten Program. We could see key learning points for Belonging and Contributing early in the year, then look at their Self-Regulation and Well Being as they established connections with their partners during the year. As for Problem Solving, Innovation and Demonstration of Language and Mathematical behaviour, we could see their growth throughout the year with these challenges and it helped to guide our instruction when we are in the regular classroom.

One of my female students made a connection with a Grade 7 boy. She was a little shy and reserved. When they were initially partnered up, I noticed that the Grade 7 boy was patient and gentle when talking to her. He could get her to open up and share her ideas during the challenges. We had a lull in the meetings due to term 1 report cards. This same quiet and reserved little girl was then often asking me when the next inquiry buddies time was going to happen. This program works for both the older and younger students.

**Jennifer Hoehn Grade 2 teacher, Desiree Miskimmon Grade 8 Extended French teacher, Kadie former Grade 8 student**

**Miskimmon:** Hoehn and I started with a parallel task activity where the students made paper airplanes and both the Grade 8s and Grade 2s had to individually make a plane that could fly a certain distance and potentially carry a load. Students got to know one another, and we built the planes inside and experimented with different types of loads outside, which was a comfortable and fun way for the students to mingle.

Next, we met to work with Snap Circuits. This gave us the opportunity to partner some students up based on pairings that we thought may work for a future project. The Grade 8s were asked to guide and teach Grade 2s by asking them questions, yet to ensure that if they had any questions, they too should

discuss and explore them with the Grade 2s. We thought this would enhance the Grade 8s engagement. During this activity, we noticed high engagement from all students as the activity allowed the Grade 2s to enjoy trying things on their own and ask for help when necessary. Also, this allowed the Grade 8s to explore more difficult circuits and further challenge themselves while the Grade 2s were interested in another aspect. We noticed a lot of rich questions being asked by both grades and we observed the Grade 8s enjoying the leadership aspect of being not only a guide but a "builder" as well. The Grade 2s often used and explained their own strategies to the Grade 8s which opened up/ diversified their role as well.

We then created groups for our next project, The Backyard Oasis. Students were asked to create a backyard design, which included a range of criteria yet encouraged a lot of imagination. Some students had two-storey decks with slides and fountains while others created outdoor lights using circuits. Conversations included discussions about distance and measuring as the students had to build within a certain perimeter and create a diagram that was to scale. For the older students, we prompted them to think about volume and circumference when creating a pool or hot tub and all students were asked questions about materials used, discussing insulation and the quality of different attributes of the yard. This project lasted just over a week and we met every day which enhanced focus as students remembered ideas from the previous day -- this helped project organization and kept progress moving forward. The student groups presented the different oases at the end with all buddies sharing what was presented.

Our last project was Sphero Track and Field where students worked in teams to try and program a Sphero robot to successfully complete an assigned Track and Field activity. The coding aspect was difficult for many students which provided an opportunity for a lot of rich discussion and encouraged perseverance. The students enjoyed watching the other groups perform the activity at the end, which recreated the atmosphere of a Track and Field meet. This activity really encouraged all ages to work as a team. We noticed several younger buddies guiding the older buddies and the older buddies grew more and more comfortable with taking the feedback, and often complimented the younger buddies on their success. Both grades worked together as a team and when someone was frustrated, someone else was ready to take over.

In conclusion, Inquiry Buddies provided the students with the opportunity to engage in four diverse projects involving a variety of skills. Students did not do the same thing continuously when we met, keeping the idea of buddies refreshing. The attitude among the students was positive as they knew each time we met we were doing something different and both grades were equally involved, which really provoked more engagement from the Grade 8s compared

to previous years. The projects encouraged all students to support one another, work respectfully through conflict and enhance the creative mind. They explored, built, shared, presented and persevered, choosing and reflecting on their use of resources and tools.

**Harris:** Hoehn and Miskimmon were comfortable with the challenges of meshing their classes together and with working together. Both teachers had considerable teaching experience with inquiry. Their recount demonstrates the benefits of regularly reflecting about our teaching practice and adjusting to improve learning and understanding for our students ... and for ourselves.

**Miskimmon:** As a teacher and/or facilitator, it was enjoyable to watch the student engagement and reflect on what worked and what didn't. It was fun to observe students in a creative environment and listen to the questions and rich communication that was taking place. It was so nice to have a flexible and amazing partner to collaborate and schedule time with and I do feel that this is very important to the whole process. It also provided me with the time to discuss creative concepts with a colleague which in turn further enriched my learning. Inquiry Buddies fit nicely into the year, providing my students with the opportunity to participate in different activities that I may have found difficult to execute otherwise.

**Hoehn:** As a teacher and/or facilitator, it was amazing seeing the growth of the Grade 2 students. I had one student who nearly missed the entire linear measurement unit. The Backyard Oasis activity gave me the opportunity to teach this student about linear measurement in a way that they could use the information immediately. With the regular model of teaching math, that may not have been possible. The Grade 2 students learned a lot from the Grade 8 students. They got to see what they will be learning in the future at our school and were excited about it -- I think the excitement in the Grade 8s was contagious. This collaboration with Miskimmon also allowed me to bring math to our conversations ... Mathematics was/is a focus at Ardagh, and last school year I was a part of a TLLP to leverage technology in Mathematics. As the students worked on their challenges, we teachers saw learning skills in a new light and beyond providing feedback during working sessions, we could gather authentic data to help with the learning skills section of the report card. I liked not having buddies weekly because it allowed us to focus on the challenge and not allow the students to lose their focus and excitement about what they are working on.

**Harris:** Hoehn's comment about learning skills data for report cards is important. Learning skills are the essential part of a report card as they provide a summation of how a student learns. Being able to discuss observations with a highly capable teaching colleague while students are in action provides the teacher with another's point of view as well. Focussing on feedback during the inquiry process also provides opportunities for assessment for learning, assessment as learning and assessment of learning.

**Kadie, former Grade 8 student:** Inquiry buddies was a good way to get lower and higher grades working together because it incorporated something that both the older students and younger students could do be it drawing, building with Popsicle sticks, or learning to code. I also liked how we did Inquiry Buddies in Grade 7, where the younger student thought of a question and we helped them put together a presentation to answer their question.

Inquiry Buddies benefits both younger and older students because it gives younger students a chance to interact and learn from the older students, and it gives the older students a chance to practice their leadership and teaching skills.

I think the next steps for Inquiry Buddies is to make it a little more open to the younger students. I personally had an easier time working on the Inquiry Buddies project in Grade 7 when the younger students got to choose their topic. I believe this is because they were working on something that they were interested in.

**Harris:** Hoehn and Ma cautioned that younger students often don't have the capacity to judge what needs to be done in certain learning situations. An undertaking as Kadie suggests would require a keen understanding of determining what individual students are capable of. Near daily conferencing and feedback sessions may be required. Kadie's idea has merit as many of us like owning our choices. Teachers considering this should consider their comfort and determine where their students are with respect to the Gradual Release of Responsibility model.

**Harris:** Kadie also wrote about having to be much more of a teacher and guide with her Inquiry Buddy than she observed with other classmates. Kadie recognized that the student pairings dictated the level of coaching/observing/doing required. This demonstrates the importance of teachers monitoring the student pairings and of preparing the older buddies for various situations.

**Allison Thomas, Principal of Ardagh Bluffs PS** (recently retired): There are many challenges when teachers and classrooms want to plan and work together. For planning, allocating money to facilitate the learning amongst teachers can always be a challenge. As a Principal, when a teacher or group of teachers initiate an interest that promotes learning and development of relationships among varying groups of students it is hard not to support this, having the additional money from the TLC allowed them to meet - this was key as the time was needed to blaze the trail.

Some teams specifically included Kindergarten classes; it was important to ensure the DECEs were included in conversations and valued as learning partners. Knowing how to support/help the group throughout the inquiry process was challenging as was providing input and feedback because it was incredibly individual and looked so different for each partnership class grouping. Our lead teachers were at different stages in process and different mindsets of process. It was important to ensure that although it looked different amongst partnerships, there was a common focus and purpose = betterment of student learning academically and socially and emotionally. The key commonalities:

- allowing them to take the lead and be independent in doing so, having faith and trust in them
- allowing the group to self-direct the meetings and determine the direction of the conversations
- purpose of combined classrooms needed to be clearly defined
- to develop positive relationships, future mentors, higher level thinking and learning for Kindergarten students -- facilitated by older students; which would require pre and post meeting discussions about how to best work with younger students
- challenges would have to be defined and developed to better engage older students
- develop an inquiry timeline that works for students and teachers and fits the inquiry challenge (weekly meetings often saw Kindergarten students forget or lose interest in their topic, finding times to fit teacher schedules to accommodate daily meetings for a few days to more than a week was also difficult)
- ensure gradual release of responsibility is developed so Kindergarten and younger students can then start to proceed independently - this is the ultimate goal for this project. Ma says, "We've had a few students achieve this. One for example started an inquiry about airplanes and flight last year. Others in the class were hooked into his enthusiasm and the Kindergarten class was transformed into an airport. Students are given as much responsibility as they can manage. It is an ongoing process.

**Thomas:** I am proud of our Ardagh teachers for taking on this initiative. Clearly this important work matters to the development of our students and to the development of our teachers.

### **Summary:**

The observations of students, staff and our principal demonstrate that collaboration between and amongst the various people in any school is an excellent way to develop learning skills, academic goals and life goals. Our findings regarding Inquiry Buddies will be shared at a staff meeting and we will continue to reflect to improve how we interact with each other.

Each pairing of teachers approached this teacher inquiry with their own needs, abilities and comfort in mind and came away with a better understanding of collaboration with peers and amongst their students.

### **What We Learned by Working Together**

**We learned we are better together.**

**We = students + teaching staff + administrators + \*families\***

\* future Inquiry Buddies endeavours should consider including family views and input to further broaden the scope and success of this program.

Learning partnerships, learning environments and pedagogical practices were enhanced for every teacher who took part in this teacher inquiry. All involved knew the overarching goal was improving student academic achievement and social and emotional development. Frank exchange of views in a supportive, open and encouraging environment truly helped each teacher refine reflection to improve personal planning for next steps.

To paraphrase student Kendall, students are the key and actions involving students should be taken with them in mind. AND, students should be involved in deciding what the actions will be as much as is possible.

### **Inquiry Buddy Recommendations:**

Find a partner class (if the grades are closer it is more likely that student competencies are similar - is that what you want? - Examples that worked well at Ardagh Bluffs Gr 5 & K, Gr 2 & 8, Gr 3 & 8

Plan with your teacher colleague and modify as your classes progress through the year. Include the DECE/ECE if working with Kindergarten and involve Educational Assistants for their insights about specific students. Be polite and candid if the process isn't meeting your needs or your class' needs.

Discuss with your students how to work and talk with older/younger buddies. Consider that some students may require specific discussions about specific buddies. For example, a student with special needs may require modifications or other strategies. Have these discussions before the meetings begin and debrief after buddy meetings to better meet student needs and concerns and to spread good ideas.

Use your paired time to observe and talk with the kids. Provide feedback during the paired sessions where required. Consider doing shared observations with your teaching colleague to better enable shared reflections later.

Consider scheduling daily/frequent buddy meetings until a 'project' is completed. This keeps students engaged and keeps memory/attention focused. Plan for a whole week of visits rather than a weekly or bi-weekly visit to provide opportunities to establish connections and relationships.

Consider the time frame to begin the next Inquiry Buddies session. Too often may take on a baby-sitting flavour. Too seldom may extinguish positive relationships.

Make time for student reflections - modelled whole class, small group and individual

Select what seems best - consider regular debriefing with whole class (provides thought for students who are developing reflective/meta-cognitive abilities)

Plan to meet in an area that can accommodate a large group such as outside yard, library, or the gym. If limited for space, consider trying a Google Hangout with your buddy classroom. Involve your teacher librarian when an extra teacher is required.

Work with your teacher librarian when you need to impart specific skills such as research to your students. Work with your teacher librarian when you want another person to observe and provide another point of view.

Be creative with resources. Look to the community for support with finding material resources such as wood, nuts and bolts, plumbing fittings, and parts. Check materials for safety considerations. As well, send out a feeler for technical resources from individuals such as engineers, computer techs, media specialists.

Lobby your principal for funding for release time by highlighting the learning benefits to your students and the positive public relations from the community. Apply for various grants from teacher federations, provincial and territorial governments and other organizations.

The time to start is now.

Have fun with your colleagues and students. This authentic and engaging work should be exciting for you too.