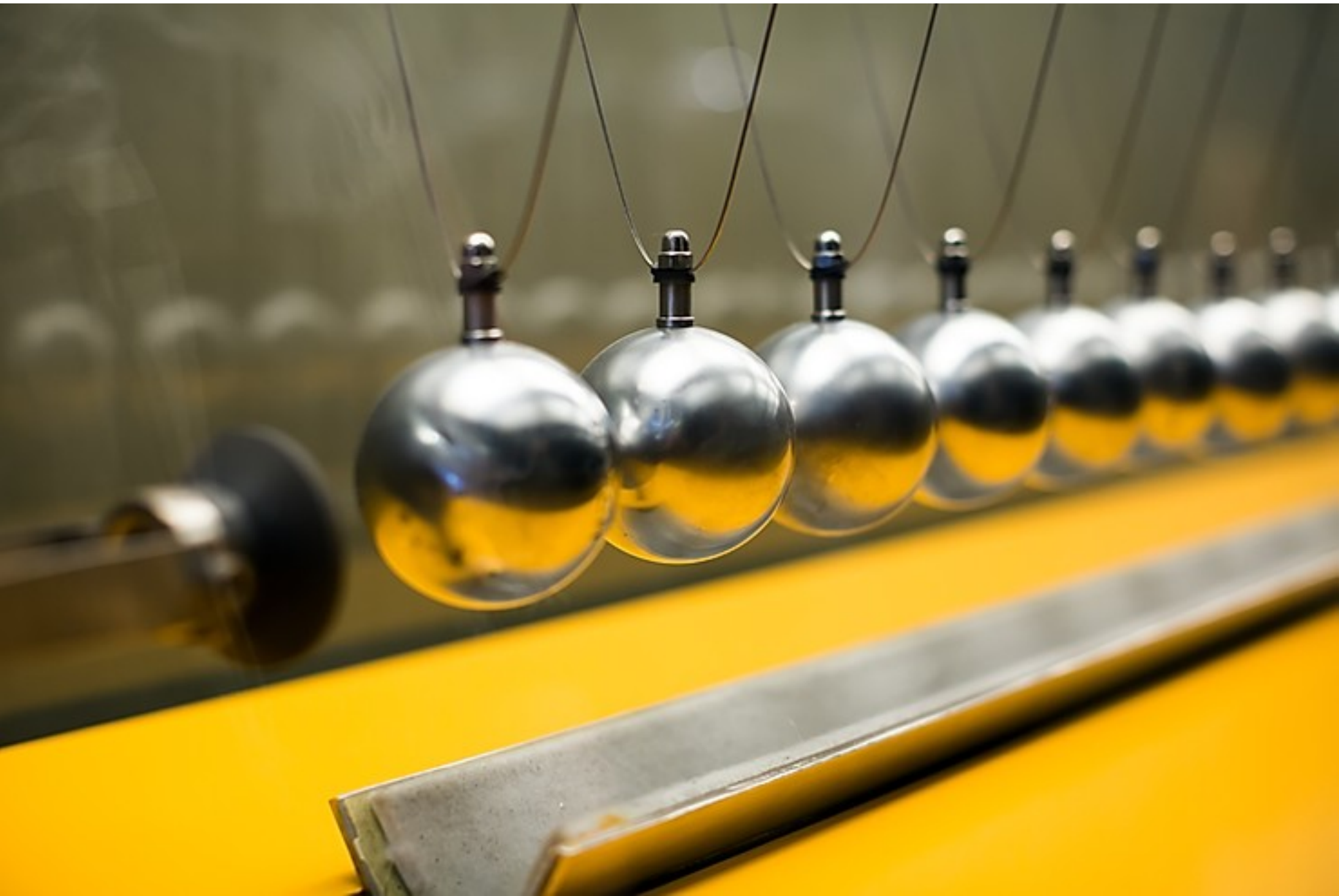


11 minutes ago · 7 min read

# NOW MORE THAN EVER ....

## Helping Parents Cope During a Pandemic



Parents are our students’ first teachers and now their role as teachers is more important than ever! While under duress, parents must be let in on the secrets of how we teach that works best. Most parents and caregivers are at home now, under pressure because they have been laid off, lost their jobs or because they are working from home. In each of these cases, they now also have their children with them – constantly. We may be able to reduce some of that extra pressure by helping them to understand some guiding principles of teaching and

learning that we use every day:

1. **Learning is fun;**
2. **Learning is best accomplished when it is relevant, meaningful, and hands-on;**
3. **Learning can be in short bursts with breaks for snacks, drinks, exercise, not sitting for hours;**
4. **Learning is safe, risk-free, adventurous and sparks curiosity;**
5. **Learning is a social process that must include Talk;**
6. **Reading together, every day and every kind of material, is gratifying, important and a bonding process. Writing daily can be fun when art is included;**
7. **Learning can be all around the house as exploration; discovery through inquiry is learning.**

## 1. Reading

The importance of Literacy surpasses any moral imperative we individually or collectively may have. Literacy is freedom and the foundation of democracy. It is every student's right to learn to read, write, do mathematics, and think critically. Critical literacy is the capacity for a particular type of thinking that involves looking beyond the literal meaning of text to observe what is present and what is



missing, in order to analyze and evaluate the text's complete meaning and the author's intent. Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking in focusing on issues relating to fairness, equity, and social justice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Here are some questions to ask your children while reading a text together:

- Knowing what we know about who created this text, how do we expect the author to treat the subject matter?
- Why are we reading or viewing this text?
- What do we already know about the text based on what we can see (Pictures/illustrations)?
- What do the images/pictures suggest? What do the words suggest?
- What kind of language is used (words are used) in this text? What is its influence on the message?
- What do you interpret to be the author's intent? Explain.
- With whom do you think the author wants us to identify or sympathize?

- Who is the target audience? How do you know?
- How might different people interpret the message of the text?
- How are children, adolescents, young adults or parents represented in this text? Are boys or girls represented differently?
- What has been left out of this text that you would like to have seen included?
- Is the text fair? Does it treat the subject matter/sides/parties fairly?
- Who benefits from this text? Who does not?
- What does the reader/viewer need to know ahead of time in order to really understand this text?
- What is real in the text? What is not real? How is reality constructed?
- How might the creator of this text view the world? Why do you think that?

Source: Compiled by Michelle Sharratt, University of Toronto, 2015.

## 2. Writing



After watching students as struggling readers come alive with daily opportunities to write—about the ordinary things that were important to them—I became a firm believer that if you can read you can write, and if you can write you can read. Most students can't wait to write about real-life happenings—that are only sensational to them, like David's "My

New Hair Cut" or Jeffery's "We Went Tobogganing Last Night," and so on. Drawing the pictures and 'publishing' (stapling a booklet together) empowers writers.

The power of writing is not to be dismissed. The audience and purpose for writing across the subject areas has to be authentic and relevant to our student writers. In science, geography, or mathematics, the ability to write detailed observations, stages of erosion, or steps in the solution to a problem promotes critical thinking and reasoning.

## 3. Inquiry

Giving parents and students permission to inquire together is giving them permission to explore, create, try and fail, investigate, and discover new knowledge. They need collective permission to revel in the unveiling of new facts, opinions, and shifts in understanding that result when each moves from their individual prior knowledge to commonly understood new knowledge. Finding new facts is enhanced by digital media tools, search tools and social networking platforms, so parents must find ways to enable students to communicate in these ways, and to join them in a continued dialogue about both what new facts they have found, and the use of digital tools as enablers of their learning. Continuing changes in the nature and functionality of these tools must be part of every parent's understanding of modern



learning and in protection of their child's openness to learning and critical thinking (in personal conversation with Todd Wright, 2020).

**Some great links for parents/families/caregivers are:**

<https://teachingkidsnews.com/>

<https://www.tvokids.com/school-age/games>

<https://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc2/>

<https://www.uniteforliteracy.com/>

<https://www.storylineonline.net/>

<https://www.getepic.com/>

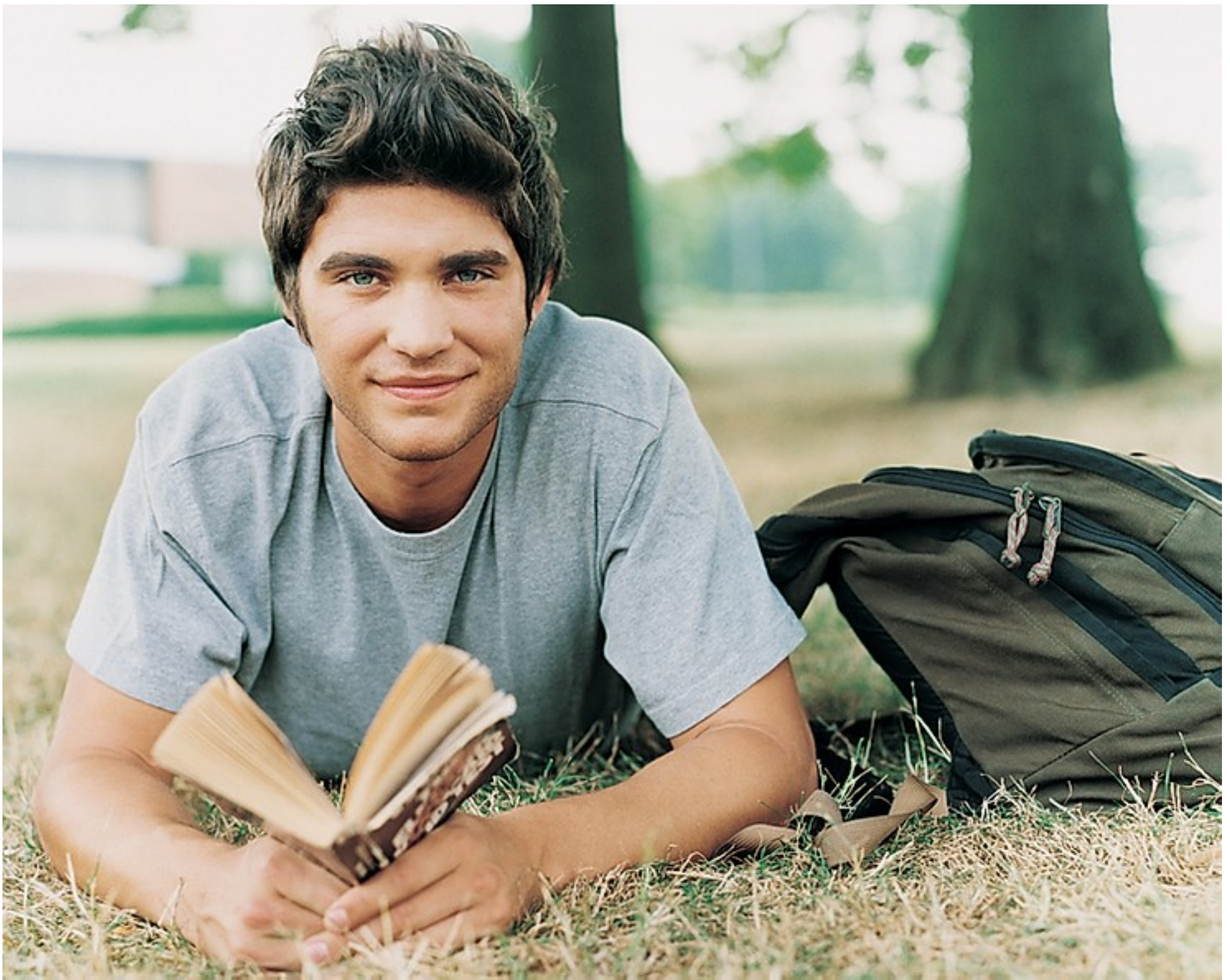


For a parent/caregiver assisting a child or children, it is important to understand what inquiry is. Inquiry involves processes or steps and results in products of learning that require that students think “hard”. Why? The hard thinking is done through specific inquiry processes. The outcome of the hard thinking within the processes is that students find their own solutions to problems (or learn new knowledge), but more importantly, they develop the life-long skills of working together: collaboration, real communication, and honest peer and self-assessment through Descriptive Feedback. These are very real family skills of working together – this in itself is another reason for parents /caregivers to be encouraged to understand the Inquiry process.

Inquiry has six assessment “for” and “as” learning components:

1. deconstructed learning intentions, co-created big ideas, and essential questions (What am I Learning? Why?)
2. co-constructed, accumulated Success Criteria (How am I doing/going? How do I know what will make my work better?)
3. specific Descriptive Feedback (How do I know how I am doing/going?)
4. peer- and self-assessment (How can I/we improve?)
5. individual goal setting (What are my next steps?)
6. robust learning tasks (Where can I go for help?)





These stages are taught. Inquiry has to be seen to be, and must be treated as a “process,” like a science experiment or writing an expository paragraph. The stages will never be in lock-step. The hard part for parents/caregivers can be the messiness of inquiry. It is important to be a nimble parent who can gauge when to let their children lead research, when to ask reflective questions without intruding, and when to jump in with a “just-in-time” lesson. This explains why inquiry is often represented diagrammatically by spirals or a helix, as in Figure 6.4, because, indeed, it is often two steps forward and three sideways. Don’t panic – try to establish structure and routine within the inquiry process. It is important as parents continue to embrace learning throughout the inquiry process.

#### The Six Stages in a Student-Led Inquiry for Parents

Parents must consider the six stages in Figure 6.4 (CLARITY, 2019) that are present in any inquiry. Here are some anecdotal explanations of each:

1. **Engage:** Use authentic, real-world, “wicked problems” that are age appropriate. Catch students’ curiosity onto this hook during the inquiry by knowing when to extend thinking and when not to intervene.
2. **Equip:** Ensure that your ‘at-home’ students have the research skills, respectful operating norms, collaborative facilitation skills, and technology tools to do the



exploration of their chosen topic.

3. **Experience:** Provide students with broad-based experiences that demand vocabulary enhancement in the discipline they have chosen to learn more about.
4. **Explain:** Give students time to talk about their learning to others, always expecting them to bring evidence of their findings and big ideas and be able to support their claims through Talk.
5. **Elaborate:** Ask questions that promote your children's ongoing interest, demand their critical thinking, elicit their defense of their discoveries, and expect that they can elaborate on what they have determined.
6. **Evaluate:** Teach children to evaluate their products against the above Success Criteria that you have created and that are in an ongoing state of development through each inquiry. (Sharratt & Harild, 2015)



The essence of inquiry at home requires more than simply answering questions or getting a right answer. The same as in a classroom, it espouses investigation, exploration, search, quest, research, pursuit, and study. It is enhanced by involvement with a community of learners, in this case the parent/caregiver and the child(ren) each learning from the other in social interaction. (adapted from Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2007, p. 2)

Moving children beyond initial curiosity to a path of ongoing, deeper inquiry is one of the greatest challenges of inquiry learning. In this process, parents play the all-important roles of curator, facilitator, guide, change agent, teacher, wise counsellor, and provocateur—whenever and whatever the situation demands (CLARITY, Chapter 6, 2019). Inquiry-focused learning demands that children's thinking is in the center of the learning and that parents/caregivers

1. defer judgment,
2. encourage volume,
3. be visual [use graphics],
4. be succinct [summarize ideas],
5. listen to others,
6. build on others' ideas, and
7. encourage wild thinking. (Boss, 2012, p. 64)

We call these ideas 'norms' or rules because they work to help learning happen.

It is important for parents to feel teachers have their backs—to let them run with “out of the box” ideas in creating that culture of innovation. Melanie Greenan (personal communication, 2017) says that if parents can let go of control, have trust in their children, and learn to get the right design for the subject content through student-led inquiry and knowledge building, then inquiry will create huge learning gains for all students. In this way, learning through inquiry gives students reason to value, use, and develop skills, such as reading, writing, and critical thinking, and does so in ways that blur the conventional boundaries between discrete subject areas (2019).

Inquiry is partly designed to produce “community of learner” behaviours. To create this within interesting inquiries for students, the process needs to reflect norms of how we will be learning together and protocols for processes and research procedures. The notions behind the six stages of inquiry in Figure 6.4 are not complex to write about or speak about, but executing them takes real planning, thinking, reflecting and patience. This is the work of parents who want to develop persistently curious children who possess critical thinking, problem-finding, and problem-solving skills.

Learning is a social process and in this time of staying home and apart inquiry is held together by talking – a lot. ‘Accountable Talk’ is purposeful, meaningful talk about the subject at hand to achieve the desired and necessary outcome for your children: improved learning. The social practice of Accountable Talk to promote critical thinking in your learning spaces is deepened through use of digital tools, including social networking tools, and supported by strong norms of acceptable behaviour for every member of the learning experience.

Parents are a child's first teacher – no one promised parenting and parent-teaching would be easy. Just ‘give an idea a go’ and if it doesn't work out as planned – there is always tomorrow! 😊

My Best,  
Dr. Lyn Sharratt  
Toronto, Canada.  
March 31, 2020

“CLARITY: What Matters MOST in Learning, Teaching and Leading”. Corwin Press, 2019





