



# CONNECTION

RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP (RPP) NEWSLETTER

## GOOD-BYE AND THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

By Jacqueline Leighton

This is our final newsletter. Before I explain what the next year holds, I wish to thank the parents, teachers, principals, superintendents and students for working with us this year and throughout the SSHRC project. There are so many specific people to thank so instead of naming them by names, I simply say thank you to you all. If you are reading this newsletter, please know that you have been a deciding part of making this project a success.

Starting in August 2020. I will begin to analyze the data we have collected throughout the project. Already there have been a number of publications and presentations associated with parts of the project. But the bulk of data still have to be analyzed. This might take some time but I hope to have a final report by August 2021.

The University of Alberta and specifically our Faculty of Education is undergoing massive changes. As many of you have probably read in the Edmonton Journal, the provincial funding for the University has been significantly reduced. The new president of the University of Alberta is therefore committed to making the necessary changes to re-organize the number of faculties and programs.

We are not sure what the future of the Faculty of Education will be at this time. Already, our teaching loads have increased. It is possible that our specific School and Clinical Child Psychology program may be relocated to another academic unit. The re-organizational changes are actually quite exciting because it is possible that the work we do in School and Clinical Child Psychology might be relocated to a unit that is better equipped to support a clinical training program. The new president has a strong vision for us and this is exciting.

We started this journey in 2016 and it is now 2020. The SSHRC grant formally ends in 2021. I have learned many lessons from you during these past 4 years. I want to share the three most important lessons (and directions) I take away from this work.

1. To be effectively studied, child social and emotional wellbeing should be studied within the broader child rights perspective. As many of you already know, the **United Nations Declaration on the Convention of the Rights of the Child** was ratified by all countries except the US in 1989. There are four key principles: Best interest of the child, the views of the child, non-discrimination and the child's right to survival and development. Article 12 specifically includes the importance of having children provide their participation and input on matters concerning them. The social and emotional wellness of classrooms and schools is a prime area to obtain children's views, study them and seek to include them in recommendations for pedagogy and practice.
2. Although there are a number of papers, books and even programs about children's social and emotional development and wellbeing, the research we have conducted during this project have underscored the need for better theoretical and empirical evidence of children's experiences. Many theoretical perspectives are still crafted by adults without much input from children via high-quality data. There are gatekeepers to accessing children's voices and this is a hurdle to be understood and hopefully overcome.
3. To create effective school and research partnerships, time is essential. This means having time to talk, ask questions and share. The University of Alberta and SSHRC specifically aim to support the work of researchers and school partners. However, the best way these organizations can support the work is with the gift of time. However, this is yet to be well understood and coordinated. My hope is that with a new vision at the University, better ways can be found.

## INTERVIEWING STUDENTS

By Vicky Qualie

One of the major areas of inquiry for the study was to understand how children feel about learning, making mistakes, and how they experience feedback. We began collecting these data using standardized survey instruments with hundreds of students from our partner schools. After some reflection, conversations with stakeholders, and a pilot study interviewing students on their experience with the survey, Jacqueline decided to transition to semi-structured interviews with a smaller sample of students. A survey may reveal a trend that students feel safe to make mistakes, for example, but open-ended interview questions allow researchers to explore why.

I began conducting student interviews at Suzuki Charter School in the fall of 2019, with a sample of 28 children - two from each classroom. I met each student in their classroom and brought them to a private room in the office. We often chatted down the hallway as I got to know students. It tried to make students feel safe and comfortable.

Once we sat down at the table, I would talk to students about their interest in talking with me, or any questions they might not feel comfortable answering. If the child needed breaks, we took them! One of the most important aspects of the interview was to help students realize there were no right or wrong answers. This is not always easy for children to understand, so I would explain that an interview is not a test - that how they feel cannot be right or wrong. I also reminded students throughout our time together, there are no right or wrong answers.

Jacqueline designed a list of 10 interview questions. Each student was asked the same questions, but it was important to not be a robot during the interview and conduct it in the most

natural way. For example, where it was considered relevant, I asked additional questions to delve deeper into their responses. Some of my prompts included phrases such as: "can you tell me more about that?", or "can you give me an example of that?", or "how did that make you feel?" I was careful to avoid leading questions, for example "did that make you feel scared," where I am proposing how a child might have felt instead of just asking how she or he would have felt.

Jacqueline intentionally created questions and activities that allowed the children to explore their feelings about feedback and mistakes by talking about other people. For example, there was a drawing activity where students drew a picture of a friend receiving feedback from a teacher. I asked each student to consider how their friend felt about the feedback he/she received from the teacher? This is a less invasive technique than asking students directly what they think or feel.

I was pleased to see that children of all ages, kindergarten to grade six, were able to engage in the research and provide their perspectives. With the school closure, I was only able to reconnect with six students for the second round of interviews. I was able to work with families to conduct remote interviews and that was a great learning experience.

I have been busy transcribing the interviews - capturing our conversations verbatim and ensuring that information is anonymized, as per our ethical requirements. Jacqueline will take it from here to analyze the data for themes and then begin the process of getting results ready to share with you and for publication.

As my time with this project comes to an end, I wish to express my gratitude to all of you for the time we have spent learning from each other.



**THAT'S A WRAP!**

This concludes our final edition of Connection, the RPP newsletter that has fostered our relationship with you - our research partners.

Thank you again for walking this journey with us. We appreciate your enthusiasm, commitment, and flexibility.

Don't be a stranger, please visit [leighton4learning.com](http://leighton4learning.com) to see what Jacqueline is up to.