



David Livingstone Elementary School

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Thursday, April 9, 2020

Dear Families,

Week Two of living a reality too different for us even to have imaged. I am missing kids, teachers, families and life as we know it. I am trying to connect with students with a daily video-tweet. It is posted on the twitter feed on the school website and goes directly to those following @LivingstoneVSB. Some great things are happening in the Vancouver School District with feeding students and childcare for the Essential Service workers. Some great things are also happening in the Livingstone School Community with teachers connecting with families and students.

The superpower of our teachers is the way they go about foraging relationships with students as a foundation for learning. It is something that is done over the course of many weeks and months. Asking questions. Listening to stories. Laughing at jokes. Challenging preconceived notions. Helping students to navigate through conflicts, missteps and failures – real and perceived. All of these things are a regular part of building relationship and daily learning. It is not something that can be photocopied or ordered online. We are in the process of learning how to nurture connections without daily face-to-face contact. Teams Classroom, Zoom, Twitter, You-Tube, the school website and a variety of other social media APPS allow us to deliver messages. Videoconferencing allows some opportunity for group discussion, or partner discussion in forums, but the day to day conversations that happen at school emerge from 1-1 questions and carefully constructed experiences.

As my children were growing-up, sit down family conversation at dinner had to be structured. Soccer practice, music lessons, school sports, Brownies, Scouts, and a myriad of other commitments made the drive-through at McDonalds a part of life. Now more than ever, family conversation will need to provide the daily asking of questions, considering why the super moon appears, the discussion of characters in books, and checking out the answers to possibilities. The *who, what, when, where* questions are the easy questions to answer. The *Why* questions inspire higher level thinking and the imagination required for innovation and for really good conversations. These kinds of questions frequently occur in our families; however, it isn't always appreciated as important learning.

Teachers are currently in the process of structuring things for their students to do at home that will matter. They are trying to find the balance of different opportunities for children to engage in learning. It will include reading and writing. Research tells us that as the amount of reading and writing increases, so does the skill level. However, the understanding of what is being read improves as it is discussed. This is why book clubs are so popular with adults. It is social and helps us to understand the text in different ways. Research also tells us that writing for an audience improves our writing as we strive to make ourselves better understood or share something that matters to us. The audience doesn't need to be parents trying to work at home. Discussion of books and sharing writing could be in a daily phone call to Grandma or an Auntie or a neighbour or a friend.

Teachers often use themes or project-based learning because they are ways to direct student interest and enthusiasm into their learning. Birds make their presence known in Vancouver in the springtime. We hear them first thing in the morning. They have adapted to life in the highly populated downtown core, in neighbourhoods, and in ocean and forest habitats. We are not invested in our students becoming ornithologists. However, the study of birds becomes an opportunity to teach observations skills, research skills, how to use binoculars or a compass, a reason to tell time or make measurements. Project based learning is often framed in a way, so students begin to ask their own questions and hone the ability to devise plans to pursue answers. The necessity of the scientific method for a purpose other than because the textbook says so. Check out the school website for a format for this study.

We are fortunate that at this point in the school year, teachers already have established relationships with their students and know their educational needs. As every classroom differs, so will the type of work for "school at home" to support students during this public health crisis. A work package, an online program, a videoconference or an ingenious project will not replace the teacher. Teachers go to university for five years and are mentored during practice teaching opportunities to become teachers. Then they participate in professional development, inquiry groups and often further education. They have developed a skill set to work in a face to face context with students on a daily basis. We don't expect parents to become teachers. We don't expect teachers to accomplish what they are able to do in a face to face context with kids. We can expect that working together, we can help kids to stay curious and interested in learning. Teachers and parents can both provide the input to ensure our students feel supported in their learning. We can be gentle with ourselves, so the change challenges us to try new things but doesn't overwhelm us with insurmountable demands on ourselves.

The school website has a number of helpful links, including those from our music teacher, Ms. Presley, and Mr. Mures, our librarian. I signed up for The Harry Potter at Home, just to see what was available for free. The author, J.K. Rowling is recovering from COVID-19 and just recently made this free to children. Harry Potter fans, like myself, love it!

Please feel free to contact me on my direct line 604-713-5005 or email me at cfroese@vsb.bc.ca if you have any concerns or questions about available supports. I am happy to work together to ensure needs are being met during these challenging times.

I am grateful to be part of such a kind and supportive school community. All the best in finding a meaningful way to celebrate the Easter weekend.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carrie Froese". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Carrie Froese

Principal



April 9, 2020 Inquire2Empower blog post by Carrie Froese
["Down the Rabbit Hole" during COVID-19 Pandemic](#)