

The Inquiry Project Phase II: Connections, Collaborations and Content Showcased on Website

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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Teacher-Librarians Constructing Understanding through Inquiry or “The Inquiry Project”, a partnership project between the Ministry of Education and the Saskatchewan School Library Association (SSLA), has spanned three years and involved many educators throughout the province. The Working Group were diligent in creating a truly Saskatchewan product that will support educators in understanding and using inquiry as an approach to teaching and learning Saskatchewan curricula. The early stage of the project was documented by Chris Arnstead in *The Medium* for the Fall 2012 edition, while this article reflects the work of the past year. In response to the survey, a rich array of curated resources were shared, developed, collected, or contributed and have now been gathered onto a website for access by all. These resources include webinars, multimedia, documents, references, resources, and tools and templates at www.ssla.ca/inquiry.

This website will assist Saskatchewan educators in understanding and using inquiry as an approach to teaching and learning with Saskatchewan curricula. As you review the website and share it with others please keep the following key messages in mind that are at the heart of the project:

- ✓ The focus of the project and website content is Saskatchewan. The concepts related to inquiry come from the renewed provincial curricula of Saskatchewan, the supports are from Saskatchewan educators in the context of teaching Saskatchewan curricula, and all the videos are the work of current (2012-2013) Saskatchewan educators.
- ✓ Inquiry is integral to all renewed Saskatchewan curriculum and the materials on the website can assist educators to achieving curriculum outcomes. Inquiry has many benefits for both teachers and students and can be a rich, worthwhile, and multi-faceted approach to teaching and learning.
- ✓ The information and tools provided on this website provide clear messages to teacher-librarians about fostering inquiry and how they can be instructional partners and support the inquiry approach.

The first phase of the Inquiry Project, which included a survey of educators around the province, was intended to determine the understanding and use of inquiry in teaching and

learning in Saskatchewan schools. The extensive participation in the survey included 362 responses from 23 different school divisions. The responses generated themes, ideas, and questions, for the working group to consider in planning the next phase. More importantly, it raised the level of interest about inquiry in many educators. The questionnaire also provided data for the working group that suggested issues and confirmed the direction of the project. The school library community was involved in distributing the survey as well as participating in it.

Based on the survey feedback the working group focused the next phase on the curation and development of resources. A series of webinars about the inquiry process offered professional development for educators. Dr. Jeffrey Wilhelm gave two webinars on *Preparing for Inquiry* and *Planning for Inquiry*. Cheryl Erlandson from the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit presented on *Assessment of Outcomes in an Inquiry Context*. Carlene Walter with Saskatoon Public Schools spoke about *Bringing Inquiry to Life* by suggesting a variety of technology tools to use in the various aspects of inquiry. Each webinar was well attended and is archived on the website.

During the webinars a participatory group began to develop around the notion of inquiry as educators made connections and collaborated to build their understanding of inquiry. Individuals contacted the working group and shared their stories, asked questions, or contributed resources. Many educators opened the doors of their classrooms and libraries to filming so that videos could be collected to show the inquiry process. Members of the working group developed or selected resources to be recommended or shared. Months were filled with writing, editing, web development, video editing, revisions. One of the most time-consuming tasks has been the video examples – preparing the work and taping the classes in action, reviewing the hours of raw footage, creating the storyboards for the clips, and finally editing, revising, and editing the clips.

The end product is a website, www.ssla.ca/inquiry, a web resource for Saskatchewan educators to understand and use inquiry as an approach to teaching and learning. The website has five distinct sections: the landing page (including a sub-page for Leadership), Planning for Inquiry (with sub-pages on Collaboration and the Saskatchewan Way), Engaging in Inquiry (sub-page on Student-Generated Questions), Assessment within Inquiry, and the Gallery (sub-pages for Documents, References, Multimedia, Webinars, and Tools and Templates). It is rich in examples of Saskatchewan educators demonstrating their work and sharing their involvement in inquiry. These examples provide other educators with food for thought and insight that they can apply to their own work. As well as practical suggestions, references are included which recommend further resources to consult. Some of the tools include planning templates, a framework to compare various models of inquiry to the Ministry concept, examples of instructional and assessment strategies, and much more. An Inquiry Launch Presentation provides a full

explanation of the website, in less than six minutes, and is archived at:

<http://connect.edonline.sk.ca/p377ayd8bga/>

The process was not without its challenges, but through the collaborative efforts of the working group the project has been successfully completed. This accomplishment occurred because of the contributions of the following educators who provided leadership, knowledge, experience, commitment and dedication to the task.

- Carlene Walter (Saskatoon Public Schools) and Chris Arnstead (Regina Public Schools) on behalf of the SSLA;
- Joanne Beltramini (Regina Catholic Schools), Charlotte Raine (Good Spirit School Division) Cheryl Erlandson (Director, Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit) representing the interests of educators;
- Brent Toles (Social Sciences consultant) for the survey and Lynda Oliver (Arts Education consultant) for the web content development on behalf of the Ministry of Education;
- Carlene Walter creating the website to provide a structure bringing all the content into a cohesive and useful tool for the SSLA;
- Ministry of Education leadership providing the personnel, funding, advice and other necessary services to develop and communicate the project throughout the province; and,
- Judy Nicholson contracted jointly by the Ministry and SSLA to facilitate the project.

Please spend time browsing the wealth of materials available on website and alert your colleagues to it as well. My hope is that you return often to explore and to use its many useful and interesting resources.