



Teacher-librarians Constructing Meaning through Inquiry

Rewards of the Inquiry Approach

Teachers follow prescribed curriculum and strive to accomplish the outcomes suggested for each grade and course. An inquiry approach to teaching and learning is recommended in curriculum. However, some teachers have misconceptions about inquiry learning and haven't yet experienced the benefits for both students and teachers that this approach can achieve.

INTERDISCIPLINARY - One of the criticisms of inquiry learning is that it is time consuming and that there are more efficient ways to teach. A rich inquiry will involve outcomes and indicators from several areas of study allowing learners to accomplish many objectives at the same time through their inquiry tasks, demonstration of learning, or assessment. As students become more familiar with interdisciplinary inquiry learning, less time is needed to develop necessary skills also.

PLANNING - Worthwhile inquiry requires careful planning and is not haphazard or unguided. Each curriculum guide provides suggestions for "big ideas" or "umbrella questions". As well, the ELA curriculums recommend grade level appropriate processes and methods. Teachers need to plan how to interest learners, to build background knowledge, to develop information gathering skills, and to assess and present what is learning.

TEACHER COLLABORATION - Inquiry learning is an approach that lends itself to teacher collaboration. It affords teachers the opportunity to plan together, share areas of expertise, work with small groups, and reduce workload by sharing tasks. The pleasure and professional learning that happens when educators co-plan and co-teach cannot be overstated.

ENGAGEMENT - Rather than merely covering content, inquiry learning engages students in work that interests them. Working under the umbrella of an over-riding idea or question from curriculum, students choose an aspect that interests them and plan their own inquiry. Choice is one of the easiest ways to engage students: the choice of question, information source, way to present, type of product, method of assessment. The more choices students are given, the more they will invest themselves in their learning.

"Inquiry learning provides students with opportunities to build knowledge, abilities, and inquiring habits of mind that lead to deeper understanding of their world and human experience. The inquiry process focuses on the development of compelling questions, formulated by teachers and students, to motivate and guide inquiries into topics, problems, and issues related to curriculum content and outcomes."

Saskatchewan Ministry of
Education. (2012)
Curriculum Introduction

RESPONSIBILITY - Since students are involved in every aspect of inquiry learning from the planning, to the choice of inquiry question, to the way to demonstrate their learning, they are responsible for their own learning.

REAL - At its best, inquiry learning is meaningful and authentic. Students engage with real world problems and sources of information in order to come to an understanding that helps them to contribute knowledge, ideas, and skills to something relevant to them that they feel matters.

DEPTH - Inquiry learning allows learners to delve into a topic in depth. Rather than touching briefly on many topics, inquiry requires students to think deeply and critically. A class can assemble a wealth of knowledge which affords a better understanding, enables students to form new ideas, and decide how to act appropriately.

DIFFERENTIATION - Not only does choice increase student engagement, but also it provides scope for differentiation for varied learners needs, either enrichment or modification of time, learning modality, or content. Since learning is student-centered, the teachers guide individuals or groups of students with needed mini-lessons or coaching at an appropriate time.

SOCIAL LEARNING - Inquiry learning fosters collaborative work skills as students integrate their individual and small group learning into the encompassing question or “big idea”. Students learn the skills to function as part of a team as well as individually. Inquiry learning accommodates individual learning but also capitalizes on the social qualities of today’s students.

An instructive chart comparing traditional teaching styles to learning with an inquiry approach is presented in *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action* (Harvey, S. and Daniels, H., 2009, page 56).

Daniels, H., & Harvey, S. (2009). *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.