

The Inquiry Project: Highlights of Phase One Final Report

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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*Teacher-librarians Constructing Understanding through Inquiry
Phase One Final Report*



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Last year, the SSLA and the Ministry of Education joined forces to discover what teacher-librarians require to support teachers and students with an inquiry approach to learning curriculum. Together they engaged the services of project facilitator Judy Nicholson who works on this project on their behalf. Helping Judy with this task is a Working Group composed of Ministry personnel, SSLA executive members, school division library consultants, and an educator from the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit (SPDU) of the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF).

To uncover to what extent educators in Saskatchewan understand and use inquiry as an instructional stance, the team developed a questionnaire. This first task for the team became Phase One of the project and was accomplished during the 2011 – 2012 school year. Judy, with input from the Working Group and Ministry consultants, constructed a questionnaire to collect information about educators' understanding of and comfort in using an inquiry approach to teaching and learning. Since the purpose of the questionnaire was to provide information for our project and not to conduct a scientific research study, the methodology was not set by research strategies and therefore, the findings can be used only for the purposes of this project.

Questions probed educators' view of a teacher-librarian's role in schools as well as ways they personally learned about inquiry. The questionnaire also asked what educators need in their classroom, school, and school division to fully implement inquiry. Respondents had the opportunity to share resources or to recommend materials they had found helpful in their own professional development.

This voluntary, anonymous questionnaire sought feedback from a variety of educators around the province: classroom teachers, teacher-librarians, in-school administrators, school division consultants and administrators, and Ministry personnel. The Working Group circulated an invitation to participate in video format amongst their many contacts, including the distribution

list of SSLA members, the Networking Group at the Ministry, school division teacher-librarian distribution lists, and their own personal contacts.

The video features Regina Catholic Schools coordinator Joanne Beltramini inviting participation in the questionnaire. Please click here to watch this video introducing the Inquiry Project (2 1/2 minutes): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xtu8BZNH35g&feature=player_embedded#t=0s

The questionnaire was open for responses from March 20 to April 19, 2012. In total, there were 386 responses from all over the province. Nearly all school divisions had at least one response and some had up to 80 responses. There were several school divisions with 40 or more responses. Responses were representative of urban and rural, northern and southern, and public and separate school divisions. Approximately half of the respondents are classroom teachers, a quarter are teacher-librarians, and a quarter are consultants/coordinators, administrators, directors/superintendents, or Ministry personnel. The Working Group is delighted with both the quantity and quality of responses. Respondents offered thoughtful answers and had obviously replied candidly and fully. The Working Group greatly appreciates the time and effort people spent on the questionnaire as the results will be used to direct Phase Two of the project.

Judy and I studied the data obtained from the questionnaire and shared the responses with the Working Group members. By the end of July, Judy completed the analysis and wrote the Final Report. The data and recommendations from this report will help inform and direct Phase Two which will be accomplished over the 2012 – 2013 academic year.

From the considerable amount of information collected from the survey, the following are observations I considered interesting. Once again, these points will be considered in planning Phase Two but are my comments and not scientific conclusions:

- For many respondents, a key source of information about inquiry learning is curriculum documents.
- An emerging trend in professional development is the use of professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional learning networks both in person and online.
- Educators expressed that they like to learn from each other, working and co-teaching with mentors, consultants, or coaches.

- Respondents are at all stages of development with inquiry – building awareness, trying it out, feeling they have a good understanding, and implementing it comfortably in teaching and learning.
- There is a lack of knowledge about the role of the teacher-librarian and the ways they can support inquiry. The expertise of teacher-librarians with both print and digital resources is well recognized but their role in co-planning, co-teaching, and leading professional development is less well known.
- In-school administrators indicated a need for help in recognizing, encouraging, and facilitating inquiry in their schools.
- The main sources of knowledge about inquiry for teacher librarians are 1) personal reading and research, 2) curriculum documents, 3) school division or school-based workshops, 4) conferences, 5) professional learning communities.
- When asked to describe their current understanding and use of inquiry for teaching and learning, slightly fewer than 40% of teacher-librarians said they are beginning to use inquiry and need to learn more and just over 40% said they try to include this approach in most of their units.

Educators supplied many suggestions to the query about what supports they need in their classroom, school, and school division in order to grow in their understanding and use of inquiry. The Working Group’s challenging task is to consider these suggestions and formulate a plan to meet some of these needs.

The SSLA executive would like to thank the members of the Working Group for their contributions to Phase One of this project and their respective employers for sharing these people’s time and expenses with the project. As positions change, different people may be representing some groups for Phase Two.

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Thank you to the many educators who responded to the questionnaire and shared their honest opinions and situations. The Working Group will plan Phase Two of the project early this fall. Please watch for announcements on the progress of this project or visit www.ssla.ca for updates.