

CCSS Leadership CoP
12/01/15

Utilizing Inquiry in the K-12 Classroom

Presenter: Stephen Armstrong, Social Studies Consultant, CSDE

Breakout Session

How do you adjust your curriculum to meet the Inquiry model demands?

- In Southington, we are trying to make more connections between literacy and inquiry. We started implementing inquiry practices at elementary and middle, so that students coming up would be prepared for the change in the high school curriculum.
- Teachers in another district are currently make some choices about which topics to leave out, but continuity can be lost or there are gaps going to the next level because the choices are made by individual teachers. Inquiry is a perfect marriage for the Social Studies Framework, but we are having difficulty deciding what omit to make time for inquiry.
- EngageNY has some good resources for breaking down inquiry into smaller steps.
- Implementing inquiry is time consuming, and we have a hard time with what to give up. We need guidance about how other people do that; as well as how much the teacher is doing and how much the student is doing when implementing inquiry.
- Although curriculum changes are being made in Southington, UBD remains relevant. When introducing the shift to inquiry, we started by looking to see if and where there are elements of inquiry built into the existing curriculum that are not currently labeled as inquiry. That approach enables us to keep a percentage of our existing curriculum. Then, as a next step, we can prioritize and decide what we will we drop and what we will substitute. For example, some performance tasks resemble inquiry, so they need no overhaul.
- We have been using UBD for 10-15 years, but we never noticed what we were doing is inquiry. It was not necessary to create curriculum, but to recognize if we are doing it or not enough of it. We can find opportunities for inquiry in what can we do in small parts, and that addresses all the content within the given time. An example of this is splitting the class into groups, where each group focuses on one aspect of the content, and then all groups report out to the whole class
- There is a lot of value in letting the kids drive what is being done. For example, going into KWL and inserting a little more of that into inquiry, engages kids in asking the questions.
- In Bloomfield, we spend time looking at the standards and how the units meet the standards, and then develop units for the standards. We look at the units to see how all these things line up; so by looking across the whole year, you can see when the particular content comes up. We look at what you are teaching relative to skills and inquiry. We gather and look at lots of data to get there. Some units have to go, but teachers feel good about it. The shift takes time, trial and error. This is not a quick fix; but done by aligning, making a few changes, and taking a few units/projects that already exist. Do it and see what kids wind up covering.
- Inquiry can be in all of what we do. Changing an entire program is ambitious, but can be done over time.
- Change is a 3-5 year process. Take a step back and do this piece by piece, so it can be done right. Even when change is not affecting some grade levels, they can still be learning as you move on. Teachers need to be gentle with themselves now and eventually it will be right.
- Southington worked from elementary up. You have to have a plan so that the grades connect to the next higher grades/levels. Once the elementary level has a curriculum, the next

grade/level is affected. The roll out started from K and up so nothing would be lost in the transition to the other levels, even though the process of setting up the K-12 curriculum started at the high school level.

- The shift can include the preschool level for continuity.

What are three "best ideas" that you will take away from this morning's session?

- Limit the amount of teacher-directed instruction. Use primary and secondary sources for inquiry lessons. Primary sources do not have to be complex; sources that are simple can be effective.
- The process in *What Do Good History Detectives Want to Know?* (i.e., introducing primary sources at the start of a topic so that students can glean content from simple primary sources instead of getting the content from direct instruction by the teachers.)
- Allow students to create their own learning experiences.
- Using engaging resources to start lessons. Resources do not necessarily have to be in document form (e.g., can use artifacts).
- Implement questioning strategies to drive inquiry.
- Avoid too many closed-ended questions.
- Restrict yes/no questioning during instruction.
- Have kids create questions. Build students questioning skills to facilitate learning. Can start by teaching them to distinguish between compelling versus simple questions; open-ended versus closed-questions.
- Add C3 (College, Career, Civic Life & Responsibilities) design framework.
- The advantages of non-judgmental brainstorming as part of the inquiry process to develop compelling questions for a unit.
- Diversity of questions that are part of the inquiry process.
- Inquiry, the Inquiry Design Model (IDM), and the IDM Template.
- Develop final assessments that are more performance-based.
- Stay up-to-date with pedagogical practices.
- Avoid trying to "cover it all."
- Avoid warring about changes.
- Let go of poster board projects and memorization of facts.

What did you learn from your colleagues today that you will bring back to your school or district?

- EngageNY website <https://www.engageny.org/> contains information about breaking down the inquiry process into bite size steps.
- Open up creating questions to students, so that the questions are compelling to the students, not just the teacher.
- c3teachers.org for resources on Inquiry Design Model and the Inquiry Arc of the College, Career, Civic Life (C3) design framework.
- IDM template
- <http://www.socialstudies.org/> National Council for Social Studies website
- *Make Just One Change* by Dan Rothstein – book and *Just One Question Institute* –website related to this book