

(733 words)

Small Changes Can Make a BIG Difference

By the AASL Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force

AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* publication is 320 pages long. Each chapter includes a wealth of information; and, while the Competencies in each of the three integrated frameworks is strategic and essential, it can be daunting to imagine where to begin. Consider this an invitation to look at one of the Shared Foundations, Inquire, with this perspective: small changes can make a *very* big difference. One-step strategies for moving your instructional practice forward as you Think about and Grow in your study of Inquire, may provide some traction for conversation with teaching staff and colleagues:

Consider listening to learners when you ask, “What do you wonder?”

Connect with the Shared Foundation of Inquire through Competencies in the Think Domain (Learner I.A.1.): “formulating questions about a personal interest or curricular topic.” When beginning a project or unit with an inquiry stance, critical and creative thinking might be facilitated by providing a choice of interesting, edgy, controversial, or mysterious images or videos, and short excerpts of text including primary sources. Remembering that audio, visual, and textual resources that are interesting to one student might not be interesting to another, so providing them with a choice of resources from which to choose and respond to empowers learners and personalizes the learning for them. Try asking learners to respond to this prompt: “*What do you wonder as you review this video, image, text?*” In the context of a wide array of resources, this student-centered prompt personalizes the content, resulting in higher levels of resilience and commitment; it also honors the range of perspectives that learners bring to the table to share with their peers. Asking your learners to share their observations and wonderings in small groups before reporting out to the class helps to build collaborative skills, honors their thinking, and provides them with the opportunity to scaffold their ideas in smaller, less formidable groups.

Consider asking learners to document their wonderings.

Refer again to the Competencies in the Think Domain for Inquire (School Librarian I.A.1.): “Encourage learners to formulate questions...” Following prompts for learners to express their curiosity on topics of personal interest or with a curricular focus, consider requiring learners to document their wonderings. This provides them with three different opportunities. In reviewing their own wonderings, they have an authentic opportunity to analyze question types, determining the differences between informational and thinking questions. Learners also have the opportunity to see value that *both* kinds of questions have in the inquiry process. Lastly, learners are able to engage in a reflective process to determine topics in which they have the greatest interest, based on their exploration of resources.

Consider asking your learners to reflect at different points along their inquiry process.

When learners are immersed in an inquiry project or research, they might feel “stuck” as they try to make sense of text. They may also be overwhelmed when navigating resources or next steps in the process. In the Shared Foundation of Inquire, learners are “Engaging in sustained inquiry” (Learner I.D.2.); the strategies that school librarians employ for facilitating “sustained inquiry” are fundamental to nurturing learner’s resilience. What strategies might be implemented? Prompting learners to step back from their

research and reflect will invigorate the process and honor their thinking. These prompts might be used to tip-off a reflection: “*What makes you curious as you read this book/article?*” or “*Think about what you have learned/read so far; what are you curious about in your topic now? Has it changed from what you wondered in the beginning?*” Inquiry doesn’t have to, and shouldn’t, happen only at the beginning of a project or unit. Again, the Inquire Shared Foundation in the Grow Domain (Learner I.D.4.), “Using reflection to guide informed decisions,” signals the importance of reflection during this process. Anchoring a learning experience with their wonderings *throughout* the process is yet another vehicle for making inquiry projects more student-centered and personal.

These are small changes that can make a big difference in transforming the culture of a class. Consider one step, one activity, one interesting prompt to change the outlook of your high achieving *and* your unmotivated learners. Activities, or moments, that empower your learners to make choices, reflect, and wonder will be some of the most impactful experiences for transforming learning in your library.