“Living in a State of Inquiry”
Lessons from the Student Work Study Teacher Initiative

Multi-media resource for professional learning
Professional development as a term and as a strategy has run its course. The future of improvement, indeed of the profession itself, depends on a radical shift in how we conceive learning and the conditions under which teachers and students work.

Fullan, 2007
Living in a State of Inquiry

In Ontario and other jurisdictions, teachers are increasingly shaping their professional learning based on the needs of students. Once they identify student learning needs, they work with principals, superintendents and board consultants in classrooms to identify professional learning needs.

This webcast shares a moment in time in the learning of educators involved in the Student Work Study Teacher (SWST) initiative. Launched in 2009 by the Ontario Ministry of Education, SWST was designed to deepen understanding of student work and improve instruction for struggling students. Although SWST continues to focus on students who are not progressing as expected, and to design interventions on their behalf, it has evolved to become a way of thinking about effective pedagogy more generally.

This way of thinking about professional practice, based on what the students are actually doing in their classrooms, is explored in five video themes:

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A previous webcast featuring SWST was released in the fall of 2012. Students of Mystery: The Student Work Study Teacher Initiative can be found online at: http://learnteachlead.ca.
About the Student Work Study Teacher Initiative

The Student Work Study Teacher initiative began in 2009. At that time, the initiative focused on understanding the thinking of students who were not working at the provincial standard (Level 3 – equivalent to a “B” grade). Observing and talking with students about their thinking while they were engaged in learning, as well as analysing their work, helped educators to see student work as more than just “written products.”

The process of observing, documenting and analysing student work enabled the educators involved in SWST to gain greater insight into effective pedagogy. As they deepened their understanding of students as learners in the classroom, they also refined their understanding of the assessment and instructional practices that helped students progress.

SWST continues to be rooted in studying the work of students who, for whatever reason, have not been successful in making progress as expected. Continuing to adopt a learning stance has proven to be powerful. The willingness to observe and reflect on student thinking helps educators not only to understand student learning, but also to understand the barriers that might be impeding their own learning.
The Student Work Study Teacher Initiative: Roles and Responsibilities

Students:
• Students working at Level 2 in a strand of literacy or numeracy
• A fluid population that may change over time

SWS Teachers:
• Experienced classroom educators identified by their boards to work in a temporary research role
• Supported in their researcher-practitioner role by ministry staff

Host Teachers:
• Classroom teachers who work collaboratively with SWS teachers to document student learning

District Leaders:
• Provide opportunities for educators across the district to experience the SWST initiative
• Use evidence generated from SWST to inform improvement in student learning
Evolution of the Work

The video clips featured in this segment are:
- The Researcher Lens (2:07)
- Impact on School Culture (2:25)
- Impact on System Culture (1:46)
- Impact on Professional Practice: PLC (5:02)
- Impact on Professional Practice: SWST Reflection (0:45)
- Impact on Professional Practice: Collaboration (2:25)
- Nature of the Work: What it Looks Like in a Classroom (5:35)
- Shift in our Thinking (3:36)
- The Learning Stance (2:57)

In this segment, you will hear a variety of perspectives on how the initiative has evolved in three school boards. You will hear from senior system leaders, school administrators, SWS teachers and host teachers who have used a learning stance to inform practice and professional learning in their respective boards.

Discussion Points:

As you view these clips, try to identify the strategies that are used to make student thinking visible. How do these strategies help to support and scaffold student learning?

Think of a student who is currently experiencing challenges in the classroom. What strategies might be helpful in furthering his/her learning?

How does the discussion between the Student Work Study teacher and the host teacher help them to understand the student’s learning? Describe a time when collaboration between educators helped to solve a problem of practice?

As you view this segment, you may wish to use the organizer “Ideas into Action” to record your thinking. It can be printed or downloaded from the main folder of the DVD.

Preview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Clip</th>
<th>Key Ideas</th>
<th>Possible Actions</th>
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Deepening our Learning

The video clips featured in this segment are:
- Researchers’ Perspective: Impact on Collective Inquiry (5:25)
- System Thinking (2:52)
- Upper Canada District School Board (1:10)
- London Catholic District School Board (0:36)
- Halton Catholic District School Board (0:46)
- Special Education (1:43)
- Learning from our Mistakes (1:27)
- Goal Setting (2:03)
- Efficacy and Ownership (1:12)
- Student Engagement (0:25)
- Professional Learning: Principal Leadership (1:07)
- Professional Learning: Adult Learning (0:40)

In this segment, you will hear from educators in Ontario schools who describe how collaborative inquiry has influenced their work. Rather than looking to the “experts” to solve problems, staying with the challenge – and rigorously thinking about it – often results in innovative solutions. It also helps to build ownership and sustainability of the work.

In the video segments from Upper Canada District School Board, London Catholic District School Board and Halton Catholic District School Board, we learn how SWST has created a culture of learning among educators that supports assessment of, for and as learning.

Educators and students also speak to the increase in student ownership and motivation when students are involved in setting their own learning goals.

Discussion Points:

Reflect on the idea of “staying in the problem and developing new solutions.” What does this suggest about how we may alter our pedagogical practices?

As students become more self-reflective and able to judge their own work, what are the implications for our practice?

As you view this segment, you may wish to use the chart “Ideas into Action” to record your thinking. It can be printed or downloaded from the main folder of the DVD.
Reciprocity

The video clips featured in this segment are:

- Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board: Shared Vision Through Inquiry (3:13)
- Greater Essex County District School Board (0:52)
- Halton Catholic District School Board (2:37)
- Windsor Essex Catholic District School Board (1:13)
- St. Clair Catholic District School Board (1:52)
- Upper Canada District School Board (0:56)
- Research Perspective (5:56)

This section highlights the idea of reciprocal learning – that students, teachers, principals and administrators can learn from each other.

Representatives from six district school boards share their current thinking regarding the role and impact of inquiry. Following the individual board narratives, you will hear a research perspective on reciprocity. You may wish to think about how studying student experience from an asset stance (recognizing a student’s strengths) can influence your school/system actions.

Discussion Points:

How has the learning from the SWST initiative impacted your board/system/school plan?

How does your board/school integrate various initiatives such as the Collaborative Inquiry for Learning in Mathematics, Early Primary Collaborative Inquiry and SWST?

Where is there evidence of “de-privatization” in your district/school?

In examining the professional learning model in your board/school, explain how you ensure that all voices are at the table and heard.

As you view this segment, you may wish to use the chart “Ideas into Action” to record your thinking. It can be printed or downloaded from the main folder of the DVD.
Spread and Sustain

The video clips featured in this segment are:

- The Hub Work (2:47)
- Professional Learning Community (5:53)
- The Challenge of Spread and Sustain (8:27)
- Structures (5:00)
- School Based Spread (0:59)
- Professional Learning: A Shift in Ownership (2:34)

Cynthia Coburn, professor of educational research at Northwestern University, talks about a framework with four dimensions: depth, sustainability, spread and ownership. She asks us to consider the following question: “In what ways is your system learning brought to scale?”

This section provides specific examples of structures that various board personnel have used to “spread and sustain” the learning system wide. You will hear how the SWST initiative is now deeply rooted in day-to-day practices in many boards.

Discussion Points:

What does “spread” look, feel and sound like in your board/district?

What do you think is meant by spread being more of a “pull” rather than a “push”?

Of the structures referenced, which one(s) would help to spread and sustain the work in your board/district?

Who sits at your learning table? Why?

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Future Directions

The video clips featured in this segment are:
• Shift in Collective Culture (1:41)
• What We’re Learning (1:05)

In this section, Dr. David Cameron and Rachel Ryerson, senior researchers with the Ministry of Education, discuss the shift from an isolated approach to professional learning towards a collective approach. Rachel says that, “In order to keep up we need to be continually learning and committed to learning.” David emphasizes that evolving our practice to reflect a collective effort can only lead to more powerful learning in our classrooms.

As educators document student learning, they are able to see and hear students in an authentic way and arrive at a fuller picture of their learning. Further, as they engage in documentation, they are realizing that their students often have more knowledge and skills than they thought.

Student Voice, Capacity Building Series, 2013
Resources and Related Reading

Cameron, D.H., Gauthier, G., Ryerson, R., & Kokis, J. (2011). Teacher professional learning from the “inside out”: Studying the student experience as means to teacher action and new knowledge. Available upon request: LNS@ontario.ca.


**Ontario Ministry of Education Resources:**

*Capacity Building Series*

- Student Voice: Transforming Relationships (2013)
- Dynamic Learning: Connecting Student Learning and Educator Learning (2013)
- Pedagogical Documentation (2012)
- Student Identity and Engagement in Elementary Schools (2011)
- Collaborative Teacher Inquiry (2010)
On this DVD you will find a Print and Video Resources folder which contains WMV files, Additional Resources, Organizers and this Viewer’s Guide (PDF).

To order the multimedia package

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Contact Service Ontario
416-326-5300 or 1-800-668-9938
http://www.publications.serviceontario.ca/ecom

The video segments and related resources are also accessible online at www.curriculum.org/content/webcasts

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