

Deeper Learning in the Time of COVID-19: New Hampshire (Part 1 of 3)

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

In part 1 of 3 in AYPF's Deeper Learning in the Time of COVID-19 webinar series, panelists discussed how a focus on student-centered and personalized learning, with a special emphasis on fostering student self-direction and metacognition, in New Hampshire is helping students to succeed during COVID-19. New Hampshire's success has largely hinged on work-study practices to help students inside and outside the classroom.

Sarah Lench, Chief Curiosity Officer and Learning Networks Director at the [Center for Innovation in Education](#), began the conversation by acknowledging that the COVID-19 crisis can be used as a bridge to create meaningful change where individuals collaborate in new ways, learn new habits and behaviors, and shed harmful ones. Lench highlighted three school districts (Sunnyside in Tucson, AZ, Shelby County in Shelbyville, KY, and Two-Rivers Public Charter School in Washington DC) throughout the country that succeeded in their transition to online learning because of the strong relationships between students and teachers, which made adaptation possible. While many people strive to replicate deeper learning instructional models, Lench noted that "where deeper learning is most successful, it saturates the whole school culture and changes the way the adults in the system work together."

Jonathan Vander Els, Director of Innovative Projects at the New Hampshire Learning Initiative, provided background on the implementation of the work-study practices in New Hampshire four years ago including: communication, collaboration, creativity, and self-direction. Vander Els noted the importance of leading with student voices as they are too often overlooked. In keeping with this, Vander Els interviewed **Nicole Woulfe**, a 6th grade teacher at Sanborn Regional Middle School (SRMS), **Anthony Doucet**, a 9th grade teacher at Souhegan High School (SHS), and several of their students. SRMS and SHS have long used the work-study and metacognitive practices, which made the transition to online learning less disruptive during COVID-19. Woulfe and her colleagues use the workshop model, where they introduce an idea and provide strategies for students to manage their time in the classroom. She noted that the transition to remote learning made self-reflection more difficult, but teachers adapted by encouraging students to fill out online forms to accomplish the same goals. Woulfe believes explicit instruction on self-direction in schools is needed to increase confidence and independence among students. Vander Els also spoke with **Caitlin Milner** and **Luke Thomas**, students at SRMS about their experience with remote learning. Milner remarked, "In math class we usually do real life examples, which you can't always do in a different setting." She noted that this made retaining information difficult. Thomas commented, "My phone is always tempting to look at. My brothers are a distraction sometimes, too. So, I just had to learn to walk away from distraction."

At Souhegan High School, students have been graded on both content standards and work-study practices for over 20 years. Additionally, the Laconia School District chose to report progress only on work-study practices rather than grades. **Gail Bourn**, the Academic Coordinator for Teaching and Learning Excellence at the Laconia School District, noted that

providing a grade would have been unrealistic, and the work-study practices provide a better assessment of remote learning. **Max Syverson**, a student at SHS, recognized the importance of self-direction in the move to online learning, as he noted that “in school, self-direction is a standard, but in online learning, it is a lifestyle and responsibility,” as there was less support available. **Riley Devine** and **Masho Primmer**, also students at SHS, found it easier to focus on schoolwork while at home, but they noted that the lack of social interaction made it more difficult for them to engage with the material. Doucet recognized the social void that online learning created, and he wants to “build-in more collaboration time in the fall if we come back in an online environment...because that connection can help with self-direction.”

Finally, **Ellen Hume-Howard**, Executive Director at the New Hampshire Learning Initiative, spoke about key takeaways and future steps. She noted, “We should start with student agency and our relationships with students. This should be at the forefront before curriculum and assessment pieces.” Moreover, she addressed the necessity of reforming grading practices to better support students. She hopes to continue refining work-study practices to provide opportunities for students to transfer these practices into their careers.

New Hampshire leads the way in implementing work-study and metacognitive practices in its schools. These tools have created self-directed learners, whose skills have been essential during the COVID-19 remote learning period and will continue to serve students well in their future educational and career endeavors.

This event summary was written by Nicole Chandonnet, AYPF Intern (Summer 2020).