

Inquiry-Based Learning



Inquiry-Based Learning is not a new teaching strategy. In fact, you most likely learned about it in college while studying about John Dewey's educational reform. Dewey set out to advocate child-centered learning that was based on inquiry and real-world experiences. Unfortunately, in today's educational system, children are less likely to inquire and ask questions, and more likely to be subservient and listen.

Inquiry-based learning is meant to change that. Inquiry implies that students will get involved and ask questions which leads to better understanding. Our goal as teachers is to guide our students to find answers to our questions, and encourage them to ask more questions while doing so.



What are the Benefits of Inquiry-Based Learning?

While rote memorization is an important skill to master, inquiry is a skill more aligned with our modern workforce that demands individuals be inquisitive and be able to solve complex problems. Inquiry implies a need to know, where students seek answers and want to find resolutions. Educators can nurture these inquisitive minds so that students can carry this mind set with them throughout their life.

Inquiry based-learning has other advantages as well:



Students who are actively involved in the classroom develop problem-solving skills that can be applied to their schoolwork as well as later in life.



An inquiry-based approach can be used in any classroom and in any age group. Older students will benefit from more sophisticated questioning, but inquiry can be implemented into everyday activities with younger students.



Inquiry-based learning works extremely well in a collaborative environment. Since ask and one to answer.



Struggling students who do not do well in a teacher-led classroom respond well to an inquiry-based learning environment. It helps builds their confidence and self-esteem.



The Key to Effective Questioning

Since inquiry-based learning is based on getting students to ask questions, it's essential that you, the teacher, are able to model inquiry effectively. Research suggests asking four types of questions: Inference questions, interpretation questions, transfer questions, and questions of hypothesis.

Here we will take a quick look at each type, plus discuss a few tips that make for good inquiry-based questions.

- **Inference questions.** These are questions that ask students to think beyond the information that is available.
- **Interpretation questions.** These questions propose that students have an understanding of the consequences of the information.
- **Transfer questions.** While inference and interpretation ask students to think deeper, transfer questions ask students to take their knowledge and use it.
- **Hypotheses questions.** These are questions that make students predict and test their knowledge.
- **Questions need to be something that students care about.** Remember, students will be coming up with questions themselves so they need to be something that they care about or are interested in finding out.
- **Questions must be answerable.** If you are having a discussion about a book you are reading in class, a question such as “Why did the author write the story?” can be an effective question if the answer exists and the students can find it, or if they have a strong opinion about it. If you ask a question such as, “Why did the author write the last paragraph in way that they did?”, students will not be able to answer this question, because they are not the author.
- **Answers should not be a fact.** “What did Noah build?” This question can simply be found on the Internet in a matter of seconds and does not make a compelling question. “In what ways do you think Noah was a righteous man?” would make a compelling question because students would have to research this information.
- **Questions must be objective.** Questions such as “What does evidence suggest?” or “What do scientists believe” can objectively be answered. But, a question such as “Which play is better, ___ or ___?” Cannot be objectively answered.



The Importance of Preparation

Inquiry-based learning is based on the notion that students ask questions and take the lead in their own learning. But it also involves a lot of planning on your part. While you can build inquiry-based lessons into just about any activity, it still takes a little time. Follow these steps to help you get started.

1. When planning, consider all factors: Age appropriateness, skill level, the time you'll spend on activity, the resources you'll use, collaboration techniques, and so on. Make these decisions upfront and then leave the rest for the students.
2. Find out what the students are interested in. Ask broad questions and guide your students toward achieving their objectives.
3. Any topic can be the subject of an inquiry-based project. Whatever students chose as their topic of interest, be sure to ask them what they would like to know about that topic, then show them how to map their questions to correlate with each subject. For example, if the topic of choice was "sneakers," the questions would fall into these categories:
 - Literature – What stories involve sneakers?
 - Art – Can we make a sneaker?
 - Science – Why are sneakers good for sports?
 - Social Studies – Do all cultures wear sneakers?
 - Math – Why are sneakers expensive?

Your job as the teacher is to serve as the guide to so students can go through the learning process themselves.

Inquiry-based learning is a strategy that can be used to actively engage your students. It's important to remember that if you are going to implement this strategy you need to consider your students' experience so you can effectively determine how much direction they will need to complete an inquiry-based task.

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