

ENGAGE STUDENTS THROUGH INQUIRY: DISCOVER NEW LEARNING ACROSS ALL CONTENT AREAS

“Tell me and I forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I will understand.” You have likely heard this interpretation of a Chinese proverb by Xunzi, a Confucian philosopher, in relation to teaching and learning.¹ In education, this phrase emphasizes that engaging students in experiencing or doing while learning will result in greater understanding of a concept.

One way to help our students gain better understanding is by involving them in their education through inquiry-driven learning. Society today is always changing and our ability to learn and adapt is pertinent to becoming successful in adulthood. We can prepare our students by teaching them to embrace critical thinking, learn from failure, and collaborate with peers. Inquiry-driven instruction is proven to be an effective teaching practice by highlighting the core principles of student-centered learning while doing. “We retain 75% of what we do compared to 5% of what we hear and 10% of what we read. Inquiry-based learning allows students to better understand and recall material by actively engaging with it and making their own connections.”² These are staggering statistics that show a need for inquiry-driven instruction across all content areas.

What is Inquiry-Driven Learning?

Inquiry-driven learning is not a new idea, just restructured in its method over time. Education thought leaders such as John Dewey, Howard Gardner, Maria Montessori and others promoted the importance of student-driven learning through curiosity and action. “Inquiry-based instruction is a student-centered approach where the instructor guides the students through questions posed, methods designed, and data interpreted by the students. Through inquiry, students actively discover information to support their investigations.”³ Inquiry-driven learning embraces students’ thinking processes and helps them initiate their own learning. Through inquiry, students are given the chance to learn from each other and push toward mastery of a subject while being in a state of continuous learning and reflecting.



How to Incorporate Inquiry-Driven Learning in Your School

Some districts have completely abandoned canned curricula to focus on fostering inquiry-driven learning in their schools. This requires a great amount of effort that includes creating learning maps and outlines of curriculum goals and using resources as tools of inquiry instead of relying solely on the standard textbook. If your school is not ready to part with their set curriculum, you can be purposeful with the questions you ask to drive the learning of your content. It really comes down to asking purposeful questions that will engage students and give them a chance to take ownership of their learning.

Establishing an environment that embraces inquiry-driven learning takes time and practice. There can be some uncomfortable feelings from students, as well as teachers, toward the unknown as learning changes and evolves. This is a common thread when initially adapting lessons into rich inquiry-driven plans. High school teacher Christi Apler shares these feelings about her experience with inquiry-driven instruction when she states, “Wrestling with messy, open-ended questions allowed students to understand the content more deeply.”⁴ Inquiry-driven learning naturally differentiates, and floods students with background knowledge to help peers work together in their learning. With inquiry-driven learning, students are building knowledge, not sifting through information to find the right answer. With continued practice and success of inquiry-driven learning instruction, teachers will begin to see shifts in the understanding of all students.

¹ Garson. (2019, February 27). Tell Me and I Forget; Teach Me and I May Remember; Involve Me and I Learn. Retrieved from <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2019/02/27/tell/>

² Enrichment. (2018, April 3). What is Inquiry-Based Learning (And How Is It Effective)?. Retrieved from <https://gradelearning.com/what-is-inquiry-based-learning/>

³ Alper, Christi. (2018, August 17). Embracing Inquiry-Based Instruction. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/embracing-inquiry-based-instruction>

⁴ Alper, Christi.

Try It Out!

There are varying degrees of inquiry-driven instruction that involve modeling, facilitating, and supporting students. Below are some ways you can incorporate inquiry-driven instruction into your daily teaching practice.

Chart learning: Using Reading and Analyzing Nonfiction (RAN)⁵ charts can be a great way to introduce students to the idea of asking questions and checking in on their learning as they go. RAN charts include a space to chart learning through inquiry with the categories of prior knowledge, wonderings, information confirmed through research, misconceptions, and new learning. Charting gives students the opportunity to ask questions beyond the instructive texts and to dig deeper into understanding.

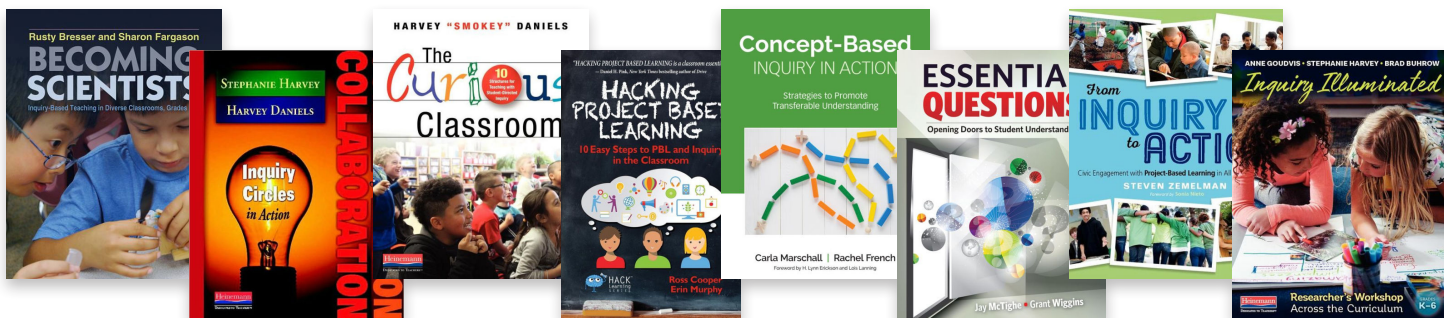
Ask open-ended questions: The most important part of inquiry-driven instruction is asking purposeful questions that can drive students to explore their learning. Try to focus in on a topic without being too broad. For example, when studying animal habitats, you may ask students to think about a problem that is a roadblock for a specific animal such as “How are melting polar ice caps affecting polar bears?” Encourage students to come up with their own open-ended questions as well!

Prepare a project-based learning lesson: You can dive right in by setting aside time for a project-based learning lesson. Ask students to solve a problem by providing ideas, research, and a product to present. For example, “What could help polar bears thrive?”

Curate content for inquiry kits: Create a kit of resources for students to use while researching. This includes finding multiple texts about a subject in fiction and nonfiction for students to read different viewpoints. You may also include digital books, audiobooks, articles, infographics, and more. The idea is to flood students with reliable and authentic information to help guide their research.

Participate in a genius hour event: Genius hour is based on giving students the opportunity to use 20% of their learning time on their own pursued passions.⁶ Try setting aside an hour of time each week for students to pursue their learning passions.

Professional learning resources: There are some great professional resources available to help guide teachers in the process of incorporating inquiry-driven learning into their teaching practices. See some of our favorites below!



Recommended Professional Learning Resources

Bresser, R., & Fargason, S. *Becoming Scientists: Inquiry-Based Teaching In Diverse Classrooms, Grades 3-5.*

Harvey, Stephanie. *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles In Action.*

Daniels, Harvey. *Curious Classroom: 10 Structures For Teaching With Student-Directed Inquiry.*

Cooper, Ross. *Hacking Project Based Learning: 10 Easy Steps To PBL And Inquiry In The Classroom.*

French, Rachel. *Concept-Based Inquiry In Action: Strategies To Promote Transferable Understanding.*

Mctighe, Jay. *Essential Questions: Opening Doors To Student Understanding.*

Zemelman, Steven. *From Inquiry To Action: Civic Engagement With Project-Based Learning In All Content Areas.*

Goudvis, Anne. *Inquiry Illuminated: Researcher's Workshop Across The Curriculum.*

⁵ Stead, (2006). Reality Checks: Teaching Reading Comprehension with Nonfiction, K-5

⁶ Kelser, Chris. What is Genius Hour? Retrieved from <https://www.keslerscience.com/what-is-genius-hour/>