

Why Inquiry?

The reason for proposing inquiry in our schools is that we want students to engage in authentic, real work that reflects the work that an adult at work or in the community might tackle. We want students to engage in questioning that provoke authentic exploration with the characters of academic rigor typical of real work with real ideas.

Schools ought to be communities of robust inquiry that strive to foster intellectual habits of thought, meaning-making and discourse in all students, rich and poor, gifted and severely ordinary. Schools ought to be communities where students come to do rich, engaging work--work that inspires, develops insight and stirs the imagination.

Schools ought to be places of robust inquiry that:

- engage students in meaningful, purposeful, worthy work. Work that is authentic, intellectually and emotionally engaging
- respect and cultivate the dispositions that all children bring with them when they first walk through our doors: imagination, curiosity, persistence, and the drive to understand the world.
- respect and cultivate the ability of all children to think-with their words, their drawings, their bodies, their heads and their hearts.
- help students engage with, and understand, difficult matters.
- help students uncover things that have been hidden, and bring to life brand new questions, ideas and abilities.
- make school an intellectually exciting place to be, a place where learning is fun even when it is hard, perhaps especially when it is hard, and frustrating, and challenging.
- require teachers to be co-inquirers with the students in the inquiry.
- require teachers to co-create meaningful, authentic learning tasks and activities with students that lead to deep understanding.

Inquiry is the process by which knowledge is created in our world. Inquiry brings the following features into play:

- personal experience,
- the need for further information
- knowledge creation
- deep understanding

The Inquiry Learning Community

*Learner
Centered*

*Knowledge
Centered*

*Assessment
Centered*



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When we, as humans want to know, when we want to deepen understanding, we undertake an inquiry. Once students are invited into participating in the real work of a discipline, their level of interest, engagement and quality of their work increases dramatically because they now have reached a place of deep understanding.

"There is a good deal of evidence that learning is enhanced when teachers pay attention to the knowledge and beliefs that learners bring to a learning task, use this knowledge as a starting point for new instruction, and monitor students' changing conceptions as instruction proceeds. For example, sixth graders in a suburban school who were given inquiry-based physics instruction were shown to do better on conceptual physics problems than eleventh and twelfth grade physics students taught by conventional methods in the same school system. A second study comparing seventh-ninth grade urban students with the eleventh and twelfth grade suburban physics students again showed that the younger students, taught by the inquiry-based approach, had a better grasp of the fundamental principles of physics (White and Frederickson, 1997, 1998). New curricula for young children have also demonstrated results that are extremely promising: for example, a new approach to teaching geometry helped second-grade children learn to represent and visualize three-dimensional forms in ways that exceeded the skills of a comparison group of undergraduate students at a leading university (Lehrer and Chazan, 1998). Similarly, young children have

been taught to demonstrate powerful forms of early geometry generalizations (Lehrer and Chazan, 1998) and generalizations about science (Schauble et al., 1995; Warren and Rosebery, 1996)." (1)

"There is continuity in inquiry. The conclusions reached in one inquiry become means, material and procedural, of carrying on further inquiries. In the latter, the results of earlier inquiries are taken and used without being resubjected to examination This immediate use of objects known in consequence of previous mediation is readily confused with immediate knowledge." (2)

References

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