The Inquiry Process (Conducting Research)

TN 24

Inquiry-based learning is a form of **self-directed learning** in which the learners decide what they need (want) to learn, identify and use resources that will provide the necessary information, and assess their own progress in learning. Although self-contained "research projects" may be described as inquiry projects, the term "inquiry" has a larger meaning than **research**. Inquiry encompasses the habits of mind that promote learning, and the processes that can be woven through all classroom activities to enable students to broaden and deepen their understanding of the world. Inquiry processes begin and are sustained by **student curiosity**. They are supported by teachers who ask, "How can we find out?" Inquiry-based instruction fosters and sustains an attitude of inquiry that will guide students through a lifetime of **independent learning**.

Building classrooms around inquiry is a way of **integrating process and content**. Students learn to locate, manage, process, and share ideas—at the same time deepening their understanding of subjects that matter to them.

Stages of Inquiry

Students need to review and assess their inquiry process at the end of each stage. They may move back into the inquiry process at any time.

Stage 1: Task Definition

- Pose the question: "What do I want to know (more) about?"
- Establish the purpose and need for inquiry.

Stage 2: Planning

- Activate prior knowledge.
- Develop specific question to focus and direct inquiry.
- Establish assessment criteria for content and process.

Stage 3: Information Retrieval

- Identify and select information sources.
- Locate and collect information.
- Primary (e.g., interview, survey)
- Secondary (e.g., periodical, book)

Stage 4: Information Processing

- Choose relevant information.
- Evaluate information.
- Organize and record information.
- Make connections and inferences.

Stage 5: Creation/Genesis

- Make decisions about audience, purpose, and form.
- Create product(s).
- Revise and edit.

Stage 6: Presentation and Assessment

- Present final form of product.
- Assess product.
- Evaluate inquiry process and skills.

Teacher Considerations

Teachers…

- model the attitudes and habits of an inquiring mind
- act as a catalyst for student thought
- create a learning environment that supports inquiry into questions and topics that students care about
- plan a course of study flexible enough to accommodate unanticipated inquiries
- build students' repertoire of strategies, while encouraging more autonomy
- broaden the information base in the classroom and links to the community
- manage inquiry activities that may require students to work independently in settings other than the classroom

***** This information sheet is adapted from *Senior 2 English Language Arts* General Learning Outcome 3, pages 169-170. Teachers may wish to read "Fostering Student Independence in Inquiry," a detailed chart (pages 171-178 of the ELA document) that surveys the six stages of inquiry and outlines the tasks appropriate for skills required at each stage for both advanced and less experienced students. Stages of Inquiry and Fostering Student Independence in Inquiry Posters (for classroom display) are available through Manitoba Text Book Bureau, Stock # 80386.

Related Teacher Support Materials

- "Geographic Skills and Perspectives," Appendix A, *Canadian National Standards for Geography, A Standards-Based Guide to K-12 Geography*. The Canadian Council for Geographic Education, 2001. Copyright: The Royal Canadian Geographical Society.
- SFAL 6.84: Researching
- SFAL Chapter 8: Student Learning Projects
- TN 2: The Nature of Geography
- TN 11: Asking Geographic Questions
- TN 12: Asking Questions
- TN 37: Critical Thinking in Social Studies