What is Inquiry-Based Learning?

Sources:
TeAchnology: http://www.teach-nology.com/currenttrends/inquiry/

Inquiry-based learning (IBL) is more than asking a student what he or she wants to know. Inquiry here implies possessing skills and attitude, which allows a person to ask questions about new resolutions and issues while gaining new information. It’s also about triggering curiosity. And activating a student’s curiosity is, some would argue, a far more important and complex goal than the objective of mere information delivery.

The dictionary meaning of Inquiry is seeking knowledge, information, or truth through questioning. All the people carry on with this process throughout their life, even if one might find it not very much reflecting. For example, infants use inquiry to build their sense of the world; the babies turn towards voices, put things in their mouths, grasp things, and observe faces that come near. The inquiry process is mainly the gathering of data and information and applying them to senses like smelling, tasting, touching, hearing and seeing.

Much interesting information and facts are readily available, which needs an understanding of how to make sense out of it and turn it into useful knowledge. The teachers must be able to analyze that he or she does into only have to accumulate information and data but also have to generate it into useful knowledge, which can be easily done through IBL. Our country’s success depending upon natural resources is the past; the future of our country’s success now depends upon the workforce which works smarter.

What inquiry-based teachers do isn’t easy at all; however, it’s just hidden, and some people confuse the two. By hiding a teacher’s strings (the strategies used to investigate inquiry), teachers encourage inquiry, and the students develop their own skills as content-area experts.

Unfortunately, the traditional ways of teaching discourage the process of inquiry. It makes the student get less prone to asking questions as they move through their grade levels, they are just expected to listen and repeat the expected answers. This is due to the lack of understanding of IBL. IBL is not just asking questions, but it is a way of converting data and information into useful knowledge.

Despite its complexity, IBL can become easier on teachers once they have mastered the techniques. It becomes seemingly easier because it transfers some responsibilities from teachers to students, but it’s really easier because releasing authority engages students. Teachers who use IBL combat the “dunno”- a chronic problem in student engagement.

When a teacher asks a student something like, “What do you want to know about (subject)?” they are often met with a shrug, or a, “dunno.” Inquiry-based learning, if front-loaded well, generates such excitement in students that neurons begin to fire, curiosity is triggered, and students can’t wait to become experts in answering their own questions.

There are four essential elements on which IBL depends, which are, first is that the patterns and meanings should not be deceptive to the beginners, second is that the useful knowledge about a field should be structured, third is that the knowledge which is structured should be applicable, transferable, and accessible to a vast range of situations, fourth is that the structured knowledge should be easily retrieved so that new information in that particular field could be gained without much effort.

IBL can be applied on all disciplines, which has been confirmed through different researches. Learners have different perspectives of viewing the world like economic, historic, scientific, artistic, etc. The disciplines can be interrelated through IBL, which ensures the integrity of different disciplines and the world views about them.

The teacher must organize their lesson plans according to the changing, interrelating, and communicating of knowledge. A good teacher's worksheet enables the student to increase its
study skills by providing different ways of viewing the world, communicating with it, and successfully introducing new questions and issues of daily life and finding answers of them. Questioning and finding answers is an extremely important factor of IBL as it aids in effectively generating knowledge. In the end, IBL is basically teaching students to have a greater understanding of the world they work, communicate, learn, and live in.

**Learning Something New**

Triggering inquiry is about learning something new, and triggering curiosity is no small feat. It takes modeling enthusiasm; and learning something new generates our own enthusiasm, even if it’s something new about the content we’ve covered for years.

Teachers have to bring the love of inquiry into the classroom. They must model their own curiosity quotient. Our curiosity quotient is a hunger to learn that defines how we advance our knowledge of the world. According to the Harvard Business Review, a higher curiosity quotient can indicate more flexibility and help build a greater ability to handle complexity.

**The 4 Steps of Inquiry-Based Learning**

After a teacher finds an interesting topic and has triggered curiosity in the students, what comes next in inquiry-based learning? This can be answered in four basic steps that should represent the outline of a simple unit. Lessons on literacy, researching, informational writing, for example, should be embedded into each of these steps.

1. **Students develop questions that they are hungry to answer.** Writing tie-in: Have them develop a problem statement that requires them to pitch their question using a constructed response, further inquiry, and citation.

2. **Research the topic using time in class.** It’s crucial to have some of this be classwork so students have access to the head researcher in the room- the teacher. The teacher isn’t going to do the work for them, but you are going to guide them and model methods of researching reliably.

3. **Have students present what they’ve learned.** Students should create and present a culminating artifact. When I have my students present what they’ve learned, I use a rubric that uses “Able to Teach” as the acme of what to reach for. After all, many people can understand content, but can they communicate it?

4. **Ask students to reflect on what worked about the process and what didn’t.** Reflection is key. And it isn’t just about asking them to think back on their opinion of the topic. It’s about reflecting on the process itself. That’s where the work goes into metacognition. Thinking about thinking. Thinking about how they learned not just what they learned.

In terms of your content area, imagine a classroom where different kids are presenting their findings on a single, simple aspect of the content. You’d have a classroom that, overall, learns deeper and wider than ever before.

In terms of student achievement, the power of their question should help drive the research, the writing, and the presentation. It should help motivate them to become experts in their self-described field. And the more often a student gets a taste of what it feels like to be an expert, in however small a concept, the more they will want that feeling later on in life.

It all starts with teachers finding their own enthusiasm, own excitement, and own curiosity. Trigger those attributes and the classroom will be heading towards being built on inquiry.

**Classroom Connections:**

ELA: Dissecting a poem or scene in a book. Digging deeper on topics in informational texts.
Math: Proving algorithms or explaining theorems.
Science: The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) is based on inquiry-based learning.
Social Studies/History: Digging deeper on text, art/photos, or primary documents to expand understanding.