

Inquiry in the MYP Individuals & Societies Classroom



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The Purpose of Inquiry

Inquiry-based learning is one of the central ideas of the MYP and puts students at the center of learning. It is a way for your students to directly connect their classroom experiences with their own knowledge, and the world around them.

Good inquiry starts off with the teacher having a very clear idea of what skills the students are going to be working towards and developing throughout the inquiry-based activity or unit.

Ideally, good inquiry-based teaching will involve lots of opportunities for differentiation of personalized learning.

So to sum up inquiry, it's a method of teaching where the teacher creates a structure where students work towards a particular goal or outcome with flexibility for students to make the work their own.

Do you already use inquiry-based teaching in your classroom? What have you found works best for you and your students?

The Stages of Inquiry

There need to be multiple opportunities for students to succeed in different ways, but one of the key features of a good inquiry-based lesson regarding teaching is that the teacher is enabled to deal with students on an individual basis and support them on their particular individual needs.

Beginning a unit with a provocation, then proceed with activities that focus on inquiring into the concepts that will be taught in the unit.

When students embark on the process of questioning, they begin to evaluate their perspectives or the perspectives of others on the concepts of the unit.

This process provokes a deep interest and further inquiry into how, why, what, when.

Through this questioning technique, the students have an invested interest in the topic and a desire to uncover the response to their questions. They are also much more active and dynamic in the learning process. Learning is centered around thinking and thinking is inspired by questioning.

The Three Stages of Inquiry

To understand the different ways inquiry can work within the classroom, it is often helpful to think of inquiry regarding three stages - structured, guided, and open. During the teaching of your MYP unit, you will often move through these different stages of inquiry.



STRUCTURED INQUIRY

This stage of inquiry provides students with a high level of structure and guidance. Students often follow the lead of the teacher often engaging in one inquiry together as an entire group using teacher provided resources.



GUIDED INQUIRY

This stage of inquiry provides students with some direction with the teacher acting as a facilitator. The teacher takes great care to provide the right support when needed. Students can be given the necessary materials and questions to answer, however students have more freedom in answering the question versus structured inquiry, and are involved in designing the product or solution.



OPEN INQUIRY

This stage of inquiry involves students leading the direction in all respects, coming up with the questions then designing the investigation/process, carrying it out, and communicating and reflecting on the results.

My notes



Inquiry in Practice

Inquiry as a concept is a huge idea. In order to consider what an inquiry based classroom might look like, think about how you can put students in the driver's seat when it comes to learning. It can be really difficult to relinquish control over the classroom, particularly when you've put a lot of time into developing your well-thought-out unit plan!

Use the following questions and worksheets to help you think more about what inquiry can look like in your classroom.

What is a unit, project, or lesson that you would like to add more inquiry-based learning into?

List some of the activities in this unit/project/lesson that is teacher-focused and not inquiry-based:

- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---

Now add those teacher-based activities to the left side of the table and think about ways your students can learn this same information by investigating, exploring, inquiring. Then go ahead and fill in the right side of the table with your new ideas.

Teacher-focused:

Inquiry-based idea:









In order to think about this shift, it's helpful to consider this example.

This is an example of how inquiry can take place:

1. Choose an image that's connected to the unit
2. Show the image to my students and ask them what's happening?
3. Ask my students to write down questions or guess who the people are/setting is in the image
4. Provide an opportunity to let my students think about why the image exists (for example, I've used a photo of a refugee boat in the Mediterranean and asked students to think about why children are in the boat, where has this boat come from, where are they trying to get to, who took the photograph, and what's the purpose of it).

Using these questions, I am modeling inquiry for the students, and I'm hooking them into the unit to get them thinking about the particular topics that we're going to discuss.

Lesson Plans & Activities

Here are some learning activities and lesson plans that focus on inquiry-based teaching methods so students has the flexibility to really own their learning.

Enlightenment Song Activity

When my students are wrapping up their work on the enlightenment time period, I like to use a fun song activity to get them thinking and reviewing each enlightenment philosopher. This is a way for students to investigate and explore, while I guide them through the process.

You can easily modify this type of activity for any unit you are covering in your classroom.

In the resources section, find:

- A student direction worksheet on the Enlightenment Song Activity.

Projects

Instead of a big test at the end of your units, consider asking your students to create a project to show their learning instead. This way students are able to be creative, explore and investigate their learning further, and make more connections.

One of my favorite projects is my Mesoamerican Museum Summative Project where students create their own artifacts. The final day of the project, we have a "museum" day where students go around to view the artifacts that their classmates have created.

Another fun project is asking students to create children's storybooks after synthesizing information from the unit. I have my students create Revolution Storybooks by researching a revolution from around the world and then synthesizing the information and writing a children's nonfiction book that is appropriate to share with our Grade 5 class.

In the resources section, find:

- A student project worksheet that goes through all the steps of the Mesoamerican Museum Project.
- A student directions worksheet for the Revolution Storybook project.

Use Art

Using art is a great way to get students involved in inquiry. This can be creating their own artwork based on what they are learning, or viewing artwork and creating new meaning for themselves through their viewing.

One of my favorite art projects I do with my students is when teaching the Boston Massacre. I give students two different artworks -- one from the colonialist's view point and one from the British's view point. Then I have the students explore and create meaning through a guided inquiry process.

In the resources section, find:

- A guided inquiry worksheet on the Boston Massacre and Point of View.

Scavenger Hunts

Everyone loves scavenger hunts and I think this is a great way to get students involved in their own learning and create meaning from their learning materials. You can do this in many ways: with your textbook, with a book or article you're reading, with a speech they listen to out loud, with a documentary, or using online resources like a webquest.

When I teach the Declaration of Independence, I use a scavenger hunt that helps my students really pay attention to the details and then I ask them guided inquiry questions to help them develop their own thoughts.

In the resources section, find:

- A student direction page for the Declaration of Independence Scavenger Hunt.

Conclusion

An inquiry approach requires more work on the front-end of instruction. It's also important to maintain a balance of instructional approaches. Inquiry can be achieved using a variety of instructional approaches, but remember, the task is to ensure that students are in charge of what they're learning.

Notes

Inquiry in the Classroom

Teacher Reflection

Think through the lessons and activities you have planned over the next month or so. How can you incorporate more student-led activities and inquiry into your plans?

How might your students benefit from more inquiry-based lessons?

What do you want to remember most about what you learned?

My notes



Resources

Find all the printables that were discussed in this Print and Go Pack by downloading the individual files in this Pack.



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