



Inquiry-Based Learning

Submitted by Lorine Sweeney

Guiding Question:

What is inquiry and inquiry-based learning and how can Social Studies teachers be successful in implementing inquiry-based learning activities?

Abstract:

Inquiry is when students experience the wonder of exploration and the quest for understanding. Inquiry-based learning involves questioning, seeking answers, and constructing new understandings. Inquiry-based learning replaces lessons that rely solely on “knowledge telling.” Looking at Social Studies learner outcomes through the lens of inquiry involves new pedagogical practices for teachers. Following a model for inquiry will assist teachers and students as they implement inquiry-based learning activities in their classrooms.

Introduction

Recently a neighbour shared with me a provincial examination taken by 8th Graders in 1895. The caption read, “Look, Could You Pass this Exam?”

Questions on the exam included:

1. Give nine rules for capital letters.
2. Give the principal parts of lie, lay, and run.

3. Name the events connected with the following dates: 1607, 1492, 1849.
4. Give an account of the discovery of America by Columbus.

The neighbor remarked, “And they said kids weren’t learning back then!”

I was struggling for words to explain my position that, no, students really weren’t learning back then and, unfortunately

many similar situations still exist today. Upon further reflection, I realized that I needed to explain to my neighbour that students exposed to the type of questioning illustrated on the exam are not given opportunity to develop deep understanding. They are not encouraged to connect and evaluate; they lack opportunities to participate in meaningful learning experi

Phases of Inquiry, Teaching Tips and Key Learnings

Phases of Inquiry from Focus on Inquiry	Sample examples of Focus on Inquiry Teaching Tip	Examples of Key Learnings from Social Studies Teachers
Planning Stage	Help students prepare for retrieval in the planning stage. Model brainstorming for potential sources and help define search terms.	Students should formulate their own questions. Students seek understanding through questioning.
Retrieving Stage	Teach students to evaluate websites – currency, coverage, objectivity, accuracy, and authority	Assess every stage as you go along. Also, allow students time to reflect at each stage.
Processing Stage	Teach critical thinking skills Teach critical reading skills	Knowledge is constructed, not reproduced, and students construct understanding through inquiry-based learning.
Creating Stage	Give opportunities to complete a draft creation and revise after input from others	Don’t give time for too much “glitzy” technology. Use technology for what you can’t do otherwise.
Sharing Stage	Provide opportunity to think about the audience, complete presentation notes and practice.	Provide students a chance to write about why they chose a particular sharing method.
Evaluating Stage	Establish pre-determined evaluation criteria and evaluate the final product as part of the whole	Students can assess their inquiry in the form of a personal flow chart

ences – experiences best accomplished through inquiry-based learning.

The new Social Studies Program of Studies is moving beyond fact-finding and teacher-formed questions. It is based on developing critical thinking skills, processes, values and attitudes. It reflects an inquiry-based approach to learning.

What is Inquiry?

Inquiry is an approach to learning that steers away from the kind of “knowledge telling” illustrated in the example of the grade eight exam. Inquiry is “the dynamic process of being open to wonder and puzzlements and coming to know and understand the world” (Galileo Education Network, 2004).

What is Inquiry-based learning?

Effective inquiry-based learning is when students are exposed to learning experiences that are not about memorizing and regurgitating facts. Facts change, and information is abundant. Also, effective inquiry is not designed to lead students to the “right answer.” There often is more than one “right” answer.

Effective inquiry-based learning as defined by Alberta Learning (2004) is “a process where students are involved in their learning, formulate questions, investigate widely and then build new understandings, meanings and knowledge. That knowledge is new to the students and

may be used to answer a question, to develop a solution or to support a position or point of view. The knowledge is usually presented to others and may result in some sort of action” (Alberta Learning, 2004, p.1).

Research for Deliberate Inquiry

The new Social Studies Program of Studies includes specific outcomes for skills and processes designed to encourage students to apply their learning. One of the specific skills outcomes, Research for Deliberate Inquiry, is intended to develop learners who are self-motivated problem solvers and co-creators of knowledge. These students apply selected skills, evaluate appropriate resources, and use suitable technology.

Focus on Inquiry Model

In 1994 Alberta Learning published *Focus on Inquiry*, a resource designed to support teachers as they incorporate inquiry-based learning in their classrooms.

The inquiry model outlined in *Focus on Inquiry* includes six phases of inquiry:

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| (a) planning | (b) retrieving |
| (c) processing | (d) creating |
| (e) sharing | (f) evaluating |

with ongoing reflection included at each phase.

Within the document, each phase is presented through six lenses, one being teaching or “teaching tips.” During the

past two years, Social Studies teachers throughout the province have been attending inservices related to inquiry and the inquiry model. As teachers completed my inservices, I asked them to write down their key learnings. The table on page one includes one summarized example of a Focus on Inquiry teaching tip for each phase and one key learning as expressed by Alberta teachers as they learned about the inquiry model.

As social studies teachers become accustomed to using an inquiry approach in their classrooms, they will realize how powerful this approach is in developing proficient, investigative, and self-motivated citizens.

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Annotated Resources, Web Sites, Books, etc.

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Focus on Inquiry:

Written by University of Alberta professors Dr. Dianne Oberg and Dr. Jennifer Branch, this resource is designed as a cross-curricular teachers’ guide to implementing inquiry-based learning. Curricular connections to inquiry, including the new Social Studies Program of Studies are addressed. The document incorporates suggestions for teachers as they design inquiry activities and as they work through the six stages of inquiry. The document also focuses on research, metacognition, and professional growth. Available at http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/bySubject/focusoninquiry.pdf

Galileo Educational Network Association creates and promotes leading edge educational practices through research, collaboration, and professional learnings. The inquiry & ICT area of their site includes articles on the nature of inquiry, exhibits of ICT infused inquiry projects, and on-line resources. Available at www.galileo.org/tips.html

The Inquiry Page:

This is a virtual community of educators who create, discuss, and share inquiry experiences. Innovative learning experiences are shared in a collaborative environment. You will need to join to become a member, but once there, you are able to share, collaborate and grow as an inquirer. Available at <http://www.inquiry.uiuc.edu/index.php3>

Concept to Classroom houses a series of free self-paced workshops about today’s educational issues. The Inquiry-based

Learning page houses a workshop that is informative and readable. The workshop takes the reader through topics such as the nature of inquiry-based learning, a comparison of inquiry to the traditional approach, benefits, classroom connections, and critical perspectives. The page leads to video clips of demonstrations of inquiry classrooms and facilitation tips. Available at www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class

Mavericks Teacher Resources:

Using Inquiry Learning: This website represents history by using the voices and opinions of people important to the development of Alberta. The page begins with an outline of how to use inquiry-based learning and then utilizes images and audio and visual files to allow students to become thinkers about the “real” history of Alberta. The site leads the teacher in using ICT skills, has curriculum connections to the social studies program of studies, and incorporates ideas for assessment. Available at <http://www.glenbow.org/mavericks/teacher/english/index.html>

Biography:

Dr. Lorine Sweeney is the AISI/Curriculum coordinator with Buffalo Trail Public Schools. She also teaches on-line courses to Masters’ students for the University of Alberta Teacher-Librarian by Distant Learning Program. These courses are directly related to inquiry-based learning. Previously, Lorine spent several years leading inquiry projects in classroom settings. Both Lorine’s Masters and Doctorate degrees relate to research about constructivist teaching and resource-based inquiry learning.