

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF INQUIRY LEARNING.....

Inquiry learning is a constructivist approach, in which students have ownership of their learning. It starts with exploration and questioning and leads to investigation into a worthy question, issue, problem or idea.

It involves asking questions, gathering and analysing information, generating solutions, making decisions, justifying conclusions and taking action.



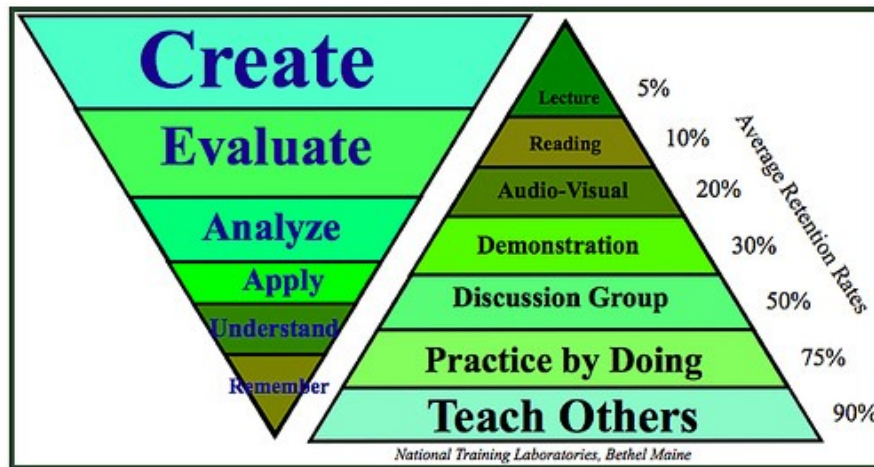
Why Inquiry??

Inquiry learning approaches when correctly implemented can help develop higher-order, information literacy and critical thinking skills. They can also develop problem-solving abilities and develop skills for lifelong learning. It engages and motivates students. Students worked co-operatively and collaboratively to solve problems with a greater depth of understanding.

The teacher's role in inquiry learning is one of 'facilitator rather than the 'keeper of knowledge". The teacher scaffolds learning for students, gradually removing the scaffolding as students develop their skills. With young children or students new to inquiry it is usually necessary to use a form of guided inquiry.

At the heart of inquiry is a good question. It is often open-ended (has no right or wrong answer) and is higher-order, rich, worthy and/or fertile.

What is inquiry learning?



"Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me and I understand."

The last part of this statement is the essence of inquiry learning. Inquiry implies involvement that leads to understanding. Furthermore, involvement in learning implies possessing skills and attitudes that permit you to seek resolutions to questions and issues while you construct new knowledge.

Inquiry learning is a collaborative process in which teachers and students work together to negotiate various aspects of the curriculum. Inquiry learning involves students posing their own questions, exploring answers and solving problems.

Inquiry learning enables learners to examine the complexity of their world and form concepts and generalizations instead of being told simple answers to more complex problems. It is based in the belief that students are powerful learners who must be actively engaged in the process of investigating, processing, organizing, synthesizing, refining and extending their knowledge within a topic"

A Context for Inquiry

Unfortunately, our traditional educational system has worked in a way that discourages the natural process of inquiry. Students become less prone to ask questions as they move through the grade levels. In traditional schools, students learn not to ask too many questions, instead to listen and repeat the expected answers.

Effective inquiry is more than just asking questions. A complex process is involved when individuals attempt to convert information and data into useful knowledge. Useful application of inquiry learning involves several factors: a context for questions, a framework for questions, a focus for questions, and different levels of questions. Well-designed inquiry learning produces knowledge formation that can be widely applied.

Importance of Inquiry

Memorizing facts and information is not the most important skill in today's world. Facts change, and information is readily available -- what's needed is an understanding of how to get and make sense of the mass of data.

As educators we must understand that schools need to go beyond data and information accumulation and move toward the generation of useful and applicable knowledge . . . a process supported by inquiry learning. In the past, our country's success depended on our supply of natural resources. Today, it depends upon a workforce that "works smarter."

Through the process of inquiry, individuals construct much of their understanding of the natural and human-designed worlds. Inquiry implies a "need or want to know" premise. Inquiry is not so much seeking the right answer -- because often there is none -- but rather seeking appropriate resolutions to questions and issues. For educators, inquiry implies emphasis on the development of inquiry skills and the nurturing of inquiring attitudes or habits of mind that will enable individuals to continue the quest for knowledge throughout life.

Content of disciplines is very important, but as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. No one can ever learn everything, but everyone can better develop their skills and nurture the inquiring attitudes necessary to continue the generation and examination of knowledge throughout their lives. For modern education, the skills and the ability to continue learning should be the most important outcomes.