

7 Benefits of inquiry-based learning

As well as building skills to help students reach a high level of thinking, inquiry-based learning can deliver other benefits to students and teachers.

1. Reinforces curriculum content

Whereas some see inquiry-based learning as a departure from the curriculum, you can use it to reinforce relevant content and improve understanding of core concepts.

This is due to curiosity's effect on the brain. When a concept sparks curiosity, there is increased activity in the hippocampus the region of the brain responsible for memory creation.

When students show more curiosity than normal regarding a specific topic, satiate it by using their questions to introduce an inquiry activity in the coming days.

In doing so, they should effectively retain essential information gleaned during the exercise, according to a study from the Association for Psychological Science.

2. “Warms Up” the brain for learning

Running a brief inquiry activity to start class can help students absorb information throughout the day, according to the same study.

Specifically, it states that curiosity prepares the brain for learning -- allowing students to become more proficient at understanding and remembering skills and concepts.

An easy way to inspire curiosity is by launching an inquiry activity as a surprise. Related to a recent topic students found especially interesting, begin a lesson by playing a video or sharing a primary source document. Then, give students an open question to answer either individually or as a group.

This will help start class in a curiosity-sparking, intellectually-stimulating way.

3. Promotes a deeper understanding of content

By delving into a concept through inquiry, students should see it as more than a simple rule, idea or formula.

Many of them will understand:

- How the idea was developed
- Why the rule or formula works
- When they can properly apply the rule, idea or formula

This is because the process of asking open questions, solving them through original strategies, empowers students to take ownership of their learning. Barring hiccups, they should be able to build understanding of a concept through their own methods and thinking styles. The same principle applies to experiential learning, which puts students at the center of the learning experience.

They won't have to follow a process they can't grasp, possibly arriving at a seemingly-unjustified conclusion.

4. Helps make learning rewarding

Inquiry can help students see the intrinsic rewards of learning, says an oft-cited article from the Harvard Educational Review.

The author states that many kids learn in an attempt to earn “the rewards of parental or teacher approval or the avoidance of failure.” As a result, they may not appreciate the inherent benefits of learning.

He hypothesized that inquiry-based learning instills a different mindset. It shows students how fulfilling the act of discovery is, and that theorising a new strategy or original conclusion is a reward. Because of this, they grow to enjoy the learning process itself not parent or teacher approval. This means that student appreciation for learning can improve with a simple inquiry exercise.

5. Builds Initiative and self-direction

Students can improve certain transferable skills through inquiry-based learning, many of which relate to initiative and self-direction. This is evident when examining the steps of the inquiry process. Students learn how to ask questions, investigate, discuss, collaborate, cooperate and reach their own conclusions. Although they can separately build these skills through other activities, self-guided inquiry and analysis synthesizes this development. Such skills will not only prove useful as students reach higher grades but enter post-secondary school and beyond.

6. Works in almost any classroom

Inquiry-based learning can also benefit teachers, as you can repurpose activities for almost any classroom. Even regardless of grade and individual skill levels. This is because you can:

- Adapt the pace and content to suit the needs of students
- Appeal to students who struggle to grasp content through traditional lessons
- Deliver exercises that greatly differ, using distinct content and investigation methods
- Use an inquiry exercise as either a “minds-on” activity, review, full lesson or standalone project
- Reinforce and expand upon any relevant concept, as long as students have shown curiosity towards it

In these ways, you’ll have the flexibility to provide inquiry exercises to the majority of your classes year after year.

7. Offers differentiated instruction

Running an inquiry-based learning activity will give you a chance to use differentiated instruction strategies, appealing to the diverse learning styles of your students. Students can work by themselves, or as part of a small or large group. Inquiry itself typically involves methods such as discussion and guided research. You can also provide content in form of text, audio, video and virtual or physical manipulatives such as building blocks. Delivering a range of content and ways to process it, inquiry activities can allow you to meet your students’ distinct learning needs and preferences. Prodigy Math Game is an adaptive learning platform that helps students practice math skills at their own pace. Sign up for a free teacher account today to help:

- Deliver differentiated assessments and test preps
- Inform your instruction and drive student achievement
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