

Inquiry-based Learning

Inquiry-based learning is a pedagogical approach grounded in belief in students' capacities to shape and manage their own learning, and in the innate drive of human curiosity. The format of inquiry-based learning courses or assignments varies substantially, but the strategy is perhaps most easily understood as a **scaffolded**, student-centered research project. For example, an inquiry-guided process might begin with students exploring a subject for research, then developing a series of relevant research questions, designing a course for research identifying tools and methods, and finally answering their questions, analyzing their data, and sharing findings with a broader learning community.

Not surprisingly, the process of asking and answering questions is key to inquiry-based learning, and it's important that instructors let go of the need to answer every question (or the belief that we should be able to). Inquiry-guided learning values strong question posing as an academic skill in and of itself, and makes students responsible for answering their own and each other's questions.

Some ways to implement inquiry-based approaches:

- Start small by beginning new units or lessons with a chance for students to generate questions based on the title or topic description. You might use these questions as the basis for an assignment (researching answers for a short written response), or revisit the questions at various points in the unit, reflecting on those you've addressed and posing new ones.
- For more substantial inquiry-based projects to be effective students must have sufficient guidance and **scaffolding**—that is, you should provide structured support for each component of their inquiry in the form of readings, models, instruction, and feedback.
- Devote portions of class time for students (individually or in groups) to work on and develop inquiry projects and use the time to observe, support, and conference.

References

- Kuh, George D. *High Impact Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. AAC&U, 2008.
- Lee, Virginia S. *Teaching and Learning Through Inquiry: A Guidebook for Institutions and Instructors*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2004.
- Rothstein, Dan, and Luz Santana. *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2011.

See also

Formative and Summative Feedback
Peer Review
Scaffolding Student Learning