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The Inquiry Page: A Collaboratory for Curricular Innovation

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The Inquiry Page is a web site for collaborative curriculum development. It supports a range of activities in which educators are encouraged to investigate, create, discuss, and reflect. Teachers inquire through their access to resources on teaching and learning, including quotes about inquiry teaching, articles, project links, curriculum units, and content resources. They communicate with other teachers through various online communication media. They construct their own versions of curricula using an online inquiry unit generator. They express themselves through these units and through sharing both literal and textual photos of their classrooms.

Background

All learning begins with the learner. What children know and what they want to learn are not just constraints on what can be taught; they are the very foundation for learning. Dewey's description of the four primary interests of the learner are still appropriate starting points: inquiry, or investigation--the child's natural desire to learn; communication--the propensity to enter into social relationships; construction--the delight in creating things; and expression, or reflection--the desire to extract meaning from experience. Dewey saw these as the natural resources, the uninvested capital, "upon the exercise of which depends the active growth of the child."

But, as Dewey recognized, schooling is not just about the individual. It is the coming together of the child's interests with those of the society. The disciplines we study in school represent centuries of collective thought as well as the interests of the larger community in maintaining itself by communicating its knowledge and values to the next generation. The Inquiry Page <http://inquiry.uiuc.edu> is about how teachers weave a learner's interests with those of society. It does this by supporting teachers as they share their successes and their collective expertise (Bruce & Davidson, 1996; Bruce & Easley, 2000). The page currently supports teachers and learners of all ages and curricular areas.

Inquiry Units

The Inquiry Page fosters the online creation of Inquiry Units by teachers (or students). Each unit starts with a guiding question and provides a space for activities of Investigation, Creation, Discussion, and Reflection. The user fills out a web-based form that leads to an XML-formatted data structure. When the unit is called up again by the same, or another user, a dynamic HTML file is generated. The latter can be used by students as they conduct their inquiry. In addition, students can edit a copy of the unit, thus using the curriculum Inquiry Unit as a place for their own work.

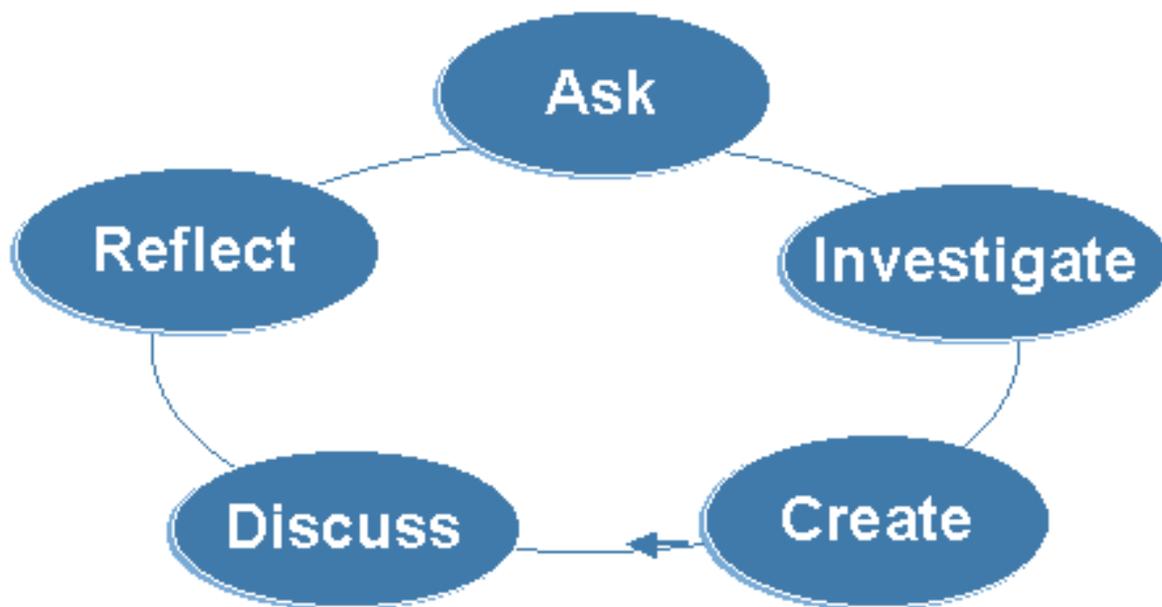


Figure 1. The inquiry cycle used to enter Inquiry Units.

The cycle employed in the Inquiry Page unit generator presents an idealized model for inquiry, not to constrain our account of inquiry, but rather to serve as a reminder of the range of activities that might be involved. The danger in any description of a process is that the reader may infer that that description is the only, or the ideal, form of that process; or, that the aspects of the process are steps to go through in some linear fashion. The intention here is not to specify the only, or the ideal process. Nor is it to identify rigid steps to follow in doing inquiry. Instead, it is to present in an organized way some of the important aspects of inquiry that might be supported in a successful learning environment. Inquiry often leads to new ideas, results, theories, questions, etc. that can be communicated with others. This communication is central to the whole inquiry process and our classroom environments ought to have a place for it.

Some Elements of the Inquiry Page

- Quote of the Day: A collection of writings on teaching and learning, with a special emphasis on those that expand our conception of what learning can be.
- Links to Resources: A dynamic incorporation (using Digital Windmill) of the Open Directory category: Reference: Education: Learning Theories: Inquiry Based Learning. This category is edited by the Inquiry Page development group.
- Evaluating Inquiry Instruction: A web page linking to articles, presentations, and other resources regarding the special issues of evaluating inquiry-based learning.
- Inquiry Units: A searchable data base of units for inquiry-based instruction across grade levels and subjects.
- Inquiry Partners: A growing collection of partner projects, courses, and schools.

Conclusion

We welcome your feedback, your contributions of Inquiry Units, and your inquiries regarding participation in the Inquiry Page project. Please write to <mailto:chip@illinois.edu>.

References

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