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Introduction

Too often secondary instruction is full of: science lab reports where the questions and conclusions contain the same information, 125 essays written by different students on the same historical topic, book reviews where summaries are plagiarized and passed off as original, PowerPoint slides filled with text that is “PowerPointless,” and so on.

This is not learning—this is following a recipe. Students in today’s schools trudge through assignments that aren’t personally meaningful in the name of mastering a certain number of learning targets and “covering material.” Learning in a vacuum without relevance and personal interests falls short. Yes, our high school students can compose a formulated five-paragraph essay, but can they defend and argue on topics that are truly meaningful and have an impact on their lives?

In this book, *Inspiring Curiosity: A Librarian’s Guide to Inquiry-Based Learning*, I hope to challenge librarians and classroom teachers to not only re-evaluate their goals, techniques, and procedures for teaching research—but to transform it. Sir Ken Robinson stated in his book *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything* (2009),

The fact is that given the challenges we face, education doesn’t need to be reformed—it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.

In my thirty plus years as an educator teaching every grade level from K-16, I have witnessed first-hand students who are transformed and engaged in meaningful work. I have empathized with students so consumed and frustrated with immigration issues that they cry out, “I thought I understood the issues, but now I don’t know!” I remember a student begging his history teacher for more time during their Socratic seminar because he “needed” to share with his classmates what he learned and wanted to influence their thinking. I’ve helped students track down information in hard-to-find college databases because they were passionate about their topic and wanted to learn more.

These moments have encouraged me to keep passion and inquiry at the center of my students’ experience and the focus of my instruction. I constantly strive to find relevant topics that pique student interest or provide opportunities to do work that matters. I have hit road blocks of curriculum pacing and administrative directives, but have always strived to give my students authentic reasons to publish and share their work with an audience who cares.

Inquiry-based learning puts the student in the driver’s seat and allows them to steer the direction of their learning. Our job as educators—whether you are an administrator, librarian, classroom teacher, or support staff—is to create an environment where this can thrive. We need to move away from compartmentalized knowledge towards multidisciplinary collaborative learning. We need to reframe what we are asking secondary students to do in school and empower them to take risks and apply what they know in real-world contexts. I hope this book inspires you to do the same.

Chapter 1 lays the foundation of inquiry-based learning and the pedagogical shift required for student agency. It asks you to review the culture of your school and evaluate whether students and teachers are empowered, take risks, work collaboratively

together, celebrate learning, and value literacy. Reviewing the ISTE Standards for Students (2016) and the National School Library Standards allows you to align your work and make goals for the future.

Chapter 2 challenges school librarians to build a strong foundation with their staff so they can work collaboratively and truly impact student learning. We look at various levels of inquiry (confirmation, structured, guided, or open inquiry) and discuss matching the instructional goals to the lesson. Suggestions for structuring inquiry lessons using Understanding by Design or Guided Inquiry Design are explored.

An extensive resource list of powerful openers for inquiry lessons are provided in Chapter 3. Oftentimes classroom teachers need new ideas to spark curiosity and engage students in meaningful conversations before they begin a personalized inquiry project. Activities around social justice issues, films, current events, or discussions with experts can engage students and provide context for their research. Problem-based learning, design thinking, and project-based learning provide insight and inspiration for structured inquiry lessons.

Chapter 4 explores how student generated questions are at the heart of inquiry-based learning. Readers will learn about the Question Formulation Technique and Visible Thinking routines as ways of helping students to fine-tune their thinking and invest themselves in quality work that matters.

Chapter 5 dives deep into the research process with ideas like “imagining the perfect source” and teaching students how to effectively search. Ideas are given for curating sources, developing a researcher’s mindset, and evaluating sources for authority and credibility. Note-taking strategies and ideas for differentiation are shared to make the learning experience personalized.

Publishing and performance tasks are discussed in Chapter 6. Stories of how students research and shared their learning with real audiences are highlighted, as well as technology tools for publishing.

Chapter 7 and 8 provide ideas for assessment and explains how to use inquiry tools throughout the research process. The benefits of reflection are explored as well as ideas of how the librarian can be more involved in assessment and reflection activities.

Finally, Chapter 9 is a librarian's call to action. Instead of being relegated to the beginning of the research instruction, librarians are encouraged to be involved in all aspects of inquiry-based learning.

Thank you for selecting this book, and I hope it opens your eyes to new possibilities and inspires you to share what you learn with your colleagues.



CHAPTER 1

Creating A Schoolwide Culture of Inquiry

One afternoon in the school library, I had a casual conversation with one of my students that led her down an interesting line of inquiry. Kate, a senior in the IB history class at Sunset High School, was talking about her upcoming Internal Assessment (a historical assessment). Kate was considering the topic of occupied France during WWII for her senior history research project. She had developed an interest in the topic during her junior year, after reading the novel *All The Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr. She was doing some background reading to get a sense of the issues during the time period.

I shared that my own father had been a teenager during WWII, and his family had been evicted from their home in Vire, France, in 1943. Their home had been occupied by the German army for two years, so the family moved in with my father's grandmother. One can imagine the turmoil.

Kate was genuinely interested, so I also shared that my uncle still had a journal of his experiences that he had written in secondary school. We discussed how smart it was of my uncle's forward-thinking teacher to ask students to reflect on their experiences. Eventually, I asked Kate if she would be interested in a video recording of my uncle reading from his journal and reminiscing with my father about growing up in the Normandy region. Kate said yes, so I sent her the YouTube video and directed her to print and online sources from our school library to get her started.

Kate's history teacher encouraged the class to take advantage of the local public library to locate academic journals and primary source documents using the JSTOR database. Kate visited Multnomah County Library and worked with a librarian there to reserve some titles. After some initial research, she was leaning toward the idea of how French identity changed during the occupation. "All of my background research has made me more confused, and I am trying to work out those ideas. It's still kind of murky," she reported after a week.

Kate experienced the natural uncertainty that occurs when a student has some solid research but hasn't adequately narrowed a research question. I encouraged Kate to look at sources outside of the American view of the war and see if she could find stories or speeches from the French resistance, perhaps newspapers or artifacts from a French museum, or the World Digital Library. Exploring the psychology of how culture is formed and how people under siege maintain a sense of self piqued her interest,

and Kate produced even more questions and ideas. She was well on her way to becoming a curious researcher.

Inquiry-Based Learning

Kate's story illustrates the transformational experience of a student personally engaged in authentic inquiry-based learning. Curiosity fuels students' passion to make connections with topics that are meaningful and real. By engaging in deep thinking and asking thought-provoking questions, students are challenged to consider new perspectives. Kate was offered plenty of choice and autonomy in selecting her topic, but it was her personal interest that made the difference. A hallmark of inquiry-based learning is that students' own driving questions propel their research. That spark of curiosity bridges the gap between what they know and do not know. Learners steer the direction of their inquiry as they consider the best way to uncover stories or unexpected ideas. Compare Kate's situation to the chorus of groans when a teacher assigns everyone to investigate a specific topic. Provocative and open-ended inquiry asks students to respond and think critically. As the research progresses, students organize and unpack information to assimilate new concepts. Notice how Kate leveraged the resources of her public library to gain additional sources beyond her school library. Using inquiry-based learning, students conduct interviews, formulate opinions, defend stances, or develop creative solutions connected to their original questions. Students are provided opportunities to present what they learned through writing or multimedia channels. Students may feel compelled to take action or extend their research to the community. Finally, inquiry-based learners reflect on what they have learned and accomplished. I was thrilled that my family history resonated with Kate and helped move her research forward. Inquiry-based learning is more than a research paper or asking questions