

Inquiry for Deep Learning

Course

Dispositions for Inquiry [7:58]

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About

The habits of asking questions, seeking information, wondering, questioning, challenging are essential for inquiry.

Transcript

You know there is no question that we need to educate our students today not just to know stuff; they really need to be educated to be inquisitive, you have to be persistent, even skeptical, in order for them to stay apace of this constantly changing information landscape we live in. In short, they need to learn the feel and the science of inquiry.

We can think of inquiry as having two dimensions. Dispositions, the feel, and skills, the science. So today, in this session we're going to focus on dispositions, habits. Habits of asking questions, seeking information, wondering, questioning, challenging. Inquiry can't occur without these dispositions. And the school librarian has an important role to play in nurturing them.

Let's think of dispositions as habits, habits of mind. They're like other habits we have developed over time like walking the dog each morning, doing our push-ups, these dispositions though are behaviors that we practice over time so that they become our way of thinking. Let's think about six dispositions that Ron Richard describes. He synthesized the work of several theorists to come up with these and they fit the dispositions of inquiry exceedingly well.

First, inquiry requires us to be open-minded. Without open-mindedness you can't be ready to consider new information or alternative viewpoints. This disposition is all the more important today, I think, as we see our society highly polarized where open-mindedness seems a rare commodity. A school library is an environment that fosters consideration of diverse viewpoints. So today we're going to talk about scripts that school librarians can use to develop and nurture those dispositions in their students. Language we can use consistently to help build the habits. In the Learning Support, you'll see a handout that provides a summary of these scripts. You may want to follow along with that as we talk.

For open-mindedness, that script might be, "Yes, but." When students present their positions we need to be sure that they have considered various sources, various viewpoints, so we say to them, "Yes, but have you looked at," or "Yes, but have you considered?" When we begin to hear our students saying to each other or to us, "Yes, but," we know that they are adopting the disposition of open-mindedness. For young children, using literature to begin that conversation about open-mindedness might start with the book like *Duck! Rabbit!* by Amy Krause Rosenthal, or the classic *Blind Men and the Elephant* tale. Either of these can become a common reference for thinking on all sides when engaging in inquiry.

Secondly, inquiry requires that we be curious. By providing resources to pique interest, the school library can serve as a stimulus for curiosity. But of course, a collection alone isn't enough to engender curiosity in all students. We librarians serve as mediators between students and our collection. And in that role we model curiosity. We create a culture of wondering. A script for librarians to model curiosity can be simply, "I wonder?" And we need to say it often.

Thirdly, inquiry benefits from our being metacognitive. In short, we want to hear our students become aware of the process of inquiry. And to ask and answer questions for themselves like, "Do I have enough information? Is my information good enough? Is my question good enough?" Think alouds should be common place among school librarians as a technique for modeling what one is thinking.

The scripts of metacognition are reflective questions like these, like, "Do I have enough information? Have I considered all sides?" We can encourage such reflection by asking students to keep a research log, recording responses to prompts that we might give them first that they might develop later on. Like, "Could there be other or better sources for me to look for next?" Or "How can I be sure I have all the information I need?"

Fourth, inquiry requires being investigative. Suffice it to say that true inquiry goes beyond gathering facts. Perhaps more important is the fact that being investigative requires

persistence, willingness to regroup, try again, as well as willingness to seek the best information; authoritative and thorough enough, rather than information that's good enough. A script for being investigative is, "What more do I need to know?"

Next, inquiry requires that students be strategic or planful. To begin, students need an appropriate mental model of the inquiry process. If they think of inquiry or research as simply transferring information from source to their product then their mental model of inquiry is flawed. Teaching students the stages of inquiry helps them get beyond this flawed perception. Using a model like the guided inquiry model from Kuhlthau or the Stripling model, both of which are provided in Learning Support for you, the librarian can teach students to be planful. This might involve using organizers to guide recording of found information. A script for being strategic could be the headings of a three-column note taking organizer, with facts, my thoughts, questions, or, I learned, I think, I wonder.

Finally, while as teachers we find it sometimes annoying, really inquiry demands that researchers be skeptical. Recognizing solid evidence to support in our argument or to make a decision requires a critical, sometimes even skeptical stance. Understanding the importance of the authority of information is a fundamental lesson. Teaching students to seek verification is another example of critical thinking that librarians can teach. A script to model healthy criticism sounds something like, "Says who?"

So how do we go about developing these dispositions in our students? First, modeling can be a powerful method. For example, as I read to children I pause to ask, "I wonder, what does that mean? Why would? What if?" Modeling curiosity. But a word about modeling, when we model behavior for students, it's really not enough to simply do what we want them to do. It's important for us to label that behavior. So we can simply say, "Did you notice that I stopped to ask a question as I was reading? That is what inquiring readers do."

Students can also benefit from repeated practice. We need to continue to use these scripts and continue to encourage students in these dispositions over and over. One time won't do it for developing a habit. And after all, we're trying to develop habits. Scripting and student language as we've talked about earlier so that these dispositions become habits is another way of helping to develop them. We need to hear ourselves saying often, "I wonder? What more information do I need? Says who?" Often when we think of inquiry, we immediately think of the skills required to engage in research. But, let's not forget that without the dispositions of inquiry the skills may not result in the best outcomes.

Activities

Scripts for Dispositions of Inquiry

Context:

Inquiry is an avenue for making research interesting, challenging, and even exciting for students. Donham explains that inquiry has two dimensions: the dispositions and the skills, the former of which is the focus of Lesson 1. Dispositions are habits of mind, which students can build by observing a librarian or teacher model them, as well as via repetition and practice. Ron Richard describes six dispositions that characterize inquiry: open-minded, curious, metacognitive, investigative, strategic or planful, and skeptical.

Instructions:

The use of scripts to model thinking aloud can help students to make habits of the dispositions of inquiry. Review the document, "Scripts for Dispositions of Inquiry," provided in the Resources below.

Identify an existing lesson or read-aloud for which you could inject some modeling of the dispositions of inquiry. For instance, to show open-mindedness, try the phrase, "Why might someone disagree?" Or, to show skepticism, ask, "Says who?"

Resources:



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Scripts

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Annotated Bibliography.

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