

RPTSG 2015-16

thinking about inquiry

Inquiry is the mindset students use to build their own knowledge and understanding through an active, open-minded exploration into a meaningful question, problem, or issue. Inquiry is considered to be a process where students:

- ask questions, conduct research, and produce some type of end product to demonstrate their understanding (the product does not have to mark an end point and can be the starting point for further inquiry)
- actively engage in building knowledge and deeper understanding of key concepts
- employ disciplinary thinking to develop important skills such as formulating good questions, plan inquiries, gather and analyze information and communicate their findings
- explore challenging questions, problems or issues that can be approached and answered in many different ways

Inquiry does not follow a set process or program. Different authors and organizations have proposed many different models of inquiry. Further, inquiry does not mean there are “no wrong answers” or “anything goes.” Rather, it requires students to provide justification for their thinking, changing the discussion from “right or wrong” to “more or less justified.”

Inquiry can be more or less guided and structured depending on what teachers need students to learn or to demonstrate. Inquiry needs to be scaffolded to match the background knowledge and abilities of the students.

Continuum of Inquiry



Elements of inquiry:

Is the result, answer or finding known or unknown?

Is the teacher or student deciding on the content or big idea?

Is the teacher or student asking the question to be investigated?

Is the teacher or student deciding on the method of investigation?

Starting points for inquiry:

an object

a tool

a story

a photograph or image

a problem or issue

a walk outside, place

community, culture

hobbies, sports

something from the news

something from media, tv, music

Mathematical provocations:

a direct prompt or question

an implied prompt through modeling

open exploration