



# Inquiry-Based Research Supports Student Achievement

Educator Insights, Teaching Strategies ·



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Reading a stack of essays with similar topics and watching students plod through research assignments dutifully to the end – *knowing they've lost interest in their*

*topic much earlier* – can be disheartening for both teacher and student. Picture your students fully engaged throughout the research process, asking for permission to extend their learning beyond the actual parameters of the assignment while you look forward to a research assignment deadline. You fluff the pillows up on your bed the night papers are due, and get ready to snuggle into your first round of reading student papers purely for enjoyment.

## Why Inquiry?

It took some time for me to realize that I was beginning to dread each research assignment deadline. As much as I wanted students to choose their own topics for research, I realized they tended to select the more standard topics for research within each study, often knowing the intended outcome of their research before even beginning. I was interested in finding an approach focused more on the actual research “process,” feeling a good product would be a natural result. My goal was to develop a clear path for my students to follow when exploring and learning new ideas across the content. I loved research, and wanted my students to love it too.

“**Inquiry learning** is a student-centered approach, it allows the teacher to engage, motivate and challenge students in active learning, whereby they discover meaning of newly attained knowledge and increase their deep understanding of encountering problems, topics, or issues that are solved through a systematic method of collecting and



analyzing  
information.”

## Inquiry Based Research Process

I had been using both the inquiry approach and primary source analysis, independently of each other in my history classrooms for some time when I decided to try a more systematic approach of research by combining both methods. I tried this with my oldest group of high school students knowing that prior to this, independent primary sources analyzed by the small class typically left my students searching for more answers.

In this case, I encouraged each student in the class to have their own question for a single source I selected for analysis. I continued to guide students throughout the process of asking and answering their own questions with each developing a different string of primary sources (path) to draw their own conclusions by gaining entirely different understandings.

## Primary Source Analysis

The analysis of primary sources allows students to take on the role of a historian by using evidence that has been left behind to interpret the meaning of an actual event in history. While classroom texts are considered secondary sources, they can include good background information for students to access primary sources in their research. Relevant historical documents and records are often referenced for further investigation and research across the curriculum in secondary source student textbooks.

*Primary  
Sources  
include:*

- journals
- letters
- novels
- artwork

- photographs
- news  
articles
- court  
case  
records
- music
- biographies
- artifacts

I observed students throughout this process become more actively engaged and independent. I could see students were motivated to find their own answers, and gain deeper understandings of the content. They were open to new ideas about research realizing results were not meant to be predetermined, right or wrong, and that a lot of satisfaction was to be gained from following their own path of discovery.

### *Related Resources*

- [Document Analysis Worksheets](#)
- [Inquiry-Based Learning](#)
- [10 Benefits Of Inquiry-Based Learning](#)
- [Resources and Downloads to Facilitate Inquiry-Based Learning](#)

Charlene Joyce has worked in a variety of different educational settings including private schools, public schools, and charter schools. She has worked at grade levels 3-12 as a classroom teacher and at the university level as a clinical supervisor. Charlene has over 30 years of experience teaching in areas of special education, language arts and the social sciences where she has crafted her teaching.

# RELATED RESOURCES

[Continued Professional Development for Learning CPDfL: Making an Impact](#)

[Aligning a Concept-Based Curriculum from Planning to Practice](#)

[Assessing Your Assessment Methods](#)



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