

Book Review

Dive Into Inquiry

MacKenzie, T. (2016.) *Dive into inquiry*. Irvine, California: EdTechTeam Press.

Amanda R. Casto

INTRODUCTION

Dive into Inquiry, by Trevor MacKenzie, explores the pedagogical methods of implementing student-driven inquiry in the classroom. Specifically, the author defines Four Pillars of Inquiry and four methods of engaging students in this specific approach to teaching and learning. MacKenzie, a high school teacher, wrote this book after spending seven years modifying and adapting the inquiry process for his students. What he learned during that time has been captured in this resourceful text of strategies and advice for other educators who are also venturing into the world of inquiry-based learning.

When teachers encounter obstacles in the classroom, they commonly ask the same questions that MacKenzie poses in his book: “Am I doing enough? Am I doing it right? What can I change?” Asking these questions caused the author to take a step back from his teacher-centered ways and experiment with teaching inquiry-based lessons to engage more of his high school English class students, including his most at-risk learners. Instead of pressing students to read outdated and seemingly irrelevant literature that caused them to immediately disengage; he discovered that letting their individual passions and curiosities drive the lessons had a greater educational impact. “Because students are genuinely excited to take ownership of their course, their energy is evident in their presentations and helps build a common trust, leading to an exceptionally strong learning community supporting inquiry,” (MacKenzie, 2016, p.16). This discovery ultimately led to MacKenzie’s decision to shift his teaching practices from teacher-centered to completely student-driven.

To begin shifting his teaching practices, MacKenzie employed help from his students to

define “good teaching.” After collecting an emphatic list of traits that his students believed to fully embody the phrase, he set out to change his pedagogical practices. The author describes the changes he made including relinquishing the control of the learning process to his students, creating opportunities to build relationships with each learner, and modifying the pattern of creating lessons. After several years of studying, categorizing, and fine-tuning student-led inquiry lessons, the author developed the four Types of Student Inquiry. These Types of Student Inquiry vary in degrees of teacher involvement and direction; for example, Structured Inquiry involves the class collaborating in one inquiry under the lead of the teacher, whereas Free Inquiry allows students to take the lead in learning about a topic of their own interest with less direct instruction and more support by the teacher. In addition to defining each Type of Student Inquiry, the author also provides detailed descriptions, student examples, and illustrations that fully encapsulate each inquiry method.

STYLE AND PURPOSE

Dive into Inquiry is broken into 20 manageable chapters. The content of this book is arranged in an organized and succinct manner, making it easy for classroom teachers to reference while planning inquiry units. In the first four chapters, MacKenzie establishes the argument for integrating inquiry-based lessons and units into a teacher’s curriculum. In Chapter 5, *Types of Student Inquiry*, the author introduces his four methods of teaching using inquiry: Structured Inquiry, Controlled Inquiry, Guided Inquiry, and Free Inquiry. The following chapters then delve into the components and pillars of best practices in inquiry-driven lessons.

While reviewing the text, the reader may notice that significant quotes and facts from the

literature are embellished in a larger font followed by the social media hashtag, #DiveintoInquiry. These quotes serve as a clever technique used by MacKenzie to carry the conversation of student inquiry with his readers over onto social media sites such as Twitter.

Dive into Inquiry is a useful and practical resource for educators, especially school administrators and classroom teachers. Principals who are eager to advance the levels of inquiry-driven instruction in their schools may find it a perfect fit for introducing their faculty to the inquiry-based learning process. This text is naturally broken into conveniently short sections, which provides many opportunities for reflection and discourse among teachers. This structure makes it ideal for use in professional learning communities or as a guide for instructional coaches.

Whether *Dive into Inquiry* is read collaboratively or independently, teachers who are ready to relinquish more control and responsibility to their learners will find this book to be interesting and relevant. Although the Types of Student Inquiry examples given are at the high-school level, MacKenzie argues that inquiry-based learning should begin as early as kindergarten. Even if teachers are not ready to fully implement student inquiry in their classrooms, they will benefit from the best practices presented in this book.

WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK UNIQUE?

Trevor MacKenzie utilizes a unique 21st Century feat to engage his readers. Throughout the text, he strategically included QR codes that lead to examples of student products from inquiry-based lessons. After scanning a QR code with a mobile device, the reader can view and interact with the graphics or videos, which demonstrate the impact of inquiry-based learning. MacKenzie includes multiple QR codes to highlight the Four Pillars of Inquiry: Explore a Passion, Aim for a Goal, Delve into Your Curiosities, and Take on a New Challenge. According to his website, "The Four Pillars are inquiry avenues that provide all learners with the support and foundation to begin to formulate their inquiry topic and their essential question." Interacting with these digital examples while reading the text makes the "impossible" of

implementing yet another new teaching practice feel easy, and entirely possible.

CONCLUSION

Inquiry-based learning has become a popular method of teaching because it promotes high levels of engagement as well as affords teachers the ability to differentiate and personalize instruction for their students. Instead of fulfilling the common role of an instructor, the teacher who incorporates inquiry-based learning in their instruction acts as a learning facilitator for lessons that are driven by students (their questioning, synthesizing of information, and development of unique end-products). This book offers a wide range of teaching strategies for novice and advanced teachers alike who are interested in the inquiry approach to learning. For teachers interested in learning more about this topic, the book's final pages provide a list of ways to connect via online tools and workshops.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amanda Casto is a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her primary focus of study is elementary mathematics education and educational equity. She has ten years of experience in teaching K-8 students in a variety of educational settings including private, charter, magnet, and public schools.