

Inquiry - Based Learning

10 Tips for Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry based learning is a technique whereby a teacher involves students in the learning process through focusing on questions, through problem-solving activities, and the use of critical thinking. Some students prefer this type of learning approach because when they become involved they understand concepts better. While inquiry-based learning obviously works well in science, consider how you can this approach for Religion. Here are some tips for the inquiry-based learning approach.

1. Give yourself time to prepare. Inquiry-based learning involves much more prep time than other lessons. It is important to give yourself proper time when preparing such lessons. You want to be sure that you are able to guide your students through the process and have proper closure to the lesson with the students' full understanding of what was taught.

2. Using collaborative learning. Inquiry-based learning generally works best in a collaborative setting. Try dividing your class into small groups. Give each group a question that they will work on together, and then let them develop a project based on the question that supports their answer.

3. Age-appropriate activities. This approach to learning works well with any age group and with any subject. The key is to make sure that you develop lesson plans that are age-appropriate. Since much of the planning falls on your shoulders, you need to keep your students abilities in mind at all times.

4. Developing good questions. Because inquiry-based learning is based on answering questions, your job is to develop strong questions that are applicable to your lessons. Make sure your questions are open-ended, giving students the ability to think out of the box. Ask other teachers how they would develop questions and use their examples.

5. Incorporate discovery into lessons. Giving students a chance to discover things on their own can make concepts click to where they understand what is being taught. Add questions to your lessons whereby students have to explore to find the answers. An example might be having students build a model in order to answer questions in a sequential order.

6. Incorporate observation into lessons. "Seeing is believing." Some students gain an advantage in learning when they have the opportunity to observe what is being taught. Of course, we generally think of science experiments when referring to this concept, but consider using this approach in Religion. For instance, create a mystery box whereas you give a team of students a sealed box. After reading a story, let the student teams guess what might be in the box based on the story. Let them open the box and see if they made any correct guesses. Then explain why you put the particular items in the box in the first place.

7. Use measurement in lessons. This approach is best used with science lessons. When a student is given a chance to measure progress it helps them learn important concepts. An example exercise might include the bubble gum experiment. Here's how it works:

The flavour in gum is mostly due to the sugar content or other sweetener it might contain. While chewing gum, you notice the sugar dissolves and the gum loses its flavour. You are actually swallowing the sugar. Once the flavour is completely gone, sit the gum out in room temperature and use the difference in a new piece of gum compared to the chewed piece to measure the percentage of sugar that is in the gum. Now you can use this demonstration to come up with new questions related to gum and the ingredients they contain. Let students do more experiments to answer the new questions.

8. Use model-building exercises in lessons. Give your students something they can identify that can be changed into something else. Label the identifier as "A" and the change it can make as "B." Now have them make a model of "B" and then explain how the transformation takes place. This technique can be used in art context or through story reading and character changes.

9. Incorporate design techniques into lessons. This is a student's chance to design something physical and use it to prove or disprove a theory. For instance, when teaching about Mission and service, let students design ways to be more sustainable in the school. Of course, when they put their ideas into action, they will be able to evaluate the success or areas for improvement. Other examples could include: design a new Cathedral, posters, Godly play resources for a particular scripture story, resources to promote Christian marriage, etc.

10. Incorporate hands-on activities in lessons. Any opportunity to let students work with their hands is a good way to use inquiry-based learning. Hands-on activities can be used in all subjects. One such example might include giving students (either individually or in groups) unfamiliar objects. Let them look and hold the objects and speculate how they might be used. The goal is for students to observe the objects giving special attention to details. Now the students must give arguments to support their speculations. This is a great way to introduce a new subject in the classroom.