

RETHINKING TEACHER PREPARATION: WHERE DOES INQUIRY FIT IN?



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

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Research Questions

- If this theory of teaching has been around and suggested as an effective approach for teaching, why has it not been used?
- What can we do to help preservice teachers better understand this model of curriculum?
- What challenges do educators face when trying to implement this model?

TPEP Alignment

Criterion 2: Demonstrating effective teaching practices

Criterion 4: Providing clear and intentional focus on subject matter content and curriculum

What is Inquiry?

Inquiry-based learning is a student-centered approach rooted in curiosity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Grounded in the C3 Framework, it shifts classrooms from teacher-driven instruction to a more democratic, question-based model (NCSS, 2013). The Inquiry Design Model (IDM) builds on this by guiding students through structured, flexible investigations that develop both content knowledge and civic readiness. In this way, we are not just teaching history—we are helping shape active citizens. Yet despite decades of support, inquiry remains inconsistently used. This project explores why, focusing on preservice training, instructional challenges, and teacher confidence.



Findings

Historical & Theoretical Foundations

Inquiry-based education is rooted in decades of educational theory. Joseph Eulie (1966) emphasized student discourse, multiple perspectives, and teacher neutrality—ideas that align closely with today's IDM framework. Constructivist theorists like Vygotsky and Piaget supported student-led discovery, while Paulo Freire (2005) critiqued passive learning models in favor of "problem-posing" education. Together, these thinkers form the philosophical foundation for inquiry: a practice that empowers students to question, explore, and construct their own understanding through supported investigation.



Practicing Teachers and Inquiry

While many teachers value inquiry in theory, its classroom implementation often proves difficult. Some educators misinterpret inquiry as a hands-off approach and fear losing control or structure (Seixas, 1993). Others face logistical barriers, like rigid pacing guides or limited planning time. Research shows that without clear support or shared understanding, inquiry often becomes a buzzword rather than a pedagogical reality (Wee et al., 2007). Professional learning communities, collaborative planning, and ongoing workshops are essential to help teachers apply inquiry effectively. Even experienced educators benefit from tools like the IDM, which offers clarity while still allowing for flexibility (Lee, Grant, & Swan, 2015).



Preservice Teachers and Challenges

Many preservice teachers are introduced to inquiry in theory but not in practice. They struggle with lesson pacing, scaffolding open-ended questions, and managing classrooms where students direct discussion (Brugar et al., 2023). A 2023 study revealed that some preservice teachers questioned whether IDM was even viable without it being the official curriculum. One interviewee stated, "The need for extra preparation and time make it not accessible" (Brugar et al., 2023, p. 504). This underscores the need for more modeling and mentorship. Preservice educators need to see inquiry in action, not just read about it. Without access to cooperating teachers who use inquiry-based methods, novice educators may default to more traditional, teacher-centered practices. Teacher preparation programs must provide practical opportunities to explore inquiry, allowing students to plan, fail, reflect, and refine their approaches.

Observations

Inquiry is not just an instructional strategy—it is a tool for equity. When students explore history through the lens of diverse experiences, they see themselves reflected in the content. As Foster and Padgett (1999) write, "Historical inquiry helps students appreciate that their personal histories are linked to the broader story of the human condition" (p. 358). Inquiry allows students to bring their identities, perspectives, and lived experiences into the classroom. It challenges dominant narratives, invites multiple viewpoints, and empowers students to think critically about the past and present. It also enables teachers to adapt learning to their students' needs: offering differentiated tasks, supporting varied expression, and choosing culturally relevant primary sources. In this way, inquiry supports not only academic achievement but also student identity, voice, and belonging.

"Inquiry connects personal history to the broader human story" (Foster & Padgett, 1999).

Conclusion

As I prepare to enter the classroom, the IDM offers more than a planning framework—it is a professional anchor. With its built-in structure, inquiry teaching helps me scaffold lessons, design purposeful assessments, and build a culture of respectful dialogue. I plan to use IDM as a guide for organizing my social studies units, always centering student questions and voices. But more than that, I hope to serve as an advocate for inquiry-based learning across disciplines. I recognize that implementing inquiry will require continuous reflection and adaptation. I am committed to professional development, collaboration with peers, and thoughtful experimentation as I grow. Ultimately, I believe that inquiry is not only a tool for content delivery but a philosophy of trust: trust in students' minds, trust in our collective curiosity, and trust in the idea that learning is most powerful when it is shared.

References

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