INQUIRY-BASED: KEY TO A MORE ADEPT 21ST CENTURY LEARNER

by:
Charles N. Peña
Luakan National High School- Annex

According to J. W. Layman, Natl. Center for Cross Disciplinary Teaching and Learning: “…Instruction must provide experiences and information from which learners can build new knowledge. Instruction helps to focus those processes so that the resulting knowledge is both valid and powerful. Valid in the sense of describing the world well…and powerful in the sense of being useful and reliable for those students in many diverse settings.”

This emphasizes the importance of selecting the best strategies to be applied inside the classroom. If students are being instructed the way the Inquiry-Based Technique presents, students may have better opportunity of learning.

According to Inquiry and the National Science Education Standards: “Inquiry is something that students do, not something that is done to them.”

It is said that student learns well when he is able to understand things around him. This is one of the principles of teaching which brings questions like how can he understand things around him if he lacks interest to learning activities? This is also one of the common problems encountered by many teachers especially in the high school where students commonly use gadgets and depend on inquiring on the net as their ultimate friend whenever they are doing their assignments. This gives students an easy access to answer their assignments/tasks without thorough understanding of what they searched over the net.

How can we solve this common problem? How can we get the interest of our students? How can we encourage them to become active investigators using the scientific process of learning?
These are the questions which probably come in mind whenever we think of better strategies we can adapt in our everyday dealing as teachers.

During the 20th Century, teachers used one of the pedagogical strategies of teachers which is commonly known as the “Chalk and Talk”. This strategy is very usual to most of the teachers, however, in this case, students’ role is just the receiver of knowledge while the teacher plays the role of being the dispenser of knowledge. This may give a boring set-up for students nowadays because they are living in the world where everything is easy to see and search due to the birth of high technologies. In this practice, students have less talks but more of listening while teachers do the contrary. The builder of knowledge here is just the teacher himself unlike in the Inquiry-Based Technique where students have the opportunity to learn and inquire independently.

Furthermore, Inquiry-Based Technique plays a vital role in giving quality and research based learning to the 21st Century Learners where students and teachers are both equipped with knowledge, skills and better understanding of life. In this process of learning, when students learned how to inquire and solve scientifically and systematically their inquiries students may have the opportunity of having deeper understanding while independently doing and answering his inquiries while the teacher still plays the role of being the facilitator of learning. Compared to the traditional learning environment of students, in the Inquiry-Based Technique students and teachers both use the scientific process, focus on ‘how we know what we know’ (evidence), and gained indirect transfer of knowledge. Also, the teacher’s role is just a facilitator of learning while student’s role is an active and independent learner and investigator.

Thus, categorically we could say that Inquiry-Based is a student-centered and teacher-guided instructional approach that engages students in investigating real world questions that they choose within a broad thematic framework. Also, in this technique, teacher as the facilitator of learning allows students’ questions and curiosities to drive the curriculum, gather information through applying the human senses – seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling, encouraging children to question, conduct research for
genuine reasons, and make discoveries of their own and making use of multiple ways of knowing and taking of new perspectives when exploring issues, content, and questions.

Finally, with the aid of this technique, students can go away of merely having projects but rather strives to nurture deep, discipline based way of thinking and doing relevant things with other peers. Also, Inquiry-Based teaches problem-solving, critical thinking skills, and disciplinary content. Promotes the transfer of concepts to new problem questions, teaches students how to learn and builds self-directed learning skills and develops student ownership of their inquiry and enhances student interest in the subject matter.

As facilitators of knowledge, it is very important to encourage students to formulate problems related to their own experiences and augment their emerging understandings with their personal knowledge. According to Dewey (1938), the teacher should not simply stand in front of the class and transmit information to be passively absorbed by students. Instead, students must be actively involved in the learning process and given a degree of control over what they are learning while the teacher serves as facilitator and guide of learning. It is important to emphasize that this process did not involve anything-goes, free-for-all exploration; it was to be guided by empirical approaches to knowledge creation. This is one of the definitions of serving students with quality education towards a successful living and to produce a more adept 21st Century Learners. When students understand how to inquire, investigate things around him and appreciate life, learning comes the way it should be served. This is the importance of using the Inquiry-Based Approach. Like what Michel de Montaigne said, “The world is but a school of Inquiry.”