

Reflecting upon my experiences in this class has shown me that I have engaged in several inquiry-based processes in my own learning as well as within my own teaching. First, my own learning examples:

While learning (and still learning) I have utilized and continue to utilize a method I call "Play":

- When I was a child (about 8yrs old) I had a toy car that operated on a gyroscopic mechanism. It got entangled with dog and cat hair. I took it apart, figured out how the gyro worked, then disentangled the hair, but not before I tried to figure out how the gyro could be modified to speed up the car. I lost the car two weeks ago under my stove (after performing a retouch – BTW I am 30 now - on my original procedure to boost the speed).
- Later, when I was in my "pre-teens" my mother's vacuum was "on the fritz". I decided to investigate. I found that the turning belt had burned out and was broken. I took the vacuum apart (much to my mom's chagrin), had her purchase a new belt and I replaced it (much to my mom's joy), Oh, and put the thing back together.
- I read comic books when I was younger (and still do). Occasionally, I would encounter a word that I did not recognize (like, omniscience). Mind you I was like, 10 years old. So...I looked it up (Gasp!!!). Then I had to look up omnipotent, and even, omnipresent. I was learning things at a ridiculous rate.
- Even later, in my early teens, My Mom decided I needed to do something productive during my summer break. Apparently, I had too many opportunities to make fires or otherwise destroy things. My GiJoe guys had all been melted (somehow?). Anyway, she gave me an antique chair that was in the basement and told me to refinish it (WHAT???). I got her to take me to an "ACE Hardware" and buy some refinishing stuff. I got stain remover, sand paper, preparation stain, wood stain, wood putty, several wood knives, and polyurethane. She now has several very nicely done (refinished) chairs.
- Recently, my girlfriend and I have moved to Urbana in order for me to pursue my Ph.D. I decided it would be great to redo the furniture we brought down from Chicago. She was skeptical as I am not necessarily a likely candidate for handy-man of the year. However, I redid three tables, a wooden stool, and a wooden chair. Then we decided to purchase small 4 inches wide by 6 inches long unfinished shelves for various locations throughout the apartment. I finished them

The point of all of this (at last) is to provide you (the reader) with insight into how I have utilized an inquiry approach within the things I have learned. I never attended a class on any of these things. I learned them all through the inquiry process (Ask, Investigate, Create, Discuss, & Reflect). I asked things of "experts", I investigated options as to performing the task, I generally created or recreated (or dismantled) something, and then discussed what I had done with others, finally I reflected upon my project and either smiled gleefully as they told me I did "GREAT" or tried to fix the problems that were pointed out.

I have typically utilized a variation, or several variations on this approach to my classrooms. Now that I am an "adult" teacher, I typically utilize and prefer a "Guide-on-the-side" approach versus a "Sage-on-the-stage" approach. Meaning, I typically take side-stage while my students discover the concepts we are exploring.

Typically when I am teaching I like to “Play”, and I like students to “Play” with ideas. Meaning I like to work with the students to “Discover” the benefits of working through math topics (I don’t like the word “problems”). Many times students will pose a question and I respond with “I dunno, let’s see if we can figure it out.” The most interesting commentary I have had from students after positing this option has generally involved the quote “You’re the teacher, you should know what the answer is.” In response, I typically provide this: “Let’s ‘Play’ and figure out what is going on.” Most students, especially advanced students find this to be an approach incongruous to what they are used to (get the answer right or get the answer wrong). Students are generally accustomed to the teacher being the “vessel” holding the knowledge that is poured into their heads. Rarely, it seems, are students capable of taking a topic and exploring on their own without the reinforcement of an instructor.

This class, LIS 450, seemed to allow just that, especially with the Marshall Islands. To be perfectly honest, I had not known “Thing One” about the Marshalls prior to this course. I learned a great deal about the Marshalls and have since (and still do) educate my friends about them. I have vested many hours in creating a website about my knowledge, visiting other websites about the Marshall Islands, reading & buying books about the Marshall Islands, and trying to tie my work within Mathematics education to the Marshalls with a separate focus on GPS units and statistical analysis.

In coinciding with “Inquiry-based learning” or at least as I see it, I am immersed within the process. I have completed my project, have viewed other projects, listened to experienced speakers, and yet, I still have questions or reflections upon what we have discovered, uncovered, or not uncovered.

This has been a rather unique journey of learning through our exploration of the Marshalls as well as the readings. It’s interesting as this journey has not quelled, met, or otherwise sated my thirst for knowledge. It has created a desire for more information, more knowledge. Information about the Marshall Islands, about Dewey, and about Inquiry Learning.

More important than this however, is the fact that I will continue to spread what I know among my friends, colleagues, and eventually students.