

Teaching the C3 Framework

C3 Teachers Blogging: Grappling with the Realities of Inquiry

Carly Muetterties

“I became a teacher for a love of the content, but my passion has increasingly become the way social studies can empower students to act...”¹

“As a pre-service teacher, creating your first inquiry can be quite intimidating...”²

“In my school, there are always a million acts to juggle with numerous priorities vying for attention...”³

“It was all going smoothly until I got the call from my principal...”⁴

These quotations are opening lines of educators’ blog posts on C3 Teachers (www.c3teachers.org). For the last four years, I have been the managing editor of the C3 Teachers website, collaborating with many teacher leaders across the country, as well as providing my own personal reflections on inquiry learning. C3 Teachers offers a virtual space that empowers teachers as they wrestle with inquiry. The bulk of the website offers teacher-created, open-resource curriculum inquiries for K-12 classrooms. I would argue, however, that the heart and soul of C3 Teachers is the blog space where educators share their experiences with inquiry-based teaching and learning. Since its launch in 2014, over 50 contributors have reflected on their work using the C3 Framework and the Inquiry Design Model (IDM). The C3 bloggers include K-12 teachers across

the disciplines, teacher educators, district specialists, preservice teachers, and a high school student, who created and

reflected upon the development of his own inquiry.

The theories around inquiry are not new, but the attention given to inquiry practices, particularly the Inquiry Design Model’s structure, has breathed life into social studies inquiry practices.⁵ Indeed, knowing and understanding inquiry-based teaching and learning theories can greatly inform teaching. However, theory alone is insufficient to address the realities of one’s classroom.⁶ To that end, the C3 Teachers blog space encourages teachers to describe



and reflect on their development and implementation of inquiries. Doing so shows how theory, practice, and one's teaching context are all in conversation with one another.⁷ Designating a space for reflecting on one's practice also aligns well with the expectations of students who are engaging in inquiry work. As students progress through an inquiry, they are grappling with a complicated matter—one that requires they make sense of a complex issue by asking questions, examining sources, and developing evidence-based conclusions.⁸ Likewise, effective teaching requires that educators engage in reflective practices, wherein they continually examine their work by employing their pedagogical knowledge as an analytical lens.⁹ Though being a reflective practitioner helps align one's practice and teaching goals, it is a practice highly valued but underutilized.¹⁰ By positioning the bloggers' reflections as a part of teaching inquiry, C3 Teachers intentionally encourages educators to engage in this important reflection of their practices.

What follows are three excerpts of C3 Teachers' reflections on the theory of inquiry and the practical realities of implementing inquiry curriculum into one's classroom. Ryan New, 2017 NCSS High School Teacher of the Year,

explains why transitioning to inquiry practices provides a space to empower students and teachers, while also revealing the challenges of direct instruction. Elementary teacher Stephanie Weiler shares the steps and modifications when planning for inquiry learning as she accommodates the diverse needs of her students. MaryBeth Yeardon and Janae Bell discuss taking informed action, one of the most misunderstood components of the Inquiry Design Model. The authors consider the importance of action being informed or ill-informed, emphasizing inquiry learning in civic preparation.

BLOG

Ryan New

*The Real Value of Inquiry*¹¹

In my school district, we created an inquiry-learning pilot program. A teacher in the pilot said: "Students should know this, but they don't." She was frustrated that when students were given more autonomy they didn't jump at the chance to take control or that they were lazy and apathetic. In fact, they were students who were used to direct instruction. They didn't know how to

move forward with their own learning. They had few experiences with asking questions, digging into sources, or creating conclusions because those are not the demands of direct instruction. What this teacher revealed is that all the direct instruction in the world can't prepare students on their own. When students attempted to learn on their own, or with their peers, they were lost. However, the areas where they are lost is where the classroom must live—but we don't know that until inquiry exposes it.

Conversely, inquiry reveals gaps in teacher instruction as well. If direct instruction is like a concert where a band plays a set of its own music, then inquiry-based teaching is a jazz scene with constant improvisation based on the ecology of the group and the feel of the night. The former is rewarded when it plays the group's top songs, the latter is rewarded when it fits into the groove of the environment by moving into uncharted waters. The former places the audience in a moment that is comfortable because the audience knows the words. The latter takes the audience to never-before-heard sounds. This is all to say that when a teacher engages consistently in inquiry, that inquiry will expose gaps in their instructional ability (in knowledge and skill). I contend, based on what I've seen with my district's inquiry pilot and with my own practice, that inquiry-based learning enables districts to move their entire staff to improved practices because these gaps are exposed in an authentic way—noticed by not just the teacher, but by both administrators and teachers. Inquiry creates a pattern of continuous professional learning and growth on the part of all those involved.

BLOG

Stephanie Weiler

*The Best-Laid Plans*¹²

I am a huge planner. There's nothing I love more than a good calendar, a clear curriculum guide, and a detailed scope

and sequence. However, as an elementary school teacher I should know by now that I can plan a beautiful unit, color-coded and date-stamped with all sorts of assessments and checkpoints plugged in, but when my students show up, plans change. That's just what happened this year as I began to implement one of my carefully planned inquiries. After spending the summer learning about IDM and designing inquiry, I mapped out my year using our district units, planning each week to align with the standards and resources that went along with those units... I was imagining classroom experiences filled with text analysis, academic conversation, and writing, where students' work led to or culminated in an inquiry.

So, I taught an inquiry. But as they say about best-laid plans, things went awry. I quickly realized my exacting plans needed some adjustments. In my third grade classroom of 20 ... I have a cluster of English Language Learners (ELL) students, a cluster of Talent Development (TD) students, and magnet students brought in from schools where social studies was never a thought in anyone's mind. On top of this, I am in a personalized learning school where students are provided choice in how and what they are learning, as well as how they demonstrate that learning. We are expected to use data to decide where students start on a continuum of standards-based tasks. How would I implement all of these things and stay true to my own and my district's vision for social studies? What was I thinking?...

I was determined to make this work. However, I had to modify my approach. I looked closely at our first (failed) attempt at an inquiry. I considered what worked and what didn't. I asked my students for feedback and for them to reflect on how they felt they best learned new material. Through these informal checks on student learning and reflecting on our first attempt, I realized that rather than trying to complete an inquiry in 3–5 days, I was going to have a compelling

question drive a few weeks of instruction. The students would work on a progression of questions, tasks, and sources that would allow them to, in the end, answer the larger compelling question to end our "unit."...

My planning on the front end was, of course, time-consuming and took a lot of creativity and organization, but it was worth it. Despite throwing out all my other beautiful, calendared plans, I felt better about the work we were doing. Students were engaged, and their arguments were actually really well presented and backed with evidence! I felt strange modifying the IDM to take so much longer than suggested, but I think the beauty of the template is that it is structured, but still open-ended enough to be adapted to teachers and students' needs. Seeing the results of modifying it this way gave me the confidence to spend a Saturday reworking some of my long-range plans to include these longer inquiries, in which questions were consistently driving the instruction toward a larger, compelling argument on which the students would feel comfortable taking a stance.

BLOG

MaryBeth Yerdon and Janae Bell
*How Informed Does Informed Action
Have to Be?*¹³

When the Paris attacks occurred in November 2015, we decided to sit down and plan a responsive unit. The rationale was that this current event might have significant implications for the next presidential election, for our country's international relations, and, of course, international human rights.... We started by revamping our school's secondary lesson plan template to include a hybrid of *Understanding by Design*¹⁴ and the *Inquiry Design Model*.¹⁵ Our informed action project would fall between a Socratic seminar and final essay. It would be built upon discussing the causality of the rise of ISIL and the conse-

quences, both actual and projected, of the Paris attacks.... In our vision, students would collaborate across grade levels to inform their school community about the complexity of how terrorist groups come to be, the purposes of terrorism, and the "best" way to respond. Sounds great, right? We thought so too, and for the most part it was. But, our informed action did not turn out as we imagined it would. Where did we go wrong? In the end we decided that this was because our informed action was not as informed as it needed to be....

Many students started out as you might think, by suggesting that the United States should take military action in the Middle East. The general consensus on day one, when students analyzed the causality of the rise of ISIL, was one of two conclusions. The first was simply that it was not our responsibility to respond to the Paris attacks and the second was that we should "obliterate" ISIL strongholds. By day three and four, more students were suggesting coalition efforts, no-fly zones, and peaceful defiance.

The culmination of our endeavor was that students would creatively present their findings to the school and then write a white paper on the causality and consequences of the rise of ISIL, then propose a solution for how the United States should respond. Upon reflection, we realized our faux pas was that we assigned the writing assessment *after* our informed action project....

When it comes to the issue of informed action, we concluded that if the informed action project had been conducted as a post-assessment extension, our students would have produced a more informed product. When comparing the writing products to our informed action product, we concluded that ill-informed action does more harm than good. Informed action takes time! Students need time and a variety of avenues to explore and inquire about complex topics. Cutting a project short could cause serious detriment to civic participation.

These blog entries testify to a central premise: Inquiry-based teaching demands teacher knowledge, skill, and creativity. It also requires attention to the particular needs of one's students and a commitment to more ambitious teaching and learning. There are challenges, to be sure, but they are challenges that pay off in student engagement and knowledge growth.

In the end, it is important to recognize teachers' active role as the driving force behind the C3 Inquiry Arc through their development of compelling curriculum and instruction. By creating the C3 Teachers community, we hope to be a support system for teachers as they implement authentic inquiry experiences, particularly by encouraging the necessary reflective practices that lead to pedagogical growth. On a personal note, since becoming the C3 Teachers managing editor, I have contributed a monthly blog post on the theory and practice of inquiry teaching.¹⁶ My role has provided me with space to grapple with components of the C3 and IDM, opening my eyes to unique challenges

of inquiry-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment. I invite you to join me and the C3 Teachers community by composing your own blog posts to share with those educators striving to do inquiry well. 🌍

Notes

1. Carly Muetterties' full blog post is available at www.c3teachers.org/sweet-spot-taking-informed-action/
2. Jessica Johnson's full blog post is available at www.c3teachers.org/keep-electoral-college-writing-implementing-inquiry/
3. Christy Cartner's full blog post is available at www.c3teachers.org/teaching-inquiry-in-my-classroom-three-ring-circus/
4. Jeff Davidson's full blog post is available at www.c3teachers.org/it-was-all-going-smoothly-until/
5. S. G. Grant, K. Swan, and J. Lee, *Inquiry-Based Practice in Social Studies Education: Understanding the Inquiry Design Model* (New York: Routledge, 2017); K. Swan, J. Lee, and S. G. Grant, *Inquiry Design Model: Building Inquiries in Social Studies* (Silver Spring, Md.: National Council for the Social Studies/C3 Teachers, 2018).
6. J. Wiley, *Theory and Practice in the Philosophy of David Hume* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
7. M. van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London: The State University of New York Press, 1990).
8. National Council for the Social Studies, *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and*

History (Silver Spring, Md.: Author, 2013).

9. L.S. Shulman, "Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the New Reform," *Harvard Educational Review* 57, no. 1 (1987): 1–22.
10. T. Dinkelman, "Reflection and Resistance: Challenges of Rationale-Based Teacher Education," *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education* 2, no. 1 (2009): 91–108.
11. Ryan New's full blog is available at www.c3teachers.org/the-real-value-of-inquiry/
12. Stephanie Weiler's full blog post is available at www.c3teachers.org/best-laid-plans/
13. MaryBeth Yerdon and Janae Bell's full blog post is available at www.c3teachers.org/how-informed-does-informed-action-have-to-be/
14. G. Wiggins and J. McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005).
15. K. Swan, J. Lee, and S.G. Grant, *Inquiry Design Model: Building Inquiries in Social Studies* (Silver Spring, Md.: National Council for the Social Studies and C3 Teachers, 2018)
16. See Carly Muetterties' blog posts at www.c3teachers.org/author/cmuetterties/

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