

Integrative Teaching International

Encouraging discussions, supporting research and developing new frameworks for improving college-level art + design foundations teaching.

ThinkTank is part of the Integrative Teaching International (ITI), an Illinois-based educational corporation.

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What is an inquiry-based art+design foundation?

An inquiry-based approach engages students in investigating real world questions *through* technical, material, and formal skill development. Inquiry is authentic problem solving and forms minds through questioning, seeking, examining, finding and connecting. An authentic problem is one where a teacher does not know the answer when posing a task to a student: both teacher and student are motivated by cooperation working toward exploring and solving a problem. The solution should evoke deep insights for both teacher and student as neither expected the particulars of the answer at the outset of the task.

Inquiry-based art+design instructional methods reaffirm a Euclidian approach to thinking. Hand is not separate from mind. Instead, training the hand, in relation to the eye, is training the mind. Just as Euclid, 2300 years ago, set out the cornerstones of geometry through the physical manipulation of materials, so too foundations teaches a pathway into visual thinking through the constraints and affordances of visual media. In addition, inquiry-based methods may also be Cartesian (shaped by ideas). Both methods are means for articulating concepts that enter social interaction. In either situation, technology (mediums) becomes an interface that can accelerate, expand, and deepen communication.

Inquiry complements the Socratic dialogue in which the teacher guides a student into a preconceived enlightened state through a series of questions. It is different from critical thinking when defined as analysis through a single, deconstructive theoretical lens. In inquiry-based education, the teacher and student work together for an outcome that is glimpsed, but not fully articulated, at the beginning of the journey. The process of instruction is inductive—building empirical evidence into plausible arguments—utilizing the visual tool kit of the elements of art and the principles of design to gather clues that inform the emergent hypothesis.

Inquiry is the engine of creation and creates new value by making new connections, or revitalizing existing ones. Inquiry should beget insight, or a genuine type of knowing where the power of the idea and possible outcomes are compelling, convincing and desired. The process of art+design is a dialogue of meaning making between maker and society. Inquiry trains the voice of the aspirant artist/designer so that it can be heard.

Inquiry is also iterative, either through trial and error or by using life experiences towards new ones. It cycles, changes variables and continuously evolves. Inquiry should motivate exploration and action. It conceives of artifacts of instruction as initiators and markers of a dialogue between the artist/designer and a specified audience. A measure of the success of an object is the quality of conversation the artifact evokes.

Inquiry is **creative** in that it generates new possibilities.

It is **constructive** as it works through inferential, rather than deductive reasoning.

It is **critical** because it incorporates multiple theoretical frameworks.

It is **connective** as it seeks links and partnership with diverse audiences.

At its core, training in art and design is not just skills acquisition in artifact making, but training the habits of mind through a cyclical and reiterative process of the hand shaping ideas and ideas guiding the hand.