



## INTRODUCTION

I haven't always been an inquiry teacher.

I didn't experience an inquiry model as a child. My formal education was not, in any way that I can recall, built on the constructivist values I now hold dear. My teacher training, although at a fantastic university with committed and informed professors, didn't introduce me to this broad and rich school of thinking that has become part of who I am; in fact, I didn't learn the beautiful language of inquiry until I was well into my career.

I became an inquiry teacher because of my students. Essentially, *my students taught me how to teach.*

After several years of trying to meet the needs of my students, slowly, over time, I asked them more questions about themselves. I asked them about their interests and hobbies and curiosities. I asked them about their dreams and their goals and their wishes for themselves. I asked them about their learning and their strengths and their stretches.

I asked and then I *listened* to what they had to say, and ultimately, I learned from them.

A magical thing happened: The more I listened and learned and allowed what they told me to direct my teaching, the more I realized I was changing. I was becoming a different teacher. In learning about my students, I discovered things about myself, about my practice, and about my profession.

I started letting my teaching touch my heart and guide my actions.

I discovered a gentleness in teaching, a soft spot in the tensions and challenges of our practice. I found an ebb and flow—an ease—that offered me an opportunity to settle into myself and, in turn, to give my students the opportunity to settle into themselves.

I unearthed a partnership that felt natural, organic, and symbiotic. Our classroom felt more like an ecosystem, a natural space where everything had its place and purpose and was integral to each thing and being. I realized that we were all a part of something bigger than ourselves.

When it came to my teaching and my time in my school, I slowly started to care about absolutely everything in a very seamless and easy way. I noticed all the small occurrences in learning. I observed how even the slightest of shifts could have lasting effects. I discovered a powerful value in particular moves, behaviours, questions, and dispositions.

It felt as though I was discovering a secret language that I had always known existed but had never heard spoken aloud before.

Now, so many years later, I still allow my students to guide me. I still lean into questions and let them shape my learning and my growth. Just as I did when I first took steps toward becoming an inquiry teacher, I continue to allow questions to direct my journey.

One specific question comes to mind as I reflect on the course of my learning and our next steps together in the book before you. It's a question that guides most of the decisions I make in my inquiry practice. It shapes my unit design, my planning, and my lesson preparation. I reflect on this question countless times in a single day. It is always present.

Am I doing something for my students that they should be doing for themselves?

Exploring this question in my inquiry practice allows me to consider who is doing the heavy lifting of learning, who is benefiting from the decision-making in the classroom, and who is sharpening the skills, competencies, and mindsets to take on more agency over learning. Time and time again, when I ponder this question, I realize that there is so much more I can be facilitating for my students to have them take on more ownership of their learning. I have come to realize that I have been trained, conditioned even, to hold the reins of learning in the classroom too tightly, too closely, and too guardedly. I recognize, however, that for inquiry to take hold in the classroom and in my students' hearts and minds, I need to loosen those reins and give my students the freedom to take the lead.

I have been asking teachers in schools around the world the same question as I support them in implementing inquiry values and practices. In guiding teachers toward embedding more student agency in their classrooms, this guiding question shapes our reflections, discussions, and planning. These collaborations provide powerful opportunities to push practice forward, to work toward something larger than ourselves, and to connect and work together to create lifelong learners, global citizens, and empathetic humanitarians.

I've consistently noticed one realm within our inquiry practice where exploring this question tends to stall—one area that has been slower to shift and reimagine. In this one facet of teaching and learning, student agency doesn't blossom as fruitfully or flow as fluidly as it does in others. This was the most difficult shift for me to make in my inquiry practice, and it tends to be the last shift I observe in the schools I support in inquiry. It is in the realm of assessment.

I have noticed several things in my work that suggest this is true.

First, assessment tends to be something mostly done outside of the classroom, *away* from students, rather than inside the classroom

*with* the students. If those who are doing the assessing are doing the learning, why are teachers working harder than students?

Second, teachers have a strong understanding of where students are, where they need to go next, and what they need to do to get there, but students don't. If I were to confer with students in learning and ask them to share with me their next steps, many students would not be able to participate in that conversation. Why is this the case?

Third, students have little understanding of success criteria, assessment tools, or learning objectives and goals. Why isn't there transparency regarding what students will be assessed on and how they will be assessed?

Fourth, there are frequent opportunities to reflect and confer in the experience of inquiry but not in the assessments in inquiry. Why does a misalignment exist here?

Finally, students share feelings of confidence, ownership, and fulfillment regarding inquiry, but when it comes to assessment, they feel anxious, overwhelmed, and uncertain. Why the difference?

This book aims to nurture more student voice, involvement, and agency in the assessment realm of inquiry so these challenges don't occur. For this to be achieved, teachers need to help students fine-tune their assessment compass—their ability to assess with accuracy, clarity, fulfillment, and authenticity. This book is rooted in the values of inquiry. It will guide you through the behaviours, tasks, routines, and protocols that will help nurture the mindset of agency and cultivate accurate and confident assessment experts in your classroom.

With this in mind, I propose you keep three big ideas in mind as you read this book. These three big ideas will act as guiding principles as you transition into including more student agency in your assessment practice:

## 1. **Let's break down the comparison culture of assessment.**

Throughout their education, our students have encountered particular experiences with assessment that have had a lasting negative impact on how they respond to learning and, more detrimentally, how they see themselves as learners. We need to move away from an assessment practice that reinforces comparison and toward an assessment practice that supports self-reflection, individual growth, and personal achievement. We need to have students reconnect with an overarching truth in learning, that your growth isn't measured against someone else's growth; your growth is measured by reflecting on where you were before and how far you've come across time.

I propose we shed light on this truth *with* our students so that we can begin to move toward an inquiry and assessment space that is much more meaningful to each and every learner in our classrooms. As you'll experience in these pages, many powerful activities can help students redefine success in school to focus on personal growth and fulfillment. Our job is to wade into this transition slowly, scaffolding when needed and gradually shifting control over assessment from the teacher to the learner as a shared partnership in inquiry.

## 2. **Let's infuse more student voice in assessment.**

By the end of this book, you will be ready to co-design assessment *with your students*. Every learning objective, every prescribed outcome, every mandated assessment tool, and every rubric and criteria used in your classroom could be infused with student voice. Your learners will have a direct hand in the assessment frameworks you use. The benefits of student voice in assessment include a greater understanding of how to succeed in

class, the potential for increased achievement for your students, and a more meaningful and fulfilling student experience in our schools. It all begins with student voice and giving our learners a seat at the table of assessment.

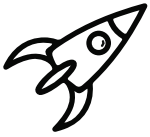
**3. Let's be brave in letting go of some of our beliefs around teaching and learning.**

You may recognize some of what I propose, and thus it may feel comfortable and reaffirming as you read. You may very well see yourself in the values, beliefs, activities, and frameworks outlined in this book. Some of what I share, however, may raise feelings of uncertainty. You may feel a particular tension in sharing a role with your students regarding assessment in your classroom. Please consider this: It is in this uncertainty and tension that great things will happen for your students. As they become more willing and competent assessors themselves, the student agency experienced will have a lasting positive impact for years to come. When students can self-assess with confidence and accuracy, they are sharpening tools they will use throughout their lives. They will become reflective, process focused, self-motivated, and active participants in their schooling experience. Big things await when you get comfortable in the mess of uncertainty. I encourage you to be brave and take some small steps toward making these big changes a reality for you and your students.

I now invite you to inquire into your inquiry practice. Grab a notebook to document your reflections, and let's settle into this learning together.

Enjoy!

**Trevor**



## HOW TO USE #INQUIRYMINDSET IN ACTION

At the end of each chapter of *Inquiry Mindset*, you'll discover prompts I have termed #InquiryMindset in Action. These short and powerful calls to action will ask you to reflect on your reading and put some of what we propose into action. Once you've done so, I ask that you capture and share these actions items with the #InquiryMindset community by Tweeting them out, sharing them with your Instagram friends, and posting them in your Facebook groups. In inquiry, we are all better together. With this in mind, let's all commit to sharing our learning as we read so we can collectively support one another in becoming the teachers our students need. Please have a notebook at the ready to help document and reflect throughout your reading. Enjoy!



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GET EVEN MORE FROM *INQUIRY MINDSET*:  
ASSESSMENT EDITION ONLINE!

Download Inquiry Mindset sketchnotes and book club resources as well a companion guide for primary teachers at [trevormackenzie.com/companionresources](http://trevormackenzie.com/companionresources).