



Trusting Inquiry: Teaching with the Inquiry Design Model

Kathy Swan, S.G. Grant, and John Lee

Trust is a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.¹

It is one thing to build an inquiry-based curriculum, it is quite another to make an inquiry come to life in a classroom. If curriculum is a recipe, then how do teachers move from being line-cooks to inquiry chefs? How do they get students to eat their inquiry vegetables and keep coming back for more? What is inquiry's instructional secret sauce? We argue that trust is how inquiry teachers "kick it up a notch!"

Why trust? Recently, we co-directed a documentary film project, *Making Inquiry Possible (MIP)*, featuring four films that explore how innovative teachers, schools, and districts are shifting to inquiry-based instruction.² At the core of each documentary is the question: What does it take to make inquiry *possible* in social studies? The answer has become unmistakable: trust. Like a song that gets stuck in our brains, once we start to hear it, we couldn't *un*-hear it.

For example, when we asked one of the teachers in the project how inquiry had changed his teaching, he responded this way:

So my role as a teacher has

changed. What I've noticed with the use of compelling questions and using IDM in my classroom is that it is absolutely incumbent on the student to answer that question for themselves. Now, that doesn't seem wild when we say that, but in the moment of teaching, many of our students have been accustomed to being able to find an answer, rather than simply create one.

Do you hear it? Did you notice how he needs to trust the students to answer the compelling question "for themselves"? Let's listen again. When we asked a teacher about scaffolding

inquiry, this was the response:

Students need enough support in order for them to even put the pieces together. What I've noticed is that it's almost like holding an egg. If you grip it too tightly, it's going to break. But if you truncate everything too much for the student, what you get on the other end is, is simply just not a robust answer. It kills the process. So because of that, I have to be the support, but also have to like, kick the kid out in the pasture a little bit to kind of figure things out on their own.

Surely you heard it this time—how the teacher needs to hold (or trust) the inquiry "egg" by not gripping too tight? Or how he needs to "kick the kid out in the pasture a little bit to figure things out on their own" as an act of pedagogical trust? While we would never suggest or condone literally kicking a kid, metaphorically (*and only*

metaphorically), it does make sense for inquiry. Students need space to wrestle with questions, tasks, and sources. Teachers need to trust students and give them that space. And, students need to trust teachers to make that space meaningful and to be there when they lose their way. Sometimes that space is uncomfortable and teachers will need to nurture students and scaffold the process so that they can ultimately embrace that intellectual freedom.

Arriving at trust has been a *Eureka!* moment for us, further deepening our curiosity about its relationship to inquiry. But trust is one of those words that is kind of squishy; and a platitude like, “just trust your students” seems really unsatisfying and possibly frustrating for teachers wanting to engage with inquiry-based instruction. So, *trust* us, you are going to want to read on!

Cultivating Trust in the Inquiry Classroom: Processes and Attitudes

We have landed on three key inquiry processes that build a culture of trust in the classroom: deliberation, collaboration, and production.

Deliberation involves instructional practices that enable students to listen to each other’s ideas and speak about their own. These practices might include a Harkness Discussion, Think-Pair-Share, Take a Stand debate, or Socratic Discussion. These types of deliberative experiences engender respect



for others and an appreciation for a pluralistic democracy where people hold different perspectives on life. Deliberative exercises build trust by fostering respect for

ideas and *empathy* among students and between teacher and students because they show that teachers trust their students to think about big ideas.

Collaboration involves instructional practices that allow students to work with others to problem solve through teamwork. These practices might include a Jigsaw task, a Question Formulation Technique (QFT) exercise, or a Structured Academic Controversy. During collaborative experiences, students negotiate with others and learn to respect other ways of knowing and doing. If a task is “group worthy,” students learn to value team members’ strengths and to value their own contributions to the whole. These kinds of experiences build trust by creating

interdependence between students and by demonstrating that teachers trust their students to work with others.

Production involves instructional practices that allow students to construct meaningful work. These practices could include an evidentiary argument or a summative project (e.g., public service announcement, museum exhibit) or it could include important formative work like constructing a map, timeline, or T-Chart. When students produce work, they risk putting their ideas out there and cultivate *agency* in the process. Healthy inquiry

classrooms allow students to explore frontiers and create forgiving spaces to learn and grow. In doing so, they build classroom trust.

By allowing students space to think (**deliberate** ideas), talk (**collaborate** around ideas), and do (**produce** ideas), teachers build a culture of classroom trust with their students that engenders key attitudes of empathy, interdependence, and agency that can accelerate inquiry-based learning in the classroom. While these processes and attributes are not exclusive to social studies, they do connect deeply to the mission of preparing students for civic life.

Inquiry Processes and Attitudes that build a classroom culture of **trust**

Deliberation

trust students to work
with big ideas



Deliberative practices build trust by fostering **empathy**. Students listen to others’ ideas and speak about their own. The types of experiences engender respect for one another and an appreciation for a pluralistic democracy where people come from differing perspectives.

Collaboration

trust students to work
with others



Collaborative practices build trust through **interdependence**. When students collaborate, they learn how to problem solve through teamwork. Students negotiate with others and learn to respect other ways of knowing and doing. If a task is “group worthy,” students learn to value team members’ strengths and to value their own contributions to the whole.

Production

trust students to create
meaningful work



Production practices build trust by enabling student **agency**. When students produce work, they risk putting their ideas out there — healthy inquiry cultures allow students to explore the space and value their contributions. In doing so, they increase student confidence.

An Invitation

We have a book in the works about building trust that will expand on the three processes above with specific guidance on instructional exercises that enable a trust-worthy classroom. We would like to invite you into the C3 Teachers' studio by sharing your insights about the role of trust in inquiry. Consider the following:

- When did I start trusting inquiry?
- How do I create a trust-worthy classroom?
- How do I show my students that I trust them?
- What does it look like when students trust each other?
- What strategies accentuate trust and what

differences do they make in students' attitudes toward your class?

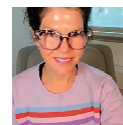
- How does a trust-worthy classroom accelerate learning?

And then, drop us a line at info@c3teachers.org and tell us your ideas about building trust for inquiry and how you think it happens. We look forward to hearing from you.

In the meantime, let's keep trusting inquiry! 🇺🇸

Notes

1. Adapted from www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust.
2. Kathy Swan, Ryan Crowley, S.G. Grant, John Lee, and Gerry Swan, *Making Inquiry Possible* film project (2020): <https://makinginquirypossible.org>.



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John, Kathy, and S.G. have worked collaboratively to build C3 Teachers a network that aims to empower teachers as they wrestle with the big ideas and instructional implications of the C3 Framework.

Albert H. Small Normandy Institute

2024 EXPENSE-PAID PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRIP TO NORMANDY

The Albert H. Small Normandy Institute will take 15 teams of high school students & teachers on a learning experience of a lifetime to Normandy in 2024. Selected teams will internalize the message "Freedom Is Not Free" by learning about the sacrifices made by a soldier from their hometown who died in the 1944 Normandy campaign to defeat the Nazi tyranny that had threatened the world.

The Normandy Institute will pay for all assigned reading materials, meals, lodging (double occupancy), transportation, and museum entrance fees in Washington, D.C. and France. Each member will be reimbursed up to \$300 of the cost of traveling to and from Washington, D.C. The "price of admission" is an agreement to make at least 3 presentations about their soldier's sacrifice and the Institute at their school or in their community upon their return. Teams consist of a teacher (any discipline) and a student who must be a rising junior or rising senior during the summer they participate in the Institute.

Selected applicants will be notified by December 16, 2023. Each teacher & student will receive books from the Institute and access to additional on-line materials. Discussions and a series of lectures by professors from The George Washington University (GW) will be conducted at least bi-weekly from January through May. During that time each team, aided by mentors and faculty from GW, will produce a biography of their hometown soldier and a briefing about a specific element of the Normandy Campaign. On June 18th, the teams will assemble on the GW campus for 5 days of intensified learning and research into their soldier's life. On June 23rd, everyone will head for France and a tour of key sites from the campaign. The trip will culminate in the Normandy American Cemetery where we will lay a wreath at the memorial, followed by the playing of Taps and the Star-Spangled Banner. Each student will present a eulogy for his or her soldier at their graveside.

Deadline to submit applications is December 1, 2023

Applications and more information are available at ahsni.com



Freedom Is Not Free