Inquiry-based learning pedagogies in the arts and social sciences: purposes, conceptions and approaches


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This paper discusses themes arising from meta-analysis of an extensive body of 'theory of change' data associated with inquiry-based learning initiatives in arts and social sciences disciplines in one UK university. The majority of educators' theories of change proposed IBL as a means of engaging students actively with existing knowledge and of developing skills of relevance to 'real world' life and work; far fewer explicitly referred to students as contributing to knowledge creation during their inquiry experiences. In general, theories of change reflected a widely shared belief that appropriate progression in inquiry would involve students in more strongly 'information-oriented' and 'teacher-led' modes at the start of their academic careers, towards more 'discovery-oriented' and 'student-led' forms as they become more experienced practitioners of their discipline. Models of practice associated with these different modes of inquiry-based learning are outlined in the paper. The authors suggest that the view that students must wait until higher levels of study to begin formulating and pursuing their own inquiry questions is open to challenge.

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