

QUEST
Quest for Useful Employment Skills for Tomorrow
ASK
Assessing Student Knowledge

How **QUEST** and **ASK** integrates with Critical Thinking, Differentiated Instruction, and Cultural Differences.

QUEST and Culture

In schools today it's not uncommon for students to be exposed to a vast amount of different cultural backgrounds. This could be with students, teachers and parents within the school. At times we may find it difficult dealing with different cultures which could be a learning experience or a confusing one for us. Wouldn't it be nice if there were a way to help bridge the gap between the different ways we were taught growing up so we can all be appreciative of our different backgrounds and learn from one another? It's human nature for a person to judge someone by appearance or first impressions. This habit needs to be reformed so that we see people from the inside out not the outside in.

The QUEST process teaches students to appreciate others ideas and personalities traits. QUEST provides safe parameters or an environment for students to work in groups and experience teamwork philosophies. It will provide students to work under ground rules they take part in creating as well as being responsible for various roles and process tools to be played out by all members rotating throughout a group session. The group will follow these parameters while using a 4-step problem solving process to solve core content related curriculum. This process is a WIN-WIN for the student. It introduces the student to group activities learning how to communicate and listen with one another sharing roles and responsibilities while effectively solving problems. It also prepares students for real life situations and choices. Today's workplace looks for certain skills in their workforce, skills such as listening, problem solving, initiative, communication and teamwork. Those students learning QUEST at the Elementary level and higher will be a step ahead of many mastering these types of skills while in school.

QUEST and Critical Thinking Skills

The issue with some schools or teachers is "How do we engage our students"? We know they can learn, but we can't keep their interest very long. How can we teach what we they are suppose to learn and have a student retain the knowledge and be interested or engaged at the same time?

The Critical Thinking process or the Elements of Reason allows a student to think differently about why they are learning various concepts in the classroom. It makes them ask questions about their what and why they are learning. Such as, what is the purpose, what are my assumptions, and what are the concepts? Our nature is too constantly "think" but our thinking is sometimes tainted with our own personal judgments or experiences.

The QUEST process has similar thinking skills involved just as those in critical thinking. The two processes can be integrated together very well teaching the student how to analyze and evaluate not to memorize and move on.

As in critical thinking the student has to ask a series of questions to learn about why they are learning a certain subject matter and the importance of it to them. With the QUEST process the student must also follow certain steps in order to solve a problem. QUEST teaches a student to first identify problems instead of solutions. Allows them to know where they are in relationships to standards. Set targets and goals both short and long term. They will learn to process and analyze data according to facts and data, to make a determination on directions they can go with their issues based upon criteria. Then once those issues are dealt with, the student will implement solutions or countermeasures with a monitoring/tracking system in place to determine whether it was effective or not.

This process is great for dealing with core content subjects, working on classroom projects, breaking down subject areas by learning styles (see differentiated instruction), and personal situations outside of school, church groups, extra-curricular activities and other situations, it's a versatile process that engages students making them accountable for their learning as well giving them an environment that promotes acceptance of all ideas.

QUEST and Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction is a platform to allow teachers to engage students and challenge them at all levels taking into consideration the various learning styles. Differentiated Instruction can happen at many levels/areas in the classroom. Areas like content, assessment, teaching methods, etc. Teachers must identify and emphasize the “Core” knowledge in each subject they must bring across to students challenging and engaging them in the process. The key to differentiation is to come up with powerful and fundamental concepts for each content area, making it fun and purposeful for the student to learn.

QUEST can support Differentiation by the using the Grouping Format, this format avoids the “one size fits all” concept of teaching or instruction. It allows for students to work in groups according to different academic differences, cognitive differences, interests, motivations, or learning styles. QUEST provides those parameters discussed above to for students to accomplish amazing things learning core content, while engaging them and making them accountable for their own learning. The QUEST process allows students to learn from others ideas, building upon and analyzing questions they may arise while making sure the group stays on task and accomplishes their goals.

In conclusion, the QUEST process is just that “ a process” it's not an additional program you have to do. It fits into many areas in a school environment enhancing many activities providing the student with a safe environment to learn in. The process is like yeast in bread. It allows for expansion of the student mind. The process allows you to do what you are doing in the classroom with the students more effectively, engaging and empowering students, preparing them for real life choices.

How the ASK process relates.

As a teacher or administrator it's always tough to get the CATS assessment scores the next school year and not be able to address the issues within certain subject areas with those previous students. Instead those students will move on to the next grade with hopes the issues they had will be addressed in the next school year. Wouldn't it be nice to have an avenue of "on-going" assessments similar to the CATS assessment all year, once a week to monitor student progress, both strengths and weaknesses? The ASK process does that very thing. The ASK process allows teachers to share with students, everything the core content/program of studies for their grade level and subject that is expected throughout the year. For example, when you attended college do you remember receiving a class syllabus for the entire year, this is the same principal with ASK. It allows the students to be aware of everything they will be taught throughout the school year.

ASK engages students in their own learning process. Along with weekly assessments covering core content, the students will also graph results on a weekly basis breaking down the core content strands into sub-strands. The student will graph by correct answers out of "X" amount of questions on the weekly assessment. Then student will also check off the areas of improvement on a core content checklist and well as their strengths. This checklist and line graph serves as a wonderful document for student data on progress as well as for the teacher and principal. The teacher will also keep a class line graph average so students can see how they are doing in relationship to the class results. On a monthly basis the teacher will do a summary totaling up the data showing student improvement areas by strand. This summary allows the teachers to begin to "teach to the need of the student" by what their data is telling them. This gives them ample time to make adjustments to their lesson plans to ensure students are learning the content area. The ASK process is NOT for a grade, it is a twenty to thirty minute session on a weekly basis covering core content in a preview-review sense giving the student a safe environment to learn in. This environment takes the fear of failure away allowing the student to think, analyze, and evaluate new problems; it's "ok" when the student doesn't get it right the first time. The teacher will do "mini" lessons on each question reminiscent of the "problem of the day" theory allowing the student time to understand and try again next time.

We have found that the ASK process is very engaging and empowering to students. It can also facilitate Differentiated Instruction in various ways, targeting knowledge levels in students and groupings. We gave a survey to the pilot students last year and their replies to us were, "why aren't we doing this in all subjects, it makes learning fun".

In conclusion, we feel the ASK process is a vital part of student work and improvement. It empowers and engages students to want to learn while making them accountable for what the teacher is expected to teach in a particular subject area. It provides a vast amount of data for students, teachers, parents, and principals for automatic feedback in all core content areas. The most important this is it provides an environment for learning without the fear of failure and builds a relationship of trust with teachers and students. We will continue to document and track students/schools using the QUEST/ASK processes to record their effectiveness in the classroom with students learning and engagement.

