CONSTRUCTING AN INSTRUCTIONAL IDENTITY AND DESTINY FROM THE STORIES WE TELL AND THE SONGS WE SING

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On 11th July 2023, Jenny Toerien and I travelled to Swindon in England for the announcement of the UK School Library Association (SLA) Enterprise of the Year Award, for which Blanchelande College had been shortlisted. The Award provided an opportunity to demonstrate our thesis, after having been at Blanchelande for almost two years, that the school library becomes integral to the educational process through its inquiry-centred instructional programme as outlined in the *IFLA*

School Library Guidelines (2015),[1] even within a GCSE and A-Level educational pathway <see https://fosil.org.uk/forums/topic/uk-sla-2023-enterprise-of-the-year-award/ for the presentation>.

The Award ceremony gave me cause to reflect on a saying that I had encountered many years before, the origin of which I forget, which is that a community is the stories that it tells and the songs that it sings. It was with this sobering thought in mind – more on which later – that Jenny and I then travelled to Rome for the IASL Conference, where we had been invited to share the work that our Award submission had been based on during two extended workshops. These workshops provided an opportunity to demonstrate our thesis more fully, which is that such an inquiry-centred instructional program, in our case framed through FOSIL, effectively counters all four debilitating tendencies that rob inquiry of its educational potency <see image below and IASL 2023 | Recovering the Educational Promise of Inquiry for the presentation>.
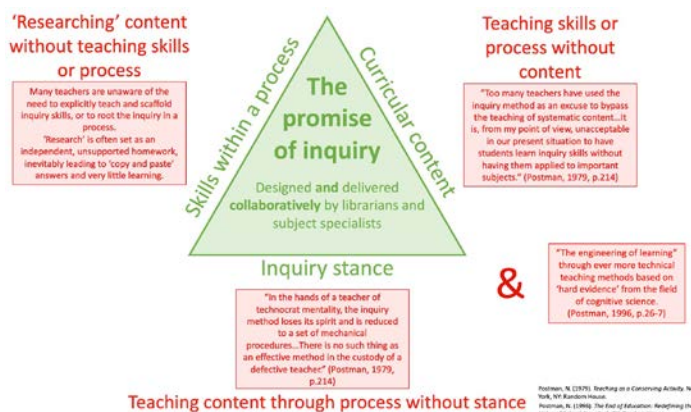
The promise of inquiry (click image to enlarge)

It is imperative that we make the case for inquiry, because Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's assertion (1969, p. 36) - that of all the survival strategies that education has

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1   The *Guidelines* were written by the IFLA School Libraries Section Standing Committee, and edited by Barbara Schultz-Jones and Dianne Oberg with contributions from the International Association of School Librarianship Executive Board.

to offer, none is more potent than the inquiry environment – holds true *and* our children are in desperate need of a survival strategy equal in potency to the complex existential crisis that threatens to literally overwhelm them. This existential crisis is epistemological in nature, a breakdown in the knowledge-building process, which is the inquiry process. Inquiry, then, is such a potent survival strategy because, by definition, it is *"a stance of wonder and puzzlement that gives rise to a dynamic learning process of coming to know and understand the world and ourselves in it as the basis for responsible participation in community"* (Stripling & Toerien, 2021) – a dynamic process that in school is directed towards disciplinary knowledge and understanding in an interdisciplinary way. This, in turn, identifies a vital role for schools, and school librarians as integral to *this* educational process within schools, in equipping their students for their vital role in strengthening the reality-based community of error-seeking inquirers upon whom our liberal democracy depends (Rauch, 2021).[2] This, however, requires school librarians who see themselves *and* the educational process in *these* terms, *even if* this view is at odds with the view of the educational process that prevails in their particular educational context. This is because the view of what it means to be educated, *as well as* how one becomes educated, is invariably contested, and we must contend for what Postman (1996) describes as *"non-trivial schooling,"* which *"can provide a point of view from which what is [reality] can be seen clearly, what was as a living present, and what will be as filled with possibility"* (p. x). This revolution will not be televised.[3]

This vital concern with the inquiry-centred instructional identity of the school librarian, which encompasses, integrates, and prioritises all of their core instructional activities (IFLA, 2015, p. 39),[4] and upon which the vitality of the profession ultimately depends, was not reflected in the IASL Conference program[5] – *Flourishing School Libraries: Research, Policy, and Practice* – even though a widespread concern for the future of school librarianship, which is rooted in the school librarian's coherent and balanced instructional identity, ran through all of the conversations that I had with colleagues from around the world. This is not to say that the program was not full of inspirational colleagues sharing inspiring work, only that the stories being told and the songs being sung did not cohere meaningfully into a balanced instructional identity, at least from the perspectives of the *Guidelines*. It is worth reminding ourselves, then, of this perspective.

The revision process of the 1st Edition of the *Guidelines*, initiated at a mid-year meeting of the IFLA School Libraries Section in Oslo, Norway, in April 2013, extended over two years, with six drafts *"developed and revised through a consultative and energetic process of international workshops in Singapore (30 international participants), Lyon, France (185 international participants) and Moscow, Russia (40 international participants), Joint [IFLA School Libraries Section/IASL] Committee facilitation and feedback, and international feedback through listservs and email contacts"* (Schultz-Jones & Oberg, 2023, p. 6). The resulting 2nd Edition of the *Guidelines* *"emphasises the [distinguishing] features of a school library based on an empirical foundation of more than 60 years of international research"* (p. 6). These distinguishing features (IFLA, 2015, pp. 16-17), which are necessary for the library to fulfil its educational *and* moral purpose[6] are:

2　This was the case that I had argued in my chapter – *Digital Literacy: Necessary but Not Sufficient for Life-Wide and Life-Long Learning* – for an upcoming IFLA/ De Gruyter book on digital literacy, which I then went on to present at the launch of the book during the IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Rotterdam <see IFLA 2023 WLIC | Digital Literacy: Necessary but Not Sufficient for the presentation and script>.

3　This is a reference to Gill Scott-Heron's 1971 poem/ song of the same name <see A Lyric Mapping Of "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" for the lyrics and a discussion of the political and cultural refences in it>.

4　Essentially, literacy and reading promotion (including appreciation of literature and culture), inquiry-based learning and teaching (including media and information literacy), technology integration, and professional development for teachers.

5　The two exceptions were *Recovering the Educational Promise of Inquiry* (Toerien & Toerien), and *Failure to Flourish: Students and Teacher Librarians in Australia* (Garrison, FitzGerald & Sheerman), which included the important and ambitious work of relating the NSW Information Fluency Framework to the inquiry process along with inspirational practical examples from Loreto Kirribilli and Broughton Anglican College.

6　The 2nd Edition of the *Guidelines* (2015) balances the educational purpose of school libraries – "improving teaching and learning for all" – which was the focus of the 1st Edition of the *Guidelines* (2002), with the moral purpose of school libraries – "making a difference in the lives of young people".

- professional and paraprofessional staffing levels appropriate for the size of the school and its unique needs
- a high-quality instructional program based around the core instructional activities and supported by targeted high-quality diverse collections
- an explicit policy and plan for ongoing growth and development.

Of these distinguishing features, foremost is *"a qualified school librarian with formal education in school librarianship and classroom teaching"* (p. 17). Given that the school library's *"facilities, collections, staff and technology are only means to [its educational and moral] end"* (p. 13), Barbara Stripling and I (2021) argued that inquiry is an educational and moral imperative, because it is only through an inquiry-centred library program that encompasses, integrates *and* prioritises all of the professional librarian's core instructional activities that the library can achieve its educational end, without which it cannot fully achieve its moral end. Then, to the extent that school takes responsibility for its role in developing engaged and empowered error-seeking inquirers, inquiry becomes an educational and moral imperative for school. This is the story and song that I am compelled to tell and sing, both in the library and the classroom.

On our return to Guernsey, we were graced in our home by the company of Lee FitzGerald and Alinda Sheerman, and over a meal this article was conceived, which reflects my early thoughts on what the stories that we tell and the songs that we sing reveal about our sense of instructional identity, and hence our instructional destiny.

This year saw both the UK School Library Association (established in 1937) and the CILIP School Libraries Group (established in 1979) holding virtual conferences, with the themes of Empowering All Pupils for the Future (SLA) and School Libraries - Diverse, Inclusive and Agents for Change (SLG). I attended neither conference, but I did scrutinise the programs. From the programs, I produced the following word clouds using WordItOut, which I used because it was free, and because, after some experimentation with a range of alternatives, it most clearly and accurately echoed to me the stories and songs contained within the programs.[7]

Word Cloud examples from SLA Virtual Conference, and SLG Virtual Conference

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7   The keywords I used come from the titles of the sessions, which include the keynotes. The size of the keywords reflects their frequency. Where variations of keywords occurred, I standardised on the keywords as they appear in the conference themes; e.g., *"empowering"* includes *"empower"* and *"empowerment"*, and the same for *"diverse"* and *"inclusive"*. For publisher or author sessions, I used both *"publisher"* and *"author"*.

(I considered doing this for the ASLA 2023 Biennial Conference (20-22/04/2023), the IASL Annual Conference (17-21/07/2023), and the AASL National Conference (19-21/10/2023) – where Barbara Stripling, Jenny and I presented Leading an Inquiry-Based School: Discovering the Promise <see link for presentation> – but these programs are much more complex *and* the start of our academic year too demanding, although I have downloaded these programs and will do so once our term ends.)

While obviously not a direct comparison, contrast these world clouds with the word cloud that emerges from the keywords outlining the distinguishing features (pp. 16-17) of a school library and the professional librarian's core instructional activities (p. 39) as outlined in the *Guidelines* (2015).[8]

IFLA School Library Guidelines
Distinguishing Features and Core Instructional Activities
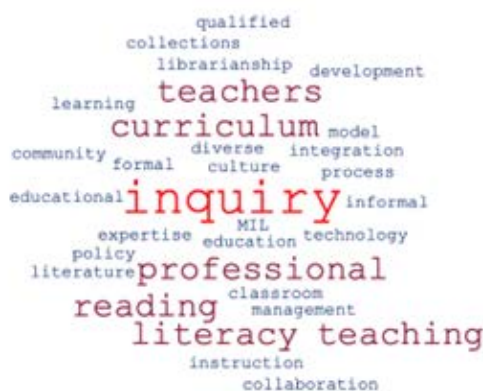
Note on Information Literacy & Inquiry

- Following UNESCO's approach, Information Literacy is included in Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

- Information Literacy is not the same as Inquiry, although it is integral to Inquiry:
  - "A school librarian should take a leadership role in ensuring there is a systematic approach to teaching an inquiry process that is guided by a school-based continuum of media and information skills and strategies" (IFLA, 2015, p. 43).
  - "Inquiry requires information literacy skills. When [librarians] and teachers collaborate to create an inquiry [process] approach to learning, students develop dual competencies in subject content and information literacy" (Kuhlthau, 1999, p. 11).

Word Cloud IFLA Guidelines

There is more to say about this than there are words left in this article, but some observations are as immediate as they are far reaching:

1. Our instructional identity emerges out of the stories and songs that we, as a professional community, tell and sing, which is an interplay between the stories and songs that we individually want to tell and sing, and those we are collectively encouraged to tell and sing.
2. Our destiny is bound up with our identity. There is an idea, which I first encountered in the writing of A. W. Tozer (2015), that what our mind/heart turns to when it is free to turn to what it will, is who we are, or will soon become. This is not a judgment, but an observable reality.
3. The consensual instructional identity, and therefore destiny, that emerges from the *Guidelines* is the result of an evolutionary history of school librarianship that stretches back over 60 years. Of course, this evolutionary history of school librarianship does not end with the publication of the *Guidelines* in 2015, but the *Guidelines* establish an evolutionary trajectory that remains vital.
4. We may do well to wonder, then, to what extent the schooling of our profession is non-trivial, in that we are purposefully building a perspective from which *"what is [reality] can be seen clearly, what was as a living present, and what will be as filled with possibility"* (Postman, 1996, p. x).
5. **More broadly, we may do well to wonder what the stories that we tell and the songs that we sing in the library say about our instructional identity and destiny to our colleagues outside of the library.**

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8   I gave inquiry a frequency of 3 because: (1) MIL skills are mentioned in the context of the inquiry process; (2) inquiry is a distinct core instructional activity, which is also discussed in the greatest detail; (3) inquiry encompasses and meaningfully integrates all of the core instructional activities.

To frame this more positively, if not less challengingly, I recall Davies (1979, pp. xii, 9), who perhaps more prophetically than she intended, warned:

> Today's school library…is a source and a force for educational excellence and…today's school librarian *"is a teacher whose subject is learning itself"*. … [However] because [of the] persistent downgrading of education, the profession itself must make a value judgment as to which criticisms from without the profession and which criticisms from within it are justified. Having identified the legitimate criticisms, the profession must then painstakingly set about to correct what is wrong, to strengthen what is weak, and to safeguard what is excellent. *"The whole aim is to lift the critique from a set of complaints to a set of purposes"*. Only then can a plan for action be formulated and disaster, always lurking in the wings, be forestalled.

It is both puzzling and troubling to note in passing, and necessary to investigate further, that Postman – who was not a librarian, and who makes no mention of librarians – identified inquiry as a most potent of survival strategies in 1969, and that by the time inquiry becomes an instructional focus for school librarians at the turn of the century, at least in the US, Postman, as a teacher, had largely lost faith in inquiry because of the very debilitating tendencies that librarians would come to effectively counter, should they choose to do so.

This leads to an equally puzzling and troubling lesson, this time from Canada.

The definition of inquiry that Barbara and I formulated for our SLA keynote in 2021 was enlarged from the definition of inquiry as formulated by the Galileo Educational Network (GEN), which served as the professional learning arm of the School of Education at the University of Calgary from 1999-2022. This definition and underlying understanding of inquiry is itself rooted in the extraordinary work of the *Developing Inquiring Communities in Education Project* (DICEP), as recounted in *Action, Talk & Text: Learning and Teaching Through Inquiry* (Wells, 2001), and which was led by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto from 1991-2001. Now, as far as I can tell, neither the GEN nor DICEP included or mentioned librarians, yet the concluding story and song of DICEP, which grew and swelled into the story and song of the GEN, remains inspirational and aspirational for us (Wells, The Development of a Community of Inquiry):

> The force that drives the enacted curriculum must be a pervasive spirit of inquiry, and the dominant purpose of all activities must be an increase in understanding. … However, as we have come to realize, there is no straightforward, universal method of achieving these goals. (p. 7)
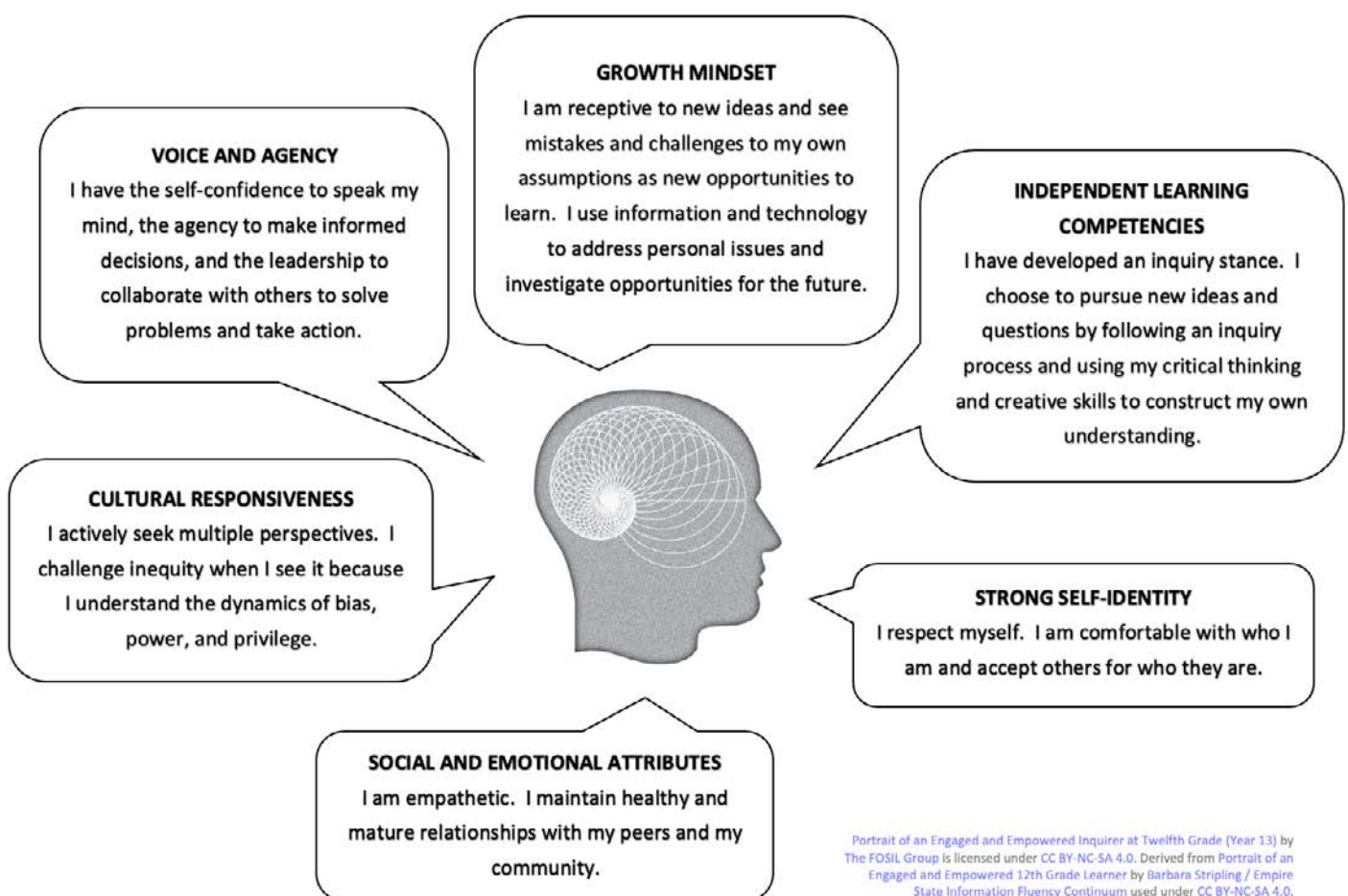
> If classrooms were to become places where students were actively and enthusiastically attempting to construct answers to questions that were of real interest to them…more would be needed than the introduction of prepackaged inquiry activities, taken from teachers' manuals or downloaded from the Internet. (p. 8)

> Each classroom is thus unique. And so, if teachers are to create communities that work collaboratively toward shared goals while valuing diversity of opinion and personal learning style and, at the same time, are to foster individual initiative and creativity, they also must approach the task in a spirit of inquiry. ... In fact, teacher and students together must become a community of inquiry with respect to all aspects of the life of the classroom and all areas of the curriculum. (p. 7)

In my conclusion, surviving our epistemological-existential crisis depends on a non-trivial education, which, in turn, can only be achieved in an effective inquiry environment, which, in turn, demands a

school librarian whose instructional identity and destiny is grounded in an inquiry-centred library program. We do this for the children we are called to serve. To this end, I am pleased to be able to share here the next stage in our development of the *Portraits of an Engaged and Empowered Inquirer* at Year 3, 6, 9 and 13 (below), which are the *Portrait Attributes Developed Through Inquiry* at Years 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-13 (below), and which include redesigned graphic organisers for these attribute- and stage-typical skills <see Portraits of an Engaged and Empowered Inquirer for work in progress>.

Portrait of an Engaged and Empowered Inquirer at Year 13 (Grade 12)

GROWTH MINDSET
I am receptive to new ideas and see mistakes and challenges to my own assumptions as new opportunities to learn. I use information and technology to address personal issues and investigate opportunities for the future.

VOICE AND AGENCY
I have the self-confidence to speak my mind, the agency to make informed decisions, and the leadership to collaborate with others to solve problems and take action.

INDEPENDENT LEARNING COMPETENCIES
I have developed an inquiry stance. I choose to pursue new ideas and questions by following an inquiry process and using my critical thinking and creative skills to construct my own understanding.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS
I actively seek multiple perspectives. I challenge inequity when I see it because I understand the dynamics of bias, power, and privilege.

STRONG SELF-IDENTITY
I respect myself. I am comfortable with who I am and accept others for who they are.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ATTRIBUTES
I am empathetic. I maintain healthy and mature relationships with my peers and my community.

Year 10-13 (Grade 9-12) Portrait Attributes Developed Through Inquiry

Attributes	Independent Learning	Strong Self-Identity	Social and Emotional	Cultural Responsiveness	Voice and Agency	Growth Mindset
Year 10-13	I have developed an inquiry stance. I choose to pursue new ideas and questions by following an inquiry process and using my critical-thinking and creative skills to construct my own understandings.	I respect myself. I am comfortable with who I am and accept others for who they are.	I am empathetic. I maintain healthy and mature relationships with my peers and my community.	I actively seek multiple perspectives. I challenge inequity when I see it because I understand the dynamics of bias, power, and privilege.	I have the self-confidence to speak my mind, the agency to make informed decisions, and the leadership to collaborate with others to solve problems and take action.	I am receptive to new ideas and see mistakes and challenges to my own assumptions as new opportunities to learn. I use information and technology to address personal issues and investigate opportunities for the future.

Many skills and attitudes may be taught **explicitly**. Others may be included **implicitly**. Assessment strategies and Graphic Organizer numbers are noted for explicit teaching of skills and attitudes.

Stages	Independent Learning	Strong Self-Identity	Social and Emotional	Cultural Responsiveness	Voice and Agency	Growth Mindset
Connect	I can develop a schema or mind map to express the big idea and the relationships among supporting ideas and topics that interest me [9-12.1]	I can examine my own assumptions and prior knowledge about the topic to determine which are valid and which must be verified during research [9-12.2] [Conversation]	I can develop and refine the topic, problem, or question independently to arrive at a worthy and manageable topic for inquiry [9-12.4; 9-12.5; 9-12.6]	I can gather context about the time period, people, and issues surrounding the topic by reading laterally across both primary and secondary sources [9-12.2; 9-12.3]	I can build on real-world experiences to broaden perspectives and open creative possibilities (e.g., field trips, makerspaces, hack-a-thon, coding camps, video production centers) [Observation]	I can develop a flexible plan and timeline for following the inquiry process to research this topic and explore diverse perspectives, given the expected level of complexity and final product for the assignment [9-12.6; 9-12.7; 9-12.8]
Wonder	I can create questions to lead to basic information and, in addition, to information that is more critical, complex, and diverse in perspectives [9-12.4; 9-12.8]	I can explore problems or questions for which there are multiple answers or no "best" answer [9-12.7]		I can create questions to lead to basic information and, in addition, to information that is more critical, complex, and diverse in perspectives [9-12.8]		
Investigate	I can evaluate and select evidence from multiple sources based on relevance and usefulness to answer research questions, currency, authority, accuracy, comprehensiveness, and point of view [9-12.10; 9-12.11; 9-12.13]	I can retrieve and use images, sound, and visual media according to ethical and legal standards [9-12.21]	I can identify misinformation or biased information by analyzing and evaluating the motivations and creators of the false or misleading information (e.g., profit, political motives, influence, point of view, social bots) [9-12.14; 9-12.19]	I can analyze the impact of point of view, perspective, and purpose on the information provided by a source [9-12.15]	I can question or challenge the text while reading or viewing to ensure comprehension and validation of accuracy and authority during my process of gathering information.	I can use information and technology to address my personal issues and investigate opportunities for the future, including higher education, career training, vocational training [Observation; Conversation; Book Checkout]
Construct	I can develop a line of argument or claim that incorporates and/or refutes competing interpretations or conflicting evidence with credible evidence [9-12.26]	I can develop my own opinion, perspective, or claim and support it with evidence and a clear line of reasoning [9-12.27]	I can develop interpersonal skills to build trusting relationships with diverse peers and adults through collaboration and communication [Observation]	I can engage in civic online reasoning by verifying information that is presented as the truth, recognizing the impact of social-media format on information, and actively seeking multiple perspectives [9-12.18]	I can display self-confidence in my own ability to take risks in learning, fail, learn from failure, and change my approach, conclusions, or opinions based on new or more accurate information [Observation]	
Reflect	I can record and reflect on my individual experience of the inquiry process – the hardest part, best part, important skills learned, insights experienced, emotional highs and lows, etc. [Process Log]	I can identify my own strengths (academic, social, and emotional) and set goals about specific ways to improve in the future [9-12.36]	I can take a leadership role in collaborative groups and completion of group projects by fulfilling my own responsibilities effectively while enabling others to contribute their best work as well [Observation]		I can display self-confidence in forming and sharing my own opinion and ideas and questioning ideas that are different from or conflict with my own [Observation; Class Discussion]	I can develop a growth mindset [Conversation]
Express	I can publish my final product for an authentic audience and real-world application [9-12.28]	I can demonstrate netiquette behavior by respecting others; using appropriate language, images and emoticons; thinking before sending or forwarding messages; creating safe screen names; and challenging cyberbullying [9-12.35]	I can work collaboratively to design, develop, publish, and present multimedia projects that effectively communicate information and ideas about the curriculum to authentic audiences [Observation; Assessment of Final Product]	I can use social media (e.g., Wikipedia, Twitter, YouTube, online blogs) responsibly for the exchange of information and ideas by fact-checking the information, avoiding the spread of misinformation, engaging in interactions around fact-based information, and respecting and thoughtfully responding to the ideas of others [9-12.33; 9-12.34]	I can deliver presentations to authentic audiences and peers with self-confidence, clarity, attention to the intended impact on the audience, and an "expert" or "professional" stance [9-12.29]	I can evaluate my own product and process throughout the work and use self-assessment, teacher feedback, and peer feedback to make revisions when necessary [9-12.30; 9-12.31]

FOSIL Portrait attributes developed through inquiry (click image to enlarge)

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