

RE/DIS-COVERING THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM THROUGH INQUIRY – PART 2: For Teacher Librarians

By Darryl Toerien and Lee FitzGerald



DARRYL TOERIEN

Darryl Toerien is Head of Inquiry-Based Learning at Blanchelande College, Guernsey, Channel Islands, UK. He is a member of the UK School Library Association (SLA), the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL), and the School Libraries Section (SLS) of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). He is also originator of FOSIL (Framework Of Skills for Inquiry Learning, 2011) and the FOSIL Group (2019).



LEE FITZGERALD

Lee FitzGerald is Editor of this journal, an adjunct lecturer to the MEd TL program at Charles Sturt University, a long time Teacher Librarian and advocate for inquiry learning.

Part 1 of this article appeared in the September issue of *ACCESS*, and asked Teacher Librarians (TLs) to circulate the article amongst teachers, Heads of Department and Principals. It was a plea to those in charge in schools to make concrete the promise of freedom that exists in inquiry learning, to understand the nature of guided inquiry learning, and how it can sit naturally alongside explicit instruction and also incorporate it. It also suggested that the TL is well qualified to take an effective part in inquiry learning. We hope that some of you were able to circulate it. I did and found agreement in my two readers (both Heads of Teaching and Learning) about the necessity of combining explicit instruction with inquiry

learning methods, and treasuring curiosity in their students, especially in this time of information perverseness. However, neither had experienced the suggested TL role in inquiry learning in their schools.

Part 2 of this article is addressed to TLs, to elaborate on the reasons for involvement in inquiry learning with practical suggestions for doing so, using two sound inquiry learning models, Guided Inquiry Design (GID) and FOSIL. Note that FOSIL is open source/ non-proprietary, and all materials are freely available and adaptable.

What is the role of the TL in inquiry learning? "Teams of-TLs and teachers work together to design, implement, support, assess and reflect on an inquiry task, using an inquiry learning model such as Guided Inquiry Design or Framework of Skills for Inquiry Learning" (SICS, CSU, 2024).

An inquiry model is:

more than a set of skills, more than an information literacy model, and **is** a pedagogical model aligning the content taught in a school to one of a very limited number of models that truly deal with inquiry learning as a **whole school pedagogy**. (Toerien & FitzGerald, 2024, p21)

As pointed out in the [ALIA/ASLA Statement on Information Literacy](#) (ALIA & ASLA, 2016) "Information skills are embedded across the Australian curriculum within the general capabilities and contextualised in a range of learning areas, providing the framework for teacher librarians to create and manage a program." (ASLA, 2016, p. 1)

Part 1 of this article also presented an example of FOSIL as an inquiry learning model being embedded in the culture of its school, in this case Blanchelande College in Guernsey, Channel Islands. Darryl Toerien demonstrated how FOSIL/inquiry is essential to achieving the aims of the school, with clear links to the K-13 library-centred inquiry program made up of curricular and extracurricular inquiry units. FOSIL is linked to [The Empire State Information Fluency Continuum](#) (ESIFC) outcomes, which demonstrate the level of information fluency that students have achieved throughout schooling. Australian TLs have a similar opportunity to demonstrate the growth of information fluency in their students through the [NSW Information Fluency Framework](#) (IFF).

Part 2 of this article suggests firstly that the fundamental purpose of a school library is inquiry, and if we are not taking part in inquiry learning, then we serve no **indispensable** educational purpose, attending to worthy, but not essential, purposes, like fostering a love of reading. This does not suggest that TLs stop championing reading, which is itself critical for inquiry, but rather that the attitude and skills of inquiry learning are crucial for all students, and in playing an active part in the inquiry learning of a school, the TL is involved in an intrinsic way with teaching and learning. Secondly, we suggest practical ways for bi-passing the old

shibboleths that stand in the way of establishing and maintaining a vibrant inquiry learning culture. These include Release from Face to Face Teaching (RFF) in primary school; and in secondary school, the difficulties in establishing the TL as an essential partner in the design, teaching and assessing of inquiry learning.

Why is inquiry learning so important to education?

David Foster Wallace's notion of *Total Noise* perfectly captures one horn of our information dilemma, being the growing "tsunami of available fact, context and perspective" (2007!); the second horn being the growing maelstrom of mis-information, dis-information and mal-information. And *this* in a digital environment that is itself both overwhelming and endlessly distracting. No wonder information literacy preoccupies us. And yet, important as making sense of information is (Figure 1a), it is only part of our real concern, which is constructing meaning from information (Figure 1b), or, more broadly, the dynamic process of learning from information and the motivation for doing so (Figure 2), particularly in the context of subject area learning.

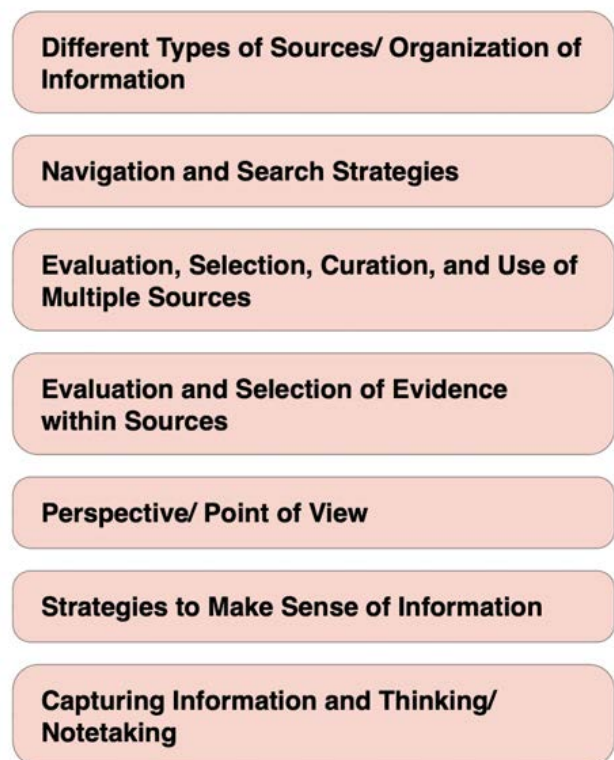


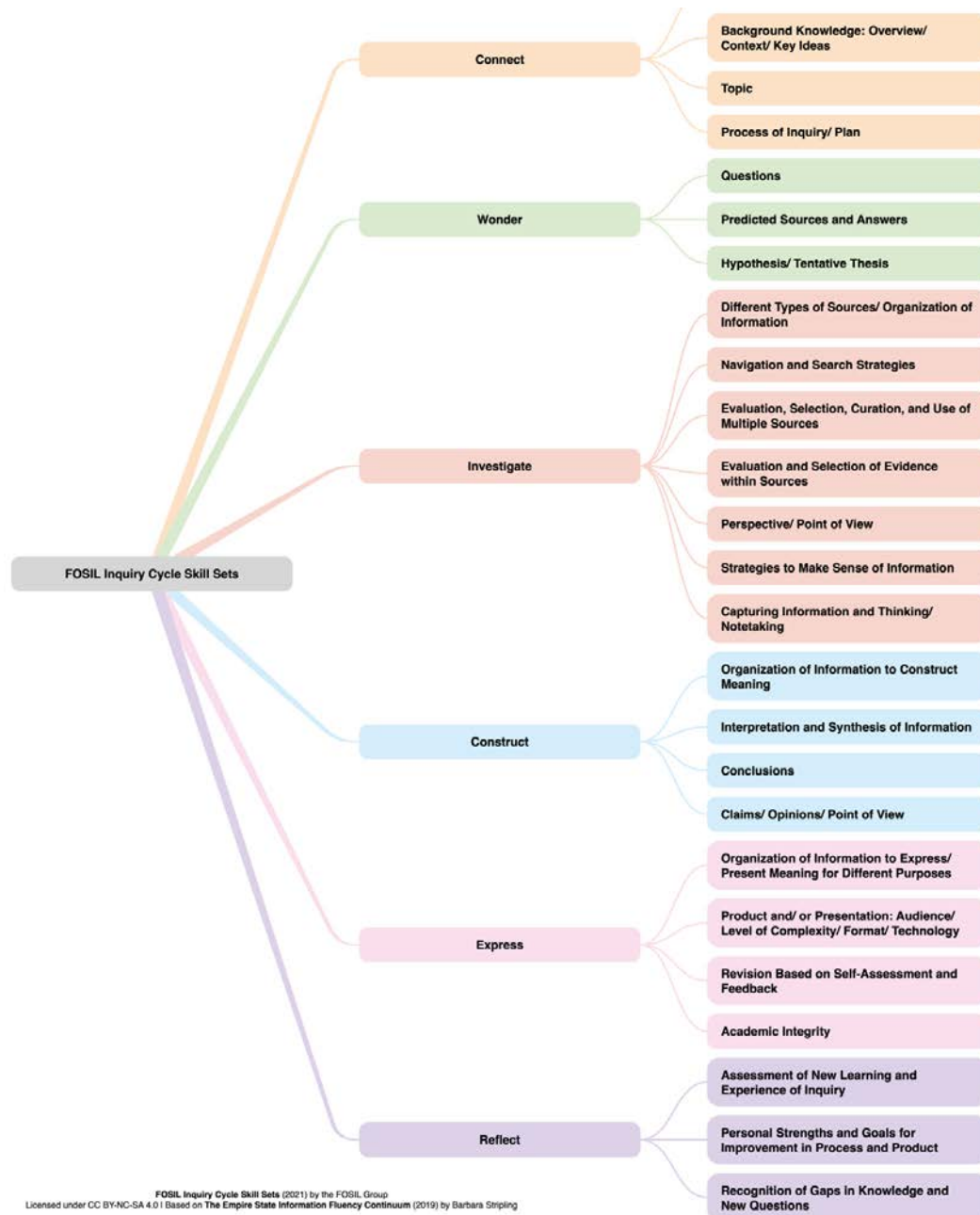
Figure 1a. FOSIL Skill Sets: Investigate - Making sense of information

- Organization of Information to Construct Meaning
- Interpretation and Synthesis of Information
- Conclusions
- Claims/ Opinions/ Point of View

Figure 1b. FOSIL Skill Sets: Construct - Constructing meaning from information

For this reason, we view the librarian as teacher of sense-making and meaning-construction, which is a collaborative undertaking with classroom-based colleagues. Our shared preoccupation, then, is Peirce’s (1955, p. 4) first rule of rea-

son – “in order to learn we must desire to learn, and in so desiring not be satisfied with what we already incline to think” – and its corollary – “Do not block the way of inquiry”. Not only is inquiry a natural way of learning, provided it is enabled systematically and progressively, often through explicit instruction, but it is also critical if school is to equip students for their role in strengthening the “reality-based...community of error-seeking inquirers” upon which our imperilled democracy depends (Rauch, 2021, pp. 15-16). This is why Postman and Weingartner (1969) rightly assert that “of all the ‘survival strategies’ education has to offer, none is more potent or in greater need of explication than the ‘inquiry environment’” (p. 36).



FOSIL Inquiry Cycle Skill Sets (2021) by the FOSIL Group
Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 | Based on The Empire State Information Fluency Continuum (2019) by Barbara Striping

Figure 2. FOSIL Skill Sets

Why the library should be essentially an inquiry environment

This situation makes the library integral to the educational process of school. The reason for this is timelessly captured by Douglas Knight (1968), then Chair of the US National Advisory Commission on Libraries and President of Duke University, in his reflection on what a library is:

A library...has two major and unique functions. First, it makes possible meetings of mind and idea...Second [it] allows and encourages the development, the extension of ideas—not their passive absorption, but their active generation...This creative center which is a library should not be defined by the adequacy of its space, equipment, and collections alone, but by the adequacy of its people—those who first teach the mind to inquire, and those in the libraries who can show it how to inquire. (vi-ix)

It is unsurprising, therefore, that Daniel Callison (2006) states that “the school library only exists as a learning centre because of inquiry” (p. 601), or that the *IFLA School Library Guidelines* (2015) define the school library in terms of inquiry (p. 16) and position inquiry as an educational and moral imperative (Stripling and Toerien, 2021).

Now, the potency of any given school library will depend on the extent to which it is true to its nature, which is not solely and/ or fully under the control of its librarian(s). This is because any given school will itself only ever be a more or less vital and enabling inquiry environment. This is a complex situation that exists between the library and the classroom, and one that requires explication, *still*. The burden of explication rests heavily on us, and is the price of our high calling, for if our libraries are to be vital and enabling environments to our schools and our children, they must first and foremost be so for us.

Where can Australian TLs find opportunities to be involved in inquiry learning?

- The achievement standards and content descriptions in the Australian Curriculum and in the outcomes of state curriculum relating to information literacy in our syllabuses.

- The General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum.
- The Cross Curriculum Priority areas – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia, and Sustainability.

Please see the article in this issue of *ACCESS* about the Information Fluency Framework to see the amazing work that members of a Special Interest Group of the School Library Association of NSW (SLANSW) have done, especially in regard to mapping the IFF to these areas.

Getting involved in the inquiry learning of your school

I’ve been involved in Australian school libraries long enough to know that the ideal in inquiry learning is difficult to achieve, and to maintain. For primary TLs, it helps to regard taking RFF classes as an opportunity, rather than something making involvement in inquiry learning literally impossible because of the demands of the classes. It may be possible to ensure that the RFF program fits in with themes and topics in your school, ideally using the opportunity to use the RFF classes to teach the information fluency skills as part of an inquiry unit. And to seek time to work with primary teachers to be involved in the design, teaching and assessment of research tasks in the most common themes occurring in your school.

For secondary TLs, it is very common practice for teachers to ask TLs to deliver ad hoc information literacy lessons, which may be about e.g. referencing, or using Generative AI. For these skills to ‘take’ and to be internalised by students, it is more effective that they learn them in the context of the task they are undertaking. TL involvement in inquiry learning varies enormously across schools, depending on the level of collaboration established between teachers and TLs, and expectations of the role of the TL, ranging from a keeper of books/digital resources to full collaborative partner in inquiry learning. One of the most daunting things about contemplating an inquiry program is the sheer number of subjects and inquiry tasks that students are involved in. In working towards an inquiry program across the school, it

may help to consider these steps:

- Look at whole form subjects 7-10.
- Work towards whole form inquiry tasks, incorporating the same inquiry learning model in Year 7, and 10.
- Work with the research tasks in Year 11 (e.g., the historical investigations) and All My Own Work. (A new version is available at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/nesa/hsc/all-my-own-work>.)

This may be enough! Especially if you are also using the IFF to demonstrate student achievement.

New syllabuses K-12 are being developed as part of Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum, and the NESA roll out of Version 9. These will provide opportunities for TMs to investigate how these syllabuses will be taken up in your school, and to look at finding a pattern through 7-12, or K-6, whereby students can experience an inquiry learning model at strategic points in their schooling, in whole year enrolment subjects. There is talk still of a senior project for all students, which could be the culminating point of an inquiry program. Keep an eye on the new syllabuses as they are published and implemented.

Please find below a list of familiar themes/topics recurring K-12 in our syllabuses, for areas you may be able to work with in inquiry. There are matching inquiry units on the [Guided Inquiry Oz edublog](#), which have been developed by Australian TMs over the last ten or so years.

<p>Primary</p> <p>Early Stage 1: My place and my family</p> <p>Stage 1: Threatened animals Past and present family life</p> <p>Stage 2: Community and remembrance British colonisation Living sustainably Human Body Solar system</p> <p>Stage 3: The Australian colonies Australia as a nation Global Connections Australian identity Bushfires Microorganisms</p>	<p>Secondary</p> <p>Stage 4: Consider whole form enrolment subjects, e.g. History/ Geography in stage 4 – for targeting an inquiry project, e.g.</p> <p>History: New Kingdom Egypt Ancient Egypt Ancient China Medieval Europe The Black Death</p> <p>Geography: Water in the world Place and Liveability</p> <p>Stage 5</p> <p>History: Industrial Revolution Holocaust The Gallipoli campaign</p> <p>Geography World travel</p> <p>Stage 6:</p> <p>History: Ancient Historical Investigation Modern Historical Investigation</p>
--	---

Other materials on the GIOz edublog include:

- Working in inquiry circles
- GI Theory and practice
- Scaffolds for every part of the GID process
- [GI practice and planning](#) (unit planners etc)
- And for a workable overview of GID for both students and teachers, there are [Students doing inquiry](#) and [Teachers and TMs doing GI](#)

You may be interested in *The Down Under Devil's Advocate: Ten ways to derail a Guided Inquiry*

On the [Guided Inquiry Design](#) website, you will find the latest on Guided Inquiry Design. Especially look at

- Leslie Maniotes' *Making the Shift to Guided Inquiry Design* article
- [GID framework](#)
- Professor Carol Kuhlthau's video *GID K12 Information Literacy in Use* available [here](#).

FOSIL resources

FOSIL was developed by Darryl Toerien from the work of Barbara Stripling on the [ESIFC](#). The [FOSIL Group](#) was created to freely share developments relating to FOSIL-based inquiry specifically, but not exclusively. Since 2020, FOSIL has been developed in close collaboration with Barbara alongside the ESIFC. FOSIL Group membership, which is free, is only required for participation in forum discussions. The website is voluntarily maintained on behalf of the community by Darryl and Jenny Toerien, with hosting made possible by the [UK SLA](#).

The main features are:

- The [FOSIL Inquiry Cycle](#) ([PDF](#) or [PNG](#) download), including:
 - Links to individual stages in the Cycle – [Connect](#) | [Wonder](#) | [Investigate](#) | [Construct](#) | [Express](#) | [Reflect](#) – each with a more detailed description of the stage, some instructional considerations, and some exemplary [graphic organisers](#) that are free to download and use/ adapt under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).
 - A simplified Cycle specifically designed for use in primary school ([PDF](#) or [PNG](#) download).
 - The PK-12 [Framework Of Skills for Inquiry Learning](#) (2009, reimagined 2019), which includes links to ESIFC graphic organisers for individual priority skills.
 - FOSIL Inquiry Cycle skills sets ([PDF](#) or [PNG](#) download, or vertical orientation [PDF](#) or [PNG](#) download).
 - A substantial and growing [collection of graphic organisers](#) which serve both instruc-

tional and assessment purposes.

- Many support full inquiries, e.g., the *Year 6 (Grade 5) Cool Water Inquiry* (see forum discussion below), involving Art & Design Technology, English and Science.
- Others support one or more stages and skill sets, for example *Presentation and poster design* (Express), created for the *Cool Water inquiry* but not limited to it.
- [Discussion forums](#), the most important being:
 - [FOSIL Presentations](#), including professional development and conferences, for example *Blanchelande 2024 | Academic Integrity and Augmented vs Artificial Intelligence* and *SJSU 2024 | Engaging and Empowering Learners for Life*.
 - [Inquiry and resource design](#), for example *Year 6 (Grade 5) Cool Water Inquiry* and *Extended and Higher Project Qualifications* for Year 10 (Grade 9) and Year 12-13 (Grade 11-12).
 - [The nature of inquiry and information literacy](#), e.g., *Locating ourselves in the epistemological landscape*.
 - [Articles about the nature, development and application of FOSIL-based inquiry](#).

To conclude, we invite you to consider whether or not being surrounded by the 'total noise' of information is critical for our students, and to prioritise our role in helping them hear clearly in our school libraries. A quote from Jakovljević, (2020) on David Foster Wallace's essay *Deciderization 2007 – a Special Report*, puts the current moment succinctly, if dramatically: "We, like diminished kings or rigidly insecure presidents, are reduced to being overwhelmed by information and interpretation, or else paralyzed by cynicism and anomie, or else – worst – seduced by some particular set of dogmatic talking-points".

References

- ALIA/ASLA. (2009). *Joint statement on Information Literacy*. <https://asla.org.au/information-literacy>
- Callison, D. (2015). *The evolution of Inquiry: Controlled, guided, modelled, and free*. Libraries Unlimited.
- Dewey, J. (1956). Experience and education: Selections. In *Great Issues in Education*. II, 3-17). The Great Books Foundation.
- Faculty of Arts and Education, School of Information and Communication Studies. (2023). *Module 4, Introduction to Teacher Librarianship*. Charles Sturt University.
- FitzGerald, L. (2024). Guided Inquiry in Australia. <https://guidedinquiryoz.edublogs.org/>
- FitzGerald, L. (2016). Ten ways to derail a Guided Inquiry. *Guided Inquiry Design in Action*. <https://52guidedinquiry.edublogs.org/2016/02/25/the-down-under-devils-advocate-ten-ways-to-derail-a-guided-inquiry/>
- FitzGerald, L. (2015). Opportunity knocks: The Australian curriculum and Guided Inquiry. *ACCESS*, 29(2), 4-17.
- The FOSIL group (Framework of Skills in Inquiry learning), (2024). *The FOSIL Group: Advancing inquiry learning*. <https://fossil.org.uk/>
- Edublogs. (2024). *Guided inquiry in Australia*. <https://guidedinquiryoz.edublogs.org/>
- IFLA. (2015). *IFLA School Library Guidelines*. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. <https://www.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/assets/school-libraries-resource-centers/publications/ifla-school-library-guidelines.pdf>
- Jakovljević, T. (2020). David Foster Wallace on the role of the essay in the world of total noise. In *Deciderization 2007: A Special Report*. <https://doi.org/10.18485/bells90.2020.2.ch10>
- Knight, D. M. (1968). Foreword. In *U. S. Libraries, Library Services for the Nation's Needs; Toward Fulfillment of a National Policy* (pp. vii-ix). United States Office of Education.
- Kuhlthau, C. (2024). *GID K12 Information literacy in use*. <https://guidedinquirydesign.com/>
- Kuhlthau, C. & Maniotes, L. (2014). Making the shift from traditional research assignments to Guided Inquiry learning. *Knowledge Quest*, 43(3), 9-17.
- NSW Department of Education (2021). *The Information Fluency framework*. https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/media/documents/Information_fluency_framework.pdf
- NSW Government (2024). *All my own work*. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/nesa/hsc/all-my-own-work>
- Peirce, C. S. (1955). The scientific attitude and Fallibilism. In J. Buchler (Ed.), *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (pp. 42-59). Dover Publications.
- Postman, N., & Weingartner, C. (1969). *Teaching as a subversive activity*. Delacorte Press.
- Rauch, J. (2021). *The constitution of knowledge: A defence of truth*. Brookings Institution Press.
- School Libraries Systems Association & Stripling, B. (2024). *Reimagined: The Empire State Information fluency framework*. <https://slsa-nys.libguides.com/ifc>
- Stripling, B. K., & Toerien, D. (2021). Inquiry: An educational and moral imperative. *School Library Association Weekend Course: Leading School Libraries: Library, School, Sector*. School Library Association (UK). <https://fossil.org.uk/forums/topic/sla-2021-inquiry-an-educational-and-moral-imperative/>
- Toerien, D. & FitzGerald, L. (2024). Re-discovering the promise of freedom through inquiry – Part 1. *ACCESS*, 38(3), 21-28.