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Creative Commons Reboot of the FOSIL-based Heroic Inquiry Cycle

Darryl Toerien

Blanchelande College (K-12), toerlend@blanchelande.sch.gg

Hugh Rose

Illuminator of Traditional Stories

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Keywords

FOSIL, Heroic Inquiry, Hero's Journey, school libraries, inquiry-based learning, student engagement, instructional design, Creative Commons, information fluency, graphic design in education, inquiry cycle, visual literacy, 21st-century learning, educational frameworks, pixel art education tools

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Darryl Toerien, Blanchelande College (K-12)

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This brief multimedia article discusses the Creative Commons reboot of FOSIL-based Heroic Inquiry in two parts. The first part is a written reflection by Darryl Toerien on the collaborative development of Heroic Inquiry (1.x) at Blanchelande College in 2021, which is the alignment of the stages in the FOSIL-based inquiry process (2010) with the stages in the Hero's Journey, and then the reasons for the collaborative redevelopment of Heroic Inquiry (2.x) for the FOSIL Symposium in 2025. The second part is a recorded reflection by Hugh Rose on his visual interpretation of the design brief for Heroic Inquiry (2.x).

Part 1: From Heroic Inquiry (1.x) to Heroic Inquiry (2.x)

"Inquiry is a stance of wonder and puzzlement that gives rise to a dynamic process of coming to know and understand the world and ourselves in it as the basis for responsible participation in community" (Stripling & Toerien, 2021).¹

This definition reflects both the subjective dimension of *who* is coming to know and understand, and *how*, which is primary, and the objective dimension of *what* is becoming known and understood. For this reason, Jacques Maritain (1952, p. 3) states that:

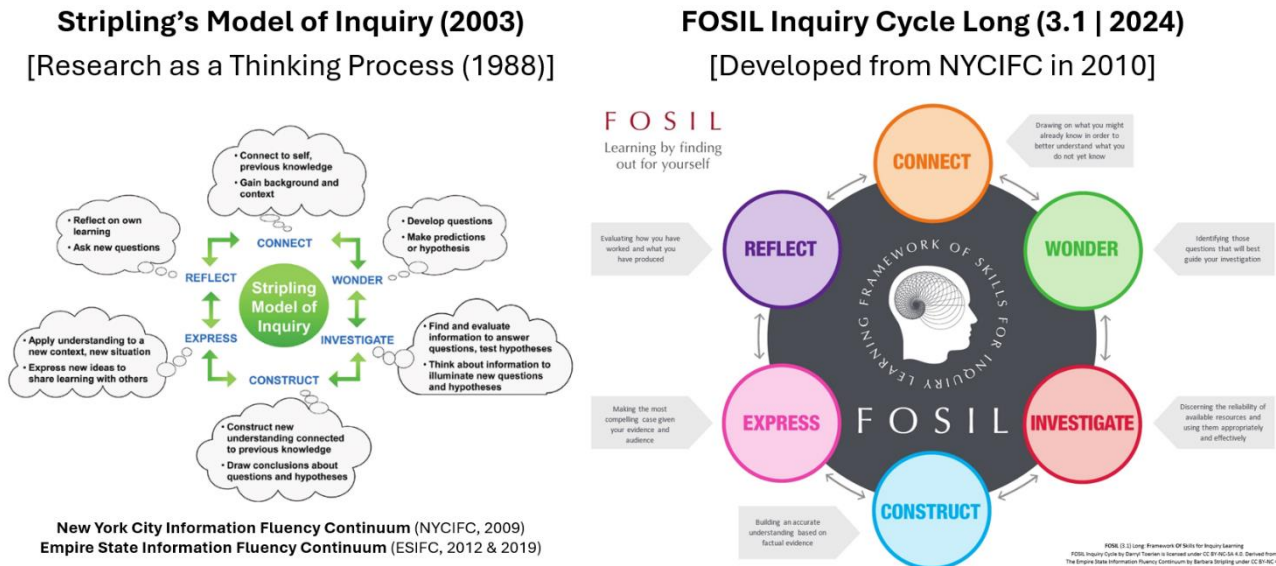
Nothing is more important than the events which occur within that invisible universe which is the mind of [a person]. And the light of that universe is knowledge. If we are concerned with the future of civilization we must be concerned primarily with a genuine understanding of what knowledge is, its value, its degrees, and how it can foster the inner unity of the human being.

Now while inquiry comes naturally, development as an engaged and empowered inquirer does not. The reason for this is that while some of our knowledge and understanding of the world, "truly, comes from experience and experiment," most necessarily comes "from record, in the widest McLuhan-like sense" (Beswick, 1967, p. 201). This is why there is a vital need for a sound instructional model of the inquiry process that is undergirded by a framework, or continuum, of developmentally appropriate skills, many of which are technology-dependent by definition or in use. As Stripling (2017) points out, a model is necessary but not sufficient, because we also need "to structure teaching around a framework of the literacy, inquiry, critical thinking, and technology skills that students must develop at each phase of inquiry over their years of school and in the context of content area learning" (p. 52). These are two of the reasons why [FOSIL](#) (Toerien, n.d.) is based the

¹ Barbara Stripling and I formulated this shared definition of inquiry for our keynote address at the UK School Library Association conference in 2021. Our definition is rooted in and enlarges the definition developed by the Galileo Educational Network (GEN), the professional learning of the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary from 1999-2022. The outstanding work of the GEN, in turn, is rooted in the equally outstanding work of the Developing Inquiring Communities in Education Project (DICEP), which was led by Gordon Wells of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto from 1991-2001.

work of Barbara Stripling as reflected in the [Empire State Information Fluency Continuum](#) (2022).

Figure 1: Stripling's Model of Inquiry and the FOSIL Inquiry Cycle ([PNG download](#))



It is tempting to view this learning process of coming to know and understand—the heroic struggle *to become who we truly are*, which is the fulfilment of the deepest potentialities of our being human in the world (Maritain, 1962, p. 10)—as a disembodied intellectual activity, especially in school, where the focus tends to be on *what* is coming to be known, or more likely memorised, and possibly understood, often to the detriment of *how* and by *whom*. The third release of the FOSIL Inquiry Cycle (3.x), first developed in 2018, began to address this through the central ‘FOSIL head’, which represents an iterative thought process that, though centred in the mind is nevertheless embodied, and so extends beyond the mind.

However, this heroic struggle to know and be known involves us fully as human beings—cognitively and metacognitively, emotionally, socially and culturally—and is the rationale for Heroic Inquiry, which aligns the stages of the FOSIL Inquiry Cycle with stages in the [Hero's Journey](#) (Wikipedia, 2025), or monomyth, as popularised by Joseph Campbell, and which I described in the following terms in my original design brief to Hugh for Heroic Inquiry (1.x):

Every inquiry, whether formal or informal, is a heroic journey.

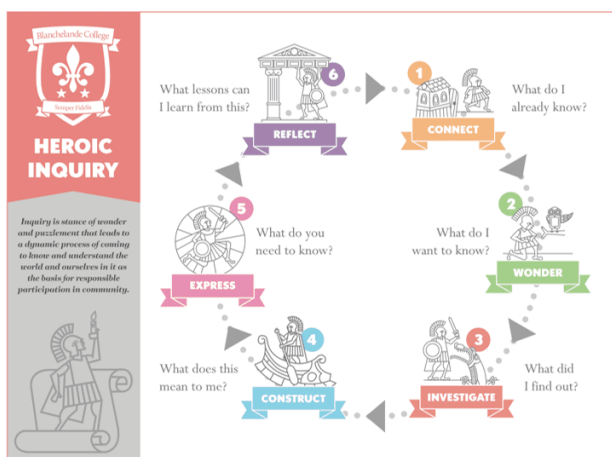
Broadly, inquiry is a movement—intellectual, certainly, but also, and equally important, physical, emotional, social and cultural—from the comfort of the known into the discomfort of the unknown, there to wrestle knowledge from information and understanding from knowledge. There lurks real danger here, for being even somewhat misguided can lead far astray, and so discerning those who would help from those who would hinder, or even harm, is vital. From this now-enlightened place to return, enlivened and alive to possibilities heretofore unimagined. And so to set off again.

This heroic journey of inquiry is the story of those who have stretched the boundaries of human knowledge and understanding in one or more of the fields of study in which they laboured, and those who labour there still. It is this unfolding story that we are

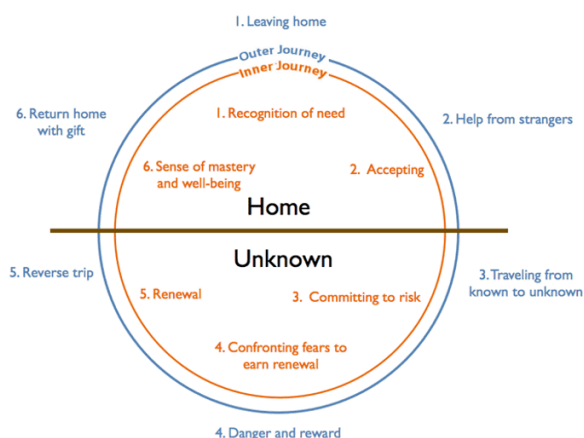
inviting our students to identify with and, in learning to stretch the boundaries of their own knowledge and understanding, add their voice to and so find their place in.

Figure 2: Heroic Inquiry (1.0) and the Hero's Journey ([PNG download](#))

(1.0) Short with Definition and Heroic Inquirer (2021)



Hero's Journey (original source of this version unknown)

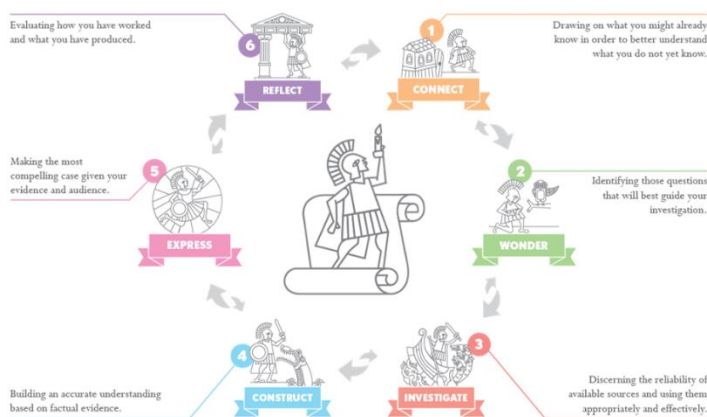


A discussion of teaching and learning through FOSIL-based Heroic Inquiry at Blanchelande College, which remains essentially the same, is beyond the scope of this article. However, this is the subject of *Do not block the way of inquiry!* (Toerien, 2023), an article written for ACCESS, the professional journal of the Australian School Library Association, which is [openly and freely available](#). Further discussion, much of it practical, may be found in the [FOSIL Group Forums](#).

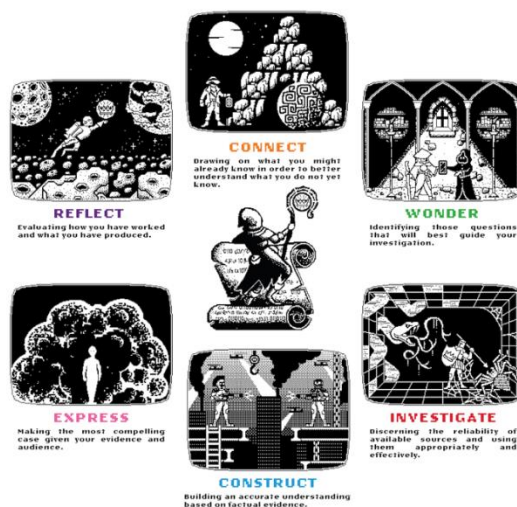
The wider reasons for the reboot of the FOSIL-based Heroic Inquiry Cycle are outlined below.

Figure 3: Heroic Inquiry (1.1) Creative Commons Reboot (2.1) ([PNG download](#))

Heroic Inquiry (1.1) Long (2021)



Heroic Inquiry (2.1) Long (2025)



Contextual details for Heroic Inquiry reboot:

- The 'classical' version of Heroic Inquiry (1.x) was produced in collaboration with Hugh Rose in 2021 while he was working at Blanchelande College under the previous Principal, whose influence on the images was strongly felt. This is appropriate, given the centuries-long educational tradition in Guernsey that Blanchelande College is rooted in.
- However, because this iconography is so closely associated with Blanchelande College, sharing our unfolding understanding of the embodiment of the inquiry stance and process in the Heroic Inquirer and through the Heroic Inquiry journey was constrained. Moreover, as the current Principal, Alexa Yeoman, [noted in her address](#) at the inaugural [FOSIL Symposium](#) (The FOSIL Group, n.d.), being rooted in this rich tradition does not trap us in the past, given Blanchelande College's commitment to providing an outstanding *contemporary* liberal education, of which inquiry is a distinguishing feature. This forward-looking educational stance enables us to equip our students for *their* futures as engaged and empowered independent learners and active citizens, as our Director of Studies, Jane Grange, [noted in her address](#).
- Growing interest in Heroic Inquiry, combined with a growing need to reconceptualise Heroic Inquiry in contemporary terms that spoke more directly to the reality our students need to deal with, created the conditions for the Creative Commons reboot of Heroic Inquiry (2.x) in 2024-5.
- This posed a number of challenges, not least of which were that Hugh no longer worked at Blanchelande College, I had a limited budget for FOSIL-related developments and we had a very tight deadline if we were to share the reboot during the FOSIL Symposium. My meetings with Hugh were, consequently, limited to evenings and weekends, and many emails.
- There were also technical challenges. In order to make the reboot as accessible to students as possible within the constraints outlined above, and without resorting to forced stereotypes, we decided to approach the Heroic Inquiry stages in the style of a video game (although there are also cinematic references), in which character creation and role-playing is natural. The pixelated graphics created exciting possibilities, but also design constraints. Notably, we deliberately chose not to use colour, which serves an instructional purpose in FOSIL-based inquiry, for reasons of printing costs—except for the stage names for when colour is an option, but will still print fine without colour.
- While we did not have time to hold any formal consultations during the design process, we did not work in isolation, and sought and acted on feedback from an audience that included children of school-going age from various nationalities.
- We are proud to share the final design under Creative Commons, and encourage colleagues to adopt or adapt as needed, and to share their experiences (see conclusion below).

The stable release of Heroic Inquiry (2.1) and all resources associated with it are now openly and freely available via [FOSIL Resources](#) under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Part 2: Visualising Heroic Inquiry (2.x)

Hugh Rose (The FOSIL Group, 2025) [reflecting on the visualisation of Heroic Inquiry 2.x](#) (18m24s).

Figure 4: Heroic Inquiry 2.x Design Reflection by Hugh-Rose ([PNG download](#))



Heroic Inquiry Reboot!?



Heroic Inquiry Reboot (2.0) by the FOSIL Group and Hugh Rose for Blanchelande College is based on the Empire State Information Fluency Continuum by Barbara Stripling and shared under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

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