

Inquiry: Fundamentally Creative and Fundamental to Creativity

It is difficult to believe that the "storm of hype and fright" (Beckett, 2023) ushered in by ChatGPT still rages, and shows no sign of abating. I mention this because no topic of discussion—including, and perhaps especially, one on creativity—can ignore AI. By AI, I mean Generative AI in the form we are most likely to encounter it in at school, namely, Microsoft's Copilot, Google's Gemini, and/or OpenAI's ChatGPT. And while I have grave concerns about AI on a number of levels—see, for example, Fernandez (2026) and Winnicki (2026)—I have, largely, focused on the practical difficulty (impossibility?) of actually teaching the use of AI for actual learning, and this from within an inquiry stance and process—see Toerien (2025) and Hutchinson & Toerien (n.d.). Having said this, I *am* going to ignore AI in this discussion of inquiry and creativity, at least initially.

Creativity, according to the broadly accepted *standard definition*, "requires both originality and effectiveness" (Runco & Jaeger, 2012, p. 92). The requirement for originality is unsurprising. However, originality, while necessary for creativity, is not sufficient, and a degree of effectiveness, or usefulness, is also required. A creative idea, then, is an idea that is both original *and* effects its intended outcome. Furthermore, a creative idea presupposes a creative person, and a creative process from which a creative idea might emerge, and then through which it might become a creative entity. This recalls Matthew Syed's (2015) observation that insight is the endpoint of long-term iterative process, which is important because creativity, like inquiry, is a stance *and* a process, which further means that creativity can be *fostered*. Understood in this way, inquiry is fundamentally creative, and fundamental to creativity.

Why?

Inquiry is personal, in that it is centred on students *as persons*, and, as Jacques Maritain (1943) asserts, guiding the dynamic process through which a person forms themselves as a person is the chief task of education. This dynamic process of becoming yourself—the fulfilment of the deepest potentialities of your being human in the world (1962)—is the epitome of creativity in terms of *originality*, for there is literally no-one like you. Moreover, inquiry has this as its end and is the means to this end. The reason for this is that inquiry is a stance of wonder and puzzlement that gives rise to the dynamic process of coming to know and understand the world and ourselves in it—reality—and, as Dallas Willard (1999) asserts, dealing with reality is ultimately the only true measure of success. This dynamic process of coming to know and understand reality—from direct experience, but mostly from the record of human knowledge—is the epitome of creativity in terms of *effectiveness*, for, as Balzac is said to declare, "the world belongs to me because I *understand* it" (Bloom, 1987).

So how does this relate to the school library and librarian?

Douglas Knight (1968, pp. vi-x) identifies two major and unique functions of a library, regardless of type:

- It is space for the meeting of the minds of our students and the ideas held in our collections, both non-fiction and fiction.
- It is space for the creative extension, or development, of those ideas in the minds of our students.

The librarian, Knight continues, is, then, a teacher of this process of learning, which is an inquiry process. This, in turn, requires close collaboration between those in the classroom who first teach the mind to inquire, and those in the "creative center" that is the library who teach the mind *how* to inquire, which makes the librarian integral to the educational process. Maritain (1952, p. 3) powerfully describes this most important and urgent work of ours:

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.

This moment of enlightenment, which is the point at which we become ever more truly and fully ourselves, is symbolised in the **Express** stage of the FOSIL-based Heroic Inquiry Cycle; however, as we have noted, this moment of enlightenment is the outcome of an iterative inquiry process that hinges on the movement from **Investigate** to **Construct** (Figure 1).

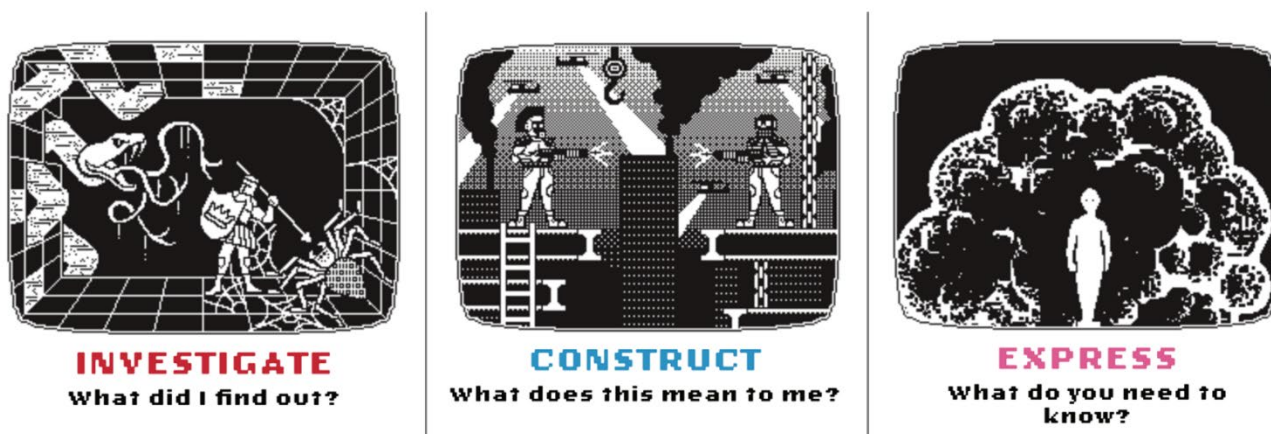


Figure 1: The inquiry process of becoming more truly and fully ourselves

The work of **Investigate** is to make sense of *relevant* information, characterised increasingly in a digital environment by information overload and information disorder:

- Information overload, which is a question of the quantity of information, is exacerbated by the World Wide Web, and is symbolised by the spider.
- Information disorder, which is a question of the quality of information—mis-, dis-, and mal-information—is exacerbated by AI, and is symbolised by the serpent.

Making *sense* of what others are saying—rather than merely copying-and-pasting what others are saying, or merely copying-and-pasting what AI tells me others are saying—is difficult work. However, it is also essential work if I am to acquire knowledge, which is necessary for authentic learning.

The work of **Construct**, then, is to find meaning in *pertinent* information, which is personal—what *I* think and feel about what *I* now know—and which is, by its very nature, *original*. Deciding what I think and feel *based on* the knowledge that I have acquired is difficult work. However, it is also essential work if I am to gain understanding, or insight, which, too, is necessary for actual learning. Moreover, it is this understanding gained from knowledge—insight—that enlightens me, enabling me to be more *effective* in dealing with reality. The struggle symbolised in **Construct** is, therefore, both internal and external—a heroic struggle to become more originally and effectively myself against internal and external forces opposed to that. Sometimes, these forces combine, as in the case of AI, where the temptation to outsource the difficult work that is essential for learning is incentivised by "people who do not love us but want our money" (David Foster Wallace interviewed in Lipsky, 2010).

I end, therefore with Paulo Freire (1970/2005, p. 72), which is also a beginning:

“For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”

The revolution, and indeed the resistance, will not be televised.

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