Chapter 1

Guided Inquiry: What is it, Why now, What’s new?

Guided Inquiry really changed the pedagogy - the way people taught, students learn and how we collaborated - school principal

The challenge facing today’s educators is to prepare students for learning, living, and thriving in the dynamic, cluttered, and chaotic information environment of today’s world. At the core of what it means to be educated today is to know how to learn from a variety of sources of information. Those of us working with children and youth are well aware of the impact the digital information environment has had on their lives. They need to be able to think, learn, and create and be able to search, evaluate, and use information for thinking, learning, and creating. They need schools that give them opportunities to practice this daily in every subject of the curriculum. They need to see the connection between what they are learning in school and the world outside of school that motivates and inspires them to do their best. The current world requires research competency and subject knowledge in the context of fostering cooperative learning, reading comprehension, language development, and social skills.

As you begin this book, think about the ways your school is preparing students for successful living and working in the contemporary world and beyond. Are you preparing students to meet the demands for high levels of literacy in the technological work place? Will your students be ready to think for themselves, make good decisions, develop expertise, and learn throughout their lives in the complex information society? These are fundamental challenges for educators around the world. Basic to meeting these challenges is finding ways to develop student competence for deep learning from a vast array of sources of information and for finding meaning in information-laden digital environments. Many teachers are turning to inquiry in subjects across the curriculum to meet the challenge of educating their students for an information laden society. Inquiry that is designed and guided by a Learning Team to enable students to gain deep personal meaning through a wide range of resources is called Guided Inquiry.

Guided Inquiry – What is it?

Guided Inquiry is a way of teaching and learning that changes the culture of a school into a collaborative Inquiry Community. It is designed and guided by a Learning Team that leads students to gain deep understanding of subject area curriculum content and information literacy concepts while developing literacy and social skills. It is a fluid, flexible approach to transforming schools that centers on deep learning, based on Kuhlthau’s studies of the Information Search Process (ISP) and the concept of Third Space. Students are guided through the flow of discovery in the process of learning from a variety of sources of information to prepare them for successful learning and living in the information age.

Inquiry learning emphasizes personally relevant questions that inspire students to learn more and create unique ways of sharing what they have learned. Guided Inquiry raises the bar even further to move students to deeper learning by incorporating the research process explicitly into their work. Students conduct their own research and construct new understandings while using the inquiry process.

Guided Inquiry is an approach to learning that involves students in finding and using a variety of sources of information to increase their understanding of a specific area of the curriculum. It is not simply answering questions and getting the right answers. It engages, interests, and challenges students to connect their world with the curriculum. It does not stand alone, but is grounded in the content of the curriculum, which motivates students to question, explore, and formulate new ideas. It is enhanced by social interaction in an Inquiry Community where each student can learn from another.

This way of learning that prepares students to think for themselves, make thoughtful decisions, develop areas of expertise, and learn throughout their lives. It is a way of learning that meets the demands of the information-driven society. Students gain competence in inquiry learning by being guided through the inquiry process by teams of teachers and librarians at each grade level. The Learning Team guides the inquiry in two ways: first, by applying the Guided Inquiry Design® framework to design units of study incorporating curriculum content with literacy goals and information literacy concepts.

and second, by guiding students through eight phases of the inquiry process with interventions, assessments, and strategies in each phase of learning.

Motivation and interest are key elements in Guided Inquiry. Students are guided in the use of a wide variety of resources to explore ideas and address questions rather than being confined to one textbook of predigested facts. They form their own questions through experiences, reflection, conversation, and writing in the early phases of the inquiry process. They are given opportunities to work together with other students to formulate their ideas and also encouraged to create deep understanding for themselves. Their end product becomes a natural way of sharing their learning with the other students in their Inquiry Community. Students gain a sense of ownership and accomplishment in the work they are producing that gradually leads to competence, independence, and expertise.

Emotions play an important role in learning. Recent brain research confirms that emotions work in conjunction with thinking in the holistic process of learning and constructing knowledge. In Guided Inquiry, the Learning Team concentrates on what students are feeling as well as what they are thinking and doing as they are learning throughout the inquiry process (Kuhlthau, 2004b). Students learn that feeling uncertain is a normal and necessary part of learning. They acquire strategies to support them during phases of uncertainty and are guided in their efforts to learn deeply in the inquiry process.

This approach works best within a larger system of learning. Students build competence and confidence by being guided through the inquiry process at each grade from pre-kindergarten and up. Through repeated exposure to Guided Inquiry, students gain the ability to use the tools, strategies, and resources for learning in the information age within an authentic context.

**Guided Inquiry – Why Now?**

Guided Inquiry responds to the critical need for transforming schools for today’s world. Global interconnectedness enabled by information technology calls for new skills, new knowledge, and new ways of learning to prepare students with abilities and competencies that rise to meet the challenges of an uncertain, changing world. Some
people thought that an Internet connection in the classroom is all that would be needed to transform a 20th century school into a 21st century learning space. If only it were that simple. A new way of schooling is required that prepares students for living and working in a complex information environment.

Many teachers sense that they are not meeting the needs of all students. There is great concern with the general level of literacy among low achieving students and the loss of human talent through the attrition of disadvantaged students in urban schools. Kozol (2005) distressingly describes how schools for neediest and poorest populations return again and again to an industrial age model of training students. In some schools so much time is spent on learning to read there is little time for reading to learn. There is a lack of content in these schools, nothing to spark interest, no ideas to motivate children to want to read to learn. For many students, school seems boring and disconnected from their lives. Even in many high achieving schools, teaching is narrowly focused on test taking and low level learning goals.

The challenge for the information age school is to educate children for living and working in an information-rich technological environment. Three basic charges of education in a free society are to prepare students for the workplace, citizenship, and daily living. Schools need to be reconfigured for the information age to ensure that all children are fully prepared. To prepare students for the workplace, we must seriously consider how information technology changes the nature of work and raises new questions about how we contribute to and innovate productively in the global economy. To prepare students for citizenship, consideration must be given to the ways that information technology changes our sense of community and raises pressing questions about how we participate as an informed electorate in a democratic society. To prepare students for daily living, consideration must be given to the ways that information technology increases the connectedness and complexity of everyday life and raises questions about how we gain a sense of self in relation to others and experience creativity and joy in our personal lives. Students need schools where they can learn to connect, collaborate, create, and contribute productively in a community of learners.
Information Technology Changes the Ways We Learn

Emerging information and communication technologies change the way we learn. Internet connection provides direct access to vast information resources. Mobile devices provide instantaneous communication any time and any place. Multifunctional hand-held devices are ubiquitous around the world. They are in cosmopolitan urban centers and in remote rural outposts. Web tools help us interact, connect, and collaborate in fantastic new ways. Technological tools that have become part of our everyday lives have great benefit for people across the world.

However, there are potential dangers as well. The advantage of immediate access to quick answers may have the downside of not forcing us to ask harder questions. Ian Leslie (2014) warns that,

Google makes us all dumber. As search engines get better, we become lazier. We're hooked on easy answers and undervalue asking good questions…The gap between a question crystallizing in your mind and an answer appearing at the top of your screen is shrinking all the time. As a consequence, our ability to ask questions is atrophying. Google’s head of search, Amit Singhal, asked if people are getting better at articulating their search queries, sighed and said: ‘The more accurate the machine gets, the lazier the questions become.’ Google’s strategy for dealing with our slapdash questioning is to make the question superfluous. Singhal is focused on eliminating ‘every possible friction point between [users], their thoughts and the information they want to find.’ Larry Page has talked of a day when a Google search chip is implanted in people’s brains: ‘When you think about something you don’t really know much about, you will automatically get information.’ One day, the gap between question and answer will disappear. I believe we should strive to it keep open. The gap is where our curiosity lives. We undervalue it at our peril (Leslie, 2014)

Schools need to offer students opportunities to ask deep questions and learn how to search for meaningful responses to those questions.

There is an upside and a downside to these fantastic devices. Information technology is instantaneous and mobile, providing greater equality of voice, access, and communication in real time. While everyone has a voice this also produces an abundance of misinformation and many misunderstandings. Questions arise of what is accurate, what is reliable, what is important, and what is wise.

There is confusion between what is enduring and what is ephemeral in online information. What is intended to be ephemeral keeps cropping up and reappearing as a digital footprint, frequently at awkward times, such as, personal photos on Facebook that become part of a prospective employer’s consideration for hiring a candidate. What is intended to be enduring and long lasting frequently disappears and is hard to track when most needed. For example, that interesting website you found last week may no longer be accessible today. Personal communities expand with likeminded people on blogs and wikis while disengagement with the here and now is prevalent. Questions arise about who are our friends and what is our relationship with others. Students need authentic contexts to engage and participate in the digital world and share meaningfully with others.

Information technology has an impact on education, the economy, and politics in phenomenal ways that change the way we learn, work and are governed. New skills, new knowledge, and new ways of learning are essential to function and thrive in this vibrant information environment. Students who are unprepared are headed down a slippery slope leading to disappointment, confusion, and possible disaster. Schools need to move beyond teaching how to use technology tools to integrating technology for use in learning and seeking meaning.

Educators are seeking ways to prepare students for living and working in the changing information environment. There is an extensive and growing movement in education that advocates acquiring essential skills and knowledge through an inquiry approach to teaching and learning. Concentrating on teaching the latest technology is not productive, as tools change continuously and radically. We are constantly being introduced to the next new thing and adapting to the latest innovation. Young people may pick up these new technologies easily and learn the functions with little or no formal instruction. We know that for this generation of learners, learning all of the bells and whistles of a new device isn’t the hard part of information technology use. Schools need to provide opportunities where students learn to use information technologies for creativity and enlightenment.
Inquiry is a Way of Teaching and Learning

Many districts, schools, and teachers are turning to inquiry learning as a way to address this change. Inquiry has the potential to motivate learners as it requires the integration of content areas and application of skills in an authentic learning context. Inquiry learning helps school leaders to meet the challenge of preparing their students for life and work in the information environment and to be college ready. Initiatives such as, project based learning (PBL), expeditionary learning, blended learning, and International Baccalaureate schools all embrace inquiry approaches to learning. These initiatives are increasingly being employed in schools to motivate students. For example, project based learning (PBL) seeks to get students involved in an extended project that engages students in deeper learning (Boss and Krause 2014). These systemic shifts are happening in public schools, charters, and independent schools. Guided Inquiry is not only aligned with these initiatives, it provides a research-based framework to support teachers to design deeper learning for their students within these contexts (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari, 2012). Some teachers have called Guided Inquiry the “roadmap to success” for their IB and PBL schools.

The Common Core State Standards (2010) and American Association for School Librarians (AASL) Standards (ALA, 2007) both advocate an inquiry approach. Inquiry is a way of learning new skills and broadening knowledge in the midst of rapid technological change. Inquiry is the foundation of the information age school. The underlying concept of inquiry learning is considering a question or problem that prompts extensive investigation on the part of the student.

Inquiry Benefits All Students

An inquiry approach engages all students not just those who have already shown that they are academically inclined. In the Rutgers University Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL) study of student learning through inquiry projects conducted by Todd, Kuhlthau, and Heinstrom (2005), a wide range of students participated including those classified with learning disabilities, students at risk for dropping out of school, as well as ESL (English as a second language) students. These
students were shown to benefit from learning through inquiry. They gained a sense of their own learning process by successfully pursuing a project from start to finish. But more importantly, they learned strategies and skills transferable to other inquiry projects and other situations where information would be needed (Todd and Kuhlthau, 2005a; 2005b). An inquiry approach to teaching and learning seeks to develop independent academic competency, career readiness and life skills, essential in all schools for all students.

**Guided Inquiry for Learning in the Information Environment**

Guided Inquiry is a research approach in which students are learning how to learn in an information rich environment that is critically needed now. It is built around questions. First are the essential questions that the Learning Team develops in the design of the inquiry unit. Next are the questions that students find compelling and interesting in the process of inquiry. This requires more of students than responding to a simplistic question and getting a quick answer. Guided Inquiry encourages investigation, exploration, search, and deep study. It is culturally and personally relevant when it engages and challenges students to connect their world with the curriculum. It sparks interest and creativity and brings the school learning to life. It involves an inquiry community, each student learning from the others in social interaction.

This is an integrated approach in which students are learning content, meeting subject area curriculum standards, and applying literacy skills in authentic ways. It creates an environment that motivates students to learn by providing opportunities for them to construct their own meaning and develop a deep understanding. It requires them to work hard and to persist to deeper learning. Students work through a process that involves curiosity, questioning, critical thinking, interpretation, revision, synthesis, creation and sharing. Independence in research, a variety of skills, social as well as language and reading skills are all embedded in the Guided Inquiry approach. It equips students with abilities and competencies to address the challenges of the information age.
Guided Inquiry – What’s New?

There are a number of components that are completely new and unique from other approaches (See chart below). First, it is based on extensive empirical research. A complete framework for designing inquiry learning is provided. A comprehensive information literacy curriculum has been developed specifically for Guided Inquiry. Student research is embedded in the inquiry process at all grade levels. It uses a Learning Team approach. Five kinds of learning are accomplished through Guided Inquiry. A wide range of resources is integrated- including community resources, museums and vast online sources - with materials in the school library. Finally, Inquiry Tools are provided for guiding and assessing learning within each phase of inquiry.

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Based in Empirical Research

Guided Inquiry is grounded in a constructivist approach to learning and extensive empirical research, presented in Chapter 2 (Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed). Kuhlthau’s highly regarded research on the stages of the Information Search Process and Maniotes’ study on the powerful learning that occurs when connecting the curriculum to students’ world, form the basis of Guided Inquiry.

The Information Search Process (ISP), established in over two decades of research, analyzes students’ process of learning from a variety of sources of information and provides insight into how to guide students in the inquiry process. It is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed). The model of the ISP describes feelings, thoughts, and actions in six stages of learning through the research process: initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection, and presentation (Kuhlthau, 2004). The studies of the inquiry process found that students need considerable guidance and intervention throughout to enable a depth of learning and personal understanding. Without guidance, students often view research as a simple collecting and presenting assignment that can lead to copying and pasting with little real learning. With guidance, students are able to concentrate on constructing new knowledge in the phases of the inquiry process to gain personal understanding and transferable skills. Based on the findings of the ISP studies, Guided Inquiry provides essential guidance at critical points in the inquiry process that fosters deep personal learning.

An important tenet of Guided Inquiry is the necessity of connecting to the students’ world. Maniotes’ (2005) research describes the importance of creating a learning environment called Third Space, explained in Chapter 3 (Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed). If we think of the student’s world outside of school and the student’s cumulative knowledge and experience as first space and the curriculum as second space, the question arises of how to make these two very separate spaces intersect. When first space and second space overlap, Third Space is created. Third Space is where the most meaningful, lasting learning takes place. The teacher’s challenge is to create Third Space as often as possible. Guided Inquiry creates Third Space by enabling students to draw on their own experience, identify their own questions, and make their own connections within the inquiry process that motivates learning and builds ownership and expertise.

Framework for Designing Inquiry Learning

Guided Inquiry Design is a framework for teachers, librarians and other specialists to work together as a Learning Team to design and guide inquiry learning, described in Chapter 5 (Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed).
complete design framework with comprehensive examples, reproducible session plans, strategies, and tools is provided in the authors’ companion book, *Guided Inquiry Design: A Framework for Inquiry in Your School* (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2012).

There are eight phases in Guided Inquiry Design: **Open, Immerse, Explore, Identify, Gather, Create, Share, and Evaluate.** It is a framework for guiding students through the phases of the inquiry process from opening the unit of study, to sharing the learning with the Inquiry Community, and evaluating the outcome. The Learning Team designs interventions for each phase of inquiry learning to enhance subject content through their respective expertise, making it more interesting, relevant, and thought provoking. Learning is designed to actively engage students, motivating them to pursue important questions and attain a deeper understanding of the content under study.

**Student Research Embedded into Inquiry Learning**

One of the unique features of Guided Inquiry, that separates it from other approaches, is that student research is embedded into the inquiry process. Guided Inquiry is inquiry learning with research at the center of the learning. As students learn content through researching their questions, they also reflect on themselves as learners. Guided Inquiry prepares students for research with extensive introduction in the **Open and Immerse** phases. They learn a variety of research strategies for each phase of the research process. Strategies for searching, browsing, and scanning sources are introduced and practiced in the **Explore** phase to identify a focused research question, which drives more comprehensive searching and deep reading in the **Gather** phase. The research cycle culminates in the **Create and Share** phases by preparing to share learning with others. The research cycle is repeated as an integral feature of Guided Inquiry in which students learn how to research as an essential part of learning in the inquiry process.

Term papers and research reports have been standard school assignments seemingly forever. In some cases, they are important culminating activities for a course of study. But far too often they are merely extraneous assignments added on after the “real” teaching of the curriculum has been accomplished. Alas, many students suspect as much, viewing these assignments as academic exercises without much internal value or real-life
application. This attitude became abundantly clear in the course of Kuhlthau’s information seeking studies. Students regularly informed her that the purpose of a research assignment was to learn how to do a bibliography or the format of a paper for college (Kuhlthau, 1988b). Still, as one student reflected, “Now that I think about it, I guess it was a missed opportunity. I thought it was just one more needless school exercise. If I knew I’d find out something of my own that was interesting I could have given more time. I did it all the last night.”

In Guided Inquiry, students develop a research question within the inquiry process not before they begin. The “assignment” doesn’t come in until the Identify phase when they are prepared to form their research questions. The Learning Team Opens the inquiry with something that sparks curiosity and students Immerse in the broad topic together as an Inquiry Community. This is intentionally done because the assignment skews students’ perception of the work on mechanics rather than on interesting ideas and unnecessarily heightens their level of tension, as evidenced in the ISP. Guided Inquiry is designed to Open students to what they are curious about and what they are interested in about the topic. This occurs prior to considering any constraints by the assignment. Next they Immerse in an experience that helps them to build background knowledge as an Inquiry Community. Next they dip in to read and do some browsing in Explore. Once they have explored their own interests to find an area under the larger topic of study, they Identify their well focused research question. After identifying their research question they are ready to think about what they will do with the information they Gather to Create and Share with others. In Guided Inquiry, research is embedded in the inquiry process and developed as a natural component of deep learning.

Learning Team Approach

The configuration of the 21st century school needs to be quite different from its 20th century industrial age counterpart. The old model where one teacher and one class of students was the norm is surely past its prime. The information age calls for a Learning Team approach, each member bringing his or her expertise to create a dynamic learning environment, explained in Chapter 9 (Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed).
Guided Inquiry uses a flexible team approach to teaching and learning. A Learning Team is made up of a core team and an extended team. The core team of teachers and librarians designs and guides the inquiry process from start to finish for each unit of study. The extended team of experts, specialists, and administrators is invited to join in when needed. The Learning Team works together with each member contributing his or her special expertise. Core team members collaborate on all aspects of learning, from the initial designing through all stages of intervention and assessment, adapting as students progress through the phases of the inquiry process.

**Concepts based Information Literacy Curriculum**

A comprehensive information literacy curriculum is provided specifically developed for Guided Inquiry. A concepts approach to information literacy is adopted to build competencies and abilities that are transferable to a variety of information seeking situations. The rationale for the concepts approach to information literacy is explained in Chapter 6 (*Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed*). A complete curriculum for teaching and learning information literacy based on major concepts that underlie information location, evaluation and use is presented in Chapter 7 (*Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed*). This curriculum provides a structure for developing a prekindergarten-12 scope and sequence of information literacy tailored to the needs and abilities of your students.

Guided Inquiry information literacy concepts are the basis for developing high levels of research proficiency and for adapting to rapidly emerging information systems and sources. A conceptual approach to teaching information skills introduces students to ideas and strategies they can transfer to a variety of situations and contexts throughout life. These concepts are best taught by integrating them to all levels of your prekindergarten-12 school curriculum to promote a high degree of independence in searching, selecting, and using information for learning about a wide range of topics and important questions.

**Five Kinds of Learning**

Students are engaged in five kinds of learning: curriculum content, information literacy, learning processes, literacy competencies, and social abilities. Guided Inquiry is a way to teach integrated content of the curriculum, it is not an additional subject in and of itself. Any subject area content can be applied to Guided Inquiry as long as the subject involves an inquiry that is deeper than mere fact finding.

Guided Inquiry enables students to gain a greater understanding of subject area curriculum content and information literacy concepts. At the same time, students are developing competency in reading, writing, and speaking and in turn gaining social skills through interacting, cooperating, and collaborating with other students. In addition, they are learning how to learn in an information rich environment. Learning teams help students develop research competency and subject knowledge as well as foster reading comprehension, language development, writing ability, cooperative learning and social skills. All of which have been identified as essential for successful lifelong learning.

**A Wide Range of Resources**

In Guided Inquiry a wide range of resources is integrated into the inquiry process, including community resources, museums, and vast open educational resources with materials in the school library, discussed in Chapter 8 (*Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed*). It combines often overlooked outside resources with materials available in the school. The ultimate goal is to develop independent learners who know how to expand their knowledge and expertise through skilled use of a variety of information sources employed both inside and outside of the school. Resources inside the school, such as library materials, databases, and other selected sources are supplemented and expanded by local community resources, experts, museums, public libraries, and the wide range of online sources on the Internet.

Different types of resources also provide different experiences for learning. When students encounter a combination of media they begin to see how different sources reinforce each other to build their depth of understanding. Audio and video texts encourage students to employ all of their senses for learning. People in the community offer expertise that makes student inquiry come alive. Museums provide objects and artifacts that make the inquiry more real. This book particularly emphasizes museum resources.
collections as an integral resource that has been underused and easily accessible for inquiry learning at any grade level.

**Interventions with Ongoing Assessment**

Guided Inquiry is a preparation for life, not just preparation for a test. While it is important that students are able to show what they know, many test-oriented approaches are counterproductive, in that they do not foster the lasting connections essential for an educated person in a rapidly changing information environment. Inquiry learning is effective for preparing students to think deeply about a subject so that they can succeed in tests that are authentic to the learning situation. Guided Inquiry targets assessments to the learner and the situation as it is integrated into the inquiry process. The result is lasting learning that has meaning and application in students’ lives.

Interventions are designed for guiding and assessing learning within each phase of the inquiry process, described in Chapter 10 (*Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed*). Strategies for guiding inquiry are based on six C’s of collaborate, converse, compose, choose, chart, and continue drawn from Kuhlthau’s research (2004). These are implemented in five Inquiry Tools: an Inquiry Community for collaborating, Inquiry Circles for conversing, Inquiry Journals for composing, Inquiry Logs for choosing, and Inquiry Charts for visualizing and charting. All of the Inquiry Tools help students to continue in the inquiry process and provide instruments for formative assessment along the way and for summative evaluation at the close, described in Chapters 11 and 14 (*Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century, 2nd Ed*).

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**Guided Inquiry for Deeper Learning**

Much has been written about rethinking and redefining schools to accomplish the mission of educating the next generation for living and working in an information-laden society. To address this critical need, school leaders are increasingly calling for organizing
around an inquiry approach to learning. Guided Inquiry, grounded in sound research findings and built on solid professional practice, develops strategies and competencies for deep learning from a variety of sources of information. Students gain competence by being guided through an inquiry process by Learning Teams of teachers and librarians at each grade level.

Through Guided Inquiry, students gain the ability to use the resources of the library with those of the surrounding community and the wider world for learning the content of the curriculum and meet curriculum standards. Students see school learning and real life meshed. They learn to draw on the knowledge and wisdom of the past while using the technology of the present for advancing new discoveries for the future. In the next chapters, we explain in detail what is new and unique about Guided Inquiry, citing many of the studies that form the basis of this approach. This foundational book is a good place to begin to consider how to implement an enhanced inquiry learning program for your students.

Reflection Questions

- Are you satisfied with the process of learning that is used in your school?
- Are students encouraged to develop their own ideas about complex problems and issues?
- What are the bright spots?
- What needs improvement?
- How does your school engage in the reform movement to prepare students for today’s technology-driven environment?