

The Inquiry Model

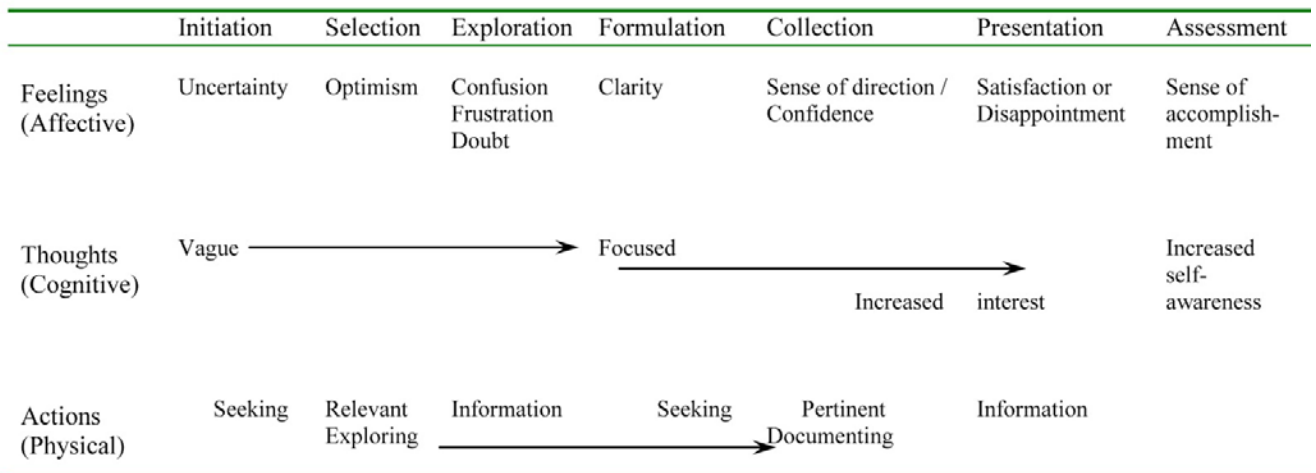
During library lessons this term, the students have been learning and putting into practice the [Inquiry Model](#).

The Inquiry Model acts as a guide to finding and sharing answers to questions students may ask. It is a skill that should serve the students not only during their time at school but also transferrable to life after school and into adulthood. It is a way of approaching a question to systematically and effectively find answers and solutions.

The Information Search Process

The Inquiry Model has much in common with other models. However, one of the strengths of the Alberta model is that it takes into account the emotions and thoughts of the student during the research process based on Carol Kulthau's [Information Search Process](#).

Figure 1: Information Search Process¹



It is important that children are aware of their own changing emotions during research so that they do not become discouraged when they are faced with moments of uncertainty which are to be predicted.

The Six Stages of Inquiry

1. Planning
2. Retrieving
3. Processing
4. Creating
5. Sharing
6. Evaluating

Throughout each stage, the student is reflecting on the process.

Inquiry Model



The following is taken directly from the document [Focus on Inquiry](#) (2004) from Alberta Learning.

1. Planning Phase Inquirers should understand that the underlying purpose of inquiry-based learning projects is to develop their “learning to learn” skills. Inquiry-based learning begins with the inquirers’ interest in or curiosity about a

topic. It is the puzzle that needs to be solved. *At this phase of the inquiry process—the most important phase of the whole process—inquirers often experience a sense of optimism about the tasks ahead.*

2. Retrieving Phase The inquirers next think about the information they have and the information they want. Inquirers may need to spend considerable time exploring and thinking about the information they have found before they come to a “focus” for their inquiry.

*This pre-focus phase is **at first enjoyable** for students, as they actively search for information related to their topic. But as the amount of resources they find increases, students **sometimes “tune out”** and stop searching, since they may not know how to handle the irrelevant data or cannot find the data specific to their inquiry.*

*Since many students are set in what they want to find out, they often **become frustrated** at this point in the process. Teachers help students past these feelings of frustration by teaching them that these feelings are ones that all inquirers experience, and by teaching them the skills and strategies for selecting relevant information and for adjusting and modifying inquiries.*

3. Processing Phase This phase begins when the inquirer has found a “focus” for the inquiry. A focus is the aspect of the topic area that the inquirer decides to investigate.

*Coming to a focus can be very difficult for students, as it involves more than narrowing the topic. It involves coming to an authentic question, a personal perspective and/or a compelling thesis statement. Inquirers usually **experience a sense of relief and elation** when they have established a focus for their inquiry. Even so, choosing pertinent information from resources is often a difficult task; there may be too little information or too much information, or the information may be too superficial or too in-depth for the inquirers. Often the information that is found is confusing and contradictory, so students may **feel overwhelmed**.*

4. Creating Phase Organizing the information, putting the information into one’s own words and creating a presentation format are the next tasks in the process.

*Students **feel more confident** at this phase and want to include all their new learnings in their product, resulting in too much information.*

5. Sharing Phase If students have been given enough supports throughout the inquiry process, they are proud of their product and eager to share it, regardless of the format or audience.

They may feel a bit nervous about presenting something in which they take such ownership, and they may feel anxious that others may not understand or

appreciate their efforts. Nevertheless, they feel that they have done well on this assignment.

6. Evaluating Phase Finally, when a research project is complete, inquirers feel relieved and happy. They are **excited** about their new skills and understandings, and they want to reflect on the evaluation of their product and their inquiry process. In order to make sense of the inquiry process, they need to understand and question the evaluation criteria, to identify the steps in their inquiry process, and to share their feelings about the process. Students should be able to articulate the importance of this kind of work for developing their “learning to learn” skills, and they should be able to see the connections between their inquiry work done in school and their work or activities that are done outside of school. They should also be able to reflect on how their experience has influenced their personal inquiry model and on what they have learned about themselves as inquirers.

This Inquiry Model will not be learnt after only a few months. It will take a few years of using it during research projects outside of the library in the classrooms; eventually, it becomes a way of thinking, and students can transfer these skills to beyond school and into adulthood.

References:

Alberta Learning (2004). *Focus on inquiry*. Retrieved from: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/032c67af-325c-4039-a0f3-100f44306910/resource/b7585634-fabe-4488-a836-af22f1cbab2a/download/29065832004focusoninquiry.pdf>

Kuhlthau, Carol. (n.d.) Information Search Process. Retrieved from: <http://wp.comminfo.rutgers.edu/ckuhlthau/information-search-process/>

Extra reading on the Information Search Process:

How children search the web: Children’s Search Engines from an Information Search Process Perspective : <http://www.webcitation.org/5cS6dSsM6>