

# THE FRAMEWORK FOR INQUIRY: A STORY OF SUCCESS



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*I have a daughter who is a wonderful student. She's a gifted writer, and here we were in her junior year of high school. It was the night before her research paper was due, and she still didn't have a thesis. She was devastated, distraught and miserable. She was feeling a failure, I'm sure. When I unwound the process of how this had happened, I realized that there was just no framework for helping them (the students) deal with this along the way. (Carlos Interview, June 2020)*

## Carlos Laboy - original participant in Kuhlthau's research in 1985

For Teacher Librarians (TLs) and teachers, the previous quote is cringe worthy. This student suffered from the failing of the teachers and TLs of not offering proper support to the research process. However hard it is to hear of failed projects, Carlos is correct. All educators need a framework for helping students navigate the research process (Lance & Maniotes, 2020). Carlos is not an educator, but a top Wall Street equity research analyst. So why is he so strong in his conviction? Why should we listen to his advice?

Carlos is a Guided Inquiry Design (GId) success story. He knows, first-hand, how having a framework for research helped him in school, university, and through his career and in life. In this article I'll describe Carlos' successes as well as the framework that made such a difference for him.

## It's like winning a lottery!

A native Spanish speaker, Carlos' second language was English, when his family migrated from Puerto Rico to the mainland United States as he entered the eighth grade. Although he himself claims that he was an average student in every way, by the time he was a junior in high school, he was working hard preparing to go to university. It was then, that he crossed paths with someone who changed his life forever.

When I recently interviewed Carlos, he was primed to speak with me after having a few frustrating experiences with school research assignments with his own high school aged children. We all draw from our own experiences when parenting and Carlos was uniquely over-prepared for this task. Through helping his daughter and son on their research papers, he realized what had been different for him. Carlos explained that *"the most important experience"* he had as a high school student was learning the research process.

*"This is without question the most impactful and rewarding thing that happened to me academically. I was so*



## CARLOS LABOY

*lucky to be picked out of a group of kids in a high school with 3,000 students to do this (study)! The day that happened to me... was like winning a lottery!"*

It was during that year-long study where Carlos learned about researching from his then TL, Carol Kuhlthau and his high school English Teacher. The research process became the framework that would ripple through Carlos' life successes. Knowing how he thought, felt, and acted when researching gave him the knowledge, confidence, and skills for success. Not only did Carlos gain confidence, he found being able to harness the process "empowering".

As you probably know, the inquiry process is complicated. Having a framework that validates your experience builds confidence when you recognize the patterns of the process, see the normalcy in the challenges, experience the moments of flow and excitement alongside the lows of frustration and struggle. Carlos describes the framework this way,

*"I realized, this is how every paper is supposed to go, this is the way this process works, this is what I need to do to get to the next step."*

Carlos effectively internalized the research process. He knows what emotions to lookout for and what action to take at each phase in the process. This knowing breeds confidence in his ability to meet the challenges that the process poses each time.

You see, Carlos was one of the participants in Dr. Carol Kuhlthau's original studies on the Information Search Process (Kuhlthau, 2004). Through Kuhlthau's interviews and by sharing her findings with the students in the study, the participants actually came to see the research process as their own. They said, *"This is my process, this is the way that I learn."* (Kuhlthau, 1985). Carlos mentioned specifically, "The time that Dr. Kuhlthau spent helping me understand the research process... gave me a tremendous amount of confidence".

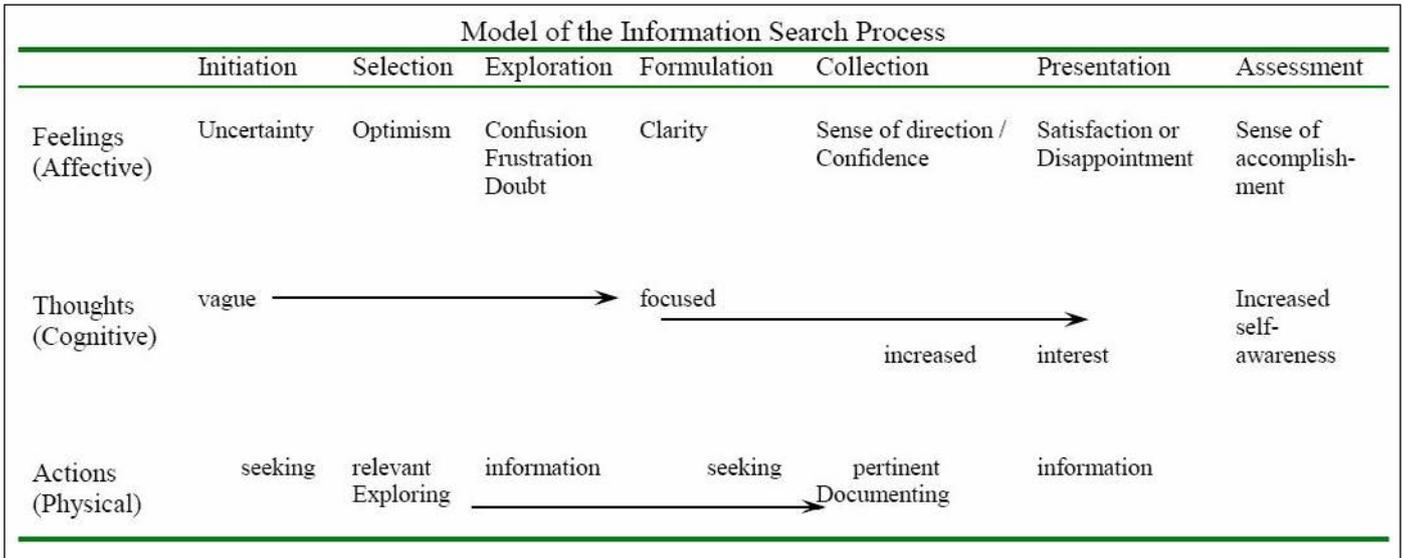
We'll return to Carlos and his story later. But first, you're probably wondering what is this framework that Carlos has internalized? What is the process he knows so well? The research process is the Information Search Process (Kuhlthau, 2004) and the framework is the GId framework (Kuhlthau Maniotes and Caspari, 2012).

### The framework for inquiry

Dr. Carol Kuhlthau's studies opened completely new ways of thinking about the research process. The findings were especially important because the stages that she uncovered ran counter to the way teachers and TLs were designing and presenting research assignments to their students (Maniotes & Kuhlthau 2014). Traditionally, students doing research assignments (much like Carlos' daughter in the beginning quote) were *thought* to proceed through three simple steps of:

1. selecting a topic,
2. collecting information and,
3. reporting on findings.

But what Kuhlthau found was a deep description of a much more complex process including students' thoughts, feelings, and actions. She found that the students actually experienced six (not three) distinct stages of learning. The first three stages were altogether ignored by the traditional assignment. She also found a few points in the process where students were



The model (ISP) effectively describes the feelings, thoughts, and actions in six stages. ISP used model with permission from the author. <http://wp.comminfo.rutgers.edu/ckuhlthau/> <http://wp.comminfo.rutgers.edu/ckuhlthau/information-search-process/>

confronted with some big hurdles and when they especially needed support. Namely,

1. Overcoming the uncertainty and “the dip” in confidence in the middle of the process,
2. Formulating a clear focus,
3. Building new understandings in the latter half of the process.

It’s worthy of note that these typical stumbling blocks are all areas in which Carlos excels in his use of the process.

Kuhlthau also found that different kinds of reflection all along the way and at specific points were advantageous to the flow of the phases. Reflection came in the various forms of communication through writing, talking, collaborating, and/or charting for understanding during the process. (Kuhlthau, 2004).

This new description of the research process (ISP) from the student perspective has important implications with great potential to completely change how we guide student learning from information or inquiry-based learning. In Kuhlthau’s own words,

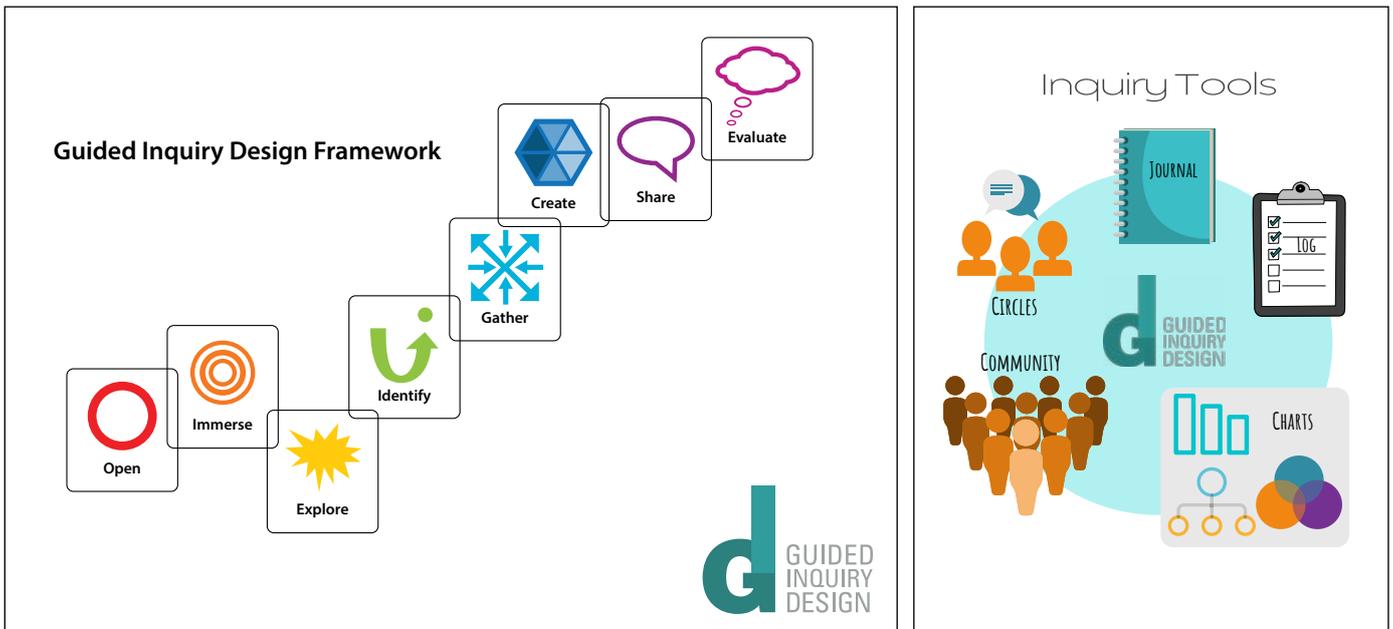
*“By 2000, I realized that the research process (ISP) was a fundamental component of education in the rapidly evolving information environment. All students need to understand the research*

*process for learning, working and living in the information age.”* (Kuhlthau personal communication/ [Guided Inquiry Design](#) website)

A framework was needed to bridge the gap between Kuhlthau’s research and practice in schools the answer to this need took shape as GId (Kuhlthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2015).

The GId framework provides fluid flexible process, a clear straight forward path for educators designing and implementing units of inquiry. It places the learner perspective at the center of the design. Habits of mind and social emotional learning are intentionally embedded in the work, recognizing the students’ feelings, thoughts and actions as described in the ISP. The framework is complete with core strategies for student engagement in each phase, including simple bullet points as well as instructions on how to specifically guide students at each phase of the process using the Inquiry Tools for optimizing success in the P-20 context. Over the past 10 years it has been tested, expanded upon, and a training program for teachers, Tls and coaches has been developed for robust use in schools across the United States and world. (Fitzgerald, 2018; Kuhlthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2012; Maniotes, Harrington & Lambusta, 2016; Maniotes, 2017; Maniotes, 2018).

But that’s not the end of our story. Perhaps



Left: Gld process. Right: Inquiry tools. Printed with permission from <https://guidedinquirydesign.com/gid/>

it's truly a new beginning, for doing well in school is only touching the tip of how this process helped Carlos. Understanding how the research process works within each of our students, serves them well beyond the walls of school. To learn how, let's turn back to Carlos' example. "The research process and the ability to dig is critical to being helpful in my field." Fast forward to today. Carlos is a top ([award-winning](#)) equity research analyst on Wall Street. He describes that the confidence and skill in using this process keeps him "heads above his competitors."

First of all, being well-versed in research gave him access to the high paying jobs on Wall Street.

*When I started working on Wall Street, being a research analyst or being a banker were the pinnacle of banking in terms of income levels ... So, it opened up doors for me that I am absolutely certain that would never have been opened had I not become proficient in this research process.*

Second of all, the process helped him to rise to the top of his industry by providing more helpful information to his clients.

*I work in an industry where there are financial statements available on companies. All of my competitors and*

*every investor has access to that same financial information. Everyone can run the same analysis of the numbers that are available. But really trying to understand how a company, or how an industry, is evolving and how a consumer is going to be behaving as well as how a company will react to those opportunities in the marketplace, requires learning to ask questions. Learning to ask the right questions. And, if you ask the right questions, you get the right answers.*

The right questions come in the middle of the process when people are ready to decide the direction of their research. "Identify" is a turning point in the process (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, Caspari, 2012). Teachers and TMs who don't know or use the Guided Inquiry framework, often think getting a focus happens much easier and much earlier than it does in reality as evidenced in Kuhlthau's findings. As a result, educators don't often recognize the struggles or the phases of the process required to get to that turning point. What can easily happen to students when left to fend for themselves is what Carlos' daughter went through. She was not able to find her focus, even the day before the paper was due. This is deadly and what makes inquiry and research plummet into an exercise of cut and paste.

### Creating a mosaic - a differentiated perspective

The other aspect of inquiry that makes a

difference is in *what you do* with what you find, how you *USE* the information. What Carlos does with the information as an equity analyst is the hinge point to success. He explains,

*If you learn to ask a lot of the right questions and to dig for insights to create a differentiated perspective. It helps your clients gain a better understanding, a different understanding, of the subject matter...That's a lot of what I do, when I do research on companies, I dig for insights that help investors glean a differentiated perspective. I fill out a mosaic of what's going on in the industry from an investment standpoint that is different and is valuable. So, learning how to use a shovel and dig and gain commercial applications for it (the process) was hugely valuable and empowering.*

Not only has learning the Information Search Process helped Carlos to be patient with the process as he is finding his focus for the research, but it has given him an edge by offering insights that have value for his clients. His familiarity with the process enables Carlos to be helpful,

*"using that differentiated perspective that you've gained and sharing it in a way that it becomes valuable to others".*

He is able to offer something that sets him apart from the rest, finding that unique perspective only when he digs for more information.

### **Being able and willing to change your mind**

So, getting the right question or focus is one hurdle and the challenge of digging for that differentiated perspective yet another. Carlos has learned that you also have to have the right mindset (Dweck, 2006). Carlos captured this when he explained,

*"the digging (in) the research process is about asking questions with an open mind. It's about being able and willing to change your mind. Don't bring in an agenda, just ask questions, learn."*

Carlos employs a few key strategies for reflecting in the process. He says,

*You have to learn to be quiet when you're getting that information so that you can take it all in. You have to learn to be reflective of what you're getting. And there's a tremendous amount of humility that's required in the process because, if you bring in your preconceived notions there's a good chance that you can be wrong a lot of the time.*

Having an inquiry stance, quieting your mind, being reflective of the incoming information are all habits of mind attained through guidance in the inquiry process (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, Caspari, 2012). These are life skills that give rise to success in life, college, and careers.

### **Take aways**

This article began with a student in 2020 who desperately needed a framework to better guide her research. You learned about Carlos, and his successes from having internalized the research process from his days in high school. Knowing the research process were the keys to Carlos' success in school, life and career.

All our students today deserve such experience and knowledge. I urge ACCESS readership to learn more about Gld's framework, as it offers a clear pathway for teachers, TLs and educational leaders and their students for inquiry. You can come to know the process from the website, the books, or the Gld professional development on the framework and apply it to the work you are doing with students.

Gld is the framework used to effectively design units of inquiry and to clearly facilitate student learning so that all students come to know the process as their own, as Carlos once did. Our students deserve to have the guidance they need to be able to dig into whatever path they choose in life. In today's complex information landscape, we owe it to the next generation to use this framework as a solid foundation to guide their successes. Take it from Carlos, this is the framework all students need.

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