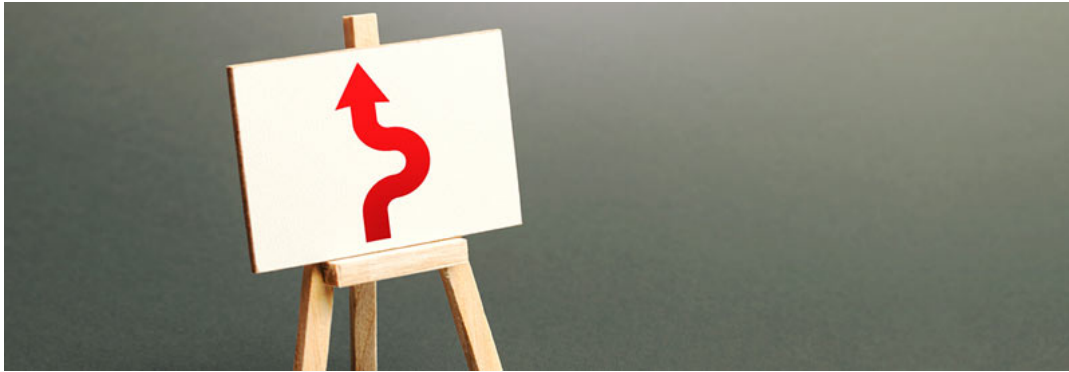


Stick-to-itiveness: Three Strategies to Achieve Persistence through Inquiry

Article



by Leslie Maniotes, November 2013



The three great essentials to achieve anything worthwhile are, first, hard work; second, stick-to-itiveness; third, common sense. —

Thomas Alva Edison

In this fast-paced information world, our students seek easy answers to their questions. They find simple answers in a flash on mobile devices from Wikipedia and the Internet. But, as Thomas Edison once said, "...to achieve anything worthwhile... stick-to-itiveness" is essential.

BIG QUESTIONS

Our most worthwhile and important questions don't have simple answers. This concept applies to our students who have opportunities to ask authentic questions and solve complex problems through a deep investigative study like inquiry. An example of this type of study might begin with the questions, what are the problems in my community, and how can I make my community a better place to live? To effectively answer these deeper questions and solve complex problems, students need to employ the "stick-to-itiveness" suggested by Edison. In this article, I will be discussing the three components embedded in Guided Inquiry Design® that can help students persist in more complex tasks that address big questions.

Guided Inquiry is grounded in Kuhlthau's research on the Information Search Process (ISP) as it describes information seeking behavior within complex tasks (2004). In Kuhlthau's ISP, the term "continue" is used to indicate persistence. If students find quick answers to their simple questions, they are not likely to continue to move through the ISP stages. Continuing is only necessary in the face of deeper questions and more challenging information tasks.

The ISP describes thoughts, action and feelings people experience as they seek information to solve a complex information problem or inquiry question. Through the ISP research, we recognize that students must learn to persist through the challenging emotional dip in the Exploration stage so that they can identify a worthwhile focus to pursue to conclusion. The entire inquiry process requires persistence because it occurs over an extended period of time. Finally, synthesizing and applying information to create something new to share with others requires persistence and "stick-to-itiveness."

Educators can employ three strategies to help students persist through the entire inquiry process. First, engage students' passions and interest. Second, design inquiry experiences that support student persistence throughout the process. Third, guide the learning that occurs within that process. The next sections will explore each of these strategies.

ENGAGING THIRD SPACE—LEARNING RELEVANT TO STUDENTS

Third space is a powerful component of Guided Inquiry that motivates students to persist through the entire inquiry process. Third Space is where students' interest and knowledge from their socio-cultural experiences blend with the content in discipline specific knowledge required in school. This sounds simple, but in fact is challenging to

attain.

In order to attain third space, students must feel comfortable or safe to apply their out-of-school knowledge. They also must be forthcoming in sharing their understanding about the world within the formalized school environment. This requires an open classroom culture of sharing and respect. Subtle elements of the way we talk to students in class have a large impact on creating an open culture.

Consider the type of discourse in your learning space. John Paul Gee explains that stable patterns of discourse become socially accepted (1992). Members learn which ways of talking are valued and not valued by that community. For example, students quickly learn when their local and cultural knowledge is not valued in the official spaces of the classroom. This realization can lead to a variety of choices. Students can choose to take on the ideal student role by paying attention and contributing with the official discourse. Or they can act as if they are participating with engagement; feigning interest is a common student achievement. Or they can act out, pushing against the boundaries of official discourse, even though the result is often negative.

When third space occurs, students don't have to take on false roles, they truly engage as they bring their own ideas, interests, and knowledge to bear on the task at hand. When students are comfortable to make connections across their multiple discourse communities and identities, they are not afraid to ask questions that have meaning to them and are relevant to their lives. In third space, this happens within the context of the academic content they are investigating. Students identify relevant and meaningful questions to investigate. As a result, they are much more able to persist through the highs and lows of investigating those questions, because their genuine interest in the topic drives the work.

HOW WE DESIGN UNITS OF INQUIRY

The design of inquiry also plays a role in encouraging the open culture necessary for engaging in third space. Guided Inquiry is uniquely designed with three critical phases prior to asking a research question. Through Guided Inquiry Design® the phases Open, Immerse, and Explore engage students' interest in the topic prior to identifying a focus. In such a way, we purposefully design learning so that third space occurs. Third space is enacted when students are given multiple and varied opportunities to explicitly connect their personal, social, and cultural understandings to the formal concepts and ideas under study.

Well-designed inquiry units encourage students to make deep connections from the beginning. These connections can sustain persistence within a longer in-depth study in the process of learning from a variety of sources. In Guided Inquiry Design the early phases of inquiry are specifically designed to help students connect to prior knowledge, build background knowledge, and ask authentic questions. Students explore ideas from a variety of sources to Identify a question or problem that really matters to them. The time invested in the early phases of inquiry pays off in the persistence students have (through the concluding phases: Gather, Create, Share) and quality of the outcome.

Guided Inquiry also embeds tools that encourage persistence throughout inquiry. Guided Inquiry Design® is set within an inquiry community that is studying one topic for a specific purpose. The purpose is clearly laid out in the Open phase so the reason for the study is interesting and clear to students. Students work in inquiry circles within that community. These are small groups with similar interests or themes within the larger topic. The inquiry circles provide students with opportunities to talk in a small group with like interests and get ideas when they get stuck, need a nudge or have similar information needs. These circles provide students with the ability to persist through a challenging project. Because students keep journals and logs, they can track their progress and come to know how they have evolved through their understanding of concepts, themes as well as formed their own perspective on the topic. Tracking the journey through journals and logs helps students reflect and persist through inquiry because they have a visual documentation of their understanding and learning through the process.

GUIDING THE LEARNING

Even within the best organized design, good teaching is needed to encourage student persistence. Teaching through inquiry comes in all shapes and sizes and can include direct instruction, coaching, modeling, and conferring. Much of the instruction occurs in small groups and one-on-one and takes the shape of a conversation. Students who get stuck can be redirected to dig deeper into their interests, or to pursue a question that has more available information. Again, just how this is accomplished is important.

In Guided Inquiry we emphasize a constructivist approach. Rather than telling students what to do at every turn, we encourage them, at appropriate times, to find their own paths, allow them to make mistakes, and guide them in a positive direction. Guiding students requires striking a balance between stepping in and holding back.

Teaching as a means to help students construct their own understanding is a lot like coaching. We can coach students to discover their own path through inquiry. Asking "what" questions can help guide them through the process. "What" questions serve to open the conversation? What are you working on? What are you finding most

challenging for you right now? Then offering, not an answer or solution to their challenge, but a probing question like how will you go about resolving that? Or providing them with a suggestion for a strategy they can use such as talking with a member of their inquiry circle about the topic. Remember, the strategies for inquiry are simple: compose, converse, collaborate, choose, chart, continue (Kuhlthau 2004). Advising students to journal, talk, or share ideas are simple but productive ways to help them learn to persist through a complex task.

Making a plan to meet with each student provides an opportunity to articulate what they are thinking and provides the educator with those coaching moments where students can be guided to construct their own understandings. Coaching conversations encourage students to persist and help them consider the direction for their next steps. This also implicitly teaches them that talking with someone about the work increases progress.

Providing students with the time to reflect on the process is also important. Within these reflections students are more able to recognize what was hard and how they managed to persist through it. Heightening their own awareness of what helped them reach a higher level of understanding in inquiry is worth the time. Once they have reflected on what helped them, they are more likely to use these strategies in the future. Through reflection students recognize the challenging aspects of a deeper study and learn to grow from these challenges as well as recognize how they overcame them.

PERSISTENCE IN DEEPER LEARNING

There is a real need for students to learn the "habit of mind" for persistence in order to thrive in our information society. This article explored three embedded components of Guided Inquiry Design® that will help encourage students to persist through a challenging information task of inquiry learning. The challenge is to find opportunities for extended inquiry where students must persist through to find deeper explanations to the questions they have.

For more about Guided Inquiry see Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century (Libraries Unlimited, 2007) and Guided Inquiry Design®: A Framework for Inquiry in Your School (Libraries Unlimited, 2012).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Gee, J. P. *The Social Mind: Language, Ideology, and Social Practice*. Bergin & Garvey, 1992.; Kuhlthau, C. C. *Seeking Meaning: A Process Approach to Library and Information Services*. 2nd ed. Libraries Unlimited, 2004.; Kuhlthau, C. C., L. K. Maniotes, and A. K. Caspari. *Guided Inquiry Design: A Framework for Inquiry in Your School*. Libraries Unlimited, 2012.; Kuhlthau, C. C., L. K. Maniotes, and A. K. Caspari. *Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century*. Libraries Unlimited, 2007.; Runes, Dagobert D., ed. *The Diary and Sundry Observations of Thomas Alva Edison*. Greenwood Press, 1968.

MLA CITATION

Maniotes, Leslie. "Stick-to-itiveness: Three Strategies to Achieve Persistence through Inquiry." *School Library Monthly*, 30, no. 2, November 2013. *School Library Connection*, schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/1967021.

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/1967021?topicCenterId=2252404>

Entry ID: 1967021