# CiSSL turns 10: Inquiry, learning and empowerment

*By Dr Ross Todd*

*The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind.*

I have been reflecting on **CISSL**'s 3rd International Research Symposium held in New Burnswick New Jersey on 26th and 27th April, 2013. What an exciting event it was, and it was a privilege as director of the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (**CISSL**) to lead this event, titled *Digital Youth, Inquiry, and the Future School Library . . . Research to Practice*. The Symposium brought together great minds from across the USA, and from Australia, New Zealand, Croatia, Sweden, Germany, and the UK.

It was first a celebration: 10 years since the establishment of CiSSL at Rutgers University in 2003, and a celebration of thirty years of the research of Distinguished Professor Emerita, Carol Kuhlthau, whose ground breaking research centering on the Information Search Process began in 1983. At the same time, it sought to understand the information and learning landscape of schools, the intersection of digital youth and inquiry and to put great minds together to address the future of information rich and technology immersed learning in 21st Century schools. The core questions centered on preparing schools to deliver a 21st century education for digital youth.

CiSSL's agenda is built on the internationally acclaimed research of Carol Kuhlthau. This research is the foundation of Guided Inquiry, developed by Dr. Carol Kuhlthau, Dr. Leslie Maniotes and Ann Caspari. We have a firm commitment to building professional practice on a strong research tradition, and I am convinced that more than ever, we need to be clearly articulating the research evidence as the basis for professional practice, and engaging in the iterative process of generating and disseminating evidence of learning outcomes. Our beliefs about the goodness and traditions of schools libraries are not enough. This symposium was an opportunity to feature leading scholars and practitioners who have taken up this challenge. We were privileged to have Dr. Barbara Stripling, (ALA President Elect) And Dr. Sharon Weiner (Vice-President, National Forum of Information Literacy) also as part of our symposium.

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The presentations of Australians Lee Fitzgerald and Jo Belby from Loretto College Kirribilli, and Alinda Shearman from Broughton College in Sydney showcased evidence-based practice centering on Guided Inquiry, and received great acclaim for their leadership and creative pedagogies, and for the evidence they have generated. We were fortunate to have inquiry teams also from Sweden and the USA who also showcased their school-wide and indeed district-wide processes of implementing Guided Inquiry and providing evidence of outcomes.

The participants engaged in collective thinking, wrestling with the challenges of our times, and over the two days, engaged in a creative process of learning from the research, and identifying a mosaic of concepts and principles that we believe are fundamental to constructing a preferred future for digital youth. These are illustrated in the word cloud below:



Lyn Hay's research presented at the Symposium, titled 'Student Choice and Preference for Using Technologies to Support Inquiry Learning. It's Personal!' highlighted that information technology is no longer a tool to support learning. It IS the learning environment. And as her research shows, students' engagement with this learning environment is selective, personal and deliberate. It is not one-size fits all. It presents the challenge of customising and personalising the inquiry learning environment, and providing flexibility and adaptability through negotiated pathways to learning.

Considerable attention is being given in educational circles to the convergence of mobile information technologies and integration of digital devices, and the development and delivery of app-related content. At the same time, attention is being given to creative technology applications, the

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development of digital collections, the creation of virtual learning worlds, and virtual gaming and other innovative approaches to the integration of digital content into learning and their impact. In a presentation titled 'Collaborative Information-Seeking in the Wild: Kids' Self-Initiated Strategies and Solutions Supporting Creation of Web Games', Dr. Rebecca Reynolds of Rutgers University presented her research on **Globaloria**, a guided discovery-based program of game design learning occurring in multiple U.S. states. This research seeks to unpack the complex thinking and metacognition that engages students in creative, inquiry learning tasks.

It is clear to me that information technology is today's learning environment. The digital information landscape is the new normal. I've been reading **Mal Lee's ideas around 'Digital'** . Schooling is not static and immutable, even though so much that happens seems to maintain the status quo. The digital information landscape as the new normal raises core concepts such as the collective ownership of learning and creative opportunities for collaborative learning communities beyond school walls: communities that are global, intergenerational, interdisciplinary and intercultural. These are communities which challenge dominant discourses in schools about what knowledge is, how it is created and applied, and how it inspires and enables social responsibility, social action and social change.

With information technology constantly in transition, ever changing, and ever challenging, it poses key questions in terms of imagining and creating innovative information-for-learning environments for students. I have come to realise that while leadership in the transformation of and transformative role of school libraries must take place in the context of information

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technology as the learning environment, the core work must not center on information technology, but on the mind, and the functioning of the mind in the context of information technology. The human mind remains the most essential, most powerful and most critical app that we must engage and activate. Engaging and empowering the mind is the core role for school libraries as centers for intellectual agency, cultural and social agency, and for social justice, social action and change. In order for the school library to be a center (within and beyond schools) for learning activism, creativity and innovation, the primary building block is creative pedagogies for deep inquiry. And that is all about powering up the mind. Powering up the mind is the future of school libraries. More importantly, education for the creative application of powerful minds is preparing students for their future, rather than the past.

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