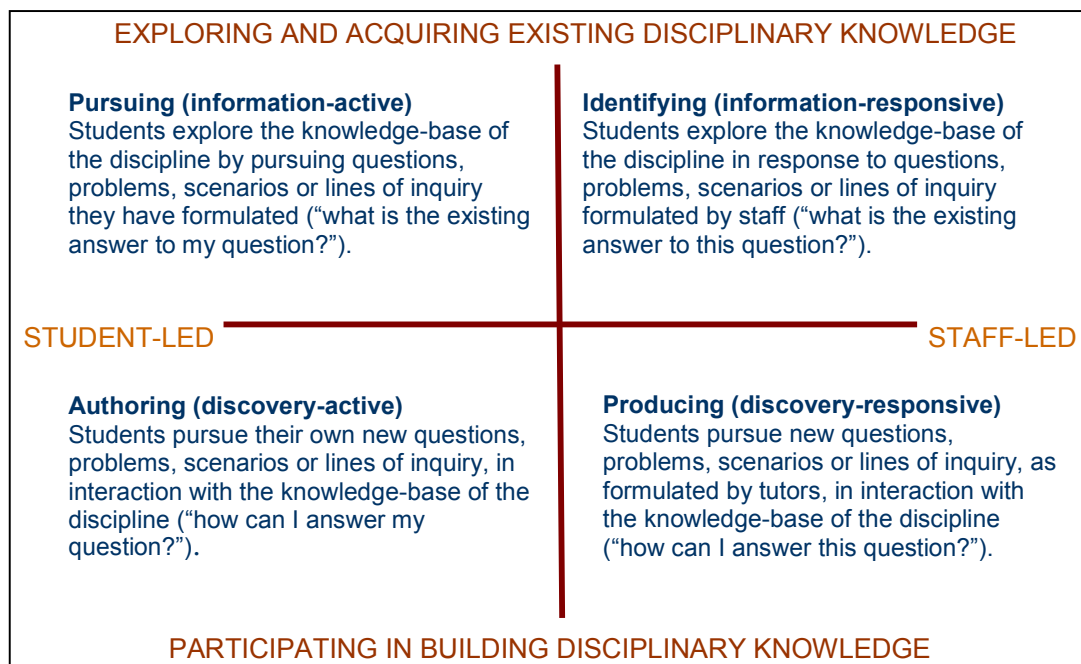


Inquiry-based Learning: a Conceptual Framework

This framework for researching and developing inquiry-based learning (Figure 1, below) originates in qualitative research carried out by CILASS into first-year undergraduate students' experiences of inquiry and research in arts and social sciences disciplines (see Levy and Petruilis, 2007). The research revealed two main conceptual frames through which students viewed their experiences, which are labelled here the 'information' frame and the 'discovery' frame. When viewed through the information frame, students experienced research and inquiry as the exploration and acquisition of existing disciplinary knowledge. When viewed through the discovery frame, they experienced research and inquiry as participation in building on, and contesting, that knowledge.

These differing experiences are represented by the vertical axis of the matrix presented below. The horizontal axis adds a further dimension, classifying students' experiences according to the extent to which their accounts emphasised student- or teacher-led processes. We use the term 'student-led' to refer principally to the framing of the inquiry, and secondarily to the framing of the inquiry process, by the student. Similarly, 'teacher-led' refers principally to the framing of the inquiry, and secondarily to the framing of the inquiry process, by the teacher. The matrix differentiates accordingly between 'active' and 'responsive' modes of both information- and discovery-oriented inquiry, corresponding to four broadly differing modes of student inquiry that are characterised as: *Identifying; Pursuing; Producing; Authoring*.

*Figure 1: Inquiry-based Learning: Conceptions and Approaches
(version 2, September 2008)*



The framework has been found useful for researching and mapping conceptions and practices in IBL, and for supporting the design of inquiry-based learning tasks. It is important to note that its dimensions are continua rather than oppositional binaries and that, in practice, inquiry experiences (and inquiry-based learning designs) may combine differing approaches. For example, during the course of a given inquiry task, the dynamic of students' activity may well encompass both exploration of existing knowledge (finding out about, and understanding, existing theory, perspectives, and so on) *and* building upon this to create new knowledge (new to them, or to the discipline at large) through analysis, experimentation, etc. In an extended inquiry process, students may move from a more teacher-led experience initially to a more strongly student-led one in later stages.

Papers that discuss the framework include:

- Levy, P. and Petruilis, R. (2007). Experiencing inquiry: lessons from the first undergraduate year. In: Proceedings of Learning Together, 22-24 July 2007, Institute of Education, London, UK. Available at: www.shef.ac.uk/cilass/resources
- Levy, P. and Petruilis, R. (in review). First year international undergraduate students' experiences of learning through inquiry. *Reflecting Education, Special Issue of Papers Presented at Learning Together, 2008*.
- Levy, P. and Petruilis, R. (2007). Towards transformation? First year students, inquiry-based learning and the research/teaching nexus. In: *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE)*, 11-13 December 2007, Brighton, UK. Available at: www.shef.ac.uk/cilass/resources
- Wood, J. and Levy, P. (forthcoming). Inquiry-based learning pedagogies in the arts and social sciences: purposes, conceptions and models of practice. In: Proceedings of *Improving Student Learning (ISL)*, 1-3 September 2008, University of Durham, Durham, UK.

We would be very pleased to hear from you if you find this framework useful. **When referring to it for either research or development purposes, please acknowledge the source, as follows:**

CILASS (2008). *Inquiry-based learning: a conceptual framework*. Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences, University of Sheffield. Available at: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/cilass/resources>

5th September, 2008.

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