

SABBATICAL REPORT

**Observations on the Network of Innovation and Inquiry
and the Spiral of Inquiry
in British Columbia, Canada**

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Heartfelt thanks go to the staff and in particular to the school's two outstanding deputy principals for allowing me to walk away knowing the school would continue to function as usual.

My sincere thanks to the district and school leaders who shared their time, their thinking and their practice with me in British Columbia. Thanks also to the group of British educators from Whole Education who I accompanied on my school visits and who incidentally shared their own experience of networks in the UK setting.

Most of all, my thanks go to Judy Halbert and Linda Kaiser for their openness and willingness to share their work with so many educators.

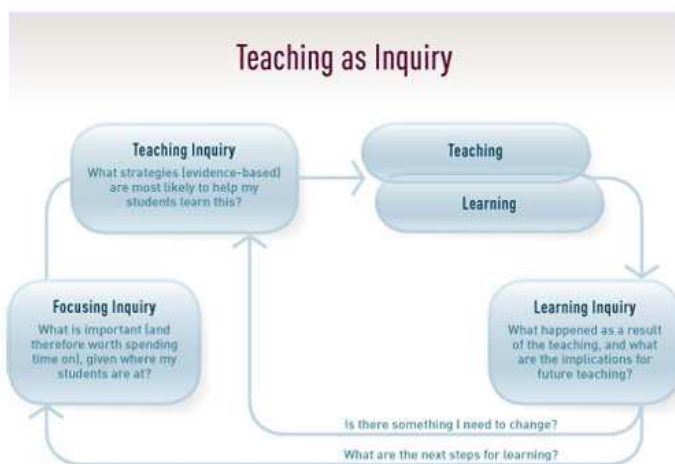
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “Teaching as Inquiry” process is an integral part of the NZ curriculum. It allows teachers to consider the impact of their teaching on the achievement of their students and to make adaptations based on these considerations.

In British Columbia, Canada a voluntary inquiry-based network of schools, currently involving about half of all schools in the province, is focused on a disciplined approach to collaborative inquiry. The Network of Innovation and Inquiry was set up in 2000 (as Network of Performance-based Schools - NPBS), funded by the BC Ministry of

Education with a focus on improving the quality and equity of education in British Columbia.

In their work with this network Judy Halbert and Linda Kaiser, two educators from the University of Victoria, BC, have developed a model for the inquiry process to drive bottom-up change at system and school level. This model is the “Spiral of Inquiry”.



PURPOSE

To examine the way the Spiral of Inquiry is being used in British Columbia, Canada in Networks of Innovation & Inquiry to create greater collaboration between educators and to involve families and community members, and to look at its impact on student achievement in schools.

RATIONALE

To enhance what we already do as part of the “Teaching as Inquiry” model, particularly in the “Scanning” phase of the spiral and to look at how the voluntary Network of Inquiry and Innovation operates to support this work.

BACKGROUND

The Teaching as Inquiry model is used as a basis for teaching and learning at Pt. Chevalier School. As part of the school's appraisal process, teachers use this model to present an annual inquiry based on the needs of a target group of students in their own classes.

After reading "A framework for transforming learning in school: Innovation and the spiral of inquiry" Helen Timperley, Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert, I was interested to find out more about a process that, while it seemed both broader and deeper, was very much evidence-focussed. The key questions ***What's going on for our learners?*** and ***How do we know?*** keep the emphasis very much on students. I was also interested in how responsive to the context of an individual school and community the process was.

The paper outlines the spiral in action for those who are interested in learning more about it.

METHODOLOGY

- Undertake professional reading
- Meet school and district personnel to discuss how both the Spiral process and the Network of Innovation and Inquiry support student achievement
- Visit classes to observe, discuss with students and teachers
- Attend network sharing afternoon
- Attend Network of Innovation and Inquiry (NOII) symposium in Vancouver

FINDINGS

From my time in Canada

Based on the schools I visited, the schools' inquiries sharing session I saw and the symposium I attended, schools are at various stages in their use of the "Spiral" model.

A significant factor appears to be the commitment of the school district to the model and to the Network of Innovation & Inquiry as a vehicle to collect case studies of the "Spiral" inquiries, to share ideas and successes and to offer a collegial level of support.

Collaborative inquiry is the cornerstone of the work being done. As the Network of Innovation and Inquiry has evolved and changed over time it has held true to its three original aims. Everyone to whom I spoke articulated these very clearly.

- ***Every learner crossing the stage with dignity, purpose and options***
- ***All learners leaving our settings more curious than when they arrived***
- ***All learners gaining an understanding of and respect for indigenous ways of knowing***

The Spiral of Inquiry framework is proving to be an effective model for collaborative inquiry – and it is the collaboration between teachers/ learners/families/communities that is critical to this effectiveness.

Teachers to whom I spoke found the framework enabling. Its collaborative nature allowed them to work together - developing shared understanding of an issue, shared language around it and shared learning in seeking to identify and address issues. The framework is a continuous process which initially focuses on two key questions – **“What’s going on for our learners?”** and **“How do we know?”**

While the first question keeps teachers focused on their students and elicits a variety of opinions, the second filters those opinions according to the evidence to support them.

Some varied examples of things schools found in their first scanning process were:

- Only 68% of students could name two members of staff who thought they would succeed
- Students couldn’t link up work in school to the world outside
- Students were passive about learning and didn’t know where they were going next
- One year group felt much more unsupported by staff than the others
- The staff students felt believed in them coincided with the lessons in which they felt they were achieving well
- The same staff members are being identified over and over as caring about students – what they are doing differently?
- Asking the students questions was uncomfortable – long silences, no eye contact
- Some students obviously trying to give the ‘right’ answer
- A bit of a reality check to put yourself in the students’ shoes
- Very different to be putting quantitative data into context – it’s the story behind rather than the black and white

The importance of leadership in this process is acknowledged with around 60% of school districts in BC involved directly in specific leadership development based on the Spiral of Inquiry. Vancouver Island University has a leadership programme with an emphasis on among other things, understanding and applying the Spiral of Inquiry.

As the Best Evidence Synthesis on Leadership has shown here too, in BC the active involvement of the principal in professional development was key to success. In some schools / districts the leading of learning had been passed to a coordinator. In Delta District, Vancouver the appointment of a ‘District Principal of Innovation and Inquiry’ had signalled a commitment to collaborative inquiry. This district had also established a sharing day every second year for those involved in collaborative inquiries and set up a district-wide daily blog on learning.

Whole school professional development is not mandatory in the province. The BC teacher union firmly advocates teachers should determine their own professional learning needs, and that these should be provided for within the district.

Principals found the provision of collaboration time made a big difference, both to the perceived value of the inquiry and to getting more teachers involved in the process. This time varied in these schools - one hour per week in one of the secondary schools (timetabled in as part of workload), 75 - 90 minutes per week in three elementary schools

(DPs or specialist teachers took classes in the hall to allow this) to an hour every second week before school in one elementary school. Another school held 'learning lunches' as an opportunity for staff participating in an inquiry to collaborate – and as a hook to increase participation in the inquiry.

In the schools I visited it was more commonly a group of teachers involved in an inquiry than the whole staff. There was a general confidence that participation would grow as teachers saw the impact of taking action – indeed a gradual but steady increase in participants had already happened in some schools.

In talking with the British educators I met on this tour, the "spiral" approach appears to be being used in the UK by small groups of teachers in a variety of settings but not yet as a school-wide process.

Both principals and teachers found the network model supportive, though almost all to whom I spoke found it hard to separate the support of the network itself from the support they received from Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert. These two educators have clearly played a key role in the network and based on comments from many participants at the symposium, they are perceived as critical to its continued functioning.

As part of the network process teams of educators at the school level develop an evidence-based inquiry into an area of importance in their context. On completion of a case study, participating schools receive a small grant to recognise their contribution to the network and to the province. Principals to whom I spoke were quick to emphasise that the grant was a pleasant acknowledgement but not a motivation for participation. They also emphasised the importance of the voluntary nature of the network.

I was fortunate to attend a meeting where inquiry teams from a variety of schools met from 4.00 – 6.30pm and shared some of their journeys over the past year. One or two people stayed with their presentation to answer questions around the process while the remainder of the team moved from display to display. There was a considerable amount of anecdotal evidence of progress in the inquiry but little achievement data yet available with two months of the school year yet to go. Judy and Linda summed up the sharing at the end, emphasising the process teams had been through.

On May 8 & 9 I attended a symposium sponsored by the Networks of Inquiry and Innovation, "Passion and Purpose: Making it Real". Leaders from School Districts and from First Peoples organisations shared ways in which real differences were being made for some of their students. There is a strong commitment to the First Peoples' Principles of Learning and these were particularly evident in community involvement in a range of the inquiries presented.

These principles are:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning involves recognising the consequences of one's actions
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities
- Learning recognises the role of indigenous knowledge
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story
- Learning involves patience and time
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity
- Learning involves recognising that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and / or in certain situations

We also heard from a group of secondary students about how the inquiry process was genuinely engaging them in learning. Interspersed throughout the two days were presentations from schools on their inquiries and flash-chat opportunities.

Flash chats involve the circulation of a sheet of paper with 20 topics on them. Symposium participants select a topic they are interested in hearing more about / contributing to and move to the relevant table where a facilitator initiates discussion. Topics were varied and included:

- ALL learners leaving our setting more curious than when they arrived - what strategies are you using to increase curiosity and intellectual engagement?
- Teacher preparation programmes – How are you strengthening teacher preparation programmes through networking and collaboration? What new designs are working well?
- Effort, Grit and Resilience – What are you doing to build a growth mindset and resilience in your learners?
- Stretching all students – What are you finding most helpful in creating challenging learning experiences for all learners?
- Transitions – What is working to improve the transition of Aboriginal learners to secondary and post-secondary?
- Building connections with your Aboriginal communities – What's working?
- Building leadership capacity and adaptive expertise – How are you working with your colleagues to build capacity? What strategies and structures are you finding most helpful for collaboration and teacher professional learning?
- First Peoples' Principles of Learning – What is working to ensure all learners are gaining an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal knowledge and culture?

From my reading

The phases of the spiral are strongly supported by growing understanding of the research around learning. The Seven Principles of Learning from the OECD publication, "*The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice*" Dumont, H, Istance, D and Bebevides, F (2010) are easily embedded in the model (over time the model has adapted to incorporate this work). These principles are:

1. **Learners at the centre** – learners are both metacognitive and self-regulated
2. **Learning is social** – well organized cooperative learning matters as does personal research
3. **Emotions are central to learning** – the adults in the learning environment are highly tuned into the emotions and motivations of their learners
4. **Individual differences are recognized** – the adults pay a great deal of attention to prior knowledge and individual differences are attended to through small and large group learning opportunities
5. **Stretching all learners** – every learner is asked to do hard work and accept challenges – but each learner is not overloaded
6. **Assessment for learning is a way of life** – formative assessment is regular and learners get meaningful feedback. This individual feedback helps the individual learner. The assessment culture shapes the overall learning environment
7. **Building horizontal connections** – thoughtful connections are made between areas of knowledge. As well regular and well-designed opportunities take place in and with the broader community. The authenticity of these experiences promotes deeper understanding.

Questions used in the Spiral of Inquiry process related to each of these principles of learning are:

Learners at the centre

- Can learners answer the question, "Where are you going with your learning?"
- Can they describe in their own words what they are learning - and why what they are learning is important?
- Can they use a range of ways to demonstrate their learning?
- Can they self-manage independent learning times?
- Are they able to set specific learning goals and construct their learning through active exploration?

Social nature of learning

- Do learners demonstrate the kind of social and collaborative skills needed for teamwork, citizenship and the workplace?

Emotions are integral to learning

- Can each learner name at least two adults in the setting who believe he / she will be a success in life?
- To what extent are learners able to monitor and manage their own emotions?

Recognising individual differences

- Do learners feel their teachers know their individual strengths, interests and passions?
- Do they believe their teachers know and understand what they find difficult or challenging?
- Are the prior knowledge and cultural backgrounds that learners bring to the setting respected, valued and utilised?

Stretching all students

- Are learners, regardless of their age, able to teach someone else and are they able to make a contribution to the community as a whole?
- Are all learners experiencing demanding, engaging and challenging work without excessive overload?

Assessment for learning

- Can learners describe what quality work looks like – and how they are doing with their own learning?
- Are learners confident and comfortable in both giving and receiving feedback with their peers, based on co-constructed criteria?

Building horizontal connections

- Can learners see and understand connections across content areas?
- To what extent can learners connect with and learn from the broader environment – and from members of their community?

LEARNINGS

- The process is much stronger with a whole school approach
- An important factor in getting a meaningful inquiry underway is the timing of the scanning phase – too quick and not enough evidence / too many assumptions, too long and the process loses momentum
- Regular scheduled opportunities for collaboration are essential – ideally during the school day
- Scanning should not be restricted to an area we already have evidence around – it is important to look at social, intellectual and emotional engagement too
- An effective inquiry is not about what the educators think – students and community should also be participants – we need to ask what works for students and what doesn't
- An effective inquiry takes time – at least 2 years and 3 would be better
- We need to work on developing the collaborative skills of teachers

Where to for Pt. Chevalier School?

I would like us to:

- Look at inquiry in a different and perhaps more holistic way
- Look at professional learning in a different way
 - develop a more responsive model according to the needs identified in a scanning process
 - review how and when that professional learning is delivered.

Conclusion

Having this wonderful opportunity to step back from my work at Pt. Chevalier School and look at a different schooling system has been invaluable.

After visiting schools and talking to fellow educationalists from both British Columbia and the United Kingdom, I have come back feeling very affirmed about the wonderful work teachers at Pt. Chevalier School are doing.

I am also very appreciative of the level of self-management the New Zealand education system offers to schools and of the richness of our curriculum which allows us to be truly responsive to the needs of our own school communities.

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