



## *Spirals of Inquiry*

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### ***SCANNING: WHAT'S GOING ON FOR OUR LEARNERS?***

*Without evidence, you are just another person with an opinion.  
(Andreas Schleicher, OECD)*

#### **What scanning is and isn't:**

Scanning involves inquiry and evidence-seeking mindsets; scanning is not about seeking evidence to reinforce the status quo.

Scanning takes a wide perspective on learning - not just a focus on aspects of academic learning that are easily measured.

Scanning is about what is happening for all learners from their perspectives and those of their families - not just the perspectives of the professionals.

To create powerful learning environments for ALL learners, we need to weave **indigenous ways of knowing**, with **strong evidence-informed practices**, and **innovative and imaginative approaches**. In scanning, we want to find out what is happening for learners in each of these areas.

#### **Here are some questions for you to consider during the scanning process:**

##### **To what extent...**

Can every learner name at least two adults in the building who believe he or she will be a success in life?

Do learners get to experience a sense of connection to the land? Is learning from the environment part of their experience?

Are learners engaged in physical activity at the beginning of the day?

Do learners have the opportunity to express themselves in a variety of ways?

Do learners, regardless of their age, have the chance to teach someone else and to make a contribution to the community as a whole?

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 this important?

Are learners able to describe what strong work looks like – and how they are 'going' with their own learning?

Do learners receive high quality focused feedback that provides clear directions for improvement?

Are learners confident and comfortable in both giving and receiving feedback with their peers based on co-constructed criteria?

Do Aboriginal learners see themselves reflected in the curriculum - and in the literature they are reading - on an on-going basis?

Do learners understand themselves as learners? Are they self-regulated? Are they becoming increasing meta-cognitive?

Do learners see and understand the connections across content areas?

Do learners feel their teachers know their individual strengths and interests? Understand what they find difficult or challenging?

Are all learners stretched through demanding, engaging and challenging work?

Are learners engaged in high quality, well-organized cooperative learning on a regular basis?

Is the prior knowledge that learners bring to the setting respected and valued?

### ***FOCUSING: WHAT'S GOING TO GIVE YOU THE BIGGEST IMPACT?***

#### **What focusing is and isn't**

Focusing uses information from the scan to begin to clarify where energies need to be invested - this is not the time to introduce completely new areas.

Focusing usually requires collection of further information to clarify what is happening. Don't assume you know. "How do we know? Why does this matter?" are especially important questions to ask in this phase.

Focusing should include strengths or positives as well as problems and challenges.

What popped out at you during the scanning phase? What additional evidence do you need? How will you gather it?

What are some strengths that your learners show in this area?

How could you build on these strengths? What can you do more of more often?

What is going to make the biggest difference for your learners?

What can you most effectively tackle over the next few months?

Where are you going to concentrate your energies - so that you can change the results and the experiences of your learners?

### ***DEVELOPING A HUNCH: WHAT'S LEADING TO THIS SITUATION?***

#### **What developing hunches is and isn't**

Developing hunches involves getting deeply held beliefs and assumptions out on the table. It doesn't involve a general brainstorm of all possibilities.

Developing hunches focuses on how the educational professionals are contributing to what's working and to what's not working.

Hunches are about professional practice – not about other factors. Developing hunches is about opening up thinking and possibilities – it is not about venting or finding someone to blame.

How can you express your views in a way that opens up thinking about practices?

How can you create the conditions that build curiosity not defensiveness?

How do you ensure that when developing hunches, you focus on the areas over which you have control (rather than blame the parents, the system, the learners or anyone else)?

How will you develop fairly quick ways to test out your hunches?

How might you involve learners and their families as you check out your hunches?

### ***LEARNING: WHAT DO YOU NEED TO LEARN? HOW WILL YOU DESIGN NEW LEARNING?***

#### **What professional learning is and isn't**

Professional learning is the core business of all educators. It is what we do!

Professional learning is connected to the identified learning needs of young people. It isn't about the latest new thing.

Professional learning take places through multiple opportunities, over time, in an atmosphere of trust and challenge.

Professional learning is not a one-shot wonder.

Now, that you have explored some hunches and have landed on a focus for more in-depth learning and action, what is it you need to learn more about?

Are there schools with a similar focus you can learn from?

What is the most current evidence-informed thinking in this area?

Who can you draw on for support? What resources can you access? How can you make sure that the strategies you are considering are evidence informed and fit with your context?

What designs for professional learning will you use?

Over time how will you build in multiple opportunities for learning during the school day?

How will you sustain the momentum and keep the learning engaging?

How will you address the varied needs of educators in your setting?

How will you ensure that everyone – formal leaders, teachers and support staff – are engaged in their learning?

### ***TAKING ACTION: WHAT WILL YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?***

#### **What taking action is and isn't:**

Taking action is about thinking more deeply about new ideas – and then taking informed action. It's not just about implementing a set of strategies.

Taking action is informed by a deep understanding of why some practices are more powerful than others. It's not just trying things out.

Taking action involves understanding that when doing something differently, effectiveness is judged by the impact on learners and their learning. It isn't about getting the teaching practices right.

Taking action doesn't mean everything will work perfectly the first time. It involves persistence, support, teamwork – and sharing what is working and what isn't.

How will you ensure that everyone involved knows they are expected to DO something different?

How will you make sure they have the time and support to try out new actions?

How will you provide opportunities to learn from what is working – as well as from the challenges faced - when trying out new approaches?

How can you make risk-taking less risky?

How will you build in collegial support for new actions?

How will you ensure there are lots of opportunities for reflection?

How will you open up classroom doors as you try out new approaches?

What will you do to model new actions yourself?

### ***CHECKING: HAVE WE MADE ENOUGH OF A DIFFERENCE?***

The purpose of shared inquiry is to make a difference in valued outcomes for learners. The checking question asks *are we making **enough** of a difference? How do we know?*

Change does not always equal improvement or transformation. There are many instances where teachers have changed what they were doing only to find not much has changed for their learners.

On a memorable occasion one educator told Helen Timperley, *"It must be good because I have done it."* New actions arising from an inquiry spiral can only be considered 'good' if learner outcomes have changed for the better.

### **What checking is and isn't**

Checking is fundamental to the inquiry spiral and to an evidence-seeking mindset. It is not just a routine to follow.

The checking has high expectations that inquiry, new professional learning and action make a substantial difference for all learners - not just a little difference for some learners.

Checking turns assessment into information about the effectiveness of teaching and what can be done about it.

Checking is part of an on-going spiral of inquiry. It is not done just at the end of the term or year. It is done regularly so that adjustments can be made in a timely fashion.

What evidence will you be seeking to know you are making a difference? How much difference?

When will you check and how often?

How can you do it in a way that allows for adjustment – right away?

How will you make it safe for teachers to share what they are learning in the checking phase?

How will you celebrate that learners can now provide in-depth answers to the four questions?

How will you celebrate the additional learning gains you have collectively made?