

JUDY HALBERT AND LINDA KASER

LEADING THROUGH SPIRALS OF INQUIRY

For Equity and Quality



EXPERIENCED EDUCATORS Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser expand on their previous work in this all-new book for school leadership teams. Written for teams ready to get started—or keen to go deeper—this book will provoke new thinking and provide specific strategies for accelerating meaningful change.

Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry walks the reader through the six stages of the Spiral of Inquiry, a proven framework to help you

- overcome inequality to create genuine equity and change outcomes for students;
- transform learning environments at both the school and district levels;
- clarify the direction for new professional learning based on evidence from educational research as well as real-world examples of innovative practices from other schools;
- challenge long-held biases and assumptions guided by clarity of purpose, a growth mindset, and a stance of curiosity;
- effectively incorporate self-reflection and continuous improvement in your learning environments.

Building on the experiences and wisdom of inquiry leaders from around the world, this book addresses the specific issues leaders face during the process of change, as well as ways to engage in and support inquiry networks across schools, districts, and other jurisdictions.

Praise for
**LEADING THROUGH SPIRALS OF INQUIRY:
FOR EQUITY AND QUALITY**

If *Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry* were required reading for every education leader, school systems and the world would be a much better place. Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser invite readers to journey with them as they examine how adults can help every child “cross the stage with dignity, purpose, and options.” This book is at once a practical guide for school personnel and a manifesto on how to transform, and leapfrog forward, our education systems.

—*Rebecca Winthrop, Senior Fellow and Co-Director, Center for Universal Education, The Brookings Institution*

The chapters in *Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry* provide a pathway towards implementing a cycle of inquiry that makes a significant difference to students and to the collective purpose of schools. Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser’s framework challenges us to move slowly through a process of curiosity and inquiry to create a culture of learning that continually asks us to consider what matters most to student learning, and more importantly, how we know.

—*Rosa Fazio, Principal, Sir Sandford Fleming Elementary School*

Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser approach teaching and learning with the respect and wisdom it deserves. Every part of this book acknowledges the complexity of education, but cuts through it to offer practical ways to keep being and doing better. If you want to make a real difference for children and young people, this book is where to start. I know I will be carrying it with me for a long time to come.

—*Dr. Amelia Peterson, Associate Professor, London Interdisciplinary School, England*

Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser’s Spiral of Inquiry framework reflects the importance of relationships, curiosity, trust, examination of biases and assumptions, and high expectations of both learners and ourselves. Embedded in this work is the understanding that Indigenous knowledge systems have positive impacts on learning environments, and that quality education systems require equity for Indigenous learners. I look forward to more educators engaging in this powerful and accessible inquiry process for the benefit of both learners and our larger society.

—Jo Chrona, Author of *Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies: An Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education*

Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry is simultaneously friendly and deeply challenging. I felt the easy warmth of the book but not for a moment did I feel complacent. The profound link between the lifetime work of the authors and their deep integration with Indigenous ways of thinking and action greatly expands the agenda before us. Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser first invite and then compel us to take action, while providing the tools for achieving impact on a large scale.

—Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus, OISE/University of Toronto

Through their humility, experience, wisdom, and passion, Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser provide a way forward for educators in our quest to support greater equity and quality in schools and education systems. *Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry* will compel readers to connect, collaborate, and intentionally create a preferred future for the young people we serve.

—Suzanne Hoffman, CEO, BC School Trustees Association

The phrase “connecting research to practice for equity” is often used to describe work that fails to make explicit the meaningful connection between the work of scholars and the lives of practitioners. *Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry* is a rare exception. This book comes to life with accessible prose that delivers complex ideas grounded in evidence and equity-minded practices that have the potential to transform and restore educational communities.

—Alan J. Daly, Professor and Director of Leadership Doctoral Programs, University of California, San Diego

Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry should be within arm's reach of any educator who wants to transform their classroom, school, or district for the better. The authors' simple yet powerful step-by-step approach to improving teaching and learning for *all* is laden with accessible microbites of research that truly make sense. This, mixed with authentic stories, draws you in and leaves you more curious about your learners than when you first cracked the cover.

—Barb Hamblett, Principal, Valleyview Secondary School

The power of networks and networking has been described as the “New Power.” Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser and their now global Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education have been exercising this power for sufficient time to know the impact of inquiry leadership teams transforming the learning of young people. Their networks of leaders activate the equity/quality dynamic for all learners. This book reveals what real learning transformation looks like. It conveys, at once, compelling evidence, inspirational practice, and the shared consciousness of the pursuit of powerful purpose.

—Anthony Mackay, CEO, National Center on Education and the Economy

In *Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry*, Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser brilliantly synthesize over twenty years of learning, experience, networking, and wisdom. They provide clear steps educational leaders can take to create more powerful learning and equity in their school communities. Every person leading educational transformation, whether they are new to the Spirals of Inquiry framework or looking to go deeper, should have a copy of this book on their desk.

—Jim Laird, Principal, Canyon Falls Middle School

Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry is a goldmine for everyone in the field of education, no matter where you are working or what your position. If your goal is to make sure our young citizens get the best start possible, every page in this thought-provoking book will encourage and support you, providing a foundation for personal reflection and professional dialogue. Congratulations, my friend—you are about to read a great book that will give you hope and strength as you bravely continue your work as a leader in education.

—Lillemor Rehnberg, Retired Principal and Principal Educator, Sweden

Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser hold a mirror up to our highest and best selves, prompting us to map a collective path toward a future where every child is seen, loved, and thriving. To prepare us for this journey, they provide astute guideposts, powerful questions for reflection, and a broad research base. This book is a perseverance of hope written by two educators who have seen reason to remain certain about the power of educators to change the world.

—Brooke Moore, District Principal of Inquiry and Innovation, Delta School District

In the world of professional learning and educational change, it is rare to find a resource both completely grounded in the real-life practice of educators and steeped in current and seminal research. Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser's voices of experience and those of many other educators are woven among important western and Indigenous perspectives, resulting in a potent guide for those wishing to catalyze quality learning and equity.

—Wendy Carr, Professor of Teaching Emerita, University of British Columbia



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Portage & Main Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Province of Manitoba through the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage and the Manitoba Book Publishing Tax Credit, and the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund (CBF) for our publishing activities.

Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens.

Front cover design by Frank Reimer

Interior and back cover design by Jennifer Lum

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Leading through spirals of inquiry : for equity and quality / Judy Halbert, Linda Kaser.

Names: Halbert, Judy, 1949- author. | Kaser, Linda, author.

Description: Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 2022018819X | Canadiana (ebook) 20220188408

ISBN 9781774920206 (softcover) | ISBN 9781774920282 (EPUB) ISBN 9781774920275 (PDF)

Subjects: LCSH: Learning. | LCSH: School environment. | LCSH: Effective teaching.

LCSH: Educational leadership. | LCSH: Inclusive education. | LCSH: Career development.

Classification: LCC LB1060 .H35 2022 | DDC 370.15/23—dc23

25 24 23 22 1 2 3 4 5



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Winnipeg, Manitoba

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*For inquiry-minded networked
educators everywhere*

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INTRODUCTION

WE HOPE YOU are reading this book because you are curious about how to create greater equity and quality in your school and community. You may be a classroom teacher, a formal leader, a system-level leader, a member of the support staff, a teacher candidate, a student leader, a cultural worker, or an interested family member. You may live and work in a complex urban setting or a small rural community. You may be early in your career, or you may be contemplating what your plans might be after your formal career is over. We hope that you have a friend with whom you can share these ideas. Regardless of whether you are reading this on your own or as part of a learning team, you care deeply about the learners in your community, and you want to improve their lives and their life chances.

Throughout this book you will see us refer to inquiry leadership teams. Meeting the complex needs of every learner, and leapfrogging inequality as a system, is impossible for any one teacher, formal leader, or school to do alone. We need to reach out to colleagues for support, encouragement, and challenge. We need to stretch our thinking and question our own assumptions and practices. It is through teamwork that we will grow as professionals and make the greatest difference for our learners.

We believe that leadership is defined more by contribution than by formal title or role. In our view you are a leader if you are willing to step outside of the

confines of your own classroom, school, or community to consider the ways in which your actions can contribute to better outcomes for your learners. Yet we also know that the active involvement and support of a formal leader is crucial in maximizing impact.¹ In the chapters to come, we will discuss the roles and opportunities of all leaders, whether informal or formal.

Initially the inquiry leadership team may just be a few individuals committed to system change. In some settings it is a teacher-leader who provides the ongoing leadership. Regardless of the makeup of the group, it is the commitment of the individuals working as a team that will make the difference. When teams meet across schools—in a network—they can have an impact on individual schools and on the system as a whole. Whatever form your own team takes, we hope that you will find ideas, strategies, and examples in the following pages that will deepen and strengthen your work.

This book is a labour of love for us. We have both been in education for a long time. Linda claims she has been in education for her lifetime since, when she was a very young child, her mother ran a kindergarten in their home. She spent her spare time as an elementary school student stapling and filing papers for her father, who was then the president of the local teachers' association. Teaching and activism are in her blood. Judy doesn't have quite as strong a claim for her educational lineage, but with a grandmother and a brother as teachers, it is definitely in her DNA.

We first met when Linda was working for the Ministry of Education for the Province of British Columbia (BC) and came to visit the school where Judy was working as a school counsellor. Judy had developed a group counselling program for students whose families were experiencing separation and divorce. As Linda was looking at the poster on the bulletin board offering a number of different group counselling options, she bumped into Judy. She asked her who had thought up this approach and how it was going. This was a pivotal moment for Judy. Having someone in an important position (like the one Linda had) ask her about her thinking and her practice was unusual. It made her think about the power of a good question and the importance of respectful listening.

Around this time, Linda was known in BC as the “writing lady” for her work in developing a highly successful provincial young writers network. This network brought together teachers from across the province who developed some great strategies, and collectively this network was able to boost writing performance across the grades.

A decade later, Judy was serving as a secondary principal and was working hard to create a more responsive, engaging setting for her learners. She was thriving in this role. At the same time, Linda was asked to move from the elementary school where she was a highly regarded principal to take on the leadership of a very dispirited secondary school.

There were relatively few female principals of large secondary schools in the early '90s, and Linda reached out to Judy for friendship and support. We ended up gathering a small group of female principals who met monthly to exchange ideas, resources, and stories and to enjoy the occasional glass of wine.

THE NETWORK BEGINS

Fast-forward to the summer of 1999 when we were both invited to a meeting that would change the course of our careers for the next two decades. The Ministry of Education had just released a series of learning progressions (BC performance standards) for reading, writing, numeracy, and social responsibility. Hundreds of teachers had been involved in the development of these progressions, and they had the potential to be an invaluable set of resources. The wise person leading this work at the Ministry knew that if the resources were simply sent out to schools in shrink-wrapped binders, the chances of their being widely used were slim to none.

At the meeting, each of us was offered a small grant to see what we could do to encourage teachers to use the materials. It didn't take long for us to decide to consolidate our two regional grants. We knew from our own experience that we needed to involve teams of teachers and principals, that the work needed to be invitational and inquiry-based, and that the meeting structures needed to be simple. This was the starting point for what was originally called the Network of Performance Based Schools.² Neither of us would ever have imagined that what started as a simple invitation would become the heart and soul of our lifework.

The network grew steadily over the next ten years and took a big step forward in 2009 when the late and much respected Kwakiutl educator Dr. Trish Rosborough (at that time the Director of Aboriginal Education at the Ministry of Education) asked us to meet with her at a downtown hotel. At the time, the Ministry was encouraging school districts and local Indigenous communities to develop plans to improve the experiences of Indigenous learners. These

Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements required an enormous amount of work at the district and community levels. Collaboratively developed and endorsed, they represented new forms of partnership aimed at creating better experiences for Indigenous learners in BC public schools.

Over a coffee, Trish told us that she had seen that we were having success in developing networks focused on changing outcomes for learners in the key areas of the performance standards. She wondered if we might be willing to develop a similar network focused on Indigenous education. Could we move the goals of the enhancement agreements from being well-intentioned words on paper into action in classrooms? With that invitation and challenge, the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network was formed. The response from BC educators to the opportunity to learn more about Indigenous ways of knowing and to change practices to better reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning (developed in 2008) was very positive.³

In 2016 at a meeting of network leaders, the team decided to combine the networks into one—now known as the Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (NOIIE). We have made considerable progress on our equity and quality goals in the past few decades—and we still have a long way to go before every learner, regardless of their gender, race, orientation, or background, crosses the stage with dignity, purpose, and options. Perseverance, commitment, and courageous leadership are all required for us to reach 100%.

From our own experiences, especially as female leaders, we know that leadership can sometimes be lonely. We know how important it is to create appreciative spaces, where vulnerability is seen as a sign of strength and not a weakness, where courage and fear aren't mutually exclusive, and where it is acceptable to be deeply curious. For many educators, the network has become a space where everyone can leave their formal role at the door, enter as a learner, and focus on the work that needs to be done.

TRANSFORMATION REQUIRED

We have all heard that education systems designed in the last century must change to meet the needs of our learners and our societies today. We know that

schools must be transformed to engage young people. Accepting these views is relatively easy. The trickier questions involve knowing what this transformation will look like and how we can achieve it.

We have been interested in understanding school leadership and in developing new leaders for a considerable period of time. Working with hundreds of educators in graduate programs in British Columbia at three different universities over the past two decades has given us a broad perspective. In 2009, we wrote *Leadership Mindsets: Innovation and Learning in the Transformation of Schools* to explore some of the key areas of leadership that we had observed in our strongest school and network leaders. A clear sense of purpose and inquiry competencies were important features of this book, and their importance is just as significant today.

In their provocative book, *Leapfrogging Inequality: Remaking Education to Help Young People Thrive*, Rebecca Winthrop and her colleagues from the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, argue that inequality is far too prevalent locally and globally. These scholars urge us to link successful innovations in networks to speed up the range of more equitable outcomes in developing systems by leaping over obstacles or barriers pervasive in more developed jurisdictions. They note:

In many areas of the world the leapfrog mindset is alive and well. Children from poor and wealthy families alike are participating in new approaches that have shown impressive results in changing how schooling is delivered, what is taught, and how teaching is done. This richness of education innovations holds promise for leapfrogging—addressing skills inequality and skills uncertainty—especially if the education innovations community can do a better job of mitigating current gaps and governments can provide a conducive environment for effective innovations to thrive and be scaled up.⁴

Leapfrogging Inequality argues for the development of learning systems that place curiosity at the centre of the learning and teaching process and settings in which hands-on, playful, and experiential learning are centre stage. We agree with this system-changing challenge. We see the leadership teams involved in Spirals work making a big contribution to this dramatic shift—in individual schools and in networks—across a wide range of jurisdictions.

SCHOOL COMMUNITIES THAT ARE CHANGING EXPERIENCES FOR THEIR LEARNERS

We have learned a great deal from the educators in BC and increasingly from around the world who have entered into the networked space of inquiry and connections. Those school communities that are making the most difference for their learners share five important foundational qualities:

They are clear on their purpose. They know what they are doing and why they are doing it.

They are persistently curious. They ask questions, they listen to their learners, and they listen to each other.

They demonstrate a growth mindset. They believe that with effort, support, and strategies they can and will improve.

They are committed to equity. They deliberately identify barriers that predict success or failure, and they intentionally disrupt them. They take an active stance to eliminate racism.

Finally, **they work as teams** both within their schools and across their communities.

The global pandemic uprooted many of the traditional givens for school systems. Ideas about place and space, assessments, lesson plans, grading systems, and the concept of classroom shifted on an almost daily basis. While some educational communities expressed a longing for a return to “normal,” many others seized the opportunity to make creative changes based on the needs of learners. The purpose of this book is to provide inquiry teams with an approach to dramatically changing the experiences of young people based on evidence about what makes a difference to learners and to their learning—evidence that is being applied in real schools in real communities doing the hard work of transformation.

Although reformers like to argue the relative merits of improvement, innovation, and accountability, these distinctions are not as relevant to practitioners who may be struggling to make learning more engaging at this moment in their particular context. Through a disciplined approach to collaborative inquiry, resulting in new learning and new actions, educators, learners, their families, and

involved community members are gaining the confidence, the insights, and the mindsets required to design powerful new approaches to learning. This process is transforming their schools and their districts. Innovative learning environments are being created and sustained.

We believe that innovation floats on a sea of inquiry. We also believe that curiosity is a driver for change. Creating the conditions in schools and learning settings where curiosity is encouraged, developed, and sustained is essential to opening up thinking, changing practice, and creating dramatically more innovative approaches to learning and teaching. As educators, we all want to engage with ideas and practices that make the biggest possible difference.

THE SPIRAL OF INQUIRY AND INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING

In our early days with NOIE, we asked schools to engage in a year-long cycle of inquiry and then to publicly share what differences they had made. When we discovered the research of Helen Timperley, a professor of education at the University of Auckland, we knew that we needed to combine our case study research from BC with her research on high-impact teacher professional learning. Lorna Earl, an assessment expert from the University of Toronto, brought us together for a think tank in Northern Colorado during mud season. Cooped up over three cold and damp days, we generated an exhaustive list of ideas we thought were essential for contemporary school leaders. We called this list the “theory of everything” or, more informally, the TOE job. We decided we had to narrow the focus just a bit and agreed to meet with our new friend from New Zealand in various parts of the world to see where our ideas converged.

Together we experienced an Antarctic front sweeping across Waiheke Island in New Zealand and a mould-infested condo in Honolulu. We debated every idea and every word, and we became good friends. The Spiral of Inquiry process is the result of this collaboration.

A number of publications emerged from our time together. In 2013, the two of us wrote *Spirals of Inquiry: For Equity and Quality* as a publication for principals and vice-principals in BC. In 2014, we published a monograph with Helen Timperley entitled *A Framework for Transforming Learning in Schools: Innovation and the Spiral of Inquiry*. In 2017, we were asked by C21 Canada to write a playbook version

of our original *Spirals of Inquiry*, and this has since been translated into Swedish, Spanish, Catalan, and Welsh. This book builds on what we have learned over the past decade as inquiry teams apply the Spiral of Inquiry in a variety of settings. It expands on the original key ideas, provides current research evidence connected to the stages of the Spiral, and uses examples from schools in a range of jurisdictions to illustrate the ways in which leadership teams are applying these ideas.

The image of the spiral was chosen deliberately. Many action research cycles are illustrated as a circle with a beginning and an end. The spiral reflects a never-ending process of curiosity, growth, learning, acting, and reflecting. The spiral shape holds a special significance in a range of Indigenous cultures. For many Indigenous peoples in North America, the spiral represents the evolution and growth of the spirit, the “broadening of consciousness.”⁵ It is a symbol of change and development.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning represent a starting point for identifying common elements in learning and teaching that exist in First Nations’ societies in BC. One of the nine principles is that “Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational.” A further principle is that “learning requires patience and time.”⁶

While we accept the need for patience, we also need purposeful action for things to change. Bringing to life the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Canada has started and is very much a work in progress.⁷ The discovery in June 2021 of the unmarked graves of 215 children who died at the Kamloops Residential School on the territory of the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation rocked the consciousness of Canadians and emphasized, yet again, the importance of education as a path to reconciliation.

Leona Prince is the District Principal of Aboriginal Education in the Nechako Lakes School District in British Columbia. She is a member of the Lake Babine Nation and comes from Nak’azdli Whut’en. She also belongs to the Lakh Tsa Mis Yu (Beaver) Clan. In March 2021, Leona spoke at an international conference (International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement [ICSEI]) as part of a team from the Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education. Here are her observations about the connection between the Spiral of Inquiry and the work of reconciliation:

Throughout my career as an educator I have always gravitated towards tools that recognize and affirm the rich diversity that we have here in BC. After becoming involved with NOIE, I came to the realization that this framework is a tool for reconciliation. This is not something that I say lightly. I firmly believe that Indigenous pedagogy is fluid, based in relationships, and has multiple entry points where all can engage in learning. These are all things that are true of this model of learning, as well. Most importantly, the Spiral of Inquiry places our children at the center of all knowing, being, and doing. This is an iterative model that is process-driven, which mirrors Indigenous culture and knowledge practices. There is no expected end, but an infinite opportunity to improve on our skills and collective knowledge. This is what current-day public education should look like and what we aspire to achieve. We should value, as a system, process over a product-driven pedagogy. There is a danger to being product-driven, because there is a finality to it, and it limits the potential of our children and by extension our future within this province and country.

The foundation of the inquiry process is relationships. This reminds me of the original relationships of this country and the intention moving forward. The original relationships between Indigenous and Settler nations were built on the idea of mutual respect and mutual understanding, two canoes moving together along the same path. These agreements were to last “as long as the grass grows, the river flows and the sun rises in the east and sets in the west,” in perpetuity, like the spiral. Throughout our history we have forgotten those intentions, and tools like the Spirals of Inquiry can help us remember and re-establish that knowledge and process those truths. Inquiry is the Truth in TRC. It helps us affirm the foundations that we are starting from and gives us an opportunity to be honest about the work that we need to do, together. There is no other process that has validated Indigenous Knowledges and has promoted growth more than this model in BC. *Mesij*.⁸

As Leona so thoughtfully points out, the Spiral of Inquiry invites you into a new, respectful, professional learning space. It asks you to engage in a process that will include surprises and cause you to sometimes feel uncomfortable. It can also be deeply satisfying as you make tangible progress in addressing real learner-related

challenges. It is difficult to work out more effective ways to do things before you have a clear understanding of what is currently happening and why. The Spiral asks you initially to suspend judgment on how to “fix” things that are not going well. You need to talk with—and listen to—the learners themselves right from the start. You need to exercise patience and to take your time. The Spiral challenges often long-held biases and assumptions, and requires you to engage in professional learning with an activist stance.

This book reflects our desire to honour the work underway in network schools, to build on the experiences and wisdom of inquiry leaders across countries, to provoke new thinking, and to provide some specific strategies for school teams ready to get started—or keen to go deeper—in leapfrogging inequality and creating genuine equity. The stories included in this book reflect the work in schools we have visited and the educators for whom we have the greatest respect and affection. Although the names of the people and of the schools have been changed, the stories and the spirit of their work are very real.

This book is designed to help teams get started or to go deeper with the Spiral of Inquiry. The first chapter outlines some of the foundational ideas and the research behind the Spiral. Chapters 2 through 4 provide a more in-depth dive into the first three stages of the Spiral—Scanning, Focusing, and Developing a Hunch. We chose to divide the new learning stage into two chapters, so chapter 5 introduces areas for new learning that many network schools are finding especially helpful while chapter 6 provides a series of considerations for inquiry leadership teams as they design New Professional Learning for their colleagues. Chapters 7 and 8 complete the final two stages of the Spiral—Taking Action and Checking. Chapter 9 provides some examples of the ways in which networks across a range of jurisdictions are working together to build equity and quality for all learners.

Each chapter concludes with a brief summary of the key points that we think are most important for you to consider. You will also find a series of questions designed to prompt learning conversations with your team or to serve as prompts for book club meetings. Finally, because this book is all about leadership for change, we will suggest a few specific moves for formal leaders to consider each step along the way.

Let’s get started.

1

PURPOSE, CURIOSITY, AND MINDSET

Three Foundational Ideas

**What motivates you as an educator?
What do you wonder about?**

In her early 20s, Linda found herself teaching in a North London primary school. There she met Ronald, a little boy with endless vitality who slept in a chest of drawers, as there was not enough room in the single bed for him and all his siblings. Judy spent two of her formative years as a teacher in a remote community where jobs were scarce and the future for all but the very fortunate was uncertain. The despair she felt hearing that three boys in her class engaged in a suicide pact the year after she moved out of town has haunted her. Judy never stopped wondering what could have stopped this tragedy. Linda has never stopped wondering what happened to Ronald. These experiences, along with many others, have fuelled in us a passion for social justice and the drive to make schools a place where hope is nurtured, options are expanded, and futures are created.



AS EDUCATORS,¹ YOU have undoubtedly all had moments of outrage when you struggled with unfairness, injustice, poverty, and inequity. The Spiral framework has its roots in moral purpose. The process involves deep listening and challenges often long-held biases and assumptions. It requires inquiry teams to engage in professional curiosity with a growth-oriented mindset.

In this chapter, we will provide you with a rationale for three foundational ideas and a brief description of the stages of the Spiral itself. In the following chapters, we will dive more deeply into each of the stages, always coming back to the central purposes of equity and quality.

WHY CLARITY OF PURPOSE MATTERS

In leadership teams, it's important for you to be clear on your shared purpose as you re-design the learning experiences of the young people you serve. When our commitment is to equity and quality, simply providing the opportunity for learning is not enough. Comments such as "I've done my best to teach them; it's not my problem if they didn't learn" are completely unacceptable. As educators, it is not only our problem, it is our professional responsibility to lift every learner. The days of it being acceptable for some young people to leave school with marginal skills and minimal knowledge, lacking the capacity to participate fully in society, are long behind us.

We like how the Australian state of New South Wales conveys a purposeful feeling in their motto: "Every learner is known, valued and cared for." Building

cultures where this motto comes to life is not an easy task. We need schools to be centres of learning and connection for everyone.

Historically, schools have served a sorting purpose, determining which students will go on to university, which students will access some post-secondary training, and which students will go directly to work. In our complex, uncertain, interconnected, and volatile world, we need much more from our schools. One way of illustrating this is to show the shifts required if we are to move more quickly from sorting to learning systems.

FROM SORTING	TO	LEARNING
A focus on instruction and academic achievement		A focus on deeper forms of learning and well-being
Summative assessment for grading and reporting		Formative assessment for coaching and learner agency
Teaching in isolation		Teaching teams working as learning communities
Competition between schools		Networking and collaboration across schools and with communities
Leadership by role/focus on the individual		Leadership by contribution/focus on the team
Externalized accountability		Local internalized commitment and responsibility and capacity-building
Maintaining the status quo		Passionately pursuing equity and quality for all learners

Tackling the challenge of creating higher quality and more equitable learning systems for all young people is tough, complex work. It is not work for the faint of heart, nor can it rely on the lone heroic educator. Changing systems requires teamwork, courage, commitment, collaboration, curiosity, and an intense sense of moral purpose.

Right now, we encourage you to think about why you are interested in engaging in Spirals of Inquiry.

- What drives you to want to change the experiences of your learners?
- Do you have in mind a group of learners whose challenges trouble you? Who is the Ronald that you wonder about?
- Can you articulate clearly the purpose for your school?
- Is this purpose broadly understood and shared by your school community?
- To what extent do your day-to-day actions match your values?
- Are you ready to have your assumptions challenged?
- Are you curious about what is really going on for your learners? Are you ready to listen to them?

STARTING WITH MORAL PURPOSE

Simon Sinek, in his widely viewed Ted Talk² and then in his book *Start With Why*, uses the image of a golden circle to explain why productive leadership always starts with purpose.

He claims that virtually everyone in an organization or school can say *what* they do. For instance, “I teach history.” He further claims that most people can say *how* they do this: “I deliver curriculum, I assess progress, I provide feedback, and I report to parents.” He argues, however, that considerably fewer people in many organizations can give a clear answer to the question of *why* they do what they do. The main message here is that some leaders start and finish their thinking at the outermost circle. They ask themselves what they are doing and seldom think any further.

Leaders operating at the outer edge of the circle can lose sight of their actual goal and, as a result, fail at their main task of challenging and encouraging people to the greatest possible extent in their development, in their thinking, and in their actions. We have witnessed some educators in leadership roles who do the job and run their schools irrespective of the impact of their actions on their staff or their students.

We have also seen many leadership teams that are highly motivated by the conviction that they can help contribute to a more just world through high-quality education for everyone. As truly effective school leaders, their concern is not just about *what* to do. They know that *why* and *how* they do what they are doing matters.

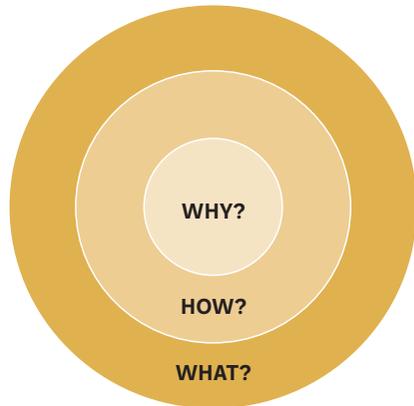
In our work with hundreds of schools in a range of countries, we have seen firsthand the importance of clarity of purpose *before* embarking on a new initiative or embracing a new program. When we know *why* we are making a change—whether it is designing deeper forms of learning, creating more inclusive and equitable learning settings, or prioritizing environmental sustainability—the chances of persevering when things inevitably get tough are much better.

The educators we work with are much more motivated by challenging, hard goals than by incremental goals such as those focused exclusively on raising achievement scores a few percentage points. The idea of “HARD Goals” comes from the work of Mark Murphy. His research finds that “HARD Goals,” which “are Heartfelt, Animated, Required, and Difficult,” can “light up the brain and encourage great performance.”³

This happens when we:

- genuinely believe in the importance of the goal (it is Heartfelt)
- bring it to life through our work every day (it is Animated)
- are driven by a sense of social justice and urgency for equity (it is Required)
- understand that achieving it will be truly challenging (it is Difficult)

The Golden Circle



In *The Infinite Game*, Simon Sinek talks about a just cause as the truly big idea or ideal vision of what we want to create. This is a cause that we stand for and believe in. Broadly speaking, the Spiral of Inquiry is rooted in a vision of equity and quality for all learners in every context, regardless of their starting point. This is our just cause, and it has developed over time into three big goals:

1. Every learner crosses the stage with dignity, purpose, and options

For us, crossing the stage is a metaphor for young people moving from adolescence to adulthood. Dignity implies that learners have the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being judged, that they feel safe both physically and psychologically, and that they are recognized for their strengths and contributions. A sense of purpose and genuine options for the future help equip young people with the confidence to make their way in a complex world.

2. Every learner leaves our settings more curious than when they arrived

Too often we have seen, to our dismay, the natural curiosity that young children bring to their early learning diminish in some school settings. The big questions about how the world works are reduced to “What is on the test?” or “What are we doing today?” Similarly, we see new teachers entering the profession eager to make a difference. It is tragic to see this enthusiasm diminished over time by static or negative cultures. We now know a great deal about how to develop inquiry-mindedness for educators and for students. It is our goal that every teacher becomes more curious about their practice and about their impact on learners. The Spiral is designed to open up space for adult curiosity and to create more curiosity-infused environments for learners of all ages.

3. Every learner gains an understanding of and respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and develops an anti-racist stance

The experience of colonization in many countries, including our own, has had lasting negative consequences for First Peoples. Understanding our various histories and the impact of colonization is a first step toward reconciliation and to creating more socially just societies. The Black Lives Matter movement is raising awareness of the insidious effects of racism within many cultures. Understanding and respecting Indigenous ways of knowing will help us in the hard work of reconciliation.

We share these with you as examples of the kinds of goals that have evolved from two decades of challenging conversations within and across inquiry-oriented schools. We offer them simply as a starting point for your own conversations about what the big purpose is for you, your school, and your network. And we encourage you to think about how, through engaging in Spirals of Inquiry, you can get closer to achieving your own bold goals.

WHY CURIOSITY IS SO IMPORTANT

A careful look at learning systems around the world leads us to believe that those systems with teachers and formal leaders who use their collective curiosity in learning teams are the ones that are doing the strongest job of helping their learners with the deeper forms of learning that are required today. John Watkins, Amelia Peterson, and Jal Mehta argue:

All over the world, school is changing. Faced with all the possibilities, inequities, anxieties, and complexities of contemporary life, educators and students alike are balking at an inherited approach to schooling that does little to prepare students for those challenges. They are finding ways to orient student work around meaningful questions and practices, replacing coverage with mastery of knowledge, busy-work with disciplined creativity, and one-size-fits-all with a diversity of promising approaches. Some of them have described this as a reorientation towards **deeper learning**.⁴

Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine have also introduced the notion of symmetry in educational change.⁵ Educators in many systems want young people to be curious, inquiry-minded thinkers, thoughtful problem-solvers, and wise decision-makers. The idea of symmetry is straightforward—if we want these outcomes for our students, then we need to strengthen adult competencies in these same areas. For young people to be curious, they need to be supported and surrounded by adults who are equally curious themselves. We need to place inquiry-based approaches at the centre of our own collective professional learning. This requires a shift in focus toward developing collaborative capacity among educators.

DR. JUDY HALBERT and **DR. LINDA KASER** lead the Transformative Educational Leadership Program at the University of British Columbia and are co-directors of the Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (NOIIE). Over the course of their careers, both Judy and Linda have served in many roles in the education system, including teacher, principal, district leader, and policy advisor with British Columbia's Ministry of Education.

They are co-authors of numerous books on achieving equity and quality for all learners and networking for innovation and improvement across systems. These include *Leadership Mindsets: Innovation and Learning in the Transformation of Schools* (2009), *Spirals of Inquiry* (2013), *A Framework for Transforming Learning in Schools: Innovation and the Spiral of Inquiry* (2014, with Helen Timperley), and *The Spiral Playbook* (2017).

Judy and Linda were recognized by the Big Change Organization as Pioneers for their work with NOIIE and were co-recipients (with Debbie Leighton-Stephens) of the prestigious Cmolik Prize for the Enhancement of Public Education in British Columbia (2019).



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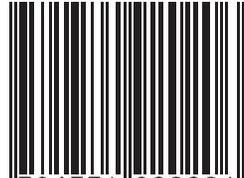
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ISBN 978-1-77492-020-6



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