



## **WHAT MAKES A THOUGHTFUL INQUIRY? A Thinking Guide for Inquiry in Network Schools Winter 2011**

### **A clear focus on deep learning**

“This will make a difference for our learners.”

### **Classroom / learning environment based**

“What we do together in our classrooms will make the difference.”

### **Important**

“This area and question really matters. The area is important (not trivial).”

### **Do - able**

“We will know within this school year what difference we are making.”

### **Interesting**

“We are genuinely curious and motivated about what we will discover.”

### **Evidence is classroom / learning environment informed**

“We understand, own and use this information.” “The use of criteria for quality is a central part of our work.”

### **The whole school is the focus over time**

“We know we need to get started with a few key people and we are also designing our inquiry with an impact on the whole school in mind.”

**Observations and Examples from the  
Network of Performance Based Schools and the  
Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network**

[www.npbs.ca](http://www.npbs.ca)

Your **school wide** inquiry has more learning power when it is...

### **RIGHT SIZED**

It is “right sized” – it is not too complex or too broad.  
Some schools make their inquiries too big or too complicated or inquire about too many areas at once.

**Advice:** Develop an inquiry that is big enough to be interesting to you and yet is also focused enough that you can make good progress in a school year.

#### **Examples:**

Blewett Elementary (SD 8):

- To what degree will a focus on cross-grade coaches using clear learning intentions, criteria and descriptive feedback, increase the number of students fully meeting or exceeding expectations in Reading?

Charles Hay Secondary (SD 52)

- Will a focused, skill-based reading group approach at the Grade 8 level significantly improve each student’s individual literacy level?

Mouse Mountain Elementary (SD 91 AESN)

- Will Grade 3 Aboriginal students’ reading comprehension improve with explicit instruction in main ideas and details and the use of the following formative assessment strategies:
  - Use of learning intentions in child-friendly language
  - Use of teacher/student criteria setting
  - Activating students and learning and teaching resources for each other?

### **LINKED**

Your inquiry is connected to your other school learning initiatives; it is not a question in isolation from your ongoing work. It fits with your overall thinking about what matters.

**Advice:** When you make strengthening learning in a VITAL AREA a focus of your inquiry, it helps to create coherence, motivation and meaning for learners and teachers.

**Examples:**

Lakes District Secondary (SD 91 AESN)

- Will the introduction of daily student support, a pyramid of intervention, focused individual goal setting and weekly teacher collaboration time improve the academic success of learners in Grades 8 – 10?

Campus View Elementary (SD 61)

- Will involving students in personalized science exploration improve student procedural writing in the areas of meaning and form?

**EVIDENCE-INFORMED**

It is based on a strong evidence foundation – from both research and practice. Inquiry is not an evidence free practice.

**Advice:** Build your inquiry on the best of what we currently know professionally from BOTH practice and learning sciences research – and then design a question that suits your context and school culture.

**Examples:**

Coldstream Elementary (SD 22)

- Through the development of multi-age groupings and the creation of activities for these groups, can the appreciation for diversity within our school be strengthened and social responsibility, both school community and globally be enriched?

Forest Park Elementary (SD 68)

- Will students' reading comprehension improve by participating regularly in Literature Circle conferences as outlined in Grand Conversations?

**DEEP**

Your question deals with the deeper areas of learning – it is not a shallow, surface issue. Learner meta-cognition will result – the learners will be able to explain their own thinking using the language of the performance standards criteria for quality.

**Advice:** Choose a question that is important and tough – one that will require you to think about new practices and, possibly, unlearn old deeply habitual routines. Make sure you plan for deep, ongoing teacher learning support on an immediate, annual and long-term basis.

**Examples:**

Foothills Elementary (SD 57)

- Will the co-construction and explicit teaching of cognitive “deep learning” strategies (e.g. making connections, questioning, visualizing, inferring, determining importance, and synthesizing) embedded in formative assessment (e.g. providing learners with clarity about learning intentions, providing and co-developing with learners the criteria for success in student-friendly language, and involving learners in self/peer assessment) result in improved student performance and self-monitoring in reading comprehension and writing?

Home Learners’ Program (SD 67)

- Will using specific strategies to communicate and connect with students at risk for school failure lead to improved student learning and connectedness?

Lake Cowichan Secondary (SD 79)

- To what degree does providing students with on-going descriptive feedback improve their ability to read for information?

**FAIR**

Your work considers the importance of moving learners out of the “not yet” group. Network members believe that educational fair play means that we will make sure as many of these learners as we can possibly reach move into the approaching and meeting and exceeding levels of learning. By sharing improvement strategies that work with these learners quickly province-wide the Network intends to make a contribution to both equality and quality of outcomes for BC learners.

**Advice:** We now have strong evidence from formal research and practitioner scholars in the Network that cross-grade work that is well structured makes a big difference to learners in the areas of citizenship, reading, writing, math problem-solving and active health/social responsibility. This evidence base must be put to work in our inquiries as it has provided such strong learning for both the older and younger learners.

**Examples:**

Heather Park Elementary (SD 57)

- Will grade two students familiar with metacognitive strategies and the use of the six formative assessment strategies be able to coach grade five students new to both metacognitive and formative assessment strategies to a better understanding of both skill sets? At what point will the older learners begin to take the lead?

Timberline Secondary (SD 72 AESN)

- Will the incorporation of a unit plan focused on *Shared Learnings* and student metacognitive journal reflections, as well as student interaction with local First Nations Elders/presenters (about their residential school experiences) increase student cultural awareness thereby creating a more sophisticated understanding of our local cultural landscape?

## **PRACTICAL**

Network members understand from their own experience with inquiry that it is challenging to develop a good question to get you started – and this work is based on a form of action learning that asks whether what you learn will be informative as well as whether it will help you make improvements in learning success for your learners.

Now that you have your question for this year, read the questions from other schools like yours – ones that have a similar context and interest. Get in touch with each other, follow up at regional meetings and by email or phone. Stay connected.

Over time, groups of staff working with curiosity and an interest in classroom learning, evidence and sharing ideas will make a difference. So be prepared to refine your thinking as you learn more.

This is inquiry-mindedness with a strong action orientation – aimed at helping every BC learner cross the stage with dignity, purpose and options.