Narrowing the Gap through Collaborative Enquiry
Key Points Summary
Narrowing the Gap through Collaborative Enquiry

+ **What is the project?**
This project will support small teams in Whole Education Schools to engage in collaborative enquiry, using the Spirals of Enquiry model, to narrow achievement gaps for their students.

+ **Why have you chosen this approach?**
‘Spirals of Enquiry’ is a proven approach, based on extensive evidence, which has been shown to have impact for student outcomes, as well as for teachers.

+ **What support will be available?**
There will be a national kick-off event in November 2014 and another in July to 2015 share findings. In between, there will be occasional themed webinars and fortnightly team calls with an expert enquiry coach, to help maintain focus and momentum. Teams are required to take part in all these activities.
Benefits and Outcomes

Why should we engage in this?

- Help narrow the gap in your school through sustainable school improvement
- Stimulate and/or further develop professional enquiry culture
- Provide development opportunities for staff at all levels
- Develop leadership and change capabilities in staff
- Opportunities for staff to become enquiry leaders across schools
- Contribute to growing evidence and knowledge base at a national level
Benefits and Outcomes
Why should we engage in this? Impact on students

Spirals has been powerfully used by teachers working with indigenous learners in BC schools, where there is a long history of underachievement for this student group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Enquiry question</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eighth Avenue Elementary</td>
<td>Will working in small groups benefit primary Aboriginal students in grade 3 personal writing?</td>
<td>In the Autumn 100% not meeting targets, in the Spring 12% not meeting target</td>
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<td>Lakes District Secondary School</td>
<td>Will the introduction of daily student support, a pyramid of interventions, SMART goals and weekly teacher collaboration time improve the academic success of Aboriginal students in grades 8 – 10?</td>
<td>Percentage of students not successful in at least one course fell by 20% from 2008/2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Forks Secondary</td>
<td>Will the development of an activity based lunch time program led by elders within our community improve the Aboriginal graduation rate for 2012?</td>
<td>Graduation rate improved from 85 to 93%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aspen Elementary</td>
<td>Do formative assessment strategies increase the oral language skills of our students?</td>
<td>Improvements from 30 students not meeting expectations in the Autumn, and 10 not meeting in the Spring</td>
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</tbody>
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Taken from Aboriginal Enquiry: Lifting All Learners 2013 pp. 65 – 70

There are also local results which indicate that school who sustain enquiry over a three year period show accelerated gains.
Benefits and Outcomes
Why should we engage in this approach in a network?

We know from research about professional learning that collaborative enquiry (e.g. in a network setting) consistently delivers improvements in learning outcomes for students as well as teachers. (Earl and Timperley, 2008)

*Spirals* has been the model for teacher enquiry used in the Network for Innovation and Inquiry across BC. Recent PISA (2012) results indicate that BC has maintained its position among the highest performing jurisdictions in the world.

In New Zealand and British Columbia (BC), where the Spirals of Enquiry approach originated, there is strong evidence of sustained improvements in outcomes where an inquiry focus is supported and sustained over time. (Halbert and Kaser, 2013)
The Spirals model

Spirals is based on a series of questions teachers ask about their learners and their practice to drive a process of enquiry and action learning. On the next few pages you’ll find a little more detail about each of the stages.
Understanding Spirals

1. **Scanning**: asking carefully crafted questions of learners that help us to understand their perspectives on how and what they are learning.

2. **Focusing**: exploring the issues raised by learners to identify priority areas for further enquiry.

3. **Developing a hunch**: exposing the beliefs and practices that have a bearing: what am I doing that’s contributing positively and negatively?

**What’s new?**

We think we know our learners, but do we really? Paying serious attention to the detail of what learners think, feel and do will provide fantastically helpful insights, useful throughout the school.

In *Spirals*, teachers dwell on really understanding the issue and the role they play in it. They are ‘held back’ from a rush to action, which is likely to result in only superficial changes which don’t then ‘stick’.
Understanding Spirals

4. New professional learning: seeking out fresh ideas and developing new practice by engaging with colleagues, other schools and with research evidence.

5. Taking Action: applying new learning and practice with a clear sense of the impact we expect to have for learners as we do so.

6. Checking: making sure we had the impact we expected. Have we made the difference we hoped for? If not, why not? What else do we need to do?

What’s new?
We are rarely asked to commit so explicitly to demonstrating that professional learning has a direct effect for learners in the way the Spirals model challenges us to.

We know that schools and classrooms are complex places. But we know too that teachers really make a difference for learners. Spirals focuses attention relentlessly on the interactions between teachers and learners, and their effects.
What does it look like in practice?

On the next couple of pages you will find examples of real enquiries conducted by teachers, using the Spirals approach.
Naksup Secondary School – How do we improve engagement in Science lessons?

1. Scanning
Teachers asked students at the beginning of the enquiry how they experienced their science lessons.

2. Focusing
Students told them that they felt disengaged and demotivated in science. They said they felt passive, with little ownership or say over what and how they were learning.

3. Developing a hunch
Teachers wondered whether motivation might be low because there was no way for students to connect what they were learning in science to the world outside the classroom. Teachers thought overuse of text books might contribute to this.

4. New professional learning
Teachers researched enquiry based learning in science. They found evidence that exhibitions of student work and personalised learning portfolios enhance student ownership of their learning and increase motivation.

5. Taking action
Teachers introduced an enquiry and competency based learning model into science, using the student’s own curiosities as the jumping off point for new topics. Students constructed portfolios in which they identified their personal strengths and areas to improve. They also noted their perceptions of the relevance of their learning in the real world.

6. Checking
Teachers and students reflected together on their starting points and progress. They noticed improvements in the quality of students’ work and an increase in students’ motivation. Students said that course materials took on a new light when they could apply it to their lives.
Teachers completed a common writing task with their classes, marked them together using shared assessment criteria, and then discussed their findings. They also talked to students individually and in groups.

They noticed that students appeared anxious and stressed when completing writing tasks, which got in the way of their success. Their focussing question was, ‘how can we decrease anxiety related to writing and increase the quality of writing output?’

There seemed to be increasing pressure placed on students to perform. Teachers wondered if children were missing the opportunity to enjoy writing because they were worried about “what we, the teachers, want?”

Teachers explored strategies from a formal writing programme which encourages students to engage the reader’s thinking as they write. They also made connections between writing and the school’s book club to explore reading and writing for pleasure.

Teachers used the assessment of the common writing task to identify aspects of students’ writing on which to focus. Teachers also worked with students to help them understand and handle negative thoughts and emotions, and some strategies to reduce anxiety. Students also used the assessment criteria to set their own writing goals and to self-evaluate.

There were significant improvements in students’ writing. Students completed a feelings journal entry on the topic of writing, which helped teachers to see that students were feeling more in control of their emotions around writing. Teachers also realised that being able to use strategies to control anxiety is a continuous process.
What’s the value add of the network?
Supporting in school and cross school learning to narrow the gap

At this point you might reasonably be thinking – OK I get it, and I’m convinced by the spirals model. But why don’t we just do this on our own, as an individual school? Why complicate things by doing Spirals as part of the network?

There are (at least) two really great reasons:

1. The enquiry will be supported in the first year by an international team of experts, including Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser, who developed Spirals in BC, Canada. Judy and Linda are excited to be working with us to introduce Spirals into English schools.

The enquiry will be led by Prof Louise Stoll and Julie Temperley, who between them have developed and led numerous enquiry based programmes. With participating schools, we aim to develop a version of Spirals that is ideal for our context.

2. Consistent and compelling evidence tells us that professional learning in networks complements and adds value to in-school professional learning. The diagram over the page illustrates this.
Individual schools and the wider network strengthen one another by engaging in joint work of value (Little 2005) and through the sharing of ideas and practice.

Making clear the end goal or ‘keeping the end in mind’ is critical to ensuring that enquiry can have maximum impact. Equally, understanding that it is changes in schools’ culture and teachers’ practice that lead to impact for students is key.
What will happen, when?

A possible timeline for enquiries:

- Scanning, focusing and developing a hunch – first half Spring Term 2015 (approx. 6 weeks)
- New professional learning – second half Spring 2015
- Taking action and checking – Summer Term 2015
- Sharing outcomes with others – July 2015 and beyond

Repeat cycle in schools for 2015-16
## What will happen, when?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sep 14</th>
<th>Jan 15</th>
<th>Apr 15</th>
<th>Jul 15</th>
<th>Sep 15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme</strong>&lt;br&gt;Launch at WE Annual Conference 19th Nov</td>
<td></td>
<td>Share outcomes at Summer Conference in early July and plan wider knowledge exchange</td>
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<td>Repeat cycle in schools for 15/16 and update programme based on learning</td>
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### National Twilight
- Possible regional twilight events in Spring term to share enquiries

### Virtual Twilight
- Webinars to help share emerging enquiries and learn about methodologies
- Virtual coaching and 1:1 calls with each enquiry team in schools
- Termly newsletters and research digests

### In School
- **Start Enquiry**
- Scanning<br>Focusing<br>Developing a hunch<br>New professional learning<br>Taking action<br>Checking<br>Knowledge exchange
- Repeat cycle in schools for 2015-16
Commitment from you…

To join in the enquiry you will need to commit:

**People:** For secondary schools the minimum enquiry team comprises a senior leader, middle leader and a teacher. For primary schools the minimum enquiry team comprises a senior leader and a middle leader or teacher. More staff are welcome to join teams if there is the capacity in school.

**Money:** Whole Education is subsidising the first cohort so the school investment is simply the cost of attending the two national events. We ask that the full enquiry teams attend both events (three people from Secondary schools, two or three from Primary schools). The launch event is on the 19th November in London and is £295 + vat per person and the sharing event will be in July (date and location tbc) and is £195 + vat per person. So, the total cost for a team of three is £1470 + vat and for team of two £980 + vat. These costs will be invoiced for following your acceptance on the enquiry.

**Time:** The time investment includes two face-to-face day events, one in November and one in July, and fortnightly coaching calls from January. We will also provide optional half termly webinars and, if demand, local hub twilight events. Other time commitment will be in school and at the discretion of your team. The enquiry approach is based on impact over the medium and long term so the expectation is that your enquiry will continue after the first year.
Commitment from Whole Education…

We will provide:

• A London launch event in November facilitated by the designers of Spirals and the project team (Dr Judy Halbert, Dr. Linda Kaser, Julie Temperley and Prof. Louise Stoll)

• A sharing event in July to discuss outcomes and plan for year 2

• From January, fortnightly coaching calls

• Half-termly webinars on pertinent themes

• Half-termly newsletters and research digests

• Options to become a coach for cohort two from Summer 2015