

the Spiral Playbook

Leading with an inquiring mindset in school systems and schools



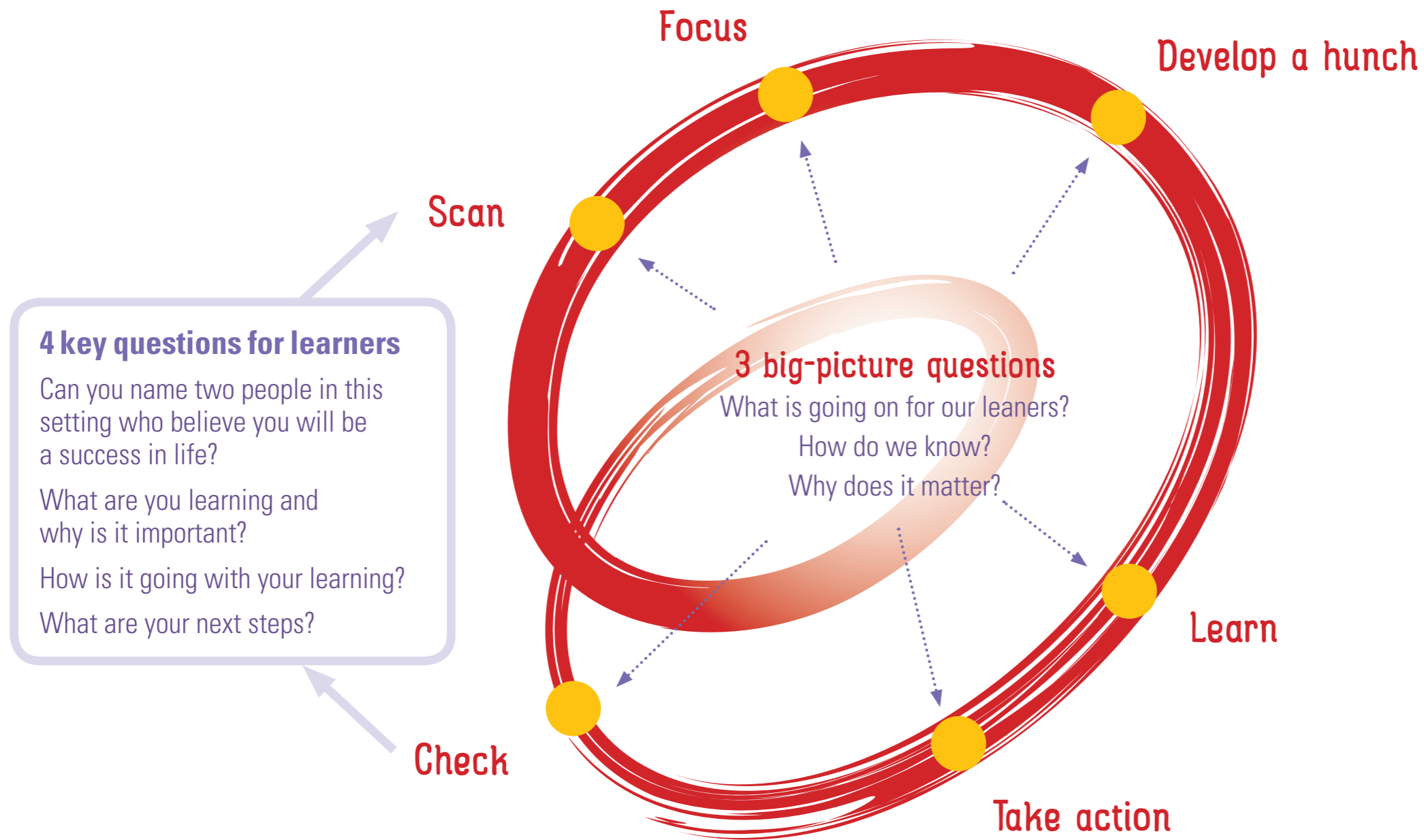
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Canadians for 21st Century
Learning & Innovation

the spiral of inquiry



Inquiry

is about being open to new learning and taking informed action.

Big ideas for learning and leadership

Shifting from sorting to learning – implications for systems and learners

From Sorting	To Learning
A focus on instruction and teaching	A focus on deeper forms of learning
Summative assessment for grading and reporting	Formative assessment to provide descriptive coaching feedback and learner self-regulation
Teaching in isolation	Teaching teams working as learning communities
External centralized pressure	Local internalized commitment, capacity building and responsibility



Big ideas for learning and leadership

The spiral of inquiry offers a way to shift from the fixed mindset of sorting and ranking to a **growth mindset** for deep learning.

Big ideas for learning and leadership

OECD seven principles of learning

- Put learners at the centre
- Emphasize the social nature of learning
- Understand that emotions are central to learning
- Recognize individual differences
- Stretch all learners
- Use assessment for learning
- Build horizontal connections

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

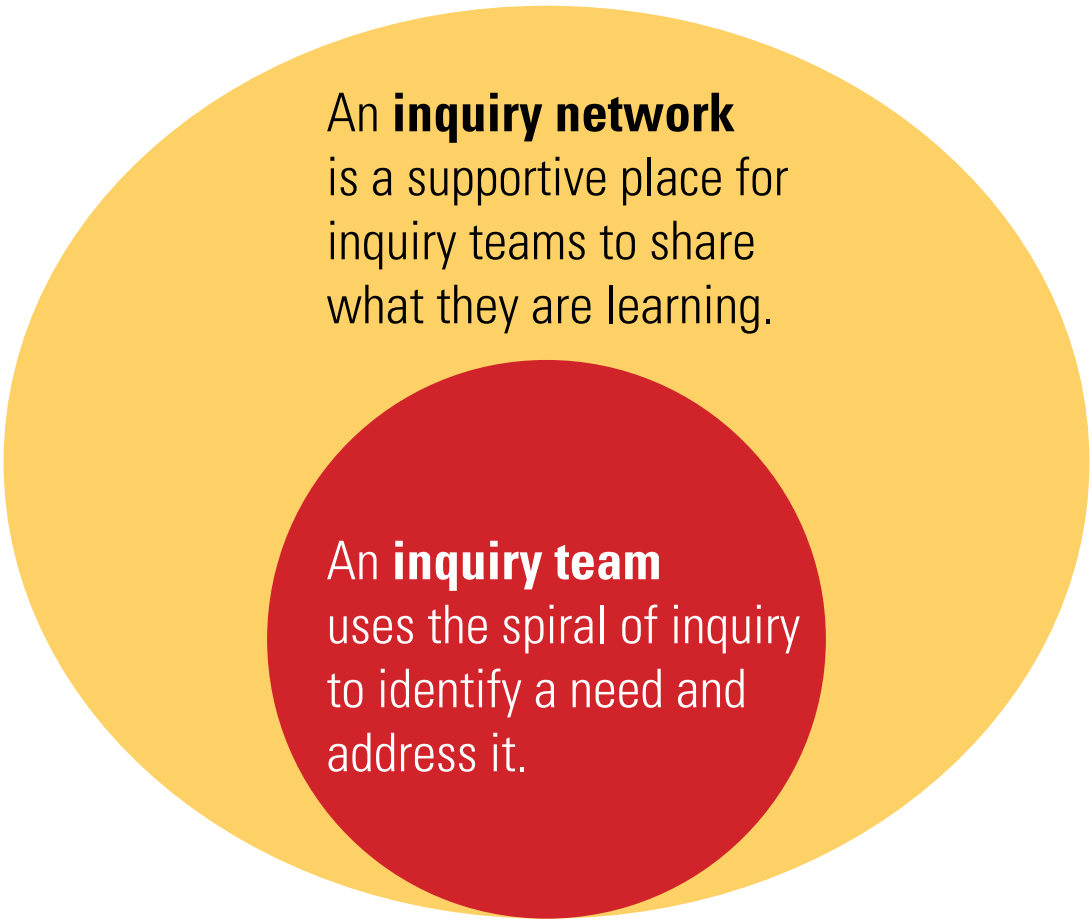
Big ideas for learning and leadership

First Peoples Principles of Learning

- Learning**
- ▶ supports the wellbeing of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
 - ▶ is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational
 - ▶ involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions
 - ▶ involves generational roles and responsibilities
 - ▶ recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge
 - ▶ is embedded in memory, history, and story
 - ▶ involves patience and time
 - ▶ requires exploration of one's identity
 - ▶ involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred

Source: First Nations Education Steering Committee, British Columbia (For the full text go to fnesc.ca/learningfirstpeoples)

Big ideas for learning and leadership



An **inquiry network** is a supportive place for inquiry teams to share what they are learning.

An **inquiry team** uses the spiral of inquiry to identify a need and address it.

The more intentional you are about using **the spiral of inquiry** to change outcomes for learners in your setting, the more coherent and innovative the whole system will become.

Questions to set your inquiry in motion

Start with a clear moral purpose

What are the quality and equity goals for all learners in your system?



Questions to set your inquiry in motion



3 big-picture questions

- What is going on for our learners?
- How do we know?
- Why does it matter?

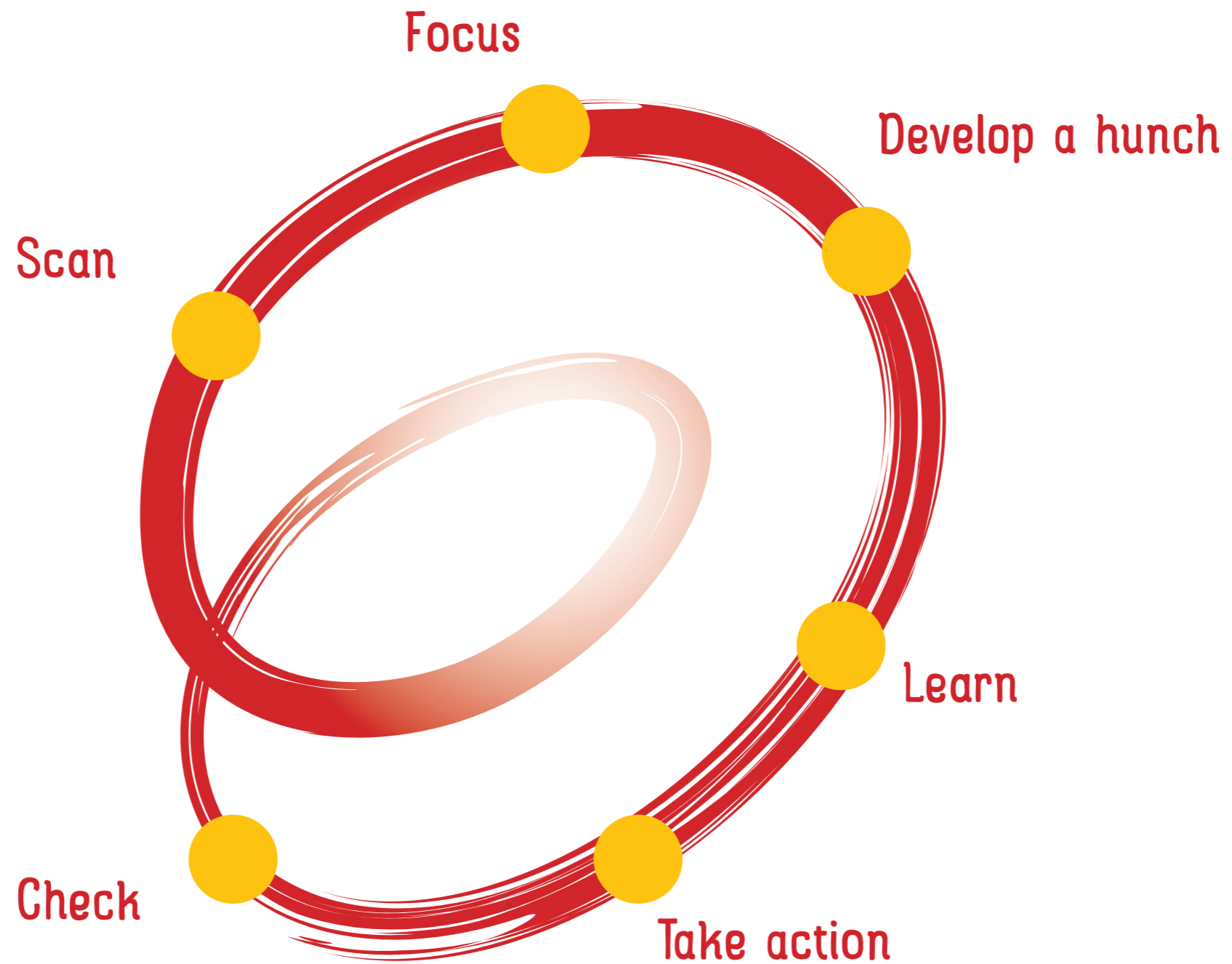
Questions to set your inquiry in motion

4 key questions for learners

- Can you name two people in this setting who believe you will be a success in life?
- What are you learning and why is it important?
- How is it going with your learning?
- What are your next steps?



Phases in the spiral of inquiry



Scan

What is going on for our learners?



Scanning involves

- A wide perspective on learning, informed by learning principles
- Finding out what learners think and feel about their learning, and what their families and communities perceive about their learning

Scanning is NOT

- Seeking evidence to reinforce the status quo
- Only looking at aspects of academic learning that are easily measured
- Exclusively about what the professionals think

Focus

What will have the biggest impact?



Focusing involves

- Using information from the scan to identify an area for concentrated team learning
- Gathering more information if you need it to understand the situation
- Building on strengths or positives, as well as clarifying challenges
- Identifying a common area that the team can work on together

Focusing is NOT

- The time to introduce completely new areas disconnected from the scanning process
- About assuming you have it all figured out and don't need to investigate any further
- Just about problems or challenges
- About everyone choosing his/her own area of interest

Develop a hunch

**What is leading to this situation?
How are we contributing to it?**



Developing a hunch involves

- Getting deeply held beliefs and assumptions out on the table about your own practices
- Focusing on things your team can do something about
- Checking your assumptions for accuracy before moving ahead

Developing a hunch is NOT

- A general brainstorm of all possibilities
- Being obsessed with the actions of others or with issues over which you have limited influence
- Venting about the past, fuming about the present, or finding someone to blame

Learn

**What do we need to learn?
How will we learn this?**



New learning is

- Tailored to the situation
- Directly linked to the focus identified earlier in the spiral
- Exploratory—testing how new approaches could be better than previous practices
- Sustained and supported over time

New learning is NOT

- Pursuing the latest trends
- Disconnected from the context
- Uncritically adopting new ways without understanding the purpose
- A short-term or quick fix

Take action

What can we do to make a meaningful difference?



Taking action involves

- Learning more deeply about new ways of doing things – and then trying them out
- Evaluating the impact on learners – and seeking their feedback
- Building trust and cultivating a growth mindset

Taking action is NOT

- Trying something new without considering its value and relevance in your situation
- Implementing without monitoring the effects on learners
- Assuming everyone feels OK about the change

Check

Have we made *enough* of a difference?
How do we know?



Checking involves

- Knowing what you want to accomplish for your learners and having specific ways to determine how you are doing—early in the inquiry process
- Setting high expectations that your actions will make a substantial difference for ALL learners
- Setting the stage for what comes next

Checking is NOT

- A routine to follow at the end
- Seeking some difference for some learners
- Judging the capacity of learners to succeed
- Justifying your actions

Celebrate what you have learned.

Acknowledge the gains, the losses, and the uncertainties.

Stay open to new possibilities.



Learn more at c21canada.org/playbook

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