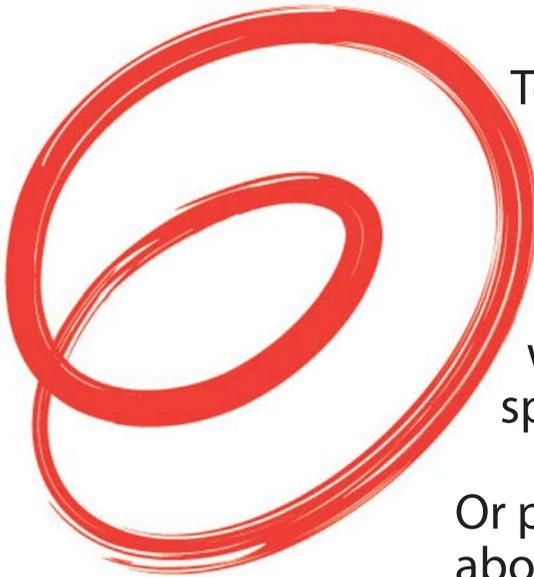


Spiralling in China

Jacalyn Kersey, a former Vernon Principal, writes about how the
Spirals of Inquiry
are having an impact at BC's offshore schools in China



Teachers who use the Spirals of Inquiry seem to find each other no matter where they are in the world.

Maybe it is because those of us that have worked with Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert speak a common language.

Or perhaps it's because we share a attitude about learning.

Jeff Laing, who is currently the Vice-Principal of Maple Leaf Foreign Nationals School in Wuhan, China has been teaching the BC curriculum in China for almost eight years. I first met Jeff at an August Professional Development day for new Maple Leaf Administrators in Dalian. At the break, Jeff and I fell into a conversation that used the language of Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser and the *Spirals of Inquiry*. It was wonderfully familiar language in an unfamiliar context. I first worked with Linda and Judy more than a dozen years ago when I participated in a provincial leadership professional development, and since then, through the Aboriginal Enhancement Network, and Networks of Inquiry and Innovation. I was delighted to discover that Jeff had worked with Judy and Linda in the Vancouver Island University Masters of Education in Educational Leadership. Hearing the language of the *Spirals* and connecting with a colleague with a growth mindset on my first day at work in China, was greatly comforting.

Moving to China after teaching in BC for 23 years was a scary undertaking. My husband was teaching Grade 7 in Lumby and I was in my 9th year as an Administrator of a school in Vernon. Our careers were satisfying, but when presented with an opportunity to live and teach overseas in the BC Program, we realized that we were ready for an adventure. We packed up our daughter, who was going into Grade 2, and we moved to China to work with Maple Leaf Educational Systems.

Unique Situation

Maple Leaf Educational Systems (MLES) currently enrolls 8600 of the nearly 30,000 students in the BC Program. In the early 1990s, Dr. Sherman Jen, MLES' founder and CEO, had a daughter enrolled in a BC public school in Vancouver, and he was so impressed with our system that he sought permission to start a program in China. In 1995, 14 students were enrolled in MLES. Today, MLES employs more than 400 BC Certified teachers at 11 MLES schools, and three K-9 MLES Foreign Nationals Schools. The MLES schools enrol mostly Chinese students who attend Chinese programs from K-9, and then enter the BC Program in Grade 10. They graduate in Grade 12 with the same BC Dogwood as onshore students. The Foreign National Schools enrol only non-Chinese students and the law permits them to study foreign curriculum in grades K-9. The three MLES Foreign National Schools enrol 350 students from 40 different countries, all of whom study the BC Curriculum. The goal of MLES is to combine the best of the East and the West. More than 50% of its graduates go on to attend the top 100 universities in the world.

Spirals at the School Level

In 2016, Jeff spent year one of his VIU Masters Program diving into the *Spirals of Inquiry* with the guidance of Judy and Linda. In his role as VP at the Wuhan Maple Leaf High School, he spent September, October, and November scanning to identify what was going on for Wuhan learners. Friday afternoon school-based professional development sessions included built-in dialogue time. Teams of teachers identified topics to explore and began dialogue around professional learning, setting goals, and identifying learner needs. Surveys, teacher dialogue, and focus meetings helped to determine that there was a need to support English Language learning and instructional strategies. Peer tutoring, ELA subject support, and further professional development opportunities were created. In August of last year, Jeff led a session on the *Spirals* that was attended by 30 Wuhan teachers. With Jeff's move to the Maple Leaf Foreign Nationals School, Melissa MacLean, incoming VP at the High School, took up the torch to coordinate the *Spirals*. With the help of many of the teachers who attended the *Spirals* session, she continues to move student support in a positive direction.

This spring, Jeff Laing plans "12 weeks of *Spirals*" in the classroom with the intermediate students at Wuhan Maple Leaf Foreign National School. He assumed his new role of Principal this fall, and he plans to continue to use the *Spirals* to continuously improve the school.

Spirals at the System Level

One of my roles as Assistant Superintendent is to demonstrate

that the entire MLES BC program is continuously improving. MLES is accredited by AdvancEd, a globally recognized educational accreditation board, and AdvancEd requires that we continuously strive to improve our educational practices to improve learning. The only way I knew to approach this daunting task was to use the *Spirals*. With the help of the Continuous Improvement Team (CIT, a group of 14 teachers and administrators who volunteered to represent all of the MLES schools), we set out to find discover what was going on for our learners. I gave a presentation on the *Spirals* at our first meeting. We then developed a scanning tool utilizing a positive inquiry perspective.

We asked:

- What is going well?
- How do we know it's going well?
- What could we do better?
- What should we do more of? *and*
- What should we get rid of?

Each member of the CIT engaged their school in an extensive scanning activity. Six weeks later, the team convened in Dalian. We put the results of the scans onto chart paper, spread them out across the room, and circulated to read and compare. We found that there were many similarities across the campuses, and that our scanning activity brought up many questions. We decided to focus on three areas that would have the biggest impact for our learners: data collection, information technology, and implementation of the new BC curriculum. At this point in time we broke into three groups, with each group taking on a focus area. We

spent several weeks developing Hunches, and learning about each area. We then came together to share our Hunches:

- that the data we would like to collect is out there, we just needed to gather it in an easier way
- that Professional Development around IT would increase innovative use in the classroom
- that a robust wifi system would help us with data collection and increase innovation in IT
- that Pro-D was needed to assist schools with the implementation of the new BC curriculum.

The three groups set out to learn more about their areas. They surveyed teachers, sat in on Department Head and System Coordinator meetings, and had one to one discussions. Eventually, each group set goals, benchmarks, and timelines. We presented these to departments that could help us to achieve each of them, such as the Head Office IT department, the Curriculum Team, and the Principals and VPs group. At the time of writing, we were in the Take Action phase, pursuing goals that we believe will make a difference.

Where to Spiral Next?

The CIT has an inquiry question that we developed in our first few meetings: “How will we know that our efforts to continuously improve will result in student success?” We will reconvene monthly to determine if our efforts are making enough of a difference. We will continue with the Spirals as we strive to continuously improve as a system.

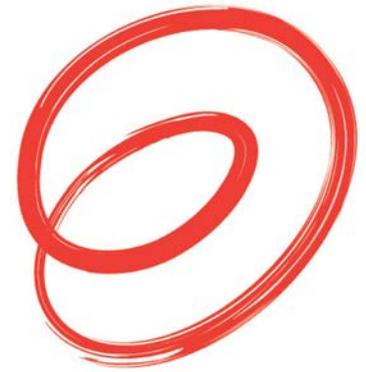
The CIT’s dive into the Spirals has created spin-off Spirals. The System

Coordinators (Itinerant teachers) and the CIT have found that our students entering Grade 10 often have no prior experience with inquiry, self-assessment, and self-reflection. The law in China for students in K-9 is that they must study the Chinese curriculum. They study English on top of this curriculum, but their exposure to inquiry, self-assessment, and self-reflection is minimal. In Maple Leaf High Schools, these concepts are introduced in Grade 10. The System Coordinators and CIT are currently learning more to determine how best to introduce, scaffold, and build mastery in the three years high school students are with us. We will soon move to Take Action.

Since connecting with Jeff Laing, I have met many more Maple Leaf teachers who are familiar with the Spirals, and with Judy and Linda. I had several copies of the Spirals Playbook when I arrived, and they are currently being used in Maple Leaf schools all over China. We will continue to grow our network within our system. The Spirals are an important tool to encourage collaboration and focus around the experiences and success of learners. In an international setting, a deep understanding of learning and the experience of learners is essential.

The Spirals provide a framework to gather information continuously about what our learners are experiencing, and to provide opportunities for growth and success.

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**Where
to
Spiral
Next?**

