Discussion Paper: Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry

Introduction

Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry is a core leadership competency that invites system leaders to embrace uncertainty, question assumptions, and model continuous learning. At its essence, inquiry is curiosity in action—a lived, daily practice that propels reflection, growth, and transformation. This competency is grounded in a belief that engaging learning environments emerge when questions are as valued as answers, and when evidence, innovation, and reflection become embedded in the very fabric of our systems.

A culture of curiosity is sustained not just by individuals asking good questions, but by organizations that structure themselves to support thoughtful risk-taking, reflective dialogue, and shared discovery. For system leaders, this means building trust, promoting diverse perspectives, and ensuring that data, stories, and lived experience are all part of evidence-informed decision-making. It means leading with humility and openness, recognizing that true inquiry requires not only intelligence—but courage.

This work is also deeply connected to Indigenous worldviews. It calls on leaders to value Indigenous knowledge systems, honour diverse ways of knowing, and embed inclusive decision-making practices. In fostering a culture of curiosity and inquiry, leaders support both personal growth and systemic transformation—advancing equity, student voice, and authentic engagement across communities.

Considerations for Leaders

1. Lead Self

- Model daily practices of inquiry with humility and curiosity.
- Pose challenging questions about personal beliefs, assumptions, and leadership practices.
- Embrace thoughtful risk-taking and remain open to being changed by what you learn.

- Critically reflect on diverse evidence—quantitative, qualitative, and experiential—to inform your practice.

2. Lead Teams

- Create psychologically safe spaces for curiosity, questioning, and innovation.
- Encourage teams to test new approaches, reflect on outcomes, and iterate practice.
- Build collaborative processes that engage multiple voices in shared inquiry.
- Facilitate the use of evidence to assess team impact and adjust course when needed.

3. Lead Organizations

- Embed inquiry into the structure and culture of the organization, linking evidence and action.
- Develop systems for transparent decision-making grounded in diverse forms of evidence.
- Prioritize equity by ensuring inquiry surfaces and addresses disparities in student experience.
- Nurture system-wide learning networks focused on iterative improvement, trust, and transparency.

Reflective Questions for Leaders and Teams

1. How do we cultivate a culture where questions are welcomed and inquiry is ongoing across all levels of the organization?
2. In what ways do our decisions and actions reflect evidence-informed thinking that includes both data and lived experience?
3. How are we intentionally creating space for diverse voices—especially those historically marginalized—in shaping our inquiries?
4. How do we ensure our inquiries lead to changes that improve life opportunities for all learners, with equity at the centre?
5. What systems have we put in place to share evidence, learn transparently, and adjust based on what we know?