The principles of learning to design learning environments

The overview section presents: a) the Learning Principles themselves, b) the Principles recast around teachers and educators. These Principles maintain that learning environments should: make learning and engagement central; ensure it is understood as social; be highly attuned to learners' emotions; reflect individual differences; be demanding for all while avoiding overload; use broad assessments and feedback; and promote horizontal connectedness. Tool 1.1 gets learning environments to interrogate how well they are organised so as to optimise young people's learning, using either a relatively rapid scan or more profound review. Tool 1.2 builds on the Learning Principles through a Spiral of Inquiry as developed in British Columbia, Canada. Tool 1.3 puts learners centre stage by getting schools to juxtapose the perceptions of staff with the views of learners themselves. Tool 1.4 recasts the Learning Principles so that they are focused on the educators, leading to the identification of priorities and strategies for action.

1.1 The ILE Learning Principles in brief

Learning research should deeply inform educational policy and practice. In order to embed the close understanding of learning in the *Innovative Learning Environments* (ILE) study, the OECD commissioned authoritative research reviews by prominent experts on different aspects of learning and asked them to identify what this showed for the design of learning environments (Dumont et al., 2010). We then distilled the conclusions from these different reviews into the seven Learning Principles presented below.

Identifying the fundamentals of learning provides the design principles to shape both individual learning environments and wider systems. Therefore, these principles are proposed as fundamental to all schools and learning settings as offering the building blocks of design, improvement and innovation.

The force and relevance of these learning principles do not reside in each one taken in isolation - they are not a menu from which to "cherry pick" some favourites while ignoring the rest. They add up to a demanding framework as the OECD proposes that all of them should inform practice and design, whether in schools or in wider settings and systems.

It is, however, unrealistic for a school or district to start working on all seven principles with equal priority at the same time. Instead, working on one or two – on engagement and emotions, say, or personalisation or formative feedback or horizontal connectedness – can provide the channel through which to drive the others. The tools outlined in this chapter recognise this need for prioritisation.

LEARNING PRINCIPLE ONE:
The learning environment recognises the learners as its core participants, encourages their active engagement and develops in them an understanding of their own activity as learners.

This principle means that learning should be at the front and centre. The learning environment should actively engage *all* students and develop in them the capacity to understand themselves as learners with the necessary strategies to be able to learn more effectively. This principle means that "learning centredness" should permeate the priorities of the learning organisation, whether it is a school or another site for learning.

The second key aspect of this learning principle is engagement: if students are not engaged how can they meaningfully learn? This is about *each individual learner* engaging and ensuring that all learners are engaged. The principle also stresses that learners should be capable of organising and monitoring their own learning, and able to assess what they have already accomplished and what still needs to be done.

When this principle is seriously informing practice system-wide, we would expect that teachers would locate student learning, learner engagement and success consistently

at or near the top of their professional priorities. We would expect teachers to be knowledgeable about the nature of children's and young people's learning and to grow more knowledgeable as they gain experience. As young people come to understand themselves as learners they would become articulate about the nature and activity of their own learning and that of their peers. Other members of the learning community should be able to articulate the centrality of young people's learning, reinforced by the quality assurance system.

LEARNING PRINCIPLE TWO:
The learning environment is founded on the social nature of learning and actively encourages well-organised co-operative learning.

Learning depends on interacting with others, though there will always be an important place for personal study. Those others may be teachers or other educators and/or peers. The interaction may be face-to-face or at a distance. It may be through different media. It may also involve community learning, including inter-generational contact with seniors.

Studies have demonstrated the robust effects of co-operative forms of learning when it is done well. The co-operation needs to be designed to enable learning by all and not only the most active in the group: it should be much more than simply letting young people talk and share tasks. It may be supported by communication technologies through discussion boards, blogs, forums, chat-rooms and messaging. The ability to co-operate and learn together should be fostered as a "21st century competence", quite apart from its demonstrated impact on measured learning outcomes.

When this principle is seriously informing practice system-wide, we would expect learning environments to be alive with the "buzz" of collegial activity and learning, though not necessarily all the time. Learning spaces, building layout, seating arrangements and the like would also reflect preparedness for group work. We would expect enquiry, problem-solving and project-based pedagogies to all be widespread.

LEARNING PRINCIPLE THREE:
The learning professionals within the learning environment are highly attuned to the learners' motivations and the key role of emotions in achievement.

Learning should not be understood as a purely cognitive activity as students' emotions and motivations are integral to its success. Students are not only more motivated to work hard and to engage when the content is meaningful and interesting to them but they learn better when they feel competent and experience positive emotions. Being attuned to one's emotions is an integral part of developing personal strategies

for successful learning. Using technology in co-operative, inquiry-based or community learning is effective partly because of its capacity to engage learners.

Being highly attuned to motivations and emotions is not an exhortation to be "nice" – misplaced encouragement in any case does more harm than good – but is first and foremost about making learning more effective.

When this principle is seriously informing practice system-wide, educators and others in learning communities will be articulate about emotions. We would expect that educational discourse, as well as the language used by learners and their families and other members of the learning community, would reflect the understanding that emotions are an integral part of learning success. Teachers and other educators will have developed pedagogical understanding so that they know how to push young people without ridicule or demotivation.

LEARNING PRINCIPLE FOUR:
The learning environment is acutely sensitive to the individual differences among the learners in it, including their prior knowledge.

Students differ in a myriad ways regarding their abilities, competencies, motivations and emotions; they differ too in their linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds. These differences significantly affect what happens in classrooms and the learning taking place; grasping such differences is critical to understanding the strengths and limitations of each individual learner and the larger group. A major challenge for all learning environments is to be sensitive to these differences, understand the different starting points of their students and adapt learning activities to them.

Technology is an important means to individualise information, communication and materials. Formally recording individual progress, with the active involvement of the learners themselves, permits the information to move from inside the teacher's head to become more visible and useful – to the learner, to the teachers in general and to others, including parents.

When this principle is seriously informing practice system-wide, it will be reflected in the mix of pedagogical practices being exercised – shared whole-class or multi-class learning activities; targeted small group or individual learning activities; face-to-face, virtual and blended learning; school- and community-based. We would expect there to be the widespread use of formative assessment throughout learning environments. As the learning becomes more personalised, the active role of the learners themselves becomes more powerful.

LEARNING PRINCIPLE FIVE:
The learning environment devises programmes that demand hard work and challenge from all without excessive overload.

That learning environments are more effective when they are sensitive to individual differences stems also from the fact that each learner needs to be constantly pushed up to and just above their own perceived limits of what they are capable of doing. No-one should be allowed to coast for any significant time on work that does not stretch them. By the same token, simply increasing pressure to overload does not make for deep and lasting learning.

When this principle is seriously informing practice system-wide, "growth mind-sets" (as described by Carol Dweck; for instance, 2006) will predominate over the common viewpoint that student capabilities are fixed. Instead of procedures that primarily aim at sorting students, we would expect the predominance of processes for optimising learning across the whole range of achievement and interest. There will be thorough-going personalisation as educators and learning communities devise innovative ways of stretching all learners.

LEARNING PRINCIPLE SIX:
The learning environment operates with clarity of expectations and deploys assessment strategies consistent with these expectations; there is strong emphasis on formative feedback to support learning.

Assessment is essential for student learning. Students need meaningful feedback on their work, while teachers need to assess progress regularly in order to adapt and personalise their teaching. Learners need to understand what is expected of them. Accordingly, assessments should be consistent with the learning objectives rather than representing a parallel set of measures unconnected with the objectives.

This principle is about making very clear what the learning is for and how to know when it has been successfully achieved. It is also about ensuring that the assessment is sensitive to individual strengths and weaknesses. And, it is about valuing feedback so that the assessment serves the formative purpose. All this implies demanding roles for teachers.

When this principle is seriously informing practice system-wide, there will be widespread capacity to articulate the methods of formative assessment and the use of evidence. Self-review and evidence-informed learning leadership will become increasingly prominent aspects of learning systems. There will be a significant shift away from simple "pass/fail" and "right/wrong" judgements towards mastery, understanding and the capacity to transfer knowledge to new problems. These demanding expectations will extend widely beyond individual professionals and schools in a culture of high quality teaching and learning.

There will be flourishing diverse metrics in use that are able to reflect deep learning, social capabilities and what are often called "21st century competences".

LEARNING PRINCIPLE SEVEN:
The learning environment strongly promotes "horizontal connectedness" across areas of knowledge and subjects as well as to the community and the wider world.

A great deal of learning comes about through making connections and especially when learners are able to make these for themselves. Learners need to be able to integrate discrete objects of learning into larger frameworks of knowledge and curricular themes. In this way, knowledge can be built on and transferred; it can be used to address unfamiliar problems rather than just those set by teachers at a particular time.

Connections need to be made across different subjects in inter-disciplinary ways. Meaningful real-life problems do not fit neatly into subject boundaries, and addressing such problems makes learning more relevant and engaging. Connections also need to be made between the learning that takes place within schools and outside. Learner homes, the community and the wider world offer enormous potential and sources for learning. In short, learning environments need to promote "horizontal connectedness".

Putting "Learning Principle Seven" widely into practice will have meant extensive work to integrate knowledge around key concepts. There will have been a great deal of research and development around pedagogical expertise, content knowledge and inter-disciplinarity. Diverse assessment metrics and flexible qualifications that assume holistic understanding will have incentivised leaders, educators and other professionals, learners and their parents and other stakeholders to embrace horizontal connectedness. Partnerships and networks will be the norm.

1.2 The principles reformulated around educators

The seven principles, reformulated around teachers and educators offer a parallel set of lenses through which to reconsider fundamental practices. Schools should be powerful learning and working environments for teachers as well as for the students. Viewed in this light, the principles reformulated in this way suggest that learning environments and systems should be:

- places where *educators share a clear priority about the centrality of learning,* for their students but also for themselves, and are fully engaged in meeting that priority; the teachers as well as the students understand themselves as learners

- where *teaching is not viewed as a private matter* and is often collaborative

- where teachers are recognised as performing much more effectively when motivated, which in turn is *intricately linked to their emotions* (satisfaction, self-efficacy, avoidance of helplessness and anxiety etc.)

- places which are acutely sensitive to *individual differences in the capacities and experiences of teachers*

- *highly demanding for each educator* while avoiding excessive overload and stress that diminishes not enhances performance

- where *expectations for educators are clear and they work formatively* – in their assessments and teaching of learners but also through organisational design strategies that generate rich evaluative information on the teaching and learning taking place

- where there is *horizontal connectedness* to which educators centrally contribute – across activities and subjects, in- and out-of-school and with other schools, groups and organisations with which the educators are connected.

TO FIND OUT MORE

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THE PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING TO DESIGN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: THE TOOLS

Tool 1.1 *How well do we embed the Learning Principles?* This tool allows interrogation of how well schools and other learning environments embody what makes young people learn best. This tool may be used for a relatively rapid scan, though ideally it should lead to a more profound analysis that will naturally take longer.

Tool 1.2 *Building on the Learning Principles through a Spiral of Inquiry.* This tool also uses the ILE learning principles but with a method – the "Spiral of Inquiry" – developed in British Columbia, Canada. The Spiral structures questions, dialogue, enquiry and research in sequence. It gets leaders and educators to engage in collaborative inquiry through a disciplined approach to help them design powerful learning environments.

Tool 1.3 *Learners at the centre – what do they think?* This tool puts the learners centre stage. It involves the juxtaposition of the perceptions of staff about learners with the views of learners themselves. The endeavour to gain an accurate picture of what students really think is itself revealing of how well the learning environment recognises learner voice. Making sense of the findings and their implications may well need the involvement of a third party as facilitator.

Tool 1.4 *Teacher-focused to be learning-centred.* This tool recasts the Principles so that they are focused on the teachers and educators. The innovative school demands new definitions of educator roles in which their own learning is fundamental to the success of the learning environment. The tool invites familiarisation with the Principles, choosing one as the focus for action and deciding on strategies for putting it into action.

Tool 1.1
How well do we embed the Learning Principles?

This tool offers a vehicle for asking searching questions about how well schools and other learning environments are based on what makes young people learn best. This may be in a single school. It may be a group of schools asking this question collectively. It may be a district (in which case replace "your school" by "your schools"). It need not be restricted to schools – a community learning project will find this tool just as relevant as will a school.

The tool may be used for a relatively rapid scan or for a more profound in-depth analysis. It will work best with a more in-depth analysis but the simpler review will still allow you to scan your school in terms of the learning principles – Steps One and Two – and provide a basis for moving forward.

The more in-depth exercise involves gathering evidence and deciding on action to be taken based on your analysis. It is also about following up on your actions to see how much better the learning principles are being put into practice as a result.

There are further basic choices for you to make in applying the tool. One choice is whether you feel it is more important to focus on the areas that are already strengths or instead on the principles that are the least well implemented in your school. There is the choice about whether to concentrate on all principles through a particular focus such as writing or number or verbal articulation or inquiry, rather than make everything a priority. Normally, you will need to prioritise.

Step One: Familiarisation with the Learning Principles

The first step is to discuss the meaning of these principles. It is not about how well they apply in your situation – this comes next. It is about making sure that everyone understands them. You'll find them in the introductory text. It involves reading them – in advance or as an exercise to do together – but it is especially about taking the time to discuss them.

Step Two: Overviewing the existing situation

This is now the time to ask collectively – a leadership group or a whole staff or school community – how well you think you are putting these principles into practice. As we stressed in the introductory text, we see these as needing to be considered as a whole set. While later you may prioritise, at this stage you

Tool 1.1 How well do we embed the Learning Principles? *(continued)*

should ask about how well all seven principles inform your practice. For your school, district or cluster:

- *How far is each principle reflected in your visions, plans and designs?* Place the numbers 1 – 7, corresponding to each of the Learning Principles, in the top half of the chart (Figure 1.1): are they sufficiently prominent or not enough?

- *How well is each principle being achieved in practice*, including how well it reaches all targeted learners? Now place the numbers 1– 7 in the lower half of the chart corresponding to "achievements in practice".

Take time to discuss the placements and why you have chosen these. Note disagreements about the placements but if possible seek a consensus viewpoint.

Figure 1.1. **Grid for locating the application of the ILE principles**

	Degree of application of the learning principles	
	Well or Very Well	Still Far From Enough
Intentions, plans and designs		
Achievements in practice		

Step Three: Gathering the evidence

List the kinds of evidence that will support the assessments of how well you are meeting the different learning principles, both in designs and in achievements in practice. Discuss how adequately the evidence identified will capture the placements. This has a double function: clarifying what you would like to know about the learning taking place and identifying the means to support your opinions.

Next, embark on gathering the available evidence to support these judgements. This process may well take time. If there are disagreements about the extent to which the school or schools are realising particular learning principles, your evidence may well resolve the question of which of the competing viewpoints is most plausible. (If this evaluative work starts to take on greater significance you may need to do it more systematically as with Tool 3.2).

Then, having gathered evidence:

- *Revisit the original placements* of the numbers on the chart in the light of the evidence: discuss whether they should be maintained and revise if necessary. Seek to resolve any disagreements in the original assessments.

Tool 1.1 How well do we embed the Learning Principles? *(continued)*

- *Discuss the adequacy of the evidence available* on how well the ILE learning principles are being met in your school/learning environment. You may decide that improved evidence should be part of your course of action (Step Four).

Step Four: Deciding on the course of action

This is a critical stage. Address the following questions:

- In the light of the review and evidence-gathering, what are the key priorities for change? Why these?

- What are your strategies to make these changes happen? Why are these strategies expected to produce the desired effects?

- (Anticipating Step Five) What evidence will show whether the desired changes are happening and how will we monitor the changes?

Step Five: Revisiting the situation

After an appropriate time period, review the progress achieved:

- *If the change has been disappointing*, ask: how far did we fail to implement an adequate strategy, is it too early to see results, or was our original analysis faulty?

- *If change has lived up to expectations,* what should we do next to sustain progress and to make more?

This tool, with its cycles of revisiting the application of the learning principles, may be applied repeatedly. In subsequent applications, other learning principles and priorities for action may become the priorities. If the ambition is to use it for more than the one-off scanning process, gathering evidence will be especially important.

Tool 1.2
Building on the Learning Principles through a Spiral of Inquiry

Another way of getting teams of educators to work together using the Learning Principles has been developed by our colleagues Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser in British Columbia, Canada, working with Helen Timperley in New Zealand. This is called the "Spiral of Inquiry" and it has been widely applied in Canada and further afield. The Spiral is a way of structuring questions, dialogue, enquiry and research in sequence. It aims to get experienced educators to engage in collaborative inquiry through a disciplined approach to help them gain the confidence, the insights and the mind-sets required to design powerful learning environments – indeed to transform their schools and their systems.

Engaging in the Spiral of Inquiry (Figure 1.2) provides participants with the experience of leading change in their own settings. Working as a collaborative team with the others embarked on a similar process in other settings builds confidence and allows joint learning from each other's experiences.

Figure 1.2. **The "Spiral of Inquiry"**
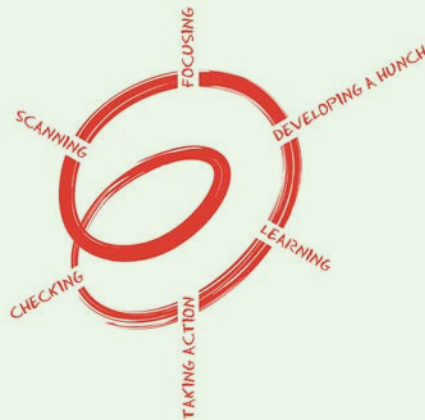
Source: Halbert, J. and L. Kaser (2013), *Spirals of Inquiry: For Equity and Quality.*

The diagram is a simple graphic showing how the phases need to be sequenced, and each phase is framed by three key questions:

- **"What's going on for our learners?"**
- **"How do we know?"**
- **"Why does this matter?"**

Tool 1.2 **Building on the Learning Principles through a Spiral of Inquiry** *(continued)*

In applying this tool, there should be a relentless focus on the experiences of the *learners*.

Scanning

The sequence begins by scanning the learning environment to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of the learners. The scanning process goes far beyond a simple look at available achievement data or results from satisfaction surveys. It involves asking searching questions drawn from the seven ILE Learning Principles:

- Do learners see and understand themselves as learners? Are they self-regulated? Are they becoming increasingly meta-cognitive?

- Do learners see and understand the connections across content areas?

- Are learning professionals tuned into the emotions of learners – and the connection between emotions and motivation?

- Do learners receive high quality focused feedback that provides clear directions for improvement?

- Are learners confident and comfortable in both giving and receiving feedback with their peers based on co-constructed criteria?

- Are all learners stretched through demanding, engaging and challenging work?

- Are learners engaged in high quality, well-organised co-operative learning on a regular basis?

- Is the prior knowledge that learners bring to the setting respected and valued?

- Are learners at the centre of every decision made in the school?

Scanning is all about collecting a variety of rich evidence about what is going on for learners. It is a process that takes some time. In a reasonable amount of time, generally ranging from one to three months, school inquiry teams can gather a great deal of useful information that covers all essential topics.

Sharpen the focus on a key area for change

Scanning typically raises lots of issues, but there is a limit to how many initiatives any one setting can take on simultaneously. A fragmented or

Tool 1.2 **Building on the Learning Principles through a Spiral of Inquiry** *(continued)*

scattered focus will result in overload and confusion. So, inquiry teams now sharpen the focus on an area for change that has high leverage while at the same time being manageable.

It is important to avoid premature decisions about what to do. Teams need to have the courage to slow down at this stage to develop a deeper understanding of what is going on in one or two key areas rather than moving to hasty action. In making the decision about where to focus, the key questions are: "What is going on for our learners?" and "How do we know?". So, it may be worthwhile to collect further evidence to know what is going on that can influence the choice of focus.

Developing hunches

The next phase involves developing hunches about the ways in which the learning professionals themselves are contributing to this situation. A "hunch" is based on intuition and not necessarily grounded in established facts.

The key point is the need to have the courage to put ideas on the table and to hear from a range of voices. This often requires courage, as it may need confrontation with well-established structures and routines that are actually contributing to the problems. The idea is get a collective understanding of the different hunches in play from those most closely involved, and these may be the learners, the leadership and/or teachers.

New learning

The "hunching" stage leads to discussion about what needs to be learnt and how this will occur as changing practice involves new learning. Designing new adult learning is the critical next step.

This phase is critical because better outcomes for learners are the result of teachers and leaders acquiring new knowledge and developing new skills that lead to new action. The main challenge at this stage is to decide on what to learn and how to learn it. It means asking why new ways of doing things will be better than what went before.

The authors warn to be wary of pre-packaged solutions, as these may well prove to be insensitive to the particular challenges of the school and learning community; they will not have involved sufficient collaborative work on the part of that community to arrive at the new learning needed.

Tool 1.2 **Building on the Learning Principles through a Spiral of Inquiry** *(continued)*

The authors also caution that the integration of new knowledge takes a minimum of a year of focused collaborative effort, and two years is likely to be much better. This shows that full application of the Spiral of Inquiry is not an exercise to identify change that might follow in the future but a powerful means of structuring that change process itself.

New actions and checking

New learning leads to new actions. It is about taking informed action that will make a difference. The starting question in applying the Spiral is "what's going on for the learners?" If the professional learning of the previous phase does not lead to change for the learners themselves, then the movement around the Spiral will have stopped just as it was reaching its finale.

The final phase involves checking to determine how much of a difference has been made. The authors insist that the key question here is "have we made enough of a difference?" This phase is about having an informed sense of the gains to be expected from the whole process. This requires making informed guesses about the time needed to see change happen and about the evidence that will make for valid checking that enough of a difference has been made.

Tool 1.3
Learners at the centre – what do they think?

This tool, more than the others in this Handbook, puts the learners centre stage (though we hope that they are active in the others, too). It involves the creative juxtaposition of two exercises - one about the perceptions of teachers and other educators concerning learner agency, the other about the views of learners themselves. It assumes a learning environment with significant existing trust towards the learners and a readiness to build on this still more. It also will call for a readiness to confront possibly uncomfortable findings without being defensive.

We do not suggest a strict methodology for using the tool. You may well want to listen to learners for their ideas on how it should be done.

The first two exercises are not steps, which would suggest sequence. They can be carried out simultaneously. We think it best to avoid that the one influences the other, so that you are able to base your review of "learner-centredness" on an accurate sounding of what people really think. The juxtaposition will occur when these first two exercises have been completed.

Putting learners at the centre – what do we do?

This is an exercise for all the educational staff. It amplifies reflection on the first of the 7 Learning Principles. It involves gaining an accurate picture of how staff perceive that learners and learning are at the centre of the school/learning environment.

This exercise focuses on the questions:

How far do we think learners are at the centre of our school (or other learning setting) and why? How far do our students exercise "learner agency" by making an active input and taking responsibility for learning?

Remember: this is not asking about how we wish things to be, but how they are at present. Having compiled staff viewpoints we suggest that they are put safely aside and left unchanged.

What do the learners think about the school and the learning they do?

This is all about the learners and what they think. You will need to devise ways of getting everyone to express their views on what they think about the school (or other centre or programme) and about the learning they engage in.

It should be revealing of how far young people see the school as a primary site for learning and whether they consider they learn as much or more outside school.

Tool 1.3 Learners at the centre – what do they think? *(continued)*

You will need to be creative in devising this exercise. If it is set as a standard academic test, we can expect that those who already do well will engage in it most and it will only confirm existing views. At the same time, if learners are to express themselves frankly, it will need to be clear that they can do so without any negative repercussions. As far as possible, it should avoid being personal about individual teachers.

Devising and running this exercise successfully should be regarded as itself indicative of the role of learners in your school. Gather carefully the insights you gain from conducting the exercise, in addition to what you learn from their expressed viewpoints. You will have to decide how far you want to extend the notion of the "learner" to include their families.

Making sense of the learner responses

Understanding what comes out of the learner responses will probably not be easy. They may say uncomfortable things. What they say may not conform with the ideas generated by the staff about learner-centredness. But it may also be difficult to make sense of the learner replies: it takes hard work to "dig the jewels out of the evidence" (as expressed by Earl and Timperley – see references to this chapter).

It will be preferable if you work with a facilitator to help this process. It may be, if you have a trusting relationship with another school, that the two schools conduct this simultaneously and staff members from the one act as facilitators for the other. You may wish to use a third party entirely.

However this exercise is done, the important thing is to gain a close understanding of what the learners are telling you. Part of the exercise is to ask them directly and to hear their voice.

Where next?

Now is the time to bring out the original soundings of the staff to remind yourselves of your starting point. The creative juxtaposition lies in confronting the views of the learners with the views of the leadership and educators. How far have the learners confirmed the staff views or has the sounding of the students created an appetite to view their role differently? In general, how well are we doing to engage learners and to give them genuine voice and agency?

Where you decide to go next with the insights gained and who else to bring into the conversation from the wider community is the final main decision point in using this tool. It may lead naturally to efforts to enhance learner agency. It may suggest the need for wider change, in which case we hope you find other tools in this Handbook useful for that purpose.

Tool 1.4
Teacher-focused to be learning-centred

Schools should be powerful learning and professional working environments for teachers and educators. This is not about emphasising the importance of teachers at the expense of students but it is to recognise that being teacher-focused is integral to being learning-centred. The seven Principles reformulated around educators offer a way to do this.

Reformulating the original Learning Principles around teachers and educators gives a specification for learning environments that they should be:

- places where *educators share a clear priority about the centrality of learning*, for their students but also for themselves, and are fully engaged in meeting that priority; the teachers as well as the students understand themselves as learners

- where *teaching is not viewed as a private* matter and is often collaborative

- where teachers are recognised as performing much more effectively when motivated, which in turn is *intricately linked to their emotions* (satisfaction, self-efficacy, avoidance of helplessness and anxiety etc.)

- places which are acutely sensitive to *individual differences in the capacities and experiences of teachers*

- *highly demanding for each educator* while avoiding excessive overload and stress that diminishes not enhances performance

- where *expectations for educators are clear and they work formatively* – in their assessments and teaching of learners but also through organisational design strategies that generate rich evaluative information on the teaching and learning taking place

- where there is *horizontal connectedness* to which educators centrally contribute – across activities and subjects, in– and out-of-school and with other schools, groups and organisations with which the educators are connected.

The 21st century learning environment demands educator roles in which their own learning is central as well.

Step One: What do these educator principles mean and how well do they describe our school or district?

Discuss how well these principles apply to the teachers and educators in your school, learning environment, school district or cluster. How well do some

Tool 1.4 Teacher-focused to be learning-centred *(continued)*

apply but not others? To some people but not others? Naturally, the teachers must be prominent in these discussions and should often lead them. It will also be important to engage others involved in the teaching so that the full educator voice is heard. As strategies and narratives are prepared, others from the wider learning community should be brought in, too.

Take the time to clarify what these educator principles mean in practice in your setting. This is a key aspect of this tool. But, also ascertain whether all agree that these are appropriate principles for teachers and educators; if any disagree, what are the grounds for doing so? Is this disagreement in principle or does it reflect different views about what each should mean in practice? Are particular principles more controversial than others?

Step Two: Choose one of the educator principles as the focus for action

Decide which of the seven principles should become the priority focus for change in your setting. Choose one that enjoys widespread support while being judged as strategic for making your school or district become more powerfully learning-centred.

Take time to decide which one is best for your school, district or cluster. Try to ensure consensus about this choice as it will guide subsequent action and requires commitment from all concerned.

Step Three: Decide on strategies for putting the educator principle into action and implement them

This is the critical stage of identifying which changes are needed in order to put the principle into effect, and then acting to make the changes happen. Time will again be needed to arrive at strategies that will make a difference rather than just tinkering around the edges. You will need to be open to innovation and thinking "out of the box". Each participant should be given the chance to put ideas on the table. The senior leadership will need to be fully committed.

It may be at this stage that you need to go back to Step Two if you find that the identified actions for a particular educator principle will make less of an impact than first thought.

The chosen educator principle and the strategies for putting it into practice should be integrated into the wider vision for learning in the school/district. A narrative should be prepared which spells out why and how these

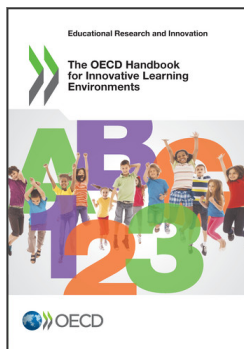*Tool 1.4* **Teacher-focused to be learning-centred** *(continued)*

actions will be instrumental in realising the broader vision of the learning environment. This narrative should be concise and yet able to make the key arguments; it too will need to be discussed and revised.

All educators will need to be on board and stay on board. You will need to take stock at regular intervals and to confront unexpected barriers including possible loss of professional enthusiasm.

Step Four: Take stock to decide what more needs to be done and whether the exercise should be repeated

Having kept the educator community on board and after a suitable lapse of time (say, a year), discuss the progress made on the change strategy. Discuss whether the initial choice of principle was a good one and whether the strategies chosen were the most appropriate. Discuss whether they could have been more successfully implemented. Discuss the impact of the strategies not only on the adult staff but on the quality of the learning.

This may well be the time to revisit the chosen strategies and to revise the narrative. Otherwise, and if there is an appetite for more but with different directions and focus, repeat the exercise by choosing another principle and follow the four steps. Or instead, apply another tool in this Handbook.