

Learning Tour Study Guide

For Leaders
and Learners
Participating in
NOIIE-Sponsored
School Visits

by

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SD 38

In a learning community, effective professional development is anchored in the school-based work and inquiry of teachers. Teacher and leader inquiry can lay groundwork for ongoing, evidence-based professional learning. What we do for professional development can also open doors for growth, both personally and professionally.

The extent to which we as leaders promote the conditions for effective professional learning is largely due to our learning cultures. We should be proud that we have rich cultures here in British Columbia that value continuous learning. We consistently encourage our staff to reach for professional learning that is focused on student outcomes, embedded in teacher practice and informed by the best available research on effective learning and teaching. We facilitate collaborative structures and experiences that are rich in reflection and feedback. As leaders, we also support professional development that engages teams to focus on the needs of their students after thoughtful scans and data collection. As school and district leaders, we know how effective professional learning can change outcomes for our learners, especially when it is ongoing, supported, and fully integrated into the culture of our learning environments.

As leaders, we are also well versed at supporting our staff in attending workshops and conferences. We are active in facilitating study groups, book clubs, focused conversations, and structured collaboration to uncover new learning. We source teacher consultants and mentors to come and support our staff. We even encourage our staff to participate in courses to learn specific knowledge and skills.

But how often are we visiting other schools? How often do we leave our sites, and tour and learn from other vibrant school communities? Are we promoting and engaging teachers, leaders, schools and the wider education community in professional conversations beyond the walls of our buildings? When is the last time you had the opportunity to reach beyond your current context, and visit another school in your district? Your province? Or even beyond – nationally or internationally? Might you consider a learning tour in your future professional development plans?

Why Go on a Learning Tour?

Learning tours can be powerful professional learning experiences that are reciprocal in engagement and enrichment for all involved. Learning tours have the potential to be a powerful part of a professional inquiry, network building, and a critical part of school transformation. In professional knowledge creation and sharing, leaders and educators have the time and space to get curious about what they observe and what they receive, both practiced and shared from other communities.

A tour can impact your own inquiry, and once you return to your site you can consider how your learning will impact your learners' engagement and experiences. As a participant, you can also have an increased sense of what's possible and map out what is next in your learning journey – both personally and professionally.

“Visiting Canada was a pivotal moment for me, both in terms of professional development and personal growth. The concept of “Truth before Reconciliation” is so simple, yet the way that it played out in each and every school and echoed in the voices of each student and educator we met, made it so much more than just words... It wasn’t long after returning home that we began to dig deeper into our own context and implement our learning. We have worked with our educators to confront racism and white privilege, create authentic connections between curriculum and Indigenous perspectives and to begin our journey of Reconciliation in earnest.”

Laura Curran, Teacher, Glenmore Park Public School, New South Wales

The Network of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (NOIIE) holds sacred the importance of connecting leaders locally and globally. Schools locally have been hosting teams from around the world in highly curated school tours. By matching educators' inquiries with schools who are exploring parallel questions, and with schools who are modelling practices and pedagogies, visitors to host sites are having transformative experiences. NOIIE learning tours are professional learning opportunities for educators around the world who are interested in exploring our approach to collaborative inquiry, or in deepening their practice.

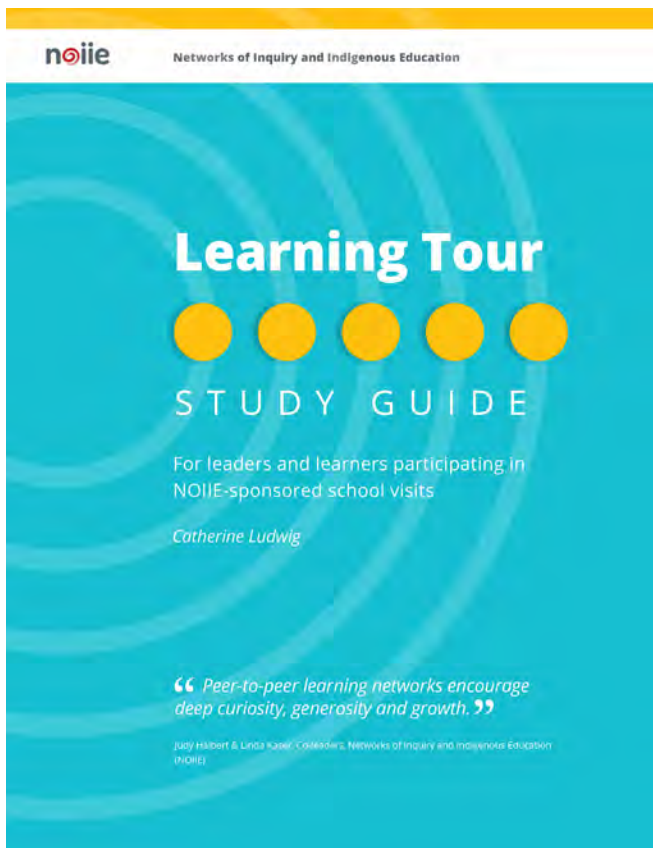
Whether you travel locally or afar, a learning tour could offer you an opportunity to see powerful schools and programs in action, and then bring the learning back to your community. Whether you choose a road tour or a virtual (online) visit, you will connect with people who face the kinds of challenges you face, and who are ready to share their stories.

“...the experience was so recent, alive, deep, transformative and inspiring. In some way, I never came back home, or who really came back was another me... I am very grateful to the principals who welcomed us and allowed us to enter their schools and classrooms and I am deeply grateful to Linda and Judy for helping us and making it possible. The whole experience remains very much alive in me and continually reinforces me towards what really matters.”

Begonya Folch, Cap de Servei d'Èxit Educatiu i Noves Oportunitats, Subdirecció general de Transformació Educativa, Direcció General d'Innovació, Recerca i Cultura Digital, Departament d'Educació, Generalitat de Catalunya

Learning Tour Study Guide

To support school learning tours – both road tours and virtual tours – NOIE dedicated resources to support the creation of a Learning Tour Study Guide for leaders and learners participating in NOIE-sponsored school visits (Catherine Ludwig, 2021).



At the heart of this resource is Dr. Judy Halbert & Linda Kaser's message that "peer-to-peer learning networks encourage deep curiosity, generosity, and growth."

Our hope is that leaders and educators will use this guide to harness their strong desires to know or learn something new, to tap into their sense of wonder in a genuinely interested and non-judgmental way. The guide reminds us to approach tours with an open heart that is present and appreciative of others. As participants who go on learning tours, they will build connectedness and feel part of a larger entity such as a partnership, team, community, or network.

How is this Resource Organized?

The Learning Tour Study Guide will help you before, during, and after your tour.

Each section of the guide includes:

- **tips for engaging** on your tour
- **questions to consider** with space to reflect
- **pointers to resources** you might find helpful
- **connections to our First Peoples' Principles of Learning**
- **quotes** from various important and honoured perspectives



Using this Study Guide

The Learning Tour Study Guide is seated in honouring and acknowledging Indigenous ways of knowing by being rooted in the *First Peoples' Principles of Learning*. The guide keeps in mind that learning is a circular and relational process, not to be rushed; a lifelong process that needs to be nurtured. It focuses on being heart-open to local cultural protocols,

stories, relationships, practices and the nature of knowledge and honouring Indigenous Elders and knowledge-keepers, elements that have a place within the worldviews of First Peoples.

*"I know I am just a tiny voice in the wilderness
– but I will be heard."*

*I always think of these words as we continue
to transform the education system here in
BC. All voices matter and all voices need to
be heard.*

Tsnomot, Brad Baker, Squamish Nation and
North Vancouver School

The guide is organized in five sections meant to support you or your team before, during and after your experience:

● Before Your Tour

OPEN

What are you hoping to learn from the tour? Open your mind, your heart and your will to the possibilities ahead.

Before you attend your school visit, begin by reflecting on your mindset, personal biases, intentions and inquiry focus. Your learning tour will be more useable with the personal context. Be open and curious as you reflect and remember to consider the needs of the community you serve.

● During Your Tour

OBSERVE

What evidence of learning do you observe in each setting? What's going on for the learners — especially the students — but also the teachers, Principals and others?

During your visit you will explore diverse learning environments. This is a time to get curious and practice looking and listening with an unbiased lens. Beware of confirmation bias. Stay open, suspend judgement and explore new perspectives. What is

going on for the learners? How do you know? Take the time to talk to both the learners and the leaders and explore if you can make the unknown, known.

ASK

What do you wonder? Ask focused but open-ended questions.

During your tour aim to build meaningful connections, trust and a shared sense of discovery. Stay curious. During your tour, clarify and co-construct meaning via questioning. Questions matter. They open us to new questions and carry us forward in shared discovery. Ask questions that build belonging and trust.

RECEIVE

What resonates? Receive and reflect on the stories people share. Which stories resonate? Why?

During the tour you will encounter stories. Stories about belonging and learning in the community you are visiting. Story is about meaning — each person evokes their own meaning from story. Oral tradition is used to transmit learning, values, skills and histories. Evoke your sense of wonder and listen for the stories and narratives. Connect the dots between other people's stories and your own experiences. Stories will become pivotal in your learning and offer a powerful narrative to build new understandings and learnings.

● After Your Tour

TRY

What's next for you — personally and professionally? Try new things. Build your adaptive expertise.

After the tour, venture out of your comfort zone, inspired by the possibilities you encountered. Do you envision small, micro-movements in your own practice, or large-scale system shifts? Be wary of simple changes that lead to 'all or nothing' outcomes; they tend to be less durable than an evolutionary approach. You will grow through trial and error and you will find that others around you grow, too.

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Questions to consider

How would you describe your inquiry? What do you want to learn?
What question do you want to unpack?

Are you open to new approaches? How do you know?

What cognitive and cultural biases are you aware of? What might be hidden?

What is your connection to the land and to Indigenous wisdom in your territory?

Who are the people and what are the traditional unceded territories you will visit?

Ideally, a site visit conducted in a spirit of thoughtful learning and sharing creates a mutually beneficial learning experience for both the visiting and host schools.

With willingness to challenge personal beliefs, perceptions, and practices, and an open and receptive attitude toward new ideas, this *Learning Tour Study Guide* will support you and your teams in having a professional, respectful exchange in which it is safe to converse, question, and discover. It aims to keep your heart and mind open to forging new relationships, and it is strength-based in the belief that every individual and school has valuable lessons and stories to impart. Visits to view and get curious about innovative teaching practices might help expand and refine personal pedagogy, build supportive networks, and spark critical and creative approaches. Upon return to your site, the guide supports you with questions to venture out of your comfort zone, inspired by the possibilities you encountered.

Study Guide Now Available

Learning tours can be a powerful part of a professional learning plan and a critical part of a school transformation effort. They can expand your sense of what's possible, and inform the path forward.

Ideally, a learning tour conducted in a spirit of thoughtful learning and sharing creates a mutually beneficial learning experience for both the visiting and host schools. This is the guiding principle for this new *NOIE Learning Tour Study Guide* that we hope will set the tone for a truly collaborative learning experience.



@CathJule

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LIVE VIRTUAL WORKSHOP

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Building a Culture of Strength

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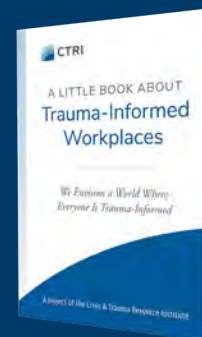
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- Highlight Strengths

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