SERVICES TO SCHOOLS INQUIRY EXEMPLARS: What are they? How do they work?

Services to Schools’ Inquiry Exemplars are curated sets of quality resources designed to inspire and support approaches to teaching through inquiry.

THE ROLE OF RESOURCES IN INQUIRY

The term ‘inquiry’ is short for inquiry-based learning. Simply put, inquiry-based learning is a pedagogical approach that places students’ questions, observations and actions at the centre of the learning experience. Within this scenario, educators are responsible for creating an environment that facilitates and supports the creating, researching, challenging, refining and justifying of student ideas, with the aim of moving children from a position of wondering to that of deeper understanding.

Resources of all kinds play an important part in an inquiry-based classroom. They are important avenues for students seeking ‘answers’ (resources as information), but are equally crucial as catalysts for questions (resources as inspiration). As illustrated in figure 1 (below), the Inquiry Exemplars focus on this second aspect, exploring the role of resources as a means for generating fertile inquiry questions and activities; and enabling inquiry behaviours. The exemplars also link to the New Zealand Curriculum Learning Areas.

Although they may inspire lessons, the Inquiry Exemplars are not intended to be lesson or unit plans. They do not contain activity ideas, suggested sequences, or learning intentions. Nor is it expected the questions and resources would be transferred ‘as is’ to a classroom or library. Rather it is envisaged educators will select and adapt from those resources and questions offered to meet their own specific teaching and learning context.

FERTILE QUESTIONS

The questions contained in the Inquiry Exemplars are based on Yoram Harpaz and Adam Lefsteins’ idea of ‘fertile questions’.¹ Fertile questions have some or all of the following characteristics. They are:

- **Open**: There are several different or competing answers, any of which might be ‘right’.
- **Undermining**: Making the learner question their basic assumptions.
- **Rich**: Cannot be answered without careful exploration (there may be subsidiary questions).
- **Connected**: Relevant in some way to the learners.

FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE INQUIRY EXEMPLARS

Each Inquiry Exemplar is made up of a range of elements. Page 1 (figure 2) is a Resources Map. It shows a range of quality complementary print, digital and professional resources associated with the given inquiry context:

Page 2 (figure 3) shows the same resources (in the same inquiry context) organised by Learning Area, and with example fertile questions:

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2 http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/Learning-areas
Page 3 (figure 4) shows the same print and digital resources (in the same inquiry context) and examples of the Inquiry Behaviours and Approaches they might inspire:

Page 3’s inquiry approaches and behaviours are taken from:

- The New Zealand Curriculum: Key Competencies, and Principles and Values
- The Ministry of Education Inquiry Framework: as articulated in their First World War Inquiry Guides and Resources, and

Educators may add to, or substitute these models with one more widely used by their school.

Page 4 (figure 5) focuses on two specific print and digital resources, the kinds of fertile questions they might inspire, and the Inquiry Behaviours and Approaches they might support: