Practitioner Inquiry

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Continual reflection and growth is the essence of being a professional. Desirable practice is underpinned by thinking, questioning, and reflection.

(NSW Department of Community Services, 2002: 18)
Why reflection?

• Assists in defining teaching problems and questions.

• Requires a conscious consideration of the problem.

• Demands detailed description of actions and responses.

• Involves clarifying reasons for the effects of actions.

(Perry, 1997: 171-172)
What can we reflect on?

We can reflect on:

- struggles
- dilemmas
- positive experiences
- break through.
How do we become reflective practitioners?

- Creating a habit, structure or routine.
- Clarifying the purpose.
- Identifying the opportunities in our work.
- Individual – story or dialogue (unpacks richness of experience, evaluate issues, identify learning edges).
- Group reflection – recount event, analysis, making connections and formulating critical questions.
The term ‘enquiry’ describes a situation where there is curiosity and a desire to find something out by exploration, investigation and research. Enquiries involve questions being raised, challenges to thinking and problem-solving activities.

(De Boo, 1999, p2)

Teacher research is designed by practitioners to seek practical solutions to issues and problems in their professional...lives...it stems from teachers’ own questions about and reflections on their every day classroom practices.

(Stremmel, 2002, p65)
Today’s teachers are expected to be more than just providers of information. To effectively guide their students, teachers need to be reflective practitioners, using research-based pedagogy in and adapting it to their own particular classroom.
Practitioner inquiry provides

• Opportunity to:
  – investigate teaching issues
  – develop practical solutions or new ways of thinking/teaching
  – develop understandings
  – inform further practice
Benefits of practitioner inquiry

• Permission to try something new
• Deeper, more reflective knowledge about practices
• Affective change – confidence as a teacher, as decision maker, act as agents of change
• Decreased sense of isolation: work in collaboration with colleagues
• Can create research culture in the setting
• More open to learning

(Hahs-Vaughn & Yanowitz, 2009; Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007; Stremmel, 2002).
Practitioner inquiry process

• Identify a question
• Apply a theoretical framework, includes reading on topic as well as method
• Collect base line data
• Analyse data in terms of question
• Identify implications – changes to be implemented
• Collect more data, analysing and evaluating changes

(adapted from Cochran-Smith, 2005, cited in Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007, p. 206)
Continuous spiral of learning

evaluation

reflection

action
Excellence in teaching relies on [teachers] making informed decisions about what to do and say, based on their own reflections and analysis of their day-to-day teaching. 

(MacNaughton and Williams, 2009, p. xiii-xiv).
Questions to get you started

- What do you wonder about in your classroom? Why?
- Is there something you would like to look at differently? Why?
- Is there anything that troubles you? Why?
- What is your focus – the classroom, the program, the children, the families, the team you work with? Why?
- Evaluating issues – what is happening here – what, is working, what could be going better? What would I like to do?
What is data?

- Evidence
- Recognition of practice
- Facts
- Descriptive information
Data examples

• Formal and informal observations
• Interviews
• Surveys
• Collecting artifacts
• Keeping a journal
• Photos
• Videos or audio recordings
• Samples of children’s work
• External feedback – verbal or written
• Curriculum materials (Arhar et al, 2001).
Data and my question

• Have a think about the question you want to explore.

• Formulate a question

• Think about the base data that needs gathering.

• Jot down your ideas.

• Share with your team and formulate a plan
Where to from now…

pause

review

reflect

Baseline data
What next...

• Collect and analyse data in relation to your question
• Implement changes
• Collect data on changes
• Reflect in your journal
• Evaluation of the process
Ongoing reflection

• Ongoing questions to respond to in terms of your question:
  – What is working well? Why?
  – What is surprising me? Why?
  – What is troubling me or not working well? Why?
  – What will I do now / try in terms of this reflection and question? Why?
  – How am I feeling about this question? Why?
  – What knowledge, skills or attitudes have I learnt from this?
Being involved in research has shown that teachers are “more reflective, more critical and analytical in their teaching, and more open minded and committed to professional development.”

(Stremmel, 2002, p. 64)
References


