The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research

Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn Through Practitioner Inquiry

Third Edition

Nancy Fichtman Dana
Diane Yendol-Hoppey

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Contents

Foreword to the Second Edition **xi**
Gene Thompson-Grove

Foreword to the First Edition **xv**
Ann Lieberman

Preface **xvii**

Acknowledgments **xxi**

About the Authors **xxiii**

Introduction to The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research **1**
Downloadable Content for Professional Development Facilitators and Course Instructors 1
How to Use the Inquiry Books 2

1. Teacher Inquiry Defined **5**
What Is Teacher Inquiry? 6
What Is the Relationship Between Teacher Inquiry and Teacher Professional Growth? 12
What Evidence Exists That Teacher Inquiry Is Worth Doing? 14
What Is the Relationship Between Teacher Inquiry and Differentiated Instruction? 15
What Is the Relationship Between Teacher Inquiry, Data-Driven Decision Making, and Progress Monitoring? 16
What Is the Relationship Between Teacher Inquiry and Response to Intervention? (RtI) 18
What Is the Relationship Between Teacher Inquiry and Lesson Study? 19
What Is the Relationship Between Teacher Inquiry and Teacher Evaluation? 19
What Is the Relationship Between Teacher Inquiry and the Common Core State Standards? 21
How Is Teacher Inquiry Different From What I Already Do as a Reflective Teacher? 22

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What Are Some Contexts Ripe for Teacher Inquiry? 23
Professional Learning Communities 23
Student Teaching and/or Other Clinical Experiences 24
Professional Development Schools and Other Networks 25
How Does My Engaging in Teacher Inquiry Help Shape the Profession of Teaching? 26

2. The Start of Your Journey: Finding a Wondering 29
Where Do I Begin? 29
Where Do I Find My Wonderings and Questions? 30
Passion 1: Helping an Individual Child 33
Passion 2: Desire to Improve or Enrich Curriculum 39
Passion 3: Focus on Developing Content Knowledge 44
Passion 4: Desire to Improve or Experiment With Teaching Strategies and Teaching Techniques 46
Passion 5: Desire to Explore the Relationship Between Your Beliefs and Your Classroom Practice 48
Passion 6: The Intersection of Your Personal and Professional Identities 50
Passion 7: Advocating Social Justice 56
Passion 8: Focus on Understanding the Teaching and Learning Context 64
What Happens If I Still Cannot Locate My Wondering? 67

3. To Collaborate or Not to Collaborate: That Is the Question! 71
Why Is Collaboration So Important? 72
Reason 1: Research Is Hard Work! 72
Reason 2: Teacher Talk Is Important! 73
Reason 3: There's Safety in Numbers! 74
Reason 4: There's Strength in Numbers! 74
What Are the Possibilities for How I Might Collaborate? 76
Collaborative Structure 1: Shared Inquiry 76
Collaborative Structure 2: Parallel Inquiry 80
Collaborative Structure 3: Intersecting Inquiry 82
Collaborative Structure 4: Inquiry Support 82

4. Developing a Research Plan: Making Inquiry a Part of Your Teaching Practice 85
What Do Data Look Like, How Do I Collect Them, and How Do They Fit Into My Work as a Teacher? 85
Strategy 1: Literature as Data 86
Strategy 2: Field Notes 92
Strategy 3: Documents/Artifacts/Student Work 101
Strategy 4: Interviews 101
Strategy 5: Focus Groups 105

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Strategy 6: Digital Pictures 106
Strategy 7: Video as Data 107
Strategy 8: Reflective Journals 109
Strategy 9: Weblogs 111
Strategy 10: Surveys 114
Strategy 11: Quantitative Measures of Student Achievement (Standardized Test Scores, Assessment Measures, Grades) 120
Strategy 12: Critical Friend Group Feedback 127
When Do I Collect Data and How Much Do I Collect? 134

5. Considering the Ethical Dimensions of Your Work as an Inquirer 147
What Should I Consider When Thinking About Ethics in Relationship to Practitioner Research? 147
What Role Do School District Research Policies Play in the Inquiry Process? 150
What Role Do University Institutional Review Boards Play in the Inquiry Process? 152

6. Finding Your Findings: Data Analysis 157
What Is Formative Data Analysis? 157
What Might Formative Data Analysis Look Like? 158
Example 1: A Seventh-Grade Science Teacher Analyzes Data at the Start of Her Inquiry 158
Example 2: An ESE Teacher Uses a Progress Monitoring Tool to Gain Insights Into Student Progress as Her Inquiry Unfolds 161
What Is Summative Data Analysis and How Do I Get Started? 166
What Might Summative Data Analysis Look Like? 172

7. Extending Your Learning: The Inquiry Write-Up 183
Why Should I Write? 184
What Might My Writing Look Like? 185
Step 1: Providing Background Information 186
Step 2: Sharing the Design of the Inquiry (Procedures, Data Collection, and Data Analysis) 189
Step 3: Stating the Learning and Supporting the Statements With Data 191
Step 4: Providing Concluding Thoughts 206

8. Becoming the Best Teacher and Researcher You Can Be: Assessing the Quality of Your Own and Others' Inquiry 213
Why Is It Important to Assess the Quality of My Work? 214
What Is the Difference Between Generalizability and Transferability? 215

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How Do I Go About Assessing Teacher-Research Quality and Why Is It So Difficult to Do? 217
What Are Some Quality Indicators for Teacher Research? 221
What Are Some Ways to Enhance Inquiry Quality? 226

9. The Beginning at the End of Your Journey: Making Your Inquiry Public 235
Why Is It Important to Share My Work with Others? 235
What Are Some Ways I Might Share My Work? 240

References 251
Index 263

Additional materials and resources related to *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research* can be found at **go.hbe.com.au**

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these three groups, teachers' voices have typically been absent from larger discussions about educational change and reform. Historically, teachers have not had access to tools that could have brought their knowledge to the table and raised their voices to a high-enough level to be heard in these larger conversations. Teacher inquiry is a vehicle that can be used by teachers to untangle some of the complexities that occur in the profession, raise teachers' voices in discussions of educational reform, and ultimately transform assumptions about the teaching profession itself. Transforming the profession is really the capstone of the teacher inquiry experience. Let's begin our journey into the what, why, and how of teacher inquiry with an overview of the evolution of the teacher inquiry movement and a simple definition of this very complex, rewarding, transformative, provocative, and productive process.

WHAT IS TEACHER INQUIRY?

Understanding the history of teacher inquiry will help you recognize how today, as a current or future educator, you find yourself investigating a new paradigm of learning that can lead to educational renewal and reform. This history lesson begins by looking closely at three educational research traditions: process-product research, qualitative or interpretive research, and teacher inquiry (see Table 1.1).

Two paradigms have dominated educational research on schooling, teaching, and learning in the past. In the first paradigm, the underlying conception of "process-product research" (Shulman, 1986) portrays teaching as a primarily linear activity and depicts teachers as technicians. The teacher's role is to implement the research findings of "outside" experts, almost exclusively university researchers, who are considered alien to the everyday happenings in classrooms. In this transmissive mode teachers are not expected to be problem posers or problem solvers. Rather, teachers negotiate dilemmas framed by outside experts and are asked to implement with fidelity a curriculum designed by those outside of the classroom. Based on this paradigm, many teachers have learned that it is sometimes best not to problematize their classroom experiences and firsthand observations because to do so may mean an admittance of failure to implement curriculum as directed. In fact, the transmissive culture of many schools has demonstrated that teachers can suffer punitive repercussions from highlighting areas that teachers themselves identify as problematic. The consequences of pointing out problems have often resulted in traditional top-down "retraining" or remediation. In the transmissive view, our educational community does not encourage solution-seeking behavior on the part of classroom teachers.

In the second paradigm—educational research drawn from qualitative or interpretative studies—teaching is portrayed as a highly complex,

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2

The Start of Your Journey

Finding a Wondering

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

In Chapter 1, we welcomed you to teacher inquiry by defining the process, discussing inquiry as professional development, and exploring the relationship between inquiry and educational reform. This welcome to inquiry places you, as prospective and practicing teachers, in charge of your own professional growth and development. Leading your own learning is likely quite different from many of your past experiences in preservice and inservice teacher education. If you are a prospective teacher, up to this point you have likely engaged in coursework at college, where professors define learning objectives for you in course syllabi, choose your education texts, and define assignments that must be completed for graduation and initial certification. If you are a veteran teacher, you have likely attended inservice sessions covering topics selected for you by administrators or curriculum specialists in your district or perhaps topics mandated by your state. Hence, by taking charge of your own learning, you are beginning your journey into uncharted territory! Charting new territory, when you are unfamiliar with both the terrain and

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PASSION 3 EXERCISES

1. Make a list of topics you teach for which deeper content knowledge would enhance your classroom practice. On this list, circle the topics that you believe require substantive transformation or adaptation if you are to teach the content area to children.
2. Evaluate the materials you currently use to teach content within each subject area and unit you teach. Do these resources represent diversity of perspectives and multiple voices? Whose voices are present or missing?

Passion 4: Desire to Improve or Experiment With Teaching Strategies and Teaching Techniques

In Passions 2 and 3, wonderings are located around a particular topic and content area. The work of the teacher also encompasses applying generic teaching strategies (such as cooperative learning, role play, simulation, lecture, and discussion) and specific teaching techniques (such as questioning, assessing student learning, and integrating technology into instruction) throughout the teaching day. Similar to the desire to improve or enhance a particular piece of curriculum as discussed in Passion 2, you may have a desire to gain insights into, improve, and/or experiment with new or routine teaching strategies and techniques. In the following example, Nancy Sunner is intrigued with learning more about the questions she poses to students in her daily teaching:

> Questioning is an enormously powerful and important skill in productive teaching. For decades, teacher questioning has been a topic of study. Researchers had found that teachers rely on questioning as an essential element of their teaching repertoire. On an average, elementary school teachers ask 348 questions during a typical school day (Acheson & Gall, 1997). Through the process of effective questioning, teachers can stimulate thought, help students reinforce basic skills, involve shy or quiet students, draw in the attention of a student who has drifted off, and promote self-esteem and success in the classroom.
>
> The skill of effective questioning requires teachers to constantly balance several things at once. During questioning, teachers must remember their lesson goals, monitor their communication with the students, assess the students' verbal and nonverbal responses (nods, raised hands, shrugs, and downcast eyes), and think about the next question. This impressive and sometimes overwhelming aspect of teaching sparked my curiosity about my own questioning techniques in the classroom.
>
> As a beginning teacher, I have experienced great satisfaction when I asked a student a question and I got a correct response. I

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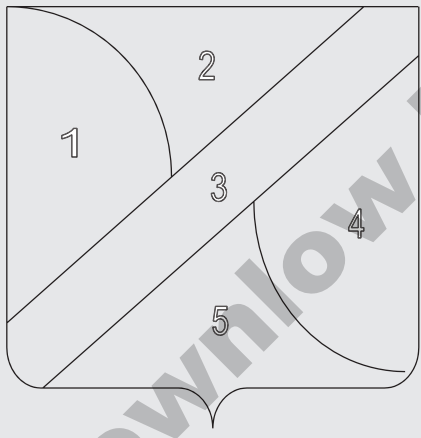
(Continued)

3. Follow the guide provided to design a Teacher's Coat of Arms. In space 1, draw a real or mythical animal that best describes the teacher you want to be. In space 2, choose a real symbol, or create your own design, for an insignia that best describes the teacher you want to be. In space 3, choose one color in any shade—or a rainbow effect—that best describes the teacher you want to be. In space 4, draw one character, real or fictional, that best describes the teacher you want to be. In space 5, choose one word that best describes the teacher you want to be. How you write that word should also help to describe the teacher you want to be.



Passion 7: Advocating Social Justice

Recall from Chapter 1 the notion that engaging in inquiry is a responsibility you accept as a teacher that enables you to take a stand and effect educational change. By generating data and evidence to support the decisions and positions you take as an educator, you help reform classrooms and schools, which results in the promotion of social justice. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993),

> When teachers research their own practice . . . they begin to envision alternative configurations of human and material resources to meet the needs of culturally diverse groups of students, teachers, and administrators. And they are willing to invest more of their own resources and professional energy in larger efforts to reform classrooms and schools. (p. 80)

Your first teacher inquiry wondering may come from your desire to effect social change by exploring questions of race, class, gender, or ability. In fact, effecting social change in regard to issues of social justice may

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you. If you are recording, you will make the recording, listen to it later, and transcribe what has occurred by taking notes or enlisting another person to script notes from the recording for you. While listening to yourself on audio recordings can be extremely insightful, many teacher-inquirers we know find it difficult to make this a part of their teaching and opt for having others take notes for them instead. For example, intern Gail Romig and mentor-teacher Brian Peters were engaged in a shared inquiry project to investigate the ways they might use science talks to enhance student understanding of science concepts. Early in their inquiry, they recorded the science talks as they occurred but changed to taking turns scripting the talks for each other as follows:

> Throughout our inquiry process, we took turns facilitating the talks and gathering data. While one person sat with the group and helped to guide the conversation, the other person sat outside the circle and kept track of who was talking and what kind of information they were sharing. The person who collected data sat outside the circle so as to not distract or intimidate the students. If the students thought their ideas were being judged or scrutinized, perhaps they would not have been as likely to share. This seemed to be the reaction of some children when they knew they were being audio-recorded.
>
> Early on we tape-recorded a few of our Science Talks. It seemed, however, that some students were reluctant to talk when they saw the microphone. During one of our small group talks later in the marking period, one child asked why we don't tape record the talks anymore. Gail told him that it seemed like people were afraid to talk if they thought they were being recorded. The student said that he didn't like to talk when we recorded because he thought his voice "sounded dumb" on recordings.
>
> In addition to students being uncomfortable with audio recording, we found that listening to the tapes in the evening after school was insightful but too time consuming and not worth the time it was taking to rehash the entirety of the Science Talk discussion. Audio recording captured more than we needed to capture. To gain insights into our wondering, we just needed to know who was talking and what type of talk it seemed to be. Consequently, we developed a system for taking field notes that involved noting who was talking, paraphrasing what was said, and coding the comment with one of four different codes: "S" for simple, "D" for detailed, "R" for repeat, and "0" for no response. Along with this system we also made notes of what we observed happening during the talks, for example, if students were sharing with a child next to them. (Peters & Romig, 2001)

As with Amy and Lynn, it took some time for Gail and Brian to find a comfortable way to capture the classroom action in their field notes. For

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