

critical links: A professional inquiry process

7A.1

Discussing Four Statements: Who are we as a group now?

This Four Statements discussion is much like *Sharing Perspectives*, the first discussion you had when you came together as a group in Step One. As a learning community it is important to set aside time to take another "picture in words." Only this time it will be a snapshot of what people believe about teaching and learning now that they have completed their inquiry studies.

Begin by allowing a quiet time for everyone to individually fill in the *Four Statements Discussion Sheet* and the *Teacher Self-Assessment Rubric*. You will find both of these tools in the resource section. We do this as individuals because we must take time to assess and reflect on the merit of our study before we share our thoughts with others. It is important that we determine what our work means to us and its worth for our professional growth before we see it through others' eyes. This discussion will work best, however, if the reflection is done immediately before beginning the discussion. The conversation will have more energy if people have done the thinking just prior to the talking.

When everyone has completed the two worksheets, sit in a circle with no chairs or tables in the middle. Make sure that everyone can see each other. No one should sit outside the circle. Even observers are included in the circle though they may not speak.

A facilitator who does not participate in the discussion should give directions and guide the conversation. (See facilitator note.)

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7A.2

Practicing with a Friend: Do I need to do that again?

Once again, just as in step five when you prepared before sharing your initial findings with the group, you will practice with a critical friend before this final presentation. This practice session is necessary because you won't be able to share all your information. A critical friend can help you to select the most important aspects of your inquiry project so that you present the most pertinent information. You'll also be more comfortable presenting your initial findings if you have a practice session.

For this practice session you and your partner will need the *Talking Points for Inquiry Presentations* and the *Response to Inquiry Presentations* worksheets, which are in the Resources section.

The whole session should take about an hour. Each of you should take about a half-hour to do the following:

1. Show your completed *Charting Your Evidence* and *Weighing Your Evidence* sheets from Step Six to your critical friend. Discuss what you consider to be your most important collections of evidence and the conclusions you have drawn from them.
2. Look through the *Talking Points for Inquiry Presentations*. Select the talking points that you believe will most help you tell the story of your inquiry study. You should select number 11. It is the most important point—the reason you did your study.
3. Ask your partner which pieces of information are the most important for each talking point you selected. Listen to your partner before you explain which points you think are most important. Your partner is looking at this information with fresh eyes and may have a different perspective. Consider your partner's advice and select the information that is most important.
4. When you have made your selections, look at the whole of what you have chosen. Does this information best represent your inquiry journey? Do you need to add more information to give the full picture? What information seems to be extraneous and can be deleted? What transitions do you need to make between the talking points so all the information comes together to make a complete picture of your inquiry?
5. Once you have made your final selections, consider how long you have to discuss each section of the information you're presenting and still allow time for questions and responses from your listeners. Write the time you've set aside for each section in the margin of your *Talking Points for Inquiry Presentations*. (You will have about 20 minutes total in the structured presentations to explain your study and take responses and questions.) Does it add up to about 15 minutes? Add or delete material according to your information priorities and the time allotment.

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6. With your partner, look over the *Response to Inquiry Presentations* sheet. Consider what questions people might ask or what responses they might make in the structured presentations. You may want to make a list of the questions you anticipate, what answers you'd give, and share them if you have time in the presentation.

7A.3

Presenting the Studies: Why and how do we share our inquiry studies?

The structured presentations are a way to learn about other people's studies and use them to inform our teaching practices. We also hear what others think about our inquiry study. The discussion of the presentations is that creation of shared knowledge that arises from the local school context. It is, therefore, more meaningful than research done in other school districts. We discuss what works, or doesn't work, for students and teachers we know—people with whom we work everyday.

There are several ways to schedule the presentations depending on the size of your learning community. Not everyone needs to hear every presentation; however, if your group is ten or fewer people, you may want to do just that. Then it's simple. Schedule breaks and begin.

If your learning community is larger than ten, it becomes difficult to listen attentively and offer thoughtful, considered feedback. You may want to break into smaller groups. You might consider going through one structured round in the small groups and nominating a person or two from each group to share their inquiry study with the entire group for a second round.

If your group is twenty or more, you may want to have people self select into groups of five or six and ask them to number off within the groups. For the first round, the self-selected groups present to each other. For a second round, all the "ones" form a group and present to each other, the "twos" form another group, the "threes" another group and so on. You may want to have a final round where a few people present to the entire group.

There is only one rule: Comments, responses, and questions are about helping the presenters use the information and evidence they have gathered as fully and deeply as they can to improve their instructional practices. Judgmental comments that criticize without suggestions for improvement are not helpful.

Decide on a schedule and begin presentations.

NOTE: At the end of the presentations, it is important that you have some formal closure. This could be the last time you will meet as a learning community. You might sit in a circle and ask each person to comment on the one thing s/he will take with her/him from this experience. Another activity that works well is to ask each person to recognize one person who influenced him/her the most during the course of the work together and why. These don't need to be sappy comments. A person might be recognized for his/her sense of humor and ability to lighten the mood. Another person might be recognized for bringing great brownies or veggies and dip that hit the spot.

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7A.4

Conclusion and Beginning

Congratulations! You have presented your inquiry project findings to your small learning community and, in the process of conducting this inquiry, you have most likely learned a great deal about your own teaching.

For many teachers, this is just the first step in a life-long process of professional inquiry. You may wish to continue collecting evidence for your research question next year. You may wish to collect different evidence to answer that same question. Or perhaps one of the catalyzed questions that evolved from your original inquiry question has caught your imagination and you would like to study it further.

Although this process works best in a small learning community, it is not always feasible to gather a group of teachers to walk through each step. If you decide to continue an informal process of inquiry in your classroom, you will undoubtedly find many ways to share your work with others—staff development meetings, departmental meetings, collaborations between schools, and even informal discussions with your colleagues. The most important factors to your success are a commitment to collecting and weighing evidence from within your own classroom, a desire to improve your teaching practice for the benefit of your students, and the ability to share your work so that you receive feedback from multiple sources and are able to communicate your findings to others.

We hope that this process has been beneficial to you and your students. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or comments regarding the content of this site.

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7R.1

Four Statements Discussion Sheet

Please take a few minutes to reflect before writing down four (4) statements about how your inquiry study impacted your teaching and the work you do with students and their learning.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Is there anything you would do differently to deepen and make your study richer in terms of learning for either you or your students if you were to repeat this inquiry?

Did your study upset your equilibrium or surprise you in any way? Did it upset your students' equilibrium or surprise them? If so, how?

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7R.2

Teacher Self-Assessment Rubric

Dimensions:	My study was Awesome	My study was Excellent	My study was Getting Close	My study didn't turn out like I wanted
Intellectual challenge	Challenged me to think more deeply than I've thought about teaching for a long time	Challenged me to think in new or different ways	Challenged me to think but in predictable ways	Lacked real challenge to my thinking ways
Generation of new ideas	Created multiple, interesting new ideas and/or viewpoints for me and/or my students to consider	Created new ideas or a different viewpoint for me and/or my students to consider	Created ideas or viewpoints for me and my students to consider but not terribly new or different	Lacked ideas for me and/or my students to consider
Application of new ideas	Forced me and/or my students to work in new ways if we were really going to follow through to get answers to my inquiry question or finish my study	Encouraged me and/or my students to work in new ways to get answers to my inquiry question or finish my study	Allowed me and/or my students to work in predictable ways to get answers to my inquiry questions or finish my study	Lacked any motivation for me and/or my students to work to get answers to my inquiry questions or finish my study
(Add your own dimension)				

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7R.3

Talking Points for Inquiry Presentations:

1. Your name and what you teach, grade level, and school:
2. The question with which you started and how/if it changed:
3. Why you chose that question: The meaning it had for you at the beginning:
4. Conclusions or findings *so far*:
5. Actual evidence or information you collected, including various types of student work:
6. Any instruments you used to collect information (surveys, questionnaires, structured observations):
7. What information you'd collect if you had more time:
8. Feelings, intuitions you have but no hard information or evidence to support them:
9. Any pertinent research, educational books, or articles you read:

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10. Reflections on the process (Select those which you want to discuss):
- Struggles and joys
 - Where has the journey taken you
 - How will you continue or where will you go now because of this work
 - What are you noticing now that you weren't noticing before you began your inquiry
 - How students responded
 - What you got that you expected and what surprised you
 - Ideas for doing it next time
 - What do you still hope for this time

* 11. (Most important talking point) The impact doing this study had on my teaching

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7R.4

Response to Inquiry Presentations

Please respond to the following questions as you listen to the presentations. You may wish to share selected responses with the presenter orally at the end of the presentation, but please write comments and pass them to the presenter to read later when s/he will have time to absorb your feedback.

1. What question did you think was at the core of this inquiry study? In your own words, describe what you think was the "heart" of this inquiry study.
2. Which collections of evidence or information did you view as most important? Which ones most influenced your thinking about this study?
3. What collections didn't provide the kind of information you needed to really support a conclusion about the question?
4. In your view what was the most interesting or useful aspect(s) of this study?
5. What information or conclusions from this study could you apply to your teaching situation?
6. What questions do you still have?