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# Epilogue: Student Teacher Inquiry

**Pete Boyd and Agnieszka Szplit**

In the twelve chapters of this book the authors have provided insight into their pedagogies for teacher education and how these relate to the theme of student teacher inquiry. Rather than reporting on the well-established approach of ‘teacher action research’ most of the chapters provide insight into a very wide range of creative learning activities used by teacher educators under the broad banner of ‘inquiry-based learning’. In this epilogue, reflecting as editors on the rich range of chapters within the text, we will offer some thoughts around the characteristics of student teacher inquiry, the focus of student teacher inquiry, the language of teacher inquiry and the possibilities for teacher inquiry to contribute to new knowledge.

The characteristics of student teacher inquiry might reasonably be considered to include some or all of the following:

- Sustained focus on learning (of pupils and / or of teachers)
- Developing a meaningful and challenging question
- Enactment in a classroom or school (or simulation) with an element of experimentation
- Critical engagement with both public knowledge and practical wisdom
- A theoretical framework or perspective
- Ethical collection and analysis of some evidence of learning (data)
- Development of pedagogical knowledge but within the context of a curriculum subject
- Reporting on findings to peers

And it is interesting to consider to what extent these characteristics are demonstrated by each of the strategies described in detail within the preceding chapters. In many of the approaches evaluated it appears that the tutor provided much of the shape of the inquiry rather than allowing student teachers to develop their own questions. This structured approach seems reasonable provided that student teachers are developing understanding and skills in inquiry and working towards a capstone professional inquiry assignment. Four of the chapters focused on teacher identity and again this seems worthwhile, assuming that elsewhere on the programme students pursue inquiry that is focused on children’s learning. Chapter 9 by Femke Timmermans and Gerda Geerdink puts down a warning to

us all, as teacher educators, that efforts to develop students' research skills do not necessarily translate into their adoption of inquiry as stance.

In relation to the focus of student teacher inquiry, if our aim as teacher educators is to develop inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) then it seems important to consider the *authenticity* of the inquiry-based tasks that we set for student teachers. Considering a pedagogy for teacher education that is informed by a clinical practice model (as proposed in Chapter 1) then the inquiry should focus on a 'core practice' of teaching (Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009). A pragmatic list of teacher core practices might include the following: planning lessons; planning sequences of lessons; explaining; designing learning activities; facilitating classroom learning; setting high expectations; responding to individual learning needs; questioning; assessing and giving feedback; grading, monitoring, recording and reporting. An inquiry focused on one or more of these seems likely to feel authentic to student teachers because of its relevance to classroom practice. But a higher level list of professional core practices might include: collaborating within a teaching team; evaluating teaching and learning; critically engaging with public knowledge (theory, research evidence, professional guidance and policy); and leading change in practice. In designing student inquiry the teacher educator might focus the activity on one or more core practices, and at some point in their programme the student teacher needs to develop the skills of designing an inquiry more independently. Related to the focus for student inquiry is the organisational challenge for many teacher education programmes around the sequencing of student opportunities for enactment of core practices in the classroom whilst retaining the space for them to plan, complete and follow-up an inquiry.

In reflecting on the 'language' of teacher inquiry a useful starting point is to consider the difference between 'teacher inquiry' and 'teacher research'. This might seem straightforward in that research would perhaps be more systematic, more formal in terms of methods, more theorised, more engaged with the research literature, and less focused on simply improving local change in practice. But language is important in shaping practice and it is important that educators develop a shared language of 'inquiry'. This seems to be particularly important in the current context of education, dominated as it is in many nations by Neoliberal policy that emphasises students and parent 'choice' of school or university within a quasi-market. Some language has been appropriated, for example in schools in England the term 'data' is now widely taken to mean quantitative test and examination scores used to track student progress. If a research mentor suggests 'collecting some data' by which they mean a wide range of possible sources and types of information, then unfortunately teachers and especially school leaders will take that to mean test and exam results. In this case a work around is to use the term 'evidence of learning' in place of data but even that alternative term perhaps reflects the context as it still might imply a focus on measurable outcomes. Developing a shared language for teacher inquiry will require activity at local and

national levels but perhaps some progress is also possible across international networks. Most importantly it will be a language that needs to be developed in the context of application, meaning in schools.

Finally we should consider the possibilities for co-creation of new knowledge through teacher inquiry and reflect on the position of student teacher inquiry within that bigger picture. The concept of 'Mode 2 Knowledge' is contested but certainly has resonance for teacher educators committed to supporting teacher inquiry. Mode 2 means knowledge that is developed within the context of application and is seen as strongly contextualised and socially robust (Nowotny, Scott & Gibbons, 2001). In educational research generation of Mode 2 knowledge therefore happens in schools or other educational settings and the position of a university-based researcher is one of boundary-crossing agent collaborating with expert teachers as co-researchers. The collaboration of university-based educational researcher with school-based practitioners reflects the kinds of scientist, engineer, designer collaborative research teams identified by Ben Shneiderman as capable of producing breakthrough research in technology fields (Shneiderman, 2016). The student teacher might be considered to be a boundary-crossing agent and student teacher inquiry therefore offers possibilities for teacher educators to build collaborative research with school-based teachers. This pursuit of co-creation of mode 2 knowledge perhaps all seems rather ambitious. It requires university-based teacher educators to be active confident researchers and generous collaborative partners for teachers. It also requires teachers to find time and develop capacity for inquiry. Kurt Lewin, the founder of action research, commented wisely that 'Experience alone does not create knowledge'. As university-based teacher educators and expert school teachers we should collaborate through professional inquiry, and student teacher inquiry is an important opportunity for such collaboration.

## References

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