

TAKING STOCK OF YOUR CLASSROOM

Engaging in the exercises in this book will not only help with your inquiry practice, but it will also renew your teaching spirit. Check any box below that applies to you right now:

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- I'm working harder than most of my students.
 - The majority of my students care more about their grades than about learning.
 - I've lost sight of who I am and why I'm teaching.
 - I'm thinking of quitting the teaching profession.
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If you checked at least one box, you're heading in the right direction! Keep going. This book is designed for you.

If you haven't checked a box, your *colleagues need you* to work alongside these exercises with them.



EXPERIENCE #2

How Do You Know If You're "Doing" Inquiry?

The most common reaction I receive from teachers after an inquiry workshop is: "I'm just relieved that I'm *already* doing these things!" This is a reasonable reaction for many of us who work hard without a lot of feedback and pats on the back. Reassurance feels good. But it can be misleading, too.

The truth is that most teachers are *not* already doing these things. Think about it. If we were, our classrooms and schools would look very different than they do today. We wouldn't be making documentaries about progressive schools. I'm sure your classroom is the exception, but let's make sure we are being completely honest with ourselves.

Awareness and acceptance is the first step to creating an inquiry classroom. It means asking yourself what is happening beyond the grades, test scores, and formal evaluations. It means taking in feedback from the most difficult student or parent. Nobody is perfect, so take that pressure off yourself. Above all, try not to take it personally. This is simply about realizing that we are often unconsciously defaulting back to teaching habits that are counter-productive to what we are really going for in our classrooms. It's OK. It happens. You're OK. You're human.

Inquiry teachers are curious people, and so their disposition is one of wonder rather than all-knowing. They are willing to be wrong. They embrace mistakes as the best methods for learning. They are open to new and sometimes conflicting points of view. More than anything, they are honest about where they are and where they want to improve.

ARE YOU READY FOR SOME HONESTY?

Go back to your Self Survey (Experience #1). Read through the statements again. Did you put your X in the right place? Move it if you need to. Find a partner

and talk about the statements and your responses. Are you feeling ambivalent or concerned about any of them? Maybe you want to rewrite the survey to represent your instructional goals more completely. Do it!

Next, write down recent specific *examples* from your classroom next to each statement to illustrate *why* you placed the X where you did.

Finally, brainstorm ways in which you can collect data (it doesn't have to be quantitative) to get a better sense of how you're doing with each of these statements. Talk with colleagues about their responses. Which statements do you feel most confident about? What questions does this experience raise for you? There is no need to create an action plan for this right now (unless you're motivated to). Just simply become more aware.



EVIDENCE OF INQUIRY

STATEMENTS

EXAMPLES

I have a strong relationship with each one of my students.

I am OK not having all the answers.

My students talk (academically) as much, or more, than I do.

There is equal verbal participation between students in my classroom.

I ask more questions than make statements while teaching.

My students ask at least as many questions as I do during class.

Students listen to other students when they speak. I rarely repeat or paraphrase for them.

Students back up their claims and cite their sources without prompting.

Students have lots of opportunities to make their own choices.

There are lots of opportunities for students to quietly think and reflect.



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	POSSIBLE DATA COLLECTION METHODS



EXPERIENCE #3

What Do Your Students Think?

As a university teacher, I receive detailed feedback from my students about my teaching at the end of each quarter. Students are invited to respond to a series of multiple-choice questions and short answer questions. This is collected, computer analyzed, and returned to me along with their written responses within a few days. My students' feedback is worth its weight in gold. They are the ones I care most about impressing. Plus, they are also in the best position to tell me if my teaching is having an impact on their learning experience.

Great, right? Don't you wish this was standard practice in our K–12 schools? Just for your own eyes, you know? The good news is that you don't have to wait for your school or district to act to get regular feedback from your students.

YOU CAN DO IT RIGHT NOW.

Set aside 15 minutes and invite your students to indicate their agreement with statements about their experience in your classroom. I've provided one for you to use right away (Inquiry Student Survey). Make sure it's anonymous so that students won't be afraid to be completely honest.

At the bottom of every survey, offer optional space for students to share their response to the following prompt: *I wish my teacher knew . . .* Students interpret this prompt in a variety of ways, but I always find it incredibly instructive (thanks to Kyle Schwartz, a Colorado distinguished teacher for sharing this idea).

As with the Inquiry Self-Survey, feel free to alter and edit as needed for your purposes. You can create your own student survey by starting with a list of the questions you have about your teaching practice. What information could your students provide that would most help you improve? List some ideas in the space provided.

What I want to know from my students.



A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for students to write their responses to the question above.

Inquiry Student Survey

Reflect on the statements below and show your agreement by marking an "X" on the continuum: 0 = not true to 10 = yes, absolutely.

.....

1 I know every student in my class really well.
0 _____ 10

2 My teacher knows me well.
0 _____ 10

3 Students talk more than the teacher in class (about stuff related to the class).
0 _____ 10

4 My teacher asks a lot of really good questions.
0 _____ 10

5 I ask a lot of questions in this class.
0 _____ 10

6 Students get to make a lot of choices in this class.
0 _____ 10

7 My teacher admits to not knowing all the answers.
0 _____ 10

8 Students listen to other students when they speak in this class.
0 _____ 10

9 We spend time talking about where our information comes from.
0 _____ 10

10 I'm learning a lot in this class.
0 _____ 10

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I wish my teacher knew:

A large, empty rectangular box with a blue border, intended for students to write their responses. A small pencil icon is located in the top right corner of the box.

Reading Your Student Surveys

After you've collected the student surveys, take a moment to pat yourself on the back. This is an intensely personal, emotional, and complex profession. The simple act of asking for and receiving feedback is heroic. My advice for making sense of the feedback is to start with the "I wish my teacher knew" section. Compile these short answers into categories (compliments, advice, questions, concerns). Then, use a blank template to record the approximate placement of the X's for each one of the ten statements. Where do they cluster? Where is there the most and the least agreement? Remember, no self-flagellation allowed. We are all still learning. Go easy on yourself, but keep your eyes open, too.

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I WISH MY TEACHER KNEW . . .

COMPLIMENTS

ADVICE

QUESTIONS

CONCERNS

Statement that had the most agreement:

Statement that had the least agreement:



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