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# Preface

## About This Book

After experiencing the power of practitioner inquiry as a part of my dissertation work where I engaged in collaborative action research with a group of teachers and their principal for an entire school year in 1991, I have been passionate about practitioner inquiry ever since. For the past 20 years, I have integrated inquiry into the fabric of initial teacher preparation in the professional development school; presented workshops, institutes, and various presentations on practitioner research to teachers and administrators in several states across the nation; initiated a program of action research in K–12 virtual schools; coached and studied principals engaged in inquiry as a way to gain insights into their administrative practice; directed a center for school improvement whose main goal was to support and promote practitioner research as a primary mechanism for school improvement across the state of Florida; created a website to support teachers in the inquiry process; and authored several books and research studies aimed at helping practitioners inquire into their practice. Across all of these inquiry endeavors, I have worked with hundreds of educators as they embarked on the inquiry journey.

Over time, I began to see patterns emerge in many teacher researchers' initial approaches to their work. These patterns encapsulated places where their initial work in each phase of the action research process might have been tweaked or massaged just a bit to lead to more powerful and deeper research efforts. I believed that if captured and placed in a succinct and useable form, teacher inquirers everywhere could learn from these patterns, dig deeper into their work, and ultimately produce higher quality research to improve life and learning conditions for teachers and students everywhere. This is why this book was written.

## Who This Book Is For and How to Use It

While there exists a plethora of introductory texts on teacher research, this book takes off where other introductory texts on action research leave the reader, providing teacher inquirers tips for each part of the inquiry process as they are in the midst of doing it (i.e., developing a wondering, developing an inquiry plan, analyzing data, and presenting one's work). Hence, it serves as a perfect complement to books that introduce the process of practitioner inquiry, and coordinates seamlessly with the introductory text I authored with Diane Yendol-Hoppey, *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research*. Yet this book can also be used as a short, succinct, stand-alone text to guide teachers through the inquiry process in a very targeted and specific way. Teachers can use this text to get jump-started in the process for the first time and can refer to lengthier texts on the subject later to learn more detail about the process.

Many preservice teachers engage in inquiry as a part of their teacher education programs at various times and in various configurations. In addition, many practicing teachers engage in inquiry as a part of advanced graduate study at the university. Sometimes course work for preservice teachers and graduate students focuses specifically on action research, and at other times, action research is undertaken as an assignment in a content or methods course, such as Teaching Children Mathematics. This book may be used as a text in any university course (whether or not the course focuses on action research) to scaffold assignments related to inquiry that may be a part of the class syllabus. Its short length enables the text to be used in content courses without overwhelming the student, and as a complement to other readings on practitioner research, it will help students enrolled in courses on action research produce higher quality final projects.

In addition to being a valuable resource for practicing teachers to supplement other lengthier texts or jump-start them in the process of inquiry as professional development and college students to help them craft higher quality research as a part of coursework, this book is also for any educator who coaches action research. In essence, the book itself serves as an action research coach. It is a brief resource coaches can give to their coachees to provide them with a checklist of sorts as they progress through each phase of the inquiry process, making the complex job of the inquiry coach easier.

The goal of this book is to help teachers fine-tune their work and ultimately produce higher quality research than would be produced

in the absence of deliberate reflection on and careful scrutiny of each phase in the action research cycle: developing a wondering, developing a research plan, analyzing data, and presenting the research. If you are a teacher researcher, this book can serve as a critical friend, gently pushing you a little further in each step of the process. And if we all push ourselves a little deeper in the inquiry process, we capitalize on the capacity of teacher research to raise teacher voice in educational reform and improve schooling for all children. Happy inquiring!

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# Introducing the *Inspire to Inquire* DVD

**I**n sum, the text of this book is designed to help teachers fine-tune their work throughout each phase of the inquiry cycle. While each chapter includes many examples of teacher researchers' work to accomplish this task, there is no substitute for actually seeing and hearing real teacher researchers in action. For this reason, a unique feature of the book is the accompanying *Inspire to Inquire* DVD.

The *Inspire to Inquire* DVD contains four short video clips that cut across the book as a whole and provide stories of practitioner inquirers and the importance of the work they do. Two additional clips enable the reader to meet the author in person to learn more about her work with inquiry throughout the years and her passion for the process.

The clips are designed to ignite discussion about the inquiry process and the power it holds to transform teaching and learning in classrooms and schools across the nation. As such, a great way to use these clips is at venues, such as faculty meetings, professional development workshops, or college classes. Each clip can kickoff a meeting, workshop, or college class by serving as a springboard for discussion about the inquiry process and each teacher's inquiry work. The video clips can also extend face-to-face faculty meeting, workshop, or college class meeting time by serving as an impetus for online discussions of the clip's content in between work sessions that focus on each phase of the inquiry cycle: developing a wondering, developing a research plan, analyzing data, and presenting the research.

Finally, clips can also be viewed by individuals at various times as they progress through the content of this book to provide inspiration and ideas for the ways the processes described in the text translate into real classroom and school contexts.

Clip 1, titled **Introducing Inquiry**, provides a brief overview of the entire inquiry process and its importance by author Nancy Fichtman Dana. As such, it's a great clip to view before even beginning the text or as a complement to Chapter 1. This clip can serve as a catalyst for the book and the inquiry process itself and the ways both might be used to further school improvement and professional development endeavors in a district or school or further one's learning about teaching as an education student in a college or university.

Clip 2, titled **Inquiry as a Pathway to Understanding Teaching Strategies and Techniques**, features teacher inquirer Tracy Staley. Tracy teaches fifth-grade science in a Title One school where approximately 75% of the students are on free or reduced-price lunch. Discouraged by her students' performance on her state's standardized reading and science tests, Tracy wished to try some new approaches to the teaching of science and wondered, "What is the relationship between my students' participation in station activity and their science learning?" This clip chronicles Tracy's use of the inquiry process to gain insights into the implementation of her new approach to the organization of her science instruction and the impact it had on her students' learning.

Clip 3, titled **Inquiry as a Pathway to Equity**, features high school social studies teacher Gary Boulware, who engaged in inquiry to increase access to the AP courses he taught after noticing that his classes were occupied mostly by white, upper-middle-class students, and Thea Saccasyn, a principal who led her entire faculty in inquiry to uncover and challenge their assumptions and biases related to the children they teach in her high-need, high-poverty school. This clip portrays the promise the inquiry movement holds to create more equitable classrooms for our children and youth.

Clip 4, titled **Inquiry as a Way of Being and Teaching**, features ESOL teacher Stephanie Whitaker. This clip portrays the way Stephanie uses the inquiry process to approach her mathematics instruction, teaching for conceptual understanding rather than procedural understanding of the mathematics concepts covered in her curriculum with outstanding results.

Clip 5, titled **Inquiry and the Common Core**, features educational consultant Jamey Burns and the work she has done with one elementary school to use the process of inquiry as a mechanism to better

understand the Common Core as it rolls out in their district. An interesting component of this DVD clip is the introduction it provides to student inquiry, applying the same process that teachers use to learn more about their professional practice to students in the classroom. This clip portrays the promise engaging students in inquiry holds to actualize the Common Core in classrooms.

Serving as the final clip on the DVD, Clip 6, titled **The Power and Passion of Inquiry**, again features author Nancy Fichtman Dana reflecting on the process of inquiry as a whole and the importance of taking an inquiry stance toward one's teaching. As such, it's a great clip to view after completing the text or as a complement to Chapter 6. This clip can serve to bring closure to the completion of one cycle of inquiry as explicated in the book, and it might even be viewed at the end of an Inquiry Showcase where teachers in a school or district have presented their work to one another or university students have presented an inquiry they've completed during the semester to their classmates and the instructor at the final class of the semester. The purpose of this clip is to inspire inquirers to continue their research. Hence, this clip might also be used at a faculty meeting or district workshop designed to help teachers reflect on and evaluate the inquiry work they've just completed during one school year and provide the impetus for teachers to plan their next cycle of inquiry by answering questions such as "Where do we wish to take our research next?" and "What new wonderings do we have?"

However you choose to use the clips contained on the DVD, the clips help the words contained in the following pages of this book come alive in unique and interesting ways. The intended result of viewing these clips in combination with the reading of the text is to help the reader inspire to inquire and continue one's inquiry journey throughout the professional lifetime. Enjoy each clip. Enjoy the journey. Bon voyage!