Inquiry in Teacher Education: A look at the concept and practice of teacher inquiry as it pertains to the new BEd program

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Outline

1. What, Why and How of Inquiry?

2. Transition to Inquiry:
   - Principles of Teaching 2010-2012: The Plan
   - Principles of Teaching 2010-2012: The Lived

3. Moving Forward: What have we learned?
What is Inquiry?

- A stance...a posture...an attitude of questioning...a consistent, interpretive engagement in educational ideas and practices.
  (Cochran-Smith et al., 2010)
Why Inquiry?

Educational phenomena (e.g., teaching, curriculum, classroom events, school textbooks, educational standards, educational systems) are socially constructed, complex and uncertain enterprises….

Inquiry is necessary if educators are to understand [and judge] whether current educational practices serve identified human needs and satisfy important human purposes.

CREATE Program Document
...[s]he had to decide what to do to focus on worthwhile achievement...to decide how to communicate the idea that respect for evidence, clarity and ‘elegance’ matters...to choose in individual cases, whether to permit free, creative activity in place of required tasks...to decide whether to nurture sensitivity at certain points instead of encouraging cognitive action...how much to allow for personal idiosyncrasy...or should adjust the demands of the clock or the schedule to the rhythm of a child’s inner timer...multiple small uncertainties about whom to call on, whom to discipline, whom to reward...to give reasons...to persuade others that [s]he is making sense....

(Maxine Greene, 1973)
What is Teacher Inquiry?

In order to sustain and improve their practice, teachers should routinely ask critical questions about their curriculum choices and pedagogical decisions.

Inquiry-oriented teacher education aims to develop this habit of inquiry in teacher candidates, to cultivate discernment and wise judgment about what is desirable in the name of education.

CREATE Program Document

- Dewey, 1916, 1933
- Schwab, 1970
- Schon, 1983
- Grimmet & Erickson, 1988
- Ross, Cornett & McCutcheon, 1992
- Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993
- Fenstermacher & Richardson, 1993
- Clandinin, 1995
- Clarke & Erikson, 2002
- Dunne & Pendlebury, 2002
- Coulter & Wiens, 2002
- Nicol, 2006
Program Aims to Promote

- *An inquiry stance*: a consistent interpretive engagement with educational ideas and practices

- *Intellectual maturity*: an appreciation of diverse perspectives and publics; and the necessity of reasoned judgment

- *Responsibility for one’s own ongoing learning* as a teacher
  - Identifying and addressing curiosities and challenges that may not have ready-made answers
  - Linking and integrating different kinds of knowledge from various courses and field experience
How to Achieve Aims?

- Inquiry Seminar I: Developing an understanding of teaching as reflective inquiry

- Inquiry Seminar II: Conducting an inquiry project
  - practitioner OR other type of educational research project
  - topics: teaching an ecological sciences unit; challenges for recently immigrated students; textbooks as cultural and historical objects

- Inquiry Seminar III: Engaging in inquiry into the teacher candidate’s experience of learning to teach, educational commitments and professional responsibilities
Teacher Inquiry: A Continuum

Informal

Reflective practice

Formal

Teacher research
- Action research
- Self-study
- Arts-based inquiry
- Autobiography

A conversation with the situation at hand… moving from doubt to new environing conditions, occasioning new questions. (Dewey, 1910)
Principles of Teaching

Inquiry Seminar I

Inquiry Seminar II
Principles of Teaching 2010-12: The Plan
Transition to Inquiry I & II

General intentions:
To engender in teacher candidates

- an understanding of teaching as inquiry-based, judgement-centred, and requiring engagement with multiple others—students, parents, colleagues, scholarly community;

- an appreciation of the importance of research in understanding curriculum, teaching and learning;

- a desire to engage in their own educational inquiries—to become students of teaching.
Inquiry I & II

The courses serve as an introduction to teacher inquiry as:

1) practitioner inquiry

2) educational study

Teacher candidates will learn to engage in inquiry in a systematic and critical manner, beginning first by interacting with scholarly examples of educational inquiry and leading eventually to their own independent inquiry.
UBC classroom

Field experience

Project: proposal, research, consultation and presentation
Inquiry Seminar I

Understanding teaching

Understanding teaching as inquiry

Exploring teacher inquiry

Generating questions for inquiry

Engaging conversations with colleagues and children
Inquiry Seminar I

Enlarging perspectives through scholarly and professional communities

Generating observations, noticing what we notice

Making sense

Taking action

Reflecting on teaching
DISCUSSION GUIDE


1. Sims writing about how her question keeps evolving brought to mind a number of other authors whose reflections on the nature of questions bear thinking about. What does Martuswicz mean when she writes the following and does it relate at all to teachers’ questions?

To ask ... as the play between what we know and don’t know, between the thought and the unthought, and always between the said and the unsaid. As such, a question is an invitation to the play of multiplicity that operates between the given and the virtual. When we ask why...we are opening a space in which there is an indefinite number of possible answers for us to choose...[Martuswicz, 1997, p. 99].


2. What did Gadamer mean when he wrote the following and how might it inform an understanding of teacher inquiry?

A person who thinks must ask himself questions.... This is the reason why understanding is always more than merely recreating someone else’s meaning. Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one’s own thinking on the subject. Only in an inauthentic sense can we talk about understanding questions that one does not pose oneself.... Gadamer (1994, p. 375).


3. See below the list of questions which Sims generated over the course of her inquiry. What kinds of questions did she ask? How did they arise? How did one question lead onto another? Were some questions more educationally significant than others? Discuss the role of question in her research process. Upon reflecting on your own research process, what role did questions play for you?

- What is the significance of teacher research?
- What is the role of inquiry in teacher research?
- How does teacher research influence practice?
- What are the challenges and opportunities of teacher research?
- How does teacher research connect to larger educational issues?
Inquiry Seminar II

Preparing for inquiry

Consultations around the inquiry

Representation of inquiry results
Assignments – Inquiry I & II

1. Class Participation / Entrance and Exit Slips

2. Metaphor / Critical review (or lesson obs/analysis)

3. Inquiry Project:
   - preparing the inquiry proposal,
   - conducting the inquiry project,
   - presenting the final project
     - oral / multi-media presentation
     - written paper
Inquiry Proposal

• What is your question and how did it arise for you?
• Why is your question **significant** (to you and/or to others)?
Inquiry Proposal

• What is your question and how did it arise for you?

• Why is your question significant (to you and/or to others)?

• What (publically available) (re)sources will you draw on to explore your question?
  journal (field)
  readings (books and journal articles)
  curriculum documents
  policy documents
  other sources

• What do you expect to find out?
Assessment Criteria

The inquiry project should reflect an emerging ability to:

- engage substantively with a topic as reflected in careful reading of the literature and an understanding of significant issues, perspectives and assumptions,
- position oneself in relation to ideas discussed,
- consider educational issues critically,
- relate one’s insights to curriculum and pedagogy.
Representation of Inquiry Results
The Possibilities Surrounding Motivation in the Classroom

It would be a lie to say that previous to enrolling in the Bachelor of Education program at UBC I had given any real thought to the topic of motivation. I had assumed, like many I am sure, that some people were motivated and others were not, and that little could really be done to spark motivation in those who had none. My disinterest in motivation ended one day during an educational psychology class...
My childhood experience as an ELL in school

“English Only.” The big, bright yet austere sign covered one of the walls in my ELL (English Language Learners) classroom where my friends from all over the world were pulled out to receive segregated language lessons. There were also invisible signs throughout the school in the form of teachers’ frowns, reprimands and nagging from other kids saying “speak English”. Even at home, my parents told me to speak English and forget my mother tongue to “make room” for English. Since they were aware of the practice at school, they wanted to implement the same ‘English only’ policy at home, supposedly to have English replace my mother tongue as quickly as possible. In the classroom, not understanding what was going on was more acceptable than trying to figure out by asking in other tongues...
My initial interest in philosophy with children started from a larger question of inquiry that branched into a subset of questions: How do we create community? What would this community look like? The definition of community can have much variance and I am interested in gaining a more complete understanding of my vision of community. One of the branches of my definition of community involves issues of power and how it is distributed...
Why are Quiet Students So Quiet?

When you walk into a classroom during a class discussion, it is easy to identify the quiet students and the verbal students. During classroom discussions, the more talkative students tend to dominate the discussion and the teacher tends to give more attention to the more verbal students (Townsend, 1998). Often, the students who do not speak up during discussions may be ignored or neglected. Other times, the teacher is often too busy with the verbal students so that the quiet students are overlooked because the quiet students are easy to manage and rarely cause trouble. . .
Sharing with a Wider Audience
Principles of Teaching 2010-12: The Lived
KIPP (Kindergarten and Primary Program) cohort

Creating a space for inquiry

Practicum connections
Conceptions of Teaching

- An “hour-glass” process

- Guiding questions, e.g.,
  - What are some present day understandings of teaching and teachers?
  - What are some historically significant understandings of teaching and teachers?
  - What understandings do you hold about teaching and teachers?

- Readings, e.g., Freire’s *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*

- Entrance / Exit slips
Understanding Teaching as Inquiry / Exploring Teacher Inquiry

- What is inquiry?
- What is student inquiry?
- What is teacher inquiry?
  - Reading examples of inquiries conducted in primary classrooms
  - Key qualities of teacher inquiry
Linking Inquiry and Practice

- What kinds of questions do teachers ask?
- Where do teachers’ questions come from?
- What constitutes a good question?
  - 3 Gs (generational, generous, generative)
Enlarging Perspectives
Preparing for Inquiry/Practicum

- Refining your questions
- Taking notice
- Journal reflections
Formalizing Inquiries

- After practicum
- Generating and narrowing questions
- Time for talk in large and small groups, and then on an individual basis
Inquiry Questions

- How does poor nutrition affect learning and behaviour of young children?
- Why is physical education given such a low priority when empirical evidence suggests it can have a positive effect on learning?
- What are the effects of delaying Kindergarten?
- Is full day (all day) Kindergarten the best choice for all students?
- How do play-based learning centres promote or reinforce gender-based play in Kindergarten?
- What are the effects of using “time-out” as a management technique on children, teachers, and parents?
- How does using a SMART Board help students with learning disabilities?
Presenting Inquiry Projects

- Small group presentations vs. individual presentations
- Peer feedback
- Uploading presentations
- Paper due after presentation
Moving Forward: What Have We Learned?
What Have We Learned?

1. Research Study (CSTE):
   - Interviews with teacher candidates and instructors
   - Documents: Student Proposals + Projects

2. Teacher candidate feedback gathered 2010-2012
   - Teacher candidates’ experiences, understandings and recommendations
   - Instructors
   - Coordinators
Aims = Achievements?

- Intellectual Maturity
- Responsibility for Learning
- Inquiry Stance
Teacher Candidates’ Understandings

- Education as a field of study/research

- Contested and complex, involving a range of issues and perspectives

- Practice of teaching is uncertain, lending itself to questions and problems—a reflective practice

- Who they’re becoming, what they value and the influence of the past on both

- Relationship to knowledge
  - Choosing their own topics/questions for inquiry; meeting face-to-face with instructors; learning to read experience in rich ways; sharing with peers… a graduate student experience?
Teacher Candidates’ Experiences

- Why all this talk about inquiry?
  - Completely new and difficult language and process
  - University programs = information and application
  - Project vs. stance

- What’s happening to our cohort?
  - Formation of cliques - Receiving in-depth feedback
  - ‘Lowering the bar’ - Student views/values challenged

- Shouldn’t we be getting ready for practicum?
  - Teacher as doer vs. doer who thinks
  - Instrumental reasoning (how to teach vs. what/why)
  - Inquiry is what students, not necessarily teachers, do
Academic vs. Professional Education
Candidates’ Recommendations

- **Calling for an experience of practitioner inquiry**
  - To work with teachers in the field who embody and model inquiry as professionals
  - To do their inquiry projects during practicum, that is, to engage in practitioner inquiry

**Ethics Review Process**

- Questioning
- Framing
- Exploring Perspectives
- Implementing “Solutions”
- Evaluating
Students’ Thoughts….

“A wonderful experience…one of the best experiences in the B.Ed program…an outlet to tap into my intellectual side.” (Alain)

“It took a while to understand what it is and how it might look. At the end I felt a bit more appreciative about what it was all about…. Teaching is really a reflective practice…thinking about the reasons why we do and say…asking more questions.” (Caroline)

“It seemed a much bigger deal than it was!” (Maria)