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Tool nr. 33 - material

Developed by: Catholic Education Flanders

Name of the material

Easy ways to collect data during your work

Sources

Inspired by: Dana, N.F., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2008) *The reflective educator's guide to professional Development: coaching Inquiry-Oriented Learning Communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin press

Purpose of the material

To discover different ways of data collection

- This material has been developed to support teachers in collecting data during their practitioner inquiry. When teachers decide to do practitioner inquiry, they start with formulating a question about their practice. Once their question is clear and concise, they can collect data.
- This material gives an overview of the different kinds of data that teachers can collect. The material gives also suggestions on how to work with the material in school teams.

After the collection of data, teacher - inquirers analyse the data, decide on what they will do based on the analyse of the data and share their findings with colleagues.

How you can use this material in your practice

Two possibilities:

1. Cut out the twelve different ways of data collection and put them on several tables in the meeting room;
 - a. Make twelve groups (f.i. 24 participants = 12 groups of 2);
 - b. Each group go from table to table and read the different ways of data collection;
 - c. After having read a way of data collection, they discuss on how they can use this way of data collection in their practitioner inquiry.
2. Cut out several times the twelve ways of data collection and put them in stacks of 4 (f.i. 1 – 4, 5 – 8, 9 – 12)
 - a. Make groups of 3 participants;
 - b. Each participant of each group reads a stack of 4 ways of data collection (f.i. cards 1 – 4) and he/she gets the task to explain the content of what he/she has read to the other 2 colleagues;

Participants tell to the other participants of each group what they have read.

Material



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Data collection 1: Field notes

To capture action in the classroom, many teacher researchers take field notes as they observe. Field notes can come in many shapes, forms, and varieties. Some of these include scripting dialog and conversation, diagramming the classroom or a particular part of the classroom, noting what a student or group of students are doing at particular time intervals (e.g. every two minutes), and recording every question that a teacher asks. Field notes are not interpretations but rather focus on capturing what is occurring without commenting as to why the action might be occurring or how one judges a particular act.

The forms that your field notes take depend on your wondering.

Data collection 3: Interviews

Teacher talk is important! As talk is crucial to the life of a teacher, capturing talk can be an important form of data collection. Field notes are one way to capture talk that occurs naturally in the classroom. Some teachers-inquirers go a step further than naturally occurring classroom talk by interviewing as well. Interviewing can be informal and spontaneous or more thoughtfully and planned.

Data collection 2: Documents/artifacts/student work

Field notes capture actions as data on paper. However even without field notes, schools and classrooms naturally generate a tremendous paper trail that captures much of the daily classroom activity. The paper trail includes student work, curriculum guides, textbooks, teacher manuals, children's literature, individualized education plans, community memos, parent newsletters, progress reports, teacher plan books, written lesson plans, and correspondence to and from parents, the principal, and specialists. The amount of paperwork that crosses a teacher's desk can make any teacher bleary eyed. Often the papers teachers view do not hold significant meaning when read in isolation or when quickly in order to be able to hand them back in the morning. Teachers need to 'get through' paperwork in order to keep up with their work.

Yet, when teaching and inquiry are intertwined with one another, the papers become data and take on new meaning. When teacher-inquirers select and collect the papers that are related to their research wonderings, we call these papers documents and artifacts. Systematically collecting papers provides you with the opportunity to look within and across these documents to analyze them in new and different ways.

Data collection 4: Focus groups

Focus groups offer teachers another vehicle for collecting the talk and thoughts of children in the classroom. In many ways, focus groups occur daily in the form of whole-class or small-group discussion. The focus-group discussion can serve as a tool for understanding students' perceptions. For example, a focus group can provide insight into how students experience a new instructional strategy.



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Data collection 5: Digital pictures

Interviews and focus groups can capture words as data. A very old proverb you are likely familiar with is 'a picture is worth a thousand words.' Another wonderful way to capture action that occurs in the classroom as data is through digital photography.

Data collection 6: Video as data

Digital pictures capture a single snippet of action in the classroom at one point in time. Video as a form of data collection takes digital pictures one step further by capturing an entire segment of action in the classroom over a set time period. Given that teachers often collect their best data by seeing and listening to the activities within their classroom, video becomes a powerful form of data collection for the teacher researcher. Teacher researchers have found that using video can help them collect descriptive information, better understand an unfolding behavior, capture the process used, study the learning situation, and make visible products or outcomes. More specifically, through observing video of one's own teaching, teachers can observe attitudes, skill and knowledge levels, nature of interactions, nonverbal behavior, instructional clarity, and the influence of physical surroundings.

Data collection 7: Reflective journals

Strategy 1 to 6 are ways to make data collection a part of your teaching by capturing what naturally occurs in your teaching day – action in the classroom through field notes, digital pictures, and video; student progress in your classroom through document analysis; and talk in the classroom through interviews and focus groups. One of the ways that interviewing and focus groups serve as powerful data collection strategies is through the *talk* of interviewing, because a teacher-inquirer gains access into the *thinking* of the child or adult being interviewed.

Capturing "thinking" is a challenge for any researcher. One way a teacher researcher captures the thinking that occurs in the school and classroom within his or her own mind is through journaling. Journals provide teachers a tool for reflecting on their own thought processes and can also serve as a tool for students to record their thinking related to the project at hand.

Data collection 8: Weblogs

Similar to a journal, weblogs are another excellent way teacher researchers can capture their thinking as an inquiry unfolds. Weblogs are easily created, easily updateable web sites that allows an author (or authors) to publish instantly to the Internet from any Internet connection. As blogs consist of a series of entries arranged in reverse chronological order, they can serve as a sort of "online diary" where teacher researchers can post commentary or news about the research they are currently engaged in. Unlike the journal as a form of data collection, the teacher researcher who blogs can combine text, images, and links to other blogs as well as post comments in an interactive format. The comment feature of blogs provides the opportunity for teacher researchers to receive feedback from anyone in the world (in an open blog community) or teacher researchers (in a closed community).



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Data collection 9: Surveys

Some teacher-inquirers employ more formal mechanisms (such as sociograms and surveys) to capture the action, talk, thinking, and productivity that are a part of each and every school day. The most common formal mechanism we have observed in our work with teacher-inquirers is surveys. Surveys can give students a space to share their thoughts and opinions about a teaching technique or strategy, a unit, or their knowledge about particular subject matter;

Data collection 11: Critical friend group feedback

Using multiple sources of data is important. An additional way of data collecting is through critical friend group feedback. Critical friend groups are one version of professional learning communities. A professional learning community is consisting of educators who come together voluntarily at least once a month for some hours. Group members are committed to improving their practice through collaborative learning.

Data collection 10: Quantitative measures of student achievement

In this area of high-stakes testing and accountability, numerous quantitative measure of student performance abound, and these measures can be valuable sources of data for the teacher-researcher.

Data collection 12: Literature as data

Although we often do not think of literature as data, literature offers an opportunity to think about how your work as a teacher-inquirer is informed by, and connect to the work of others. No one teaches or inquires in a vacuum. When we engage in the act of teaching, we are situated within a context (our particular classroom, grade level, school, ...), and our context mediates much of what we do and understand as teachers. Similarly, when teachers inquire, their work is situated within a large, rich, preexisting knowledge base that is captured in such things as books, journal articles, newspaper articles, conference papers and Web sites. Looking at this preexisting knowledge base on teaching informs your study. All you need to figure out is which pieces of literature connect to your wonderings and will give you insights as your study is unfolding. Teacher-inquirers generally collect literature at two different times.

- When they define or are in the process of defining a wondering and
- As their studies lead them to new findings and new wonderings.

In these cases, teachers use the literature to become well informed on what current knowledge exists in the field on their topic. Literature is an essential form of data that every teacher-inquirer should use so as to be



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connected to, informed by, and a contributor to the larger conversation about educational practice.