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To access this website, please visit http://corwin.com/Thereflectiveeducatorsguide
I used to shy away from anything that looked like inquiry. Where would I find the time? What did I know about data? How was it different, really, from what I did naturally as an educator—asking myself questions, reflecting on my practice, paying attention to the challenges of my craft, even going public in my critical friends group and asking my colleagues for feedback?

And then I participated in a collaborative inquiry institute and, in preparation, read the first edition of Nancy Dana and Diane Yendol-Hoppey’s book, *The Reflective Educator’s Guide to Classroom Research*. I was hooked. Now, I can’t imagine not having a question that guides my thinking, a question that helps me determine what kind of data I need and how to gather it, a question that helps me look at my assumptions and helps me open up possibilities. I am a better educator because I have begun to explore questions about my practice in a systematic way.

This second edition is an even richer compendium. There are more stories told in the voices of teachers at all stages of their inquiries, and their authenticity is palpable. These teachers’ stories and musings are interspersed with practical exercises and strategies. And while the authors add their assurances throughout the book that it really is just fine to find your own comfort level as you begin, the voices of the teachers—who sound just like colleagues—make you think it would be possible for you to do what they are doing, too, if only you could find your own question.

Certainly, according to Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, questions propel the inquiry. But before the question, the authors suggest, educators often begin with something else. It may be a wondering, a sense of “what if?” Or they may decide to reconnect to a passion—the reason they became a teacher in the first place. Sometimes a dilemma, or a critical incident, or a sense of not knowing sets the stage for the inquiry—or they notice that something is working and decide they need to know why. And for some, it is reading someone else’s research that causes them to want to explore their own practice.
Dana and Yendol-Hoppey legitimize and give voice to all of these possible starting points—and they make it seem easy not only to begin, but to continue on through the process—finding people with whom you can collaborate, developing a plan and integrating inquiry into your practice, collecting and generating the data that will provide the most insight into your question, analyzing your data, writing up your conclusions and going public by sharing your work with others, and assessing the quality of your inquiry. At no point does it feel impossible or even overwhelming; they effortlessly convey that this next step is simply the next logical thing to do.

The dictionary defines inquiry as 1. The act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Indeed, the act of teacher inquiry involves searching, exploring, studying children, examining one’s own practice, and discovering and rediscovering new possibilities. It demands working collaboratively with colleagues to guard against, in Peter Senge’s words, “counting as ‘real’ the data which confirms what we already believe.” Colleagues provide perspectives and insights we can’t possibly have on our own, because wherever we go, there we are, looking at the world through our own lenses.

All of this, of course, requires certain dispositions. It means we must, at times, slow down and be reflective. We must develop the intellectual side of ourselves—the place where we can open up to others with curiosity and interest, where we can consider options or ideas we hadn’t thought of before. We have to develop the capacity to identify and explicitly work on the questions that matter most to our students—the questions or aspects of our practice that perhaps make us the most uncomfortable. When we engage in collaborative inquiry, we become students of teaching and learning for one another, so we have to learn to frame good questions and develop the habit of taking an inquiry stance toward all that we do. We must become comfortable being uncomfortable—and get used to being in the place of not knowing more often, with a greater capacity for ambiguity. In fact, as Dana and Yendol-Hoppey point out, one of the reasons we engage in teacher inquiry is that it honors the complexity inherent in all teaching. Inquiry insists that we routinely unearth our assumptions—our assumptions about our students and their families, our assumptions about our colleagues and ourselves, our assumptions about achievement and what constitutes a meaningful education—and to examine these assumptions with others—because we believe that the most effective schools have adults in them who are the least satisfied with their practice. We must be willing to collect and make public the evidence from our practice—the data and the student work. We can’t be afraid of hard work or of saying, “I was wrong.” And we must find courage in community, as we hold each other accountable for acting on what we learn.

At one point, a teacher in The Reflective Educator’s Guide to Classroom Research declares, “Had I not posed the question, I never would have
noticed what was actually occurring!” And so, as we ask and explore questions such as, “What supports and experiences for teachers new to our district make a positive difference in their lives as educators?,” “What aspects of the school do families of color experience as supportive and effective, and how can we build on what works?,” “How can I make each ELL student’s story visible in the organizational culture of our school?,” “How does kindergarten writing impact literacy in Grade 1?,” and “How can my students be cultural resources to the curriculum?,” we set off on a journey to “make the familiar strange.” In so doing, we echo T. S. Eliot when he says, “And the end of all our exploring, will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time.”

—Gene Thompson-Grove

Cofounder, National School Reform
Faculty Director, Professional Development and Special Initiatives, Public Schools of Brookline, MA
Foreword to the First Edition

The Reflective Educator’s Guide to Classroom Research is more than a book about how to do teacher research or action research in your own classroom. Certainly it is that, but it is much more than that. Building on the awareness that teachers have accumulated an enormous amount of knowledge through their years of teaching, the authors show how this knowledge can be mined by teachers studying their own practice, making visible the complexities of teaching. It is work that is enriched by sharing with other teachers who can learn from it, expand it, critique it, and build on it. By learning about their practice in this way, teachers not only build their capacity to better understand their own teaching, but also help to build a collaborative culture in their school.

This kind of practitioner inquiry requires teachers to have access to some kind of a group, either inside or outside their school, so that an “inquiry stance” toward teaching becomes a way of life. There is increasing evidence that some teachers who study their practice, go public with their teaching, and share what they are learning with colleagues not only develop greater confidence and understanding about their own teaching and student learning, but also begin to think differently about what it means to be a “lifelong learner” (Lieberman & Wood, 2002).

A special quality of this book is that it makes us feel like Nancy Dana and Diane Yendol-Hoppey are two friends by our side, helping us to develop a process for thinking about teaching and learning in our own classrooms. Numerous authors have attempted to write “how to” books about teacher research, but this one recognizes that doing research is a process and that the role of the authors is to engage the reader in moving through that process: how you get from a focus on a particular student who keeps you awake at night, or something in the curriculum, or the interaction of students, to the development of a way of studying the problem that eventually illuminates its complexities and often leads to ways of thinking that suggest actions, strategies, and solutions. It is apparent that the authors
have facilitated classroom research involving many teachers, as the processes we read about are rooted in the reality of teachers’ struggles to know more about their teaching and to get better at understanding their own as well as their students’ motivations to learn.

*The Reflective Educator’s Guide to Classroom Research* helps us learn that collaborating with peers helps not only one’s own research quest, but that it can be the source of better group understanding as well. Do we want to do a *shared* inquiry; a *parallel* inquiry where we do our own research, as others do theirs by looking at the same topic; or an *intersecting* inquiry where people have different questions on the same topic? How can we learn to do research as a part of teaching work and not an add-on? What strategies can we develop to collect data? And once data are collected, there is the common question, “What do I do with all this information?” The authors are right there: teaching, facilitating, supporting, and moving us through a variety of ways to look at data, always grounded in teacher examples and always explicated by conceptual understandings of how to think through each of these steps.

Readers experience not only what it is like to do classroom research, but perhaps as important, gain an understanding of how teachers can become scholars of their own practice. These “scholars” become colleagues capable of developing their own means of holding themselves accountable within the context of a professional learning community; a community of teachers (as well as their students) excited about learning and stimulated by their continuous inquiries into their own practice.

—*Ann Lieberman*

Senior Scholar, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Visiting Professor, Stanford University
Since we first began working with practicing and prospective teachers engaged in inquiry in the late 1980s, we have been passionate about the process and the promise it holds to raise teachers’ voices in the profession we love. While much has changed on the educational landscape since we began our work with teacher inquiry, the process of inquiry itself has endured and remains a powerful vehicle for teacher professional development as well as initial teacher preparation. Indeed, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) report that “teacher inquiry and the larger practitioner research movement appear to be flourishing in the United States and in many other parts of the world” (p. 11).

While the core of our inquiry work has remained constant, with each passing year and each teacher inquirer we work with, we learn more and more about the process and how to facilitate it. In the third edition of this book, we both respond to the changing times and capture what we’ve learned about facilitation since authoring the first and second editions of this text.

Two of the most pressing educational issues facing teachers today are teacher evaluation and the Common Core State Standards. In this edition, we have sections that discuss the role of inquiry in both, as well as added examples of the ways the process of inquiry can help teachers unpack the Common Core and what these standards will mean to their practice. Additionally, since the second edition, the concept of teacher leadership has continued to gain momentum. In this edition, we provide a more pointed discussion on the relationship between teacher leadership and teacher inquiry.

As we teach about inquiry at the university and coach teachers in the process, we continue to learn much from our students and the wonderful teacher researchers we have worked with across the nation and abroad. In the experiences we have had since writing the second edition, we have learned about the use of iPads as a tool for teacher research, how to make interviewing a part of teaching practice, and the importance of structuring journal entries. We’ve updated our discussion of data collection strategies to include these lessons learned. Furthermore, we’ve expanded our coverage of how and when to use literature to inform a teacher researcher’s work.
In addition to updates in the chapter that focuses on data collection, in previous editions, we mentioned the iterative nature of data collection and data analysis but then proceeded to mainly focus on the summative data analysis process in the chapter on this subject. In this edition, we add a discussion of formative data analysis and provide examples of what this might look like in practice. We hope with this addition, readers will better understand what is meant by the “iterative” nature of data collection and analysis and the ways these two components of the inquiry process go hand in hand.

Our passion for the process of inquiry has helped us build bridges between K–12 and higher education contexts and experience powerful school-university partnerships. As teacher inquiry spans both these contexts, we have learned the importance of celebrating commonalities as well as understanding and appreciating differences. In this edition, we sharpen our discussion of the differences between academic research and teacher inquiry as well as discuss ethical issues related to engaging in the process of inquiry whether you are doing it as part of school-based work, university-based work, or a combination of both.

Finally, shortly after our second edition was published in 2009, we published a separate facilitator’s guide with ideas and tips for using the book in district professional development endeavors and/or college coursework. In this third edition, we seamlessly meld activities and ideas for teaching or facilitating professional development using this text by including a substantial accompanying website for professional development providers and course instructors.

This third edition emerges from our understanding of the literature in the areas of professional development, action research, teacher research, qualitative research, quantitative research, and the process of change as well as our collective experience working with practicing and prospective teachers engaged in inquiry for over 20 years. What we have learned from these teachers about how and why they inquire provides insights into the power teacher inquiry holds to transform classrooms and schools to places where teachers’ voices contribute to the knowledge generated about teaching and learning.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Using a journey metaphor, in this text we take you through the process of inquiry step by step. You begin your journey with a brief introduction to teacher inquiry in Chapter 1 and then move to Chapter 2 to define your first inquiry. This chapter, appropriately entitled “The Start of Your Journey: Finding a Wondering,” gets you started on an inquiry by engaging you in a series of exercises designed to help you cut through all of the intricacies and complexities of teaching to “focus in” on one area that you
are passionate about studying. We define eight passions as places where you may locate your wondering. The passions we cover are inquiring into an individual child’s academic, social, and/or emotional needs; a desire to improve curriculum; a desire to enhance content knowledge; a desire to improve or experiment with teaching strategies and teaching techniques; a desire to explore the relationship between your beliefs and your classroom practice; an investigation of the intersection between your personal and professional identities; issues of social justice; and understanding the learning context. As we explore each passion, we use examples from teacher-inquirers we have worked with to illustrate the ways their wonderings emerged from the intersection of their real-world classroom experiences and one of the particular passions defined in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3, we explore the importance of collaboration with other educators and define four possible structures for inquiry collaboration that might support your inquiry work. At the close of this chapter, you will be ready to begin data collection, a process explored in Chapter 4. In this chapter, we discuss a dozen common strategies for data collection used by teacher-inquirers (literature, field notes, document analysis, interviews, focus groups, digital pictures, video, reflective journals, blogs, surveys, standardized test scores and other assessment measures, critical friend group feedback). Throughout our discussion, we point to the ways each of these strategies connects to what you already do in your life and work as a teacher. We do this because we want you to see how teacher inquiry is a part of, not apart from, the work you do as a teacher.

In Chapter 5, we provide important guidelines for you to consider in relationship to the ethical dimensions of teaching and inquiry. Key questions are raised to help you assure that the work you are doing as a teacher and inquirer is ethical and will do no harm to the students you teach.

In Chapter 6, we explore what we have found to be one of the most difficult steps for teacher-inquirers—data analysis. We discuss and illustrate the ways you analyze data as you are collecting it as well as after collection is complete. If you enjoy jigsaw puzzles you will particularly enjoy your journey through this chapter, as we fully develop this metaphor to describe the summative data analysis process step by step. In addition, we use the work of one teacher-inquirer to illustrate what data analysis might actually look like in practice.

In Chapter 7, we look closely at the “writing it up” process as a way to extend the learning that has occurred during data analysis. One teacher-inquirer’s work is shared in its entirety to illustrate four basic components of any teacher’s inquiry write-up.

In Chapter 8, we discuss the ways engagement in inquiry is connected to every individual teacher becoming the best he or she can be! One part of becoming the best you can be is reflecting on the quality of the teacher research you produce. Chapter 8 offers five quality indicators and questions you can ask yourself as you reflect on your own and your colleagues’ research.
Finally, in Chapter 9, we bring closure to your first inquiry journey by discussing the importance of sharing your inquiry with others and helping you identify outlets for your work.

Across the nation, prospective and practicing teachers vary greatly in their experience with teacher inquiry. Perhaps you are brand new to teacher inquiry. Perhaps you have been engaged in inquiry for years and wish to further the development of teacher inquiry in your school. Perhaps you wish to make teacher inquiry a more visible or meaningful part of your teacher education program. Perhaps you seek to mentor other professionals in their first inquiries. Wherever you may be in your inquiry journey, we hope this text provides the impetus for you to take the next steps along the pathway of simultaneous renewal and reform. Happy inquiring!