

# Inquire

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## Strategies From General Education

### *How can systematic inquiry strengthen arts education professional development?*

Wonder about your work. Ask the burning question. Inquiry is at the heart of professional development. It provides direction and focus. By reflecting on what helps teachers and students learn and systematically seeking answers, you can improve the structure of your professional development. Inquiry can help you plan the professional development framework. You assess needs and find out more about teachers' current capacities and interests while envisioning possibilities. A culture of inquiry helps educators, their partners and supporters connect the dots among professional development, teacher growth, and student learning.

In inquiry-based learning communities, the boundaries blur between professional developer and educator as well as between teacher and student. Everyone contributes to collective learning and improved education. Teachers participating in professional development actively craft the learning community, the questions, and ultimately, help colleagues and students grow. With ongoing professional development and a culture seeking continuous improvement, periods of planning and implementation in inquiry-based communities flow together and are flexible.

The burning question may look at your process and help you adapt your approach. **Example:** *How can we better support teachers when we're not meeting face-to-face?*

You might ask a summative question to help you take stock. "Did we or didn't we?" **Example:** *To what extent are students developing dance literacy from our classroom teachers' arts integration?*

#### **The inquiry cycle for educators**

***Ask, explore, find out something, contemplate what you find, adapt accordingly and ask again.***

When teachers pursue the answers to thoughtful questions about their practice and are ready to use what they find out, it's sometimes called 'action research.' Questions could include, "How can I measure and improve student music skills when choral work takes place in groups?"

#### **The inquiry cycle for professional development designers**

***Ask, apply answers to inform structure, implement, collect data, reflect, apply changes, and ask again.***

When people planning professional development ask questions about the services and broader learning community, it may be called evaluation or research, depending on the question's scope. Questions could include, "How effective are we in delivering the services we intended?" And, "What differences has it made for students?"

## *Strategies from General Education*

In general education, inquiry, data and research are common themes. They help keep professional development focused on student learning and teacher growth. Helpful approaches include:

- Research-informed professional development strategies grounded in theory and practice
- Data monitoring of professional development effects on teaching and student learning including tracking dispersed data to encourage a focus on all student.
- Evaluating professional development quality through multiple information sources, enabling designers to adapt to differences in teacher and student learning.
- Employing user-friendly distillations of research to help educators apply that research to daily practice.
- Empowering teachers to embrace research-based instructional approaches and assessment that can help students meet rigorous academic standards.

See McREL Insights Professional Development Analysis, National Staff Development Council, Westchester for Human Services Research.

[Return to top of page](#)

## Promising Practices: *Inquiry* | *Strategies*

The inquiry-based arts learning communities referenced in this handbook talk about renewal. Excitement for teaching and learning expands over time rather than wanes. Individuals in inquiry-based learning communities pursue their own questions as well as broader questions formulated by the collaborative group. At the same time, these communities study teachers and students' deepening understanding. In inquiry-based learning communities, assessment transcends the common culture around standardized testing. Assessing student work unites community members around common goals and leads to framing overarching questions arising from practitioners' needs. Strategies for adopting inquiry-based approaches include broadening the community to include external partners, developing 'low stakes' environments that encourage risk taking, and using process results to increase transparency and public engagement.

### *Inquiry-Based Professional Development*

#### Arizona Artist Teacher Institute

Traveling institutes for rural educators teach classroom teachers how to reflect on arts-making processes, while helping them learn to teach dance and theatre.

#### Pennsylvania Governor's Institute for Arts Educators

Annual weeklong institute for arts specialists focuses on areas of need and interest identified by evaluator partner. While teaching about authentic assessment, it also gives educators multiple opportunities to assess and analyze the institute itself, adapting mid-course as needed.

#### Perpich Center for Performing Arts

Arts Quality Teaching Networks: Minnesota teachers involved with this network develop research questions about their practice during their first year with the group. Over the second and third years, they design and use assessment tools to help collect information to answer that question. Their network colleagues serve as sounding boards; each network meeting has time for formal and informal discussion. At the end of the school year, the full network breaks into small groups of four to five people. Each teacher spends 15 minutes presenting their investigation and findings to their group. The network facilitators provide prompts to help guide both the sharing and ensuing discussions.

#### Center for Arts Education (CAE)

This large New York City network of classroom teachers, arts specialists, principals and district administrators, teaching artists, and arts education administrators started off grappling with authentic assessment of learning in and through the arts. The questions continue to change over time. Among the veteran members of their learning communities- including Center staff and longtime school-cultural community partnerships—questions like, “What does it mean?”; “How do we do it?” and “How do we know what works?” have gradually shifted to “What protocols do we need to capture and authentically assess student performances?”; “What do we need to know about media to well document student work—in dance, in theatre--so that we can assess the learning after it is long over?”; and “How can we adapt protocols that are useful in looking at and reflecting on the visual arts for use in the performing arts?” While trying to find ways to assess the effects of cultural partnerships, the network moved the whole community forward into a deeper discussion of student work.

[Return to Promising Practices](#)

## Inquiry Strategies and Results

It takes time to see the growth of the inquiry-based learning community. Over time, inquiry produces a pathway of data that makes it very easy to chart and share growth with others and galvanize support for continued improvement.

Inquiry Strategy	Sample Learning Communities	Results
<p>Long-term partnership with research(s) to both evaluate and study more general questions</p>	<p>A+ schools</p> <p>Big Thought and Dallas Public Schools</p> <p>Comprehensive Arts Education</p> <p>Discipline-Based Arts Education (DBAE)</p>	<p>The long term commitment to rigorous looking helps build the learning community: teachers and partners become better able to recognize and document educational progress. These partnerships helps the learning community improve professional development over time.</p>
<p>Develop or link to existing assessment networks to answer "How can we better assess student learning in or through the arts?"</p>	<p>Arts as Basic Curriculum (ABC)</p> <p>Washington State's Classroom-Based Performance Assessments</p>	<p>The asking of the question and deep looking at student work can improve teacher practice.</p> <p>Using authentic assessments inclusive of arts learning and more complex skill sets provides a better picture of student learning and change in arts infused and arts education.</p>
<p>Support teachers in pursuing action research (i.e. teachers answer questions then use what they find out)</p>	<p>ArtsSmart Institute</p> <p>Perpich Center for the Performing Arts</p> <p>Wisconsin Arts Assessment Project</p>	<p>Educators pursuing individual action research questions can help each other refine the inquiry or understand the findings. Small discussion groups sharing and discussing their questions and findings-in-progress on a regular basis can develop the quality of interaction needed to help the whole group grow.</p>
<p>Develop or utilize specific inquiry protocol for the learning community to help educators and others improve their practices.</p>	<p>Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE)</p> <p>Perpich Center for Performing Arts</p> <p>Traverse City Area Public Schools &amp; (Harvard) Project Zero: Artful Thinking</p>	<p>Educators involved as teacher leaders help other colleagues learn. Specific protocols simplify, clarify and standardize the shape of the process. Prompts linked to questions of teacher interest give a framework for teachers to move more deeply into improving practice with increased ownership and investment in the process.</p>

## Lessons Learned

**Focus on student work.** Looking deeply at student work with a group of colleagues is professional development. Learning happens while educators work together to develop and adapt tools to help them teach and understand what students are learning. When whole networks work on these questions, well structured groups can develop a shared language about the kind of learning that can take place in and through the arts. See [Center for Arts Education \(CAE\)](#), [Vermont MIDI Project](#).

**Let teachers' questions drive inquiry.** When teachers' burning questions drive inquiry, they may be willing to put in the extra time to find out the answers. See [Perpich Center for Performing Arts](#), [Traverse City Area Public Schools](#).

**Develop a theory of action.** Sketch the sequence of events that you think will happen. How will the professional development affect teachers? What will teachers be able to do as a result? How will that change the learning environment for students? What will students be able to do as a result? Your theory of action can help you look for the intermediate steps along the way, to reveal whether you are moving towards your intended result in the way you imagined. Your ideas about this sequence may evolve as you reflect on actual events. See [ArtsSmart Institute for Learning](#), [Perpich Center for Performing Arts](#).

**Read, internalize and use evaluation of professional development to improve the program.** Otherwise, it's a report on the shelf, a tool for public relations or a tremendous amount of money missing the mark. When the information changes hands but doesn't enter heads, no practices change, leaving improvement to individual idea and chance.

**Energize learning communities through long-term research partnerships.** Communities trying to change teacher practice who collaborated with long-term research-based partners learned how to think like researchers. Teachers, administrators, secondary and post-secondary students and partners internalize the questions and learn to identify and make sense of evidence. Groups work together to share that evidence with others in the community and the public. See [Big Thought: A Learning Partnership](#), [Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education \(CAPE\)](#), [Traverse City Area Public Schools](#).

**Allow outside eyes to improve the quality of knowledge about teaching and practice.** What we think we know may change when others help us see. Arts Connection's video assessment protocols helped teachers and their partners step back from the experience and examine teaching and learning in a new way. Looking through the eyes of the group helped a teacher see past her personality bias to recognize the strengths of a student involved in storytelling. What may have been seen initially as too much talking looked gregarious and engaging with the help of the assessment team ([Arts Connection](#)).

**Make the evaluator an early partner in the work.** A researcher/evaluator who joins the team of planners early in the process can help integrate reflection into the professional development program itself. With a long-term commitment, the evaluator can help the program shift, change, grow or reduce, all the while moving closer towards its intended goals. When evaluators come in midway, opportunities to align design and data capture may be lost. See [Big Thought: A Learning Partnership](#), [Perpich Center for Performing Arts](#).

**Use critical friends to help stay on track.** Whether gained from a formal evaluation or interaction with critical friends, feedback from knowledgeable people outside of your learning community can help you see the work differently. If your original theory of action or goals overreached the possible, outside perspective can help you see how to reformulate your approach. See [Comprehensive Arts Education](#), [Perpich Center for Performing Arts](#).

**Practice and refine developing skills with a partner.** Work with a partner who can observe, trade places, share in the experimentation and debrief. See [Arts Impact & Puget Sound Education Service District](#), [ArtsLit: The Arts Literacy Project](#), [Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education \(CAPE\)](#).

**Involve stakeholders in the process.** Think creatively about how your diverse stakeholders can be involved and incorporate this into your ongoing learning community discussions/work. The educators, administrators, artists, parents, activists, and students in your network can be much more than people you serve. Beyond shaping original questions, they can help you improve professional development. See [ArtsLit: The Arts Literacy Project](#), [A+ Schools](#), [Pennsylvania Governor's Institute for Arts Educators](#).

## Useful Tools

### **Artful Thinking**

Protocols and processes to help develop thinking habits and capacities.  
See specifically: Thinking Routines, Teacher Think Track

### **Arts PROPEL : An Introductory Handbook**

*Winner, Ellen. Harvard Project Zero, 1991.*

Protocols for facilitating student-directed arts learning. A collaborative framework for approaching the pathways to learning the arts.

### **Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI)**

Tool rating levels of arts integration based on the inquiry process of teachers and researchers.

### **Critical Links: A Professional Inquiry Process**

Online facilitated guide to action research in arts and education practice.

### **Chicago Arts Partners in Education Planning and Assessment Tools**

Research-based practices simplified into user-friendly checklists for educators and their partners.

### **Moving Toward a Culture of Evidence: Documentation and Action Research Inside CAPE Veteran Partnerships**

*Burnafor, Gail. Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, 2006.*

Report on CAPE partnerships that have a developed arts integration practice and have made a multiple-year, collective commitment to documentation and action research.

### **Renaissance in the Classroom: Arts integration and Meaningful Learning**

*Burnafor, Gail et.al., eds. Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, 2001.*

Frameworks, advice, checklists, rubrics, CAPE case studies on developing arts education partnerships that make a difference for teachers, schools, and students.

### **Wisconsin Arts Assessment Project: A Guide to Connected Curriculum and Action Research**

*Peppard, Julie. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1997.*

A guide to action research that helps teachers investigate their teaching practices with the goal of improving student learning.

## Your Turn

- What is my burning question about teaching and learning?
- What is the arts learning community's current question about improving teaching practice?
- If the arts learning community could look at only one question for the next three years, what would it be?
- What information and tools do I already have that can help me answer that? (e.g., peer observations, partner reports, teacher journals or papers for prior classes, faculty presentations, student final projects, student achievement scores, student conference notes, individualized education plans).
- What other information or tools could help?
- What structures will I use for teachers to engage in inquiry? (e.g. networks, partnerships, protocols)
- Who could help me make sense of this? (e.g., colleagues in same discipline, different discipline; education administrator, artist partner, arts organization partner, mentor, retired educator in same discipline, parent with arts skills)
- What will teachers be able to do as a result?
- How will that change the learning environment for students?
- What will students be able to do as a result?