

Diagnosing Instructional Inquiry as an Attribute of School Culture

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What is school culture? A school's culture represents beliefs, values, and norms that are shared across a school community. A school's culture has a powerful impact on teacher beliefs, attitudes, and practices. Facets of the school's culture can support or undermine a school's ability to improve student learning and achieve organizational goals. (Deal & Peterson, 2009, Sarason, 1996; Saphier & King, 1985).

What is instructional inquiry? Instructional inquiry occurs when teachers inquire, either individually or with others, about the efficacy of their instructional practices, particularly in the face of student struggles and areas of weaker student learning. Teachers who critically reflect on or reason about their past instructional practices for the purpose of identifying weaker areas of instruction and for rethinking those practices are engaged in instructional inquiry. Conversations between teachers that emphasize critical reflection have been found to be important for teacher learning, teacher professional communities, and the improvement of student learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2001; Cosner, 2011; Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, Goldenberg, 2009; Seashore Louis, Kruse & Associates, 1996; Timperley, 2011).

How might you diagnose/assess the presence or absence of AND nature and quality of instructional inquiry in your school? Based on your memory, you might reflect back on focal events/settings listed in the left column to consider: What occurred in these events/settings? What documents/materials/tools were utilized? What did you see or hear during these events? You might also decide to collect data for analysis. These data may be "observational." For example, notetaking during the observation of these focal events that captures information about each of the event indicators. These data may be "artifact-based." For example, a review of materials/tools utilized during these events with attention to these event indicators.

There are settings and situations in your school where the presence/quality of instructional inquiry is likely to be visible for diagnosis. Consider the following:	Indicators / "Look-Fors" What might you see or hear?			Your Diagnosis/Assessment from the Three Categories to the Left (Based on Your Reflective Consideration or Data that You Collect/Review) <u>AND</u> Evidence Drawn Upon / Informing Your Assessment
	More Robust <i>Culture of Instructional Inquiry</i>	Developing <i>Culture of Instructional Inquiry</i>	Less Robust <i>Culture of Instructional Inquiry</i>	
<p>Teacher Team Meetings (grade-level/department/course teams)</p> <p>Professional Development Meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During teacher team or professional development meetings, nearly all teachers or teacher teams demonstrate interest in and actively explore questions about their instructional efficacy • Teacher teams (or professional development meetings) meeting time is utilized on a regular basis to engage in collaborative routines that prompt instructional inquiry (considerations of past instructional practices and their efficacy/impact) or the sharing of critical practice feedback and advice. This might occur when teachers engage in such formalized routines as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) collaborative data use (examining student assessment results AND considering ways in which prior instruction impacted these results), b) various forms of lesson study, c) critical examination of unit/lesson plans or teacher created student work tasks • Teachers regularly utilize discussion protocols and tools during meetings that prompt all teachers to critically reflect on a past instructional practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During teacher team or professional development meetings, some teachers or teacher teams demonstrate interest in and actively explore questions about their instructional efficacy • Teacher teams (or professional development meetings) meeting time is occasionally utilized to engage in collaborative routines that prompt instructional inquiry (considerations of past instructional practices and their efficacy/impact) or the sharing of critical practice feedback and advice. This might occur when teachers engage in such formalized routines as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) collaborative data use (examining student assessment results AND considering ways in which prior instruction impacted these results), b) various forms of lesson study, c) critical examination of unit/lesson plans or teacher created student work tasks • Teachers occasionally utilize discussion protocols and tools during meetings that prompt all teachers to critically reflect on a past instructional practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During team or professional development meetings, many teachers or teacher teams demonstrate little interest in and spend little time exploring questions about their instructional efficacy • Little or no professional development or teacher team meeting time is used for the purpose of formalized collaborative instructional inquiry routines • There is little evidence of discussion protocol or tool use during professional development or teacher team meetings to prompt formalized use of collaborative routines for the investigation of instructional efficacy or the sharing of critical practice feedback and advice between colleagues 	

Settings / Situations	More Robust <i>Culture of Instructional Inquiry</i>	Developing <i>Culture of Instructional Inquiry</i>	Less Robust <i>Culture of Instructional Inquiry</i>	<i>Diagnosis / Assessment</i>
Faculty / Staff and other School-wide Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student learning results are regularly examined to identify areas of student weakness or struggle AND to speculate potential root causes to these problems including ways in which instruction may be contributing to these student learning problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student learning results are occasionally examined to identify areas of student weakness or struggle AND to speculate potential root causes to these problems including ways in which instruction may be contributing to these student learning problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student learning results are examined but instructional root causes to these problems are not likely to be considered; responses to these data, such as regrouping and re-teaching, are focal considerations. 	
Teacher Mentoring/Coaching or Peer-observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentors/coaches/peers are regularly sought by most teachers (including both new and veteran) to observe teaching practices for the purpose of providing critical practice feedback and advice; particularly related to new practices being cultivated or instructional practice areas identified as less well developed; or to engage teachers with inquiry routines that help teachers to engage in critical reflection / instructional inquiry following the instructional observation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentors/coaches/peers are occasionally sought by some teachers (including both new and veteran) to observe teaching practices for the purpose of providing critical practice feedback and advice; particularly related to new practices being cultivated or instructional practice areas identified as less well developed; or to engage teachers with inquiry routines that help teachers to engage in critical reflection / instructional inquiry following the instructional observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentors/coaches/peers who are sought to observe teaching practice tend to do so for new teachers AND/OR tend to focus on providing largely positive feedback or praise rather than helping the observed teacher critically examine his/her practice and critically reflect upon weaker areas of that practice 	
General (Various Teacher Actions/Conversations Across the School)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified or emergent student struggles and challenges prompt most teachers to replay prior instruction and consider the ways in which instruction contributed to these student struggles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified or emergent student struggles and challenges prompt some teachers to replay prior instruction and consider the ways in which instruction contributed to these student struggles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified or emergent student struggles and challenges prompt many teachers to name student learning problems and site various student or home circumstances as reasons for these struggles. 	

Below is a listing of literature that can help you and your school learn more about **School Culture**.

- Deal, T., & Peterson, K. (2009). *Shaping school culture: Pitfalls, paradoxes, and promises* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Saphier, J., & King, M. (1985). Good seeds grow in strong cultures. *Educational Leadership*, 42(6), 67-74.
- Sarason, S. (1996). *Revisiting "The culture of the school and the problem of change."* New York: Teacher's College Press.

Below is a listing of literature that can help you and your school learn more about a **Culture of Instructional Inquiry**.

- Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (2001). Beyond certainty: Taking an inquiry stance. In A. Lieberman & L. Miller (Eds.), *Teachers caught in the action: Professional development that matters* (pp. 45-60). NY: Teachers College Press.
- Cosner, S. (2011). Teacher learning, instructional considerations, and principal communication: Lessons from a longitudinal study of collaborative data use by teachers. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39(5), 568-589.
- Gallimore, R., Ermeling, B., Saunders, W., & Goldenberg, C. (2009). Moving the learning of teaching closer to practice: Teacher education implications for school-based inquiry teams. *The Elementary School Journal*, 109(5), 537-555.
- Panero, N. S., & Talbert, J. E. (2013). *Strategic inquiry: Starting small for big results in education*. Harvard Education Press.
- Saunders, W., Goldenberg, C., & Gallimore (2009). Increasing achievement by focusing grade-level teams on improving classroom learning: A prospective quasi experimental study of Title 1 schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(4), 1006-1033.
- Seashore Louis, K., Kruse, S., & Associates (1995). *Professionalism and community*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Timperley, H. (2011). *Realizing the power of professional learning*. Berkshire, UK: McGraw Hill.