



Wishes, Challenges, and Opportunities

Developing an Initial Inquiry Focus

Purpose of the Tool

Opportunities for innovation are all around us in the teaching and learning contexts in which we work. Narrowing down which opportunities you would like to focus on can be a challenge. This tool can help you share and reflect on the documentation you have been collecting in your own context, helping your study group to frame a long-term inquiry focus that can guide your work in the coming months.

When to Use

Use this tool after you have done some initial exploration of your home teaching and learning context (e.g., observations, conversations, collecting documentation, slow looking, etc.) and feel ready to work with your group to home in on an initial inquiry focus that will guide your work together. You might find it helpful to let this conversation unfold over multiple study group sessions or to return to this conversation multiple times throughout the process of inquiry-driven innovation.

Preparation and Other Considerations

Study group members should reflect on the in-school explorations that they have done so far (talking to students and colleagues about their experiences, collecting classroom documentation, engaging in slow looking or other types of observation, etc.), and each group member should select one piece of documentation from these explorations that feels significant. A piece of documentation might include a photograph or short video clip, a piece of student work, handwritten notes, an interview transcript, and so on. Study group members should be prepared to talk about why the documentation they selected feels significant.

Steps

1. Share documentation and headlines as a group. Gather together your study group. In no more than five minutes per person, each study group member should share 1) one piece of documentation from their explorations within the school, and 2) any “headlines” or take away thoughts that came out of their explorations. Following each group member’s presentation, all group members should individually take a few minutes to note:
 - Wishes: What is an aspirational or long-term goal for teaching and learning in your context that comes up as you listen?
 - Challenges: Are there any explicit or implicit challenges suggested by this documentation?
 - Opportunities: Are there any explicit or implicit opportunities suggested by this documentation?

2. Share highlights.

After all group members have shared their documentation, go around the circle one more time and have individual group members share one or two wishes, challenges, and/or opportunities that they feels is/are most exciting or compelling. Make sure that a group member takes notes to keep track of what is discussed.

Synthesize to draft your inquiry focus.

As a group, talk about an inquiry focus that you might want to pursue together over time. Similar to a research question, an inquiry focus is a question of practice situated in your teaching and learning context that:

- Is personally important to the members of the study group;
- Has relevance and importance for the broader teaching and learning community outside of the study group;
- Poses a problem or puts a new spin on an old issue;
- Is not too broad—contains some specifics;
- Exhibits complexity and warrants “slow looking”—in other words, it will not be easily answered in a few sentences or a quick internet search; and
- Encourages (or at least leaves the door open to) trying out new practices, strategies, resources, or tools.

It will likely take multiple conversations to frame an inquiry focus that feels right for your study group. Over time, you will work to develop one or more innovation projects—a discrete project to develop new practices, strategies, curricular approaches, resources, and so on—that address a wish, challenge, and/or opportunity from your group.