Teaching as inquiry: Well intentioned, but fundamentally flawed

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Introduction

- TAI presented as a teacher action at the basis of 'effective pedagogy' (The New Zealand Curriculum, p. 34).

- Evidence suggests presently the concept is neither well understood, nor is its practice consistent

- TAI has some sound principles and laudable intentions, but is a flawed model.

A critique of teaching as inquiry

- Sinnema and Aitken required their model to be underpinned by "attitudes [of] open–mindedness, fallibility, and persistence" (2011, p. 32).

- This underpinning was subsequently left out of *The New Zealand Curriculum.*

- the TAI model lacks a collaborative dimension

- evidence, research and social justice outcomes

Teaching as inquiry

- Sinnema and Aitken (2011) commissioned to write a Best Evidence Synthesis on Social Sciences for the Ministry of Education in 2004

- The TAI model was one of their findings.

- This model was later developed and used in *The New Zealand Curriculum.*

The relationship of teaching as inquiry to practitioner inquiry and research

- Sinnema and Aitken (2011) conceptualised TAI as a process of research within specific practice contexts, providing practitioners with greater knowledge and understanding of those contexts

- They challenge to a perceived theory–practice division by explicitly rejecting the critique that practitioner inquiry lacks research rigour.

- Although Sinnema and Aitken distinguish between practitioner (teacher) research and action research, these terms are less clearly demarcated in scholarship

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The relationship of teaching as inquiry to practitioner inquiry and research

- the practitioner research/inquiry vs AR dichotomy is a false one

- practitioner research may be better understood as an approach (reflective of a particular theoretical framework).

- A practitioner seeking to engage in some form of deeper inquiry will (like any researcher) consider a range of strategies and methods

Collaborative critical teacher reflective practice

- The challenges of the modern classroom

- 'reflective practice': the on–going, regular and persistent use of reflective tools to engage, individually and collectively, in critical thinking about various aspects of practice (teachers' work). This practice has a temporal character requiring practitioners to look back, to consider the immediate and continuous present, and to project into the future. Reflection problematises, confronts and challenges, leading to the creation of plans for just action, and the implementation of those plans to bring about significant and meaningful changes to the circumstances of people and situations where practitioners have influence.

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Collaborative critical teacher reflective practice

- epistemological requirement:
  - practitioner skills.
  - relevant theoretical and practical knowledg
  - in order to *do* reflection

- ontological requirement of reflective practice, which enables practitioners to *be* reflective.
  - The willingness to question personal assumptions and beliefs
  - the pre–existing ideas practitioners have about their situation

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Collaborative critical teacher reflective practice

- espoused theories and theories in use (Argyris & Schön,1974)

- make them assumptions of the practitioner publicly explicit

- 'single loop', learning fits 'governing variables'.

- 'double loop learning', a reorientation of underpinning assumptions

- Argyris and Schön (1974) understood mind–sets in terms of what they called 'Model I' and 'Model II'.

Collaborative critical teacher reflective practice

- An important disposition is the willingness to locate reflection in a socio–political context

- Education is not neutral

- Freire rejected the idealist view that altering the consciousness of people would alter reality (1985).

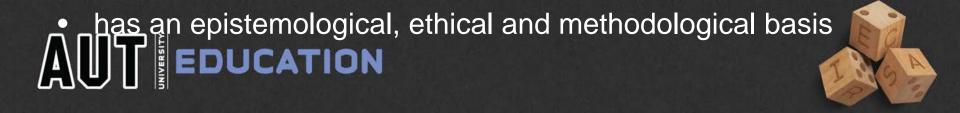- instead see people in dialectical relationship with the world

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Collaborative critical teacher reflective practice

- Smyth's four–step model
  - follows a process of 'describing, informing, confronting and reconstructing' (1992, pp. 295–300).

- Smyth's approach to reflective practice must be understood as being socio–politically contextualised, and focussed on action as an outcome.

Collaborative critical teacher reflective practice

- Benade (2012, pp. 229-233) argued for the development of a 'community of critical professional inquiry' in schools.

- a formal opportunity for planned collaborative reflection and action

- aims
  - challenging underachievement
  - developing ongoing school and organisational improvement.
  - nurtures a commitment to social justice
  - reaching out to the school community
  - requiring teachers to engage in appropriate research

- has an epistemological, ethical and methodological basis

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The 21st century learning project

- *What is reflective practice?*

- personal or individualised and collective or collaborative

- requires questioning activities

- temporal dimension

- Reflective practice is habitual

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- spatial dimension

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The 21ˢᵗ century learning project

- *What is the focus of reflective activity?*

- confined to the improvement of teacher practice

- linked to appraisal

- Linked to key strategic goals

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The 21ˢᵗ century learning project

- *What personal attributes does reflective practice require?*

- reflection requires teachers to have certain dispositions.

- look outwards and inwards; articulate inner thoughts and listen to others; committed to self–questioning.

- committed to their own learning

- able and willing to challenge their own ignorance.

- Teachers must constantly talk with colleagues

- Courage

The 21ˢᵗ century learning project

- *What is teaching as inquiry and its relationship to reflective practice?*

- significant ignorance among the teacher participants

- 'teaching as inquiry' confused with 'inquiry learning'

- teaching as inquiry linked with appraisal

- the implementation of the model in schools is uneven

- potential to impose a universalising model on the teaching profession

A critique of teaching as inquiry

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Implications for teacher education

- Technical rationality: the view that "professional activity consists in instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique" (Schön, 1983, p. 21).

- a name change.
  - '*teaching* as inquiry' emphasises teaching, not teachers
  - *'teachers as inquirers'* emphasises the community of professional inquiry.

- a more rigorous design framework will include systematic question–building and problem–posing activities, supported by research

- And this is where teacher education can play a significant role in preparing graduates