Inquiry Projects – e-LFA Cluster Hamilton

Overview

The e-Lfa cluster is a comprised of two schools; Hamilton's Fraser High School (HFHS) and Sacred Heart Girls' College Hamilton (SHGC). Both schools are at very different places in our ICT PD cycle as HFHS has recently returned from a year's hiatus from the project. This has led to HFHS continuing into 2012 for their final year while SHGC completes the project in 2011.

The Focus of this VLN reflection will be looking at National Goal 3 and our initiative of bringing the inquiry cycle/ process to our schools professional learning. The long term goal of this will be to increase both the merit and excellent level pass rates as well as increasing the staff knowledge of the inquiry process.

Sacred Heart Girls College is using the inquiry model for staff wide Professional Learning while Hamilton's Fraser High School are undertaking focused inquiry in smaller, select groups.

The inquiry process was selected as a focal point due to seeing PD of this nature successfully being used at the primary school level. This change to secondary has been met with some difficulties which will be described in this document.

Before this project was undertaken staff surveys had shown that staff had been discontented with the traditional method of Professional learning and wanted this to be increasingly **self-directed** and more **relevant** to their individual as well as student's needs.

School wide focus

At SHGC the 2011 school wide focus is literacy, ICT and increasing the achievement level of students which naturally lends itself towards inquiry. The end product of this is for teachers to have control over their own learning and to have discovered both new skills and techniques to increase the achievement of their students. All teachers will present their findings at the conclusion of the project.

What did we do?

SHGC

A teacher only day was used to introduce the teacher projects and the goals were outlined. Staff have been provided the following guidelines:

- *Choice of 'project' – classroom based; something you are going to teach rather than something additional, relevant to you.*
- *Choice of who you work with – can work individually, in pairs or small groups.*
- *Choice of learning 'delivery' – some whole staff; workshops; one-on-one.*
- *Provided technical support through the use of workshops and a expert (lead)teacher programme of mentors.*

I understand inquiry to be a process of systematic, rigorous and critical reflection about professional practice, and the contexts in which it occurs, in ways that question taken-for-granted assumptions. Its purpose is to inform decision-making for action. Inquiry can be undertaken individually, but it is most powerful when it is collaborative. It involves educators pursuing their "wonderings" (Hubbard & Power, 1993), seeking answers to questions or puzzles that come from real-world observations and dilemmas.
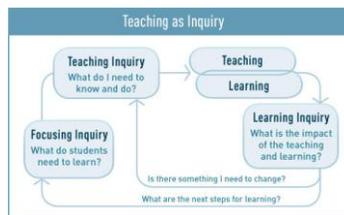
Also the following list of examples of ways to both undertake and present their finding:

- Action research, where the educator identifies an issue/puzzle/contradiction, gathers data in relation to the issue, draws on research, analyses the data, theorises a strategy, acts and reviews;

- Critical dialogue, where a group of educators meet regularly and engage in a form of critical discussion, typically involving one member describing a practice or a dilemma in his/her teaching and the group interrogating the assumptions and beliefs about learning upon which that practice is based. This often leads to new strategies or approaches (e.g., Smith-Maddox, 1999);

- Classroom/work-place observations, where individuals, pairs or groups can observe each other teaching as a part of the process of collaboratively exploring an issue. They might describe what they see (in written form or orally) and then analyse and interpret these observations through reflection and critical discussion, in order to develop new strategies in relation to the issues/problems identified;

- Journals, where educators write regularly in journals about their work, recording their criticisms, doubts, questions, successes and joys. Looking over these at intervals can often reveal some rhythms or irregularities that are not picked up when there is a focus on individual events or practices;

- Critical data analysis, where educators interrogate data (gathered by them or by the system), seeking to reveal issues or interesting observations that might form the focus of further inquiry;

- Appreciative inquiry, where educators gather data about successes and try to understand the factors that promote these, rather than focusing on problems. This form of inquiry starts with the assumption that whatever you want more of, already exists in an organisation. It is a matter of examining the whole, not looking at the separate parts of a system that are not working;

- Portfolios, where an educator compiles evidence of successful development in his/her work. Portfolios foster reflection because they cause the educator to identify professional strengths and weaknesses;

- Writing, where educators use various approaches to reflect on their work, including narrative inquiry (involving story-telling), and proposal writing (involving research and the development of a reasoned argument, as these materials do);

- Text analysis, where educators analyse policy and other texts in order to unearth assumptions and theories and to subject these to critical analysis;

- Program evaluation, where educators seek to assess the outcomes of particular activities, using approaches that range from goal-based evaluations to those that are open-ended and responsive.

From this the three bullet points were discussed and examples were given of a possible example of a teacher driven project.

The following is an overview of the direction given towards how they should approach the enquiry.

A template was provided to staff in order to scaffold their thinking towards their projects. The project had to include the following three aspects.

1. ***Your project is to include specific strategies that will <u>lift the % of Merits and Excellences</u>. You may (but you don't have to) specify the % increase you are looking for. The inquiry aspect would be focusing on these strategies).***
2. ***There must some <u>literacy strategies</u> included. (School wide focus)***
3. ***There must be some <u>use and/or integration of ICT.</u>***

Example of final outcome.

- *I have learned to use pivot tables (ICT) to analyse my <u>L3 English results</u> from the previous year. From that analysis, I can see that an average of 43% did not choose to sit the external Shakespeare AS.*
- *As a result of this analysis, I have decided to teach a Shakespeare unit at a lower year level to make the students more accustomed to the language. I am now planning a JNR unit that looks at the history of language (<u>literacy</u>) with a particular focus on Shakespeare's language. I am using YouTube presentations that explain language changes to engage the students (<u>ICT</u>). I am also including the conventions of a Shakespeare performance (<u>literacy</u>). I am going to use the free animation software, Scratch, for the students to create their own Shakespearean scene (literacy / ICT).*

- *In two years' time, I want 50% of the students to attempt the external Shakespeare AS and 20% of those to gain a Merit or Excellence.*

The project is currently being undertaken and the lead teachers who are the technology leaders for each faculties are providing support in the form of workshops and being available for one on one tutoring with groups and individuals.

Lead teachers helping a staff member with the ICT component of their inquiry.

HFHS

Hamilton's Fraser High School took a different direction for their inquiry process in that they used Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) to look at particular areas. This is due to the contract "restarting" this year and the facilitators feeling it important that direction was given in the early stages. Currently these groups are in their early stages and as these progresses their findings will be uploaded to the VLN.

The following areas are being developed

Facebook at Fraser

- Set up Facebook groups with students.
- Develop a structure to manage student interaction within Facebook on his page.
- Use Facebook to help connect with students, to connect students with each other to conference and discuss class work and critical analysis of art.
- Regular meetings to reflect on actions taken and new initiatives.

PLC Group 2

- Create a "Geography at Fraser" Facebook page.
- Encourage student focused discussion via Facebook.
- Create a YOLA website to share lesson materials and relevant internet information with students.
- Structured lessons on Google Earth and Google Maps in relation to Geography at this time.

PLC multimedia

- Developed a system of filming the video, editing it, uploading it to the internet, and disseminating the tutorial videos to use in both the classroom and at home
- Create a YOLA site for junior students to access the tutorial videos alongside their notes

PLC Moodle

This group works towards Moodle's integration within the school.

What have we learned to date?

Staff have found it difficult to know what a good inquiry model was and what would work for them. Even with modeling and examples some still were confused with exactly what they should be undertaking. Many staff chose to modify schemes of work as their project. Also currently there is no way to know current progress as no milestone reporting was set within the task.

Using staff wide inquiry and project based PD does not work the same as it would in the primary environment. Staff at a secondary school have many different subject areas and levels and need to focus on one area or assessment, especially when student achievement are required as indicators. This made cross curricular groupings more difficult to successfully undertake.

It may have been more beneficial for a school wide inquiry model to have been chosen. However I also believe giving the staff the opportunity to take ownership of their own professional development in order to raise achievement powerful.

Currently SHGC Staff are spending all their allocated PD time working towards this project. The results will be shared at the end of term 2 and uploaded to the VLN environment.

Useful resources.

http://instep.net.nz/inquiry_and_evidence_based_practice/inquiry_based_practice

I have also found some excellent examples of inquiry, yes they are primary but I believe they show the process well.

http://voicethread.com/?#q.b1413651.i7488318

Atkin, J. (1996). '' From Values and Beliefs about Learning to Principles and Practice'' .Seminar Series, no. 54. Melbourne: Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers of Victoria. Available at www.learningtolearn.sa.edu.au/Colleagues/files/links/ValuesBeliefs.pdf
Atkin argues that "we need values and vision driven development in which the question we are regularly asking of ourselves, as individual educators and school communities, is how well are we achieving what we value and believe; how well does our current situation match our vision of what is possible?" (page 4).

Coburn, C. E. (2005). "Shaping Teacher Sensemaking: School Leaders and the Enactment of Reading Policy". *Educational Policy* **, vol. 19 no. 3, pp. 476–509. Available at http://gse.berkeley.edu/faculty/CECoburn/shaping_sensemaking.pdf**
Abstract

A growing body of research has emphasized the social processes by which teachers adapt and transform policy as they enact it in their classrooms. Yet little attention has been paid to the role of school leaders in this process. Drawing on sociological theories of sensemaking, this article investigates how principals in two California elementary schools influenced teacher learning about and enactment of changing reading policy. It argues that principals influence teachers' enactment by shaping access to policy ideas, participating in the social process of interpretation and adaptation, and creating substantively different conditions for teacher learning in schools. These actions, in turn, are influenced by principals' understandings about reading instruction and teacher learning.