

## ACTIVITY 1.1: BLOCK PARTY

*This activity was adapted from a protocol titled Block Party, adapted by Debbie Bambino from Kyleene Beers's prereading strategy from the School Reform Initiative and National School Reform Faculty websites. Please visit their websites (<https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org>; [www.nsrffharmony.org](http://www.nsrffharmony.org)) for additional text-based protocols that can be utilized to discuss this chapter.*

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** Handout: "Twelve Interesting Quotes From Chapter 1"

**Step 1:** Copy and cut apart the quotes in Handout 1: Twelve Interesting Quotes From Chapter 1 so that each participant will receive one quote. You may wish to glue each quote on an index card to make them easier for participants to handle. If you are working with more than 12 people, quotes may be repeated.

**Step 2:** Have each participant randomly select one quote. Once each person has received a quote, ask them to flip the quote over and write a statement about what this quote means to them. (5 minutes)

**Step 3:** Participants get up and mingle to find a partner who received a different quote from the one they received. Once everyone has a partner, state that each pair should share their quotes with their partners, as well as what each quote meant to them. (5 minutes)

**Step 4:** Repeat Step 3 two more times with a different partner. (10 minutes)

**Step 5:** Have participants return to their seats. As facilitator, you will lead the whole group in a discussion of ideas and questions about teacher inquiry raised by this experience. (10 minutes)

*See the handout "Twelve Interesting Quotes from Chapter 1" that follows.*

## TWELVE INTERESTING QUOTES FROM CHAPTER 1

*Directions: Copy and cut apart so each member of your group receives one quote.*

Teacher inquiry is a vehicle that can be used by teachers to untangle some of the complexities that occur in the profession, raise teachers' voices in discussions of educational reform, and ultimately transform assumptions about the teaching profession itself.

Given today's political context, where much of the decision making and discussion regarding teachers occur outside the walls of the classroom (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Rustique-Forrester, 2005), the time seems ripe to create a movement where teachers are armed with the tools of inquiry and are committed to educational change.

While both the process-product and qualitative research paradigms have generated valuable insights into the teaching and learning processes, they have excluded the voices of the people closest to the children—classroom teachers. Hence, a third research tradition emerges highlighting the role classroom teachers play as knowledge generators. This tradition is often referred to as “teacher research,” “teacher inquiry,” “classroom research,” “action research,” or “practitioner inquiry.”

In general, the teacher inquiry movement focuses on the concerns of teachers (and not outside researchers) and engages teachers in the design, data collection, and interpretation of data around a question. Termed *action research* by Carr and Kemmis (1986), this approach to educational research has many benefits, among them these three: (1) theories and knowledge are generated from research grounded in the realities of educational practice, (2) teachers become collaborators in educational research by investigating their own problems, and (3) teachers play a part in the research process, which makes them more likely to facilitate change based on the knowledge they create.

Very simply put, inquiry is a way for me to continue growing as a teacher. Before I became involved in inquiry I'd gotten to the point where I'd go to an inservice and shut off my brain. Most of the teachers I know have been at the same place. If you have been around at all you know that most inservices are the same cheese—just repackaged. Inquiry lets me choose my own growth and gives me tools to validate or jettison my ideas. (Kreinbihl, 2007, personal communication)

You know that nagging that wakes you in the early hours, then reemerges during your morning preparation time so you cannot remember if you already applied the deodorant, later on the drive to school pushing out of mind those important tasks you needed to accomplish prior to the first bell, and again as the students are entering your class and sharing all the important things happening in their lives. Well, teacher inquiry is the formal stating of that nagging, developing a plan of action to do something about it, putting the plan into action, collecting data, analyzing the collected works, making meaning of your collection, sharing your findings, then repeating the cycle with the new nagging(s) that sprouted up. (Hughes, 2007)

Teacher inquiry is not something I do; it is more a part of the way I think. Inquiry involves exciting and meaningful discussions with colleagues about the passions we embrace in our profession. It has become the gratifying response to formalizing the questions that enter my mind as I teach. It is a learning process that keeps me passionate about teaching. (Hubbell, 2007)

Teacher inquiry differs from traditional professional development for teachers, which has typically focused on the knowledge of an outside expert being shared with a group of teachers. This traditional model of professional growth, usually delivered as a part of traditional staff development, may appear as an efficient method of disseminating information but often does not result in real and meaningful change in the classroom.

This movement toward a new model of professional growth based on inquiry into one's own practice can be powerfully developed by school districts and building administrators as a form of professional development. By participating in teacher inquiry, the teacher develops a sense of ownership in the knowledge constructed. This sense of ownership heavily contributes to the possibilities for real change to take place in the classroom.

By cultivating this inquiry stance toward teaching, teachers play a critical role in enhancing their own professional growth and, ultimately, the experience of schooling for children. Thus, an inquiry stance is synonymous with professional growth and provides a nontraditional approach to staff development that can lead to meaningful change for children.

Understanding and correcting the inequalities that exist in schools and society is of critical importance to all educators. Teachers engage in inquiry for equity to increase the learning and life chances of every student with whom they work, regardless of factors (e.g., race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, and ability) that often inhibit students in an educational system that was not designed to meet their needs.

Engagement in inquiry can be a powerful pathway to the creation of more equitable classrooms. In fact, distinguished scholars of the practitioner research movement, Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle, maintain that the ultimate goal of practitioner inquiry "always and in every context" is to enhance "students' learning and life chances for participation in and contribution to a diverse and democratic society." (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009, p. 146).