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Redefining Teaching Itself: A Book Review of The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research 3rd Edition.

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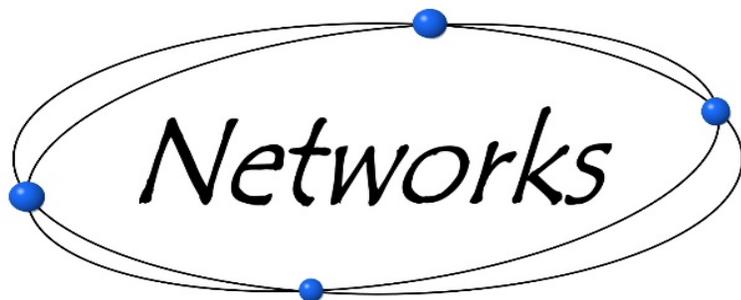*Kansas State University*, sporath@ksu.edu

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Redefining Teaching Itself: A Book Review of *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research 3rd Edition.*

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Dana, N. F., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2014). *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

The journey metaphor is a typical representation of teacher research and the authors of *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research* evoke the metaphor, with images of paths, maps and compasses, because it visibly represents the feeling of starting an action research project. The authors make a point to favor the term "inquiry" over "research" to negate the typical associations with the term research. As a word, research tends to indicate one of two dominant educational research paradigms - that of teachers as technicians implementing outside experts' recommendations or complex qualitative or interpretive studies completed by university researchers. Instead, Dana and Yendol-Hoppey suggest that a third paradigm, that of teachers as knowledge generators (otherwise known as action research, teacher research, practitioner inquiry, or classroom research) whose valuable form of research is grounded in personal inquiry. This inquiry begins with an open mind and is rooted in personal wonderings and dilemmas.

The goal of this book is to help readers recognize that classroom research is a process (not just a product) and to give guidance to a pre-service or in-service teacher in recognizing a problem, designing a way to study it, and taking action on the inquiry. Although the metaphor of the journey is conjured several times, the authors also frequently state that the journey is not a linear one and sometimes the educator may wander off the path or find new paths to walk. Across the nine chapters and 250 pages, the authors lay out the process of designing a personal inquiry into teaching. In addition, they provide numerous narratives from classroom teachers who have completed the journey, exercises to help readers think about their own journey, and specific examples from completed inquiry projects. Being a third edition, there are several new features in this well-respected title and these features include more information about data

analysis, connections with inquiries and the Common Core State Standards, a discussion on ethics in teacher research, and a facilitator password-protected website. This website includes concise chapter summaries, discussion questions, and activities for workshops or college-level classes. The audience for this book is clearly both in-service teachers interested in conducting their own inquiry projects and teacher-educators who may introduce this process to their pre-service teachers. The number of examples of teacher inquiry narratives and examples taken from actual presentations, papers and teachers' journals are a strength of this book.

Since the authors believe that teacher inquiry is a valuable, yet under-appreciated form of research, they spend chapter 1 discussing the different research paradigms in education and build a case for supporting teacher-initiated inquiries into their own classrooms and practice. They link teacher inquiry to educational reform and highlight that inquiry is more than just teacher reflection. Chapter 2 starts the journey of designing the inquiry and the authors focus on what they consider eight passions that most teachers may wonder about or question. The eight passions include: a child, curriculum, content knowledge, teaching strategies/techniques, beliefs about practice, the intersection of personal and professional identities, advocating for social justice and contextual issues. These passions move from very technical questions that focus on content and methods of teaching; to the very personal about philosophy and identity; and then outside of the classroom with issues of social justice and contextual influences of the teaching environment. "I don't know" is a powerful statement for any teacher to admit (scary though it is) and the "felt difficulties" (p. 30) are what leads most teachers to undertake an inquiry.

Collaboration, according to the authors, is a key aspect of any inquiry. They provide numerous reasons that collaboration is essential which include: (1) recognizing that inquiry alone is hard work, (2) talking is necessary for understanding, (3) the support the inquirer will get from others will help sustain them through difficult times, and (4) there is strength in the process when multiple people are conducting inquiries. There are many variations of collaboration which may consist of shared inquiries where both teachers investigate the same question; parallel inquiries where pairs of teachers with different questions help each other through the process; intersecting inquiries where teachers conduct projects on similar topics with different questions; or an inquiry support where a teacher has a critical friend who may not be engaged in his or her own research.

Critical to the success of any inquiry project is having a clear plan and chapter 4 focuses on the design of an inquiry project and more specifically data. The authors list twelve different forms of data such as reviewing the literature; writing field-notes and journals; collecting artifacts; conducting interviews, focus groups, and surveys; along with quantitative measures and using feedback from critical friends. It is comforting to be reassured by the authors that data collection plans will change and that the process is not linear - as an inquirer learns more he or she may need to adjust how data is collected. There are three examples of research briefs which show the major components of a good inquiry and could be used as a model for any researcher.

One of the new chapters for this book includes a discussion about ethics. As educators, the first focus should be the students and helping each student realize his or her own potential. Inquiry, being a form of professional development, helps teachers achieve this goal. However, recognizing that there are many paradigms for research, the distinction between typical teacher reflective practice and systematic inquiry makes the line between researcher and teacher very thin. This being the case, the authors discuss some of the ethical considerations that teachers will need to consider when conducting inquiries in their own classrooms. This includes issues of privacy, school district policies, and university Institutional Review Boards. The teacher's own

goal and purposes of the inquiry will shape how much formal permission he or she may need to have to conduct the inquiry, but the authors provide a good introduction to the steps the teacher may need to take.

Chapter 6 focuses on what is characteristically called data analysis, but the authors call it "finding your findings" (p. 157). They provide analysis procedures for both formative and summative data. The authors use the metaphor of piecing a puzzle together with the imagery of laying out all of the puzzle pieces, grouping like sections together, fitting pieces together, and finally seeing the whole picture. There are two helpful tables in this section about how to organize data and strategies to illustrate findings. In addition, there is a useful and lengthy narrative of how one teacher worked through her data which included field-notes, her reflective journal, student work, and critical friend feedback. Through this process, the teacher also changed her research question mid-inquiry as she learned more about the student she was researching. This narrative is a beneficial illustration of the process with all its messiness and complexity.

Much of the work of data analysis happens in the mind of the classroom researcher - thinking through the patterns and conclusions. The authors feel that for extended learning and action to take place teachers need to share their inquiry with others. Chapter 7 provides a form for clarifying thinking about an inquiry through writing or producing a brochure. This leads into chapter 8 which assesses the quality of inquiry work. According to the authors, it is frequently difficult to assess the quality of inquiry projects because the criteria of traditional research does not apply and inquiry projects have a dual purpose of both professional development and contributing to knowledge. Not all inquiries will fulfill both purposes and they shouldn't. In addition, developing an inquiry stance is a crucial part of the process, and cultivating a disposition of inquiry can't be easily assessed. Nevertheless, one of the major standards of quality would be transferability. This means that when teachers hear or read about others' classroom inquiries, they engage in the process of finding similarities between their context and the inquiry's context and transfer the results. Some of the indicators of a good quality inquiry project that would provide this transferability include: having a complete context; a distinct wondering or purpose statement; strong and clear design process; and accurate and evident learning with implications for practice. The authors provide a table with the five quality indicators to use for assessing either personal inquiries or to review other pieces of teacher research, including specific questions to ask of the inquiry.

The book concludes with encouragement to share inquiries with the public. The authors feel that sharing is crucial to advance both the teacher researcher and others in their teaching practices. Using the metaphor of throwing a stone into a pond, the inquiry may cause small ripples that affect the classroom, but as the ripples move outward, others will be influenced by the project. It is the authors' belief that teacher inquiry can break the cycle of teachers focusing on just surviving in the classroom and shift them into more critical reflection and reform. According to the authors, this is a new form of teacher leadership and, in paraphrasing Charlotte Danielson, teacher leaders are "those who continued to teach while influencing practices of other teachers in other classrooms" (p. 239). The end of the chapter provides methods of sharing teacher inquiries at both the local and national level including websites, organizations, conferences, presentations, and journals. The authors end with an inspirational quote that all teachers can hold onto, "Through embarking on the inquiry journey, you break boundaries. You redefine life. You redefine teaching itself" (p. 250).