

2. Teaching as Inquiry: A 21st Century Pedagogy for Teachers

By Tony Burkin

When we ask teachers and leaders to articulate what it means to possess a 21st century pedagogy there are varied responses but there are consistently three common themes:

1. *Learners have agency;*
2. *Learners have a voice; and*
3. *Learners are provided choice.*

Research shows human beings are more motivated when these three attributes are present and unsurprisingly this leads to greater engagement. Engagement is the nirvana for a teacher in a learning space.

Engagement isn't necessarily an indicator learners are learning (New Zealand's Graham Nuthall wrote a very good book touching on this called **The Hidden Lives of Learners** (<https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/hidden-lives-learners>) but it's a very good starting point none-the-less.

21st century pedagogy empowers learners. Based on the principle of *agentic* learning, learners have autonomy, engage in inquiry and problem solving, have freedom to explore, are able to make choices and decisions, set learning goals and success criteria, evaluate whether they have achieved those goals and met those criteria, and then decide what their next steps might be. They are helped along the way, but they have agency.

We find it interesting these same guiding principles often go missing in action when it comes to teachers' learning.

In their book, **Teaching as Inquiry: Asking Hard Questions to Improve Practice And Student Achievement**

(<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/teaching-as-inquiry-asking-hard-questions-to-improve-practice-and-student-achievement>) Alexandra

Weinbaum and her colleagues define professional inquiry as a process through which "*teachers can identify the key problems and issues that need to be addressed in order to help improve teaching and learning in their classrooms and schools.*" (p.4).

They note, inquiry allows "*teachers to make sense of their experiences in the classroom, learn from those experiences, and draw upon the perspectives of colleagues to enhance their teaching and their students' learning.*" (p.3)

Put this way it's relatively easy to see the links with 21st century pedagogy for students – there's choice, voice, agency, identification, exploration and the expectation teachers focus their learning within the context of their stage of career, their abilities and within the contexts of their own classrooms. Professional inquiry is a 21st pedagogy but for teachers. *Teaching as Inquiry* when done well is a very personal process through which teachers reflect on their teaching in their context with their learners based on their knowledge and skill.

What has been the experience of New Zealand teachers?

Peter Drucker coined the term Management by Objectives (MBO) in his 1954 book, **The Practice of Management**

(<https://www.amazon.com/Practice-Management-Peter-F-Drucker/dp/0060878975>).

More recently MBO has been referred to as Management by Results (MBR).

MBO/MBR is a strategic management model. Through MBO/MBR senior leaders communicate and define very specific organisational objectives. It's a means of ensuring employees are channelling their energy into areas leaders believe are important for their organisations.

The process starts by reviewing and defining the organisation's goals, setting employees objectives, monitoring their progress and evaluating.

Over the last five years we have asked many teachers what they are inquiring into. The two most common responses we hear are, "We're doing a *Kāhui Ako inquiry on ...*" and, "We're doing a *whole school/centre inquiry on ...*".

When we ask teachers this question we are using two lenses to filter responses and to answer the two questions we have. Is this centre/school using professional inquiry to align 21st century pedagogy in learning spaces with their teachers' learning experiences – are leaders here seeking to

genuinely engage their teachers as learners? Or is *teaching as inquiry* being used as a strategic management tool to meet organisational objectives?

We find it's more the latter than the former and by quite a large margin.

Dramatically rethinking appraisal as a learning process isn't necessarily the only thing requiring thought. *Teaching as inquiry* also needs to be dramatically rethought too.

So long as *teaching as inquiry* remains a strategic management tool, as it currently does in many centres and schools, it will be counterproductive to any efforts made to reshape appraisal as a process through which teachers are engaged as learners.

Making this shift, *teaching as inquiry* could become an authentic engine within appraisal for teacher growth, development, reflection and learning.

As teachers we will be more likely to own the process and drive it ourselves and we would be better positioned to evaluate the impact of our practice on learning and identify our next steps – just as we desire from our students.

And we might come to believe we are being treated a little more decently – with a little more humanity.