

PREFACE

The intention of this book is to conduct a research-based study of how educational inquiry is conceptualised in contemporary curriculum and its implications for teacher implementation of inquiry-based learning. Within the school education sector, the notion of inquiry or inquiry-based learning, has been under attack on a number of fronts in several countries over a number of years. This has particularly been the case in the UK and Australia, where various interpretations of inquiry—based learning (IBL) have been introduced into national curriculum frameworks, to varying degrees of success, a theme that is explored in more depth in Chap. 1. For proponents of a more traditional approach to teaching and learning, inquiry learning is seen to lack academic rigour and is often associated with notions of student freedom that encourage them to study only those areas that they are interested in. It is often decried as devaluing more teacher-founded pedagogy by negating direct instruction, one that results in not enough ‘knowledge’ about the ‘kinds of knowledge’ that students need to know.

The prime cause of this criticism, however, is one that reflects the inadequacy of educators’ knowledge as to what inquiry actually is in the educational context. Between the two of us, we have a total of almost 70 years experience in teaching across the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors in Australia and in various international contexts. For both of us, the inquiry approach has been the foundation of our educational work, but one driver for this book has been our independently derived conclusions as to the expertise of teacher practitioners in inquiry. For many educators, inquiry is a student-centred activity that is initiated by

them, but with relatively little direct input in their role as teachers thereafter, beyond the odd word or comment.

This lack of teacher understanding about the complexities of inquiry learning is, we argue, at the heart of expressed concerns as to the relevance and effectiveness of inquiry-based learning. A more accurate reality is that effective inquiry-based learning depends as much on the direct participation and specific expertise of the teacher in inquiry-based **teaching** as it does on a focus on student-driven activity. This deep, embedded form of inquiry expertise is a parameter that is often lost or ignored when teacher practitioners seek to implement inquiry-based learning, replaced too often by a surface compliance with the outward appearance of inquiry principles.

In many ways, acceptance of this approach to inquiry-based teaching can be seen to reflect a reluctance to take on the inherent uncertainty of inquiry-based teaching, as it is not always possible to predict where the students might wish to take the investigation. Both of us have experienced working with colleagues in all sectors who are more concerned with keeping an orderly, predictable learning space in an abiding attempt to keep ‘control’ of the student group. As a result, inquiry learning in the modern classroom is now often more based on the teacher’s need for classroom management, rather than a creative unknown that might lead to more effective and enjoyable learning on the part of the student.

The possibility that the process of inquiry might also vary between knowledge disciplines and reflect the conceptual bases—and therefore conceptual variations—of the different learning areas, is also not generally one that is acknowledged or explored, especially since many teachers are seen, through their professional accreditation, to be experts in only one or two different disciplines. The purpose of this book, then, is to provide a more comprehensive, nuanced and evidence-founded analysis of the nature of educational inquiry, with a particular dual focus on its interdisciplinary nature and the role of teacher in what is frequently derided as a student-controlled activity.

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