

Tools for developing a hunch: Identifying assumptions

It is important to identify and examine deeply held beliefs and assumptions as they shape what we notice in relation to the issue, how we interpret what we have noticed and how those interpretations then determine how we act. The following table may be used to consider personal beliefs and assumptions that may have influenced your actions in focus area/issue you are investigating.

1. Start with the Actions column – list the actions you have taken in the focus area or issue you are investigating
2. Fill out the Constraints column – think about what caused or motivated you to take that action.
 - Why did I take that action?
 - What influenced my actions? (Perceptions, feelings, attitude)
3. Fill out the Assumption column – identify the assumption(s) you made when taking that action. This is the ‘why’ of the constraints column. Why do you hold that belief, perception or attitude?
 - What were my teaching or personal beliefs that influenced my actions?
 - What is my perception of the students, teachers or others involved?

Issue:		
Root cause:		
Assumption The ‘why’ of the constraints	Constraints Beliefs, attitudes, values, perceptions that influenced your actions	Actions List your actions within this focus area/issue you are investigating

Adapted from Robinson, V. M., & Lai, M. K. (2005). *Practitioner research for educators: a guide to improving classrooms and schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

The following is a worked example that explores the problem of student overreliance on the teacher for next steps.

Issue: Constant reliance on the teacher for next steps		
Root cause: The way I give instructions detailing the learning process of a project and respond to student questions		
Assumption	Constraints	Actions
The 'why' of the constraints	Beliefs, attitudes, values, perceptions that influenced your actions	List your actions within this focus area/issue you are investigating
I assume students will listen and retain the information.	This is what I've been taught is good teaching practice – set the lesson up with all the information students need.	Give all the instructions about the learning process, verbally and at the start of the lesson.
I assume this is the best/most effective and efficient way (for me) to deliver the instructions for the majority of students.	It's the way I like to work because I've done the planning for the project and I'm running through the plan in my head as I'm explaining it to the students.	
Students should be familiar with this form of delivery as all their teachers do it this way.		
Students should be able to use their logic and thinking skills to work out what to do next on the project.	Giving the instructions verbally is more efficient when I'm teaching and saves me having to prepare lots of resources.	

<p>Students will fall behind or we'll run out of time if I teach them work out the answer for themselves.</p> <p>Students don't have the skills needed to work out their next steps. They need their hand held.</p> <p>I assume that none of the other students can provide the answer or help the student to arrive at the answer.</p> <p>I assume students can't draw on their prior knowledge to work out their own steps. Either they don't have the prior knowledge or don't have the time or desire to think for themselves.</p> <p>I'm assuming students are lazy and are used to taking shortcuts or getting others to work for them.</p>	<p>I believe it's faster and easier for me just to respond with the answer than to redirect them to a resource or question them to make them think.</p> <p>I believe I can problem-solve faster than they can, so again I'm saving time so the lesson moves forwards.</p> <p>I think students like it when I give them a quick answer, so they can get on with their work.</p>	<p>I tend to immediately respond to students verbally with direct answers or quick fix solutions</p>
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Questions for checking the validity of assumptions

Use these questions to work through your automatic reasoning process. This should enable you to check the quality of your own thinking about what is occurring in your classroom in relation to the issue/focus area.

<p>Interrupt data/evidence</p> <p>What have I noticed?</p> <p>What might I have missed?</p>	
<p>Interrupt descriptions</p> <p>Am I reporting the issue accurately?</p>	
<p>Interrupt interpretations</p> <p>What other possible interpretations are there?</p>	
<p>Interrupt conclusions</p> <p>What information or logic led me to my conclusion or judgments?</p>	

Adapted from Robinson, V. M. (2011). *Student-centered leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The following worked example continues examining the problem of student overreliance on the teacher for next steps.

<p>Interrupt data/evidence</p> <p>What have I noticed?</p> <p>What might I have missed?</p>	<p>Student's aren't listening fully to instructions, they hear the first few and then zone out. Students are struggling to retain instructions about next steps of the project, always asking me for help with next steps or waiting passively for my help.</p> <p>I might have missed how students are showing they understand or don't understand my instructions.</p> <p>I might have missed other ways students behave when they don't know what to do next or how those who do know what to do behave.</p> <p>I might have missed how students are trying to remember or work out next steps. They might be asking others or looking around the room or online for answers.</p>
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<p>Interrupt descriptions</p> <p>Am I reporting the issue accurately?</p>	<p>Students aren't fully engaged in the learning if they aren't listening to project instructions and have to keep asking what to do next.</p> <p>I think so as I've used observational data of the start of my lessons, student voice to see if they know what to do next/ understand the project and qualitative data of how many questions students have asked in relation to next steps to identify my issue.</p>
<p>Interrupt interpretations</p> <p>What other possible interpretations are there?</p>	<p>Students aren't interested in what we are learning. Perhaps it's not relevant to their lives, interests, culture or building on their strengths?</p> <p>Students don't understand the process we are working through, which is why they need help to work out what to do next.</p> <p>I haven't taught students where to go to find out their next steps or structured my teaching in a way to support students to know what to do next.</p> <p>Students do know what to do next or can work it out for themselves but they choose to rely on me because it's easier than thinking for themselves.</p>

<p>Interrupt conclusions</p> <p>What information or logic led me to my conclusion or judgments?</p>	<p>I'm not supporting students self-management development or to think for themselves. Students aren't progressing and growing in my class if I do all the thinking for them.</p> <p>Students aren't fully understanding the project if I do all the planning. Perhaps I should co-construct the next steps with them?</p> <p>I'm not contextualising the learning process and/or content. I may need to be more responsive towards their interests, prior knowledge, culture, strengths etc. when planning content/projects.</p>
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Blank versions of both these tools are on the following pages of this tool for you to use.

Issue: Root cause:		
Assumption	Constraints	Actions

Interrupt data/evidence What have I noticed? What might I have missed?	
Interrupt descriptions Am I reporting the issue accurately?	
Interrupt interpretations What other possible interpretations are there?	
Interrupt conclusions What information or logic led me to my conclusion or judgments?	