

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 Practices column – list the actions you have taken in the focus area or issue you are investigating
2. Fill out the Influences 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 your beliefs 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 children, teachers or others involved?

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| Issue: | | |
| Root cause: | | |
| Assumption Identify the assumptions behind your beliefs | Influences List the beliefs attitudes, values, and perceptions that influenced your actions | Practices List your actions within this focus area/issue you are investigating |
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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 are worked examples that explore the problems of rushed caregiving routines and unsuccessful questioning practices.

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| <p>Issue: Rushed caregiving routines</p> <p>Root cause: My priorities around routines and my assumption that nappy changing is a negative experience</p> | | |
| <p>Assumptions</p> <p>Identify the assumptions behind your beliefs</p> | <p>Influences</p> <p>List the beliefs, attitudes, values, and perceptions that influenced your actions</p> | <p>Practices</p> <p>List your actions within this focus area/issue you are investigating</p> |
| <p>I assume that changing the children's nappies according to schedule is more important than what the children are currently doing.</p> <p>I assume that nappy-changing is unpleasant for children and that children do not want to be involved in related tasks such as selecting or unfolding the nappy.</p> <p>I assume nappy-changing has to be finished before teachers can have breaks and I'm anxious to meet other adults' needs.</p> | <p>We only have limited time to get children's nappies changed before teachers go on their breaks.</p> <p>I like to get the nappies done and out of the way.</p> <p>It is better to change a child's nappy quickly so they can get back to play. Nappy changing is a boring and repetitive routine.</p> | <p>Taking children from an activity to attend to nappy-changing. Moving through the nappy change as quickly as possible. Lifting the child onto the nappy bench instead of having the child climb the steps. Selecting the nappy and unfolding it, fastening it quickly around them, lifting them down and ticking off their name. Moving to the next child on the list.</p> |
| <p>Issue: Questioning practices are not very successful</p> <p>Root cause: My beliefs about appropriate teacher behaviours and children's reliance on the teacher</p> | | |
| <p>Assumptions</p> <p>Identify the assumptions behind your beliefs</p> | <p>Influences</p> <p>List the beliefs, attitudes, values, and perceptions that influenced your actions</p> | <p>Practices</p> <p>List your actions within this focus area/issue you are investigating</p> |

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| <p>I assume children need adult-initiated questioning to learn the appropriate content from activities.</p> <p>Questioning is primarily for finding out what children know.</p> <p>I assume that teacher-led interactions best support children's learning.</p> | <p>I believe there is lots for children to be learning while they play. Play is good for developing vocabulary and literacy and numeracy concepts.</p> <p>Teachers should support children to engage in thinking while they play. Questions make children think.</p> <p>Teachers should question children to find out their knowledge and provide them with information where there are gaps in their knowledge.</p> | <p>Questioning children during play:</p> <p>Asking children to name colours and shapes while they play with playdough.</p> <p>Asking children what they observe and why it is happening For example, why does the sand empty more quickly through that container than the other container?</p> <p>Asking how many scoops will fill a bottle in the water tray.</p> <p>Asking the names of ocean animals in the water tray.</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 setting in relation to the issue/focus area.

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| <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> | |

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| <p>Interrupt conclusions</p> <p>What information or logic led me to my conclusion or judgements?</p> | |
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Adapted from Robinson, V. M. (2011). *Student-centered leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The following worked example continues examining the problem of questioning.

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| <p>Interrupt data/evidence</p> <p>What have I noticed?</p> <p>What might I have missed?</p> | <p>Many of my questions are closed questions that don't invite children into longer exchanges with me. Some children enjoy showing their knowledge, others seem to be interrupted and distracted by my questioning. When I asked children about why they thought the materials behaved in that way, they gave longer, more thoughtful answers, and I was able to respond with follow-up questions.</p> <p>I might have focused my questioning on an aspect of the activity that they aren't interested in or thinking about.</p> <p>I might have missed cues as to what children are doing and thinking as they play in the sand / water. Finding out more about this might help me understand how to question more effectively.</p> |
| <p>Interrupt descriptions</p> <p>Am I reporting the issue accurately?</p> | <p>I think this video of my practice is reflective of my usual teaching style, because I find children often give me one-word answers and I regularly find it hard to extend my exchanges with children.</p> |
| <p>Interrupt interpretations</p> <p>What other possible interpretations are there?</p> | <p>Children don't know the answers to my questions – am I pitching the questions at too high a level?</p> <p>Children don't have the vocabulary skills in English?</p> <p>Children are not interested in the topic of my questions?</p> <p>Direct questioning may not be familiar to them because of their cultural background?</p> |

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| <p>Interrupt conclusions</p> <p>What information or logic led me to my conclusion or judgements?</p> | <p>I conclude that closed questioning does not help me to build meaningful exchanges with children. This is informed by the short exchanges recorded in my video observations.</p> <p>Another conclusion is that I am not getting a full enough understanding of what children are doing or thinking before I launch into questioning. This is informed by the shallow nature of our interactions, and the way that video recording my interactions shows that children were attending to aspects of the activity that I could have picked up on to extend but didn't. need to investigate other potential conclusions such as children's lack of familiarity with the topic.</p> |
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