

THE BIG PICTURE ACADEMY Research Project

MAP4U Murdoch University

RESEARCH BRIEF No. 2 Big Picture Reflective Practices¹

Teachers' knowledge and voice are integral to school-based research processes. Teachers are a vital source of data about students learning, classroom practices, and how their own learning is evolving. Leaders too. The Big Picture design has four recommended reflective practices. Through adopting these practices the Advisory teacher, the school and the research team obtain significant evidence for what has happened and what is happening, what is changing and what isn't, and what staff and students are learning. All require a habit of persistence. Once in place they are all worth the effort.

1. Thank God it's Friday (TGIF)²

At the end of every week staff write something about their week. This reflection can be about all sorts of things and could include:

- A record of what happened
- A description of something that went well – or something that didn't go so well
- A memorable anecdote

- Something they have learned
- An issue or problem they are struggling with
- A student or group of students
- Their plans for next week
- Something they are reading
- An idea they have

There is no requirement that every week every one of these things is attended to – maybe just one. Some schools also engage their students in putting together a TGIF for their advisory or their year group or their school.

2. Keeping a Journal³

Students in a BP school are asked to keep journals. They are asked to write in them at least three times a week. They use the journal to document their learning experiences, make plans, track their work, reflect on their learning or just on their life generally. They can use the journal to communicate with their Advisory teacher.

1. The notes for this brief have been adapted from Down, B & Hogan, J with Straton, R (2010) *Big Picture Education Australia The School Research Framework*, Perth, Centre for Learning and Change, Murdoch University.

2. This is the name that evolved through the development of the early Big Picture schools. The name is not compulsory.

3. Stewart, G with Hogan, J (2001) *The Reflective Teacher Kit*, ANSN and DET: Perth WA. See pp. 24-26 for more advice on keeping a journal for learning.

In the same way BP staff can keep a journal too. They can use the journal to:

- help clarify their thinking
- keep track of their learning projects
- collect ideas and perspectives
- involve others in their learning by getting their views on what you have written.

Not least this helps staff understand what is involved in keeping a journal and the journal becomes a great source of information for reflection on learning in the school.

3. Narratives

At the end of every term the BPE student writes a personal narrative about their work and their learning. This can take many forms but often includes a reference to the student's Learning Plan, Learning through Internships (LTI), their Exhibition, Projects, other subjects they are doing and so on. The personal narratives are kept by the students. Over time they become a record of their learning journey as well as evidence of the learning for the student, the advisory and the school. Advisory teachers are also asked to write a narrative about every student in their advisory every term. These too are assessments of the student's work and learning over the term. They are an important way for the Advisory teacher to describe a student's progress and growth as a person. The narratives focus on highlights for the student, how they are engaging in their advisory and community, their participation in the school and wider community, their LTI, their personal qualities and self organization, the learning goals, project(s), other subjects, exhibitions and portfolio. Any judgements must be supported with evidence. Both the student narrative and the Advisory teacher narrative are used in the student portfolio and read by the family. They also become a rich record of student learning in the school and can be used by the school as evidence of student learning and progress over time

4. Advisory Teacher Learning Plan

Students in a BP school/Academy are required to have a learning plan. Advisory teachers (and leaders) are encouraged to have one too. In these plans the Advisory teacher asks - and answers - for themselves how they are going against some key elements of the BP design. That is, elements like advisory group identity, relationships with students, setting up LTIs, organisation of the work etc. Against each of these asking questions such as:

- How am I going?
- What would I like to do better?
- What is my goal for this term/year?
- What will I do about this?
- How will I show it?

Conclusion

These are important practices for the Advisory teachers and their leaders to develop as they implement the BP design for the students. These same practices also become invaluable for our research providing key evidence of how things are developing and evolving over time. It helps to ensure the Advisory teacher experiences are at the heart of the research. It also helps to make the research less intrusive reducing the need for more school visits.

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