



WASHINGTON STATE
LEADERSHIP
ACADEMY

Critical Inquiry into
System Problems of
Practice

September 25-26, 2008



SETTING THE STAGE

Plan for this session.....

- A Parable
- Setting the stage for the work this year
- Why inquire? A rationale.....
- Exploring the essential components of a critical inquiry process for closing learning gaps
- Defining our team's problem of practice
- Reframing to find "root cause"
- Leading others to work on change



SETTING THE STAGE

A PARABLE.....

Once there was a little town on a river.....

Table Talk:

- What message do you perceive in the parable?
- How is it relevant for your work in closing achievement gaps and ensuring all student learn at high levels?



GETTING STARTED WITH POP

CRITICAL INQUIRY....

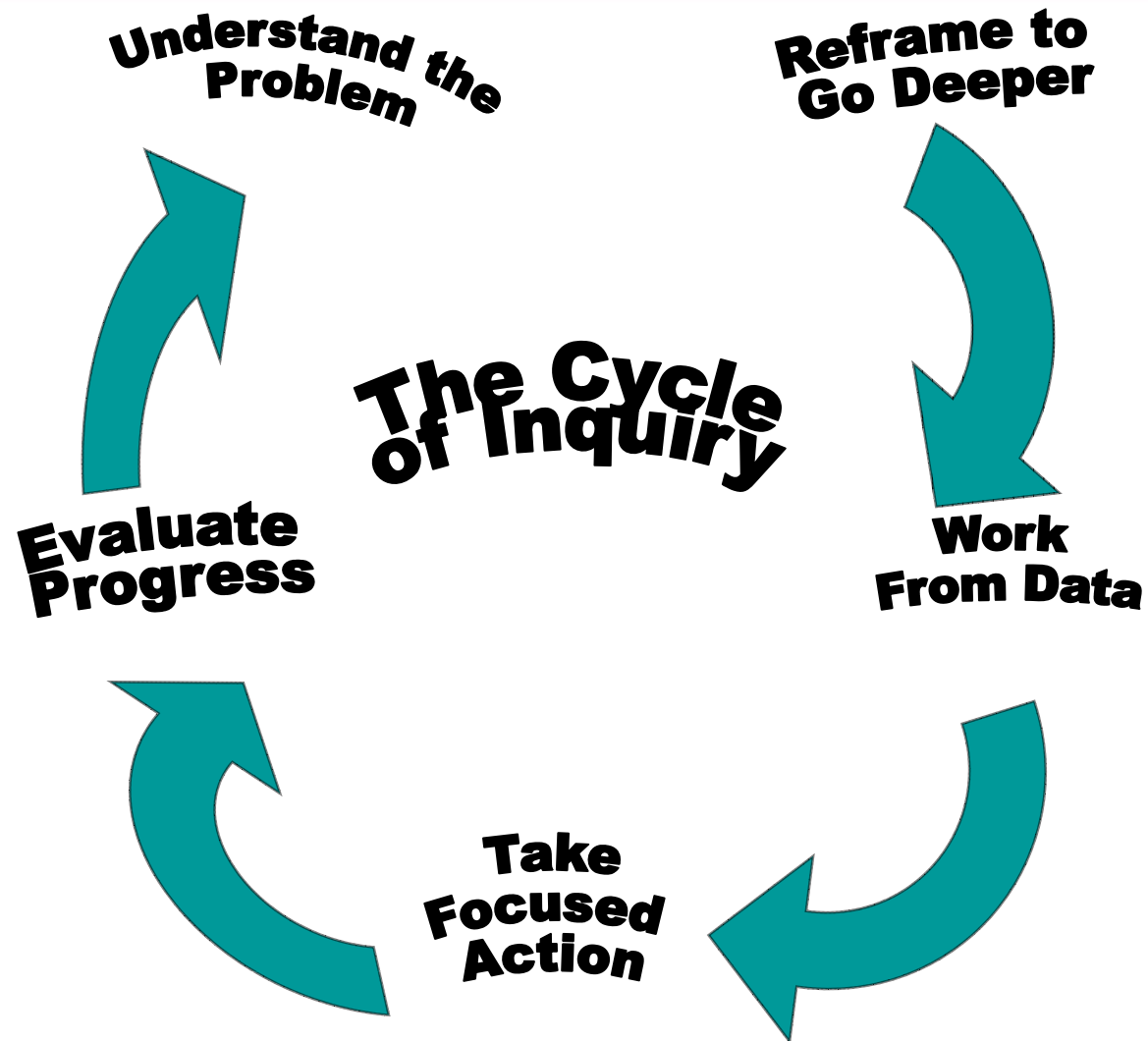
- Is a process for generating and using knowledge in your district; “knowing and doing”
- Posits professionals capable of learning from and improving their own practice
- Is value-laden, not value-free
- Is not an imposed “fix” or a “prescription,” but rather a way of thinking and working from information (data) in your home district context
- Is about asking questions that bring tacit assumptions to the surface and allows us to dialogue about them



GETTING STARTED WITH INQUIRY

ELEMENTS OF A CRITICAL INQUIRY PROCESS

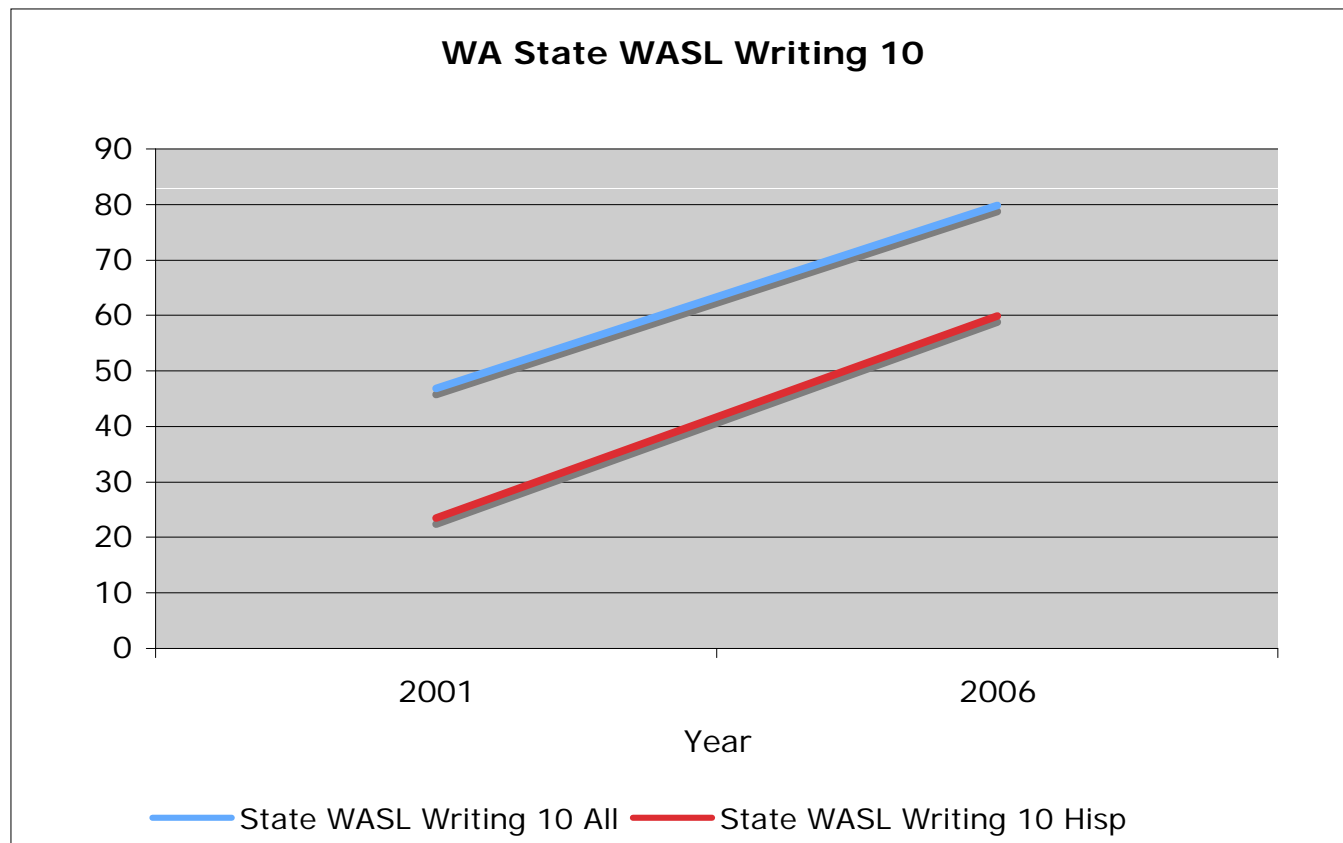
- **FRAME THE PROBLEM:** Develop an initial understanding
- **REFRAME TO FIND “ROOT CAUSE”:** Raise, check and clarify values, assumptions, beliefs embedded in the problem; connect to core values
- **WORK FROM DATA:** Seek information that bears upon the problem
- **TAKE FOCUSED ACTION:** Generate possible solutions or strategies; decide on a solution, based on identified “theory of action”
- **EVALUATE:** Assess your progress toward addressing the problem in light of new data.....





REFRAME TO GO DEEPER

WA State WASL All and Hispanic Students: Writing Grade 10





GETTING STARTED WITH INQUIRY

FOUR WA DISTRICTS EXERCISE

- What are your hunches or assumptions about what teaching and learning looks like in each district?
- How do you know?
- What evidence would you need to test your hunches about WHY any district's writing test data looks like it does?



UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

WHO SAYS?

- “A problem well put is half-solved”

-- John Dewey



UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

A “GOOD” PROBLEM STATEMENT

- Identifies a learning issue, or achievement gap issue for students
- Frames the challenge as a question to be answered
- Avoids embedding blame in stating the problem to be solved
- Avoids embedding pre-conceived solutions in stating the problem
- Considers “root causes” that led to the problem, such as personal beliefs, professional learning needs, and system learning/alignment needs.



UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- In your work at your district right now, what is the pressing learning problem you will work on this year? How do you know it is a problem (what data are you relying on)?
- What are the root causes of this learning problem?
- What are you doing about it now?
- What more do you need to know to understand the problem as fully as possible?
- What would be different, and for which students, if the problem were solved?



UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

TEAM TASK #1: REVISIT THE PROBLEM

In teams, discuss:

- In your work at your district right now, what is the pressing learning problem you will work on this year? How do you know it is a problem (what data are you relying on)?
- What are you doing about it now?
- What would be different, and for which students, if the problem were solved?