

AT LAST, ANOTHER TOOL TO GO WITH THE HAMMER!

If a hammer is your only tool, every problem starts looking like a nail.

-- Abraham Maslow

The primary contribution of Practice-Based Inquiry[®] (PBI) to policy is that it is a new tool that accurately assesses the quality of actual school practice. This is a major contribution since, in the end, it is the quality of what schools and teachers actually do on a daily basis that determines how well students learn in that school. PBI focuses on how well students are learning. It directly considers the complex action of schools with the research technology necessary to make accurate and substantive judgments about the quality of live practice.

And as it turns out PBI also contributes in extraordinary ways to the professional development of team members, and to the ways we think about what school reform is and how to support it.

We know that learning in the classrooms of a school is particular, complex, dynamic and mundane. It is easy to see why most American researchers shrug and say, “You can’t measure that complexity. We have to use simpler artifacts for learning.” And indeed, the common assumptions that we now make about the nature of evidence and the process of forming conclusions do not work to support accurate or substantive conclusions about actual practice.

The century old traditions of school inspection hold the conceptual roots for how PBI works by providing a different set of assumptions. See [Reaching for a Better Standard](#). The foundation elements of PBI—dynamic evidence, professional judgment and deliberated consensus—are supported by another world-view than those that are behind social science experiments and variable based research. (Go to [PBI](#).)

As it turns out, these PBI assumptions generate a different world-view about schools, learning and school change. For example, teachers on a visit team learn to take their professional judgment seriously and are clearly reminded how seldom we ask them to use their professional judgment, let alone develop it. And yet professional judgment is implicit in their daily work—shaping what they learn from their practice. It contains standards of actual performance and is key to their deciding what to do next.

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