

# Seeing Children - Deepening Classroom Research Protocol

*“Children are at the forefront of teacher research. The studies are usually designed to help teachers gain new ways of seeing children, develop deeper understandings of children’s feelings and growth, and become more responsive to children.”*

Henderson, Meier, Perry & Stremmel, 2012, p.2

Ontario’s pedagogy invites us to become classroom researchers and co-learners who construct and make meaning of learning together. Research helps us bring visibility to children’s strengths and intelligence and provides us with a lens to see and listen more deeply. It brings new life to learning together and is a reflection of our values and what we want to grow together in our classrooms. Classroom research (sometimes referred to as ‘Action Research’) fosters our own disposition for curiosity, offering answers to our questions while at the same time creating more questions to consider. It is a way to study together children’s ideas, theories, and understandings, so that our responses are a true reflection of the life of the classroom.

*“For reflective educators, work is an ongoing process of closely observing and studying the significance of unfolding activities ... to better understand and delight in what happens in the classroom. Reflection allows educators to make effective, meaningful decisions and is about how to respond and to plan for children.”*

Wendy Cividanes and Debbie Lebo

There are multiple entry points into research in the classroom. This protocol is one way to enter into educator research. The protocol will take you through a process in which you develop a question through collaboration. The question then acts as a lens for focus. If you already have a question in mind already that you are curious to study, you may find “evaluate your question” is a good place to begin.

## **Research begins with curiosity.**

Educators observe children as they play, paying close attention to recurring themes, and children’s understandings, ideas and underlying questions. These observations act as a guide to what you want to learn more about.

For example, you may notice children’s natural desire to be in relationship together. This could lead you to think about the friendships building in your classroom.

Create a word cloud together using a big idea. Using flip chart paper and post-it notes your team can consider as many words as possible that connect to the big ideas (e.g. friendship). (This is a time for individuals to work on their own.) Once the group feels they have exhausted the words connected to the big idea, consider using google, dictionaries etc. to expand your thinking.



Sort the notes into 3 or 4 categories that make sense to the team. Once you have had a chance to think through these subgroups, together decide on which area you want to focus your research.

Create one or two “how” or “what” questions that you are curious to study in your classroom. For example;

What do children already know about forming friendships?

How do children welcome each other in the classroom?

How is the environment influencing children’s relationships?

### **Evaluate your question:**

- Is the research question one that is of interest to the researcher, and potentially to others?
- Is it an idea you want to shed light on? (This is an important question as what you give your attention to will grow.)
- Does the question connect to competencies?
- Is the research question researchable?
- Is the research question measurable, and will the process produce data that can be supported? (Data is often found in notes, photos, videos etc.)
- Is the research question too broad or too narrow?

### **To guide your process as you begin to move into this research, consider the following:**

What tools or resources will you need?

What research will you do outside of the classroom? (This is a critical element of your research. Consider what you may read or watch, or who you might connect with to help deepen your knowledge)

What methods will you use to collect your data (observations)?

Who is the research for? Who is your audience?

How will you bring visibility to your process?

What systems might be useful for organizing and storing your data?

How will you ensure time to reflect and study your data with others?

How will you engage families in the research question or process?

### **Reflecting on your observations:**

Studying your data is a critical part of the research process, allowing you to make decisions around how you may respond, or whether you will move back in to observe more. There are many protocols that you may find useful in guiding you through the reflective process. Protocols such as the “Thinking Lens” and “Visible Thinking” (see attached) offer thoughtful questions and processes to



engage educators in dialogue. This is also a good time to re-evaluate your question to see what new curiosities may be evolving.

### Document your process and share your findings.

The reflective questions in the attached “Creating a Visual Representation of Learning” may be a useful resource when bringing visibility to your research.

