



## PRACTITIONER INQUIRY PROJECT GRANTS

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Participants in the Practice Potentials research study stressed the value of professional development experiences that involved the whole staff team and that extended over a period of time. Action learning and practitioner inquiry projects were seen as having great impact on the quality of programs and strengthening the teams in the services that had utilised these approaches. The dynamic nature of this way of working also made a considerable impact on staff morale and motivation.

Mitchell & Cubey (2003) state that inquiry approaches to professional development involve staff in activities that provides opportunities to:

- question our own experiences and views (not just simply validating them)
- think critically about the values and assumptions underlying our practice and consider events and situations from different perspectives
- gather and reflect on information and knowledge about alternative practices/ perspectives at both theoretical and practical levels
- investigate real life examples in our own settings.

These strategies are a significant move away from the more familiar training session approach. They are based on the idea that developing and improving practice is not just a matter of 'quick fix' approaches and transferring tips, tricks and information from one source to another, but rather emerge from a process of constructing shared understandings amongst staff teams. In this approach, we work together to reflect deeply on the meaning behind what we actually do in our day to day work.

Practitioner inquiry is change focused and revolves around a cyclical process that has some distinct phases. In Glenda Mac Naughton's book *Doing Action Research in Early Childhood Studies* (2009), these phases are identified as:

**Phase 1: Choosing to Change** – we begin with hopes, dreams and desires... we hope we can create a change for the better, we dream of a better world and we desire to make a difference

**Phase 2 Planning for Change** – this phase involves discovering what we need to know and do if our project is to succeed

**Phase 3 Creating the Change** – this phase involves cycles of gathering information about the way things are, implementing the first change and gathering information on the effects of the change in recurrent cycles

**Phase 4 Sharing the Lessons** – this phase involves sharing the lessons from our work with colleagues. Sometimes this happens formally through conference presentations and published writing but also informally through our own networks

The inquiry process is rich with opportunities for learning. The outcomes and learning achieved are usually lasting and deep for individuals and for services as a whole.

# PRACTITIONER INQUIRY PROJECT GRANT APPLICATION FORM

## Application Information

Service Name			
Address			
Phone		Email	
Practitioner Mentor			
Proposed Academic Mentor			
Number of participants taking part in the Practioner Inquiry Project			

What are you hoping to learn from your Practitioner Inquiry and how will you share this information?

How did you choose the topic you have decided upon?

What questions are you hoping to answer, what new knowledge or change is needed?

What is your vision for where you want to be at the end of the project?

How will you involve families and children in this process?

What challenges or limitations might be faced? How will you work to overcome these?

Practitioner inquiry/research is about improving our practice as educators of young children through:

- Reflecting on and exploring our current practice
- Sharing our thinking
- Changing/modifying our practice on the basis of our reflections and discussions
- Recording what we think and do

## APPLICATION GUIDELINES

1. Unsuccessful services, unless advised otherwise, will have the opportunity to apply for future practitioner inquiry grants subject to continuation of funding.
2. Entry to the program is by application and selection is based on merit.
3. The Grants are capped at a maximum of \$5000.00 per successful service per year.
4. The application process will be reviewed at the end of each year subject to continuation of funding.
5. The Practitioner Inquiry Project Grants will cease operations for any year once funds have been expended.
6. Only one Practitioner Inquiry Project Grant will be approved per service per year.

Services in receipt of Practitioner Inquiry Grants agree to share their learning with the wider ACT Children's services community in a negotiated format.

## PROJECT OUTLINE

Eligible ACT children's services are invited to apply for ACT PSC Practitioner Inquiry Project Grants of up to \$5000.00. Children's services will be chosen via an application process to access the funding.

Each Practitioner Inquiry Project will follow a similar format of 5 sessions held over a nominated period, usually completed within 6 – 12 month period. An initial meeting between the Academic Mentor, Practitioner Mentor and the ACT PSC will be organised as an opportunity:

- To develop an agreed methodology and protocol for the project
- Undertake a professional learning opportunity to ensure that all participants have a sound understanding of the practitioner inquiry process
- To plan for the analysis, review and reporting of the findings of the Practitioner Inquiry Projects.

Each Practitioner Inquiry Project will be supported by an Academic Mentor who will facilitate 15 hours of face-to-face sessions involving both Practitioner Mentors and Practitioner Educators. A further 15 hours is allocated to each Academic Mentor to provide between-session support to participants and contribute to documentation and analysis of project findings. In total Academic Mentors will be engaged under a consultant contract with the ACT PSC for a total of 30 hours over the course of the Practitioner Inquiry Project.

The project will culminate in the production of a collection of stories, reports, essays, poster series, email conversations, photography essay, and/or journal entries etc by the participating educators, outlining their experiences and documenting the findings of the Practitioner Inquiry Projects.

Each Academic Mentor will be required to write and submit an article for the ACT PSC newsletter reporting on the project and analysing the pedagogical implications of the findings. Academic Mentors will be encouraged to include other participants as co-authors whenever possible.

All participants will be invited to share their findings in an appropriate event/format to be negotiated.

The following outlines the roles of key participants in the project model:

## Academic Mentor

- In consultation with the Practitioner Mentor develop five sessions as per the project methodology.
- Negotiate with the Practitioner Mentor roles and responsibilities within the sessions according to the project methodology.
- Agree to work as facilitator and mentor with a view to building capacity and confidence within the group.
- Provide academic support in the defining of the project, data collection, analysis and documentation of findings.

## Practitioner Mentor

- Self nominate to take a leadership role to work closely with the Academic Mentor to share in the facilitation of the project sessions.
- Identify an Academic Mentor.
- Agree to take part in professional learning about the practitioner Inquiry.
- Undertake a Practitioner Inquiry Project focusing on a topic identified.
- Contribute to the organisation of data and preparation of project documentation.

## Practitioner Educators

- Self nominate to be involved, commit and contribute to 5 professional learning sessions.
- Commit to undertake a Practitioner Inquiry Project over the specified period.
- Agree to share the findings of the project through contributions to sessions and documentation of project work.

## Employer

- To enable staff to participate in 15 hours of professional learning throughout the period of the project and make arrangements for adequate paid professional learning leave to cover their attendance.
- Enable educator's time throughout the project to gather data and prepare documentation for each session (approx 30 mins each week).
- Provide a venue, resources and catering for each five sessions.

## The ACT PSC

- Work collaboratively with participating services, Academic and Practitioner Mentors.
- Provide support to the Academic Mentor and Practitioner Mentor via phone and/or email to assist with project planning, quality assurance and accountability of the project.
- Assist services to obtain an Academic Mentor.
- Fund an Academic Mentor for up to \$5000.00 through a contractual arrangement.
- Support services to share the learning gained through the project with the wider children services community