

# Am I intervening too much or too little?

We often ask ourselves if we should have intervened more during an inquiry, especially when we worry that the inquiry did not lead anywhere or make much progress.

This anxiety might be unnecessary. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in the worry of whether to intervene in an inquiry that we may not notice its positive aspects.

But what criteria can we use to assess enquiries as we go along, in order to gauge the need for our interventions? Here are three that I've found particularly useful:

- **Is the inquiry leading people to engage with each other?** (*ie*, are people showing *caring and collaborative* thinking?)
- **Is the inquiry making people think?** (*ie*, are people showing critical and creative thinking)
- **Is the inquiry helping people think for themselves?** (*ie*, are people becoming socially and intellectually independent?)

If all these criteria are being met, then I have no big worries. But I generally find that the third one is a real challenge. On the face of it, the more I intervene, the less I am developing independent thinking – perhaps even the opposite!

I am, of course, pretty confident that members of a community of inquiry increasingly *push each other* to think harder, over time. But I also believe that I can help each individual to *push herself* to think harder.

## How can I help?

I may do so through occasional, spontaneous, interventions in inquiries, but I might also use these very criteria questions in the review session after an inquiry – particularly pressing members to think (for themselves) about thinking (for themselves)! Such reviews could point the way towards specific exercises to sharpen our tools for thinking.

## Have we got an answer?

To conclude, I don't feel that reaching agreement is a particularly good indicator of progress in an inquiry. (It could even be an indicator that not enough hard thinking was done!) I am content enough if I sense that better common understandings have been reached – even if the understanding is just that the world, and the words we use to deal with it, are pretty complex. It is, after all, only through a stretching of one's conceptual framework that one's understanding of the world moves forward.