



Bringing Professional Practice into FOCUS

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## FOLLOWING A STUDENT

### Catalpa Ltd. Guide

**MAY, 2009**

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### **The PBI® Collection**

*Answers to the Basic Questions about Practice-Based Inquiry®*, serves as a brief introduction and overview to Practice-Based Inquiry. It is based on the text of the Catalpa Ltd. website.

*Fundamentals and Foundations of Practice-Based Inquiry®*, is published by Catalpa Ltd. as part of a series that explain both the conceptual and practical dimensions of Practice-Based Inquiry. It presents a comprehensive description of PBI definitions, assumptions and underlying concepts. It considers the place of PBI in the historical tradition of professional practice. Its central focus is how PBI works as a legitimate methodology and technology of inquiry that generates accurate and legitimate findings about the quality of professional practice. Its thorough and authoritative discussion of *Practice-Based Inquiry* provides the details necessary for understanding the value and how to use PBI as a research tool.

### **Handbooks for Catalpa Services**

Catalpa is proud to provide services to help clients claim and use the benefits of *Practice-Based Inquiry*. The following handbooks describe the stipulations and procedures for Catalpa services of protocol accreditation, chair certification and visit report endorsement as well as the outlines for how a Center can be licensed to use PBI®.

*Assuring the Legitimacy of Practice-Based Inquiry®: The Preparation, Review and Accreditation of a PBI® Visit Protocol.*

*Assuring the Legitimacy of Practice-Based Inquiry®: The Certification of Team Members and of Chairs to Lead Teams.*

*Assuring the Legitimacy of Practice-Based Inquiry®: Endorsing PBI® Visit Reports.*

*Assuring the Legitimacy of Practice-Based Inquiry®: Licensing PBI® Regional Centers.*

### **Guides to Ensuring the Legitimacy of PBI® Visits**

Catalpa offers a growing series of guides on how to design, conduct and follow-up on a PBI® visit.

### **Catalpa's web-site ([www.Catalpa.org](http://www.Catalpa.org))**

Catalpa's web site provides a comprehensive set of resources for those interested in Practice-Based Inquiry. The website provides you with further examples, details, links to documents and other relevant web-sites, as well as references to other studies and descriptive documents. These include access to visit reports prepared by PBI visit teams, studies and discussions of the benefits of PBI, *Handbooks* and *Guides* about how to ensure the value and rigor of Practice-Based Inquiry and an informative newsletter about the work of people around the world who use Practice-Based Inquiry principles in their work.

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## PURPOSE AND USE OF THIS GUIDE

Many see *following a student* as a signature event of a Practice-Based Inquiry<sup>®</sup> visit. Indeed, with some variation, it is used in many different PBI<sup>®</sup> protocols. While the purpose of the inquiry of protocols may differ, and the precise the reasons for including *following a student* are similar.

The purpose of an adult following a student is for the adult to learn more about how the school works. When adults follow students, they learn about what really happens to students during the school day. They learn about how students respond to what they are taught and how students relate to their teachers and the school. Learning of this kind is critical to the school's knowledge about how well it is doing.

Following a student is a good tool for gaining knowledge about the first focus area: ***Student Learning***. Much can be learned that supports conclusions in the other two focus areas as well: ***Teaching*** and ***The School***.

Following a student can help develop answers to these important questions:

- How does being in the school matter to the students in this school?
- What do students learn during the day?
- How does what students learn relate to what is taught?
- What do students do during the day?
- What do student think and talk about?
- How do students relate with other students, groups of students, and the adults who make up the school?
- How can we do our work better in this school?

The rhythm of the school day and the student's behavior, though altered slightly by the presence of an adult, retain enough of their essential truth to make the day a stimulating and thought-provoking experience.

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## **STARTING OUT**

At first, many adults are nervous about the prospect and worry that the day will be boring, or that they will not know what to do or look for. Some worry how the students are selected so that they are representative of the school, or that the students being followed will hate the experience.

In fact, although the first few moments may be awkward, those initial feelings usually dissolve rapidly as the day unfolds.

In the end, almost all students and adults find it an unusually rewarding experience. Both find that the attention they receive from another person pleasant and the provocation to see the school from more than one perspective interesting.

Since it is usually the first evidence collecting exercise a team will use, team members find it a concrete to begin to understand what: “Know what you see, rather than see what you know” means while on a visit.

### **Selecting a Student**

The school usually chooses the students to be followed by team members. It is a good idea to try and make the group of selected students represent the various student groupings of the school along such dimensions as sex, minority membership, grade level, academic achievement, special needs, social skills with adults and motivation. But this is not as important as it seems.

Team members are by and large school people and know how much they can say about the school as a whole by following one student through the school day. Further, protocols almost always have other ways to assure that team members have a good sense of the overall student body.

Based on our experience, we suggest that the school find students who are willing to be followed and are able to handle an adult visitor well enough.

The school should secure parental permission if that is required by either policy or practice.

### **Scheduling**

Both students and adults should understand the time parameters of the following exercise. Most often it takes place over a full school day. Since the expectation is that both people will be with each other the full time (e.g. for lunch or gym), exceptions should be explicit (e.g. restroom times). Further, when the two people are to

be a part, they should be clear and explicit with each other as to when and where they will hook up again. If the visit is scheduled for less than a full day, both parties should be clear on beginning and ending times and places.

### **Framing questions**

The purpose of the exercise is to learn about the school and how well it is working. **No record of the day becomes part of the student's record.** It *does* become part of the team's bank of evidence about the school.

During the orientation meeting, listen for the focus questions that are part of the protocol you are using. These will organize your observation and the discussion that follows.

Some examples of questions are:

What did my student learn today?

How well did the school serve my student today?

Followers must start with a few to being as open as possible to thinking about what they see within the actual context of the school. Usually questions should be broad so they do not limit the focus of the follower to hunting for answers to precise questions. The follower should be building a view of student learning that is supported by what the follower experiences. This supports the possibility that the follower may find surprising results.

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## MAKING IT WORK

### Active watching

Watch actively. Do not passively observe the student. You are following the student to understand as much as you can about that student's day in the school. Stay close, ask for explanations about what you are seeing together, learn about the student's view of being a student at the school and why he or she is there

Beware the "South Pacific Fallacy." It is not often that connections happen between people "from across a crowded room." **Sit as closely to where the student sits as possible.** Do not be afraid to rearrange the furniture a bit to make that possible. Do not sit in the back of the room, unless that is the only possibility.

Be clear that you are not evaluating the student, her teachers, the school or anyone else. You are trying to understand how the school works.

Ask many questions about what happens during the day. Ask them first of the student and other students, not teachers or other adults. If your student wonders why a teacher has marked something wrong on his/her paper, don't ask the teacher first. Explore it with the student first.

Pay particular attention to what the student does that would be considered schoolwork. For example, ask if you can read what the student has written.

While you should focus on what your student is learning and how well he or she know it, you will also consider the teaching and the school, but from the student's vantage-point. Is the student's experience choppy or coherent? Is what the teacher presents to the student clear or confusing?

### Taking Notes

Adult followers should keep personal notes. They might be organized into three columns: What I saw; What I thought it meant; What do I need to know next.

These notes should not be turned in. They are private and contain observations about identifiable people and care should be taken to protect their anonymity. They should be destroyed after conclusions are built.