

Final Writing Assignment

Throughout this semester we were introduced to many different forms of educational inquiry. Each of them with their own unique qualities and interesting aspects, but the one that interested me the most and made an automatic impact on my teaching was the inquiry relating to teachers' experiences. Being a teacher you share stories with your fellow colleagues all the time, maybe about a breakthrough you had with a student, a great teaching tool you found, or a lesson that didn't turn out so well. In sharing these stories you hope to help each other and learn from them, but many teachers never keep true records of these stories. They never record them or write them down for other people to read, which could end up making them "lost teachers," who let what they learned throughout their teaching career be forgotten and lost forever. Through the information in Unit Two and the story of Vivian Paley, I learned the importance of inquiry through teachers' experiences and how it can be unique and distinctive and when used properly can address various educational issues and can be a truly great resource for other teachers and scholars.

One way this form of inquiry is unique and distinctive is that it simply involves the observations and findings of classroom teachers. No scientific researchers or acclaimed authors needed, just a teacher who has recorded and gathered observations they have experienced in the classroom. They then share this information with other people interested in bettering education for their students and themselves. A classroom teacher can make a great impact on educational inquiry because they are in the classroom everyday, with students of various ages, constantly trying out new things, and finding better ways to teach and to learn. When I was introduced to this type of inquiry through Paley it really made an impact on me and made me realize that I don't have to be a highly acclaimed author or scholar to start practicing inquiry, I can start it right now. Paley explains this idea further in a quote which states, "Teachers frequently establish 'proof' of the effectiveness of their methods, not in order to write a dissertation or a book, nor even necessarily to convince others, but simply because once they discover certain truths, they can no longer teach in another way (2.4 The Necessity of Inquiry: Vivian Paley's Story)." So when teachers find something that works in their classroom they change not because they are writing a scholarly book or journal, but because it betters their students and themselves.

Another way this form of inquiry is distinctive is the way it reports its findings through narrative storytelling. Teachers' share their experiences through narrative stories of their daily classroom happenings, like a comment a student made, a lesson that went really well or any other eye opening moments that may have happened that day. Some types of inquiry are given strictly through facts and numbers, but this type of inquiry is told through the eyes of the teacher. The stories that are usually told are not the routine happenings of the classroom and the normal day to day procedures, but rather those A- HA moments that seem to just work perfectly and change a teachers way of thinking.

In her book, *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Vivian Paley describes one of these A-HA moments. Paley captured these moments by recording conversations in her classroom and then reflecting on them later that day in a journal. It was from these reflections that she was able to write her book. In a chapter called *Wings*, Paley writes about one of her student's reactions to the Lionni book Tico. In this book a bird named Tico gives up his golden wings, so his friends

will accept him again. Paley always thought poor of this idea about giving up something so precious to regain acceptance from friends, but her class made her think differently. The students thought it was the right thing for Tico to give up his wings because those types of friends were just different and they didn't want Tico to become too happy. (The Girl with the Brown Crayon) Paley realizes her students are talking about how there are different kinds of friends in the world, some that will be offended by giving up parts of themselves for friendship and some that will give away parts of themselves freely to include their friends in their journey (The Girl With the Brown Crayon). It was because of this realization that motivated her to do more research and inspired a year of learning with the author Leo Lionni. As Vivian Paley said, "Since I had my own fantasies of being a storyteller, I would have done well to follow some of the themes repeated by the children in their play. I had no illusions of becoming a Beatrix Potter or an E.B. White, but saw my role as a spinner of little tales, the sort that would make me a more interesting teacher or make teaching more interesting to me (2.4 The Necessity of Inquiry: Vivian Paley's Story)."

Teachers' experiences as a form of inquiry are not only distinctive, but they are also appropriate to study various problems and issues that happen in education. What better way to be able to address the problems facing education today than to actually be able to experiment with different methods and techniques to try to solve them. Teachers are constantly changing the way they teach and what works for one student, will not necessarily work for the next, but they are always trying to overcome different problems and issues. Scholars, doctors, and researchers are highly educated and have the degrees to prove it, but I believe that sometimes if they are out of the classroom for too long they might lose touch with what actually goes on in it. In actuality, some of the people that are handing down these recommendations and suggestions may have rarely stepped foot in a classroom, but they are the ones suggesting ways to solve our educational problems?

The classroom setting is always evolving and the students that teachers may have had ten years ago, are very different than the students that are in the classroom today. More than ever students are coming from broken homes, being diagnosed with learning disabilities, and having to deal with emotional issues. Teachers are having to deal with these new issues in education first hand and any suggestions or new information they find out by their interactions with their students would greatly benefit education. Now I am not suggesting that current classroom teachers should not read or listen to another person's inquiry if they do not have a lot of classroom experience, but more teachers are able to relate to and trust someone that has shared similar experiences like they have. So lets not only take the word of famous authors and scholars, but lets read and listen to the people that are working everyday with the students hands on, gathering information, and finding out new ways of teaching to better the learners of today.

Some researchers argue that teacher inquiry and research is not reliable and can not fully be trusted because it lacks some key features found in other forms of inquiry. These missing pieces can be broken down into three different critiques. One critique being the knowledge critique, which says that many teachers do not meet the formal and scientific standards that are held by other research communities. The next critique is the methods critique, which says that the methods used by teachers are not reliable and are not consistent in their results. The final critique is called the ends critique, which means that the information and research found by teachers are to simple and practical to address more major social and political issues (2.11 Questions of Teacher Inquiry). These critiques might hinder or harm the research that is made by teachers' experiences, but every form of inquiry should come with some type of critique

because that is what inquiry is all about, trying to find better ways to teach, learn, and gain knowledge. So hopefully teachers who practice this type of inquiry can take these critiques and ultimately strengthen it.

So with all of these great stories, observations, and information to share, how do other teachers, scholars and groups interested in this inquiry gain access to it? Some ways teachers can share their findings with the educational world include, narrative stories, and web resources like message boards or informative websites. Narrative stories like, *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, is a great example of how people can have access to the research. This book although not big and full of scientific terms, is an easy read that a lot of people can understand and relate to. To take this one step further, you could further access the book from digital e-readers such as the Amazon Kindle or the iPad. These new e-readers make accessing books and information quick and easy for many people to read. Another way teachers could share their stories of inquiry is through various web resources. The greatest resource though would be to have an informative website that could include updates on the ongoing research, message boards to discuss findings or get opinions, and of course making it as interactive as possible. I found the importance of making something interactive when I visited the online exhibits and websites dedicated to Charles Darwin and Eleanor Roosevelt. Being able to see and look at the various pieces of artifacts in the Darwin exhibit without even having to leave your house or hearing Eleanor Roosevelt's voice when she gave a speech to the troops, truly was a memorable experience and all it took was the click of a mouse. So to be able to interactively let people maybe hear some sound bits of the classroom or to be able to visually see your daily journal writings, would greatly draw more interest to your cause.

Teachers' experiences are a great first hand account of what truly goes on in education today. After reading about Vivian Paley, it inspired me to keep a daily journal about one of my more complex classes. This class contains students who have fetal alcohol syndrome, autism, and attention deficit disorder. Keeping this daily journal has let me reflect on conversations we have had, lessons that have worked very well and some hardships we have had to overcome. I have learned from these experiences and my teaching has forever changed. I know that routine is vital for them to succeed, frequent breaks and timeouts work well, and just paying that extra little bit of special attention can make their entire day. Teachers' experiences should be taken seriously as a form of inquiry because they are distinctive, they can address various issues and problems in today's education, and through various resources, like books and the web, can be made easily accessible for people in the educational world to view. Again, inquiry is supposed to question and find new ways to better the educational system, teachers' experiences do this because they give a first hand account of what is truly going on in the classrooms and the stories that are shared allow an outsider to get a peek into the lives of teachers and students.