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ABSTRACT

This paper presents two examples of teacher researchers conducting classroom inquiry situated in a framework of care. The teacher research movement continues to gain momentum as researchers seek answers and better understanding of issues related to their own practice. However, teachers continue to have difficulty in finding value in the practices and values of professional researchers. This study offers an alternative model to traditional teacher research: research that follows closely in form and function research done in the scholarly tradition, but research situated in a framework of care. Teachers are best situated to investigate issues of practice, to study their praxis, to be advocates for issues, ideas, and individuals through education research. The two vignettes are the stories of real teacher researchers, one teaching in a fourth grade science class and the other involved in teaching philosophical inquiry to elementary and middle school students. Both of these teachers thought that the inquiry into their own praxis was transformative. (Contains 25 references.) (SLD)

Situating education research in a framework of care: Examples from teacher research[1]

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As education researchers and teacher educators we continue to be challenged by the task of educating teachers in methods and dispositions of structured inquiry. Research methods classes continue to be standard fare in master's in education programs and teacher across the country continue to struggle with the ideas, goals, and values of the professional research community. In response, the teacher research movement continues to gain momentum as teachers seek answers and better understanding of issues related to their own practice. Despite these efforts, our experience has been that teachers continue to have difficulty in finding value in the practices and values held by professional researchers. In this regard, our work is offered as an alternative model to traditional teacher research; research that follows closely in form and function research done in the scholarly tradition. We believe that by situating education (teacher) research in a framework of care more teachers will find value and worth in the process of conducting education research.

Values at the intersection of love and knowledge

"Understanding is a lot like sex. It's got a practical purpose, but that's not why people do it normally" (Oppenheimer cited in Cole, 1997, pg. 5). Education research is an effort to understand. Like sex, it has a practical purpose. Most research is aimed at finding relationships, causes, indicators, or a better description. Like sex, and understanding, research has a practical purpose, however, that's not why we should do it. People have sex because it allows them to make connections with other human beings in ways that are fulfilling and beautiful. Understanding through research should be no less spiritual and fulfilling. Education research should connect to students, communities, and schools in ways that reach out, in human and humane ways. We must not only bring our minds to the process of research but our hearts and souls as well. We believe situating education research in an ethic of "care" (Noddings, 1992) has the potential to alter the character, direction, and effect of education research. What follows is a discussion of our ideas in that regard and efforts to help teachers conduct caring education research.

A focus on praxis

Praxis can be thought of as theoretically-infused-action, or theory-in-action. Sometimes praxis collapses any distinction that might be made between theory and practice. There are also thinkers who use praxis to refer to a special kind of transformative or revolutionary activity (Freire, 2000). In the most general sense, praxis occurs at the place where both theory and practice are intimately involved, and no final distinction is made. It is an attempt to become whole again. Adopting the language of praxis can

reconnect visceral, emotional ways of being with ones overly rational. We understand praxis as thoughtful, caring, action directed at change, which has the power to shape/advocate future theory and action. Key elements of this definition are: held beliefs (theory), action toward change, and an anticipatory quality.

We believe praxis should guide inquiry and education research. Researchers much be explicitly aware of their held beliefs (element 1 of definition). Rather than trying to repress these ideas or interpretive frameworks, researchers should acknowledge them and use them purposefully to guide inquiry. Epistemological ambiguity is paralyzing. Second, and connected to the first, praxical research is aware of power and strives to circumvent damaging circulation of power – power that silences, oppresses, and privileges. In response, analysis must occur from multiple perspectives, and through multiple ways of understanding, in an effort to value multiple perspectives, stories, analyses, and voices (element 2). Third, a focus on praxis suggests education research strive to affect change for a better future (element 3). Research of this nature seeks an emic, insider quality in investigation while simultaneously seeking an etic ethic of change. Education research, with an emphasis on praxis, can best be viewed as advocacy. Advocacy is necessarily about change and the betterment of the future. Advocacy is, or at least ought to be, grounded in an ethic of care.

Element 1: Personal epistemology

One way to think about education research is as an intricate web of arguments. Threads of conversation are related by connections to ideas and through relationships with people. These "family connections," are important (Morine-Dershimer, 2001) as they help readers to see the evolution of ideas and conversation, to see how concepts and lines of inquiry are related, often in surprising ways. As Morine-Dershimer suggests, we should be privy to these relationships as they are informative. Her argument is that too often education research strives to hide these connections and push for autonomy of thinking and isolation of craft and feeling. We believe her ideas can be translated into conversations in teacher research. We choose to borrow from her ideas but use our own language, which we believe is more descriptive of our thoughts. Education research and education researchers should strive to articulate a personal epistemology – the personal experiences, values, frameworks, and preferences that shape and guide both methodology and analysis. Rather than strive to limit the impact of our held beliefs, caring research strives to uncover and be responsive to our assumptions. An awareness of this

personal epistemology makes education research more human and more responsive to the needs and values of practitioners and students.

In working with teacher researchers we have found one of the most useful and effective ways of surfacing personal epistemology is through a series of autobiographical writing assignments. We ask our teacher researchers to write about their own experiences as learners of subject matter; personal strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, insights, and interests. Next, we ask them to reflect on and articulate the circumstances and details of powerful learning experiences. Finally, we ask our students to simply be observers of their own classrooms for 30 minutes. Their task is then to write about the experience, and to look closely at what they saw. The idea is that generally, what teachers write about is what's important to them as teachers. Through these activities, our teacher researchers begin to surface their held beliefs, values, and analytic lenses that they will bring to bear in their work as teacher researchers. Rather than trying to suppress these lenses, or adopt others which may or may not be valuable, our teachers use the lenses they've already forged through the lived experiences of day-to-day life in the classroom. Caring research surfaces and proudly uses this view of the world in analysis and meaning making.

Element 2: Recognize and disperse power

Too often power plays a blinding role in education research. In trying to persuade or provide convincing evidence/data, education researchers use particular methods and draw particular inferences. These methods and inferences typically portray the research or the researched in particular ways. One way to think about research is that it's the telling of stories. Researchers work hard to try to tell the story they believe will be the most convincing. As we know from narrative worldviews (Bruner, 1985; Goodman, 1976; Gudmundsdóttir, 2001) and current conversations in the historicity of knowledge, stories are highly dependent on context, and in particular, the politics of the storyteller. All storytellers, and hence their stories, have personal epistemologies. For this reason we believe element 2 is deeply connected to element 1 – and that we must tell stories, or report research in contexts.

Narrative research is a growing genre of research that finds one solution to this problem in trying to tell personal stories or simply one (as the researcher) version of the story. As a genre, narrative research continues to grow because it appeals to the individuality of experience and discards foundational baggage. Others have responded by telling the same story, or in some cases analyzing a story, in multiple ways. Cherryholmes (1999), for example, gives a reading of Palinscar and Brown's

(1984) landmark study of reciprocal teaching from perspectives of feminism, deconstructionism, and critical theory. He does this to illustrate a pragmatic reading of research – recognizing that our individual readings can shift, and mean very different things, dependent on our personal epistemology and political commitments. The same can be said in teacher research. Inquiry must be pursued from multiple analytic perspectives as this can have the effect of dispersing power. A single privileged perspective carries power and authority that silences alternate perspectives; thereby limiting paths of action and advocacy, and creating illegitimate "others."

We are critically aware that theoretical lenses like feminist epistemology, deconstructivism, and critical theory have little utility value in the world of the average teacher. Without question, these lenses may have important and powerful individual meaning, but, as far as becoming a competent teacher, these lenses have less import. To the average teacher they simply exist as a language to be leveraged by the research community – a language that continues to alienate and distance teachers from conversations in education research. Because we believe strongly in this notion of dispersion of power, and the telling of stories from multiple perspectives, we ask our teachers to conduct teacher inquiry from analytic lenses or perspectives that have more relevance in the lived experience of teachers. These lenses may be from the perspective of a curriculum designer, from a classroom manager, from a caring nurturer, from an assessment or accountability plane, from subject specific perspectives like scientific, mathematical, or artistic, from a psychological, developmental, or ethical and moral stances as well. These are not lenses typically employed by professional researchers because they are individual and carry personal epistemological baggage. However, for those same reasons, we've found they also carry cash-value for teachers. One of our recent research students stated plainly, "I look at my classroom through the eyes of a caring professional and as a mathematician because those are the lenses that matter to me." As with any lens, we run the risk of being blinded by a single perspective. In response, we ask our teacher researchers to always analyze from at least two, and preferably three, critical stances that make sense to the teacher. In a sense, we do pragmatic readings of our classroom experiences (Cherryholmes, 1999).

Element 3: Teachers as advocates: Research as advocacy

Evidence suggests few teachers read and/or make use of education research (Broudy, 1985; Clark, 1986; Hosford, 1984; Huling et al., 1981; Lucas, 1988; Zeuli, 1991). In our own experiences as teachers, education research is characterized as over technical, distant from the realities and experiences

of day to day practice, and not particularly helpful in its conclusions. Too often education research is viewed as the province of professional researchers acting toward distant goals such as theory development, knowledge production and, at best, local understanding. For some, these are useful endeavors. For many, however, these goals are not enough.

Teachers are fundamentally pragmatic and want solutions or helpful ways to conceive of their working contexts. Problems exists in schools and other educative settings, and teachers work toward solutions everyday – most commonly without the aid of education research. For this reason, we push for education research to be returned to the province of teachers. Teachers are best situated to investigate issues of practice – to study their praxis – to be advocates for issues, ideas, and individuals through education research. In this regard, we push our teachers to imagine their ideal classroom; or to identify elements within their day-to-day practice that need improvement. Education research disconnected from change maintains its distance from the values of teachers.

We now turn to two examples of teacher researchers conducting classroom inquiry in the manner in which we have described above. We believe ours is an alternative framework for teacher research that will be less alienating, less foreign, more useful, and well-received by teachers. The vignettes are not hypothetical examples. They are the stories of two real teacher researchers and are written in the first person to reflect their highly personal positions.

Two examples of teacher research grounded in a framework of care

Mark and 4th grade science

Personal epistemology

My own passion for science was shaped by my brothers' interests in science. Through their mentorship, I learned that science provides interesting and exciting ways of viewing the world. If I see the world as a geologist, I constantly try to recreate past events, to infer the past from evidence currently available. If I see the world through the eyes of a biologist, I might see living things as unique and artistic creations designed to thrive in particular niches, adapted to fit the demands of the natural world. Through lenses provided by scientific understandings, the world became a more interesting place to be and my understandings drew me into interactions with the world in ways that other subject matter didn't seem to. Soon I was hooked on science as a vehicle to more enriched living.

My experiences studying science in school were significantly less interesting than my personal inquiry. For some reason, school science was disconnected from powerful ways to see, and focused instead on terminology and simplistic, distilled heuristics. Now perhaps I wasn't the easiest student to deal with but I couldn't stand science as it was taught. For years, science had two faces for me; one that I wasn't interested in but received grades for, and another which I wanted to live and breathe, but which there was no reward. I remember this painful chasm with great clarity and vowed to teach science in ways that closed the gap. Science language without connections to the world is a dead language. I knew I could do better.

Having now become a teacher, I work hard to be faithful to my own beliefs. I this regard, observing in my own classroom was fascinating. Another teacher was good enough to agree to manage my classroom for 30 minutes while I sat in the back of the room and observed. Although I had prepared exactly what would happen for those 30 minutes, thereby relieving my teacher friend of any significant planning or instructional duties, what I watched was still very interesting. I suppose that as the classroom teacher I'm too often engaged in the delivery of instruction or in the management of tasks or projects. Sitting in the back of my classroom gave me the opportunity to focus on individual children's interactions with science and scientific concepts. My students were engaged in a short activity in which they were to classify rocks according to their mineralogic content and petrographic history – in other words, classify them as sedimentary, igneous, or metamorphic. I had asked students to do this many times in the past and it seemed a foundational sort of exercise in the study of rocks. What I saw though was a classroom full of children dutifully and dispassionately examining rocks for clues about their past. Several groups of students rushed through the activity not relishing in the uniqueness of the rocks. Other children simply copies the answers of their neighbors. Not a single child appear to revel in the idea that these rocks were millions of years old, bearing scars from long ago, holding secrets of past volcanic activity and even life – in the case of several specimens that held fossils. I was disappointed to see that my students, and my activity, had failed to engage students in the very ways I had hoped my own science learning would engage me. For the first time, I could see that although I had strong personal beliefs, I was not wholehearted in my efforts to align my practice with them. I knew how I saw rocks but couldn't translate my vision into practice that brought that same passion to the experience of my students.

Multiple political stances (uncovering and dispersing power)

With renewed understanding of my own personal beliefs and values about science learning as well as a fresh vision of what was happening in my classroom and in the learning of my students, I more formally monitored what was happening in my classroom. After the experience exploring my personal epistemology, I realized that three things were centrally important to me as a teacher. First, that my students learned good science. What I mean by that is they should learn the most widely accepted, or canonical ways of thinking about the world. Second, student should learn these things to transform the way they see the world and interact with it – not so they'll do well on some mythical test. Too often the end goal is the test. I believe the end goal should be to see the world anew, through powerful science ideas. If I can make this happen, the test will take care of itself. Third, at the intersection of the first two lies my third stance – that of a curriculum organizer. I began to understand how intimately curriculum, my learning goals, and faithfulness to the canon of science were connected. My eyes began to see these three elements and I began to feel my practices as a teacher by standing in shoes laced with my deeply held convictions. I could do better.

I began to take a hard look at the materials we were using. At the most broad level, my textbook was organized around the three "spheres" of our planet – the hydrosphere, the geosphere, and the atmosphere. Within these, the organization was at the level of volcanoes, glaciers, deserts for the geosphere, and similar topics in the other spheres. Within these sections, the text was populated with brief descriptions of the earth's features and so many bold-faced words the average 4th grader was probably left breathless (the work was done for the students, the questions were asked). Because I had studied earth science in college, I could pick out the themes that ran between these organizational units and I could see the connections among them. However, as evidenced by my observations in my own classroom, the grand "dance of connectedness" that I see when I look at the world through my science eyes is clearly obscured to the average 4th grader. My textbook was about science learning as the endpoint not a jumping off place to renewed seeing. I needed to re-organize it.

Advocacy

My first efforts came at the beginning of a unit on erosion. In planning my course, I generated the following simple math problem and imagined presenting it to my students.

The average rate of erosion of the earth's surface is about one inch every 100 years. If the earth averages 5,000 feet above sea level, how long will it take to totally wear the features of the earth down to sea level?

With my help, my 4th graders could work through the mathematics.[2] Perhaps after doing the multiplication, they would wonder, "If this is true, how come the earth isn't a flat, muddy mess?" If I could get my students to understand that the earth's surface is constantly being reshaped by creations and destructions, that central insight could motivate the rest of the course content and serve as the frame on which to hang a great deal of other knowledge. Using the interplay between creation and destruction as our organizer, I led my students through a detailed study of the physical earth.

Since we were stuck with the antiquated textbook we made the best of it. We followed its general layout but, rather than presenting each topic in its own terms and hoping that students would make connections between them, I highlighted creation and destruction at every turn. Volcanoes showed us their destructive power but also helped us to understand the growth of the Hawaiian Islands and their amazing fertility. The erosive power of continental glaciation was illustrated very clearly by the intense "carving" and "gouging" of our local area but also explained the many small hills of gravel deposited by the retreating ice. Tectonic stresses explained horribly destructive earthquakes but also the continuously rising Himalayan mountains.

Soon my students were actively looking for the Yin and the Yang of geology—the destructive and creative forces in nature— in both the curriculum and the world around them. My students constantly sought more illustrations of our heuristic. This relatively simple refocusing of the curriculum had empowered them. The complementary processes were intuitive to them, and they could "own" and use them. As scientific principles they were less "external," less the property of someone else's activity and interest. My stumbling onto the right organizing principles allowed them to engage in "doing science" and, I believe, to take away more from scientific understanding than they had from previous classes.

In the end, I found renewed energy to scrutinize other aspects of my curriculum and the learning goals I had for students in other areas as well. Why couldn't I apply these same ideals to learning in social studies, mathematics, and the arts? I had never considered that my personal epistemology would craft itself into a coherent philosophy of education based on seeing the world anew. I began to tackle other units in my 4th grade curriculum. Could we learn about mathematics as patterns as I had seen other

[2] The "answer" is 6 million years—not a long duration in geologic terms.

textbooks do? Could we learn about history as a series of conflicts? Could we learn about music as just an extension of a societies culture – reflecting and extending a peoples' values?

My research forced me to consider my own experiences, values, and desires, hold them up as political commitments by which to situate and reveal my own classroom practice, and find the energy and motivation to work towards bigger and better goals for my kids and my classroom. Nothing has been more transformative for me as a teacher.

Michael and middle school philosophy

Personal epistemology

I have been teaching philosophical inquiry to elementary and middle school students for almost 10 years now. I embarked on a teaching career because studying philosophy had been such a transformative experience for me. These transformative experiences were the opposite of most of my educational experiences prior to college.

My prior school experiences were marked in sharp contrast to my positive experiences studying philosophy in college. Most of my educational experiences up to my freshman year in college can be characterized as pointless and regrettable. I had little understanding of why I was in school and often questioned the purpose of my education, much to the chagrin of my teachers and parents. It is difficult to locate the many sources of these feelings though some of them had to do with incompetent teaching, the absurdity and pointlessness surrounding a disintegrated curriculum, and frustration with the teaching of mathematics. There did not seem to be a point to anything we did in school except, of course, for socialization with peers. So, like so many other students, I learned how to "do" school – to work the system. This attitude followed me through high school into my first year of college until I began my second quarter, and enrolled in a course titled: *Individual and the Community*. This was an introductory philosophy class designed to acquaint students with some of the great (white) thinkers of the Western world. It was in this class that I encountered Plato, Sophocles, Martin Luther, Tolstoy, Freud, Marx, and others. It was this class that sparked in me feelings I had never experienced before in school.

Our seminar was conducted around a style of dialogue and inquiry that awoke in me a consciousness that shook the very core of my being. In that class we engaged such questions as, "what does it mean to live an examined life?", "which should take precedence, the rights of the individual or the rights of the community?", and perhaps most importantly, we wondered about the complexity and

preciousness of human thought. As each week of this class went by it seemed as if a thick fog was being lifted from around me; my perspective on life and learning dramatically changed in the course of ten weeks; I began to really pay attention to my thinking, and believe that there might be something worth learning in an academic environment. I was a different person by the end of the course.

Guided by a string of creative and engaging teachers, studying philosophy has cultivated within me a genuine love for our human capacity to learn and think. In an effort to awaken others to the delights of philosophy, I enrolled at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) at Montclair State University to learn how to teach philosophy in grades K-8. The two years I spent at the IAPC were critical to the development of my thinking and scholarship. I was constantly in an environment where I was being challenged as a student, a teacher, an educator, and a philosopher. Philosophy and teaching philosophy was the air I breathed.

I value analytic-philosophical talk (philosophical inquiry) as a special kind of work with language that is empowering because it develops and sharpens one's reasoning abilities and attention to language use. I value the ability to follow one's own interests (following an inquiry/leading a life). I value a constructivist epistemological stance (all knowledge is a social construction) and I also value constructivist pedagogy (taking learner's ideas and interests seriously). These things are taken as useful and good. These values are lenses through which I now view my practice and judge the degree of its success.

Political stance (uncovering and dispersing power)

One summer I was asked to teach a philosophical inquiry class to middle school students as part of a four-week summer program. I had taught many philosophical inquiry classes and had become fairly skilled at conducting philosophical inquiry with children. A colleague of mine, who was studying language use, made video and audio recordings of the class and analyzed the discourse as a way of understanding what was happening in this discourse community. It was the results of my colleague's analysis that shocked me. As a highly reflective person – one who would have suggested he knew exactly what and how he was doing as a teacher, I was dismayed to discovered that my pedagogical moves did not seem to fit my philosophical commitments as described above.

Had I been asked to identify some of the principles that guide my practices, I could have easily listed some rules or simple guidelines but I could not have begun to talk about what revealed itself in my

colleague's analysis. Her analysis (and interpretation) revealed a step-like model of philosophical inquiry that I must have developed and held close over the many years of teaching and learning philosophy for children. The model rigorously reflected the steps of inquiry I had learned in my own experience studying philosophy but I had dovetailed it for use with children. Rather than draw broad ideas from text, I pushed students to seek accurate interpretations of the authors intent – thereby paralyzing truly individualized inquiry. My students were pursuing inquiry but the path was clearly marked and led by my instruction. I was, in fact, not being true to my constructivist orientations. I had a clear vision (although arguably unconscious) of the inquiry work I wanted my students to conduct and worked quite hard to help them follow that pattern. In this way my constructivism was pedagogically dishonest. I set the curricular agenda. I pushed for an endpoint that matched an idealized philosophical conclusion – rather than allowing multiple and dispersed conclusions. Needless to say, I was disturbed to find this disjoint between my philosophy and my practice. I did not believe it was in the best educational interests of my students.

Advocacy and Care

As I continue to teach philosophy, my style of inquiry continues to change in response to these realizations. I have become discontent with the Philosophy for Children curriculum and some of its goals (especially its insistence on rationality) and have become more interested in what the students are interested in talking about, outside of traditional texts. I have also altered my practices to be less shaping than they were. I spend less time modeling what I think philosophical inquiry should look like and more time asking students what they think and why? I have begun to involve them in the process of considering what kind of community we want to form and involve them in the making of the rules of our game.

For example, where I had previously begun my philosophy courses with an introduction into metaphysics with readings and conversations on who we are and why we're here, I now begin with an examination of the multiplicity of identity and the many reasons why we might be here – individually and personally. Rather than directing students to explicate meaning from text I ask what meaning text has for them. The entire power dynamic has shifted to reflect these curricular shifts. Where before I was the master philosopher (my previous instructional metaphor) leading my students through guided inquiry (not true inquiry; structured by me) to more true inquiry – student centered, individually defined

and pursued. My students, I believe, find my course more interesting and more empowering than they did before because they realize that their interpretations and interests are important and play a role in the negotiation of meaning. For example, I've continued to have conversations with my most recent students over e-mail about such topics as their interpretations of popular movies, music, and other media sources. These students have expressed gratitude in finding a voice and disposition toward criticism (one kind of inquiry).

Discussion and conclusions

Each teacher engaged in a series of reflection and analysis exercises that may or may not fit current definitions of classroom research. Perhaps these actions fit more with definitions of reflective practice (Grant, 1984; Reagan, Case & Brubacher, 2000; Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Zeichner & Noffke, 1998). That may be the case, but the end result is the same; through this framework, teachers have been taught to engage in structured inquiry that is sensible, respectful, and useful to them as educators. Although neither teacher was pressured to identify research questions or point to empirical data that suggested a measurable change in practice. However, each agreed that the inquiry was indeed transformative. The methods do not fit more traditional methodological frameworks and could be classified as narrative in nature. Whatever our attempts to label it, the result is inquiry that teachers find more useful to everyday practice.

When research is grounded in a framework of care, as described above, resultant inquiry is more palatable, more resonant, and more appealing to teachers. Although this work is in its infancy, we hope to continue building on these ideas and to guide more teachers into inquiry and caring research. We are convinced of the power of inquiry (Girod & Pardales, 2001) but continue to look for the most appropriate set of framing discussions. We offer these as an initial attempt.

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