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Teachers' Experience as a Form of Inquiry

One of the forms of educational inquiry we discussed in class was the use of teachers' experience. I believe this is an important form of inquiry for educators to use, because we learn best through personal experiences as a reflection. In a given day, teachers encounter many experiences with students, whether formal or informal, and it is important for teachers to take note of the interactions. These interactions can lead to deeper insight into a child's understanding and thinking, as well as their social, emotional, and educational circumstances. During our study of teachers' experience as a form of inquiry, we studied the work of Vivian Paley. She is a prime example of a teacher who used her experiences with students as a way to alter and better her teaching. Another example of someone who used their experiences was Mary Catherine Bateson (anthropologist and linguist). Even though she is not a teacher, she used her personal experiences from her personal life and field work as a way of inquiry within her profession. Teachers' experiences provide them insight to better their students and themselves to educate their classes better in the future.

The distinctive approach to teachers' experience inquiry is the use of writing. Whether it is in the form of note taking or journaling, it is extremely important for teachers to write down their thoughts, dialogue, and observations that they find helpful, surprising, insightful, or relevant. During my student teaching, my mentor and I would sit down almost daily and write down behaviors of certain students who were of concern, or activities and responses to various assignments and discussions. Those who use teachers' experience will write a lot down including the interaction between the students and between the student and the teacher. Many times, teachers use recorders as a way to keep track of formal and informal discussions, and then listen to it later. The recordings and notes allow teachers the chance to go back and look at situations in a way that they may not have had time for at that moment and then improve on them going forward. Another distinction in the approach of teachers' experience is the use of reflection. Teachers who use their experiences as a form of inquiry use their recordings and writings as a way to reflect on their teachings and their students' understandings, along with the informal conversations that occur throughout the day. It allows them to look at their instruction and change it in a way that will benefit the students.

Teachers' experience is a suitable form of inquiry for the study of educational problems and issues, because it is an authentic first-hand look at what occurs in the classroom. When a teacher writes down observations and notes, and records conversations with students, it shows how students perceive various situations and how they are developing their use of language, as well as their emotional maturity. Teachers' experience can be used to study the problems the education community is facing in terms of socio-economic status, funds for after-school programs or athletics, parent/community involvement, and many other issues. All of these can be taken into account through teachers' experience as a form of inquiry. If a teacher writes about the condition of the room and supplies that they are given and the student's response to their environment, it can be used to address the educational problems as a form of documentation. Also, if the students discuss issues about their home life, or inability to get supplies, a teacher can observe how that child is affected by the situation. Another problem that can be studied through teachers' experience is the effectiveness of certain programs and curriculum. Schools are always trying new curricula and text books, and when the teacher observes what students are learning and how they are learning, those observations are beneficial in understanding the effectiveness of the programs. Teachers' experience as a form of inquiry is invaluable to the study of educational problems many districts face because it is a first-hand look at what is truly happening in the classroom.

The accessibility and value of the results of teachers' experience to teachers, administrators, scholars, and other interests groups are numerous. As far as accessibility goes, I believe that teachers should share their experiences among colleagues in reoccurring communication, and with fellow educators at conferences and other opportunities. There are many published works of teachers and their experiences in the classrooms making teachers' inquiry available to the population. In addition, the internet has many websites and blogs where educators come together to share lessons and experiences with each other, and reflect on best practices. The results of teachers' experience are invaluable, because they are with students for a great deal of time and have an opportunity to converse with and better understand their students than most other people. Teachers' experience can explore student understanding, student relationships with those inside and outside of school, and curricula and it's affect on students. Many teachers use their experiences to lobby administrators, especially when it comes to curriculum and resources. Scholars can use teachers' experience as a way to study various aspects of the education system or child development. Overall the teachers' inquiry on a day to day basis is as accessible as the teacher makes it but should be shared often because of its inherent value to many parties in the education process.

In my experience, I have used teachers' experience as a form of inquiry. When I had behavior issues in class I documented the behavior of the child, observed the effect of different types of classroom management strategies, and wrote down dialogue I had with the student. This was useful when I spoke with the administrator about the issue. Throughout the year, I would meet with administration to find solutions to the problem using the notes that I had made. Also, I would write about specific lessons I taught, record the students' response throughout the lesson, and I would make notes about the assessments they turned in. This helped me reflect on the lesson, the students' learning, and how I could improve in the future. Teachers' experience as a form of inquiry is extremely important and useful for teachers, but also the students and the entire education community as a way to reflect and revise the curriculum and discussions held inside and outside the classroom.