

Appendix A.3 - Patterns of Experience

Looking across the experiences related in these samples of records kept by the participating educator-inquirers, there are many possible themes that could be supported by their stories (Techniques for identifying themes and other forms of analysis will be discussed in Chapter Eight). Taking these examples and hundreds of pages of additional records of inquiry experiences noted by these and other participants, several patterns that emerged are presented briefly below:

1. All the student teachers began their apprenticeship year confused about most everything they were going to do and they reflected their concerns clearly in their field notes and in their conversations with me as their university supervisor, with the cooperating teachers, and with each other. They were concerned that the students would not respect them. They were concerned about the ways the cooperating teachers were organizing the classes. They wondered about the disruptive behavior of some of the students. They wondered what role they were to play since they were not the regular teachers and they were not students. Their concerns are reminiscent of the anxieties ethnographers experience when they are seeking to establish working field relations. The novice teachers had many of the same feelings as they began their school year all on their own without the security of cooperating teachers, a university supervisor, or a cohort of colleagues they knew already who would support them in the immediate situation.
2. About two months into the school year, the student teachers were feeling fairly confident about their abilities to conduct naturalistic inquiry and they began taking on more of the teaching role too. Their field notes reflected an increasing ability to describe what they were hearing and experiencing. They included more concrete and insightful descriptions of the physical and historical settings involved, the participants, the activities and events, the verbal and non-verbal communications of the participants, and their presence and involvement as participant-observers. Their reflections about the experience grew richer with time too. They more freely included their own feelings as participants in this experience and there was marked improvement in the quality of the inquiry as well as the teaching being done over the entire nine months. Their field relations grew richer with time and the quality of questions they were asking increased. Instead of worrying so much about how to keep students on task or orderly, they asked instead what the relationships were between students' experiences outside of school and their interest in the school topics. They were willing to meet students where they were in terms of their interests and motivations rather than demand that the students "rise to the level of the set curriculum."
3. Although they had moments of insight that alleviated their initial feelings of confusion during the first few months, the greatest increments in understanding about what was going on came when the student teachers attempted to *writesummaries* about what

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they were learning about the program and their experience in it. The synthesis writing process helped them see patterns that made sense but which they had not seen while deeply involved in the more descriptive kinds of field note writing. For example, one student teacher had almost decided she was *not* going to teach in the innovative way she was observing when she had her own class. But in February, when she began writing a synthesis paper for a university assignment and was asked to defend it before external reviewers, she discovered that although she would make some modifications she was very pleased with the approach being taken in this program and intended to use it as the basis for her own programs. She and the other student teachers agreed that they needed the whole nine months to really understand the innovative program they were involved with as well as the regular classes they taught in and the process of naturalistic inquiry which they used. The notion of prolonged engagement on site which is so critical to good qualitative inquiry was also essential to good student teaching.

4. The novice teachers found it difficult to continue taking field notes as frequently as they did while student teaching; however, they were able to find ways of reflecting upon and recording their experiences even during the time-demanding first year. For example, one teacher tape recorded her field notes while driving home from school or at other moments away from the school setting. Another used a computer at the school after hours to record her notes. Another sent copies to me of personal letters and diary entries, which dealt with issues at school for inclusion in the study. None of the novice teachers' notes were as rich and insightful as their writing had been during the apprenticeship. This was a disappointment to me. But in talking to them about the experience, at least one of the novice teachers said that writing about her experience to any degree and then having a chance to talk to me about what she had written and even more about the experience helped her sort out many issues that she had been confused about. It gave her a chance to talk about issues at a deeper level than she was able to do with most of the teachers and administrators assigned to assist her during that first year in her school. Perhaps this depth was achieved because we referred to her writing as a basis for our conversations and her interactions with colleagues in the school were based on orally shared concerns about the day-to-day activities of teaching. Writing requires the writer and reader to consider the issues more deeply.
5. The cooperating teachers benefited from their involvement in preparing teachers with this inquiry focus too. They participated in many of the reading and discussion sessions and kept field notes at least part of the time. They both noted several times that they clarified their own thinking and intentions through this process. They found that their level of thinking about schooling, learning, and teaching grew deeper and deeper through this process. They made many modifications to their program in response to this thinking. They also involved their principal and other colleagues in more serious dialogue as they considered what they were reading and what they were seeing the student teachers learn.
6. As a teacher educator, I had my eyes opened to the value of studying theory in a practice setting with a focus on inquiry rather than on knowledge acquisition. I found

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that the participants had a greater stake in this whole activity than they do in traditional teacher preparation roles. The student teachers had serious questions to discuss each week based on their inquiry and teaching experiences. They saw me as their helper and advocate rather than as a grade giver who issued requirements as students normally do in college classes. The cooperating teachers saw this as “our” program rather than something the university was paying them a pittance to do or as a long-term substitute program. They also got excited about doing inquiry themselves and improving their own teaching. I will go into other ways my eyes were opened in the discussion section of this paper.

7. Finally, together we discovered several insights into education through a review of the field notes and reports written by these student teachers and novice teachers that will be shared with teachers and researchers through articles we are preparing for joint publication. For example, one participant identified what she called the preconditions for learning that she discovered through this inquiry process- conditions that should be met by teachers before students are willing to learn. Another participant explored the role of freedom and responsibility for students and how a new teacher can build on students’ views of themselves to overcome many of the challenges faced by novice teachers who rely too heavily on classroom management and other techniques commonly taught in education courses. A third novice teacher shared ideas he learned during his apprenticeship with his administrators and colleagues at his new school and helped expand their vision of educational reform. As a result, they have begun discussing ways of implementing such reforms.

Some Related Literature

I also changed as a result of conducting naturalistic inquiry with these colleagues and particularly through consideration of the readings I discussed with the other participants. In the remainder of this paper, I will summarize one particular lesson I learned and implications for the notion of teachers as researchers by using the work of Levinas, a post-modern philosopher and Parker Palmer, a thoughtful educationist.

Emmanuel Levinas is a French philosopher who has critiqued modernist thought as well as the post-modernist critics in a unique and arresting way. Andrius Valevicius (cited in Packard and Warner, 1992, page 4) claimed that “In contemporary continental philosophy there is no name today more popular than that of Emmanuel Levinas, and in France, especially since the death of Jean-Paul Sartre, no thinker held in higher esteem. Emmanuel Levinas has already been the inspiration of two generations of French intellectuals.”

Levinas (1987) argued that Heidegger did not go far enough in his critique of the metaphysics of modernism and that ethics (the responsibility of the same or oneself to the others of the world) and our social relationships actually precede metaphysics (the branch of philosophy that deals with first principles), ontology (the branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature of reality) and epistemology (the study of the nature of knowledge) in terms of importance in philosophy and in our modes of being in society:

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To conclude, the well-known theses of Heideggerian philosophy- the preeminence of Being over beings, of ontology over metaphysics- end up affirming a tradition in which the same [or oneself] dominates the other [any other], in which freedom, even the freedom that is identical with reason precedes justice. Does not justice consist in putting the obligation with regard to the other before obligations to oneself, in putting the other before the same?

Experience, the idea of infinity, occurs in the relationship with the other. The idea of infinity is the social relationship. This relationship consists in approaching an absolutely exterior being. The infinity of this being, which one can therefore not contain, guarantees and constitutes this exteriority. It is not equivalent to the distance between a subject and an object. An object, we know, is integrated into the identity of the same; the I makes of it its theme, and then its property, its booty, its prey or its victim. The exteriority of the infinite being is manifested in the absolute resistance, which by its apparition, its epiphany, it opposes to all my powers.

To be sure, the other is exposed to all my powers, succumbs to all my ruses, all my crimes. Or he resists me with all his force and all the unpredictable resources of his own freedom. I measure myself against him. But he can also — and here is where he presents me his face — oppose himself to me beyond all measure, with the total uncoveredness and nakedness of his defenseless eyes, the straightforwardness, the absolute frankness of his gaze. . . . Here is established a relationship not with a very great resistance, but with the absolutely other; with the resistance of what has no resistance, with ethical resistance. (Pp. 53-55)

Levinas does not apply his arguments directly to the issues of this paper. He is writing to philosophers about the basic tenets of philosophy. Yet, the implications of his discourse run deep into the very foundations of what we are about in the pursuit of knowledge and in the practices of education. His reference to the “same” fits well with my view of myself as a teacher educator, with the student teacher as apprentice, with the cooperating teachers, and with the novice as teacher. The “other” in each case could be considered our students. And we have our projects we are trying to achieve with these others- to teach them and prepare them and shape them in curricular ways that we value. But they present themselves to us as resistant to our projects, as people who are beyond our absolute understanding and therefore beyond our control. We can have a relationship with these others but we can not consume them into being part of us. As people, they resist being reduced to our products. Levinas would say that to view another as simply a student would be to do violence to him or her\$ to totalize the other. Instead we can recognize the exteriority of the infinite other (we can not actually consume the other into our projects and categories) and respond to the other in the ethical relationship we are already in.

Packard and Warner (1992) apply Levinas’ thesis in a critique of film writing and analysis in a way that closely parallels the theme I have begun to discover in the educator as learner experiences discussed in this paper. This is the idea that learning to relate to students as infinite others in Levinasian terms through the use of naturalistic inquiry helps teachers resist a negative focus on “totalizing” students and teaching methods; thus, they may become responsive and thoughtful master teachers more quickly. The participants I have

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worked with in the BYU-Public School Partnership have been diverted from the typical educational project of coming up with the ideal teaching method by the “faces” or perspectives of the students they have tried to understand by being naturalistic learners *as* teachers. As Packard and Warner say:

The difference between the responsible and irresponsible image [teaching method] is whether you are loving or resisting others in seeing and describing the world. In the one case you are building your own world, resisting the obligations to others as you do so, turning yourself and your world into stereotypes. In the other case, you are open, responsive to others in building your world. You aren't building it simply for yourself. You are building it for others. As Levinas put it, this is possible “only as responsibility for the other, as substitution for him.” It is the difference between shaping another for the sake of your world and shaping your world for the sake of another. Your world is open and responsive to others, not simply “in opening to the spectacle of or the recognition of the other, but in becoming a responsibility for him.”

If you want to hold things together, be thrilled by the harmonious beauty of your stereotypes, excited about your detached existence, you have to feel disgust for the mundane, disorganized world of your ordinary perception. You must keep up the need to resist ordinary perception [the emic view discovered through qualitative inquiry]. The more thrilling the imaginary [the etic or the methodologies of teaching] world, the more disgust you must feel for the ordinary one [focusing on relationships with students as people]. Charles Darwin wrote that the more elaborate and orderly his scheme of evolution became, the less he could enjoy the ordinary pleasures of life. This is the dismal fate that the irresponsible imagination [focus on teaching technique] holds for its disciples. (Pp. 1, 3)

The continuing emphasis on a science of teacher preparation and of teaching itself is toward what Packard and Warner are calling irresponsible imagination. From this viewpoint, to become a teacher, one is invited to learn teaching techniques which can be applied to learners in learning situations without ever having to face these learners as individual and ultimately uncontrollable persons. This whole process can actually close people off from other people. It closes teachers off from knowing the students as they are. It closes the student teachers off from knowing what teaching and learning can be. It prevents us all from enjoying these “ordinary pleasures of life.”

The student teachers and novice teachers involved in this project began exploring what teaching and learning can be by learning to observe and listen to the others (student teachers, teachers, and students) they worked with and by being open and responsive to them. They did this by using naturalistic inquiry to immerse themselves in the lives of the students and others they were there to serve. I did the same thing as a teacher educator trying to see the world through the eyes of my “students” and colleagues in the high school. This process helped us avoid the trap of using techniques from educational theory to assign these people to predetermined learning categories or “images.”

Our experiences as inquiring educators suggest that by encouraging educators to be

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learners who try to see the world through the eyes of others (such as students, other teachers, and parents they may encounter) they may better avoid stereotyping and learn to enjoy the pleasures of learning and teaching rather than worry so much about creating their educational theories to their loss and to the loss of the students who face them with their “defenseless eyes.”

The combination of readings, visits, discussions, writing of field notes, and other activities engaged in by the participants in the pre-service and in-service experiences described in this paper encouraged all of us to be inquiring about our experiences with students. The process of learning through naturalistic inquiry has opened us up to new possibilities and has encouraged us to try new approaches in response to student needs. This approach to teacher preparation and improvement has been in contrast to the common approach of assuming that each teacher should have certain teaching or pedagogical skills and training them in anticipation that they will use these skills some time in an educational setting.

Parker Palmer (1983) critiques the more common approach as objectivism that “is institutionalized in our educational practices, in the ways we teach and learn” and proposes an alternative that resonates with Levinas. Palmer speaks of the knower and the known which parallels Levinas’ “same” and “other.”

The teacher is a mediator between the knower and the known, between the learner and the subject to be learned... The way a teacher plays the mediator role conveys both an epistemology and an ethic to the student, both an approach to knowing and an approach to living.... As a teacher, I teach more than a body of knowledge or a set of skills. I teach a mode of relationship between the knower and the known, a way of being in the world.

To know something or someone in truth is to enter truth with the known, to rejoin with new knowing what our minds have put asunder. To know in truth is to become betrothed, to engage the known with one’s whole self, an engagement one enters with attentiveness, care, and good will. To know in truth is to allow one’s self to be known as well, to be vulnerable to the challenges and changes any true relationship brings.

Truth requires the knower to become interdependent with the known. Both parties have their own integrity and otherness, and one party cannot be collapsed into the other. But truth demands acknowledgment of and response to the fact that the knower and the known are implicated in each other’s lives.

In truthful knowing we neither infuse the world with our subjectivity (as pre-modern knowing did) nor hold it at arm’s length, manipulating it to suit our needs (as is the modernist style). In truthful knowing the knower becomes co-participant in a community of faithful relationships with other persons and creatures and things, with whatever our knowledge makes known. We find truth by pledging our truth, and knowing becomes a reunion of separated beings whose primary bond is not of logic but of love. (Pp. 29-32)

Palmer goes on to critique specific kinds of teaching that are typical of our schools and

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argues that such teaching continues to dominate our educational systems because:

. . . it conveys a view of reality that simplifies our lives. By this view, we and our world become objects to be lined up, counted, organized, and owned, rather than a community of selves and spirits related to each other in a complex web of accountability called “truth.” The conventional pedagogy pretends to give us mastery over the world, relieving us of the need for mutual vulnerability that the new epistemologies, and truth itself, imply.

We want a kind of knowledge that eliminates mystery and puts us in charge of an object-world. Above all, we want to avoid a knowledge that calls for our own conversion. We want to know in ways that allow us to convert the world — but we do not want to be known in ways that require us to change as well.

To learn is to face transformation. To learn the truth is to enter into relationships requiring us to respond as well as initiate, to give as well as take. If we became vulnerable to the communal claims of truth, conversion would be required. . . But we find it safer to seek facts that keep us in power rather than truths that require us to submit. Objectivist education is a strategy for avoiding our own conversion. If we keep reality “out there,” we can avoid, for a while, the truth that lays the claim of community on our individual and collective lives. (Pp. 39-40)

The alternative approach to teacher preparation that we have been exploring in our Partnership school has encouraged teachers, student teachers, and myself to be more vulnerable to the needs of those we are trying to teach. Conducting naturalistic inquiry to understand others and to respond to them has helped create a community that questions the objectivist milieu in which we all grew up and which is predominant around us. This experience has been an invitation to be vulnerable ourselves as we want the people we are to teach to be vulnerable to us. This is not the controlling approach of “modeling” so people will follow us. Rather, it is a matter of becoming humble enough that we really are willing to change ourselves and our projects, in the face of our students and their needs, interests, and concerns. This is the point Levinas makes in saying that the ethical relationship or responsibility to the other is primary and the ways of knowing and teaching that are the focus of so much of modern instructional theory are secondary.

Implications for Teacher Education and Teaching

This process of involving student teachers and teachers as naturalistic inquirers works. They can take field notes, do qualitative analyses, write brief summary reports, and learn to think critically about educational issues while they learn to teach and improve their teaching. It is also a helpful way to prepare teachers, help cooperating teachers do their job better, give the university supervisor an immense wealth of information about the experiences of student teachers, and help novice teachers get through their initial experiences more professionally.

More importantly, involving teachers at all stages of their development in inquiry helps

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them understand their students better, helps them exemplify learning processes for their students, makes them willing to change themselves so they are more flexible in the face of others and their needs, and involves them in the research community so we all benefit from their insights.

This process of preparing and supporting teachers could be used by other investigators, and we could study it longitudinally with cohorts of student teachers and novice teachers to see what they do with the skills developed during these reflective field experiences. If the findings of this study can be elaborated and confirmed in other settings, the implications for teacher preparation are profound. The focus in pre-service teaching majors as well as the education classes might shift from content acquisition and pedagogical technique to the study of key questions and inquiry processes used by the various disciplines and to the development of naturalistic and other interpretive inquiry skills that would help the teachers understand their students and their school settings more deeply and usefully. Certainly, the call for ethical responsibility to others voiced by Levinas and Palmer suggests that teacher preparation should involve many naturalistic inquiry kinds of encounters between those who are preparing to teach and the people they want to teach. Teaching techniques within that context may be helpfully taught but they cannot take precedence over relationships between teachers and learners.

The questions for us in teacher education to consider are these: Are we as teacher educators and as educational researchers willing to respond to the faces of these teacher researchers and welcome their insights in spite of their different views, perspectives and credentials? Are we willing to be vulnerable too? Are we willing to join in true inquiry partnerships as well as student teaching and curriculum development partnerships with cooperating teachers, teacher candidates, novice teachers, and public school students so we all learn and teach together in true learning communities? If we at the universities are willing to do this, we will all do our jobs better.

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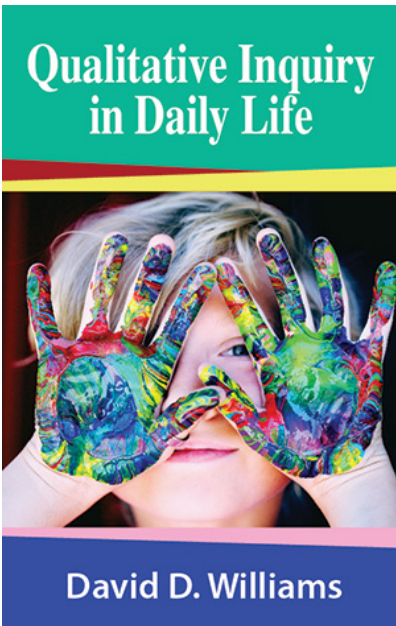
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Williams, D. D. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry in Daily Life*. EdTech Books.
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