

CHAPTER 1

DEVELOPING A CONCEPT OF PRACTITIONER TEACHER INQUIRY

Juxtaposed against traditional forms of research, this chapter discusses what practitioner teacher inquiry is, arguing that the changing environment of schooling necessitates a change in teacher identity to include the concept of inquiry study. The chapter affords readers the opportunity to look closely at how practitioner teacher inquiry is influenced by teacher identities and by long-standing beliefs, including stereotypes. Teachers are asked to analyze how the history of resegregation of teaching to a female profession has forestalled the professional work of teachers in schools, contributing to silencing the voices of teachers. As teachers analyze beliefs and values present in today's cultures, including stereotypes of teacher identity that they themselves may have accepted as facts, teacher identity moves closer to professional empowerment over curriculum and instruction needed to educate the youth of our rapidly changing world.

How to Define Research

Contemporary society is creating a new form of culture, with a broad notion of learning, substituting the concept of ready-made knowledge with a more liberating possibility of creating knowledge. There are two streams in history, one a story of reactive responding and one of building and creating (Fritz, 1989).

Positivism and Interpretive Research

Research paradigms are sets of basic principles that provide frameworks for the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Fundamental philosophical systems of science distinguish

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Examine the beliefs and stereotypes surrounding the feminization of teaching.
- Analyze how teacher identity as caring has impacted the inquiry stance.
- Evaluate how teacher identity must change as society changes.
- Distinguish interpretive science from positivism.

traditional positivism

a philosophy of science that involves a friendly-hostile cooperation of scientists in which certainty and verifiability are viewed as rational and providing empirical evidence

approaches to research paradigms. The field of science can be viewed through sociological processes that have occurred through history (Kuhn, 1970; Popper, 1968).

Originally established in the seventeenth-century philosophical Age of Reason, the research paradigm of **traditional positivism** brought certainty and a sense of understanding to a world that was viewed as rational; one could research and find the “truth” (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). By the twentieth century, these traditional research models, designed for the natural sciences, were applied to large-scale school effectiveness research.

Advanced civilizations across the world, including institutions such as schools, are confronted by what many believe to be irreversible economic and social change. It is commonplace to hear that society, and life in general, is shifting and changing rapidly. High-speed information networks, a global media industry, and an economy that relies on the exchange of knowledge rather than manufactured products, call for building and creating but also produce tremendous uncertainty (Williamson & Morgan, 2009).

Schools cannot fall behind but must keep pace with the ever-faster rate of societal change. Even in the face of tightly controlled school policies, the nature of schooling is embedded in complexity, and variation, rather than uniformity, is the norm. Those closest to education argue that student development is affected by multiple factors within and beyond school, which relate to each other in complex ways, and that it is a mistake to impose mechanistic models of linear rationality on schools (Wrigley, 2003).

Today, there is a resurgence of confidence in the power of traditional positivism and statistical methodologies that will produce “empirical evidence” to support best practices in school settings (Cochran-Smith, 2004). However, Berliner (2002) cautioned that the language of “hard science” is for bridges and sending rockets to the moon and not designed for complex issues in school settings. Conducting randomized field trials to evaluate school programs does not capture the complexity that surrounds contemporary schools. These top-down models of research fail to capture the evolving sociocultural aspects of the school settings.

Unfortunately, much of the current thrust for education research is in reaction or response to societal changes rather than in building on these changes. Instructional innovations that are statistically effective in one school setting may not be successful in another context or school setting. Additionally, positivist research methods can be misleading and confusing to P–12 teachers, untrained to understand and work within these methodologies.

The world is in an age of transition and we can no longer accept quick-fix mechanistic solutions to problems facing work careers, such as education.

Complexity theory involves the study of complex and chaotic systems in which small consequences can evoke significant changes in outcomes. Development and change are viewed as natural and associated with adaptation to one's environment based on experience.

Interpretive science advanced on the premise that reality is no longer the same for everyone; there are multiple versions of truths or realities. In particular, social scientists reject the emphasis on linear causality and variable-centered models of research, arguing that social reality exists independent of perceptions about it (Hakim, 2000).

Supporters of interpretive science believe that the nature of reality is so complex that isolating and examining specific elements of a phenomenon result in fragmented understandings. Interpreting, on the other hand, describes how people make sense of their own experiences and the experiences of others (Schnelker, 2006). Interpretive research requires more multidisciplinary and multimethod methodologies that could be used to effectively study "the erratic, runaway character of modernity" (Giddens, 1991, p. 30). Complexity theory has provided educators with a new logic to reframe complex questions. Qualitative and holistic studies are helpful tools for teachers as they seek to grasp change processes resulting from the exploration of these complex questions.

complexity theory

the study of complex and chaotic systems in which small consequences produce changes

interpretive science

the premise that people create their own meanings as they interact with others, as opposed to an objective reality that can be discovered

Practitioner Teacher Inquiry Study

The **teacher inquiry** movement is a response to the great complexity inherent in a teacher's job, to changes in society, and to the influences from social science fields studying in school settings. This relatively new branch of interpretive research necessitates that, as teaching practitioners, we alter many of our traditional ideas about the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired. This shift in research from a technical rationalistic industrial and scientific model to include the critical inclusion of teacher knowledge involves a shift from the positivistic "knowing that" to "knowing how."

The rejection of an absolutist stance and the assertion of contextual influences found in the interpretive paradigm are fundamental to practitioner teacher inquiry. Teachers who conduct inquiry studies in their classrooms are no longer viewed as "consumers" of knowledge. Classroom teachers master skills to create and critique knowledge and use this understanding in the context of their own teaching.

The teacher as researcher movement is widely acknowledged and endorsed today (Auger & Wideman, 2000; Blackwell & Diez, 1999; Green & Brown, 2006; Zeichner & Gore, 1995). Practitioner teacher inquiry is associated with the development of skills in decision making and problem

teacher inquiry

a response to the complexity in society and schools in which teachers master skills of inquiry to create and critique contextual influences of teaching and learning within the school and community settings

solving necessary for school reform initiatives (Ben-Peretz, 2011; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Slavin, 1997; Ulichny & Schoener, 1996) and in cognitive processing necessary to explore problems and dilemmas (Schön, 1983). Inquiry methodologies are used for the systematic, intentional study of one's own professional practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Hubbard & Power, 1993). Lewin (1948), a social scientist, advocated for social action as a result of research conducted. Practitioner teacher inquiry is a method of moving teacher thoughts into action, and inquiry into practice. Today, teacher inquiry is used to interpret the complexity of schools through rich descriptive accounts of happenings.

Intentional Reflectivity

reflective thinking
deep and meaningful
thinking through
problems that contributes
to self-renewal and
lifelong learning

Best practices for teaching have identified **reflective thinking** as a key element to inquiry (Grant & Zeichner, 1984; Russell, 2000). Deep and meaningful change is believed to occur through exploring and modifying basic assumptions that have resulted in ineffectiveness (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Inquiry methodologies support reflective thinking, associated with the continuous process of active and systematic thinking through problems, contributing to self-renewal and lifelong learning. Stake (1995) contended, "Good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking" (p. 19).

One of the earliest educationalists to describe the value of habits of thought was John Dewey. John Dewey, a prolific writer and educational theorist of the early twentieth century, described active inquiry roles that contribute to teacher open-mindedness and broad visions about teaching (Dewey, 1929, 1933). He defined reflective thought as the act of searching and inquiring to resolve doubt and settle perplexity. Dewey (1933) contended that reflection demanded a problem-solving process to acquire good reflective habits: "The function of reflective thought is, therefore, to transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort, into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious" (p. 101).

Reflective actions in school settings were identified by Zeichner and Liston (1996):

- Examining and attempting to solve dilemmas in classroom practice
- Being aware and questioning one's assumptions and values
- Being attentive to institutional and cultural contexts
- Taking a role in curriculum development and school change efforts
- Taking responsibility for one's professional development (p. 6)

Donald Schön collaborated with Chris Argyris, a psychologist/economist, and proposed a deeper learning in which organizations create change to underlying norms and policies by uncovering organizational errors through cycles of reflection and retesting (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Schön (1983), trained as a philosopher, studied John Dewey's theories, and wrote about the importance of continuous learning systems in the wake of impending societal transformations.

Reflection-in-action refers to the making of decisions guided by tacit knowledge that occurs while acting. Reflection-on-action, in contrast, represents the kind of reflection that occurs after a specific action or particular situation. Because many of today's situations in classrooms are complex, uncertain, and always unique, reflection allows practitioners such as teachers to address new situations, drawing on past reflections to improve future judgments (Schön 1983, 1987).

Johansson and Kroksmark (2004) described intuition-in-action as the immediacy of reflective experiences of teaching. Warin, Maddock, Pell, and Hargreaves (2006) distinguished a reflexive practitioner as incorporating attentiveness to self in practice. King and Kichener (2004) proposed developmental stages of reflective judgment that range from prereflective processes to solutions constructed and evaluated.

Although much of the literature on reflective teaching conceptualizes past-oriented reflection, there is growing understanding of the importance of prospective or anticipatory reflection. Anticipatory reflection focuses on the future dimension of one's teaching, or reflection-for-action.

Reflective study also draws attention to "bumpy moments" inherent to the act of teaching that brings light to the underlying reasons for actions. Romano (2006) contended that closer examination and more thorough reflection of these bumpy moments could provide practicing teachers with alternatives to their teaching practices.

Reflexivity is also valued for examining social and economic factors that could impact schooling (Beck & Grande, 2010; Quicke, 1999). For example, Tafel and Fischer (2001) describe how Ann Watson-Cohn reflected through journaling on her growth as a teacher that led to her thinking about deeper issues.

Practitioner Teacher Perspectives

Bruner (2002) contended that when we talk about our experiences, "we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter" (p. 64). We use stories as a way of characterizing and making sense of human interaction. Our stories give reality to what we

dissonance

discrepancies in a person's beliefs and actions that can result in reflection and activation of new ideas and possibilities

experience. Creating stories is a human and natural response for making meaning and comprehending our lives (Freese, 2006).

Teachers share their work with others through inquiry studies that involve descriptive anecdotes and stories created around puzzling and frustrating episodes in the work of teachers (Jalongo, 1992; Miller, 1992; Schubert, 1992). These professional stories are significant for several reasons.

Stories have the potential of uncovering complexities involving the professional sense of self. As teachers reflect on and study their stories, they uncover **dissonance**, or discrepancies that create new levels of stress and discomfort but that can also result in deepening reflectivity and more sophisticated possibilities for action (Phelps & Graham, 2010). It is this dissonance, and its potential for positive consequences, that holds clues to understanding change. Dissonance can activate a richer sense of self, resolving ideals and realities in teaching and synthesizing existing personal stories with new professional stories.

Storytelling can be introspective, yet it can also be an opportunity for others to see connections to similar experiences and gain deeper insight into the complex nature of learning and teaching. Personal stories can be points of reflection on a collective learning trajectory to understand where individual learning histories converge with those of others. Assumptions about gender, class, and race perspectives are frequently explored. "The nature of the shared experience forges a collective identity and bond in the formation of and inclusion in a community of practice" (Hartog, 2004, p. 163).

Space and voice become important as teachers are freed to speak about ambivalences and contradictions (Gordon, 2006). Collective teacher stories describe how teachers, male and female, of different races and socioeconomic backgrounds, come to teach youth, all the while struggling and coping with vulnerabilities that have silenced teachers in past generations with educational power outside their control.

The term *voice* is a powerful metaphor for empowerment (Johns, 2004). Teachers who use their voices as sources of knowing reject authoritative control over their work and think critically for themselves. Collectively, these voices give meaning not only to oneself but to others by drawing upon what we individually and collectively know about our work lives, to think reflectively, critically, and imaginatively about what professional teachers could be.

Furthermore, school-initiated inquiry moves the design and analyses of inquiry about teaching and learning from the academics to practitioners inside school settings. This shift challenges the **hegemony**, or the influence of others (Erickson, 1986). Should practicing teachers have autonomy to create new knowledge about their own practice? Who decides what research will be conducted? Who decides which theories will be emphasized in the research design?

hegemony

the influence of one group over others

Teacher inquiry is holistic and incorporates the cognitive, the social, the emotional, and the creative in defining “self.” Teacher inquiry encourages teachers to break down norms and traditions, as teachers create knowledge about curriculum and instruction in schools and gain new identity as inquirers and critical thinkers.

Terminologies

Interpretive science has gained widespread international acceptance in academic fields such as anthropology, sociology, behavior psychology, and education (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The variety of terms and methodologies has resulted in multiple understandings as well as misunderstandings (Jungck, 2001). For example, several terms are used to describe practitioner inquiry research: *collaborative action research*, *teacher reflection*, *teacher research*, *teacher inquiry*, *inquiry-based research*, *participative action research*, *action research*, *critical reflection*, and *ethical reflection*. Whereas some descriptions stress an action component, others emphasize less participatory processes with more individualized reflection.

More often, it is university researchers from disciplines such as education, psychology, political science, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and administrative and organizational theory who conduct interpretive studies in school settings and define and distinguish between terminology. Supported by professional organizations such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), research is published in journals such as *Educational Researcher*, *Teaching and Change*, *Educational Action Research: An International Journal*, *Journal of Educational Change*, *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, and *Networks: An On-line Journal for Teacher Research*.

Along with variations in terminology are numerous descriptions about how to prepare teachers in inquiry-based study (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Fishman & McCarthy, 2000; Lytle, 1997; Wasser & Bresler, 1996). Some designs are more technical and suggest steps and stages (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009; Mertler, 2012; Sagor, 2005), whereas others remain free-flowing and open-ended (Goswami, Lewis, Rutherford, & Waff, 2009). A widely accepted problem-solving format comprises interpretive, analytical, and reflective elements:

1. Designing a proposal with a question or problem that is pertinent to the teacher’s background experiences and the context in which she or he teaches
2. Studying the literature to find support for the issue or challenge the teacher wants to inquire about for further study

3. Designing a systematic study of an issue within the teacher's school setting to see what can be learned
4. Collecting and analyzing data sources, including the use of triangulation, to support or refute the findings
5. Reflecting on findings in relation to the context of one's teaching and school setting
6. Exploring ways to share with and inform other educators regarding the findings

Perceptions of what is considered “real” or legitimate research and who should design and conduct this research results in an artificial separation of teachers from research and researchers (Jungck, 2001). The lack of a widespread literature published by practicing teachers suggests that there may still be subtle messages received by classroom teachers that their kind of knowledge and study is not worthwhile or real (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990). This brings to mind the next question: How can practitioner teacher inquiry study be developed and valued from both inside and outside schools?

Complexities for Developing Inquiry Identity

Anthropology and other fields have had a powerful impact on dialogues about identity. A sociocultural perspective of identity views teachers as products of their social histories, acting in ways that are coherent with self-understandings. Behaviorists believe that one's actions are acquired through conditioning or stimulus-response associations. Rooted in humanistic tradition, the concept of lasting learning includes individual growth and development. Palmer (1998) argued that identity involves a lifelong process of self-discovery: “Identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human” (p. 13). Gee (2011) maintained that identity should be viewed as different ways of being in the world, at different times and for different purposes, as we act out different social positions in society. From a pragmatist perspective, lasting learning includes the need for societal change and transformation (Sun, 2008).

Teachers invest their selves into schooling, and oftentimes their self-esteem and fulfillment and sense of success or failure revolves around this professional identity (Nias, 1996). Identity, a complex construct, is important to understand with regard to teachers as researchers in their classrooms. The concept of **teacher identity** is multidimensional and is produced by personal influences as well as by the professional contexts

teacher identity

the ongoing story of how teachers come to view their professional selves as influenced by cultural and situational learnings

in which teachers work (Lasky, 2005). Olsen (2010, 2011) contended that teacher identity is both process and product and includes self-understandings that direct how the teacher navigates through the world both personally and professionally.

Complex Teacher Identity

Teaching today occurs within complex historical, economic, and social contexts. It is clear that teacher identity can no longer imitate admired childhood teachers from our past along with notions of what “good teaching” should be. Lortie’s (1975) twentieth-century classroom teachers taught what they were themselves taught, learned through twelve years of apprenticeship in school settings. This teacher identity, associated with traditional societal values that were accompanied by a strong sense of place and purpose in life, now gives way to new challenges as we go about the task of meeting the needs of changing societies that require changes in schooling.

Teaching identity is rapidly becoming complex, multidimensional, and uncertain. Risk must be understood as a social condition that replaces traditional expectations and customs, including those found in teaching and schooling. Contemporary teachers will themselves constantly absorb and attempt to make sense of new knowledge about students and families, all the while balancing this new information with already established previous teacher identities.

Rapid societal change requires us to examine the ordinary taken-for-granted ways we organize and carry out our work and to think creatively about our professional identities (Stringer, 1999). Changes in learning are shaping the form and structure of schooling and necessitate teachers to not only analyze their teaching identity, but also to scrutinize the whole nature of “self.” Unlike teaching from days of yore, contemporary teachers will construct and reconstruct their identity through a lifetime process of change.

The contemporary view of self is made up of a number of different, sometimes incompatible selves, which taken together make up the self as a whole (Griffiths, 1995). To develop an authentic self, one must accept this disconnected nature of the self. This disconnection creates tensions between goals and underlying beliefs that teachers grapple with, a tension between epistemology (what we know) and ontology (what we feel exists) and finding some form of truth between these two. Bullough (2011) described conflicts among values, norms, and beliefs that are part of teaching identity.

Enyedy, Goldberg, and Welsh (2005) reasoned that when teachers encounter dilemmas, the process of resolving these tensions and contradictions often

draws on one's self-identity. These multiple identities contribute to dilemmas as teachers struggle to resolve conflicting deliberations in their teaching.

Strain (2000) described this new learner using the metaphor of a traveler, choosing routes within and between paths of learning. Even when we describe ourselves as having varied identities, we become somewhat chameleon-like, changing when we need to change (Warin, Maddock, Pell, & Hargreaves, 2006). For most of us, beliefs change as we accumulate new experiences. Senge (1990) stated that "organizations learn only through individuals who learn" (p. 139). Acknowledging the complexity within ourselves is a precondition to this self-transformation.

Contemporary teachers experiment with these new elements of teacher identity using past experiences as they find themselves teaching in complex and increasingly differentiated and rapidly changing worlds (Cochran-Smith, 2005). In this complex world, lifelong learning is fast becoming part of our identity (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997).

Furthermore, the goal of understanding this complexity is not to reduce uncertainty, which would likely not be possible, but rather to expand our understandings of common features within these complex systems (Phelps & Graham, 2010). Struggling with the complexity of identity can produce confusion, frustration, and vulnerability until one comes to realize that unpredictability itself must be viewed as a positive rather than a negative. Unlike previous generations, contemporary identity will be created through a lifetime of this kind of learning (Richert, 2012). Alsup (2005) described successful contemporary teachers who reevaluated their beliefs and practices and accepted multifaceted professional identities that also acknowledged ambiguities within these identities.

This said, teachers should not view themselves as helpless in the face of this complexity but should be encouraged to take a proactive stance. Change requires self-direction as people contribute ideas of their own and are empowered to tailor their own learning to personal needs and aspirations (Goleman, 2005).

Self-identity must be routinely created and sustained through reflective activities of the individual (Giddens, 1991). Senge (1990) proposed that we go about this by exploring how we continue to deceive ourselves from seeing what is actually changing, "cleansing the lens of perception, awakening from self-imposed distortions of reality" (p. 161). Mayeroff (1971) noted, "I can understand in another only what I can understand in myself" (p. 31). Hartog (2004) stated, "by exploring the process of coming to know ourselves as a living contradiction we can propel our inquiry forward, as we imagine a way forward through which we may resolve tensions and contradictions in our practice, helping us to live our values more fully in our practice" (p. 157).

The tools of inquiry, such as analyzing teaching beliefs, critiquing reflective journals and videotapes, and preparing case studies, offer rich methodologies for teachers to examine preconceptions and beliefs. Through these inquiries, teachers begin to think critically about how beliefs and values impact their work. Teacher inquiry also offers explicit ways in which teacher identity change can become more visible and understandable. Teachers use inquiry to recognize what aspects of identity can be retained from past experiences and how to go about adapting to future complexity and change.

Teacher Dispositions

Dispositions are habits of professional action or moral commitment that lead to actions (Diez & Murrell, 2010). Our values are pieces of information passed down from one generation to another through actions and example, and result in a formation of our ways of thinking and actions. We do not acquire values accidentally. These values that lead to dispositions for acting often begin to develop from childhood through early life experiences of *can't* and *don't* messages (Senge, 1990). Dispositions indicate behaviors and judgments that have developed that result in how a teacher will act under certain circumstances.

To understand personal values and dispositions, one place to begin is to develop a deeper personal understanding of our earlier experiences (Elbaz, 1992). Experience itself is not useful for changing dispositions without critical reflection of experiences.

Additionally, dispositions are often characterized under broad categories such as commitment, caring, and competence (Feiman-Nemser & Schussler, 2010). Olsen (2010) contended that dispositions involve “combinations of things such as your degree of reflectiveness, your organizational skills or their absence, your level of extroversion/introversion, and how you typically cope with adversity” (p. 125).

Caring as a Disposition

Dispositions related to teacher identity frequently include gendered assumptions that are carried from childhood into teaching. Mothers and teachers are at the center of the socialization process of a nation's citizens. Moreover, mothers and teachers have long been expected to socialize youth to conform to a society based on authority of male domination. Women have historically found employment in service occupations in fields where “women's work” involves nurturing and caretaking roles (Tronto, 1987), supervised by males.

resegregated female occupation

the way in which teaching began as a male endeavor and changed to teaching conducted primarily by females

Horace Mann, the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, was an early proponent for the feminization of teaching. American schooling transformed in the early twentieth century to a **resegregated female occupation** as the nation sought low-paid teachers to teach basic skills to large populations of immigrant youth destined for our booming industrial economy. Early teaching lacked professional status as it could be entered with little advanced training (Shaw, 1995), and became a stepping-stone for working-class immigrant groups in upward mobility.

Resegregated from male to female, teaching identity by the twentieth century became associated with “caring” and continues today to impact teacher identity. Olsen (2008) reported that gender identity remains strong in first-year female teachers. All six teachers talked about their affinity for working with youth as a primary motivator for choosing teaching as a profession, three grew up “playing teacher,” four reported the influence of other women in their families who had worked in education as they were growing up, and four talked about the schedule/structure of teaching as compatible with mothering.

Mothers are often thought of as the dominant shapers of the child’s primary socialization, while teachers are perceived as the most important force in the child’s transition into the adult world (Lightfoot, 1978). Being the good or perfect caring teacher is very close to the ideal of the perfect and caring mother or parent. Although *caring* is an ambiguous and broad term, with numerous interpretations, the concept that teachers demonstrate dispositions of caring is viewed as a highly professional matter for teachers at all levels of schooling (Bullough, 2011; Palmer, 1998). For example, Nel Noddings (2005), the American educationalist well known for her ethic of care, argued that the main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, and loving people.

Teaching is often associated with personal relationships, created in friendly, pleasing, and emotionally safe environments for today’s children and youth. Certain caring initiatives have come to be expected from contemporary teachers:

- Personally get to know students and choose curriculum based on this personal knowledge
- Listen to how students are feeling
- Assume more obligations in loco parentis to care for a child as would a parent
- Encourage students to show caring relations with others

Today, psychological skills and aptitudes relating to caring are increasingly vital requirements for a whole range of growing service-related interpersonal work that frequently necessitates the suppression of one's self in order to respond to others (Hochschild, 1983). New tensions are placed on teachers as counselors, as reporting agents for the state in cases of abuse, as disciplinarians, and as facilitators of conflict resolutions between students. Everything from crisis de-escalation to alcohol abuse identification is now expected of educators, whose primary role is still viewed by the public as teaching academic content.

Given that human interaction is essential to teachers' practice, and that teachers often become intensely involved in their work, the caring disposition creates an indispensable element to a teacher's self-identity. The disposition of caring has historically shaped American teachers, and educators today continue to enter teaching to make a difference in the lives of students.

Although the disposition of caring, as part of gender identity, is one of the most powerful and positive social features in the lives of teachers in schools, it can also bring tensions to teaching roles. Many gendered ideas and beliefs serve teachers well, but teachers may unknowingly internalize beliefs about caring, which may contribute to an inability or unwillingness to use inquiry and critical thinking as tools for teaching.

Mother Teacher Stereotypes

Biases and stereotypes are cultural constructions rooted in some level of perceived reality. Stereotypes involving the history of teaching can be analyzed from psychological and social roots to permit crucial understanding about the lack of movement forward for practitioner teacher inquiry in school settings. Gender stereotypes, one-sided and exaggerated perceptions of teachers as they participate in day-to-day teaching, have been perpetuated throughout the last century. Recognizing and understanding stereotypes can result in liberation from personal fault and guilt as well as a more genuine way of perceiving possibilities for change (Lightfoot, 1978).

Sex stereotyping, in particular, places emphasis upon women's maternal roles and domestic value. Contemporary classroom teachers, both male and female, must be aware of how **mother teacher** stereotypes impact teacher identity. When the stereotype of mother teacher is not critically analyzed, caring becomes an overexaggerated role of teacher identity. Internalized, caring is placed above self. All energies are put into this role, to the detriment of other aspects of identity, including a sense of self. Some teachers may use caring as a rationale for not engaging in their own

mother teacher

the overexaggerated role of teaching that captures the traditional mothering role of caring, compassion, and thoughtfulness

professional development with statements such as, “My children need my undivided attention—I just can’t take time away from the needs of my students to engage in classroom inquiry studies.”

Collaboration is crucial for many change initiatives, but although collaboration is commonplace in other professions, teaching remains largely viewed as an individual undertaking. The isolating conditions still found in most teaching situations, similar to the homebound mother with children to care for, sanction norms to close classroom doors.

Isolation hinders understanding of complexity, transformation, and change (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008). Overreaching boundaries of caring by mistakenly believing one’s own values and beliefs about what it means to care are more authentic than those of families and communities, the mother teacher concept results in further teacher isolation by resisting critical engagement with others. When resistance is internalized, exchange of knowledge with others is limited, teacher expertise is suppressed, and potential for professionalism is restricted (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007).

Caring engagement with others, including parents and community, is highly valued in practitioner teacher inquiry. Teachers are encouraged to seek support and involvement with others. When people are working together, it “necessitates having shared understandings, values, and goals” (Lasky, 2005, p. 902). Practitioner teacher inquiry encourages colleagues to observe and review each other’s teaching, a willingness to raise questions with one another, an openness to constructive criticism from others, along with a sense of trust and engagement.

Isolation is especially detrimental to novice teachers, often left alone to conduct emotional and caring work that results in high numbers of novices leaving the field (Heller, 2004). Vulnerability is multifaceted and can be an experience of openness to trust or result in powerlessness (Lasky, 2005).

The willingness on the part of teachers to take risks and look closely at these changes rather than isolating themselves includes learning about our personal beliefs, values, and past personal and professional experiences. Beliefs are deeply ingrained and cannot change overnight. Solutions to educational dilemmas are often more a matter of these held beliefs than are reasons or evidences. Recognizing and discussing biases are themselves among the most important education endeavors to undertake.

Self-reflection can be used to identify assumptions, prejudices, beliefs, and habits of mind developed over years that govern the way we take on roles and form relationships (Newman, 2006). Teacher inquiry challenges teacher isolation and moves stereotypes about teaching away from outdated norms to create new professional identities.

Teacher Language and Professional Identity

Language is the primary vehicle through which past experiences are recalled and interpreted about oneself (Etter-Lewis, 1991). People use different styles of language for different purposes. We build identities through the discourse of language integrated into thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, and believing (Gee, 2011).

The Language of Science

The widespread growth of scientific modernist language in the twentieth century convinced academics that science could determine what was best for society and for the betterment of humanity. Professors, who were predominately male, used these “superior” science-like methods to study schools (Nicholson-Goodman & Garman, 2007). Predominantly female classroom teachers were expected to passively accept the way in which this knowledge was generated (Lieberman & Wood, 2003).

Traditional research conducted in school settings today continues to value privileged language, a body of knowledge restricted to all but those advancing to terminal degrees. The language and terminology surrounding research has separated groups of professional educators, distinguished by differences rather than similarities (Moos, 2008). These organizations have created separate languages and terminologies about their research that creates added confusion for classroom teachers.

“Research-based” language has established itself at the center of education vernacular. Large-scale, randomized, controlled tests are viewed as “real” research. National directives argue that the only research useful to educators is “scientifically-based,” or experimental research (Nicholson-Goodman & Garman, 2007). Teaching, firmly associated with feminization and caring, continues to be perceived as a “soft” science that operates from gut feelings, hunches, intuitions, and presumptions.

The language used by traditional research has resulted in barriers between academics and classroom teachers. University professors become discouraged and perplexed when classroom teachers debase traditional theories and research. And teachers feel betrayed when their attempts to put their own experiences into language are not valued (Grumet, Anderson, & Osmond, 2008).

Teachers often report minimal connections between their practice and what is understood to be the work of teaching research (Freeman, 1998). For example, novice preservice teachers report tensions and emotional isolation in school settings when they reject the school-based theories for those of the university (Alsup, 2005). Although some teachers and administrators accept

what researchers propose as best practices, many others are unable to actually cite specific research for these practices and are often skeptical and cynical regarding the veiled authority and control over their work (Nicholson-Goodman & Garman, 2007).

In a sense, the language of scientific research has distorted the voice of teachers in attempts to legitimize the position of academics (Elliott, 1993). However, in the process, education research has resulted in confusion, and lack of confidence from academics, teachers, politicians, and the public alike (Lagemann, 2000).

The conventions or rules of traditional research render the social language and professional experience of teachers as somehow inadequate. These rules for research contribute to teachers' not viewing themselves as critical thinkers and problem solvers. The beliefs that the language of research is not for classroom teachers and that teacher language is not the language of researchers are often tacit or unconscious. Teacher identity, defined by those outside the classroom and accepted by classroom teachers themselves, lacks *inquiry* or *researcher* as a teacher disposition.

Accepting knowledge from others, teachers often speak from voices of outside experts, not from the produced knowledge of their own. When teachers rely on research conducted from outside the school, they surrender their professional identity and forfeit their self-abilities of engaging in authentic professional change.

Teachers have historically not assumed the production of teaching knowledge as part of teacher identity but instead have left the creation of professional knowledge about teaching to university academics and theorists. Most damaging, having little say in processes and outcomes, teachers may themselves have within their professional identity a doubt about the worth and value of their own authentic teaching.

This silencing of teacher language further manifests itself in teacher education programs when teacher candidates are not prepared to use teacher-friendly tools of inquiry in learning to teach and when teacher education faculty do not demonstrate strong values for teacher knowledge. Preservice teachers often tutor and work with youth different from themselves yet may not be required to think critically about developing in-depth habits of inquiry or read inquiry prepared by experienced classroom teachers.

Those Who Can't

Without the formal science language, along with beliefs that teachers are not critical thinkers who are capable of studying and analyzing schooling,

teachers internalize that their own ideas are “less than intellectual.” Rejecting themselves as less than authentic researchers, teachers limit their professional selves with stereotypical statements such as the following:

- “I can’t write professionally—I don’t have the credentials to research.”
- “I don’t understand how to do research.”
- “I just don’t get these theories—they don’t make sense to me.”
- “The university is supposed to do our research—just let me teach my classes and take care of my students.”

The subtle language that surrounds “those who can’t” downplays teaching as not requiring a high degree of intellect, and many teachers have come to accept stereotypes as truth, believing that they somehow lack the intellectual rigor to research or understand research. Gilligan (2011) contended that women impose silence and listen to the voices of men to speak as if “the omission of women was irrelevant or inconsequential and women overlooked or excused the omission of themselves” (p. 17). Teacher voices have, in a sense, become silenced.

“Those who can’t” also impacts inquiry study through suggestions that teaching is routine and easy. Teachers unknowingly and uncritically consent to this stereotype with statements such as, “I am just a kindergarten teacher—who would want to know how I manage and motivate young children.” “What I do is not research-worthy.” These teachers fail to understand that struggling and marginal teachers, especially those just beginning their practice, could benefit greatly from reading teacher accounts of similar experiences.

Summary

The knowledge base surrounding teacher inquiry has historically been influenced by fields outside of education, pushing and pulling between positivism and interpretive science. Much of the early school research was conducted by university academics and primarily intended for university theorizing. Consequently, this has limited teacher roles in the research process to that of subjects in the study rather than as designers and creators of studies.

The gendered discourse of teaching has involved one of caring, viewed within an analysis of patriarchy and understood historically as a system of social structures of domination. The caring disposition, though highly valued, if left unexamined contributes to stereotypes that limit the teacher inquiry movement in school settings.

Teacher identity must be ever-changing to meet social and economic changes. Contemporary teaching will either continue in professional silence or move forward through study to analyze and explore changing values, philosophies, and beliefs. Change affects beliefs, processes, and practices sustained in schools, relations between schools, and also the structure of communities and their governments (Strain, 2000).

Experiences become a way of making and remaking identity. Proponents of practitioner teacher inquiry encourage teachers to be adaptable and able to accommodate uncertainty and change. Effective teachers must be reflective, engaged in the school context, and active in school initiatives. Active experimentation develops new ideas and theories about how classrooms work.

Visions for better schools inform teacher decisions and shape the inquiry they undertake. Practitioner teacher inquiry is grounded in the realities of educational practice as teachers investigate their own problems and facilitate change based on the knowledge they uncover. Practitioner teachers become the knowledge-generators and, as such, exert more control over the knowledge base surrounding the teaching profession.

Some of the most contested issues in the history of education have to do with fundamental disagreements about who should be educated, what should be taught, how it should be assessed, and who should decide. None of these issues are questions of science and evidence, but rather they are questions of values (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Is teaching a true profession, or should it be a technocratic career in which teachers follow and implement research findings from outside the classroom setting? Should teachers be prepared as intellectual professionals, capable of exploring problem areas in education (Clarke & Erickson, 2003)? Is teacher inquiry a fad, or does it hold the cornerstone for educational reform initiatives (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990)?

KEY TERMS

complexity theory: the study of complex and chaotic systems in which small consequences produce changes

dissonance: discrepancies in a person's beliefs and actions that can result in reflection and activation of new ideas and possibilities

hegemony: the influence of one group over others

interpretive science: the premise that people create their own meanings as they interact with others, as opposed to an objective reality that can be discovered

mother teacher: the overexaggerated role of teaching that captures the traditional mothering role of caring, compassion, and thoughtfulness

reflective thinking: deep and meaningful thinking through problems that contributes to self-renewal and lifelong learning

resegregated female occupation: the way in which teaching began as a male endeavor and changed to teaching conducted primarily by females

teacher identity: the ongoing story of how teachers come to view their professional selves as influenced by cultural and situational learnings

teacher inquiry: a response to the complexity in society and schools in which teachers master skills of inquiry to create and critique contextual influences of teaching and learning within the school and community settings

traditional positivism: a philosophy of science that involves a friendly-hostile cooperation of scientists in which certainty and verifiability are viewed as rational and providing empirical evidence

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Identify personal beliefs and values you bring from your childhood experiences that have the potential to impact, positively or negatively, inquiry study in school settings.
2. Explain the effects of early historical feminization of teaching on teacher identity today.
3. To what degree does the traditional language of research fit with your identity?
4. Argue the pros and cons of teacher inquiry as a disposition.

Useful Websites

www.pbs.org/onlyateacher/timeline.html

http://sociologyindex.com/interpretive_theory.htm

www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Gallery.html

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