Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts, Research Strand, Vol.3 No.1, Spring 2016, pp. 45-77
Ubiquity: http://ed-ubiquity.gsu.edu/wordpress/
ISSN: 2379-3007

Evolution of a Learner-Teacher-Researcher:

Or, How *Not* to Teach the Research Paper

Syracuse University

Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Sarah M. Fleming, Syracuse University, 200 Huntington Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244

Contact: saflemin@syr.edu

Abstract

In this article, I use narrative inquiry and autoethnography to explore my development as a practicing English teacher, documenting and analyzing my personal experiences as a high school student, as an early-career teacher, as a doctoral student, and as a teacher researcher. I focus specifically on my practice as it relates to the instruction of high school students in completing research assignments and moving from traditional research papers to collaborative, inquiry learning experiences. I connect this evolution to my interest in teacher education, calling for greater inclusion of inquiry learning, research instruction, and information literacy in English education teacher preparation programs, as well as more direct opportunities to encourage their becoming reflective practitioners, those who will regularly engage in teacher research and thereby contribute to a more collaborative evolution of our profession.

Keywords: Inquiry learning; narrative inquiry; autoethnography; teacher research; practitioner inquiry; teaching research; English education; motivation

Evolution of a Learner-Teacher-Researcher: Or, How *Not* to Teach the Research Paper

I remember what it feels like, sitting in a classroom and feeling like I don't belong. The conversation is over my head; the reading is too hard. I sweat nervously, worried the teacher will call on me to ask what I think about the passage we're reviewing. I keep my eyes steady on the text, avoiding all eye contact, wringing my hands beneath the desk. I look at the questions I wrote for class discussion, and a pit of shame wells up from my stomach and into my throat, a familiar burn of embarrassment flushing my cheeks as I realize just how badly I misunderstood the directions. Please, don't collect these. Maybe she won't notice. Maybe they won't notice.

I don't belong here.

Prologue: My Story

I was the student above: at sixteen in 11th grade English, at twenty-two in economics, and at thirty-four in my first doctoral-level graduate class. Often, I am still that student as I wrestle with that unofficial curriculum of doctoral study: the academic identity crisis, plagued with self-doubt, indecision and insecurity. In order to better know and understand that process of shifting identities (and in part to confirm my membership in the academy as valid), I engage in autoethnography for this paper (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The purpose of this article is to document my experiences and analyze my academic identity as it shifts from being a student, to a teacher, and eventually to a doctoral student researcher. This article is constructed as a chronological narrative, organized in sections resembling the parts of a story (prologue, chapter sections, and epilogue). Each section is introduced with a narrative anecdote from my first-person perspective, highlighting an experience that speaks to the ideas addressed in that section. I

conclude with a discussion of how this analysis informs my future as a teacher educator, and I propose the inclusion of inquiry learning in English teacher preparation.

I look to the connection between such introspective analysis, the professional development of my teacher and researcher identities and my instructional practices, and the learning I encourage my students to engage in. More specifically, as my own research practices change, becoming more deliberate and refined, so do the ways in which I teach my students how to conduct research. Just as I have been developing a sense of myself as a teacher-researcher, I have been changing my high school course goals, assignments and expectations to present a curriculum. I have also assigned research projects that reflect my changing understanding of how and why research is conducted. As I grow in my relationship with research, so do my students grow with theirs.

In order to engage in the writing of this autoethnography, I've chosen to employ methods of narrative inquiry (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011); in other words, let me tell you a story. It doesn't begin with "Once upon a time," nor will you find a neatly presented resolution at the paper's end. There are anecdotes, personal reflections, a chronology, and some lessons learned. There is a hero (me), an antagonist (also me), multiple settings, and a conflict (I should say many); but, the climax is yet to be determined. The story is still being written.

Put simply, narrative is an effective form of inquiry because we tell stories to learn. Schaafsma and Vinz (2011) explain that "narrative has the potential to present complexities and ways of acknowledging the influence of experience and culture on human learning and knowledge construction" (p. 2). We learn by telling our stories to others, and others learn by hearing, relating to, and acting upon our stories; or, as Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) explained,

narrative inquiry "privileges individual lived experience as a source of insights useful not only to the person himself or herself but to the wider field of social science scholarship" (p. 49). In accordance with an autoethnographic approach, I seek to understand the worlds of English classroom instruction and student research through an analysis of my personal experiences and recollections. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) claim that "when researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity" (para. 8). As a teacher researcher, I frequently experience such epiphanies, and I welcome the invitation to reflect upon the significance of those experiences as they inform my teaching and research interests. As a member of the sometimes distinct, sometimes blurred, cultures in question—those of students, teachers and researchers—and by realizing epiphanies through research and critical analysis, I am continuously engaged in the process, or in the "doing," of autoethnography.

Anderson (2006) distinguishes between two types of autoethnography—analytic and evocative. He claims that evocative autoethnography more closely resembles the narratives often found in creative nonfiction: "compelling description of subjective emotional experiences [that] create an emotional resonance with the reader" (p. 377). However, Anderson acknowledges the criticism that such academic work is often "marginalized" in favor of more traditional methods; he suggests the analytic autoethnographer must approach her research, data collection and analysis, and writing of the narrative with a greater commitment to its academic purpose and awareness of her subjective positionality. In my case, I am acutely aware each time I enter my classroom that my instructional practice is guided by my research and doctoral study, and as I

complete work for graduate courses, my increasing understanding of theory is filtered through my daily experiences as a teacher. Anderson deconstructs this dichotomous existence, explaining that the autoethnographer has a dual role as both a "member in the social world under study and as a researcher of that world;" that they should "illustrate analytic insights through recounting their own experiences and thoughts as well as those of others" and "openly discuss changes in their beliefs and relationships over the course of fieldwork, thus vividly revealing themselves as people grappling with issues relevant to membership and participation in fluid rather than static social worlds" (p. 384).

In his work with high school students, Camangian (2010) suggests that autoethnography allows for the critical reflection, contextual analysis and healing that "create the conditions necessary for future transformative learning" (p. 184). It seems that teachers could also benefit from this practice. In fact, teacher researchers such as myself should be especially moved to engage in this methodology because we are positioned to contribute to and affect change in both communities—we can bring a sense of realism to the theoretical paradigms of academia, and we can transform school practice by first demonstrating and then collaborating with colleagues, and more significantly with our students, on pedagogies informed by research and analysis.

This autoethnography results from the careful compilation and analysis of data sources representing my fifteen years of instructing junior- and senior-level high school students in their English classes, specifically those data that referenced teaching research paper writing. The approximately 340 pages of data included more traditional forms of texts for teacher research, like lesson plans, curriculum materials and student work samples. Other less formally organized data took the form of hastily scrawled notes to myself left in old calendars or on master copies of

materials tucked away in manila file folders, personal reflections in my teaching journals or reflective essays for graduate classes, and the often cryptic messages to colleagues in emails and text messages. I pored over multiple years' worth of collected materials from filing cabinets and digital files, and boxes of mementos representing past students—senior photos, thank you notes, and graduation invitations, identifying snippets of experience and recollection pertaining to the thinking about and doing of research.

As is necessary for the autoethnographer, I have relied heavily upon those memories that surfaced during the review of these data, and I have used them to create composite representations of my earlier selves and of my former students, giving voice to their sometimes individual, sometimes collective expressions. Schaafsma and Vinz (2011) explain that "interpretation is going on constantly and recursively in narrative inquiry. Interpretation is the habit of critical reflection. It isn't a linear process - collect narratives as data and then perform some textual analysis on them and articulate findings or conclusions" (p. 76). Rather, they explain that the act of writing narrative is in itself an analytical process, quoting Flannery O'Connor as having said "I don't know as well what I think until I see what I say; then I have to say it over again" (as cited in Schaafsma & Vinz, 2001, pp. 51-52). I identified particular themes present in the data and noted their evolution over the chronology; those themes (written as progressive verb phrases to denote the continuous nature of such experiences) informed the structure, subheadings and stories within each section of the narrative. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) acknowledge that the autoethnographic researcher assembles experiences "using hindsight" and "consult[s] with texts like photographs, journals and recordings to help with

recall" (p. 275). In this particular case, analysis of these experiences both prompted and occurred within the writing itself.

The purpose of this narrative—as I share it with you—is to explore my own development as a learner, as a teacher researcher, and as a future teacher educator and to analyze how that growth has affected my teaching of high school students (and now preservice teachers) to embrace their own identities as researchers, and as thinkers and writers. I attend to this story in a mostly chronological fashion, honoring the evolution of my identity from one of passive complicity, to questioning, and finally to provocation. As I examine my experiences, I argue for a more nuanced, and yet messier, vision of what the learner-teacher-researcher must do, in order to better model for students the complex and ever-evolving nature of learning through inquiry.

I teach where I was taught –at the same high school, in the very same classrooms, where I sat numb and nervous as described above. I wade through student assignments and post-traumatic flashbacks; they sit where I sat, where my friends/not-friends sat. I look at them and I imagine what they're thinking – is it the same as I thought? Are they smiling sweetly and counting the minutes until my class is over? Do they think I am as full of shit as I thought my teachers were? Am I making this as uninteresting and as irrelevant as they did?
Are they bored? I sure was. I had to wait until I got home – that was where I could like reading, thinking, learning. Certainly not here.

Part 1: Learning to (Not) Learn

As a high school student, I had what some call a very traditional relationship with doing research in that it was something I did once a year for a term paper, and that was it (Maniotes & Kuhlthau, 2014). One might recall a similar experience: being assigned a topic, spending a class

or two in the library, rifling through a card catalog (yes, I am dating myself here) and collecting the exact number of books required from the shelves, dutifully labeling notecards and copying down very important-sounding sentences, and returning to the classroom to follow along as the teacher constructed a Harvard outline on the overhead projector. Yes, you must have eight sources. Yes, you must write your outline in complete sentences. No, you may not use a magazine source. Yes, your thesis statement needs to be written exactly like this and placed exactly here in your introduction. No, you may not use first person.

And, like most of us who found our way into academia, I was a good student—an overachiever, a teacher-pleaser who was intent on doing everything exactly the way my teachers told me to. I was desperate to "get it right." After all, that was the mark of a good student, and that gets rewarded with an A. As an overachiever whose adolescent identity was entirely too dependent upon grades sent home on the report card, "getting it right" was the foundational experience in my education. I recall the many hours spent on the phone, the spiral cord stretched out and all the way down the basement stairs from the phone mount on the kitchen wall above, huddled on the bottom stair with my chemistry notebook on my lap, verifying the right answer with as many classmates as possible. I remember skimming over chapters of reading on the bus ride into school. I didn't dare use Cliffs Notes—that would be cheating—but I learned quickly how to surmise the plot of the story by checking out introductory sentences and listening carefully in class when the teacher reviewed the reading. (At the time, one of my greatest accomplishments was having scored 100% on the unit exam for *The Odyssey* without having actually read it; now it serves as a constant reminder of what grades can and can't reflect as assessments of learning). I learned to play school early, and I played well. I was commended for

my hard work and my studiousness; my grades were excellent, teachers seemed to like me, and my classmates knew me as one of the brains.

But then, why did I feel so dissatisfied with my learning? Why didn't I enjoy school more, and why didn't I think that I was a good student? And, most relevant to the topic of this particular paper, why didn't I see research as being fun and exciting? As a superficial overachiever, I was concerned with wanting to be the best, and that meant conforming to our school and community's notion of "best." Not learning to think for myself, not inquiring out of real curiosity, but playing school—and all the while convinced that I would soon be "found out" for the fraud I was. Someone eventually would realize that I procrastinated, half-assed my work, and engaged in what my current students would rationalize as being "creative collaboration" whenever possible (never on a test of course; that would be cheating, too), and therefore I didn't deserve to be recognized for my academic achievements, as they were technically meaningless. In fact, I would hazard a guess that many doctoral students (a.k.a. grown-up overachievers) share in this experience; we undergo such dramatic identity crises and feel like frauds because we grew up in an educational system that rewarded us for being exactly that.

So I began my young adult life in college with a compromised sense of self, and consequently not much changed. I crammed for exams and I squeaked papers in just on time, but, once again, I was going through the motions. I always loved the moments in class when I was engaged deep in thought or conversation with others, and I felt inspired by my professors' passion. But when it came time to do THE RESEARCH PAPER at the end of the term, I quickly reverted back to what I knew best, and I conducted the same, robotic process as I always had. As I went further in my studies and as I experienced more moments of passion and inspiring

epiphanies in class, the more I wrestled with my methods for academic writing. I knew the work I produced was shallow, and I felt uncomfortable and embarrassed by writing that didn't match the enthusiastic and inquisitive spirit my professors saw in me during class. So I felt guilty and inadequate, and I procrastinated. I would wait until the very last minute to write my papers, making a big show of how hard I was working as I commandeered the living room floor, spread out all the library books and sets of index cards, and physically mapped out the paper in a makeshift outline. Quotes for the intro? Up at the top of the rug by the sliding glass door. Quotes for the third section? To my left, just by my hip. I sat lurched over my Brother word processor, copying and citing lines at a ferocious speed. Eventually, dawn would arrive and there would be no more time, so I stopped and called the work done. Save, print, and out the door—just in time for my 8:30 class.

This went on for years. I got my first degree and then my second. By the time I began my first teaching position, I had completely confused my understanding of learning and research.

There they were—a whole stack of packets, fresh from the printer. They looked so crisp, so clean, not a stray pen mark, bent corner or ripped cover among them. Like any other set of new school supplies, they suggested such promise, such good intention. This is a masterpiece, I thought, I really got it right this time. This time, the kids would really do well, because this time The Packet covered everything: directions, due dates, process lists, check boxes, outlines, and models for every step of the way. It was foolproof, really—how could they not succeed with such thorough instruction and attention to detail? Look at how much thought I put into The Packet! They will surely be impressed, and thankful.

And then, a month later…

Why are these research papers still so awful?

Part 2: Learning to Teach

Those first few years of teaching were overwhelming. My teaching was characterized by those same feelings of inadequacy that plagued my own academic work in college—not feeling knowledgeable enough to grade students' work, not feeling confident in my own abilities, engaging in procrastination, and not feeling motivated by lackluster curriculum or colleagues and a school culture that seemed perfectly satisfied with reproducing the norms of secondary English instruction, just as I had experienced them.

I would argue (and will demonstrate in this paper) that so much of what doesn't work with traditional research assignments in high school English classes—and in other content area classes as well—primarily has to do with issues of motivation. Introducing THE RESEARCH PAPER was always met with groans, eye rolls, and heavy sighs (and that was just from the teachers). Department members displayed the same behaviors at meetings and in the faculty room, commiserating over what was to be a month of teeth-pulling, hair-tearing, and practically blood-letting to get those students to produce something passable. We all gritted our teeth until it was over—the last paper was submitted, the final essay graded and logged, and finally we could move on to something more enjoyable. It's no wonder our students hated it so much.

So of course my students became as obsessed with the process as I had been in school. Three weeks of library time, source sheets, and research paper whack-a-mole, and all I could hear was the unending barrage of insecure questioning from my students: Is this ok? Do I have enough book sources? *Is it good enough*?

My mantra for the research paper had been just that, too: "good enough." For me, good enough meant getting the A, but it could have just as easily meant passing, for all it did to motivate me. And for the first half of my teaching life, I watched my students experience the same struggle I did. They weren't concerned about making their papers the best they could be or how well they effectively communicated their ideas—only that the papers were "good enough" to get the grade they wanted. They weren't motivated. And as their instructor, neither was I.

It's almost three o'clock in the morning, and I just can't make myself stop. Every article I open and scan just starts me down a new trail in this never-ending scavenger hunt. I skim an abstract, I peruse the references, and then I find it—that section, that one line that brings it all together. The scene looks pretty much the same as it did fifteen years ago—my books and notes spread out over the library table, highlighters and sticky-notes strewn across stacks of articles…only something's different. Yes, my paper is still due the next morning, but I'm more concerned with getting it right than getting it done. I know it will be graded, but that's almost a peripheral thought at this moment. I type a line, delete it, then write it again. I cut and paste it somewhere else. I realize in order to use that line I need to expand an explanation elsewhere, and I connect my thoughts. I revisit my source and check my understanding of the writer's argument. I see something I missed before, stifle a squeal, and experience that moment of joy when an idea finally becomes clear.

Man, I love this work.

Part 3: Shifting Identities

Almost ten years into my teaching career and wracked with feelings of shame and guilt for not having gotten better at my craft (as I perceived it, anyway), I did what any overachiever

does in search of validation/self-flagellation: I went back to school. I took a weeklong summer course about teaching nonfiction in K-12 schools that inspired my thinking and encouraged me to feel creative, ambitious and experimental with my teaching. I read Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels' text *Comprehension & Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action* (2009), a practitioner's text that invited classroom teachers to reconsider the ways in which they have their students work in groups, engage with the curriculum and complete their assignments. I left the course with a renewed sense of awe for learning and research, one that inspired me to feel confident and capable of doing important research driven by big questions. So I registered for a 700-level doctoral seminar the following fall, focused on research about reading comprehension.

I was so overwhelmed by the experience that I didn't go back for two years.

In retrospect, I should not have been surprised. I was essentially trying to undo years of learned behavior—I certainly couldn't expect to turn into an autonomous, critical, and inquisitive researcher in just three months and one graduate class. Instead, the change in my researcher-self happened slowly and subtly. There was not one concrete moment of epiphany, but rather a series of smaller experiences that helped me become a different learner and teacher. For example, in that first doctoral course I took, when I had to establish my own question for the term paper. Or later, when I wrote my first annotated bibliography and I realized the assignment was meant to further my thinking and research and not just be a product for grading. At some point, I began to understand that the work I was doing, and the manner in which I did it, was up to me. I was in control, and I was responsible for making most, if not all, of the decisions—what to research and write about, how to go about the research, how to choose my resources, and why I was writing about it in the first place. Finally, I had a more effective means of motivation for engaging in

research, something the compulsive, overachieving teenaged me never had—a true purpose for learning.

Motivation is both varied and complex; it is defined as the "process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996, p. 4). In other words, motivation is what gets students started and it is what keeps students going. As any teacher knows, the difficulty is twofold—how to pique students' interest so that they are willing to begin the work and how to help students stay motivated to see through the challenging work and overcome the inevitable obstacles. My experience has been that even when we create learning environments and assignments that meet the first part of the motivational process (instigation), we more often than not fail in our attempts to help students sustain that motivation past the initial phase (sustainment). Conversations in the faculty room might include teachers saying, "They're just never going to be interested in ____" or "They're always excited at first, but then it's always just about the grade…"

From my own experience as a developing researcher, I can relate to what I felt it meant to do research when I was a teen and how my students tell me they feel about it now. Sometimes I might have been enthusiastic at the start, perhaps excited by a really captivating hook. But it would not be long before the honeymoon wore off, and I/they would flounder as the work got real, tedious, and then, eventually, mechanical. What kept me going at that point was the desperate need for an A, so I focused my energies on producing what was necessary and expected, neglecting to consider what I was or wasn't learning.

This can be understood in terms of achievement goal theory, in which students are motivated by goals described as either learning goals or performance goals (Covington, 2000;

Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Covington explains "that learning goals favor deep-level, strategic-processing of information, which in turn leads to increased school achievement; and second, that performance goals trigger superficial, rote-level processing that exerts a stultifying influence on achievement" (2000, p. 175). I was motivated by the need to get an A, but my goals were performance-based and therefore my learning was characterized by the "stultifying influence" of superficial processing, rather than increasing my "competency, understanding, and appreciation for what [was] being learned" (p. 174). Covington also explains that students who adopt a learning-goal orientation instead of a performance-goal one have greater tendency to self-regulate and monitor their understanding, apply learning strategies effectively, and respond proactively to failure, seeing it as the result of using the wrong strategy rather than as a sign of incompetence (p. 175). In other words, students who built a habit of valuing learning over performance, and understanding over grades, were ultimately higher-achieving and more successful students in the long run.

Other theories of motivation that speak to this dichotomy between achievement and learning have to do with the expectancy value (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) and self-efficacy or self-determination (Bandura, 1989; Wigfield & Cambria, 2010). Students who attribute their achievement to beliefs about their own abilities or intelligence, without clear recognition of the learned skills and strategies as being more significant factors, aren't able to sustain their motivation when presented with challenges. When students feel confident in their abilities, they are better prepared to work through obstacles that would otherwise derail their less assured peers. Ultimately, students have to feel invested in the work

they do. They must value its significance, feel that it is relevant to them, and feel capable of completing that work with the appropriate supports.

This is the greatest difference between the work I do as a researcher now and the work I did as a student completing research assignments then. I have the autonomy, I believe in the significance of my study, and on more days than not, I have the confidence to believe I am capable of doing this work (admittedly, that has taken some time). I am motivated to do research, and because I am motivated, I have been receptive to learning more effective ways to engage in the act of research itself. This has sustained me during those times when I have encountered obstacles like those I watch my students stumble over. Whereas they are likely to throw up their hands in defeat, I have learned ways to confront those obstacles or to practice the perseverance to push through them. For example, I take for granted the endurance it takes to wade through database lists with hundreds of resources, and I know how to use more effective keyword searching and track my searches to find more fitting articles and manage my time more efficiently. I am willing to read widely and deeply, foregoing the compulsive desire to finalize my thesis statement too soon; my students, however, find the not-knowing of preliminary inquiry to be frustrating, even frightening. Even when the research I do is challenging, and especially when it's not fully fleshed out, I am motivated to push through those moments of frustration and uncomfortable uncertainty because I believe in my topic. My high school students are just as capable of developing these strategies. Literacy research reinforces what we know from motivation theory: that students need to do work that is relevant and personally meaningful, that they must have choice in what they read and produce, that they benefit from collaborating with their peers, and that they must have chances to be successful (Rush & Reynolds, 2014). When

students have this much control and choice in what they are researching and how they do it, then they will develop the perseverance they need to push through when it gets tough for them too, just as I did and just as I do now.

Conducting my own research, and then approaching the instruction of research, from an inquiry-based model has shifted my approach to this work, even before I was formally using the method. Envisioning research as inquiry allows for greater autonomy, choice, and identification as being of value and important to oneself. Such experiences motivate students and, therefore, improve students' literacy.

The power of inquiry-based learning lies in the roots of inquiry itself: beginning with a question (Buckner & Kim, 2013; Kulthau & Maniotes, 2009, 2013). Even now, fifteen years into the twenty-first century, we teachers routinely approach The Research Paper by assigning students a topic—and often the same topic. This backfires significantly, because students aren't being prompted to think critically and deeply about the subject matter; instead, they are told what to learn about and with strict expectations for how they will represent that information. And despite everything we practicing teachers know about instruction meant to guide critical thinking and skill development, there are still plenty of class-constructed thesis statements and group Harvard outlines around, setting students up for three weeks of going through the motions. Rather than invite students to pose their own questions and devise a procedure for searching, filtering, and selecting resources, we give them the topic and a fill-in-the-blank formula: "Your thesis should say…" and "Your outline must have…" Rather than ask students to engage in deep reading and perusal of texts first as a way to provoke their thinking and questioning, we tell students to finalize their thesis statements and then find their sources. Rather than prompt

students to consider the relevancy and credibility of sources they encounter, we do the thinking for them by telling them which and how many to use, and we reward them for how quickly they can "collect quotes." We offer them a student-proof template, a guide to success, a way to the A. And they do learn some things, like the mechanics of assembling a paper and pasting together smart-sounding sentences. But do they learn why we do any of this in the first place? Do we help them to understand and appreciate the value of engaging in inquiry, or in writing to better understand our thinking? All elements of motivation—control, interest, perceived value, expectancy of success—are missing from the assignment's design. And if the students aren't motivated, there is no reason for them to invest themselves in the process in the first place.

My graduate work challenged me to become a different researcher than I had been in the past. Next, I would have to reconcile my new researcher identity with my teacher identity. It was time to talk the talk *and* walk the walk.

"Do you always answer a question with a question?"

"What do you think?"

"Why won't you just tell me what to do?"

"Good question: why won't I?"

Part 4: Changing Practice

When I left one school district to come teach at my current school, I had to go through a new mentoring program which involved the completion of an action research project. This was before I enrolled in my Ph.D. program. Because it was a district initiative and part of a flailing program with little buy-in from the faculty, it suffered and didn't accomplish its goal of encouraging teachers to engage in research-based practice. Now that I think back to it, I wish I

had been more introspective during the process, because the type of work we were set to do is the very type of work I am recommending now. If schools were to adopt philosophies that allowed for and even encouraged teachers to genuinely engage in their own action research, then perhaps those teachers would get more out of their in-service and professional development opportunities. But just like the work I described above, it cannot be accomplished through a top-down approach; instead, it must become part of the school culture, and the only way to do that is for the participants of that culture to make that change.

In their seminal work *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge* (1993), Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle argued for the significance of teacher research as means of contributing to the academy's understanding of effective instruction. They revisit this work in their sequel *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next Generation* (2009), continuing a lifetime of advocating for the legitimacy of research done by practicing teachers. They categorize action research (as attempted in the mentoring plan described above) as falling under the larger umbrella of practitioner inquiry, and they acknowledge the often overlapping intentions between schools' use of professional learning communities (PLCs) and teacher research. However, Cochran-Smith and Lytle warn against the co-opting of teachers' inquiry experiences, noting schools who dictate the focus of PLC studies are more likely undermining the benefits of teachers collaborating in practitioner inquiry, "what should be the core emphasis of communities--improving the link between teachers' practice and their students learning by building trusting relationships and developing norms of shared problem solving" (2009, p. 56). In essence, what works for our students works for us as well. When I was expected to engage in action research as mandated from above, I did so perfunctorily. But when I engaged as a member

of a learning community (my doctoral program) that invited me into a shared culture of inquiry, I was inspired to participate.

During my studies, I began to look at my teaching practice differently. I would engage in a discussion about literacy and instructional strategy in an evening class, and I would talk about it and practice it with my students the next day. I would read studies about marginalized student populations' performance on standardized exams, and I would carefully consider how students' achievement in my classes could be impacted by their sociocultural and socioeconomic positioning. I began to experiment with ways of knowing, inviting my students into the process as I strove for opportunities to make my research applicable to our daily classroom work. Those opportunities came in small moments, such as entering into a text-based discussion using students' observations rather than a scripted study guide and, in big ones, when starting a new paper and asking students to design their own driving question. I paid close attention to my students' feedback in these moments and then chose to push them even further. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was engaged in real data-driven instruction: changing my teaching based upon real reflection (teacher inquiry) about what my students needed. And they needed to learn to think independently—to write without scripts, to question authority, and to push back against the confines of their academic identities.

In small, subtle ways, I began to change how I taught students to "do" research: to engage in inquiry and to write papers that resulted from those inquiries. We stopped "doing" the research paper; instead, research became part of any and every learning experience or writing task, even if in very small ways. For example, each time we approached an assignment, we worked to construct the purpose of the assignment together by questioning what we wanted to know, learn,

and accomplish with the written piece. Students practiced writing proposals and goal statements before and during the open inquiry stage, and they engaged in more reflective writing throughout the process, speaking to how they were researching, not just what. The process of assembling the paper became secondary to determining why we would engage in writing the paper in the first place. So, instead of writing essays that cited three articles of literary criticism (found only in the pre-selected reference texts from the library shelves and certainly not from the internet, thank you very much) to explain the themes of a given novel, instead we entered into our research by questioning the author's greater purpose for writing that novel, and we waited to come to our conclusions until we had done days and days of deep reading and discussion first. We stopped finding resources to fit our assumptions; instead, we let our understanding be formed through the true synthesis of those resources. Then, and only then, did we move from a place of inquiry into one of articulating a perspective. Instead of finding resources to support their topic and permanently scripted thesis statement, students learned to wait before committing themselves to their topics, arguments and final purposes until after they'd done more independent, deep reading and reflective writing or discussing with peers.

Again, to those of us engaged in university-level research, this might seem like nothing more than common sense, but I assure you, it is not. In fact, we have an entire pedagogy that sets up our students to do exactly the opposite. Why? Because when we let students ask the questions, instead of letting us teachers pose them, we are relinquishing our power and control over the entire process. They get to choose what to study, how to approach and then design their inquiry, and why they should do so in the first place. Doing research through an inquiry approach, then, becomes just as much about disrupting the pre-existing norms of power in the

classroom, as it is about conducting the actual research assignment in the first place. Ah, there's the rub!

"Yes!" someone exclaims from the back of the room. I look up from the table where I sit with a handful of students, as we pour over chart paper with barely legible words and arrows flung this way and that. A few students sit on the table itself; one student's body is sprawled out across the tabletop and the paper so she can reach a blank spot with her marker. I catch the librarian assistant's eye as she shakes her head and purses her lips, but I break contact before she can scold her (me). The student who yelled is standing up at his seat, pointing at the computer screen and motioning for those around him to look at what he has found. He beams with pride and his classmates slap him on the back. "That's perfect!" "Right? Just what we needed!"
I make a mental note to ask him about it later. But I don't interrupt or give him a grade; he doesn't need my approval.

Part 5: Teaching to Learn

As I shifted in my understanding of research and changed my practice, so did my students' change in their research habits. As I moved away from a more traditional notion of research and toward an inquiry stance, as experienced in my own graduate research, so was I able to shift my instruction and invite students to engage with research in ways resembling my doctoral work. This required me to allow my students to move away from the research process as I learned it in high school and toward the methods I adopted in graduate school. This meant my students had to think differently about the reasons and ways we do research, not just do it because I said so.

In order to do so, I sought out examples of instructional strategies that modeled the inquiry approach I was experiencing in my studies. At the exact same time, my school district became one of the first schools in the area to offer professional development training through the Buck Institute for Education (Markham, Larmer & Ravitz, 2003), which specialized in showing teachers how to implement project-based learning (PBL). My colleagues and I were exposed to this instructional design while I worked through my coursework on campus, giving me the perfect opportunity to witness theory become practice. I immediately embraced the method, recognizing its major tenets as being those similar to my own process: having choice in selecting the topic, starting with a driving question, engaging in sustained inquiry, producing work for an authentic audience and purpose, and so on (OCM BOCES, 2015).

As I progressed in my program, I discovered other frameworks for implementing an inquiry approach in my instruction. For example, Guided Inquiry Design (Kuhlthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2007, 2012; Kuhlthau, 2013) is a model for inquiry learning that requires three phases occur before students even come close to finalizing the focus for their research. These phases are "Open," in which students' curiosity is stimulated and they are inspired to know more; "Immerse," in which the students collaborate to build background knowledge and come up with ideas to investigate; and "Explore," in which students browse widely through sources of information and engage in reflective questioning (Kuhlthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2012, pp. 2-6). Only then are students able to enter the "Identify" phase, when they will "ask a meaningful inquiry question and form a focus...students are ready to identify an important question for their inquiry because of the time they have spent immersing and exploring to build enough background knowledge to ask many meaningful questions" (p. 4).

Then comes the "Gather," "Create," "Share," and "Evaluate" phases. This means that almost half of the process is focused on the work, or learning, before the research topic is finalized. That's a dramatic difference from the student-proof research packets I used to assign. In fact, Maniotes and Kuhlthau (2014) describe the guided inquiry design as being antidotal to what they say ails our research instruction: Traditional Research Syndrome (TRS).

And while TRS might sound scary, it persists in classrooms everywhere because, put simply, it is the devil we know. In her research documenting librarians and content-area teachers' use of inquiry-teaching and learning, Stripling (2008, 2012) notes that "all research is messy and recursive; inquiry is more so because no one knows the end. Even if students are inquiring about a topic that has been studied before, the new understandings that are gained are unique to those students and to the connections that they make" (2012, p. 51). I might suggest that it is this messy and unpredictable process that prevents many of us teachers from letting go of the control TRS provides.

None of this was easy. I expected students would be widely receptive to more freedom and self-direction in their work, and they thought so, too, but a resounding theme in student reflections was clear: as much as they wanted more autonomy, once they got it, they didn't know what to do with it, and that unnerved them. They were as dependent upon The Packet as I was! Students realized that their previous experiences in writing tightly scripted research papers (suffering from TRS) may have resulted in neatly organized and edited essays, but that they hadn't practiced directing the purpose or selecting and then synthesizing the most effective resources. I began to ask students to plan the entire process with me, inviting them to be contributors to my lesson planning and objective writing. Instead of giving them The Packet, I

began to ask them to ask the same questions with me: why are we doing this? What do we want to get out of this work? Who needs to know what we're learning, and why is this important? How will we share what we've learned? Asking such questions at the beginning and throughout the process meant for much messier use of classroom and library time. Students were at different places in their inquiry at different times, and they chose different methods for organizing their work and capturing their thinking.

My students began to speak about the research process the way I learned to do in graduate school. They still spoke to the frustrating process of following leads and sifting through sources, but they had a better understanding about why they were doing the work in the first place. And the more often we spoke about the process as being just as, if not more significant than, the final product, the more they were able to acknowledge that such frustration and subsequent troubleshooting was also important. One student told a colleague that in my class she learned how to think, and many students' reflective memos attached to their submitted work suggested the same.

In addition to these changes, there have been more practical and immediate applications of teaching students to approach research using an inquiry method. The new Common Core standards set different expectations for what students should be able to do in order to be "college and career ready" (CCSSO, 2010). The standards now ask that students "conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation" (CCSSO, 2010, p. 59). In literacy our focus has been to cultivate the "Six Shifts," those instructional moves that

would help teachers move toward instruction to meet those changed expectations, such as giving students more practice in writing text-based answers using evidence from sources. If teachers are to successfully implement such changes, they will need to be more open to instruction using inquiry learning methods (Ippolito & Zaller, 2013). In doing so, we must confront our conflicting context: the new standards push one way and our school cultures, whether or not we are ready to admit it, push in the other.

However, the most significant reason for adjusting instruction in this manner is for something that isn't really new at all: our commitment to helping students develop into lifelong learners. Even though I was interested in learning and committed to helping others learn, I did not really figure out how to do it myself until well into my adulthood. If we are willing to look critically at our own practice, I do not think our students will have to wait so long. In fact, given the changing nature of today's world and the demands being placed upon them, I do not think they can afford to.

I remember what it feels like, sitting in this classroom and feeling like I don't belong. I'm not ready, I don't know enough, I haven't practiced enough—they'll see right through me. They'll know me for the fraud that I am.

I will say this to my future students, those preservice teachers as they embark upon their first teaching assignment. I will remind them that they, too, are learners in the communities they create; they don't have to be the experts. They just need to have a question, a good idea, and a plan for inquiry. The students will follow, and they will learn. They will learn to learn—and that's better than any scripted curriculum.

Epilogue: Our Story

As a future teacher educator, I think about my next set of students—those people like me who find their way into teacher education programs, who come with a love for literature, a desire to learn, and a hope to inspire young people. I wonder how many of them will enter their programs with the same conflicting experiences I did, and I imagine my teaching will be informed by this same contradiction.

In thinking about what our teacher candidates should learn and practice, I am reminded of Linda Darling-Hammond's (2010) work in which she recommends a design for schools that are "communitarian" in nature—programs that encourage teachers to continually develop their practice as a community of learners, growing alongside their students. She notes that successful schools allow for greater amounts of planning time for teachers to collaborate with each other and engage in reading and research about their craft. She also explains that schools that recognize the place for faculty to come together and explore their own projects, much like in the design described above, foster a sense of inquiry about practice that instills a building culture of excellence.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle echo this call in *Inquiry as Stance*, addressing the pedagogical trend toward professional learning communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010) or "Communities of Inquiry," as they term it (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). However, both constructs can again be derailed by school cultures that seek to implement these structures in a top-down approach, designating PLCs to study high-stakes testing data rather than teacher-selected topics and inquiries. So it comes back to teaching by doing; if we want our students to engage in inquiry-based learning, then so must we. Teachers must act as models of research and

inquiry practice. When students see how we struggle with research and project direction, they share that experience and learn to see it as part of the process rather than failure. It is no longer sufficient to educate teachers in how to teach inside their classrooms and for their students. We teacher educators must answer these calls and prepare our teacher candidates for a school culture that is more inclusive, collaborative and creatively designed, or driven by inquiry.

So what does this mean for my future teacher candidates? I cannot rest at only helping them to prepare themselves for their role as teachers. I must also help them to prepare themselves to continually engage in learning alongside their own students and to see engaging in research as a crucial part of their teaching practice. I must create opportunities in their coursework for them to learn about and practice various forms of teacher research, to help them develop the desire to engage regularly in practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). And, above all, I must engage in continual inquiry in front of them and with them, so that I might model what it means to simultaneously be a learner, a teacher and a researcher.

As promised, there is no real ending to this narrative—at least, not yet. Although the hero (remember, that's me) has conquered some of her villains, there is still more to be done. The story is still being written. But just as we tell our students: in the end, the ending matters very little. What matters is what we have learned along the way.

References

Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 373-395. DOI: 10.1177/0891241605280449

Bandura, A. (1989). Regulation of cognitive processes through perceived self-efficacy. *Developmental Psychology, 25*(5), 729-735.

Buckner, E. & Kim, P. (2013). Integrating technology and pedagogy for inquiry-based learning: The Stanford Mobile Inquiry-based Learning Environment (SMILE). *Prospects, 44*(1), 99-118.

Camangian, P. (2010). Starting with self: Teaching autoethnography to foster critically caring literacies. *Research in the Teaching of English, 45*(2), 179-204.

Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2006). Borders, tensions and borderlands in narrative inquiry. *Handbook of narrative inquiry: mapping a methodology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). (2010). *New York State P-12 common core learning standards for English language arts & literacy*. Retrieved from: https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-p-12-common-core-learning-standards-for-english-language-arts-and-literacy[1]

Covington, M. V. (2000). Goal theory, motivation and achievement: An integrative review. *Annual Review of Psychology, 51,* 171-200.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Dufour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R. & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Bloomington, ID: Solution Tree Press.

Ellis, S., Adams, T. E. & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 12*(1). Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095[2]

Ippolito, J., Lawrence, J. F. & Zaller, C. (2013). *Adolescent literacy in the era of the common core: From research into practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Kuhlthau, C. C. (2013). Inquiry inspires original research. *School Library Monthly, 30*(2), 5-8.

Kuhlthau, C. C., Maniotes, L. K. & Caspari, A. K. (2007). *Guided inquiry: Learning in the 21st century*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Kuhlthau, C. C., Maniotes, L. K. & Caspari, A. K. (2012). *Guided inquiry design: A framework for inquiry in your school.* Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

Maniotes, L. K. & Kuhlthau, C. C. (2014). Making the shift: From traditional research assignments to guided inquiry learning. *Knowledge Quest, 43*(2), 8-17.

Markham, T., Larmer, J. & Ravitz, J. (2003). *Project-based learning: A guide to standards-focused project based learning for middle and high school teachers*. Novato, CA: Buck Institute for Education.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills, The. (n.d.). Framework for 21st century learning. Retrieved from: http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework[3]

Pintrich, P. R. & Schunk, D. H. (2002). *Motivation in education: Theory, research and applications.* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill.

Rush, L. S. & Reynolds, T. R. (2014). Literacy support in English/language arts classrooms:

Motivation, dialogue, and strategy instruction. In K. A. Hinchman & H. K. Sheridan-Thomas, (Eds.), *Best practices in adolescent literacy instruction,* 2nd Ed. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Schaafsma, D. & Vinz, R. (2011). *Narrative inquiry: Approaches to language and literacy research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Stripling, B. K. (2008). Inquiry through the eyes of classroom teachers. *School Library Monthly, 28*(8), 18-20.

Stripling, B. K. (2012). Inquiry: Inquiring minds want to know. *School Library Media Activities Monthly*, *25*(1), 50-52.

Wigfield, A. & Cambria, J. (2010). Students' achievement values, goal orientations, and interest: Definitions, development, and relations to achievement outcomes. *Developmental Review, 30,* 1-35.

Wigfield, A. & Eccles, J. S. (2000). Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25,* 68-81.

Author Bio: Sarah M. Fleming is a doctoral candidate in English Education at Syracuse University and a fifteen-year high school English teacher. Her research interests include inquiry learning, critical literacy critical pedagogy and practitioner inquiry. Sarah recently published her first research article in *English Education*, and she looks forward to her future career in teacher education.