

Unit Two Paper

When I read *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* it seemed that Vivian Paley was saying to me that the starting point for learning is children's interests and it is these interests that create student experiences which then become the building blocks for continued learning. These experiences influence what is yet to be learned. Past experiences open the doors to new experiences. This is exciting because we don't know where this will lead us. Teachers as a part of this learning process interact with the students and their perspective on the events unfolding before them in the classroom also acts as an influence on what is learned. As they work with and observe their students it is through their own eyes, their own perspective. These interactions between student and teacher are enhanced by teacher inquiry. The act of examining what has happened in the classroom as a part of preparing for the next day or the next week allows the teacher to respond to events in the classroom, to see opportunities for expanding upon a story, to make connections between old experiences and new experiences. As Paley herself said "I ask myself: Would I, could I have imagined such a curriculum were it not for Reeny's fixation on Frederick and my equally ardent identification with Tico?"

In *Must Teachers Also Be Writers?* Paley writes "...what we do, as we write, is continually demonstrate the process of searching for solutions as we ask ourselves the questions no one else will ask." Essentially she is making the argument that teacher inquiry through journal writing allows teachers to examine themselves and their teaching style to help them determine ways to improve, ways to connect to the students. It is a method that Paley strongly believes in because it is one that has helped her enormously in her career. Gene Cohen in the article *Creativity with aging: Four phases of potential in the second half of life* makes the case that the Vivian Paley we recognize today is the one that was created when Paley began making teacher inquiry a part of her daily life. This did not begin until she was in her forties.

Further support for the importance of teacher inquiry through journal writing again comes from Paley in *The Original Learning Tools* when she states when writing about children playing that "unless we write it down, analyze it, think about it, discuss it with each other, stretch it out as if it is a piece of academic wisdom that we are trying to interpret, we then will continue to think of it as childish and something that can be easily put aside, when the real business of schoolwork appears." While I agree that journal writing can achieve this end, I just am not convinced it is the only way to get there. Personally, I would not be comfortable with journal writing and would find other methods more helpful, such as, time for mediation and then using a tape recorder to state my thoughts. I just don't believe that 'one size fits all.' Paley, however, is emphatic that this goal of teacher inquiry can only be achieved through the process of journaling. She makes the following statement in both *Must Teachers Also Be Writers?* and *On Becoming a Language Educator*: "Only as we write down our thoughts and observations may we question and argue with ourselves about the things we do and say. Note: Question and argue with ourselves." I remain unconvinced that this is the only effective method of teacher inquiry, for example, it seems that much can be gained through working with peers to analyze methods. Paley herself discusses the events in her classroom with her assistant.

While I remain unconvinced that journal writing is the only true method for teacher inquiry I have realized that after reading *On Becoming a Language Educator* my thoughts about teacher inquiry have changed. Originally I thought that teacher inquiry was a teacher reviewing and analyzing their own actions to determine a better way to teach and also examining what happened in the classroom in order to be prepared for the next day. Yet, somehow these actions were independent of each other. I now find it is much more than that, while it includes a reflective analysis of one's self and the classroom and all the elements in it, it is also about the interconnectedness between student experiences and learning and teacher experiences and learning. As teachers guide students in their learning they also learn from their students and inquiry requires looking at these students as a source of knowledge that will guide the class. Student becomes teacher and teacher becomes student as the educative process unfolds and students and teachers 'climb the ladder' together.