Teacher Research in Teacher Education: Emancipatory Potential in Discouraging Times

Gretchen Schwarz

Baylor University

Brandi Ray

McLennan Community College

Abstract

In a time in which teachers and teacher educators live under constant disparagement, authentic teacher research has the potential to give teachers a voice in ongoing professional development as well as school improvement. Two teacher educators share their experience implementing teacher research among pre-service teachers, acknowledging pitfalls and successes. The current "state" of teacher research is described and benefits of teacher research summarized. Despite obstacles, teacher research can be transformational for teachers and their students, even emancipatory as teachers listen to their students and seek better ways of doing school.

Keywords: teacher research, teacher education, professional development

> *Every teacher has stories to tell. Every teacher has truths to share. Teachers can learn to see children in ways no one else can. Teachers can show us the ways students learn, and the reasons learning is sometimes hard. The research process can help teachers explore their decisions, find their own voices, tell their own stories. Through these stories based on disciplined, systematic research many teachers have spoken out and changed the way in which schools work.* (Patterson, Stansell, & Lee, 1990, pp. 1-2)

Although education did not figure in the 2016 American presidential election nor in national conversation since, and what have become the usual election-year crisis cries of low quality and demands for accountability and reform seem muted, the times are still not exactly encouraging for public school teachers in the United States. Teacher work is more intense than ever, the drop-out rate in the profession remains 30% to 50% in the first five years of teaching,

and the media seem uninterested in teacher narratives of success beyond the annual "teacher of the year" story. Even the best and most honored in the profession seem discouraged. Money (2015) reported how Nancie Atwell, winner of the $1 million Global Teacher Prize, declared in *Education Week* that the profession had become too "constrained" by curriculum mandates like the Common Core State Standards and the emphasis on standardized tests. Atwell, a role model for literacy educators worldwide, declared in fact that she would discourage "smart, creative" young people from becoming public school teachers now (Money, 2015). A growing number of teacher educators might well agree with Atwell. Teacher education itself remains under attack as quicker alternative ways of entering the profession, such as the controversial Teach for America, proliferate. Teacher education has also become victim of standardization as seen, for example, in CAEP (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) mandates. What to do? Throw in the towel? Ignore reality and march on? One possible answer is the inclusion of teacher research across teacher education. (The terms teacher, pedagogical, practitioner or action research or teacher inquiry are used here interchangeably although some would disagree. All refer to the teacher as the agent of his/her own research into school matters.)

Teacher research can trace its roots to John Dewey and his academic respect for teachers and the actual classroom. Apelgren, Burnard, and Cabaroglu (2015) capture the early history:

> Dewey is regarded as one of the founding fathers for what has developed into today's educational action research (especially through his emphasis on teachers' reflection and active and collaborative participation in school development work). This stance could be seen in the 1970s in Britain, where Stenhouse (1975) and Elliott (1981) conducted research and developmental work in schools together with teachers and teacher researchers with the aim of understanding and changing educational practice. Their work built on teachers' experiences in theorizing from their own practice—and aimed at transforming their contexts. (p. 5)

Hendricks (2009, 2006) also notes the influence of Kurt Lewin, the sociologist who first described action research and placed it in a democratic context which progressive educators also acknowledged (p. 6). This theoretical framework continued to grow and spread through the work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993/2009) and others and the growth of teacher research journals and networks as reported later in this article. Seeing teacher research as democratic practice, teacher research must then be **by, of, and for** the emerging professional, not teacher research hijacked for others' purposes. Unfortunately, teacher research or inquiry can be taken by the "powers that be" to reduce the autonomy, creativity, and effectiveness of bright, caring teachers. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) warned of this a decade ago, remarking that "school-based 'inquiry' can also be co-opted and turned into top-down, step-by-step processes," thus becoming a tactic for demanding that teachers study test scores and look for fast test fixes (p. 27). However, with care and intentionality, teacher research still has great potential, particularly in teacher education programs where it is not yet fully nor authentically included. Despite diverse dilemmas, authentic teacher research may empower new teachers in new ways in this neoliberal era of top-down mandates, of monitoring and discouraging and disrespecting teachers.

Prologue

Teacher research has historically grown from teachers' voices, often sharing learner voices and challenging the status quo including inequities in the system (Castle, 2006; Bean-

Folkes, 2011). It does not make claims for all students in all schools at all times but it can resonate with many other educators and stakeholders. Too often in the current political climate in the U.S., however, the "powers that be" (from national policymakers to local administrators) undermine the potential of authentic teacher researchers to create innovative curriculum and teaching methods based on hearing their own students in their own contexts. Teacher research should be a tool for teacher growth and independence as well as a tool for school improvement. Authentic teacher research remains a means of breaking out from conventional statistical educational research or "big data" to express the diverse and unique voices of real students and their teachers in specific times and places.

Teacher research is an undertaking that the authors of this piece have found invaluable, perhaps even more so in a time in which teacher voices are so completely dismissed by administrators and policy makers. For over 25 years, one of us has been involved with teacher research either through teaching graduate and undergraduate courses or through activities related to the National Writing Project. The other has developed a commitment to teacher research in a beginning career at the college level. The authors observed one class of pre-service teachers over a year (2013-2014), took notes, dialogued with each other, and interviewed several of the students after the course had ended. Following is the resulting teacher research story of a former doctoral student, now a college instructor, and a teacher education faculty member.

A Meaningful Journey (from the [then] Doctoral Student)

In the spring semester of 2013, I was asked if I would be willing to work with the senior secondary (high school and middle school) English Language Arts interns (student teachers). This would entail supervising 16 interns in their field experience and teaching a three-hour seminar each Friday all year. Our university requires that seniors in the school of education conduct an action research project in the placement setting and present their findings at the end of the year at the annual action research symposium. It is suggested that interns find a "wondering" from their classroom and then build their project around that. As noted by the professor that worked in this capacity before me, many times students wait until the last minute, causing their projects to be unproductive, meaningless, or even silly.

This bothered me. Why would a practice as important as teacher research be given so little regard? Why would something as meaningful as action research be something our students just got through at the last minute? I had taken many research classes during my doctoral coursework and one in particular had huge meaning for me – pedagogical research. In that class we studied how teacher research, or action research, pedagogical research, teacher inquiry (there are many names) and teacher lore all had the ability to be in the forefront of educational reform. I was a believer. I had been inspired by the words of Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998) when he said:

> …there is no such thing as teaching without research and research without teaching. One inhabits the body of the other. As I teach, I continue to search and re-search. I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself. I do research so as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what I discover (p. 35).

Freire's words had become my mantra during my doctoral journey, and I wanted my students, future teachers, to know and become passionate about their ability to positively impact the educational climate. This teacher research project was going to be the way to both complete a university requirement with meaning and show my pre-service teachers the impact that our profession still holds. In addition, to help my interns experience teacher research, the professor of that pedagogical research course was going to assist me in supervising the 16 interns.

Teacher research or inquiry can be defined as the "systematic, intentional study of one's own professional practice" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Teacher research requires reflection and often action to improve schools for all children and youth. Teachers need to take a critical look at what they are doing. All this said, our students needed to have these skills in order to be change agents in our stressful educational climate and to improve their own practice and sense of self-efficacy.

For us—students and professors—teacher research would be a process. A process of both selling/convincing them and of teaching/modeling for them. We began our work with our students through an introductory Power-point and then brought in examples of teacher lore. Because our students were being certified as secondary English Language Arts teachers, we felt they would connect to the various stories and examples. They did. They were intrigued by the stories, but questioned how this kind of narrative form could be connected to teacher research. Nevertheless, each student began to formulate his/her own story. From their stories grew revised stories. From their revised stories grew research questions. From their research questions grew a research plan. Each week these steps came about in an organic way.

Each week, we spent part of the seminar showing our students how teacher voice— theirs—had the potential to redefine what teaching was and how their students may be taught. We did not refuse any idea or wondering they had. We did not let practicality or political correctness limit their ideas. We let them question and challenge and then go and find out. Each week they shared their thoughts with the class. The seminar time had become a time of community and mutual respect. Questions arose such as "Does this story speak to you?" "What is missing from this story?" "What questions emerge for further research?" "What does your mentor teacher say?" From observing their own students in their school environment, to creating a research question, to collecting their data, and then to writing their reflections and recommendations, it was all real, related to their daily lives. Moreover, the center of most conversations was their own students. Interns cared about their charges. One intern in a relatively poor rural school researched ways his own students' voices could be heard more often. Another working in a middle school attempted to find out why young adult literature, so popular at that age, was not used in the school. The ideas and opinions of the secondary students mattered to the future teachers.

We were proud of the work the interns were doing, but mostly we were proud of the future professionals we were seeing emerge. Our pride was confirmed when during the spring semester Dr. William Schubert, co-author and editor of *Teacher Lore* (1993) was an invited speaker on campus and agreed to visit our Friday seminar. Each student was given five minutes to share with Dr. Schubert his or her research agenda. He encouraged them to publish their work, made suggestions, and challenged each one of them. It was powerful. We witnessed a new-found confidence and self-assuredness in each student. They got it. They understood that their searches and voices did matter. Indeed, when the final research presentations ended the year, our students

seemed pleased with the work they had done. One (the intern first quoted below) was invited to present her study on young adult literature at the school where she interned.

We continue to be in touch with these now-former students who have begun their professional lives, and we contacted several for their thoughts on the teacher research projects. In her internship, the following teacher was working in a "difficult" urban Texas school in which 69.5 % of the students were Hispanic and 23.7% African American. This school was in trouble with poor test scores, and the administration pushed various direct means to improve those scores.

> The rationale for my research stemmed from my observations and interactions with students who were below their reading levels. I believed that their lower reading levels were due in part to not having access to interesting, relevant literature. My goal was to show that young adult literature improves students' reading levels and abilities. (T. Kelm, personal communication, January 20, 2015)

In a school in which student and teacher voices were not considered, this intern found a way to demonstrate that student experiences and thoughts mattered. Students responded well to one young adult novel and they said so; they also learned the state objectives. The intern's final poster presentation included numerous direct quotes from students, showing their engagement. Another intern in a nearby small district with mixed demographics and 14.4 % of families below the poverty level (information available @ http://proximityone.com/tx_sdc.htm) examined a topic, extracurricular activities, that engaged both students and teachers. Of her experience with teacher research, the former intern commented:

> The action research project was the culmination of several months of research and observation at our respective placement schools for our intern year . . . I chose to observe the correlation between extracurricular activities and student performance and involvement in the classroom. In order to best collect information for my topic, I chose to obtain qualitative as well as quantitative data. I surveyed a wide variety of students and faculty alike, accounting for different ethnic groups, ages, and involvement level for students and recording the results… Though the information was simplistic in appearance, it proved to be more difficult to obtain… Through the process of my research, I think I learned more about my own teaching philosophy than I did about my chosen topic. The exceptions in my research simply affirmed what I hold to be true about students: a classroom contains a group of individuals, and individuals are more than statistics. Though we can speculate and research as educators, there will always be exceptions, and it is through these exceptions that we learn the most about our students. (K. May, personal communication, January 20, 2015)

Teacher research is not simply limited to data found in one particular classroom aimed at student outcomes. It is the living voice of teachers—and students—who wonder why things are the way they are, in their classrooms, in their schools, in their districts, in curriculum and teaching, and who seek to question and change the way things are for a different "redefined" future in which children are highly valued and well taught. The first intern quoted also said:

> The beauty about research is how much one learns throughout the process. Research intensified my internship experience; it brought meaning and purpose to what I was

doing. I had a mission and a goal, and this mentality is perfectly mimetic of the teaching profession. My research connected me not only to my students and mentor teacher but also to many others in the world of academia. I gained a sense of purpose during my internship, and I also learned the importance of research. Research is actively acknowledging the realm of immense possibilities and options in life. I have learned to always question, because my research revealed new ways for me to teach and to empower students and others around me. My research was the highlight of my internship experience (T. Kelm, personal communication, January 20, 2015).

Potholes in the Road (from the Tenured Faculty Member)

Our interns' experiences with authentic teacher research based on their own questions produced many worthwhile projects that allowed novice teachers to listen to their students and to model the research process for them. The story of our journey with teacher research did not end entirely happily, however. Early in the second, spring semester at a faculty meeting on the new CAEP (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Professionals @ http://caepnet.org/), formerly NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education), accreditation process, several faculty members decided that the secondary program would require all interns to work on the same single teacher research topic, by subject area at least. The topic would also have to be focused on student outcomes so we could collect "data" for the accreditation process. I was stunned. I have been guided by the work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) who identify teacher research with authentic inquiry emanating from the teacher. Fiorentini and Crecci (2015) in an interview with Cochran-Smith in 2012, quote her as saying, "To me, what makes it inquiry is that questions come from the practitioners, the teachers, instead of questions being imposed on them" (p. 12).

Even those new to teaching, novice teachers have real and important questions. Teacher research, as we understand it, is not meant to be "junior educational research" that merely instructs pre-service teachers in the steps of a typical (usually quantitative) research project. Nor should it be designed by the institution to gather numerical data. Teacher research is meant to teach new teachers, in particular, to stop, to study, to reflect, and to question their own practice and situations in the real world of classroom work. Teacher research is specific and personal, and contextual, and much more than an imposed academic exercise. Moreover, a key part of teacher research is that it is usually student-focused, capturing the voices of real individual students. Excellent examples of this reside in educational literature that reveals everyday life in the classroom, including Michie's (2009) *Holler if You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and his Students* and Shultz's (2008) *Spectacular Things Happen along the Way*.

Another attempt to dictate teacher research came, ironically, from the Office of Professional Practice, our oversight administrative branch of teacher education concerned with field placements, state certification, and CAEP, which required our students to turn in their teacher research proposals for approval. A number of ours were rejected—they did not fit the narrow mold. I had to plead that this was how teacher research worked in my 20+ years working with it in the area of literacy. We were given a dispensation. Unfortunately, it seems a year later that a committee (to which we were not invited) decided that all field supervisors would require the pre-service teachers to do a research project focused on student outcomes, probably tests of some kind. The committee also opposed pre-service teachers doing any study of program or school related issues, anything that extends beyond technical issues in their own single

classrooms, anything that would, in a meaningful way, question the status quo. Of course, study of classroom management and literacy strategies is worthwhile, but they are not the only kind of topic interns may or should choose. They may want to ask why another district can afford i-pads for every student while theirs can barely supply old textbooks. Or why all their professional development is oriented around improving test scores. Or how they can create a positive classroom climate in which each child can be heard. Of course, such issues can be politically tricky. In our university teacher/practitioner research had been co-opted for purposes other than the actual needs or interests of intern teachers or their students in our partner schools. The lesson our students might take away was clear, at least for the immediate future—what matters in the world of educational research is not actual teacher voices, nor children voices. Others decide what is significant.

What Teacher Research Can Do for Novice Teachers

As we experienced, on the other hand, teacher research can be empowering for preservice teachers, for a variety of reasons. Three stand out:

1) Teacher research can allow uncertainty back into the professional discourse.

2) Teacher research restores the ineluctable moral character of teaching.

3) Teacher research empowers teachers as autonomous professionals.

In the face of "scientific research" and the "best practices" discourse that carries certainty about outcomes, the truth remains—teaching is fraught with uncertainty. Ever since Dan Lortie's study *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (1974), uncertainty has been acknowledged as endemic to teaching. Every day is a little different as children and teachers are human, affected in school by multiple factors from what happened at home last night, to what a bully said or did today, to bad weather that made recess impossible. Biesta (2013) asserts "what many teachers know but are increasingly being prevented from talking about: that education always involves a *risk*" (p. 1). Students and teachers do not constitute an automated factory, or a computer program, despite current top-down mandates that seek the identical certain ends for all. Biesta (2015) declares as follows:

> The question of what it is we seek to achieve returns again and again as a very concrete question that needs to be answered in relation to concrete and, in a certain sense, always unique individual students, in concrete, and in a certain sense, unique situations. It is therefore a question that lies at the heart of teaching and what it means to be a teacher. (p.9)

Sherman (2013) advocates teacher education that promotes teacher responsiveness and declares:

> Responsiveness also defies certainty: responsive teachers know that ambiguity saturates their work and that teaching requires hundreds of decisions to be made every day—decisions that have an impact on the well-being of students . . . there is no formula. (p. 10).

Teacher research is itself an uncertain and risky process that does not offer sure answers; it is based on those individual students and unique situations and cannot be generalized, and

teachers should not feel, nor be made to feel "less than" because of this. In addition, teacher research may not always lead to sure actions. The young man who researched how to include student voices in school, in the authors' experience, never had time to implement what he found. What he found, moreover, was tentative at best—the ideas of a few teachers. As May (2015) said earlier, "individuals are more than statistics." Knowledge of teaching is complicated by the fact that the aims and purposes of what teachers do have to be constantly redefined as technology changes, and families alter, school policies shift, and teachers develop professionally and personally. The classroom does not hold still. In addition, what students may learn may not emerge until years later. Teacher research may result in teacher disappointment that a certain approach did not seem immediately useful or it may result in confusing, unclear results. Test scores may seem unmoving and absolute, but real students, teachers, and learning are much more uncertain than neoliberal policymakers acknowledge.

A second benefit of teacher research is that teacher research goes far towards reestablishing teaching as a moral activity, not merely an instrumental, neutral, technical endeavor. Techniques and skills are essential, of course. However, as Sherman (2013) relates, "And yet, a teacher's choice of techniques also has moral implications" (p. 6). Teacher research emerges from teacher ethical commitments. As Cochran-Smith (2003) said, "Teaching involves caring deeply about students as human beings and, at the same time, caring just as deeply that all students have rich opportunities to learn academically challenging material that will maximize their life chances" (p. 372). Thus, teacher researchers ask questions about how to improve their students' learning and their lives in school, as did the young teacher researcher who examined the relationship of the classroom and extracurricular activities. In addition, some questions are distinctly moral. Should students be kept in from recess because they need more help with reading? How can the teacher better involve parents who have themselves had bad experiences in school? Should the teacher raise a student's grade slightly so the student can play varsity soccer, the one thing that motivates him? How can the teacher researcher be sure not to sacrifice needed time with students when doing teacher research? Questions of what is good for children are unescapably moral questions, requiring teachers to decide on aims and goals for their students beyond the passing of the tests.

Teacher researcher Campano (2009) in *Inquiry as Stance*, even theorized that "teacher research involves a metatheoretical stance whose underlying ethical imperative is to respond to students in their full humanity and dignity and thus must be understood within the dynamism and life-world of the classroom" (p. 327). In the stories of teacher researchers shared previously, Kelm (2015) was moved by literature that students found interesting. Also, she declared that teacher research helped her gain "a sense of purpose" during the internship; she challenged the status quo in reading assignments to empower and engage her own students. Thus, teacher researchers must think beyond prescriptions handed down by others.

A third benefit, then, of teacher research is that it can strengthen novice teachers into autonomous professionals. Castle (2006) defines autonomy as "the ability to make intellectual and moral decisions by considering various perspectives and deciding based on what is the best interests of all" (p. 1096). Castle (2006) elaborates as follows:

Teacher research gives teachers the knowledge and confidence to act as responsible professionals… Autonomous teachers learn to make better teaching decisions by doing their own thinking about educational issues. Teachers who are not autonomous depend on

others to tell them what to do. This makes them susceptible to educational fads that come and go… Autonomous teachers know why they do what they do and can communicate that understanding to others. (p. 1096)

As important as specific research results, the teacher's self-knowledge and confidence matter greatly. As May (2015) declared of her teacher research experience during student teaching, "Through the process of my research, I think I learned more about my own teaching philosophy than I did about my chosen topic."

In the term used by narrative teacher research advocate Clandinin (1985), teacher researchers can achieve "personal practical knowledge," results that are immediately applicable to the classroom, and results that matter to the teacher as a person. This kind of knowledge may enable a teacher to say to a principal that "this works for me" and "this does not." Teacher research knowledge may enable teachers to challenge unfair school practices, modes of assessment that harm students, "teacher proof curriculum" that assumes students are blank slates, and teachers programmable machines. Autonomy means teachers who work for authentic classroom change, not just the fad of the day. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) put it this way:

That practitioners across the country continue to raise and organize around pertinent (and impertinent) questions—questions of curiosity, critique, and passion for their students' access to meaningful learning experiences—testifies to their individual and collective commitment to *living* an inquiry stance on practice… (p. 156).

Of course, for teacher research to be a living tradition into which teacher educators apprentice preservice teachers, authentic teacher research must exist outside teacher education programs, too.

Not Dead Yet

Despite CAEP, NCLB, Race to the Top, and the movement for school vouchers, signs of life for authentic public-school teacher research still exist. The National Writing Project (based on the "teachers teaching teachers" model of professional development) offers a Teacher Inquiry Communities Network (2015) that links teacher researchers and resources. Genuine teacher research remains strong among literacy educators. Other communities exist as well as journals that value teacher research such as *Voices of Practitioners* from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org/publications/vop). Various universities and educational organizations continue to support authentic teacher research. The teacher research website of George Mason University (2015), for example, advocates the role of the teacher researcher as a "subjective insider." Moreover, practitioner research is appearing in other fields such as nursing, social work, and counseling. One has only to check the databases to find many articles from these fields.

Hopeful articles still appear across the educational literature, as well. Willegems, Consuegra, Struyven, and Engels (2017) reported the positive effect of collaboration (with in-service teachers and others) on pre-service teacher research, and Taylor (2017) discussed the importance of the teacher identity of teachers *as* researchers among inservice teachers in a graduate course. *The Educational Forum* (2016) devoted an entire issue to "teaching and learning teacher research." One study, "Learning to Take an Inquiry Stance in teacher research: An exploration of unstructured thought-partner spaces" by Lawton-Sticklor and Bodamer is

reported as a two-person narrative, like this article. Much of their work took place in unstructured conversations.

Reports are coming from across the world, as well. Sharma (2016) described the role of teacher research in India teacher education where colonialism had contributed to the low status of teachers. Sharma (2016) summarized:

> An engagement with action research is necessary because this provides the student-teachers with the opportunity to reflect upon themselves, learn to examine their own conceptions of knowledge and …. It is contended that it is important to give agency to educators so that they do not remain the object of often misguided educational reform, but get the due recognition and status they deserve as well as the capacity to affect the policy debate. (p. 59).

Likewise, Suarez (2017) described collaborative narrative forms of teacher inquiry in Argentina and Chile produced through the Narrative Documentation of Pedagogical Experiences, the goal of which is "the democratization of professional development, educational research, and ultimately, public schooling" (p. 474). Esau (2013) also analyzed the potential for teacher research to educate pre-service teachers to "become more critically reflective and socially conscious" in South Africa (p. 1). Apelgren, Burnard, and Cabaroglu (2015) described theory and teacher research practices across cultural settings from Cyprus to Sweden and Turkey. They declared that "teacher research relates to the complex and sophisticated world of teaching and learning. It concerns power relations, structural and policy issues, but most of all it involves the core of teaching and learning: the student, the teacher and the learning" (p. 9).

One of the most encouraging pieces on teacher research came from Ravitch (2014) who discussed teacher research within the setting of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. She discussed the "counter-hegemonic potential" of "practice-based narratives" (p. 4). She added:

> And, from my experience, that is where the hope is: in the stories, data, and in the evidence that emerges from a more relational, contextualized, collaborative, and practice-centered kind of research—not the top down kind of research that is being forced upon many of us—but, rather, the kind that emerges from knowing and caring about people in a setting, the kind that emerges when practitioners take seriously the responsibility to collaborate with, care for, support, and empower ourselves, our colleagues, and our constituencies. (p. 6).

Teachers in the schools can continue to challenge rote learning, time devoted to test prep, and the inequities of poverty and language. The "real thing" is captured well by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) who declared as follows:

> . . . at the heart of practitioner research is problematizing the ends question. Practitioner researchers question the fundamental goals of teaching, learning, and schooling: What purposes—besides academic achievement as indicated by test scores—are important in schools? What about teaching toward the democratic ideal, deliberation and debate, and challenging inequities? Practitioner researchers also raise questions about power and authority… (p. 9)

Cochran-Smith and the Boston College School of Education seem to value actively the role of teacher research at all levels. The work and voices of children, especially those who have been marginalized, of college students and in-service teachers do register as the statements and projects on the Boston College website show (https://www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/research-outreach.html). Teacher research is, however, not easy.

Ongoing Dilemmas

In addition to the danger of administrators, policy makers, and university committees of various kinds hijacking teacher research by changing its original meaning for their own purposes, time and support and ongoing disrespect for teacher research, especially from the "heights" of educational researchers in the university, are problematic. Even in teacher education programs, finding time and support for novice teacher researchers can be hard. Many teacher education programs, like teaching itself, have been intensified, requiring more and more of students, especially in required paperwork. Teacher researchers need dedicated time to work, they need the support of the schools in which they work and the support of their mentor teachers with whom they work, and they may even need access to concrete resources to conduct their studies. Teacher educators must themselves become knowledgeable about and supportive of teacher research. Furthermore, many Pk-12 school leaders do not want anyone asking uncomfortable questions or challenging the panacea of the week; teacher research for preservice teachers may be too risky for some emerging teachers seeking certification and jobs. However, the benefits in inculcating a sense of teaching as an uncertain and moral profession open to the future, and the benefits in educating future teachers as self-propelled professionals who ask why and think for themselves is well worth the investment of time, effort, and resources in teacher education programs.

Conclusion

The impact of top-down mandates has been significant, forcing schools and teacher education programs to use outcome-based models of education (Beyer, 2002; Bullough, Clark, & Patterson, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2001) and "research-based" practices. But whose research counts? (Sherman, 2013, p. 62)

Authentic teacher research is one means, not the only means, of "talking back" to the demeaning and discouraging voices that dismiss teachers in public schools today. In the face of neoliberal efforts to co-opt teacher research and in the face of other obstacles, the emancipatory power of teacher research needs to begin in teacher education, As Kelm (2015) said about her teacher research experience in teacher education, "I have learned to always question, because my research revealed new ways for me to teach and to empower students and others around me." Teacher research can be the informative and altering kind of research that makes a difference in the real world because it reveals the daily details, conversations, activities, triumphs and frustrations—the uncertain human reality of teachers' lives with children in American schools.

References

Apelgren, B., Burnard, P, & Cabaroglu, N. (2015). Theory-use in teacher research. In P. Burnard, B. Apelgren, & N. Cabaroglu, (Eds.) *Transformative teacher research* (pp. 3-12). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Bean-Folkes, J. (2011). The "why" behind teacher research. *Childhood Education 87* (5), 357-360.

Biesta, G. J. J. (2013). *The beautiful risk of education*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Biesta, G. (2015). How does a competent teacher become a good teacher? On judgement, wisdom, and virtuosity in teaching and teacher education. In R. Heilbronn & L. Foreman-Peck, Eds. *Philosophical perspectives on teacher education* (pp. 3-22). Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.

Boston College @ https://www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/research-outreach.html

Campano, G. (2009). Teacher research as a collective struggle for humanization. In M. Cochran-Smith & S. Lylte (Eds.), *Inquiry as stance* (pp. 326-341). New York: Teachers College.

Castle, K. (2006). Autonomy through pedagogical research. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*, 1094-1103.

Clandinin, J. (1985). Personal practical knowledge: A study of teachers' classroom images. *Curriculum Inquiry, 15* (4), 361-385.

Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation. *CAEP Accreditation Manual* (draft) (2015) https://caepnet.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/caep-accreditation-manual.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2003). Sometimes it's *not* about the money: Teaching and heart. *Journal of Teacher Education, 54* (5), 371-375.

Cochran-Smith, M,. & Lytle, S. L. (1993). *Inside/outside. Teacher research and knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009*). Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Esau, O. (2013). Preparing pre-service teachers as emancipatory and participatory action researchers in a teacher education programme. *South African Journal of Education, 33* (4), 1-10.

Fiorentini, D., & Crecci, V. M. (2015). Dialogues with Marilyn Cochran-Smith. *The Clearing House, 88* (1), 9-14.

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

George Mason University Teacher Research Site @ http://gse.gmu.edu/research/tr/tr-definition

Hendricks, C. (2009, 2006). *Improving schools through action research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Lawton-Sticklor, N., & Bodamer, S. F. (2016). Learning to take an inquiry stance in teacher research: An exploration of unstructured thought-partner spaces. *The Educational Forum, 80* (4), 394-406.

Lortie, D. (1974). *Schoolteacher: A sociological Study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Michie, G. (1999). *Holler if you hear me: The education of a teacher and his students*. New York: Teachers College.

Money, J. (2015, April 9). Teachers push back on criticism of their profession. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2015/04/teachers-push-back-on-criticism-of-their-profession.html

National Writing Project. (2015). Teacher Inquiry Communities Network. http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/programs/tic?x-t=about.view&x-print_friendly=1

Patterson, L., Stansell, J. C., & Lee, S. (1990). *Teacher research*. Katohnah, New York: Richard C. Owen.

Ravitch, D. (2014). The transformative power of taking an inquiry stance on practice: Practitioner research as narrative and counter-narrative. *Perspectives on Urban Education, 11* (1), 5-10.

Sharma, S. (2016). Action research: A pedagogic tool to prepare reflective practitioners. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences: Annual Review, 10*, 51-61.

Sherman, S. S. (2013). *Teacher preparation as an inspirational practice*. New York: Routledge.

Schubert, W. H. & Ayers, W. C. (Eds.). (1993). *Teacher lore: Learning from our own experience*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Schultz, B. D. (2008). *Spectacular things happen along the way*. New York: Teachers College.

Suarez, D. H. (2017). The narrative documentation of pedagogical experiences and the democratization of professional development and schooling in Argentine. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30* (5), 474-487.

Taylor, L. A. (2016). How teachers become teacher researchers: Narrative as a tool for teacher identity construction. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 61*, 16-25.

Willegems, V., Consuegra, E., Struyven, K, & Engels, N, (2017). Teachers and pre-service teachers as partners in collaborative teacher research: A systematic literature review. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 64*, 230-245.

About the Authors

Gretchen Schwarz, Professor, Curriculum & Instruction, Baylor University. Schwarz, now a retired professor, taught high school English and German. Research interests include teacher research, media literacy, and graphic novels.

Dr. Brandi R. Ray is the Community Programs Coordinator, Continuing Education at *McLennan Community College.*