A Teacher's Perceptions of Inquiry: Where Inquiry Experiences, Beliefs and Practice Intersect

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A TEACHER’S PERCEPTIONS OF INQUIRY:
WHERE INQUIRY EXPERIENCES, BELIEFS AND PRACTICE INTERSECT

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my best friend and forever love, Dr. Robert Vanderburg.

Cube ya!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The biggest blessing as a result of my family’s move across the country has been my ability to enter the Language and Literacy program at the University of South Carolina. My colleagues and professors have been so supportive during this journey. The collaborative experiences I have had during this program have further ingrained my love of learning.

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ABSTRACT

Linda Darling-Hammond (2008), a member of President Obama’s education transition team, published a collection of chapters, each written by prominent researchers in the field of education. Throughout this compilation, the idea of using inquiry in the classroom was heralded again and again. Darling-Hammond argued for the “implementation of inquiry-based curriculum that engages children in extended, constructive work, often in collaborative groups, and subsequently demands a good deal of self-regulated inquiry” (p. 13). Significant in Darling-Hammond’s message was that educators need to provide students with experiences that allow them to become inquirers who can construct their own knowledge. However, while the professional literature provides many examples of inquiry in action in classrooms, there has been less written on teachers who adopt an inquiry stance. By focusing on the beliefs and practices of a veteran teacher, this study fills a gap in the existing literature and has implications for pre- and in-service teacher educations as well as teacher educators.

Through the use of qualitative research methods (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 2008), life story interview methods (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Rossman & Rallis, 2003), and interview data analysis (Spradley, 1979), the purpose of this study was to understand the life experiences, beliefs, and practices of an educator, Kathryn Mitchell Pierce, who embraces inquiry in her classroom and beyond.

Kathryn’s story and her beliefs about inquiry have deepened and broadened my understandings of what it means to live a life of inquiry. Her story brings to light the
belief that inquiry is not a series of steps that a teacher follows in the classroom. Rather it is a way of being, a way of living a life. To Kathryn, living the life of an inquirer means being reflective of her actions in both her personal life and her classroom, being open to continuous learning, and constantly seeking opportunities to learn with others.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago I was introduced to the Center for Inquiry, an elementary magnet school in South Carolina that successfully uses an inquiry approach to teaching and learning which is typified by student-centered, question-driven, exploratory classrooms. The culture of learning and the feel that this inquiry school portrayed was palpable. In a first grade classroom, I heard students talk about authors they had studied. They discussed the different authors’ styles of writing and questioned why the authors wrote the way they did, having discussions about the authors’ use of punctuation and word choice. The first graders had been together the previous year, and they were able to reflect back on their shared experiences with authors from the past year and a half. In a third grade classroom, I walked in during a writing workshop time. Some students were sitting at tables writing in their writer’s notebooks. Some students were working in pairs to critique each other’s writing. Some students were reading, and when I asked them what they were reading, they told me they were reading good authors to get ideas for their own writing. Sitting in a large circle on the floor, a fifth grade class had a whole group discussion and were analyzing the short story they had just read. The story was about a young Native American. The students were questioning whether the author had accurately portrayed this culture. They made connections to the history content they had studied by talking about the historical context of the story, and they talked about other authors they had read and the various perspectives on Native American culture. Each
classroom I walked into was filled with student work and there was evidence of both literacy and content area inquiries.

After my initial visit, I began to read more about using inquiry methods and discovered how these approaches can help students become life-long learners. I read the professional literature written about the Center for Inquiry (Mills, O’Keefe & Stephens, 1992; Mills & Donnelly, 2001; Mills, O’Keefe & Jennings, 2004) and visited the school a second time. Through my readings and observations, I noticed some of the school structures that were set up. For example, students stayed together with a teacher for two years. This helped to build a closer classroom community where teacher and students could really get to know each other as learners. The whole school met with each other at the beginning and the end of each week to talk about what had happened in their classrooms during the week, which helped to build the whole school community. I learned that teachers met regularly to engage in curricular conversations and to share teaching beliefs and practices which helped to build their professional development. They realized that their vision of guiding students to learn through language (Halliday, 1975) and inquiry is an on-going process, so they continued their own inquiry about inquiry as they met regularly.

A defining moment during my own exploration and inquiry about inquiry occurred when I taught a literacy course to K-12 content area teachers, and I realized how important a teacher’s belief system was. I had set up the classroom for us to have discussions where we talked about and inquired about each other’s beliefs and practices. During our fourth day together, one of the teachers said that she felt like she was in a philosophy course because we were having so many discussions on what our beliefs
about literacy were. Her reflection on these philosophical discussions made me reflect on
the importance of a teacher’s belief systems. I believe that teaching is more than using
particular strategies and activities in the classroom. It is important for teachers to
understand their beliefs of education in order to understand the whys behind the strategies
they use.

Thinking about my observations at the Center for Inquiry and my reflections from
my own teaching, I began to wonder about the philosophical beliefs of the teachers at this
school. What types of beliefs did they have about teaching and learning that informed
their decisions on using inquiry methods in the classrooms? What experiences did they
have with their students and their colleagues that helped to form these belief systems?

As I started to read more of the professional literature and research, I came across
a growing body of research that used life-history methodologies to learn about how
teachers’ belief systems were forged through life experiences. Life histories in education
often focus on teachers' beliefs and experiences in different areas of the professional and
personal lives, curriculum development, and/or pedagogical practices, and they all focus
on a first-person accounting of a life. I became interested in using this methodology to
see if there was a connection between the life experiences of teachers and their use of
inquiry methods in the classroom.

I decided that one way to learn was to turn to an experienced teacher who
embraced inquiry. By learning about the life experiences of an experienced teacher and
learning about his/her belief systems, I hoped to have a better understanding of how s/he
lives and learns and to be able to show others the value of inquiry-based teaching. To
guide my thoughts and purpose for my study, I created the following research questions:
• What life experiences helped the teacher shape his/her teaching philosophies?
• What are the beliefs of a teacher that underlie his/her instructional decisions to use inquiry methods in his/her classroom?

**Review of Literature**

While reviewing the current professional literature, I focused on literature in four areas:

• The use of inquiry in classrooms and schools
• The belief systems of teachers
• Life history research on teachers
• The belief systems of teachers who adopt an inquiry stance

**The use of inquiry in classrooms and schools.** Inquiry methods have been explored in the different core content areas, mathematics, history, English Language Arts, and science. However, the majority of the professional literature on inquiry discusses using inquiry methods in science. Most of the published writing described inquiry lessons and activities to teach science content (e.g., Kahl, Horwitz, Berg, & Gruhl, 2004; Rop, 2010; Ross, Skinner, & Fillippino, 2005). For example, Kahl, Horwitz, Berg, & Gruhl (2004) shared two webquests that would be appropriate for middle/high school student groups to work together to study weather patterns and identify the best weather forecast source. Another example of a science-based inquiry project is written by Ross, Skinner, & Fillippino (2005) who described a project where, after reading *Chameleons on Location* (Darling, 1997), elementary students studied animal adaptations, reconstructed an original organism, and create a rain forest museum.
While most of the professional literature on inquiry-based science includes descriptions of the lessons, there is also published research exploring the effectiveness of these methods (e.g., Hapgood, Magnusson, & Palincsar, 2004; Herrenkohl, Tasker, & White, 2011; Kawasaki, Herrenkohl, & Yeary, 2004; Metz, 2004). For instance, Hapgood, Magnusson, & Panlincsar (2004) presented a case study of an elementary classroom engagement on motion and inclined planes. The researchers sought to understand how primary grade students develop their “conceptual understanding and scientific reasoning” (p. 457). After analyzing data sources such as videotapes, class-generated artifacts, pre/post assessments and student notebook entries, the authors confirmed their beliefs that “primary-grade children are capable of experiencing fundamental aspects of scientific inquiry” (p. 495) and that effective teacher mediation and properly designed texts play a role in developing students’ inquiry skills.

Although there are fewer pieces found in the professional literature on the use of inquiry outside of science, some can be found on the use of inquiry in mathematics (e.g., Whitin & Whitin, 2009; Marshall & Horton, 2011), social studies (e.g., Martin, 2007; O’Brien & White, 2006; Ohn & Wade, 2009; Woelders, 2007), and language arts (e.g., Lewison & Hefferman, 2009; Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996; Short, et al., 1996; Whitney, et al., 2008). The majority of the literature found is either descriptions of inquiry engagements that can be implemented in the different content areas or arguments for the use of inquiry. For example, O’Brien & White (2006) addressed how using an inquiry approach with social studies curriculum where middle school students could “investigate historical and geographic problems through engagement” (p. 11) fulfills social studies
curricular standards and helps students “understand their own place in historical time by understanding the stories of people in the past” (p. 15).

Some research studies can be found investigating and sharing results of the use of inquiry in the mathematics, social studies and language arts content areas. Marshall & Horton (2011), for instance, observed 102 middle school mathematics and science classrooms where students were given time to explore new concepts before the teachers explained the new concepts. Through both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the researchers found that “as the number of intervals spent on explorations increased, so too did the number of intervals that students were engaged in learning that involved higher-order Cognitive Levels [apply, analyze/evaluate, create]” (p. 97-98). They also found that when teachers explained concepts, students used lower cognitive levels (receipt of knowledge, recall, remember, understand).

The majority of the professional literature discusses inquiry in individual classrooms (e.g. Mills, O’Keefe, & Stephens, 1992; Mills, O’Keefe, & Jennings, 2004). For example, a look at a first grade classroom (Mills, O’Keefe, & Stephens, 1992), as well as a second and third grade classroom (Mills, O’Keefe, & Jennings, 2004) at the Center for Inquiry shows the effectiveness of using inquiry based methods to develop students’ literacy and content area knowledge. However, there has been some research and discussion on using inquiry based methods in whole school settings. The Center for Inquiry in South Carolina is one such example. In From the Ground Up (Mills & Donnelly, 2001) we learn how a group of educators, which includes teachers, a university and a public school district, worked together to create an elementary school with a culture of inquiry. This book is a culmination of various perspectives of key team members from
the Center for Inquiry, each telling a part of the story of how this school has been successful using an inquiry approach to teaching, school community, parent involvement, and professional development. For instance, one teacher shared examples of what happened in her classroom throughout the year which illustrated how “inquiry pervaded each day” (p. 57). Readers also learn how teachers worked toward giving their students a voice through curricular conversations and research, how community was established when both the teacher’s and students’ wonderings were shared, and how ultimately the school community and families learned to live inquiry.

Another example in the professional literature of an inquiry-based school which allows students to explore their own questions and which fosters life-long learners can be found with Deborah Meier’s (1995) description of the Central Park East (CPE) Schools in New York. While discussing the framework behind the CPE Secondary School, Meier talked about what an ideal school might look like:

> A good school for anyone is a little like kindergarten and a little like a good post-graduate program – the two ends of the educational spectrum, at which we understand that we cannot treat any two human beings identically, but must take into account their special interests and styles even as we hold all to high and rigorous standards. (p. 48-49)

The teachers at CPE used the ideas described here as a goal for how they set up their classrooms and school, which was to support students in their individual inquiries.

The Central Park East Secondary school (CPESS) opened after the success of Central Park East Elementary school. Students enter CPESS in 7th grade. Understanding the need to create smaller communities where individual students can get more one-one-one attention and that adolescents have different needs during different stages, CPESS is divided into three divisions:
Division I is the equivalent of grades 7 and 8, and Division II consists of grades 9 and 10. Students remain in the last division, called the Senior Institute, as long as they need to get a diploma and be prepared for the next step in their lives. (Meier, 1995, p. 54)

Within the divisions, grade level lines are blurred and the number of students is approximately 150. Each division is divided again into two groups of 75 to 80 students with four core teachers. Each teacher sees approximately 40 students, 15 of whom are in an extra class that acts like as a period for advisory, study hall, and seminar. With smaller groups, teachers and students can more effectively create a connectedness and teachers focus on teaching students to be lifelong learners.

When dealing with curriculum, teachers at CPESS have made it their goal not to make sure they are teaching specific content, but rather that they teach their students how to be learners in the different content areas. For example, they give students opportunities to experience the scientific method of inquiry in order to understand how scientists arrive at their truths. Teachers also allow students to inquire about their individual interests, creating the type of school that melds the kindergarten and post-graduate classrooms. By focusing on guiding their students to think about the learning process in the different content areas, the teachers at CPESS are helping their students figure out how to learn in the different situations they will encounter in their lives after school.

**The belief systems of teachers.** The belief system of teachers has been of interest to educational researchers. For example, studies can be found on how pre-service teachers’ beliefs impact their attitude towards teaching (e.g., Britzman, 1991; Chan & Elliot, 2004; Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Pre-service teacher studies also include discussions on pre-service teachers’ perceptions on Gifted Education (e.g., Bangel,
Moon, & Capobianco, 2010), the arts (e.g., Berg & Miksza, 2010; Campbell & Thompson, 2001), diversity (e.g., Kyles & Olafson, 2008), and curriculum (e.g., Kim, Andrews, & Carr, 2004).

Studies on the beliefs of teachers also discuss the types of factors that influence how teachers form their beliefs (e.g., Barnyak & Paquette, 2010; Mansour, 2009). Barnyak and Paquette (2010), for example, sought to understand the beliefs of elementary pre-service teachers’ on reading instruction and if college courses on literacy methods impacted their beliefs. The study analyzed a pre-course/post-course survey given to pre-service teachers at two universities. Quantitative analysis of the survey results discussed pre-service teachers’ beliefs in areas such as providing children with meaningful literature experiences, phonics experiences, word analysis, and skill instruction.

Researchers have also focused on studying how teachers’ beliefs align with their instructional practices (e.g., Bolden & Newton, 2008; Cross, 2009; Fitzgerald, Dawson, & Hackling, 2009; Roehrig, etal., 2009; Theriot & Tice, 2009). Bolden and Newton (2008), for example, showed how primary school teachers in the United Kingdom (UK) desired to align their classroom practices with their beliefs. However, teachers sometimes found themselves confronted with barriers to do so because of requirements of the UK National Curriculum. Cross (2009) explored how the beliefs of five high school algebra teachers and their understandings of the nature of mathematics influenced how the teachers planned their instructional activities. In a case study, Theriot and Tice (2009) discovered the types of factors, such as collaboration with peers, district workshops, student behavior, and classroom management that had an impact on how one teacher implemented his beliefs in daily instruction.
Life history research on teachers. While reading through the professional literature and research on teacher belief systems, I found a growing body of literature that used life-history methodology. These studies focused on learning more about the life histories of teachers in order to understand how teachers’ lives outside of the classroom intersected with their teaching beliefs and classroom practices (e.g., Bullough, 1989; Bullough & Baughman 1997; Day & Gu, 2007; Frost, 2010; Gomez, Rodriguez, & Agosto, 2008; Goodson & Choi, 2008; Halai, 2011; Horne & McBeth, 1998; Johnson, 2007; Kirk & Wall, 2010; McNay, 2001; Muchmore, 2001; Polettini, 2000; Smith, 2005; Upadhyay, Barton, & Zahur, 2005; Woods, 1993). Johnson (2007), for example, used life history methods to learn “how pre-service teachers have come to understand what teaching for equity and social justice means, particularly as they are learning to teach literacy” (p. 299). She described how a theme of alienation came out of the analysis of one pre-service teacher’s interview data and how the experiences of alienation led the pre-service teacher to develop “her belief in helping students build cross-cultural relationships within and beyond the classroom” (p. 311). Another study (Drake, 2006) discussed the life story data that focused on early mathematics experiences of twenty elementary teachers. The researcher discussed how a group of the teachers had viewed themselves as failures in mathematics, then experienced a turning-point experience that led them to think positively about themselves as learners and teachers of mathematics.

Within these studies, the researchers focused on different topics to explore with the life history data, such as activism and social equity (Johnson, 2007; Loder-Jackson, 2011), second career teachers (McNay, 2001), and the teachers’ beliefs and practices in a particular content area (e.g., music: Baker, 2005; Science: Halai, 2011; Smith, 2005;
Upadhyay, Barton, & Zahur, 2005; physical education: Cazers, 2009; Thorbum, 2011). Baker (2005), for instance, analyzed life history data from 28 instrumental and vocal teachers between the ages of 22 and 60 years. He discovered trends in the way the music teachers perceived their teaching and careers, and divided the teachers into different age groups: “age 21–25 (Phase 1), age 26–35 (Phase 2), age 36–42 (Phase 3), age 43–53 (Phase 4), and 54 years and beyond (Phase 5)” (p. 265). The researcher discussed implications gained from each age group. For example, the Phase 2 group had more confidence in their teaching, but spoke of isolation from the schools they were servicing. The music teachers each serviced more than one school. The analysis suggests including the music teachers during training and curriculum planning with the classroom teachers at the schools.

Other researchers wrote about the use of life history research methodologies in education (e.g., Bullough, 2008; Goodson & Choi, 2008; Kelchtermans, 2008; Kridel, 1998; Menard-Warwick, 2011; Muchmore, 1999; Sleeter, 2008). Bullough (2008), for example, discussed some of the life-history research that has influenced him, shares some insights into conducting this type of research, and talks about how even though research on teachers’ lives has begun to expand, this type of research is still “fringe” (p. 11). He also concluded that in the current political atmosphere when teachers are under attack, “as we research teachers’ lives there may be no more important task before us than championing the cause of teachers and making clear the ineluctable connection between their well-being and the well-being of children” (p. 23).

**The belief systems of teachers who adopt an inquiry stance.** As I looked at the professional literature, I noticed that the majority of the professional literature on inquiry
is focused at the elementary level or focused on the science and mathematics content areas (e.g., Kahl, Horwitz, Berg, & Gruhl, 2004; Marshall & Horton, 2011; Rop, 2010; Ross, Skinner, & Fillippino, 2005), but little research has been done about teachers’ beliefs about inquiry (e.g., Beyer & Davis, 2008; Chapman & Heater, 2010; Marshall, Smart, & Horton, 2011; Tosa & Martin, 2010; Towers, 2010; Trumbull, Scarano, & Bonney, 2006). None of the life-history studies focused on inquiry and teachers’ beliefs. Two of the case studies analyzed the connections between teachers’ beliefs and practice. Beyer & Davis (2008) showed how an elementary science teacher did not consistently practice science as explanation, an inquiry-oriented form of science teaching, in her classroom instruction, even though the teacher believed science explanation is an important part of science. Trumbull, Scarano, & Bonney (2006) compared the differences between two middle school teachers: Natalie whose careful attempt to keep control of student work led to limited inquiry experiences for her students and Meryl whose “ability to tolerate uncertainty and messiness enabled her to continue trying inquiry projects” (p. 1743).

Two of the studies focused on the effects of professional development in inquiry-based methods with teacher practice. Marshall, Smart, & Horton (2011) shared the effects of professional development experiences they provided to 22 middle school mathematics and science teachers to encourage more inquiry-based teaching methods. Tosa & Martin (2010) found that teacher participants who experienced inquiry activities in workshops were encouraged to provide these types of activities for their students. One of the studies discussed the effects of an inquiry-based teacher education program. Towers (2010) collected data in the classrooms of first year elementary teachers who had
graduated from an inquiry-based teacher education program to see if they used the inquiry methods they had learned in the program. Finally, there was one study (Chapman & Heater, 2010) that shared the story of a high school mathematics teacher who initiated her own change towards using more inquiry-based approaches in her classroom.

A Call for Inquiry

Recently a member of President Obama’s education transition team, Linda Darling-Hammond (2008), published a collection of chapters, each written by various prominent researchers in the field of education. Throughout this compilation, the idea of using inquiry in the classrooms is again fostered and heralded. Darling-Hammond argues for the “implementation of inquiry-based curriculum that engages children in extended, constructive work, often in collaborative groups, and subsequently demands a good deal of self-regulated inquiry” (p. 13). We need to provide students with experiences where they become inquirers who can construct their own knowledge. Teachers can use inquiry-based teaching methods to guide their students to become life-long learners and to be able to tackle any situation.

Although inquiry-based methods and practice are becoming more popular in classrooms and teacher education programs, and descriptions of inquiry-based activities can be found in the professional literature, as was shown in the review of literature, there is still a limited amount of research on inquiry. A study on the belief systems of a veteran teacher who has adopted an inquiry stance will help to fill in the holes of the current research. Findings and implications from this study could contribute to teacher preparation programs, professional development, and daily classroom practice.
Through the use of qualitative research methods (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 2008), life story interview methods (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Rossman & Rallis, 2003), and interview data analysis (Spradley, 1979), this study aims to understand the life experiences of a teacher who embraces inquiry in her classroom and the beliefs that have resulted from her experiences. I visited, observed and interviewed an experienced teacher who uses inquiry based methods in her classroom. Multiple visits and interviews were conducted to gain knowledge of the participant’s background, to debrief and gain a clearer understanding of the observations I conducted in her classroom, and to gain a deeper understanding of the participant’s theoretical beliefs that underlie her teaching decisions.
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

I became interested in studying and understanding the philosophical beliefs of teachers who use inquiry-based methods because inquiry follows my own philosophical understandings of how children learn and become life-long learners. I believe the goal of education should be more than teaching students standards and content areas. The goal should be to create students who are life-long learners (Cambourne, 1988; Dewey, 1938) and to prepare those students to be contributors to a democratic society (Freire, 1970).

The Goal of Education

In the early part of the 20th century, Dewey (1938) critiqued and summarized “traditional” educational methods:

The main purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the material of instruction. Since the subject-matter as well as standards of proper conduct are handed down from the past, the attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience. Books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, while teachers are the organs through which pupils are brought into effective connection with the material. Teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced. (p. 18)

Dewey (1938) and others continue (e.g., Freire, 1970) to critique these “traditional” methods and contributed solutions to improve education. Amidst these arguments, there are understandings about schooling and how children learn through inquiry-based
instruction. These include creating life long learners and viewing students as established learners.

**Creating life-long learners.** Dewey (1938) begins his description of “traditional” methods by stating its main purpose, which is to prepare students to be responsible and have success in life. Dewey believed that education should prepare students to be life-long learners. He encouraged teachers to create real-life problems for students to grapple with and then guide them to find solutions. He believed that these real-life experiences would help prepare students to work through the experiences they encounter when older.

Like Dewey, Cambourne (1988) argues with a traditional approach. In his discussion of natural learning and literacy acquisition, Cambourne states that he believes in two “self-evident truths” (p. 4):

1) Learning to read, write, spell, punctuate, etc. (i.e. learning to become literate) ought to be as uncomplicated and barrier-free as possible.
2) Once learned, the skills and knowledge that make literacy possible ought to endure beyond the four walls of the classroom; that is, they should be ‘durable’ (p. 4).

These truths can also be applied to learning in general. Learning should be uncomplicated and barrier-free, and the skills we use as we learn are durable beyond the classroom, i.e. skills that will support students’ life-long learning. However, many students (and teachers) feel that learning only happens when they are in school. This is an attitude that needs to change in order to prepare students to be successful in any situation they encounter – to be able to tackle any problem they experience whether within the walls of a classroom or beyond. Inquiry allows the students to explore the
questions they have (Shor, 1992; Ciardiello, 2003) and to develop the skills they need to learn something in any situation, promoting the idea of becoming life-long learners.

**Viewing Students as Established Learners.** Addressed in Dewey’s (1938) summary of “traditional” schooling is the demeanor of the student. Dewey argues that in traditional schools, “the attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience” (p. 18). Other philosophers and theorists have argued against this traditional view of students as well and placed inquiry as an effective teaching method. For instance, Paulo Freire (1970) supports inquiry by arguing against the traditional “banking” concept of education where the students are viewed as “receptacles” into which teachers deposit knowledge. Freire asserts, “in the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72).

Freire (1970) continues his argument for a democratic classroom and viewing students as established learners by emphasizing the need for dialogue, “Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 93). In order to be truly educated, as Freire points out, students need to be able to talk through the new ideas being presented to them and to make connections with what they already know. And the teachers’ stance should be one of valuing the ideas and knowledge that students come to their classrooms with. This view is advocated by those who support the idea of schema theory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Rumelhart, 1980), which argues that we have a way of organizing knowledge, schemata, gained from experience in our minds. Learning occurs “when something goes awry with comprehension and we have to make some structural change in our existing array of
schemata to account for that anomaly” (Pearson & Stephens, 1998, p. 88). From birth, people develop their schemata as they build their experiences and learn new ideas. The key idea here is that students do not come with empty minds ready to be filled. Rather, they come to our classrooms with previously organized bodies of knowledge, their schemata. Under the guidance of their teacher, students connect new knowledge to their established knowledge to create new understandings.

**Funds of knowledge.** Other researchers (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1978; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004) support the idea that teachers need to view students as coming to the classroom with already established knowledge and to build upon that knowledge. For example, with her reader response theory, Rosenblatt (1978) believes that the reader transacts with a text by connecting his/her own experiences with the message of the text. Probst (2002) discusses how Rosenblatt’s theory “suggests that each reader comes to the text with a unique history, a unique set of circumstances and abilities and inclinations, and has to take that into account as he/she shapes an understanding of the text and his/her reading of it (p. 31). To describe the knowledge gained through our experiences, Moll, et al. (2005) coined the term “funds of knowledge” (p. 3), and defines it as the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 72). Thus, learning is not only social in nature; it is also historical and cultural in nature. To understand and make use of this concept, it is important to understand how Moll defines culture. His definition focuses more on “practice – what households actually do and how they think about what they do” (p. 10) than on generalizations made too easily about cultural groups. From this perspective,
culture does not just refer to someone’s ethnicity. Socio-economic status (SES), environment, language, family, pop culture, friends, media, ways of teaching and learning, etc. can all be factors that determine a person’s culture. Gregory, Long & Volk (2004) present studies that describe situations where students tap into their funds of knowledge when learning new content. These studies illustrate how these funds of knowledge are present and how when given the opportunities to connect new knowledge with these established experiences, students’ learning can flourish.

By understanding that students have funds of knowledge in which to build upon, teachers will more aptly take an inquiry stance in their classrooms. Teachers will honor the knowledge students have and will have the view of building upon that established knowledge rather than thinking they are bestowing their knowledge upon the students. In addition, by having this perspective, teachers will stay away from the “banking” educational stance which, according to Freire (1970), mirrors oppressive society where students’ creativity and funds of knowledge are limited which in turn hinders students from “develop[ing] the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (p. 73). In fact, Freire states, “liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information” (p. 79). When students are viewed as receptacles, they become passive learners, and they will more likely learn to accept and adapt to the world as it is. Instead, Freire argues that teachers should liberate their students by allowing them to have a dialogue, based on the knowledge base they bring with them as well as new knowledge uncovered through inquiry, where they can learn from each other.
A Theory of Inquiry

In order to achieve the goal of creating life-long learners and contributors to a democratic society, I believe there are three essential areas that students need to experience in the classroom.

- Students need to learn to become problem-posers and problem-solvers (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970). They need opportunities where they can develop and master these skills.
- Students need to learn to be reflective and develop a meta-cognitive awareness of their learning process (Halliday, 1975; Lindfors, 1999).
- Students need opportunities where they can learn to work collaboratively with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

I believe these three essential elements of education are interconnected and equally important, and create my theory of inquiry (see Figure 2.1).

![Figure 2.1 Theory of Inquiry]
**Becoming problem-posers and problem-solvers.** If one of the goals of education is to prepare students to tackle any problem they encounter, they need to be given opportunities to create their own questions and to experience the process of answering their own questions. Dewey (1938) encouraged progressive teachers to analyze and think more deeply about what it really means to learn by experience rather than just through books. Dewey also feared that the teachers had too much control of how and when students learned. Instead, Dewey wanted educators to encourage students to experience learning on their own with the teacher having more of a facilitator role. Dewey continued his argument by analyzing what experience really means in education. He states,

> The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience (p. 25).

Dewey (1938) discusses the types of experiences that can be mis-educative such as experiences that produce a lack of sensitivity, or experiences that are disconnected from each other. He goes on to make an argument that educators should be cognizant of these problems with experience and that the role of the educator includes:

- Helping students have experiences that “live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (p. 28)
- Using their greater maturity in experience to “see in what direction an experience is heading” (p. 38)
- Being able to “judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental” (p. 39)
• Having a “sympathetic understanding of individuals” (p. 39) in order to understand the students’ thought processes
• Being aware of the type of environment that is conducive to quality experiences that lead to growth and how to effectively utilize that environment

The type of learning through experience that Dewey promotes is a component of inquiry-based instruction. To illustrate this point, I turn to a study conducted by Whitin & Whitin (1997). These researchers discuss what happened during a yearlong inquiry study of birds in an elementary classroom. They discuss how the students began with a sense of wonder. Then, by looking closely at their wonderings, the students took an inquiry stance by effectively using their resources, becoming critical in their thinking, exploring through conversation, investigating their ideas, creating a collaborative community, and reflecting on their initial wonderings and changed thoughts. This study shows Dewey’s arguments for experience which promotes the idea that students learn best by experiencing the curriculum that instills a love of learning. Dewey argues, “the most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning,” (p. 48).

Building upon these ideas on experience, researchers (e.g., Short, Harste & Burke, 1996; Short et al., 1996; Whitin & Whitin, 1997) in the classroom have discussed the development and effectiveness of using inquiry-based instruction methods as a way to give students opportunities to experience the curriculum, becoming problem-posers and problem-solvers. Short, Harste & Burke (1996), for example, explore inquiry methods during the Authoring Cycle, written language learning. Embedded within this book are chapters written by classroom teachers on different topics (i.e. Kid-watching, first days
of school, creating a collaborative environment, working with parents) where the teachers reflect on their own inquiry process while exploring these topics. The authors then discuss the implications of inquiry based methods with these topics. As a reader, I noticed a theme, or awareness of inquiry, that came up again and again throughout these teachers’ experiences. When the teachers watched their students more carefully, or investigated their curriculum plans through inquiry, or worked with parents, the teachers found that a key idea with inquiry is to allow students to become problem- posers where they can investigate their own questions. In her chapter, Egawa (1996) described their experience by stating:

We believe that the questions of others are only useful in the context of learners’ own efforts (Watson, Burke, & Harste, 1989). Unfortunately, most professional development programs and curriculum models are based on others’ questions, not the participants’. Further, full participation in a democracy includes interrogating the values and beliefs of our collective efforts (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1989), rather than simply putting into practice the directives of others. (p. 313)

Within the idea of giving students opportunities to experience curriculum, comes the notion of having students inquire about the topics that are important to them (Freire, 1970; Wells, 1999). For example, when building upon the idea of Authoring Cycles (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996), Short et al. (1996) discuss using an Inquiry Cycle as a curricular framework. Elementary teachers discuss how their classes began the year with a broad concept (e.g., Cycles, Change, Systems, Sense of Place, Interdependence, and Discovery) to which students would make curricular connections. The teachers “wanted to move into an inquiry approach where students pursued topics and questions of significance to them and where one inquiry flowed into the next in an endless cycle or spiral of learning” (p. 19).
The authentic, sometimes cyclical, inquiry experiences demonstrated in these studies also illustrate what Freire (1970) described as “generative themes.” He describes this as a social act where together, the teacher and students think through and talk about what they are investigating, while critically analyzing what they already know. Freire argued:

To investigate the generative theme is to investigate people’s thinking about reality and people’s action upon reality, which is their praxis... The more active an attitude men and women take in regard to the exploration of their thematics, the more they deepen their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality. (p. 106)

Freire’s educational theory supported the idea of students becoming problem-posers by viewing everything they learn critically. By participating in inquiry explorations and experiences, students become more knowledgeable about what they are studying and the world around them.

**Being reflective and developing a meta-cognitive awareness.** I believe in order for students to be life-long learners, they need to understand their own learning process. They need to reflect on the steps they took to learn new concepts so they can re-create the process when confronted with different problems. I believe students can do this by looking carefully at the language they use. I also agree with Wolk (2008) when he says, “Inquiry learning cannot happen in an academic culture of silence…Talk and inquiry are deeply symbiotic. The process of inquiry nurtures good talk, and that good talk furthers the inquiry” (p. 120-121).

**Learning through language.** Halliday (1977) focuses on the function of language in learning. He first explores the idea that when children are learning the language of their society, they are learning how to mean. As they are learning the
vocabulary of their language, they are learning “the meanings, or rather the meaning potential, associated with them” (p. 24). Looking at the curriculum, it is essential to understand the importance of helping students understand the specialized language for the various concepts explored in a classroom. By building vocabulary, students are able to more fully comprehend the curriculum.

Halliday (1977) also discusses how children learn about language and through language. When students are engaged in discussion and learning from each other, they are learning new language skills and learning through the language they use. Through their inquiry discussions, students learn how to effectively articulate their thoughts so they are understood by their peers. As Mills, O’Keefe & Jennings (2004) express, “the more children talk to learn, the more they learn how to talk well” (p. 6).

Learning through dialogue. Judith Lindfors (1999) is another prominent educational theorist who discusses how we learn through an inquiry dialogue. Lindfors describes the purpose of her book as “one possibility” (p. x). She asks her readers to read what she writes, think about it and think through it to make up their own minds. Her book is a form of her definition of inquiry in that she is thinking through her writing and wants to have an inquiry discussion with her readers. Throughout her book, Lindfors supports the notion that we all have a natural curiosity and urge to make sense of the world, so we will constantly inquire. She argues that when the classroom supports and encourages the social, intellectual, and individual nature of inquiry, it develops one’s humanness. Lindfors sums up her views of inquiry-based instruction by saying,

I know of no more important goal in education than that the child shall discover the power of his or her own mind. And I know of no more important source of that discovery for every child, than the inquiry that lives in the continuing exploratory dialogues of classroom life. (p. 246)
Lindfors (1999) also emphasized how the language used during inquiry discussions has a certain sound and a feel to it. Inquiry has a tone of tentativeness, and is an exploration of possibilities. When analyzing some inquiry discussions, Lindfors discussed some shared expressive features of collaborative inquiry talk:

- Tentativeness markers are abundant (I don’t knows, sort ofs, ifs, and maybes)
- The talk is imaginative, dramatic, and visual
- The children rely heavily on reaching devices (analogy, comparison, metaphor)
- Specific words are picked up and used by different participants (p. 170-171).

While inquiry talk has this tone of tentativeness, the students are still naturally intentional in their curiosity and learning.

When students become more intentional in the language they use they become more cognizant of their learning process. This idea is illustrated in a study which analyzed the inquiry discourse of students over a five year period. Jennings & Mills (2009) found that the teachers and students involved in these dialogues were intentional in their use of language. Some of the characteristics of the inquiry dialogues found in this study include making personal and interpersonal connections, being attentive, probing and thoughtful, as well as reflective.

Learning through critical literacy. While teachers successfully engage their students to learn language, learn about language, and learn through language (Halliday, 1975), they also should help their students learn to use language to critique (Egawa & Harste, 2001) what they read and learn. In an article discussing how critical literacy can be a way for students to think about stereotypes, Cai (2008) discussed how
stereotypes can actually be reinforced if students aren’t shown how to critically read texts. He says:

Studies have shown that reading and responding to multicultural literature affects students’ attitudes and views on racial and ethnic groups other than their own... On the other hand, to the dismay of many teachers, students’ transactions with this type of text can also open a Pandora’s Box of misunderstandings, stereotypical perceptions, biases, and prejudices. Instead of transforming racial attitudes, it may reinforce biases and prejudices. (p. 212)

Building upon using Rosenblatt’s (1978) reader response theory as a way to think critically about text, Cai (2008) continues by showing how readers can continue their transactions with a text by using critical literacy. When thinking of how her theory relates to critical literacy, Rosenblatt (1982) discusses how her reader response theory can lead a reader toward “aware[ness] of a contrast between the assumptions or expectations about life that we brought to the reading and the attitudes, moral codes, social situations we are living through in the world created in transaction with the text” (p. 270). This awareness of self, assumptions, and social situations can be seen as critical literacy.

Critical literacy has been defined by many. The following are a few promising definitions that appeal to me:

- Learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p. 82).

- Developing the theoretical and practical conditions through which human beings can locate themselves in their own histories and in doing so make themselves present as agents in the struggle to expand the possibilities of human life and freedom (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 10).
Critical literacy thus challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development. This kind of literacy--words rethinking worlds, self dissenting in society--connects the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequity. Critical literacy, then, is an attitude towards history, as Kenneth Burke (1984) might have said, or a dream of a new society against the power now in power, as Paulo Freire proposed (Shor and Freire, 1987), or an insurrection of subjugated knowledges, in the ideas of Michel Foucault (1980), or a counter-hegemonic structure of feeling, as Raymond Williams (1977) theorized, or a multicultural resistance invented on the borders of crossing identities, as Gloria Anzaldua (1990) imagined, or language used against fitting unexceptionably into the status quo, as Adrienne Rich (1979) declared (Shor, 1999, p. 1).

These definitions all encourage readers to figure out their own identities and then examine the social constructs in order to identify ways to promote equality by taking action against discriminating hegemonic policies. Simply having dialogue is not enough. In order to become effective inquirers, students need to learn how to learn through language to reflect on their classroom systems and to take action. Freire (1970) emphasizes this by stating, “revolution is achieved with neither verbalism nor activism, but rather with praxis, that is, with reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (p. 125-126). By fostering students’ abilities to critique and question the ideas they are confronted with, teachers can help their students learn to create a
democratic classroom by taking action and by questioning the status quo. Allowing students to inquire and reflect on the systems created within the classroom and taking action to modify some of those structures, thereby creating a democratic classroom, teachers will guide their students to take similar steps with other systems they encounter in life.

**Opportunities to learn with others.** Dewey’s (1938) summary of the “traditional” method of schooling includes that “teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced” (p. 18). The traditional schooling that Dewey describes is more “teacher-centered” than “student-centered” (Kohn, 1999). I argue that teachers are not the only agents through which students can learn. I draw from research that supports the idea that learning flourishes through social interactions. My theoretical framework for the social nature of learning has its roots in Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky defines ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). The premise of ZPD is that we learn more when we interact with others, there is more learning when two or more people interact than when they are alone, and that the ZPD is created within these interactions. Through inquiry discussions, students learn from the multiple perspectives that are shared.

Rogoff (1990) introduces the concept of “guided participation to suggest that both guidance and participation in culturally valued activities are essential to children’s apprenticeship in thinking” (p. 8). Rogoff extends the idea of a ZPD by specifying that
within ZPDs, participants take on roles of either novice/apprentice or expert. She also stresses that this model carries across all types and ages of learners and that the participants can fluctuate between these roles. Each participant in an interaction contributes knowledge from his or her unique experiences while gaining knowledge from other participants often alternating roles with each turn of the conversation. Wells (1999) contributes to this discussion by emphasizing that ZPDs are created through the interactions and do not exist as entities apart from them. He also writes that “the ZPD applies potentially to all participants and not simply to the less skillful or knowledgeable” (p. 331). Wells suggests that since ZPDs are created within interactions and depend on the knowledge of the participants as well as the context of the interaction, all of which fluctuates, ZPDs are growing and moving like a living entities, not something that can be pinned down or tested. Lindfors (1999) also supports the idea that ZPD is created through interaction and is the place “where inquiry lives” (p. 20), where one can gain knowledge with the help of another.

**Conclusion**

I believe schooling should be barrier-free with a goal to create life-long learners who can be active participants of society and who can be successful in any situation they encounter. I believe students are best taught through experiences of being problem-posers and problem-solvers, through an emphasis on meta-cognitive awareness of the learning process, and through social interactions. Together, these ideas embody a theory of inquiry. I have come to these understandings through my experiences as a teacher and through reading the words of a variety of educational researchers and theorists. I am curious to find out how others may have developed their own understandings and belief
systems that have led them to adopting inquiry-based methods. I agree with Wells (2001) when he states there is:

no universal blueprint for successful learning and teaching. Each classroom must find its own way of working, taking into account both what each member brings by way of past experience at home, at school, and in the wider community – their values, interests, and aspirations – as well as the outcomes that they are required to achieve. (p. 174).

However, I do believe that we can learn from the experiences and beliefs of a master teacher. As Clandinen (2001) argues, “in collaboration with others we can ‘re-story’ our knowledge about our teaching by taking the stories of other teachers, building upon their experiences, and incorporating them in personal and unique ways into our own beliefs about teaching” (p. vi). Therefore, for this study, through life-story interviews, I seek to understand a teacher’s learning journey that helped her develop her inquiry-based philosophy of education.
CHAPTER 3

METHODODOLOGY

Through the use of qualitative research methods (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 2008), life story interview methods (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Rossman & Rallis, 2003), and interview data analysis (Spradley, 1979), this study aimed to understand how inquiry is reflected in the life experiences and philosophical beliefs of a master teacher. I conducted visits, observations and interviews with an experienced teacher who uses inquiry-based methods in her classroom. I conducted multiple visits and interviews to gain knowledge of the participant’s background, to debrief and gain a clearer understanding of observations I conducted in her classroom, and to gain a deeper understanding of the theoretical beliefs that underlie her teaching decisions.

This study was designed to identify how a teacher views the use of inquiry-based teaching methods in her classroom. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What experiences helped the teacher shape her teaching philosophies?
- What are the beliefs that underlie this teacher’s instructional decisions to use inquiry methods in her classroom?

In this methodology section, I will discuss who my participant is and describe how I designed my research by discussing the methodological approaches I used to guide this study. I will also discuss the data collection and analysis tools I used to better understand my research questions.
Context

Geertz (1995) emphasized that the main question for the ethnographer is where are you going? I pondered this question as I searched for my participant. When I initially contacted Dr. Kathryn Mitchell Pierce and talked with her about her teaching, I asked her some questions about inquiry to better understand her beliefs and methods. She talked about how she found herself living inquiry on a daily basis. As I listened to her, I realized that inquiry was more than just a teaching method for her, more than just a way to run her classroom. Through the phone connection, I could hear her excitement as she talked about her students’ photo projects and how they were learning together. She also shared some of her current inquiries and the language she used showed me that she was still trying to figure things out as a teacher, that she was still learning new ways to teach. Because of her passion toward taking an inquiry stance in all facets of her life – both professional and personal – and the stories she shared with me about inquiry, I knew that I could learn from Kathryn’s experiences. I had found where I wanted to go to conduct research on beliefs and inquiry.

My goal was to better understand someone who internalizes inquiry as opposed to someone who just teaches it. For this study, I chose to focus on the life story of one teacher in order to deepen my understanding of her inquiry-based belief system and practice. I was introduced to Kathryn as a potential participant in this study because she is nationally known and respected as a teacher leader in inquiry. I became interested in her journey as an educator and decided that much could be learned from exploring this teacher’s history. In much the same way that I have occasionally gained insights into all
my students by conferring with just one student, I believe the life story of Kathryn will provide insight into the experiences, beliefs, and needs of many teachers.

**Kathryn Mitchell Pierce.** I interviewed and observed Kathryn Mitchell Pierce who currently teaches at Wydown Middle School in Saint Louis, Missouri. My visits with Kathryn at her home and the school were conducted during two week-long visits. Kathryn invited me to stay at her home, and I shadowed her when she went to work. Interviews occurred at her home, when we were driving through her community, and at the school. I also conducted three phone interviews with Kathryn in-between and after the visits.

Kathryn works as a writing coach to support the 6th-8th grade teachers at the middle school. In this role, she works with the teachers to offer support by giving them suggestions of strategies and activities. She also goes into their classrooms to work with students and occasionally pulls out students to work one-on-one with them. In addition, Kathryn teaches a writing course to 8th grade students. With more than 30 years of experience in the classroom, Kathryn’s background includes receiving a Master’s and PhD with a focus in reading education. She has published books, book chapters and articles that explore classroom talk, literature discussions, using children’s literature in the classroom, and curriculum as inquiry (See Appendix A for a list of her publications). She has also shared her experience by being a literacy consultant and presenter at teacher in-services, workshops and national conferences.

Kathryn’s contributions as a teacher, writer and presenter have shown her vision of creating classrooms where students have a safe place to share their thoughts and where communities are built through discussions. Her published work also shows how she
views herself as an inquirer and continues to grow professionally. In one of her more recent articles (Pierce, 2006), she describes how she has grown in her thinking about the importance of making meaningful connections between the curriculum and her students’ lives, and discusses the importance of professional inquiry.

**Setting: Kathryn’s home and workplace.** Kathryn was very gracious in allowing me to stay in her guest bedroom both times I went to visit her. This brought interesting perspectives and opportunities to my research process. While eating breakfast in the morning, or sitting together at her kitchen table, I was able to learn more about her experiences at home. I was also able to see artifacts present in her home that represented some of the life experiences she talked about. For example, the dishes that have been passed down to her from her grandparents have had a big impact on Kathryn. I was able to walk through her home and view some of the dish sets as she talked about them and the life events that revolved around them.

Kathryn lives in a small, affluent suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. There is a diverse population of approximately 35,000 (US Census Bureau, 2010). The surrounding communities include several public and private colleges and universities. Kathryn lives within a few miles of the middle school where she teaches, which is located in a neighboring city. The district includes three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. At the time of this study, in 2012, 2,516 students were enrolled in the district and 601 students were enrolled in the middle school. 15.4% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. The ratio of students to classroom teachers was 1:11 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).
Research Design

The primary goal of this study was to focus on the life experiences of a teacher and the philosophical beliefs that underlie her instructional decisions. Using a qualitative research design, this study investigated the beliefs of a teacher to provide insight on the use of inquiry in the classroom. This qualitative exploration took on ethnographic approaches and drew from research designs used in life history research methods.

Life history methodology was first used by anthropologists (i.e. Barrett, 1906; Radin, 1920) and since then, has been used in various humanities disciplines. Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue that this methodology should be used in educational studies. They explain, “By focusing more on the life and work of teachers, our strategies for professional development might be substantially improved. Professional development and personal development can be brought into a closer relationship and thereby work in harmony” (p. 72).

Ethnography as process. Wolcott (2008) provides a discussion on the differences between “ethnography as process and ethnography as product” (p. 43-44) and that there is a difference between “doing ethnography and borrowing (some) ethnographic techniques” (p. 44). Ethnography is considered a product of doing fieldwork with a group of people over a long period of time and was a descriptive account of that culture. Often today, researchers will talk about doing ethnographies when they are really adapting some of the processes of completing ethnography in their research studies.

With this study, I fall under this latter category. I adopted some of the processes and methods that are associated with ethnographic fieldwork. For example, I sought to
understand my participant’s beliefs and how the personal and professional worlds she was involved in framed who she is as a teacher by looking at the cultures around her (Spradley, 1979). I conducted on-site research (Merriam, 2009) by going to my participant’s home, school and classrooms and observed how she interacted with her peers and students. I gathered qualitative interview data (Spradley, 1979) by developing questions based on my observations and asked her about why she does the things she does.

The three prominent categories of ethnographic research are participant observation, interviewing, and archival research (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 2008). Wolcott (2008) re-labeled these categories as “experiencing, enquiring, and examining” (p. 48). In the following sections, I will use Wolcott’s definitions of these categories and describe how they relate to the type of research I conducted.

**Experiencing.** Wolcott (2008) says that experiencing includes, “information that comes directly through all the senses…observational research plays out almost entirely in what we see and what we hear” (p. 49). I visited my participant’s home, school and classrooms. In order to understand her philosophical beliefs, it was helpful to understand the cultures of the settings she was currently involved in. Therefore, I was an observer in her home, school, and classrooms with the hope to gain insight into her daily practices.

At this point, as I gained experience in Kathryn’s settings, two questions concerned me as a researcher: *will her behavior be real with my presence?* and *how involved will I become?* To answer the first question, my assumption is that Kathryn’s extended time in the classroom and her experience with the research process helped
Kathryn be more comfortable with my presence. Since my participant has been the focus of other research (e.g. Wilson, 2004) and educational documentaries (e.g. WNET/Annenberg Foundation, 1998, 2004), she is used to having others in her classroom observing her. I presumed that these experiences helped her remain in a comfortable position and contributed to my observation of her authentic teaching. In addition, I took on the view of ideal behavior that Wolcott (2008) offers:

People on their best behavior enact roles in what they perceive as ideal types. Witnessing such behavior can be extremely valuable to the ethnographer interested in teasing out beliefs about how people should act and the inevitable tension between what people feel they ought to do or ought to say, and what they do or say in fact. (p. 52).

This study focuses on Kathryn Mitchell Pierce, the teacher. In order to understand and experience her teaching life in more depth, I conducted classroom observations. Even though I was in the classroom, my interaction with students was minimal, occasionally asking students to show me their work or to talk about what they had done. These brief interactions were only used to help me understand the classroom activities and methods my participant used. Therefore, while in the classroom, I was a more passive researcher. I took on the role of an observer who was gaining further experience with the teaching environment of the participant as her main focus.

One particular example of how my experiences in her various settings gave me insight into Kathryn’s teaching life was when I observed her interaction with a group of teachers and school staff who came together to discuss a sixth grade teacher’s new research project implementation. The sixth grade teacher frequently asked Kathryn for help in designing activities for her students, specifically with differentiating instruction for her diverse students. Kathryn helped to call together other school support staff, such
as the media specialist and another writing coach, to participate in this brainstorm session. The sixth grade teacher wanted the group to brainstorm ideas for how her students could present the information they learned after completing a research project on various social studies topics. The teacher came with her ideas, and the other participants shared other ideas, as well as resources they could provide to the students. During my experience as an observer, I was able to see how Kathryn contributed to her school’s teaching community, how she helped to facilitate this brainstorm session, and her use of inquiry talk.

**Enquiring.** Complementing the participant observation aspect of ethnographic research is interviewing. Wolcott (2008) distinguishes interviewing, or enquiring, from experiencing by stating, “I emphasize the major distinction between experiencing and enquiring to underscore the critical difference between being present as a passive observer of what is going on and taking an active role in asking about what is going on” (p. 49). During my research, I created questions about my observations to understand more of the thought processes that went on that helped my participant make her instructional decisions. I wanted to learn about why she did what she did. For example, I observed Kathryn work with a group of students on their research projects. The task was to identify and research groups of people who have been systematically discriminated against in America. When I observed the students, they were sharing some of the information they had found and brainstorming ways to share the information with the rest of their class. After the observation, I held an interview with Kathryn and asked her questions such as *How did students find their topics?* and *Tell me what you were thinking as you and the students were talking.* Our conversation also led to her past
experiences and I asked her to reflect on what she did when she first started teaching and how she has changed. Some of my enquiring spawned from the observation, I created questions as I observed, and some enquiring evolved during the interviews.

In addition to creating questions based on my observations, I asked questions regarding her background to understand more about the growth of her philosophical teaching ideals. I used semi-structured interview protocols with a focus on my participant’s education and teaching that I will discuss more in my data collection section below.

**Examining.** An effective way to understand the life history of my participant, how she formed her teaching philosophies, why she makes her instructional decisions, and how she lives as an inquirer was to examine records (Wolcott, 2008). By this I mean any product my participant has produced, including written articles or papers, reflection journals, or even lesson plans. For example, my participant has published papers in peer-reviewed teaching journals such as *Language Arts, Primary Voices,* and *New Advocate.* I read these to understand more of her background and since most of these articles had theoretical frameworks embedded within, I learned more about the researchers and theorists who have helped to form her philosophy.

One *Language Arts* article written by Kathryn that I read and that we discussed during interviews was *Recognizing and Resisting Change: A Teacher’s Professional Journey* (Pierce, 2006). In this article, Kathryn describes some critical incidents (Newman, 1987) that occurred in her K-3 classroom, particularly involving two students’ responses after the reading of *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001). Kathryn asked her students to complete a Sketch to Stretch (Siegel, 1984; Harste & Short, 1988), which is to
draw their connections to the story. Through their drawings, the six-year old students portrayed “a sophisticated use of symbols and metaphors” (p. 432). In the article, Kathryn reflects on her students’ responses and how she shared this story with many of her colleagues:

This critical incident plagued me for months. I shared D’Andre’s story, along with Henry’s and Simon’s, with teachers at conferences and workshops, in the school lunchroom, over soup at a local restaurant—anywhere I could find an opportunity to tell and retell his story. Four years later, I am still telling this story, still talking with others to work at understanding what it means for me and for my teaching. This perseverating is evidence that I am still engaged in the process of reconstructing my vision as a teacher. I believe I have passed through the most challenging and disconcerting aspects of critiquing and revising my vision, and that I will continue to fine-tune it. (p. 434)

By examining this article, I was able to learn more about Kathryn’s journey and process as an inquirer. During interviews, without my prompting, she would sometimes refer back to these critical incidents, showing that she continues to reflect on her students and her beliefs.

**Data Collection**

Peter Smagorinsky (2008), co-editor of *Research in the Teaching of English* from 1996-2003, discussed how, after reviewing hundreds of manuscripts, he began to see what it takes to develop a coherent and strong method section in research articles. In his article, Smagorinsky describes the importance of the methodology section and emphasizes that details about how researchers conduct their research and how data is analyzed is essential for the reader to get a clearer picture of the findings and conclusions. Using his experience and knowledge, he detailed what should be included in the methodology section. For example, Smagorinsky asks that detailed descriptions of data collection should be included, such as descriptions of data sources (Field Journal,
interviews, artifacts, etc.). He also asks researchers to explicitly describe how the data is reduced and analyzed.

**Observations and field journal.** My participant, Kathryn, was very welcoming in allowing me to observe her both at school and in her home. She invited me to stay at her house during my two visits when I conducted research, which allowed me to see how her professional life and her personal life intersected. I used a field journal (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) to take notes about my observations in the participant’s classrooms and at her home. I worked towards being a careful observer (Merriam, 1998) while writing descriptive notes of activities that occurred. Merriam distinguishes between “routine” and “careful” observations. Routine observations are “part of our commonsense interaction with the world” (p. 94). Careful observations in research is planned, recorded, and serves a purpose to make sense of a context.

I often reviewed my notes and expanded on them to create “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) of what occurred and to help me create interview questions. When talking about an anthropologist’s observation descriptions, Geertz distinguishes between “thin” and “thick” descriptions. Thin descriptions are more of a collection of facts of what was observed or even just a superficial interpretation of those facts. Thick descriptions go towards a deeper understanding of the meaning behind what was observed. When I expanded on my notes to create “thick descriptions,” I strove to develop a variety of interpretations. I created debriefing questions based on these interpretations so Kathryn could help me understand the deeper meanings behind my observations.
One example of when I worked toward thick descriptions of my field notes, which then led to interview questions was when I observed Kathryn work with a small group of students on their research projects. At one point, Kathryn was referring to some Smithsonian art and how it related to a text they had read. Because I was hurriedly trying to jot down notes of what the students were saying, a section of my initial field notes looked like this:

T – “Talk with each other about how this picture relates to the character”
T – silent, pausing and then listening to students
S – “I think…” “maybe…” “like…” “if…” “so…” “yeah, so…”
Building on each other’s ideas.
T – “Did everyone who has an opinion have an opportunity to tell us what you think is represented in this pic?”
(T is my shorthand for teacher, S is for student) (Field Journal March 6, 2012)

I later went back to look through my notes of this observation and this particular excerpt. I recognized that I did not write full comments that the students had made because I was focusing on the tentative nature of collaborative inquiry talk as described by Lindfors (1999). I also paid attention to the teacher’s role in this discussion. While focusing on these areas and recalling the observation, I created a thick description in my field journal:

During this observation, Lindfors kept popping into my head and I realized I was observing her ideas of tentative talk. The “I think” “Maybe” “like” “if” “so” “yeah, so” etc. are examples of Lindfors’ inquiry talk. It’s hesitant and full of possibilities. It’s taking risks and chances on different ideas. And it’s collaborative. The students probably feel comfortable with each other to be able to share so many thoughts and ideas. Just about everyone said something. KMP let them go, too. She posed a question and then remained silent. There was a pause before students let loose. She didn’t jump in when hearing the initial silence as many teachers who may be uncomfortable with silence might do. After giving students plenty of opportunities to contribute to the conversation, KMP asked if anyone else had something to add. She was more of a facilitator during this discussion, posing a prompt and allowing the students to choose where they wanted the conversation to go. I wonder if she is aware of the tentative talk. How purposeful is she in creating this type of dialogue with her
students? How does she view her role as facilitator? (Field Journal, March 6, 2012)

During one of the interviews, I made connections to what I had observed with a book chapter Kathryn had written and I was able to ask Kathryn about her thoughts on the inquiry talk and her role during these discussions:

M: Ok, so the first thing I did is I read the chapter in the book that you gave me about exploratory talk. And some of the things I kind of noticed, well, first, the first thing I noticed is I love Lindfors and I love the way she talks about how inquiry has a certain sound to it, a certain feel to it. And I noticed this in your classroom and I noticed how you guys kind of talked about that [in the book], about exploratory talk, how it’s kind of hesitant and halting. And I just wanted to point that out, so I thought I would ask you first to maybe explain a little more, how does exploratory talk sound or feel like to you? So, if you can maybe talk a little more about that.

KMP: Sure. The term is Douglas Barnes’ term. And he contrasted with presentational talk, which is sort of rehearsed, final draft talk. For me the exploratory talk is for kids who are using tentative language. There’s lots of false starts in their grammatical structures as they are talking. There’s pauses, rethinking, ‘ums.’ It’s the kind of talk that leads to the creation of ideas as compared to the presentation of ideas. And it’s, to me, like a major form of talk, which should be taking place in classrooms.

M: So, what is the teacher’s role and what is the student’s role during that type of exploratory talk?

KMP: Ok. The student’s role is to use the opportunity for talking to sort out and construct new ideas, new understandings to resolve anomalies in their own mind. My job is to create the context where the exploratory talk can happen. Create the classroom climate where it’s safe to engage in that kind of rough draft thinking out loud. I have to create enough space in the day for them to have that talk. It can’t be rushed, which is hard with a 44-minute period. I also have to create the expectation that they are accountable for what comes out of the talk. (Interview 5, March 6, 2012)

Records and questionnaires. Because I wanted to learn about the philosophical understandings and beliefs of my participant that informed her instructional decisions, it was essential for me to find ways to help her share her beliefs. One way to do this was to
read through any written records she had (Merriam, 2009). For example, my participant has published articles in peer-reviewed journals and books. She also has written a dissertation for her doctorate. I read these documents to learn more about the theoretical frameworks she developed throughout her teaching career which has helped to mold her current beliefs and understandings. Other documents I explored are her vita, videos, photographs, lesson plans, student assignments, school websites, as well as objects in the home and classroom (Merriam, 1998). Although these documents were not created specifically for this research’s purpose, “they can contain clues, even startling insights, into the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 119).

An example of one document that I viewed and used to formulate questions for interviews was a documentary video created by PBS that featured Kathryn and her 6th grade English Language Arts and social studies classroom (WNET/Annenberg Foundation, 2004). During my first visit with Kathryn, I viewed the video, took notes and formulated some questions that I asked her during an interview. My notes and the video reflection interview that resulted can be viewed in appendix B and C. During my second visit, I asked Kathryn to watch the video with me. I asked her to pause occasionally and to comment on what she saw, her thoughts behind her actions and to share if any of her teaching methods or beliefs had changed since the filming of the video.

I also used artifacts in her work and home surroundings as points to prompt discussion. For example, during one interview, I asked Kathryn to describe the items that were in her office at school. She talked about her desk, the books, and the teacher resources that were located in different parts of the office. She described the significance
of these different items and how she used them in her daily teaching life, as well as what she learned from the items. For example, when talking about some of the professional books, she shared about how she learned from the writers and how she shared these with some of the other teachers. As she described these items, I took photographs of what she was describing (see Appendix D). We did a similar interview about objects in her home.

**Interviews.** Smagorinsky (2008) argues that the researcher should be explicit about how interviews are conducted in a study. For this study, semi-structured interviews conducted with the participant are the primary data source. Fourteen interviews during two visits were recorded and transcribed. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes each. The interview questions were open-ended in order to invite the participant to share her personal stories (Glesne, 1999; Spradley, 1979).

For some of the interviews, I formulated questions based on my observations, field journal, and notes on the documents I read and viewed. I sought to have my participant elaborate on the teaching methods used during the observations and her teaching philosophies that helped guide her to make instructional decisions. The inquiry talk questions and the video questions I previously discussed are examples of when I did this.

I also used a life history approach to help me think about and develop a focus for interviews. Goodson and Sikes (2001) list three reasons for using life history methods:

1. It explicitly recognizes that lives are not hermetically compartmentalized into, for example, the person we are at work (the professional self) and who we are at home (parent/child/partner selves), and that, consequently, anything which happens to us in one area of our lives potentially impacts upon and has implications for other areas too.
2. It acknowledges that there is a crucial interactive relationship between individuals’ lives, their perceptions and experiences, and historical and social contexts and events.
3. It provides evidence to show how individuals negotiate their identities and, consequently, experience, create and make sense of the rules and roles of the social worlds in which they live. (p. 2)

I used these ideas on life-history research as a lens to help me develop prompts during interviews in order to help my participant articulate how she formed her current beliefs through her experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I also borrowed an exercise used informally by Kathy Short (personal communication, April 3, 2011) during teacher workshops she conducted. She asks teachers to think about the books, people and experiences that helped shape their current philosophical beliefs (see Appendix E). While formulating interview questions before and during the interviews, I kept these ideas in mind to learn more about the life-history of my participant.

Although most of the interviews had a main focus, I conducted interviews that were “relatively unstructured, informal, conversation-type encounters” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001) that are preferred by life-history researchers. My questions tended to have more of a focus on educational issues and experiences. For example, I asked Kathryn to describe childhood educational experiences, early teachers, and the classroom experiences during different times of her life that made an impact on her.

**Triangulation and member checking.** Triangulation is using three or more data sources to gain a fuller picture of what is being studied (Denzin, 1970). Through the use of multiple data sources of interviews, questionnaires, observations, and documents I hoped to shed light on my participant’s belief structures that helped inform her instructional decisions to use inquiry in her classrooms. This may in turn give me insight into the thought processes of other teachers.
Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The interview transcriptions were given to the participant to review and to provide clarification. In addition, throughout the study I provided opportunities for member checks (Stake, 1995) where the participant was asked to provide feedback on the emerging data patterns. When necessary, additional phone interviews were conducted to clarify the data, provide more insight into the life history data, and to answer questions that came about during and after data analysis. I shared the life history summaries with the participant to give her an opportunity to verify her story.

Data Analysis

The lens through which I analyzed data. When discussing data analysis, Smagorinsky (2008) stresses the importance of the researcher sharing his/her process and argues that coding data serves “to explicate the stance and interpretive approach that the researcher brings to the data” (p. 399). I followed three modes of analysis as described by Wolcott (1994). The levels of description, analysis and interpretation signify how analysis is complex and the lens through which the data is viewed becomes deeper. In the description mode of analysis, Wolcott encourages the researcher to “stay close to the data as originally recorded,” “treat descriptive data as fact,” and to let the data “speak for themselves” (p. 10). In the analysis mode, Wolcott asks the researcher to go beyond the descriptive retelling and to carefully identify key ideas and relationships amongst the data. In the final mode, the interpretation level of analysis, Wolcott argues that “the goal is to make sense of what goes on, to reach out for understanding or explanation” (p. 10).

Wolcott (1994) also argues that these three modes of analysis are not linear. He states:
By no means do I suggest that the three categories -- description, analysis and interpretation -- are mutually exclusive. Nor are there lines clearly drawn where description ends and analysis begins, or where analysis becomes interpretation.... I do suggest that identifying and distinguishing among the three may serve a useful purpose (p. 11).

I share Wolcott’s view of these three modes of analysis. I often found myself merging two or three of the modes as I considered the data. In fact, when looking at my data, I used a constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Merriam (2009) describes the constant comparative method:

The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or documents and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated. (p. 199-200).

I conducted ongoing data analysis throughout my study, which means that I did not wait until all data were collected before conducting data analysis. I agree with Merriam (2009) when she states that “without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (p. 171). Therefore, I analyzed data simultaneously with data collection. After data analysis, I coded the data, and I wrote memos to describe my thinking about the relationships between the categories. In addition, I understand this type of analysis guided me to generate more questions for my participant, so I had to communicate with my participant again to clear up any confusion and to dig deeper. Despite the blurring of lines between the three modes of analysis as described by Wolcott (1994), I do see usefulness in distinguishing the three modes during my description of how I analysed the data. Therefore, I will use the next three sections to describe how I used Wolcott’s three modes of analysis.
During the description level, I sought to get a glimpse of who my participant is by looking through the data to create a description of her. To do this, I used aspects of life history research. Methods of life history research include constructing meaning from the participants’ life experiences through analysis of personal documents, direct interviewing and observations of their everyday life (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Rossman and Rallis argue that “the assumption in life history research is that the individual represents a more widely shared pattern of life experience” (p. 98). Delving into the life history of my participant helped to uncover how she formed her teaching philosophies which will in turn help us understand the processes of others. In addition, I share Atkinson’s (1998) view when he expresses:

I am also interested in having people tell their stories from the vantage point that allows them to see their life as a whole, to see life subjectively across time as it all fits together, or as it seems discontinuous, or both. (p. 4)

I believe all our experiences and our interactions with others influence what we believe in. By having my participant share her experiences I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of how she formed her beliefs.

I acknowledge that through life history research it is understood that the participant is the first interpreter of the data (Atkinson, 1998). I understand that the way she tells her stories and the descriptions of experiences she provides are her way of choosing what is important. Her stories are her interpretation of her life. Cole & Knowles (2001) describe this level of analysis in life history research as a way of “being introduced to and coming to know characters in a compelling literary work” (p. 117).

As I looked through the data, I constructed Kathryn’s story. At this point, I felt that I needed to start to write. Since I was using Life History research methods, one of
my committee members had suggested that I write vignettes of my participant’s life to illustrate who she is. So, I began to write her story as was uncovered in the data. I initially wrote her story in a timeline sequence. Starting with her early childhood experiences and ending with her current experiences. As I reviewed what I had written, I began to see more clearly how her story would help me uncover my research questions and I realized that her story could be organized and presented in three main sections:

- Learning from influential teachers
- Living the life of an inquirer, and
- Experiences that helped form her beliefs.

This descriptive level of analysis (Wolcott, 1994), through the telling of Kathryn’s story, has become a cornerstone of my data analysis. I have included Kathryn’s story, organized under the above sections, in the following chapter.

**Analysis.** I analyzed the data to find patterns and themes. To help with this process, the elaborated field notes, transcribed interviews, and documents were analyzed and coded using the qualitative research software, HyperRESEARCH (ResearchWare, 2011.). I was able to group the codes into two categories: timeline codes and emerging codes. The first group of codes emerged during the descriptive level of analysis, when I coded the data in terms of a timeline of my participant’s life. Codes were created that labeled different times of her life that she shared through the interviews. For example, when asked about who some of her early teachers were, Kathryn talked at length about her maternal and paternal grandparents. Therefore, I coded these sections of data “maternal grandmother,” “paternal grandfather,” etc. When she talked about her school experiences, I coded these times based on the experience. Codes such as “3rd
grade,” “middle school science project,” and “high school marching band” are examples. (A complete list of these timeline codes can be found in Appendix F.) I used the timeline codes to help write Kathryn’s story as described in the previous section.

As I reviewed and analyzed the data, further ideas and themes emerged, and I created codes to describe these. For example, as my participant talked about different instructional practices that she has implemented with her students, I coded those parts of the data. For instance, in the interviews and the various documents that I analyzed, I noticed that Kathryn valued learning through texts, therefore “learning through texts” became a code, along with “mentor texts” and “text sets.”

The emerging codes occurred throughout the research process. For example, when I would review my field journal after making a few observations, I would note big ideas that I was observing. For instance, one day, some of the big ideas I wrote about were “inquiry talk,” “culture of inquiry,” “learning from texts,” “KMPs inquiries,” “digital literacies,” and “writing to learn” (Field Journal, March 7, 2012). I kept these in mind as I read through the data and these codes were used when analyzing the interviews and documents.

My data analysis process was often recursive where I would realize that a new code would be applicable to data I had already coded. Therefore, I would re-read data to apply the new code. For instance, this occurred when I analyzed an interview where Kathryn explicitly talked about learning from some of her prior teachers and other researchers in the field. I coded this section “learning from others” and within that section, I coded sections based on who she was talking about (e.g., “Carolyn Burke,” “Jerry Harste,” “Dewey,” etc.). After I coded this section, I realized that I had read
through other data where she talked about people she learned from, so I went back to the other interviews and applied these codes. (A complete list of the emerging codes can be found in Appendix F.)

**Interpretation.** After the initial coding of the data, I used different methods to make sense of the codes and to find relationships between the codes. One way I did this was to create webs of interrelated ideas and themes. As I did this, I considered my research questions. My first question asked, *What experiences helped the teacher shape her teaching philosophies?* I looked at the data that was coded with the timeline codes as well as codes that related to learning experiences that my participant talked about. My second question asked, *What are the beliefs of a teacher that underlie his/her instructional decisions to use inquiry methods in his/her classroom?* For this question, I looked at the codes listed under my theoretical framework and the emerging codes that showed Kathryn’s instructional practices. I went through my data again and re-organized the codes to show how the data answered the two research questions.

Through this re-organization of codes, I began to see Kathryn’s life story and how her experiences impacted her beliefs. In chapter four, I chose telling cases (Mitchell, 1984) to present Kathryn’s life experiences and how she has:

- Learned from Influential Teachers
- Lived the Life of an Inquirer
- Shaped her Beliefs about Inquiry Based on her Educational Experiences

In chapter four, I also discuss how these experiences have impacted the beliefs she has about teaching and learning.
After writing Kathryn’s story, as presented in chapter four, and analyzing her story more deeply, I saw that inquiry did seem to permeate her life experiences and her actions as an inquirer began to emerge. I was able to see how Kathryn lives her life as an inquirer by:

- Being a reflective learner
- Opening herself to continuous learning
- Seeking opportunities to learn with others

In chapter five, I further analyze Kathryn’s actions as an inquirer, connecting them to theoretical frameworks.

**Researcher’s Stance**

I believe my positionality on the subject of inquiry may be considered a possible obstruction. I have knowledge of inquiry-based teaching methods. I am a believer that this is an effective teaching practice and a way to help students become lifelong learners. Therefore, I went into this study fully cognizant of my “conscious partiality” (Mies, 1993, p. 68) and worked towards understanding that my participant is my ethnographic teacher (Spradley, 1979) of inquiry and that there is still much for me to learn from her experiences.

In addition to being open-minded about what my participant could teach me, I attempted to be open-minded about this whole study. Although I have a basis of knowledge of what inquiry may look like in the classroom based on the few observations I have done and the professional literature I have read and although at the beginning of this study, I had an idea of who my participant was, I focused on allowing the data to lead
me to new understandings and even new data sources. With this in mind, I end with Merriam’s (2009) description of the qualitative research process I followed:

A qualitative design is emergent. The researcher usually does not know ahead of time every person who might be interviewed, all the questions that might be asked, or where to look next unless data are analyzed as they are being collected. (p. 169)

Obtaining Human Subjects Approval

I have undergone and completed training through the University of South Carolina’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Through this training, I have gained understanding about how to ethically conduct research with human subjects. I submitted my research proposal and received IRB approval. In addition, a letter of consent, which includes a description of the study and study procedures, a confidentiality statement and an explanation of voluntary participation, was given to my participant and a signed copy was collected. I also received approval to do research from the school district that my participant works in.

Limitations of the Study

Rosenthal (as cited in Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 395) argues there are “a myriad of characteristics that can affect the relationship between a researcher and participant, in turn helping to shape the data that emerge from the collection process.” He encourages researchers to attempt to make clear any interaction effects that may occur in a study. In this study, I was an outsider coming into classrooms to understand a teacher’s beliefs and practices. As I stated earlier, there is the possibility that my participant acted and talked in what she sees as “ideal” ways, and this behavior may impact the data I analyzed and the conclusions I made. To help with this process, I hoped to establish a rapport with my participant by sharing some of my background. With life history research, researchers
are encouraged to share their own thoughts, perceptions, and experiences (Oakley, 1981) in order to develop a trusting relationship. For example, at times during the interviews, I shared and talked about similar experiences with Kathryn.
CHAPTER 4

KATHRYN’S STORY

Part of my data analysis was writing Kathryn’s life history as told during the interviews. I pieced together the events she shared to write her story in a chronological order. After reviewing what I had written, though, I noticed three categories that spanned her life’s chronologies and that helped to answer my first research question:

- What life experiences helped the teacher shape her teaching philosophies?

After further careful analysis, I identified three patterns that shaped Kathryn’s life that describe how she has:

- Learned from Influential Teachers
- Lived the Life of an Inquirer
- Shaped her Beliefs about Inquiry Based on her Educational Experiences

I chose telling cases (Mitchell, 1984) from observations and interview data of Kathryn’s memories and recollections of her childhood and education. This chapter is intended as a place to present Kathryn’s story, her life experiences, organized under these three main ideas.

Kathryn’s Story: Learning from Influential Teachers

Kathryn’s teachers came in all forms. Throughout her childhood, the people she learned from included her grandparents and parents. During her undergraduate years, she had professors who modeled a passion for learning, and in the course of her graduate
school years, both her professors and her classmates pushed Kathryn to learn. As I listened to Kathryn and reflected on her experiences with these influential teachers, it became evident that her teachers gave her the freedom to explore and/or supported her as an explorer. These many explorations planted the seeds that grew into her life as an inquirer.

**Childhood Teachers.** When asked about who her early teachers were, Kathryn recalled memories of visiting with her grandparents. She would often spend time with her paternal grandmother, learning how to play card games, to play the piano, and to sew. In fact, her paternal grandmother let her have free reign with the sewing machine and extra fabrics so she could sew some dress-up clothes and have fashion shows. Although Kathryn admits these were not outfits she would wear outside, she enjoyed pretending that she was a fashion designer. This grandmother also taught Kathryn how to set the table and would allow Kathryn to carry the “real” dishes to the table, something her mother would not allow her to do. Her paternal grandmother shared quotidian skills with her and allowed her to move beyond the expectations of others.

Kathryn recalled spending time with her maternal grandmother, often sitting at the kitchen table. Sometimes they would give themselves manicures. Other times, her grandmother would show Kathryn how to draw with cray pas, a type of oil pastels, and they would draw and paint together. During this time together, Kathryn and her maternal grandmother would “talk about the world.” This was when Kathryn learned from her grandmother that only “hussies died their hair…If you looked at their eyebrows and the eyebrows didn’t match their hair, then you knew they were coloring their hair.” Also, Kathryn learned the importance of making an angel food cake that was sufficiently tall.
More importantly, Kathryn’s grandmother also read poetry with her, sharing the poetry Kathryn’s great grandfather had written about the geography of southern Illinois as well as the works of classic poets found in leather-bound books on her grandmother’s shelves. They explored art together and talked about the courses her grandmother continued to take at the local college – courses in art, the geology of Southern Illinois, and history. Kathryn learned practical knowledge from her grandmother about the world, but she also learned about poetry and that grandmothers can continue to grow in their understanding of the world.

Beginning in her preschool years, Kathryn’s maternal grandfather would often take her and her brothers out to the farm where he taught her to count chickens and cows. At the farm, Kathryn was allowed to play freely in places like the chicken coop, or the gardens in the backyard, and she was allowed to walk to the pond without an adult. Her grandfather allowed her to drive the tractor, around and around the barn, long before she was old enough to get behind the wheel of a car. He also taught her to count coins and dollars and took her to the bank regularly to make deposits into her own savings account. Often, as she waited for supper, her grandfather would let her climb into the pick-up truck and take her to visit the elderly relatives. She spent time in conversation with her grandfather while he repaired a door or a floor fan. At the farm, Kathryn was allowed to be an explorer, and she felt like an adult.

Kathryn’s parents were also models and teachers for her. Her father always took Kathryn and her brothers with him to the office, a plumbing supply warehouse, on Saturdays. While he was working, the children would go and play in the office store room. Since the store room had all the office supplies, they would set up their desks and
play “office.” Also, in the warehouse at the back of the office were big wooden bins with every size of valves, couplings, links and pieces of pipes. Kathryn and her brothers would sort, categorize and even “shop” for their make believe customers. They wrote out receipts, took messages on the phone, and learned to put powdered creamer and lots of sugar in stale coffee.

Kathryn’s mother helped to organize a community sand box. All the neighbors came together to build a long sandbox that ran along the back of everyone’s yard. Instead of a fence, there was a long sandbox that all the neighborhood children could play in. Kathryn’s mother also took her to the library every week where she could check out books and listen during the story times. She and her mother spent long hours reading books together. In fact, one year her mother gave her a book log as a Christmas gift, a burgundy 3-ring binder filled with pages to record author, title, genre, summary and response. Long before preschool was popular, Kathryn’s mother signed her up for a preschool class in the basement of a woman’s home. Two days a week, Kathryn and about eight other children would go to this home to listen to stories, paint pictures, color papers, and learn to be part of a group.

Kathryn knew that her parents valued education. Besides enrolling her in a preschool where she remembers playing games, doing crafts, and having circle time, they also found a kindergarten for her little brother after they moved to a more rural community that did not have a kindergarten. Her parents also started saving for the children’s college as soon as they were born. Going to college was always treated as a logical next step after high school.
**College Professors.** Kathryn began her college career at Stephens College in Missouri. During her first year, she remembers having an eye-opening experience involving book discussions in her freshman English class, led by her poetry professor. She thought it was wonderful to have intellectual conversations about books with her peers and her professor. Her poetry professor was very passionate about poetry. She felt she could sit for hours listening to him read and talk about poetry.

Another professor who shared his passion was in her Astronomy class for non-physics majors. The professor was previously a scientist with NASA’s Project Gemini but decided to work instead at a small Midwestern university. Kathryn could not believe such an important person was teaching such a basic course, so she asked him why. He told her that it was because he was able to pursue and share his passions with students. Kathryn loved that course because the professor connected mythology, art, sculpture, poetry, music, etc., to astronomy, making it more like a humanities course. For her second year of college, Kathryn transferred to California Polytechnic Institute in Pomona, California, where she met another professor that shared his passions with his students. Her American studies professor was a lawyer in the morning and taught in the afternoon to share his excitement and enthusiasm of American history and law with students.

Kathryn had always been interested in teaching, making neighbors play “school” as a young child and getting experience teaching French during high school, but some people discouraged her to become a teacher, telling her not to “waste your brain.” Throughout her college career, she fought her desire to become a teacher, but kept coming back to it, inspired by the passionate professors who had made such an impact on her. During her third year at Stephens College, she took an elementary arts education
course. She describes the professor as the “ideal Mrs. Santa Claus earth mother kindergarten teacher” who taught Kathryn and her peers how to make pound cake with their hands, collect acorns for acorn flour pizza, and other hands-on art activities that they could teach their future students.

**Graduate School Teachers.** Throughout graduate school, there were several individuals who made an impact on her knowledge and beliefs. For instance, Kathryn recalls learning from Dorothy Watson who held tremendous respect for teachers as knowledgeable and she modeled listening closely to what teachers had to say. Watson also guided Kathryn to understand the importance of children’s literature as an integral part of the curriculum. Just as Watson valued the teachers’ voices, Jerry Harste and Carolyn Burke modeled valuing the child as informant to guide curricular decisions. Another professor who had an impact on Kathryn was Judith Johnston. Johnston created examination questions that pushed Kathryn to learn something new as she was taking the exam. The exam questions were phrased in such a way that the process of answering the questions led Kathryn to deeper understandings of the topic. Kathryn also learned qualitative research methods from Bill Corsaro, who while conducting research in an early childhood classroom, would sit on the floor and become a participant-researcher, participating with the children in order to learn their perspective. Building on these qualitative research methods, Kathryn spent time in the home of the classmates David and Phyllis Whitin to observe them during their weekly Sunday family writing time. Kathryn valued the knowledge she gained from these various professors and classmates and some of these ideas still resonate with her teaching practices.
Kathryn felt there was a strong emphasis on collaboration at Indiana and that the faculty valued the voice of the doctoral students. Kathryn learned with and from fellow graduate students, such as Heidi Mills, Jean Ann Clyde, Diane Stephens, and Kathy Short. In addition, her professors encouraged her and expected her to work with them, developing a strong professor-student collaborative relationship where they worked together to learn together.

Kathryn often credits educational philosopher John Dewey as having a big impact on her belief system. She describes one of the beliefs espoused by Dewey, i.e that learning does not happen in a linear structure, that students may move in different directions based on their own experiences, and that she, as the teacher, is a mediator who guides her students to new learning. She realized she felt very strongly about trusting the student-centered classroom experiences, explaining to me:

If the experiences are very engaging and the kids are treated respectfully, they will self-monitor their behavior and they will learn important things. And so if you trust the experience and trust the kids, trust the process, it’ll work… I trust the kids and I trust the process… if I provide the right invitations and create the right environment, then the process will work and people will learn the things that are important for them to learn. But, I wanted to make a distinction between that and sort of a laissez-faire, Garden of Eden kind of view. It’s not that you just turn people loose. I mean the teacher has a significant role. And that has been true for me from the lab school days, public school days, to undergraduate and graduate.  

(Interview 8, February 28, 2012)

**Bringing together ideas about Kathryn’s influential teachers.** Kathryn’s influential teachers helped her develop her cultural knowledge, modeled a passion for education and learning, created engaging activities, and valued learning through collaboration with others. Throughout the many experiences with her grandparents, for instance, Kathryn built up her prior knowledge and learned cultural knowledge that she could connect to later in life. These experiences also helped Kathryn develop into an
effective teacher because she understands how important it is for learners to connect new learnings to prior knowledge. Kathryn’s parents also were influential because they were models to her, helped her realize the value of education, and influenced her to be the inquisitive learner she is today.

Kathryn fondly remembers the class discussions she was introduced to in her freshman poetry class and that continued during graduate school with her colleagues. Kathryn now values talk in her classroom and she purposefully strives to create similar discussion opportunities for her students. Dewey also has influenced her beliefs about creating engaging, student-centered activities for her students. Kathryn reflects back on her elementary arts education professor, the “Mrs. Santa Claus earth mother kindergarten teacher,” who demonstrated the type of activities that the theorist, Dewey, informed her of. Her passionate teachers have influenced Kathryn to develop her passion for inquiry, as both a teacher and a learner. As Kathryn’s story continues to unfold, it becomes evident that she seeks out new information to build her knowledge base and finds opportunities to learn with others.

Influential teachers helped her:

- Develop cultural knowledge
- Become passionate about learning and education
- Engage in learning activities
- Connect new learning to prior knowledge
- Learn through talk and collaboration with others
Kathryn’s Story: Living the Life of an Inquirer

Throughout Kathryn’s life, she has developed and maintained an inquiry stance. When she was little, her parents and grandparents fostered her natural curiosity by exposing her to various life situations from which she could learn, for example learning about life on a farm and taking her to the workplace. These experiences have influenced Kathryn to continue explorations on various topics throughout her life, and she talked about how she became an inquirer as a student, as a teacher, and in her personal life.

**Student Inquiries.** In the various stages of Kathryn’s life as a student, she has demonstrated living the life of an inquirer. Kathryn talked about how she was open to learning new ideas, experiencing more than the typical student, and that she valued exploring her new learnings. Her experiences show her interest in many different topics, and she took action to learn about these many interests, often going above and beyond in her involvement of these interests. For example, in middle school and high school, Kathryn was very involved with extra-curricular activities. In middle school, she remembers working on extra projects, such as a science project, raising mice for a science fair. In high school, she was involved in the marching band. At the first high school she attended, the marching band had very high expectations and students knew they had to do their best in order to keep their spot because there were always five other students in line who wanted the spot. During high school, Kathryn’s family moved and the marching band at her new school was not as organized. Kathryn attempted to be a leader and get students more interested and excited about the band, but she was not so successful. She branched out to other sports. In particular, the swim team caught her eye. Being raised to be a feminist by her mother, she did not think it was fair that there was a boys’ team at
her new school, but not a girls’ team, so she started a girls’ team. Kathryn recalls having good form as a swimmer, but no speed, so she stayed on the team until more skilled swimmers joined.

Kathryn was in the college bound track in high school. Her class experienced real world situations and was able to learn first-hand about some of the content they were learning. For example, her zoology class, the only senior level science class offered, went for a visit to a veterinarian’s office to observe a hysterectomy on a Doberman. She remembers thinking it was “so cool” to work with real animals and real tools. Kathryn was not academically challenged in high school, and that allowed her to be involved in many extra-curricular activities, such as yearbook, newspaper, drama, future teachers club, and teaching French to middle school students, all of which, she believes, has helped her to become a well-rounded individual.

When Kathryn transferred back to Stephens College for her third year of undergraduate work, she continued to use her college career as a way to pursue her various interests. She changed her major more than four times, starting with pharmacy, then switching to accounting, interior design, art, then, finally, early childhood and elementary teacher education. Kathryn felt that her experience in the many different majors and taking over 150 undergraduate hours in various disciplines helped to give her a little knowledge about a lot of things, which she explained was perfect for preparing her to be an interdisciplinary elementary school teacher who could share her multiple areas of interest with her students.

**Teacher Inquiries.** Kathryn told me about D’Andre as an example of why she feels it is important to be a teacher who is also an inquirer. D’Andre, age six, was in
Kathryn’s multi-age (ages 6-8) class in 2001. Twelve years later, Kathryn still talks about how this student “shook my core because he demonstrated that 6 year olds can engage in metaphorical thinking and use abstract symbols, use and interpret abstract symbols” (Interview 4, March 13, 2011). At the time of this incident, Kathryn was grappling with how to change her teaching to become more purposeful in bringing in talk about social issues. In a previous publication (Pierce, 1999), Kathryn discussed her concerns about bringing in heavy topics to her young students while at the same time she knew she needed to because she could see how they were already being affected by various issues of equity (e.g. gender roles, how black children were treated by white children). When the incident with D’Andre occurred, Kathryn was making purposeful steps in her classroom to help her redefine literacy and her role as a teacher. She had been working with her students and introducing children’s literature that dealt with issues of social justice and equity. D’Andre’s response to the text Freedom Summer (Wiles, 2001) demonstrated connections to Martin Luther King Jr. and some of the life experiences he had experienced. Kathryn described D’Andre’s sketch-to-stretch drawing:

In the upper left-hand corner, D’Andre’s sketch-to-stretch started with a picture of the two boys, Joe and John Henry, with sad and amazed facial expressions. They are looking toward the dump truck filled with hot asphalt, shown from a bird’s-eye view with the shovel in the bed of the truck and the wheels off to the sides. Below the truck, D’Andre drew the pool filled with asphalt and included the pool ladder and another bird’s-eye view of the two boys sitting on the diving board looking into the black and steamy pool. Continuing clock-wise, D’Andre drew stick figures standing on top of two hills and beneath a cross. This is the only component of his sketch that does not appear to be directly linked to a specific incident in the book. (Pierce, 2006, p. 433)
When Kathryn asked D’Andre to describe his sketch, and what he had written beside it,

D’Andre said:

When they saw the dump truck they saw John Henry’s brother. He [John Henry] had to go home to his family. He [John Henry] hid behind the bushes and watched all morning. Dr. Martin Luther King was standing on top of a rock and he was fighting for our freedom. So the white laws had to let the blacks do whatever. I showed them about how they were sad and, like [John] Henry, this is a thing with John Henry and Joe and Martin Luther King on the second smallest hill, holding them up and saying, “Freedom! Freedom!” That kind of reminds me of right now, like the blacks live in separate neighborhoods and the whites live in separate neighborhoods. That’s what it makes me think of. (p. 433-34)

Kathryn used this critical incident as a way to reflect on how she viewed her students, how she viewed critical literacy, and how she viewed her own teaching methods.

D’Andre’s use of metaphors and symbols helped Kathryn see how a six year, especially one who had been struggling to find a place in his new classroom, could make these connections which aided her in her redefinition of what it means to be literate. For the past several years, Kathryn has kept D’Andre at the forefront of her thoughts as she explored her views and discovered possibilities in teaching.

Some of Kathryn’s current classroom inquiries revolve around the use of multiple literacies and technology in the classroom. She views the Writing Workshop class she teaches as a “generative percolating kind of place” (interview 3, March 13, 2011), perfect for exploring new ways for her students to learn. She started by working with her students on a Harlem Renaissance unit. She chose this because she thought it would be a good opportunity to focus on author’s voice and how others in the past, particularly groups that have been marginalized, have used the arts to raise their voices in social critique. She said, “I wanted to integrate writing, including poetry, with art and music as a way of raising your voice and how each of those different media can provide a voice or
an outlet for people who previously hadn’t had a voice” (interview 3, March 13, 2011).
The next topic she tackled with the students was the Civil Rights Movement. These units are sometimes adopted by the regular Literacy or Social Studies teachers (7th grade now does an integrated Literacy/Social Studies unit on the Civil Rights Movement, using many of the multi-genre ideas developed in the Writers Workshop class). This leads Kathryn to develop new units.

While attending a National Council of Teachers of English conference, she learned about a program called PhotoVoice. Since she didn’t know much about cameras or photography, Kathryn sought the help from her school’s digital art and photography teacher. They did a joint project where they brought their students together to use PhotoVoice as a way for the students to take images of their community and environments and then discuss those images to develop themes centered on their lives. They did this for about three semesters. Although they do not bring their classes together any more, Kathryn and the photography teacher still research new technologies to use with their classes and share ideas; they still collaborate on writing experiences in the art classes, using writing to help students see and reflect, and to share their ideas through art and writing. Kathryn continues to seek out conferences where she can learn about new technology-based activities to use with her students.

Another venue where Kathryn has been able to foster her teaching inquiries has been through a Summer Literacy Institute that she has coordinated for the past seven years. Knowing that Kathryn has experience with helping teachers become action researchers, a local university asked her to take the lead in designing a professional development experience for area teachers. Working with the school districts in the St.
Louis area, university leaders identified key topics of interest and then asked her to organize professional development for the local teachers. Kathryn worked on creating a week-long professional development workshop for teachers to attend in the summer. She invites professionals in the field of education to speak and lead workshops. Kathryn, the speakers, and the teachers collaborate, discuss, and think about ways to use their new knowledge in their own classrooms. They also do a shared reading where all the participants read and discuss a chosen professional book. By the end of the week, teachers create an action plan based on what they learned throughout the week. Being the coordinator, Kathryn seeks speakers and picks texts that not only meet the needs of the teachers, but also help her grow as a thinker and educator.

**Personal inquiries.** In addition to her professional inquiries, Kathryn demonstrates that she is an inquirer in her personal life as well. Two examples of Kathryn’s personal inquiries include the topics of place settings and cooking. When giving a tour of her home, Kathryn focuses on the many sets of dishes she has. These are dishes that have been passed down to her from her grandparents and each set is used for special occasions. Each place setting has its place in the history of Kathryn’s family. Kathryn worked recently to research more about the history of these place settings and wrote a book describing the history and how they have been and are currently used. One set, for example, is a set her grandmother had ordered from the local lumberyard and used for a bridge club, which was a venue where the social structure of that community was negotiated. Another set was acquired by her other grandmother at the turn of the 20th Century. That grandmother raised six children, and they ate on those dishes every Sunday. Now, Kathryn uses them for a large Easter brunch for friends and family.
The kitchen is a focal point of Kathryn’s home. She fondly remembers her kitchen and the kitchen table being crowded with children as her daughters were growing up. Her kitchen is where she and her family had many discussions throughout their lives. It is the place where gatherings occurred with both family and friends where they could talk and learn about each other and with each other. Perhaps this is why, now that her daughters are older, that Kathryn continues to find reasons to gather her own friends. To do this, Kathryn has developed an event called the Guinea Pig Dinner. For this, Kathryn researches and tries out new recipes. Her friends are the guinea pig tasters of these new recipes. Sometimes the dishes she creates come out perfectly on the first attempt. Other times, Kathryn may go through a trial and error process. Usually the mishaps occur when trying out baking recipes. For example, one time she tried to make a layered marble cake. The first two attempts did not work out the way Kathryn hoped, so those cakes ended up in her school’s staff lunch, still edible, but not quite the right look for her. Whether the dishes come out right the first time or the third, Kathryn and her friends enjoy the togetherness while they socialize and eat.

**Bringing together ideas about Kathryn’s life as an inquirer.** From her early experiences with her grandparents and parents, the seed of valuing explorations was planted in Kathryn’s life. Throughout her life, Kathryn has grown that seed of curiosity and has sought out various opportunities where she could continue to learn new ideas. She became involved in her school studies and extra-curricular activities as a K-12 student. She fostered her knowledge base throughout her university experiences and took steps to develop her professional knowledge. She sought out opportunities to take inquiry into her personal life as well. Kathryn did not take learning these various topics
lightly. She remained passionate about everything she inquired about and went deep into her various learnings, which is illustrated in her ability to recall many of these educational experiences in a clear way.

The way Kathryn creates curriculum and fosters inquiry in the classroom mirrors the way she learned through inquiry throughout her life. She purposefully makes choices to teach in the way that she learned. Kathryn strives to create opportunities for her students where their inquisitive natures can be fostered. She values her students as individuals and is purposeful in using engagements where students can connect the curriculum to their own lives and pursue their own interests in connection to the curriculum. Throughout my interviews with and observations of Kathryn, I noticed a strong sense of making learning student-centered. She is also committed to helping her students learn through collaboration. During our conversations, Kathryn always emphasized that her inquiry teaching style was not laissez-faire, “it’s not that you just turn people loose” (Interview 8, February 28, 2012). Kathryn talked repeatedly about how she aims to create a space in her classroom where students can become inquirers. To do this, Kathryn was very careful to talk about how these spaces need to be carefully thought about and coordinated by the teacher. By being an inquirer in both her professional and personal life, Kathryn models the inquiry process to her students and shares her passion for learning.

Living the life of an inquirer helped her:

- Engage in extensive school-based and extra curricular activities
- Envision and seize self-directed professional development opportunities
- Embrace intentional opportunities to learn deeply in her personal life
• Teach in ways that are congruent with how she learned personally and professionally
• Foster students’ inquisitive nature
• Value individuals
• Create Student-centered curriculum – She connects curriculum to students’ lives and encourages them to pursue their own interests

Kathryn’s Story: Educational Experiences that Helped Form her Beliefs about Inquiry

Kathryn’s elementary school memories include both positive and negative experiences. One negative experience occurred in kindergarten. Her teacher was pregnant and left halfway through the year, but she did not come back. This was very traumatic for Kathryn because she had already developed a close relationship with her teacher. For Kathryn, not having the teacher in the classroom for the second half of the year created an imbalance in the classroom community and showed to her the importance of the teacher’s role for the learning environment. Kathryn also had positive experiences during her elementary years. She remembers reading the Guinness 720 reading series that included Dick, Jane and Spot stories and having to do a lot of workbook work. She enjoyed doing this work and loved writing her name on the workbooks. It was very important to her that she wrote her name neatly.

During third grade, Kathryn had an experience that could be seen as one of her first attempts in the role of teacher. She and another student had missed school, so the teacher had them stay in during recess to make up a subject-verb agreement test. Sentences were written on the board with a blank in each sentence. Underneath the blank
were two words to choose from. Kathryn and the other student were told to write their choices on paper and the teacher left the room to monitor the other students during recess. The other student was struggling with it, and Kathryn went up to the board and started to explain the concepts to the other student. The teacher walked in, saw Kathryn running her finger under the correct choice and scolded her for cheating. The teacher ripped up her test and threw her out. This experience left an impression on Kathryn and to this day, she can remember the experience in detail, even remembering the type of sentences that were written on the board.

Kathryn recalls two memorable projects she completed in elementary school. One was a civil war research project she completed in 4th grade. She had to create a scrapbook of things that she studied about the Civil War. She included items such as flags and drawings of uniforms. She also had to create a giant poster for fire safety week. With the help of her mother Kathryn put rabbits on hers to represent the small animals that were impacted by fires. Her goal was to capture the viewer’s emotional response so that they would help protect the forest from fires and protect the little bunnies. She won a ribbon for her poster.

Throughout the interviews, when Kathryn talked about her beliefs, she repeatedly brought up her time spent as an undergraduate in elementary methods courses and during her internship at the Stephens lab school. She also talked about spending time abroad at Cambridge University learning about the British Primary school system, a system that focused on student-driven discovery learning and project-based curriculum. This was when she felt pushed to think beyond her own understanding of educational philosophies.
and curriculum and to develop her own student-centered philosophical beliefs on teaching.

After graduating from college, Kathryn began working at a public school’s summer school gifted program. She taught mathematics and science for grades 4, 5, and 6. Then, in the fall, she began teaching 5th grade. Kathryn felt she did not quite fit in at this school and that her philosophy of teaching was different than the expectations the principal and other teachers had. Her background of learning about the British Primary Schools and interning at the Stephens College Elementary Children’s Program (a lab school), which followed the British primary school philosophy of open education, discovery learning, and child as informant was in contrast to the school she now worked with its insistence on straight lines, specific rules, and workbooks.

One very evident way she noticed these differences was in the way her room looked compared to the other 5th grade teachers. For example, during Halloween, Kathryn showed her students how to do an accordion fold and encouraged them to make a Halloween art project using their new knowledge. Her students made various types of spiders and other decorations that represented Halloween, which she hung from the ceiling. Kathryn had 24 students and so had 24 different projects hanging in the classroom. When she went to the other two 5th grade classrooms, she noticed that their students’ Halloween art was basically identical, all on the same sized piece of paper, with the same images (with slight variations). When the teachers saw her room, they told her, “Oh, honey. Next time we’ll share our templates with you.” Kathryn realized at this point that she was thinking differently than the other teachers. Kathryn saw the students in the other classrooms as having controlled, even teacher-centered, experiences. In
Kathryn’s classroom, students were provided the opportunity to express their individuality.

The following fall, Kathryn was hired at the Stephens lab school. She initially was there to cover for a teacher who was on maternity leave but ended up staying for two years. She taught a multi-age classroom, grades K-4. As she began her work in the lab school, she realized she had questions “about kids who struggled,” and that her main interests were in teaching gifted education, special education, and math. Kathryn decided to go to graduate school at the University of Missouri with a focus on special education. One of her course requirements was to take a Miscue Analysis class with Dorothy Watson. She fell in love with this course, enjoying the discussions about the definitions of literacy and how to teach literacy, and switched her major to Reading Education. She earned a M.Ed. in Reading Education from the University of Missouri and a Ph.D. in Reading and Language Education from Indiana University. In graduate school, Kathryn’s beliefs on learning through collaboration became very strong. She had experiences collaborating with her professors on research projects. She also had weekly after class discussions with her classmates where they would push each others’ thinking.

After graduate school, Kathryn spent nine years as a professor at Maryville College, Webster University, and the University of Missouri, respectively. Kathryn’s vita shows that she taught courses such as Reading, Language Arts, Curriculum and Instruction, Children’s Literature, and Educational Research. Kathryn felt that each university supported her professional growth. At Maryville College, she recalls that there was a very collaborative faculty that shared a view of the teacher as learner, and they valued action research for teachers. The faculty was very deliberate about how they
designed the undergraduate program to help students become reflective practitioners. Their graduate program, based on cohort groups working together, was designed to inspire teachers to become action researchers in their classrooms and change agents in their schools in order to make schools more equitable. While at Maryville, Kathryn worked on giving their pre-service teachers more time in the classroom to gain experience. She developed a collaborative relationship with a local public elementary school and out of the work she did there came her research on talking about books with children. Her collaborative experiences from graduate school had carried into her professional career and she sought out opportunities to learn with others.

At Webster University, Kathryn took on more of an administrative role. She was in charge of placing students in early field experiences and student teaching, as well as following-up with first-year teachers and on-going professional development. Although she enjoyed doing this work, Kathryn realized she needed to be in a position where she could spend more time in the classroom. To that end, she went to the University of Missouri where she developed a professional development relationship with the Clayton School District. The students who Kathryn taught were gaining their experience in the same classrooms of the teachers who Kathryn supported through professional development workshops and seminars. The teachers at this district were working on moving from a textbook-based, skills-based curriculum to a constructivist curriculum. At the same time, Kathryn worked with another school district whose essential professional development question seemed to be “how can we do better at using a basal reader?” Through these experiences of working with two districts with different goals, Kathryn
learned that she worked best and learned best with others who had similar theoretical views.

After teaching as a college professor for nine years, Kathryn decided to go back to teach in an elementary classroom. Her recent involvement in administrative positions at the university level had taken her away from being involved in K-12 classrooms. She missed being around students, and so when she was asked to teach a multi-age primary classroom, grades 1-3, at Glenridge Elementary School in Clayton, Missouri, Kathryn jumped at the offer. When recalling her days there, Kathryn remembers several incidents that made an impact on her beliefs and practices. In fact, Kathryn spent several years reflecting on and writing about some of the learning she gained during this time. One particular incident involved two students, six-year-old D’Andre and eight-year-old Henry. In a *Language Arts* (Pierce, 2006) article, Kathryn wrote about how, through her dealings with these students, she went on a self-discovery of how she should teach equity and social justice. The responses and connections these students made after reading *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001), a story of the experiences of a black boy and a white boy during the repeal of the Jim Crow laws, showed Kathryn the importance of being more purposeful in “teaching literacy in ways that help students construct more democratic ways of living” (Pierce, 2006, p. 435).

**Bringing together ideas about Kathryn’s educational experiences that helped form her beliefs about inquiry.** Looking back through Kathryn’s story, I can see many educational experiences that have helped Kathryn develop her beliefs about inquiry as a learner and as a teacher. Reminiscing about her experiences as a K-12 student, Kathryn realized the importance of the student’s role in the classroom and how important
it is to understand students as individuals. Kathryn also uses her early student experiences as a reminder to gain her students’ perspectives before jumping to conclusions. In addition, her K-12 experiences as a student introduced the use of art and symbols to portray her ideas. Kathryn now values providing opportunities for her students to present their knowledge through multiple media.

Kathryn’s experiences as an undergraduate student, graduate student, professor, and classroom teacher have had an impact on Kathryn’s beliefs, such as understanding the importance of seeing her students as individuals, the importance of creating opportunities for students to connect curriculum to their lives, and the importance of learning through collaboration with others. Kathryn’s experiences as a learner at the university level, as well as her early teaching experiences, continued to develop her beliefs about student-centered classrooms. Kathryn strives to create engagements put her students’ needs at the forefront. She wants to get her students involved and responsible for their own learning and so she guides her students to take action. For example, Kathryn values talk in the classroom and will provide opportunities for students to bring their ideas forward through discussions where they can learn from each other.

Dewey (1938) emphasized that educators should be aware of the type of environment that is conducive to quality experiences that lead to growth and how to effectively utilize that environment. Kathryn shares this view and believes that the teacher has a very definite role is creating the space for inquiry to happen. For example, when talking about exploratory talk, Kathryn said:

My job is to create the context where the exploratory talk can happen. Create the classroom climate where it’s safe to engage in that kind of rough draft thinking out loud. I have to create enough space in the day for them to have that talk. It can’t be rushed. Which is hard with a 44-minute period. I also have to create the
expectation that they are accountable for what comes out of the talk. And so, like the talk that they are doing like right now, I know that when, what’s guiding it is the selection of abstract categories. Is there anything magic about the abstract categories? No, not really. But, it’s searching and discussing and rethinking that’s happening along the way is what I value. And the exploratory talk is a crucial tool for that because it’s new for almost all of them. (Interview 5, March 14, 2011)

For Kathryn, the teacher’s role is to be purposeful in creating these spaces for engaging, inquiry experiences.

Beliefs about inquiry helped her:

- Understand students as individuals
- Seek to understand students’ perspectives
- Provide opportunities for students to share their ideas through multiple forms of media
- Create opportunities to connect curriculum to students’ lives
- Learn through collaboration with others
- Engage students to get them involved and inspire them to take action
- Learn through talk
- Create space for inquiry to happen
CHAPTER 5

INQUIRY AS A WAY OF BEING

I was initially drawn to complete my research with Kathryn because her colleagues, my advisors, knew her as a teacher who valued inquiry methodology. As I spent time with her and through the analysis of the data I collected, I came to understand that she was not just a teacher who used inquiry methods. Rather, I found that inquiry actually permeated her life. Inquiry is a way of being for Kathryn.

In the previous chapter, I presented Kathryn’s life experiences to answer my first research question:

- What life experiences helped the teacher shape her teaching philosophies?

I presented her story by discussing her influential teachers, how she lives the life of an inquirer, and the experiences that helped her form her beliefs. I also discussed how these experiences helped her develop some of her beliefs as a teacher to answer my second research question:

- What are the beliefs of a teacher that underlie her instructional decisions to use inquiry methods in her classroom?

As researchers, when we want to understand what it means to do a certain skill, we look to people who do the skill well and on a frequent basis. Donald Graves (1983), an educational researcher who focused on helping students become writers, for example, discusses how, in order to understand what a writer does, we need to get in touch with
how writers actually live, learn, and communicate. Graves shares the processes of what writers do, so teachers and students can engage in the actions of writers and develop their own writing skills. As her life unfolded through my analysis, I came to realize that Kathryn’s life could be considered a strong example of what it means to be a life-long learner, an inquirer. As I analyzed data from interview transcripts, observations, a video documentary, and Kathryn’s published work, I realized that by looking at her life and her actions, I could focus on and get in touch with what it means to live and learn as an inquirer. Although Kathryn lives her life as an inquirer in many ways, I focus on three ways that became apparent to me through analysis of data. She lives her life as an inquirer by:

- Being a reflective learner
- Opening herself to continuous learning
- Seeking opportunities to learn with others

**Being a Reflective Learner**

Reflection has played a large role in Kathryn’s life as an inquirer. Educational researchers have discussed the importance of reflection for teachers. Dewey (1933) called for teachers to take *reflective action*, to be “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads” (p. 9). Building on Dewey’s concept of reflective action, Zeichner and Liston (1996) describe five key features of a reflective teacher. A reflective teacher:

- examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice
is aware of and questions the assumptions and values he or she brings to teaching

is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches
takes part in the curriculum development and is involved in school change and efforts
takes responsibility for his or her own professional development

After careful analysis of the data, patterns emerged regarding Kathryn as a reflective teacher that are supported by the professional literature. Having an understanding of the features of a reflective teacher as discussed by Zeichner and Liston helped me analyze and see how Kathryn’s actions, as represented by the data, fit within these features.

**Examines, frames, and attempts to solve dilemmas of classroom practice.**

Dewey (1933), one of Kathryn’s favorite educational philosophers, stated that, “Reflection commences when one inquires into his or her experiences and relevant knowledge to find meaning in his or her beliefs. It has the potential to enable teachers to direct their activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view” (p. 17).

During our interviews, Kathryn shared similar thoughts about how reflection as a teacher is important in the process to continue to be purposeful in creating engaging experiences. She talked about how her role included evaluating classroom experiences that occurred, “In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this experiences, I have to see what it allowed [the students] to do differently, or in a more complex way in the future” (Interview 5, March 14, 2011). She uses her reflections as a way to understand her students and her teaching better and to consider the type of engagements that best suit them.
Throughout her talk about student-centered, inquiry learning, Kathryn expressed the belief that along with the dilemma of teachers creating the space for inquiry engagement, they also need to follow through and see how and where the students grow. For Kathryn, this is where reflection becomes part of the teacher’s role and is a cyclical process:

I think [reflection] has the same role there that it has in student learning, teacher learning, anybody’s learning. For me it’s part of that continuous learning cycle that you work on something and then you have to take time to step back and take a look at it and say, ‘what’s working? What’s not working? What have I figured out?’ because if you don’t, you don’t use that experience to help with a future experience. So, for me the reflection is essential for it to be a truly educational experience in [Dewey’s] definition of it. (Interview 6, March 15, 2011)

Just as reflection is a part of the teacher’s role, Kathryn believes reflection has a place in the student’s role as well. Her view is that students have the responsibility to inquire about new understandings, “The student’s role is to use the opportunity for talking to sort out and construct new ideas, new understandings to resolve anomalies in their own mind” (Interview 5, March 14, 2011). Kathryn emphasized this idea of being a reflective, intentional learner:

I think it’s that whole, are you willing to reflect on that experience and use it to shape who you are? Or do you sort of pass through it? And so I think 10 students can have the same experience but some of them will grow from it and some won’t. (Interview 7, March 16, 2011)

Because she sees reflection as an important part of the inquiry process, practicing it herself, she also wants her students to become reflective learners. She creates opportunities in the classroom for her students to build this skill. **Is aware of and questions the assumptions and values she brings to teaching.**

The data suggest that Kathryn uses reflection not just for creating appropriate engagements for her students, but also as a way for her to grow in her own inquiries. In
How We Think, Dewey (1933) discusses the importance of reflective thinking and about how we may be confronted with times of doubt, or situations where we are faced with uncertainties in our practice. He values these times of ambiguity and talks about how we can use these instances to learn, if we reflect on the perplexity. Kathryn follows this philosophy by reflecting on perplexing situations she encounters in the classroom. For example, her article discussing D’Andre (Pierce, 2006) seems to be a seminal piece in her own self-discovery. Kathryn wrote about the critical incident four years after it occurred. During those four years, Kathryn says she talked with many about the classroom incident:

This critical incident plagued me for months. I shared D’Andre’s story, along with Henry’s and Simon’s, with teachers at conferences and workshops, in the school lunchroom, over soup at a local restaurant – anywhere I could find an opportunity to tell and retell his story. Four years later, I am still telling this story, still talking with others to work at understanding what it means for me and my teaching. (p. 434)

Six years later, Kathryn is still talking about and reflecting on this incident during interviews with me. Her continuous reflection demonstrates how she is a life-long learner, a true inquirer who is willing to continuously grow in her understanding. She wrote, “This perseverating is evidence that I am still engaged in the process of reconstructing my vision as a teacher” (p. 434). She is not done learning; she is not a final product. Her belief is that she will always continue to grow as a learner.

Is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches. Kathryn is reflective about how she teaches her students by being aware of their funds of knowledge. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, (2005) discussed how our Funds of Knowledge are created from the cultural and social experiences we have that begin in our childhood. They define Funds of Knowledge as the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual
functioning and well-being” (p. 72). Educational researchers (e.g. Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Rumelhart, 1980) have emphasized the need to honor the prior knowledge, the Funds of Knowledge, that students come into our classrooms with. Freire (1970), for example, urged educators to fall away from a “Banking” concept which views students as “receptacles” into which knowledge can be deposited. Instead, Freire thought students should be viewed as having already established knowledge and that teachers should provide experiences where students can build upon their funds of knowledge.

Kathryn’s Funds of Knowledge were constructed through experiences through her early years until the present. Indeed, it appears that Kathryn’s own early educational experiences had a positive impact on forming her educational focus. Whether it was sewing her own clothes under the guidance of her paternal grandmother, exploring at her maternal grandfather’s farm, or setting up “shop” at her father’s place of business, Kathryn learned various tasks through these experiences. Kathryn’s early childhood experiences became a foundation of her prior knowledge that she could draw from when encountering new learning experiences. Honoring Funds of Knowledge is not only evident in Kathryn’s own educational experiences, but in the way she views her students. In the Language Arts article (Pierce, 2006) where Kathryn reflects on a classroom experience with her students, Henry, Simon, and especially D’Andre, her language shows that she understands that students use their prior knowledge to make connections to the texts they read:

As the children talked about powerful books and the connections they were making to their own lives, I took note of the words and phrases they used to describe issues and inequities and the topics that seemed to captivate them. (p. 429)
Kathryn’s writing and reflection in this article showed she honors her students’ Funds of Knowledge and that she pays attention to the words they use so she could reflect upon them when thinking about where the class could go next in their classroom inquiries.

**Takes part in the curriculum development and is involved in school change and efforts.** During my observations and interviews with Kathryn, I saw her take steps to be involved in curriculum development with teachers. Freedman, Jackson, and Boles (1983) discussed the importance of teachers seeing themselves as linked to their colleagues. These researchers emphasized that curricular and school structural change is more likely to occur if teachers reflect on their practices together.

Kathryn is open to working with her colleagues and be involved in curricular change at her school. For example, during my interview with Kathryn when she showed me her office, she talked about how teachers often drop by to ask for resources to teach certain content:

> People drop in to talk literacy. Which is fun, you know. People drop in and say “ya, I’m kinda interested in…I’m thinking about…and do you have a book on…” and so those are our department professional books, most of them…When I’m working with teachers and they have questions or they’re talking about something then I can come to this collection and say, “oh, we’ve got some books for you.” And I sort of take responsibility for making sure that we have ordered in books that people can use. (Interview 9, March 6, 2012)

Along with offering texts for teachers to use, Kathryn often helps teachers plan curricular units and activities. During one of my observations, I was able to sit in on a planning meeting with a 6th grade teacher (Field Journal, March 8, 2012). Kathryn, the teacher, the media specialist and other literacy aides were all present, collaborating to develop various engagements they could provide for the teachers’ students. The teacher’s main focus was to ask for help in how she could have her students present the information they were
going to research. With Kathryn leading the discussion, the team brainstormed and talked through the activities, each member bringing forth different ideas and how they could contribute.

Kathryn is also thoughtful about the curriculum structures that the school uses. For instance, the middle school Kathryn currently works at has implemented the use of essential questions across the curriculum and grade levels. Essential questions, such as *Am I my brother’s keeper?*, *Is a person shaped by the times or are the times shaped by the people?*, and *Are all men created equal?* become themes to which students can connect their new learnings. Teachers ask students to think deeply about these questions and, since there is not “one” correct answer, struggle through the ambiguity. Kathryn works with the teachers to develop the essential questions.

**Takes responsibility for her own professional development.** The data illustrate that Kathryn works to deepen her knowledge and skills and sees this as an integral part of her profession. Research has demonstrated the importance of teachers posing their own questions, gathering new knowledge, and renewing their practices. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), for example, discuss teacher research as “systematic, intentional inquiry” (p. 5). In a later article, Cochran-Smith (2001) expands on this idea:

Working from an inquiry stance is a process of raising questions and using the data of practice to investigate those questions critically and collaboratively. From this perspective, the major task of teaching is not simply figuring out how to get things done, but also deliberating about what to get done, why to get it done, who decides, and whose interests are served. When teachers work from an inquiry stance, they engage every day in the life-long process of learning to teach. (p. 22)

Throughout her career, Kathryn has demonstrated the inquiry stance Cochran-Smith discusses. As is seen by her Vita, Kathryn has posed various questions about teaching and learning and has published her findings through publications and
presentations (See Appendix A). As a teacher researcher, Kathryn constructs her own knowledge about her teaching and her students’ learning, and her published work has been a way for Kathryn to take responsibility for her own professional development. She has learned through her inquiries and has grown in her beliefs and practices. The article written about D’Andre (Pierce, 2006) is a prime example of how Kathryn has used her research to grow in her learning.

Kathryn values professional development and has a history of helping teachers become action researchers. For example, in recent years, Kathryn has coordinated a Summer Literacy Institute for local teachers. Every summer for the past seven years, Kathryn has created a week-long professional development workshop for teachers. Professionals in the field of education are invited to speak and lead workshops. All participants read a shared reading and collaborate to discuss how they can implement their new knowledge in their classrooms. Kathryn has used the Summer Literacy Institute to further her own professional development as well as the teachers who come by picking speakers and texts that meet everyone’s needs. She values the time she has spent with the educational leaders and the teachers at the institute. While reflecting planning for the Summer Literacy Institute, Kathryn said,

The part I absolutely love is I get to choose who the speakers are. And I have all correspondence with them, so I help them know what they’re coming to do, what we want them to do when they get here, and how we’re going to build on it… and then, I hire the local staff, which would be all those grade level and study group leaders [for the institute], and we have planning meetings where we orchestrate all that work [for the institute]. Someone from the district would give me money to feed them, and so I feed them in my house. And we meet in the living room and have conversations about big ideas for the institute. We break up, elementary in the kitchen and secondary in the dining room, and do some work. Then, we come back to the living room and process it. It’s just amazing! (Interview 13, September 20, 2012)
Being Open to Continuous Learning

Just as Kathryn is open to being reflective about her practices, she also has a history of being open to learning new ideas. Dewey (1916) stated that, “the self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action” (p. 351). Kathryn has demonstrated that she is active in her quest for new knowledge. She is open to continuous learning by being an active learner. Kathryn’s beliefs and actions are supported by Barnes (2008) when he discusses what the phrase active learning means:

Being ‘active’ does not imply moving about the room or manipulating objects…, but rather attempting to interrelate, to reinterpret, to understand new experiences and ideas. Whatever teaching method a teacher chooses – question and answer, guided discovery, demonstration or something else – it will always be the pupil who has to do the learning. He or she will make sense of the lessons only by using the new ideas, experiences or ways of thinking in order to reorganize his or her existing pictures of the world and how it can be acted upon. This is partly a matter of relating the new ideas to what the learner already knows. It is only the learner who can bring the new information, procedures or ways of understanding to bear upon existing ideas, expectations and ways of thinking and acting. That is, the learner actively constructs the new way of understanding. (p. 3)

Kathryn’s openness to continuous learning is best illustrated through her own life of inquiry. She believes that learners need to be “open to the interaction” (Interview 7, March 16, 2011). Kathryn’s story demonstrated three main ideas that fall under her openness to continuous learning:

- Taking risks and embracing challenges
- Valuing a diverse range of experiences
- Having a passion for learning

Taking risks and embracing challenges. Kathryn’s own educational experiences and my observations of her in the classroom support Kathryn’s belief in the
value of taking risks and embracing challenges as a learner. Educational researchers have supported the notion of teachers facilitating students learning on their own (Dewey, 1938) by creating spaces for students to pursue inquiries that they are most interested in (Freire, 1970). These ideas support the notion that students can be problem-posers and problem-solvers with the teacher as a facilitator to guide this type of learning.

Kathryn’s early experiences allowed her to try new things, to make mistakes, to give learning a chance, even if that meant making mistakes or fumbling through the process. When Kathryn’s paternal grandmother gave her free reign with the sewing machine, Kathryn was allowed to make clothes that may not have been perfect. She talked about how she wouldn’t be caught outside in the clothes she made, but she was able to at least make attempts. This grandmother also allowed her to set the table with the “real” dishes, taking the chance that Kathryn might break these dishes and setting higher expectations for Kathryn’s responsibilities as a learner. These experiences helped Kathryn value taking risks and pursuing challenges during her years as a student and a teacher.

When I observed Kathryn teaching, I noticed that these teaching values have developed into the way she gives her students responsibility for their own learning. She sets up a culture of learning that allows students to be open to learning and to take risks as they are doing so, to make attempts even if failures may be around the corner, and to value those failures. Kathryn challenges her students to take risks through the language she uses with them. For example, I would often hear Kathryn say things like, “This is the second hardest thing I’m going to ask you to do today, but you guys survived the first one, right?” (Field Journal, March 14, 2011) and “This is going to be hard, so I just want
you to let your brain hurt” (Field Journal, March 6, 2012). By using these types of phrases, Kathryn is showing the students that learning is challenging, but possible.

Reflecting on this, Kathryn expressed:

> I think one of the biggest [struggles] for me is helping the kids be comfortable with the tension and ambiguity and lack of specificity, with the messiness of it. And I, you know, I warned them last week that what we’d be doing this week would be hard mental work. It wouldn’t take a lot of paper time, not like stay up late type of work, but it would be hard thinking. And that sometimes is also very frustrating, but I knew they’d be able to do it and that coming out of it on the other side, that they would feel it was worth it. (Interview 5, March 14, 2011)

**Valuing a diverse range of experiences.** Kathryn’s early experiences with her family members instilled a love of learning a variety of things. Her involvement in the “million extra-curriculars” (Interview 8, February 28, 2012) in high school, and having this variety of experiences helped to make Kathryn a bit of a Renaissance woman, someone who has broad intellectual interests, which she continued during her college years. Kathryn jokes about how she has over 150 undergraduate hours because she changed her major so often and took so many different courses. She began as a pharmacy major, changed to accounting, then interior design, and finally education. I believe Kathryn’s love of learning is evident through these many experiences. Her pursuits to take on these various classes were not random; she was drawn to learn about these new ideas and was purposeful in her actions as a learner.

Kathryn has fed her thirst for in-depth knowledge in various personal pursuits, as well. For example, her personal inquiries into researching the dishes she uses in her home and deciding to write a book about it became a place where Kathryn could construct meaning for the dishes she uses everyday and for special occasions. In addition, her endeavors to include more technology experiences for her students over the
past several years has become a way for her to grow in her own understanding of how these new literacies fit in her ideas of how students can become more literate. These are personal pursuits because they were initiated by Kathryn. She was personally interested in learning more about the dishes she uses everyday and so she initiated that research. In her classroom, Kathryn saw a need for her students and herself to learn how to develop twenty-first-century skills (e.g., Harste, 2003; Van Sluys, 2005). She initiated her own research about how she could provide learning experiences for her students using technology tools while at the same time increasing her own knowledge about these tools.

When observing Kathryn in the classroom, this belief of valuing a diverse range of experiences is also evident. For example, when Kathryn uses text sets, one of her goals is to expose her students to a diverse range of perspectives about a topic. For example, while observing Kathryn make a presentation for 7th grade students about the Harlem Renaissance (Field Journal, March 6, 2012), Kathryn showed art from various artists from that time and that depicted various scenes such as jazz clubs, protests, and hangings. She asked the students to reflect on the art pieces, thinking about whose perspective was shown and whose was missing. Another example is Kathryn’s use of multiple literacies by embracing technology in the classroom. She has had students use technology tools, such as Photovoice, to express their ideas. Kathryn wrote about some tools that provide students with experiences in technology in a book chapter extension titled Reading the World through Moodles and Wordles and Digital Texts (Pierce, 2011).

**Having a passion for learning.** As I listened to Kathryn talk about her learning experiences and her teaching, I was impressed with her own passion to learn and the way she could easily articulate her views. The interviews I conducted with her, the
observations I saw of her, and the written works I read by her illustrate her belief that it is important to have passion for learning. She also extends her passion for learning to her students by encouraging them to inquire about the topics that are important to them (Freire, 1970; Wells, 1999), believing that by doing so, she could help her students create their own passion for learning.

When listening to Kathryn recall some of her teachers, it is evident that she was impressed with their passion. Her earliest teachers, her grandparents and parents, showed her the value of education. All of her grandparents took college courses. Kathryn particularly remembers when her maternal grandmother went back to college:

I mean I was a young child at the time so she had to be in her 50s or 60s and was going back to college and taking classes, which was just unheard of in the community. I mean this is the woman who ordered her dishes at the lumberyard. (Interview 8, February 28, 2012)

Two of her college professors, one a former NASA scientist and the other a lawyer by day, professor at night, were model teachers for Kathryn. She was lucky to have had experiences with and learn from these passionate teachers, and through her inquisitive nature has become a passionate learner and teacher herself.

Through my observations, I noticed that Kathryn likes to share her new learnings, which can be seen as evidence of her passion. For example, after attending a conference that focused on using technology in the classroom, Kathryn set up a meeting with her assistant principal to share the ideas she learned about and to discuss ways to incorporate them at the school. Kathryn also showed a passion when I asked her to show me the objects in her office and her home. In her office, she spoke about the many texts, both children’s literature and professional literature that have had an influence on her. She was animated and specific when talking about the stories, the authors, and the
information she learned from the various texts. In her home, she was passionate about what she had learned about the dish sets that have been passed down to her from her family members. Her research gave her stories to tell about each set of dishes.

**Seeking Opportunities to Learn with Others**

As I analyzed Kathryn’s own learning experiences and the observations I made on how she structures the learning experiences for her students, I recognized that there is a strong sense of the importance of collaboration. In her own experience, when asked about experiences as a student that had an impact on her teaching beliefs, one example she talked about was her first English course in college:

> I think I have to go to college first. Because that’s where there were some huge changes [in my beliefs]. I went to a women’s college, Stephens College, as a freshman. And I took an English class and I was listening to the way people were talking about the things we were reading and I’m like, ‘Oh my gosh. I’ve never been part of a discussion like this.’ And I felt at first both intimidated and really excited. I loved being in college and so I had that experience. (Interview 8, February 28, 2012)

Kathryn’s beliefs are aligned with what educational researchers and theorists have discussed regarding learning through interaction with others and dialogue (e.g. Freire; 1970; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1999). Vygotsky (1978), for example, argued that we learn through engaging activities with the aid of others. Wells (1999) agrees and discusses how learning is optimized during these collaboration events where learners can explore their ideas through dialogue, discussing their agreements and disagreements about the problems and ideas they encounter. Freire (1970) discusses how these learning engagements through interaction with others and through dialogue become a “mutual process.”
Kathryn’s story shows us the importance of learning with others as part of the inquiry process in three different ways:

- Learning through conversations with others, mentors, and fellow apprentices.
- Valuing and making space for exploratory talk.
- Seeking out diverse perspectives through multiple literacies.

**Learning through conversations with others, mentors, and fellow apprentices.** Vygotsky (1978) emphasized how students need opportunities to learn to work collaboratively with others. Kathryn’s own experiences demonstrate how she valued the times when she had opportunities to work and learn with others. For example, her college freshman English class opened up a world of learning through collaborative talk. Another time she reminisced about spending evenings with her colleagues during her graduate work. The graduate courses she took were mostly in the afternoon and early evening, and she remembers heading to a coffee shop or a 24-hour restaurant with her classmates after class and they would talk for hours, into the night, about what they had just learned. Kathryn valued these conversations and felt that she was part of an inquiry collaboration, and that even though her classmates may have gone off in different directions, they continue to influence her today. Learning with others in this way has permeated Kathryn’s professional, as well as personal life. Whether it is learning more about the use of technology in the classroom, or creating time to learn about new recipes in her Guinea Pig Dinner, Kathryn learns with and from others as she surrounds herself with fellow collaborators and leads a life of inquiry.

Kathryn carries this belief into her practices as a teacher. Wells (2009) argues that “if we want to improve the opportunities for learning in school we must find ways to
create the conditions for the dialogue of ‘thinking together’ [Mercer, 2002] to become the dominant mode of interaction” (p. 55). Kathryn transferred her own successful collaboration experiences to her students’ experiences by providing opportunities for her students to learn from each other, so they can learn from others, too. For example, she often has her students working in pairs or in small groups to build on each other’s ideas. This can be seen in the video documentary (WNET/Annenberg Foundation, 2004) of Kathryn’s middle school classroom when Kathryn asked her students to work in groups to analyze the text sets. Each group worked together to synthesize the information they gathered from the texts and to create a presentation for the rest of the class.

Valuing and making space for exploratory talk. Inquiry talk is an important structure for Kathryn to work towards in her classroom. Kathryn introduced to me the educational researcher Douglas Barnes and his ideas on exploratory talk, which has broadened my understanding of the type of talk that is used during inquiry explorations. Barnes (2008) contrasted two types of talk, exploratory and presentational:

Exploratory talk is hesitant and incomplete because it enables the speaker to try out ideas, to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them, to arrange information and ideas into different patterns. The difference between the two functions of talk is that in presentational talk the speaker’s attention is primarily focused on adjusting the language, content and manner to the needs of an audience, and in exploratory talk the speaker is more concerned with sorting out his or her own thoughts. (p. 5)

Kathryn keeps the notion of exploratory talk at the forefront when she plans inquiry engagements for her students. She understands the importance of creating spaces for her students where they can work through their ideas together through their talk. She described how she sets up these spaces for exploratory talk:

I see my role as to create the classroom context where those literature discussions or any small group discussions can thrive. Which means creating a place where
it’s safe to throw up half-baked ideas. Where it’s safe to change your mind. Where it’s safe to challenge someone else’s idea and where kids know how to do that. I think it’s my job to make sure that what I’m asking them to do is compelling. And even if what I’ve been handed isn’t compelling, I have an obligation to find a way to make it matter to the kids. I feel that I share responsibility with the kids for having productive and generative conversation. I own responsibility for setting it up and setting the stage and creating the parameters and the boundaries. And they own responsibility for ensuring they are bringing their best game to the table. That they’re bringing their questions to the table, not waiting for someone to tell them what they are. That kind of stuff. And when those two things are working well, then the discussions go really well. I do not think I need to be in every discussion group. I don’t need to listen to everything every kid says. I eavesdrop to get a sense of the pulse of the group. I eavesdrop to get a sense of what kind of energy is going on in the group but I don’t feel like I have to listen to a complete transcript of every group in order to have a sense of whether it’s working or not. Because those quick writes and the sharing out to the larger group, that gives me a pretty good deal of what’s going on. And if I have individual kids that I’m worried about, I just go sit next to them. And listen in. or ask questions. (Interview 4, March 13, 2011)

Kathryn recognizes her students do not just learn from listening to her, but rather the importance of her students learning from each other through the use of exploratory talk.

My observations include several incidents when Kathryn would propose a question to her students, or initiate a discussion prompt and she would sit back and allow her students to build on each other’s ideas. One such example is shown in my field journal of a time when Kathryn had her students discuss a Smithsonian art piece and how it related to the text they had just read:

\[ T – “Talk with each other about how this picture relates to the character” \]
\[ T – silent, pausing and then listening to students \]
\[ S – “I think...” “maybe...” “like...” “if...” “so...” “yeah, so...” \]
\[ Building on each other’s ideas. \]
\[ T – “Did everyone who has an opinion have an opportunity to tell us what you think is represented in this pic? \]

(T is my shorthand for teacher, S is for student) (Field Journal, March 6, 2012)

My notes show the type of exploratory talk that Barnes and Kathryn value with the “I think” “maybe” “like” “if” “so” “yeah, so” etc. During their exploratory talk, Kathryn sat
back in silence and allowed her students to generate the talk, building on each other’s ideas. At different times, the students were quiet and Kathryn remained quiet, too. For many teachers, this situation could be tricky and the need to talk into the silence with more prompts is tempting. However, Kathryn trusted that her students were perhaps thinking through their ideas and needed that silence to do so. She trusted that they would again continue their conversation and push each other to discuss. Later that day during an interview, Kathryn discussed her role in this process and her goal for her students, “My job is to create the context where the exploratory talk can happen. Create the classroom climate where it’s safe to engage in that kind of rough draft thinking out loud” (interview 5, March 6, 2012).

Other data that demonstrates Kathryn’s belief in the importance of exploratory talk is her published writing. She has written several articles and book chapters, both as sole author and in collaboration with colleagues, that have centered on the idea of exploratory talk. One such article is titled *Making Room for Talk: Examining the Historical Implications of Talk in Learning* (Gilles & Pierce, 2003), which she wrote with her colleague, Carol Gilles. They discussed how exploratory talk has been examined by educational researchers in the past, how their own perspectives and practices have changed based on this research, and they share strategies teachers can use to analyze exploratory talk in the classroom.

**Seeking out diverse perspectives through multiple literacies.** Through my analysis of the interview data, observations, and Kathryn’s written documents, I noticed that Kathryn believes it is important to use a diverse array of tools to bring in new voices and new perspectives for her students to learn from. Educational researchers have pushed
to have classrooms provide students with experiences where they can be prepared for twenty-first-century life through the use of twenty-first-century tools (e.g. Harste, 2003; Van Sluys, 2005). Our definition of what it means to be literate has broadened from just being able to read and write. The term “multiple literacies” (Street, 1995) has developed to include notions of cultural and social practices. As Harste (2003) wrote, “literacy can be thought of as a particular set of social practices that a particular set of people value” (p. 8). The idea of what texts are, while still including traditional books, has expanded to include other forms of literacies as well (e.g. media, art, music, technology, etc.). It has been evident to me that Kathryn values the use of multiple literacies and strives to provide opportunities for her students to interact with various types of texts and tools so they can learn through others’ diverse perspectives.

Texts, for example, are an important part of Kathryn’s education and a tool Kathryn can use to initiate exploratory talk and inquiry. When asked to give a tour of her office and home, books were a main feature of both spaces. Kathryn values the knowledge she has gained from the various texts she surrounds herself with. She uses text sets often in the classroom as a way to initiate conversations about new topics. For Kathryn, text sets are:

texts, and texts can be defined broadly…they don’t have to be print texts, but texts that offer different perspectives and so by filling the room with lots of different text sets, each organized around different topics and themes, it broadens the pool of ideas and perspectives that the kids are able to consider. (Interview 4, March 13, 2011)

Kathryn also has created a reputation in her school as the person to go to when needing a new idea or text. The teachers drop by her office often when they need a new strategy to try out or if they need a text set put together. Kathryn will pull out a professional book to
give to the teacher, or will lend out some of her children’s literature to any of the teachers.

An example of how Kathryn has offered her students opportunities to use multiple literacies is when she had her writing workshop students use photography. Her students were pushed to think about and view their environments in new ways and through a new lens by taking photographs of their surroundings. Kathryn had students think more deeply about the photographs they had taken and to create themes that characterized their environment and their lives. Kathryn has recently been on a quest to learn about new technologies so she can provide inquiry experiences for her students to learn with these new tools. She has attended conferences focused on technology and collaborated with some of her colleagues to create engaging activities for her students.

**Synthesizing Kathryn’s Life as an Inquirer**

Learning about Kathryn’s life experiences has helped me understand what an inquirer does. Inquiry is a way of being for Kathryn which is demonstrated through her actions as a reflective learner, a continuous learner, and as someone who seeks opportunities to learn with others. The data illustrates to me that Kathryn is the same person in the classroom as she is in the world. She lives inquiry in all aspects of her life. Kathryn showed me how her beliefs guide her life in and outside of the classroom. Her beliefs help her be purposeful in how she leads her life as a learner and as a teacher. The following table illustrates the relationship between all of the ideas presented in this chapter, showing Kathryn’s actions as an inquirer.
Table 5.1 Kathryn’s Life as an Inquirer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry as a way of being in life</th>
<th>Inquiry as a way of being in the classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being a reflective learner</td>
<td>Kathryn uses her reflections as a way to understand her students and her teaching better and to consider the type of engagements that best suit them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Just as reflection is a part of the teacher’s role, Kathryn believes reflection has a place in the student’s role as well. “The student’s role is to use the opportunity for talking to sort out and construct new ideas, new understandings to resolve anomalies in their own mind.” She creates ongoing opportunities for her students to grow through reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kathryn uses reflection not just for creating appropriate engagements for her students, but also as a way for her to grow in her own inquiries. She reflects on perplexing situations she encounters in the classroom (i.e. D’Andre).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kathryn is reflective about how she teaches her students by being aware of their funds of knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kathryn is reflective about curriculum development with teachers and the curriculum structures that the school uses (i.e. essential questions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As a teacher researcher, Kathryn constructs her own knowledge about her teaching and her students’ learning, and her published work has been a way for Kathryn to take responsibility for her own professional development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Opening herself to continuous learning by taking risks and embracing challenges | Kathryn sets up a culture of learning that allows students to be open to learning and to take risks as they are doing so, to make attempts even if failures may be around the corner, and to value those failures.  
Kathryn challenges her students to take risks through the language she uses with them. For example, “This is the second hardest thing I’m going to ask you to do today, but you guys survived the first one, right?” |
|---|---|
| Opening herself to continuous learning by valuing a diverse range of experiences | When Kathryn uses text sets, one of her goals is to expose her students to a diverse range of perspectives about a topic.  
She uses technology to access multiple literacies extensively in the classroom. |
| Opening herself to continuous learning by having a passion for learning | She extends her passion for learning to her students by encouraging them to inquire about the topics that are important to them, believing that by doing so, she could help her students create their own passion for learning.  
Kathryn shares her new learnings about topics like using technology in the classroom with administrators and colleagues. |
| Learning through conversations with others, mentors and fellow apprentices | She often has her students working in pairs or in small groups to build on each other’s ideas. |
| Valuing and making space for exploratory talk | Kathryn keeps the notion of exploratory talk at the forefront when she plans inquiry engagements for her students. She understands the importance of creating spaces for her students where they can work through their ideas together through their talk (i.e. literature and small group discussions).

During their exploratory talk, Kathryn sat back in silence and allowed her students to generate the talk, building on each other’s ideas using language like, “I think” “maybe” “like” “if” and so on.

“My job is to create the context where the exploratory talk can happen. Create the classroom climate where it’s safe to engage in that kind of rough draft thinking out loud.” |
| --- | --- |
| Seeking out diverse perspectives through multiple literacies | For Kathryn, text sets are:

“texts, and texts can be defined broadly…they don’t have to be print texts, but texts that offer different perspectives and so by filling the room with lots of different text sets, each organized around different topics and themes, it broadens the pool of ideas and perspectives that the kids are able to consider.”

Kathryn also uses photography during writing workshop to help her students think about and view their environments in new ways. |
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The following provides a brief overview of the purpose of the study, a summary of the procedures and a summary of the findings. Also included is a discussion of implications I have drawn from this study regarding being a mother, classroom teacher, teacher educator, and researcher.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to learn more about the life of a master teacher who emphasizes inquiry-based teaching methods. The guiding questions for this study were:

- What life experiences helped the teacher shape her teaching philosophies?
- What are the beliefs of a teacher that underlie her instructional decisions to use inquiry methods in her classroom?

Summary of Procedures

To answer the research questions, I used qualitative research methods (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 2008), life story interview methods (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Rossman & Rallis, 2003), and interview data analysis (Spradley, 1979). The main methodology procedures included visits, observations and interviews with the participant, Kathryn Mitchell Pierce, an experienced middle school teacher who uses inquiry-based teaching methods in home and school settings. Data were collected in the form of a field journal.
of observations, records of the participant (i.e. vita, videos, published articles), and interview transcriptions. Data were coded and analyzed using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Summary of Findings**

In order to help answer my research questions, I attempted to write Kathryn’s story which I presented in chapter four. My goal for this was to present Kathryn’s story as reflected by the data collected and to give my reader background information about Kathryn’s experiences. In chapter four, I found that Kathryn:

- Learned from Influential Teachers
- Lived the Life of an Inquirer
- Educational Experiences that Shaped her Beliefs about Inquiry

In chapter five, after further analyzing the data and what I had written for Kathryn’s story, I discussed how Kathryn has shown me what it means to be an inquirer. I discussed three main actions in which Kathryn engages as an inquirer:

- She is a reflective learner
- She opens herself to continuous learning
- She seeks opportunities to learn with others

Kathryn’s story and her beliefs have deepened and broadened my understandings of what it means to live a life of inquiry. When looking to help students understand the process of writing, Donald Graves (1983) encourages teachers and students to turn to real writers to see what they do. In the same way, I have turned to Kathryn to see what an inquirer does. Although I have described what Kathryn does as an inquirer, Kathryn has shown me that inquiry is a way of being not just of doing. Being an inquirer for Kathryn
is being reflective of her actions in both her life and her classroom, opening herself to continuous learning, and seeking opportunities to learn with others. Her story offers us a glimpse into how a person’s life can embody what she believes in.

An important idea I have realized is that my goal is not going to be to “do Kathryn.” My goal is going to be how I can understand her beliefs and make them my own. Kathryn is an example of how one person enacts inquiry. I can use my understanding of how she has lived inquiry and rethink my work as a mother, a classroom teacher, a teacher educator, and a researcher.

**Implications**

**Implications for being a mother.** Kathryn’s story has helped me to consider what it means to be a mother to my son. Several years ago, I watched a play (Giron, 1998) about the Wright brothers, the brothers who were first to fly a power-controlled machine. There was a scene in the play that gave the audience of glimpse of the brothers’ mother and how she may have influenced, or at least developed, their scientific minds. In this scene one of the boys spilled some milk. Instead of the expected reaction, the mother told the brothers to watch the milk, to see where the milk flowed, and to give reasons why the milk flowed the way it did. While conducting this study and learning about Kathryn’s early experiences, this scene came to my mind. I realized that I want to be the type of mother who prompts my son to think about the “whys.” I want to be the kind of mother who encourages her son to be an inquirer.

Now, I am not saying that I am going to encourage my son to go out and spill milk, but I am hoping that in those types of situations I might ask him to consider the whys and the possibilities. I want to be the type of mother who takes the time to answer
his million questions. Particularly now, at age 8, he is so inquisitive about the world around him. In fact, as I write this, he keeps coming to ask me questions about the meaning behind some of the phrases I recently used with him. I told him earlier that the medicine he took might “wear off” and he’s not quite sure what that means, so he keeps coming to ask me to explain. Even though there is a need to finish my writing, I took the time to pause and help him with his understanding (before asking him to run along so mommy can work). Although I feel I have always tried to be a good mother in this way, learning from Kathryn has made me more cognizant of my actions as a mother and have emphasized the value I now place on providing my son with these types of educational experiences.

Since Kathryn has told me about her grandmother allowing her to take risks with the sewing machine and the real dishes, I have also realized that I need to provide my son with opportunities to take risks, too. Along with this, I need to talk with my son about the value of failure and to understand failure as a way to learn. I believe that it is through failure that we learn some of our best lessons, and I hope to give my son opportunities to try new things and not be afraid of the possibility of failure.

**Implications for being a teacher educator.** Kathryn is an optimal example of a person who lives inquiry. Her inquisitive nature has made her a model for her students. She believes strongly in the power of inquiry because she has allowed her own inquiries space to thrive. Therefore, encouraging her students to be inquirers has become second nature.

As I discussed in the literature review, I believe the goal of education should be to help students become life-long learners. I have grown in my understanding of what this
means in that I actually think everyone is a life-long learner, meaning that we cannot help but learn and build our schema when confronted with new situations. Therefore, I would now like to become more specific and say that our goal in education should be to help students become more cognizant of their learning and to be more purposeful in becoming inquirers. For example, my biggest growth as a learner has been gaining an understanding that I need to approach teacher education by helping our future educators become more metacognitive about their learning and to become inquirers themselves. Rather than merely teaching inquiry methods to future teachers, I need to help my students reflect on how they are inquirers, how they are life-long learners. Once they reflect and view themselves as learners and come to this understanding, it is then they can become more effective in helping their students achieve the same by being models for their students and more thoughtful in creating spaces for inquiry in the classroom. For example, if reflection is an important action for a teacher in their own process of inquiry, the teacher could discuss with his/her students how reflection has helped and provide engagements where students could reflect on their own inquirers.

Implications for being a classroom teacher. One of my favorite quotes about teaching comes from Harvey and Goudvis (2007) who wrote, “schools should not be places where old people go every day to do the work for young people” (p. 44). Their book, Strategies that Work, provides ideas for teaching students how to become thoughtful and engaged readers. This line is included in their chapter about strategies for active literacy. Harvey and Goudvis promote the idea that teachers should help students become active, rather than passive, learners. Throughout my research with Kathryn, this quote kept tickling the back of my mind because I witnessed Kathryn, over and over,
create spaces where her students did most of the work. She would provide direction, then sit back and allow her students to take responsibility for their own learning. She also modeled this process through her own actions as a continuous, active learner.

As teachers, we can learn from Kathryn by creating similar environments for our students where they can become the active learners. I have worked with many teachers who resist this type of teaching because they feel they are giving up control of their classrooms, and they fear this means the classroom will become a chaotic place where students do as they wish. However, as Kathryn has emphasized, the type of student-centered inquiry classroom she creates is not “laissez-faire.” The teacher has a definite role, which is to be thoughtful in creating appropriate engagements for students, to facilitate their learning by stepping in when necessary, to trust the process, and to become a reflective practitioner ready to make changes if needed.

Kathryn talked about trusting the process of inquiry. Citing Dewey (1938) as an influence in this belief, Kathryn specified, “If the experiences are very engaging and the kids are treated respectfully, they will self-monitor their behavior and they will learn important things. And so if you trust the experience and trust the kids, trust the process, it’ll work” (Interview 8, February 28, 2012). For teachers, this trust, to give up a bit of control, can be challenging. However, Kathryn believes that “if I provide the right invitations, and that term came from Burke, if I provide the right invitations and create the right environment, then the process will work and people will learn the things that are important for them to learn” (Interview 8, February 28, 2012).

Implications for being a researcher. As a researcher in this study, I have become more interested in using life history methodologies. My bachelor’s degree in
Anthropology has perhaps planted the seed of interest to learn about people’s cultures and lives. For this study I adopted ethnographic and life-history methodologies especially during the interviewing process and learning to write and analyze Kathryn’s story. I would be interested in reading more about life history methods and to pursue research that attempts to understand how other teachers’ lives and practice intersect. One of the questions I have been asked about this study is Why Kathryn? Why study her life? Similar studies of other teachers may broaden our understanding of the connection between educational experiences and beliefs.

Kathryn’s story has led me to ask questions about how she has become the inquirer she is now. After getting to know Kathryn and analyzing the data I collected, I see Kathryn as one who truly practices what she preaches. Is her inquisitive nature something she was born with, or was it something that grew from her teachers and experiences? This leads me to further ask if this type of life of inquiry is attainable to anyone?

Or perhaps the role of inquiry is not the center of her effectiveness as a teacher. Kathryn has been thoughtful throughout her life in considering what is most important to her as a learner and as a teacher. So, is it that confidence of what her beliefs are that makes her most effective? She has her set of beliefs; she trusts that it will work, and she has passion about it all. Kathryn seems to have a strong sense of who she is and what she believes in. Could it be that she is an example of a great learner and someone else who has a different methodology of teaching can still be an effective teacher because they know who they are and what they believe in? Could someone who has not lived the life
of an inquirer as Kathryn has still become an inquirer in his/her personal and professional life?

As I reflect on these questions and ideas that I want to implement in my personal and professional life, I go back to my previous statement that Kathryn is not a final product. She is not done, as none of us are. We can learn from her story and integrate the ideas we have learned from her to make them our own in our continuous journey as learners. Taking Kathryn’s actions and making them our own, we follow Dewey (1916) when he stated that, “the self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action” (p. 351).
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APPENDIX A

KATHRYN MITCHELL PIERCE PUBLICATIONS

Books

Articles and Chapters


Pierce, K. M. "What do Air Traffic Controllers and Reading Teachers have in common?" St. Louis TAWL Newsletter, Fall, 1995.


Pierce, K. M. "Establishing a Reading-Writing Classroom" in K. G. Short and J.C. Harste with C. Burke, Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers, 2nd ed., Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH: 1996.

Pierce, K. M. "What do Air Traffic Controllers and Reading Teachers have in common?" Illini TAWL Newsletter, Fall, 1996 (reprinted from St. Louis TAWL Newsletter, Fall, 1995).


Reviews

Pierce, K. M. "Books to Support Teacher-Researchers; (Book Reviews), The Missouri Reader, Vol. 16, No. 1, Fall 1991.


Editorials

Pierce, K. M. "Innovation in Literacy Instruction" (Guest Editorial), The Missouri Reader, vol. 13, No. 1, Fall, 1988.


APPENDIX B

RESEARCH NOTES, MARCH 13, 2011

PBS video


Teaching Multicultural Literature: A workshop for the Middle Grades (PBS video series)

From website:

OVERVIEW:

In Clayton, Missouri, Kathryn Mitchell Pierce’s sixth-grade students read works that explore issues of historical and contemporary immigration. Pierce uses “text sets” of multicultural picture books, poetry, and nonfiction to introduce the students to a wide range of perspectives and to set the stage for their novel study. The Students choose, and then discuss in literature groups, novels by An Na, Edwidge Danticat, Walter Dean Myers, Pam Muñoz Ryan, and Laurence Yep. In culminating presentations, they synthesize themes and pose thought-provoking questions that invite others to examine these novels in new ways. This program features author profiles of Laurence Yep and Edwidge Danticat.

Pierce’s goal is to have students come away from the unit thinking about injustice and inspired to do something about it. Teacher educator Jerome Harste comments, “Often curriculum stays at an intellectual level, not at a social practice level. And what we need to do is open up space in our classrooms so that kids can position themselves differently. [So they can ask], ‘What kind of new social action should we be taking? How should we be talking about this?’ Then they have the kind of agency that education should be about.”
My Notes/Questions:

Text Sets:

- You mentioned how Text Sets are a way to start/introduce the inquiry. Can you explain this a little more? Why is this a good way to start inquiry? How do you share the texts with the students?
- “The books that we have aren’t all necessarily about immigration, but they are all about leaving, journeying, finding home, finding yourself…so this is really an introduction or an exploration that sets the stage for the conversations that should be really crucial about the novels and will help them look across the novels for big pictures about society and help them connect it back to themselves.”
  - How do you determine what texts to include that are not quite on the main topic? How do you think the texts you choose influence the students’ thoughts and conversations?
- “using literature as tools to inquire”
- “Our inquiries always begin where the children are. What they understand. What they’re thinking. What their thoughts and questions are. And they’re life experiences are. And the text sets give them an opportunity to get those life experiences out on the table and begin to use them as background.”

TIME

- How important is time? Some teachers might think to give their students one day to go through the books is enough and wonder how they would keep their students have meaningful conversations for 3-5 days on the same topic and same books. How do you get the students to this point?

QUICK WRITES

- I saw how you had students do 5 minute quick writes to “think through some ideas” about their books. And you had them go back to them later to reflect on the questions they had about novels or questions that came up during this whole activity. Is this an important part of the inquiry process? How?

TEACHER ROLE

- What is the teacher’s role during these inquiry discussions? (bring in other materials, add to
- What are things you struggle with during this process? You mentioned figuring out how many days to allow students to have with text set is a struggle. Why? What else is something you have to consider?
• What do you do to help students when they seem to be making only surface level connections and to help them get deeper and think more metaphorically? Bring “knowledge to a conscious level” (Harste)?

CHOICE

• I noticed you allowed students to pick their top 3 book choices. How else do you offer choice to your students?
• Novel selection – in your experience, how do you see children choosing the books they choose? In this lesson, you introduced the books and gave a little book review/summary of each. Can you tell me of other ways you experienced introducing books to students?
• Thesis/thought-provoking questions presentation. The students were able to give suggestions of other ways they had presented in the past. How do you get to this point? Why the many ways to present?

These types of literature engagements/conversations help “change the world that these children are creating as they move into adulthood”
Appendix C

Interview 4 Transcription

Date: 3/13/10, 3:27pm

Length: 1:04:40

M: As I was viewing the video, I was noticing some things that I want to ask you. So, I’ll try to remind you??? But, I basically just noticed a few things that you did and I generated some questions to ask maybe why or what you think about…you know, that sort of stuff.

KMP: ok

M: so one of the first things you do in this activity is introduce text sets. And you mentioned how text sets are ways to start the inquiry. So, can you explain that a little bit more?

KMP: sure. Because I, for me a definition of text sets would be texts and texts can be defined broadly they don’t have to be print texts, but texts that offer different perspectives and so by filling the room with lots of different text sets, each organized around different topics and themes, it broadens the pool of ideas and perspectives that the kids are able to consider. So going into that immigration unit, the text that’s got beyond recent news about immigration and the southern border, it gets beyond the fact that some of the kids in our classroom are immigrants. And there’s a difference between immigrant and refugee and things like that and so, the books gave them different perspective and also gave them insights into why people choose their homelands. Why some people choose to stay. What the journey is like. What it’s like when they get to the new place. That kind of stuff. So, themes that were going to be important in our study of the social studies content as well as really understanding the lives of the characters in the novels.

M: ok. So, can you give me any other examples of when you’ve used text sets to introduce or to start an inquiry?

KMP: sure, the civil rights unit. Fill the room with lots of books about, um, using JoBeth Allen’s lens of critique, hope and action. Books that offer those perspectives and sort of kick-off the unit. Our 7th grade teachers teach The Giver. And so I pulled together a set of primarily picture books on different themes that would become possible discussion
topics of The Giver. And so they spent time looking at those picture books organized by theme and as a pre-reading experience to set the stage of what they were going to read. Some quick examples. One would be the immigration was introduced, civil rights introduced social studies and the ones for The Giver would be to introduce the novel. I’ve also used as a way to introduce like a writing unit that we’re doing. So, pulling together samples. Like when we were writing an author profile. I didn’t do it this semester but I have in previous semesters pulled together published biographies and author profiles and things like that. Short ones from magazines to give the kids a sense of the genre as well as what are some of the techniques that writers use in that genre.

M: ok. Good. Um, so that kind of leads me to my next question is how have you been able to use text sets, or how do you share the texts with the students. like, in the case in the video, it looks like you just put piles on the different tables and then have students read them and talk about them. Are there other ways to use the texts, or share the texts?

KMP: usually I give a little thumbnail of what’s in each set. I may or may not tell them what the unifying theme is in that set. Sometimes they have to kind of figure that out for themselves and make the connection back to our larger topic of study. Other times like when I work with really young kids my text sets were read alouds. I’d read aloud today and then I’d read aloud tomorrow and the third day. And by the end of the week they would have heard all the books that are in the text set sort of. But, it’s almost always browsing. On the part that kids with an eye toward trying to figure out for themselves what are some patterns and common themes that we see across these books. And if they see one book that just seems likes an outlier, to ask them, well what connection do you think I had in mind? Or can you construct a connection that would make it fit? Or do you think it just needs to be moved? Mostly, ya that’s pretty common to the way we do it.

M: and that kinda connects to what my next question is. You said, I’m quoting you here, you said, “the books that we have aren’t all necessarily about immigration, but they are all about leaving, journeying, finding home, finding yourself, so this is really an introduction or an exploration that sets the stage for the conversations that should be really crucial about the novels. And will help them look across the novels for big pictures about society and help them connect it back to themselves.” So, kind of talking about, because you just mentioned that there might be an outlier. So, how do we, or how do you determine what texts to include that are not quite on the main topic and how do the texts you choose influence the students’ thoughts and conversations?

KMP: some of it’s pragmatic. Wanting to have each text set have enough books in it that the group can pick and choose from within there. Like, I don’t want a group of 5 to be handed 5 books. And so, some of it’s pragmatic, trying to stretch and look for metaphors. And so, when we’re looking at home and finding home, one of them could be that book about hermit crab, I can’t remember the name of it right now. It’s like a Leo Lionni style
book and it’s something like a house is a house for me or something like that. And it’s not about immigration, it’s not even about people, but it’s about finding a home that’s just right for you. And so kids can take the theme that’s in that picture book because it’s so easy for them to read. They can get a lot of different picture books in a short period of time and then use that to think metaphorically. So, there’s a lot of use of metaphor and symbol and that’s sort of how I’m, that’s why I’m very comfortable putting books that have nothing to do with immigration. With civil rights some of the books we pull in are just some of the people being treated unfairly, like the recess, Mean Jean the Recess Queen. It has nothing to do with Civil Rights on the surface, but it’s a lot to do with who are the bystanders, who are the allies for the targets and how do people change something that’s not right? How do get people get past those fears to do something different. So, the books again serve as a metaphor for that. I’m not sure if I’m answering your question but that’s sort of where my head went.

M: ya. No, that’s good. I just wanted to kind of for us to think about cuz it’s something that we need to think about. It’s how much the books we choose to present to our students are going to lead them or guide them to the conversations that we want them to go to or that they choose. You know?

KMP: I kind of follow Karen Smith’s philosophy in that regard. She was at the university of Arizona, I mean Arizona State. She talks about sending up literary balloons. And you throw it out there and see if somebody takes it and it may go somewhere and it may not. So, through the text sets I try to put out lots of possibilities and like, for immigration I had sort of pre-determined that journeys were gonna be important. You know, conflict was going to be important. Finding your place within the new community was going to be important. Accepting people’s differences and their cultural lifestyles and things like that. All of that was going to become an important part. So, I wanted to make sure the books highlighted that. And if some of those central themes didn’t ever come up I will probably just bring them up and talk about them. Same like with The Giver. I mean memory and history, free choice, coming of age. Those are pretty big issues in that book. And if the kids didn’t bring those up through their work with the text sets, I would either rearrange the text sets or I would just do something direct with it. Other times they could not bring one up and that’s ok because they found something else that was more compelling.

M: right. And that’s something I kind of struggle with myself as a teacher. Is figuring out how far to let them go that might not be where I thought we were going to go. Like, kind of are they going on a tangent or not. Are they really far out there or is it ok. Do you have any thoughts on that?

KMP: well, I think that’s where those either broad concept or essential question or something like that is helpful. If the sort of sidetrack that the kids are taking can
eventually come back and help them see our main focus in a new way, then I’m ok with it. If it takes us in a new road, you know, I am in a public school and I have content that we have to consider. Now, I don’t feel we have to march through it in a lock-step fashion and I feel that I have lots of freedom in terms of how we look at it, but you know, if they never talked about Chinese immigrants and their influence on the trans-continental railroad. I gotta bring that up. So, but you know, for the most part, the books are rich enough that they support multiple perspectives and they support the kids in taking different mental trips. Jerry Harste’s term with this stuff. So, I have rarely, the conflict is more in this period, do I cut off the tangent in order to get them back to what I thought we would do? Or do I let it go one more period and then see where we are. That seems to be where my dilemma comes. It’s more in the immediate today in this period rather than are we generally heading in a productive or not productive direction.

M: that’s one of my questions I had later for you, but we might just talk about that now is your role as a teacher or the facilitator of these inquiries. How do you go about planning your instruction? Like, are you responsive or do you already have a set plan? How do you go about doing that?

KMP: I write about this a little bit in my dissertation in terms of Dewey’s sense of transaction and that curriculum for me is not a linear structure in the sense that we’re all moving from point A to point B. We are moving in different directions because we’re different individuals with different experiences, but we’re trending in the same direction. And so, I see myself as a mediator between adult ways of seeing the world and adult notions of what is essential content and kids’ questions, kids’ way of seeing the world and their notions of what’s essential content. So, it’s sort of the old fashion start with where they are and help them go as far as you can. But, I don’t always pre-determine where they’re going. That having been said, one of the things that I’ve learned from Carolyn Burke at Indiana University was the power of the culminating project and that if you and the kids know what you’re working up to, if you’ve chosen well and if it’s open-ended enough then, you can have a clear sense of direction, but the kids can be free to take it in different ways. So, with the part that you saw in the videotape, they were all reading novels. And they were all going to make some kind of a presentation that included a chart, a skit, something like that. Along with questions. So, I had pre-determined that, but the content of the skit or the charts and the types of conversations that they decided to support for their classmates, that all was left up to them. So, it’s like freedom within some parameters. I don’t know if that’s what you were going for?

M: Ya, ya. Ok, my next big idea that I was seeing is time. So how important is time in the length of these activities? Because I would think some teachers might look at this, look at your project or activity and think well, if I give my students one day to look through the books then that’s enough. And they might wonder how they would keep their students having meaningful conversations in days 3 and 4 and 5. So, on the same
topic, on the same books. So, how did you get your students to that point? Where they were able to? Or how do you determine…I’m sorry there’s lots of questions in here.

KMP: sure

M: how do you determine how long to give your students? or how many days or..with these texts?

KMP: Phyllis, lunchtime Phyllis, always teases me about the fact that I use the phrase, ‘it depends.’ Because there is no hard and fast rule on that. And that’s where my teacher observations and that intuitive sense of the pulse of the group, when I tell, like, when I do workshops on this and I try to talk to my colleagues about it, I tell them, if you’re only going to do one day, then don’t bother. That the power is coming back and re-visiting and looking deeper. That every time you come back, you see things that you couldn’t have seen before because you’re looking more closely. And so for me, those text sets could take anywhere from 3 days to like a week or two weeks even. And that’s hard to justify when you got all this curriculum to cover. But, they cover so much through that and they’re driving it. They’re the ones who are saying, ‘oh this is so interesting.’ And you know, most of the time, they raise the things that I think should have been raised anyways. And then, those text sets become touchstones. We can come back to them repeatedly, so like with The Giver. The way one of our 7th grade teachers is using that process right now. She and I kind of did it together and then, she’s been doing it on her own and like, we use the text sets and get themes out there and get them doing informal reflective writing and themes. And then, they start reading The Giver and then part way through the book, we go back to those text sets. Like, ‘now that you’re into the book, let’s go back and look at these books again.’ You know, ‘what connections are you constructing between what you see going on in the text sets and what you see going on in the novel? And how is that helping you to see the novel in more complex ways?’ and that’s sort of like a precursor for them to then do some writing on a theme, using textual evidence. Those fancy words from our MAP testing. But, they focus on textual evidence then. Like, what are specific examples from the book can I use to help the reader understand how I’m seeing the theme of whatever it is. So, I use those books a lot. And that’s why I don’t really want them in the library. Because I, the kids need to be able to get back to them anytime they need them. That’s probably been one of the hardest things of moving from a classroom to a closet. Is the books. You know, what to do with them, where to put them.

M: so, just on a practical level. With the text set in this particular one anyways. Did you have them, like one day each group was working with one set of books and the next day they came back to those same set of books?

KMP: mm, hmm.
M: ok, did you ever have them switch or rotate the books?

KMP: no. and I have, but I didn’t in that instance. And part of how we sort of cross pollinate them was by having each of the text set groups sort of report out what are you thinking about as it connects. And there should have been a clip in there of us working on the whiteboard and webbing some of that. And so, in that sense, what I did in my text set group is now out there to inform what you’re doing. Carolyn Burke talks about this linguistic data pool. And she uses it, well the first time she explained it to me was you know, any time you read, write, speak or listen, it feeds into a communication data pool. Then, the next time you need to read, write, speak, or listen, you can pool from all of those language experiences. Well, when we started looking at semiotics, any experience you have as a reader, as a writer, in working video, drama, mathematics, art, all of those things feed into a communication data pool. And so, when you’re ready to create something, you can draw from what you’ve learned through any of those. Well, I kinda see the text sets in the same way, that once the kids go public with here’s what we’ve been thinking about with our text sets, that’s in your data pool. And so, you don’t have to have been in that text set group in order to use some of their insights in your discussion. Now, there were also times when the kids met across novel groups so one kid from each novel joined a new group just for one day, for one conversations. Sort of like, here’s what we’re talking about in our group, here’s some things that have been dominant. And then they go back to their own group and they kind of take with them, here’s what I heard the other groups are doing, so we call them the spies. You know, go get information from other groups and bring it back.

M: that’s a cute idea.

KMP: ya. So,

M: ok. Ya. Good. Ok, with quick writes. I saw that you had students do 5 minute quick writes to think through some ideas about their books and you had them go back to them later to reflect on the questions they had from the novels or questions that came up during this whole activity. Is this…how do you view writing with inquiry process?

KMP: as a memory tool. It’s sort of thinking on paper so you can go back and capture ideas that you had early on. It gives me something, I guess nowadays what we would call it officially is formative evaluation. It gives me some insights into how they’re connecting. What we’re reading and discussing with the themes that we’re focusing on and the topic. So, I use it to catch the pulse of the room again. But, it’s also a way for them to get messy, floating in my head ideas and get it on paper. For all the reasons we write to think and to start out our thinking. And then the kids go back and use that. Now, with the civil rights project they actually kept a journal. I’ve got a collection of those journals still in my drawer. I can show you. That they recorded all kinds of stuff along
the way. Then, when they were ready to do their final sort of ‘here’s what I’m thinking and here’s what I want to go public with.’ They can go back through and retrieve things from that journal. So, it showed them why people keep notes and why the notes allow you to see the development of new understandings.

M: and then, with writing, I’m just wondering, because you had them present their thesis and their big questions, you know, in the skits or how they had decided to do that. Do you have them write an essay at this point or?

KMP: some of them do. I mean sometimes yes, sometimes no. sometimes the thesis is sufficient. Like, even just this past week I asked the students in the undergraduate language arts class. They read two chapters on speaking and listening and I had thrown out some big open-ended questions going into the chapters to get them thinking. Sort of like as a purpose for reading and then afterwards, well, after they read, they identified, you know, three things you learned, three things that were interesting and one question you still had. And then I asked them to write a thesis statement. We had done it in class on a different topic. Of course they were familiar with what I was asking them to do. And then for me the actual thesis is not as important as the thinking that goes into it. And so with the immigration project, they never wrote an essay, but they had a thesis that organized the presentation and then the follow up discussion with their classmates. They knew what they wanted their classmates to grapple with. They had taken a stand on something. With civil rights that I had done with the museum project that we talked about in the car briefly. That project, they had all these little artifacts and little snippets of writing in this notebook that they kept everything in. and then they formulated a thesis and they organized, for lack of a better term, they organized a brochure around their thesis statement. So, the thesis was the central controlling idea of this brochure. And the brochure included visual images, text images. Some found and some created. That all showed us their connection with the topic of civil rights and their experiences that they’d had and sort of what stand they were taking, what position that they were wanting to take. And I’ve got some of those thesis statements. I’ll dig it out of my computer. I’ve got a PowerPoint with some of those examples and stuff on it.

M: ok.

KMP: getting ready right now with the civil rights, that pull out group that I’m doing. Those advanced kids that should start on Wednesday. They also will be sort of reflecting all along on all of these experiences they have with civil rights and then they’ll sort of get pushed and prodded and focusing on a thesis statement. Some of them may choose to do one of those non-linear multi-genre pieces like the museum brochure and others may do a more linear multi-genre essay. If you’re following that. A lot of buzz words there. So, they're integrating mini-dialogue with poetry with ode with manifesto with personal
narrative with fiction with report. All that stuff can be, plus visual images all brought in together to make a statement.

M: nice.

KMP: so, that’s sort of how I use the thesis statement. Sometimes they become part and in sync. A lot of times they aren’t.

M: ok. I agree with you that the thought process and, or the thought process to come to the thesis is a very big step.

KMP: well, you know a lot of lit teachers really grappled with that cuz the kids write several essays every year and you know, to what extent do you give them where they get really well written thesis and say pick one. And to what extent do you say, turn them loose write your own. But, in 8th grade it’s pretty much write your own. And you can imagine. There’s a little more scaffolding as you go down the grades. And the thinking behind how to write a thesis is pretty hard. And I think we’re getting better as a building in giving kids time to really live with a topic before they have to choose a thesis. The team I told you about, the 7th and 8th grade team that does a lot of integration between lit and social studies. I think it was last year I worked with them on World War II. And they had kids taking essential questions and a topic like does a person shape the times or the times shape the person and then their topic would be Hitler. So then turn, combine that someway into a thesis statement, ‘Hitler shaped the times blah blah blah,’ or ‘Hitler was shaped by the times blah blah blah.’ And that thesis, they initially had them try to write them at the beginning of the unit. And the kids didn’t have enough background to know how to write a good one because they didn’t know enough to know what the possibilities were. So, we ended up giving them like a placeholder thesis that they could then revise as they got more into it. And that was an important insight I thought on the part of those teachers just recognizing, you know, here’s the difficult part, it’s their classroom. They had to decide what they’re comfortable doing and I wasn’t comfortable writing a thesis before they even knew what the topic was. But, in a sense they deserved the chance to make that decision on their own. And so, they did. Haha. Amazing how that works that way.

M: haha. Well, that’s good. Ok, so going back to a little bit about the teacher’s role. So, what, during the discussions you have, what do you see your role while the students are talking with each other around these ideas?

KMP: I think there’s a least one chapter in Jennifer’s dissertation that should be really helpful to you in that because we teased that out pretty extensively. That process. Through her coding transcripts from the discussion tapes. So, that’s going to be more specific and informed than what I can come up with on the top of my head.
KMP: I see my role as to create the classroom context where those literature discussions or any small group discussions can thrive. Which means creating a place where it’s safe to throw up half-baked ideas. Where it’s safe to change your mind. Where it’s safe to challenge someone else’s idea and where kids know how to do that. I think it’s my job to make sure that what I’m asking them to do is compelling. And even if what I’ve been handed isn’t compelling, I have an obligation to find a way to make it matter to the kids. I feel that I share responsibility with the kids for having productive and generative conversation. I own responsibility for setting it up and setting the stage and creating the parameters and the boundaries. And they own responsibility for ensuring they are bringing their best game to the table. That they’re bringing their questions to the table, not waiting for someone to tell them what they are. That kind of stuff. And those two things are working well. Then, the discussions go really well. I do not think I need to be in every discussion group. I don’t need to listen to everything every kid says. I eavesdrop to get a sense of the pulse of the group. I eavesdrop to get a sense of what kind of energy is going on in the group but I don’t feel like I have to listen to a complete transcript of every group in order to have a sense of whether it’s working or not. Because those quick writes and the sharing out to the larger group, that gives me a pretty good deal of what’s going on. And if I have individual kids that I’m worried about, I just go sit next to them. And listen in. or ask.

M: Right. Mm, hmm.

KMP: so, that’s part of my role. I’m sure theirs more. (laughs).

M: OK. Good. What are some of the things that you struggle with during inquiry in general?

KMP: time, time time. And the tension between covering curriculum and Jerry Harste’s terms, covering versus uncovering. When I taught 6th grade, we covered the entire 1800s from Lewis & Clark to the World’s Fair. And it was just like, oh man. That’s just a lot of material! I mean people devote their entire lives to one chapter in the book. So, trying to figure if, that’s why I created a curriculum map. And now it’s interesting most of our teachers use one. Cuz they saw how it helped me avoid letting the curriculum take control of my life. and I just blocked out, ok, we’ve got 4 quarters of the year, what has to go on each quarter. If you have to cover all of this in a quarter? How do you split that out? And you know, if something’s going to go a little bit longer, what are you willing to shorter later. Let’s say push come to shove, immigration has to fit in 4th quarter, what can you reasonably do in that amount of time? And what do you have to let go of? Cuz particularly the civil war, our district has blessed the 6th grade teachers with a wealth of instructional materials. You could teach the civil war all year and not exhaust all the
materials that have been supplied. So how do you decide what’s the highest priority given this period of time. And that’s where essential questions have been helpful. You don’t cover everything that happened in the civil war. You try to get the big ideas and how the civil war connects to those big ideas.

M: so you mentioned. So what is the 6th graders social studies curriculum?

KMP: see, this is one of the curricular dilemmas I have. Science and social studies have topics and they’re dedicated to, designated for different grade levels. And in our district 5th grade does early American history. 6th grade does the 1800s. 7th grade does 1900s. and so you kind of know that that’s what you’re covering. And so, there tends to be a chronological approach to teaching that influenced by the essential questions.

M: I was going to ask, this is all American history?

KMP: ya.

M: ok.

KMP: we do an American history 5th, 6th, 7th. Then starting 8th grade they do world history going back to ancient civ.

M: interesting.

KMP: ya. We’re a little off cycle than most districts.

M: ya.haha

KMP: so, anyways, so that’s the way they do it. But then, in Lit, the only thing that you absolutely have to do are those three titles. Beyond that I mean, ya the kids have to write essays, but we get to decide for ourselves. We even chose the novels, too, but there’s just a lot more freedom. So, when Lit and social studies was the same person, social studies tended to drive the curriculum and Lit did whatever it needed to support that cuz it was the same person trying to do both and that’s why I felt it was so important to block out the social studies curriculum so it didn’t take over the Lit curriculum. We’re finding that now the 7th grade, and I keep talking on 7th grade because we spent some significant time on 7th grade, rehashing curriculum. Part of that was re-doing WWII and this year, re-doing civil rights. And again, social studies drives the curriculum because they have the content and Lit says, “oh we can do an essay for that, oh we can do this, we can do that.” And so Lit is more flexible in that sense, but then it also means that Lit doesn’t have a core content that they have to teach. So, if you look at the essential questions that people are writing. The essential questions in literacy are for the most part, social, social/historical related. They are not language based, linguistic, the study of English. We don’t write essential questions about the discipline of English. And I try to, I wanted
to talk about that, but it was driving people nuts, so I had to shut-up. Because they’re very comfortable using essentially social studies questions.

M: so, what kind of questions were you thinking of posing?

KMP: you know, I don’t know, I mean that was part of it. Is some of the ones that I’ve seen in the samples that are available online like what everybody else is asking, like you know, ‘how does an author create meaning through text.’ Oh my god, blech, boring. But, it is an essential question, but it’s not a compelling one. You know, ‘how do strategies help us make sense of text?’ well, that’s not going to have kids sitting up at nights. But, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ there’s a lot of ethical dilemma that goes into that. That works. ‘how does literature shape society?’ or ‘does literature shape society or does society shape literature?’ that could be more fun, but that’s a little easier to do in high school when they’ve got enough under their belt. The read to know the relationship between an author working in a time period regardless of the time period the author is writing about. So, when Karen Hesse is writing about medieval life but it’s influence by contemporary feminist views, that’s a little much for an elementary or middle schooler. So, part of me is trying to get ok with the fact that kids come through middle school without really knowing the discipline of English. English as a content area. And I’m gonna work on that one. It still nags me just a little.


KMP: which means that we also don’t bring to a conscious level with the kids all the ways that language is working except for example, when we talk about propaganda because propaganda is a social studies topic. And, so again, the content areas are driving…

M: interesting. Ok. What do you do to help the students when they seem to be making only surface level connections? To help them get deeper and to help them think more metaphorically? Like, Harste in that video said, “Bringing knowledge to a conscious level.” How do you do that?

KMP: some of it is moving across sign systems. Moving from something that is primarily language based and moving it to art. And that’s why in the writer’s workshop class, I always use some form of art whether we’re doing paint or collage or photography. I always have them shifting to another art form. Another semiotic system. I think that’s crucial. The other is the conversation, that generative, exploratory talk in the purist sense that Douglas Barns describes. That that’s essential. I think I have a role and a responsibility to listen in and to label for kids when they’re engaging in that kind of thinking. And just to challenge them when they are not. And, you know, some people will want to argue that developmentally you have to be at a certain stage cognitively to be able to do that. I disagree. And some people think that kids at different age, you know,
that age and development or IQ level, like only the high end kids can engage in that kind of talk. And I just, I don’t buy it. And so, one of the pieces, well, the only piece I wrote in Language Arts was about a 6 year old who just really shook my core because he demonstrated that 6 year olds can engage in metaphorically thinking and use abstract symbols, use and interpret abstract symbols. And up until that point, I thought I had really understood that you had to be older and or brighter to do that. And I don’t know how bright that kid was. That’s not really the issue. But, he was not impressive in his academic accomplishments, but he was impressive in a lot of other ways. One of which is came into first grade reading Frog and Toad, but then he stayed there. And he came in not writing at all. At all. Like, he even, at all. And by March, was the first time he willing put pencil to paper. That’s a long time to wait. But, he, when he did, it was like, whoa…it was worth waiting for. I mean his thinking was very sophisticated for a 6 year old.

M; like, what kind? Can you give me an example?

KMP: ya, he participated in our voluntary desegregation program and had lots of behavior issues in our school. He was not a very popular kid. Many thought of him as the bully. And we read Freedom Summer and he connected with that book and so his drawing. It’s all outlined in that article. His drawing is basically the sun in the corner, the truck in the pool and very literal stuff. And then, all of a sudden at the bottom of the page he starts talking about Martin Luther Kind and making connections with Martin Luther King and this book. Now, because I was in multi-age and I had the kids for 3 years, I didn’t quote ‘do’ Martin Luther King every year. And I had ‘done’, you know how do you ‘do’ a topic…inoculation theory. I had done Martin Luther Kind the year before and it wasn’t that we didn’t talk about it at all, it was just not a big focus of what we were doing. But, let’s face it, it was March, so St. Louis does more with it. And he being African-American, it was important. It could have been a big topic in his family or in another context like through his church or something like that. He made those connections on his own. And he used symbols like the cross and the mountain and the raised hands that had nothing to do with the book, but he showed a connection between those symbols of hope and freedom and voice and how it connected with Freedom Summer. So, his sketch-to-stretch is in that article because it just completing shook me up. The fact that he could do those things. It was not something he had ever offered up, that kind of thinking. And then, his 8-year-old classmate did the same thing where he had symbols like the weights of justice, an American flag, a gun. All those symbols were used in very intentional ways to show sort of what happened in his head after reading Freedom Summer. And so, his had nothing to do with Martin Luther Kind. Because, you know, that wasn’t the topic. So, each of them independently used very sophisticated abstract symbols to help us understand what they were thinking relative to the book. I
don’t know. That’s a long answer to a short question. I’ll give you a pdf of that article. Don’t track it down.

M: sounds good. Um, where am i? um, choice. I noticed that you allowed students to pick their top three book choices. How else do you offer choice to your students?

KMP: every chance I get basically. Like, right now the kids are working on what they don’t know as the foundation work for the digital story telling. And they’re bringing in photographs from home. Well, what photographs you choose to bring is going to influence what happens. So, there’s no requirement about the photographs. They recently wrote an ode and a manifesto. And the topic was completely up to them. They could be serious or they could be humorous. I just wanted them to play with the genre but I also wanted them, it grew out of valentine’s day and so, you know, Valentine’s day is all about love. And so this is a way to sort of twist that up a little bit. And an ode is for something you just love and so last year and this year, you had ode to my guitar, ode to my cat, ode to books. We had some great, interesting odes and then, they wrote a manifesto, which is again sort of another twist on love, which would be passion. What’s something that you’re passionate about that you want to stand up and shout to the world about? But, the topic is up to them. It was more about it’s gotta be your voice and involve one of the threads that runs through the writing workshop class and it’s mostly about voice and so that’s sort of where that comes in. other times there’s a menu of options and the kids choose from the menu and if one of those doesn’t look like what they want, they just write a proposal to add something to the menu. The kids that are going to start Wednesday. There will be a list of like 10 different genre they can play with and if they find an 11th one that they’re interested in, they just have to make a case for it. So, the kids buy in more when they have choice, but I don’t think it’s the same thing as saying anything you want to do is ok. It’s always choice within parameters. And I think part of that’s my responsibility as a teacher. To know what parameters are appropriate to support and guide their work and which parameters are maturely chosen for my own convenience. And I have to be willing to give on the second.

M: ok. Good. So, when they are selecting their novels, in your experience, how do see children as choosing the books they choose. Like, why do you think they choose the books they choose?

KMP: I think cover art has a lot to do with it. I think the number of pages in the book has a lot to do with it. And I think what my friend chose has a lot to do with it. And it’s really hard to get away from that. Sometimes, I get around it, the social sort of peer pressure or the peer appeal. I get around that by listing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choice and do it privately. And if there’s someone I just feel is just following a dominant leader, I might put them in a different book group so they might have their own voice and not be influenced by what the sort of powerful person is doing and saying.
M: that’s kind of, sounds like you really need to know who your kids are.

KMP: oh, ya. The kid-watching part is just crucial and starting in primary, when I was in elementary, one of the things that I really struggled with, was the extent to which social issues such as what happened on the playground, what happened in the lunch room, influenced the brokering of ideas in class. Like, who could throw out an idea and everybody else would acknowledge it and play with it for a while. And who could throw out an idea in a discussion and have it be absolutely ignored. Not even acknowledge. And that sometimes, I can’t, I’m not privy to the social dynamics of the playground. And the out of school community have a lot to do with that. One of my kids, when I was in multi-age primary, I wrote about this one in New Advocate. She, we were talking about books and how you know what level a book is and that kind of stuff. And somebody said, I didn’t know you read Boxcar Children and she said because you’d never been to my house. And it was said in such a way like ‘shame on you. I’ve invited you and you haven’t been willing to come.’ You can’t pretend to know me if you haven’t seen where I live.’ And one of my really high, strong, strong, strong readers, one of the oldest kids in the class. The only thing kids ever saw her read at school were picture books and she would save her novels for at home because at school you only get 15 minutes and that’s not enough time. You get into a novel, and you…

M: she didn’t want to…

KMP: no…you get it and then have to walk out again. You know? And so she chose for schoolbooks you could read in one sitting and kids, they struggled with that because they knew, in elementary school grades, chapter book readers. High status, like it’s high status. They knew she was a chapter book reader, but mostly what they saw her reading was picture books. From my point of view, that elevated status of picture books. If XX is reading picture books, the nerd, then they’re good. So, that’s part of your question about how kids choose books. Part of its reputation of the book or the author. Not all, but sometimes. Sometimes my book talks may make a difference, I’m not sure.

M: and that’s where my next question comes from. In the video, you gave a little book talk and a little book review or summary of each book. Are there other ways that you’ve presented books to your students? Or introduced books to students?

KMP: Ya. Sometimes, the books are just out and we just spend a day and they can move from title to title and browse. And then, like, I don’t do the book talk, they have to sort of get their own book talk by sampling from the cover and the book jacket, and the flaps, and the table of contents and stuff like that. And I tell them, maybe read the first chapter, skim the first chapter, look at the chapter titles to see if, you know, it appeals to you. And sometimes kids bring books up to me and say, ‘can we get a group to read this book?’ so, it comes different ways. When I do a book talk, it’s more to help them
understand sort of why this book is on the table right now. So, on the immigration, a lot of those book talks were to let them know those books were split between 1800s and contemporary and so, I wanted them to know which pile it was in, and the books represented different groups, different cultural groups. And so, I gave them a little bit about sort of what group is represented and just so they have a little something that they can connect with. But, I didn’t talk about the theme or anything like that.

M: Right. Ok, good, um, ok you have them do their thesis or thought-provoking question presentations. The students were able to give suggestions of other ways they had presented in the past. So, how do you get to that point? Like, how did they?

KMP: That’s where that arts program fits in. because what you were observing was like February, march. And so they had been in what the class called integrated arts and they’ve done informal drama, they’ve done get on stage and do drama. They’ve done set design. They’ve done art. They’ve done choral music. They’ve done some stuff with computers. They’ve had pretty broad range of ways people go public with stuff. Plus, through our elementary school they’ve done posters and dioramas and skits and, for a couple of years, we had an art specialist sort of like my role and so we had two full time art teachers and then, we had her and her job was to push in and support classroom teachers in using art. To support classroom teachers in using art to support kids thinking in their curriculum area. That position got cut in one of our many rounds of budget cuts. And so, they’ve just been exposed to a lot of it. And that provides again that sort of pool of possibilities. And so, when we brainstorm ‘what are the ways you go public with stuff?’ that list some of them are things we had done in the first semester, but a lot of it is stuff they had done in their other classes.

M: ok. Well, I think that’s about all I had from that video, but I do want to ask you, so I can get it on tape, how, can you explain to me because you were just kind of going into it. The whole arts thing, like how is their schedule set up?

KMP: right now we have a 9 period day. And one period each for Lit, science, social studies, math, but it’s blocked so you do two subjects on A days and two subjects on B days for 90 minutes. And then, everybody has PE, everybody as lunch. PE, you rotate out one quarter of the year for health, so that’s built in there. Many of our kids take a language. In 6th grade almost everybody does. After that, it’s somewhat by choice. So, there’s a language. And then, there’s just this incredible array of electives available. So, 6th grade has electives 1st, 2nd and 9th period. And then, in the middle of the day, they have their core classes and a language. And then, 7th grade has core the beginning and end of the day and then, through the middle of the day, they have their electives. 8th grade sort of a combination. They start with core, go to electives, go to core, go to electives. We stagger it that way so that there are electives all day long basically. This year for the first time, all of the kids are in core 8th period so the elective teachers get to
meet across departments. We haven’t had that for long. And it’s a heavy financial investment. If every teacher, every core teacher in our building taught an extra period a day, we could cut 5 staff positions. So, it’s a significant investment. We’re getting ready to tear down our school and build a new one on our site. Starts in March. Wednesday is the groundbreaking ceremony. (54:13) you’ll be there for that. Um, so you’ll see when we get there, we have a big field and their building part of the new school on the field and then, they’ll tear down one wing in the old school. I mean…

M: Oh, wow. That’s a lot.

KMP: ya. It’s gonna be a mess. But, one of the issues is that whole decision-making process was what to do about theatre. Because our theatre is not large enough to hold our whole school so we can never come together as a whole building. At the same time most middle schools don’t have a theatre. They have small venues, but they don’t have a full theatre. And yet we have a thriving drama program. And like I told you, the musical, there’s no way I could have taken you to the musical. The tickets sold out in 30 minutes. 30 minutes! And I mean, it was a full house both nights plus the matinee. And it has, it is no longer a school production. It’s community theatre. Like the whole community comes to see this cuz it’s such good stuff. The two young kids sitting next to me were high school kids who had been involved in our drama program in middle school and they came back to see it. And of course lots of parents of the kids who are involved in it. So, we could have saved a lot of money by building a new school that didn’t have a theatre. That used for example, the cafeteria as a multi-purpose room. But, the community including the school board was behind rebuilding the theatre because they’re that…

M: dedicated to it.

KMP: ya. And the high school has two theatres. They have a big auditorium, which is like a traditions auditorium that has the full stage with the curtain and the whole nine yards. And then, they have the little black box, which is the small theatre. So, and then we have the community that the school district is in, has a community theatre program so it’s just. It’s important. Now, there are schools…cuz I did a lot of work in St. Paul, MN, St. Paul area for a number of years and they have a school district in the St. Paul public schools, they have schools that are called A+ schools and they are arts intensive schools. And then, in Columbia, MN where University of Missouri, Columbia is, they have one elementary school that is considered an arts intensive school. So, I know there’s others that do that. And then, in the city we have magnet schools and one is visual and performing arts magnet school. And so the kids take a regular set of their core classes and then, they have a heavy emphasis on fine and performing art. I, we’re fortunate.

M: ya. That’s amazing.
KMP: and our choral music faculty member is also, I mean, he’s published songs. That’s part of his other, what he does with his life. Our theatre folks, he and two other guys wrote a couple of middle school plays, plays for middle school kids that got published. It’s not your run of the mill school in that respect. Now, are there other schools that do the arts better than we do? Absolutely. Absolutely. But it’s a big part of who we are.

M: mm, hmm. That’s really neat.

KMP: and our superintendent that, who just recently left. He was a strong supporter of the arts and one of the things he did was by a piece of sculpture to put in front of the high school, and that kind of stuff. So, just weird stuff that you wouldn’t usually think of the superintendent doing.

M: huh, interesting. Well, that sounds really neat. Is there anything that you think is important for me to understand based on the video or something that we’ve talked about?

KMP: well, ya, I think my historical roots have a significant influence on how I view teaching and learning. I mean, I started working with early childhood and constructivist early childhood curriculum was just a different animal. I ended up sort of in elementary and then middle school through the backdoor, so that early childhood stuff was my grounding. And then, at the time, because you have to remember I was in college in the 70s, and the British primary school, the British open school movement was thriving in England and I was teaching in a open classroom. It was multi-grade, open classroom, very much influenced by British primary school curriculum and that was focused on a lot of discovery learning and project-based learning, so I had already spent a lot of time with developmentally appropriate project discovery-based, hands-on, sort of a curriculum work, that was very student-driven. Because it was a private school, we didn’t have to have a formal, formal curriculum. And then, I think my education at Indiana was unique in the sense that at the point in time that I was going through collaborative classroom-based research was still something you had to spend an entire chapter justifying. Marjie Staple was the last one I think that had to go through and just try that in qualitative research. Ethnographic style stuff in the school of education still had to be justified and I was in a program that was sort of expecting us to do that kind of research and where the relationship between faculty and student was extremely collaborative similar to what you described, and again, that was somewhat a shift in culture. And so, my professional upbringing was in a very collaborative environment, which gave me sort of a lived model of how you collaborate with kids without abdicating your responsibility as a designated leader. That influenced things a lot. And then the other huge influence on my work is Douglas Barnes. And his work was both talk and curriculum, curricular thinking. The role of talk as a tool for thinking. That influenced the way I worked with literature discussion groups and at the elementary level with conflict resolution discussions which
really I can trace back now and see the roots of that, see that as a root of later work I did with civil rights discussions with kids and things like that. That all kind of feeds in together.

M: ok, ok. Well, that’s my next thing that I’m going to be doing is reading through your dissertation and looking through Jen’s a little bit. I found the pages that you were talking about in hers, so I’ll kind of explore those a little bit and see if I have other questions.

KMP: and, well, I can e-mail you the article about…it was written about my last year in primary grades and it’s trying to become a more critical educator. And D’André was the kid I was telling you about. And he’s in that piece and so I’ll send you that. Ya, the chapter that we did Carol Gilles and I did for a book that came out of England, it was sort of a tribute to Douglas Barnes, a look at what’s current research in talk. And ours was looking at talk/curriculum. I don’t know if that’s, I don’t know if that would, I’m just thinking out loud. I’ll have to go back and look at that, if that’s helpful, I’ll give you a copy of that, too. And then, the website has like sort of how I’ve structured stuff with the kids. It has the calendar as well as the downloadable stuff that you can look at. And you know, I’m just trying to think off the top of my head. You can look at my bookshelves. You can read those books anywhere. I’m trying to think, I think John Dewey’s Experience in Education would probably be the single book that has had the most significant influence on my work. And then, Douglas Barnes From Communication to Curriculum would be the second tied closely with Rosenblatt. Those are some old ones.

M: they’re some good ones, though.

KMP: ya. So, what do you feel like now? What seems like a good next, like, I don’t know what is it like 3:30 now?

M: it’s later I think.

KMP: is it 4:30 already?

M: It’s 4:30

KMP: ok, cuz this clock says 3:30, it must be 4:30. Ok, so are you getting hungry…
APPENDIX D

PHOTOGRAPHS

The following are photographs taken of Kathryn’s office and home.

Kathryn at her desk and some of her professional books
Children’s books and Young Adult novels
Kathryn’s dish sets
APPENDIX E

TEACHER REFLECTION PROMPTS

Think about some of the books, people and experiences that have shaped your current thinking on teaching.

- Books

- People

- Experiences

Look over this T-chart. Think about what you used to do in your classroom (i.e. activities, lesson plans, teaching methods) and what you do now. Has anything changed? How or why did it change?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I used to do</th>
<th>What I do now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

DATA ANALYSIS – GROUPS OF CODES

Timeline Codes

- Preschool
- Kindergarten
- Grandparents
  - Maternal grandmother
  - Paternal grandmother
  - Paternal grandfather
- Parents
  - Father
  - Mother
- Elementary School
  - 3rd grade
  - 4th grade
  - 5th grade
  - Fire safety week
- Girl scouts
- Overnight camp
- Middle school
  - Science project
- High school
  - Extra-curricular
    - Marching band
  - College bound track
- College
  - Stephens College – 1st year
    - Changing majors
    - Freshman English
    - Poetry class
  - Bradley University
    - Astronomy class
  - Cal Poly Pomona
    - American Studies class
  - Stephens College – Final years
    - Education classes
    - Private lab school
- Deciding to become a teacher
- Teaching
  - Public school
  - Stephens lab school
    - D’Andre
  - Maryville University
  - Webster University
  - University of Missouri
  - Crayton MS
    - Writing coach
- Graduate School
  - Indiana University

Inquiry codes (from my Theoretical Framework)

- Activating schema (Anderson & Pearson, Rumelhart)
- Barrier-free education (Cambourne)
- Critical literacy (Egawa & Harste, Shor, Freire, etc.)
- Critically analyzing what we already know - Generative themes (Freire)
- Dialogue in education (Freire)
- Durable education (Cambourne)
- Educational experiences (Dewey)
- Exploring questions (Shor, Ciardiello)
- Funds of Knowledge (Moll)
- Inquiry talk (Lindfors)
- Learning as democracy (Dewey, Freire)
- Learning from peers (Freire)
- Learning through language (Halliday)
- life-long learners (Dewey)
- Meta-cognitive awareness of learning process (Halliday, Lindfors)
- passion for learning (Wolk)
- Problem- posers & problem-solvers (Dewey, Freire)
- Reader response (Rosenblatt)
- Real-life problems (Dewey)
- Social theory of learning (Vygotsky)
- Student-centered (Dewey, Kohn)
- Teacher as facilitator (Dewey)
- ZPD (Vygotsky)
Emerging Codes from analysis

Instructional practices

- Accessing prior knowledge
- Caring circles
- Classroom environment
- Electives-the arts
- Essential questions
- Hands-on learning
- Interdisciplinary
- Kid-watching
- Learning through texts
- Leveled books
- Literature discussions
- Mental strain is good
- Mentor texts
- Multi-modal teaching
- Project discovery based
- Setting open parameters for projects
- Student agency
- Teacher collaboration
- Teaming
- Text sets
- time
- Traditional schooling
- Writing
- Teacher reflection
- Teacher as inquirer
- Teacher beliefs and practices
- Teacher as modeler
- Working through uncomfort
- Answering tough questions
- Honoring different perspectives

KMP Learnings

- KMPs inquiries
  - Place settings
  - Guinea pig dinner
  - Writing workshop class
  - New technologies
- Learning from others
  - Carolyn Burke
  - CS Peirce
- Debbie Rowe
- Dewey
- Dorothy Watson
- Jerry Harste
- Kathy Short
- Ken Goodman
- Piaget
- Rosenblatt