

Pearl Alimo: The Teacher As A Researcher

Teacher-inquiry or 'teacher -research' is '*an expanded professional role that involves systematic, self-reflective, intentional inquiry [investigation] into the aspects of the classroom practice*' with the aim of examining the '*ambiguities and uncertainties*' about childhood and education in order to influence educational beliefs, practices and policies.

Vivian Paley is a significant figure in the field of teacher - research. It is important to note that Paley enters the classroom willing to be taught by her kindergarten students. In *The Girl With A Brown Crayon* she confess '*Reeny has already made me see Tico in a different light*'. Using her classroom as her main field for investigation. Paley's '*work of inquiry in teaching, then focuses on how young children discover themselves to the extent that they can be self-conscious about the "truths and harmonies" in their lives*'.

What are the different yet harmonizing features of Paley's teacher- inquiry worth dissecting and digesting? First of all, as a teacher -researcher, Paley's **daily observations** of how her students behave and what they learn as they read about Leo Lionni stories, search for understanding, interpret meaning, reflect on actions by characters and discuss themes in the stories was key in her research. For example when the class read *Tico and the Golden Wings* Paley tells us '*as we come to the scene where the flock rebukes Tico, the children grew apprehensive*'. She also notes what they said "*they didn't like it*" Jonathan says to which Cory adds "*He's selfish*". Paley describes how lively and talkative her class is during story time. The information and opinion from her students informs her investigation.

Tape recording is the second feature of Paley's inquiry. This method of hers is as '*simple*' as '*using a tape recorder to build files of her conversations with the children and their classroom dramatizations*'. Paley then transcribes her tapes. -'*I... maintain a running dialogue with each tape as I transcribe its contents into series of dated notebooks*'. In her *Appendix to Wally's Stories* Paley talks about the importance of the tape recorder -'*the tape recorder preserves everything. It has become an essential tool for capturing the sudden insight, the misunderstood concept, the puzzling juxtaposition of words and ideas*'. Playing these tape recordings to recapture the daily happenings is a way of helping her understand her observations better and making sure that she does not miss a thing.

The third feature of Paley's teacher-research is the art of **questioning**. Paley confesses having her '*own questions*'. Questioning herself, interrogating her students and asking her co-worker Nisha Ruparel-sen for opinions. For example she could not help but ask herself '*Who is this Reeny girl?*' Again as a Kindergarten teacher she questions her students' intellectual prowess-'*is it possible for a kindergarten class to pursue such an intensely literacy and, yes one that demands powers of analysis and introspection expected of much older students?*' This tells us that a good investigator must pause sometimes and ask questions for deeper meanings. Another case in point was when she wanted Nisha's opinion about Lionni stories. Nisha responds '*I think children need stories like these to bring up their deeper feelings and questions*'.

As a researcher, people's answers and thoughts or ideas are key in putting together key findings. She also notes that *'Reeny, as usual has brought up her own questions and searched for her own answers'*.

Journal writing is also an important feature of Paley's research-*'even so, I would like to ask Leo Lionni why the others needed Tico to be exactly as they are...all of the above is hastily entered into my journal after school'*. She actually confesses that *'talking to myself in a daily journal'* is important. This is a way of reflecting, describing, responding and writing about her findings. Through journal writings Paley is able to share her experiences and able to use the narrative inquiry as a research methodology.

The sum of our discussions thus far is that *'teacher inquiry'* or *'teacher-research'* is about educational investigation through asking questions and the art of answering these questions through daily observations in our classrooms, daily recordings, daily reflections and sharing and these experiences by writing about our *'findings in the interest of improving [educational] practice'*. We can therefore confidently conclude that Paley's work teaches us that *'teachers frequently establish "proof" of the effectiveness of their methods, not in order to write a dissertation or a book or even necessarily to convince others but simply because once they discover certain truths, they can no longer teach in another way'*.