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Celebrating the
MASTERS



cohort group



November 26, 2001

Grand Erie District School Board
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Biographical Information

I taught instrumental and vocal music at Brantford Collegiate Institute & Vocational School for 19 years and I am now in my second year as Vice Principal at Brier Park School in Brantford. I researched and wrote my first action research project 4 years ago and it was published in the Ontario Action Researcher, an online journal. I have just become the new co-editor of that journal. My musical experience is being used in a new school-wide musical production at Brier Park that will be performed on December 18th at the Sanderson Centre.

I TEACH WHO I AM: AN ACTION RESEARCH VALUES-BASED APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



PROJECT ABSTRACT:

My study is a description and explanation of my life as a teacher and researcher in a grade 8 classroom from 2000-2001. In my study, I have looked at my own practice as a classroom teacher, using action research methodology. I was concerned about how I establish relationships with students that in turn foster a more meaningful classroom atmosphere for both teacher and students. The study shows why I chose action research, how I came to recognize my concern for the student/teacher relationship, and the process including both challenges and successes, through which I worked to ensure that my values were evident in my practice. Once I was aware of those values I was having difficulty living out in my work, I was able to use this new understanding as an area in my practice I need to improve. This research has helped me to understand and articulate my values, improve my ability to live out my values in my practice, and communicate my living theory of education and my learning to others.

Julie White

Biographical Information

Grade 8 classroom teacher at Parkview Public School in Hagersville

MANAGING TRANSITIONS



PROJECT ABSTRACT

This action research study describes my transfer into my new role of elementary vice principal from that of secondary school instrumental and vocal teacher within the Grand Erie District School Board and its resulting impact on my professional practice. The five chapters were meant to take the reader through my life from the formation of my values as a child and through the shaping of my educational philosophy. My method of learning is described in the third chapter. The final chapters contain my evidence and the answers to my main research question which was:

How can I improve my practice by valuing the voices of others?

Two component parts were:

- **How can I continue to value voice in my new role as vice principal**
- **How can I continue to ensure that my values remain evident in my practice through the transition from secondary teacher to elementary administrator?**

The significance of this inquiry has been to substantiate my claim that my espoused values are evident in my professional practice, to facilitate the development of my own professional standards of practice based on my personal values and to add to the professional knowledge base of practitioner-researchers.

Cheryl Black

Biographical Information

Teacher for 28 years having taught all grades from kindergarten to grade 8.

Graduated from Wilfred Laurier University in 1999 with a 3 year Bachelor of Sociology.

- Upgraded to Honours in 2000
- Completed Part 1 of Principals Course, summer 2001

Married with two children and one grandson.

Currently teaching grade 8 at Banbury Heights Public School.

THE ETHICS OF PERSONAL SUBJECTIVE NARRATIVE RESEARCH



PROJECT ABSTRACT:

In my work throughout the two years I have spent in a masters program, three themes with respect to research and teaching have continually emerged. These themes are the personal, the subjective and the narrative. When I proposed a project to the Senate Research Ethics Board of Brock University (SREB), it was turned down. The nature of the questions asked by the SREB caused me to reflect upon the nature of the ethical framework that underlies its existence. In this project, I examine the nature of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, the document that spawned the SREB. I use narratives from my personal experiences both in teaching and in theological education to explain my reactions to the document and the implied world view. I explain why my vision of research and teaching is not compatible with that of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, and I propose an ethical understanding based on the realities of my understanding of research and teaching.

Geoff Suderman-Gladwell

Biographical Information

My journey to teaching has been long and convoluted. I began my university career as a Systems Design Engineer, but later switched to Arts and vocal music. I graduated with an Honours Degree in Music from the University of Waterloo. After 2 years of working in a group home for young offenders, I left Canada for 2 years to study Theology at a Seminary in Indiana. After returning, I held a series of volunteer positions with Mennonite Central Committee first in Kirkland Lake working with Native Canadians, and then working at a Food Bank in Waterloo. A brief glitch working for Revenue Canada followed, and then I worked for 3 years at the House of Friendship, a social service organization in Kitchener. I went to Althouse College in 1994 to get my B Ed., and after graduation, took a job teaching music at Walsingham Public School for the former Norfolk board. My classroom experience came from teaching grade 7 at Houghton P.S. in the bustling metropolis of Fairground ON. Before taking my current position as a teacher consultant for Information technology and mathematics at the Brantford TRC, I was charged with the responsibility to spearhead the introduction of e-centre to our board employees. My current interests curriculum integration, teacher research, constructivist teaching, and the subjectivity of teachers and teaching.

MY JOURNEY



PROJECT ABSTRACT

Twenty-eight years ago I started my career as an elementary school teacher. I quickly realized that I appeared to have a style and philosophy that differed from many of my colleagues but I never really thought about why until I started this Masters' Program and engaged in an action research project that asked, "Can I empower children to take charge of their learning and behavior through providing a sense of caring and a secure environment?" While involved with the cohort group of the Masters' Program, I engaged in a great deal of reflective thinking that led to my engagement in a quest to try to determine the answer to three additional questions:

1. Where does my philosophy of teaching stem from?
2. Is my style of teaching more successful than some other styles?
3. Are the relationships I develop with my students beneficial and important to them?

The reflective thinking I engaged in led me on a very profound, spiritual and often painful, journey that I will attempt to share with you.

Brenda Colleen Christie

Biographical Information

I am a teacher and assistant department head of English at Delhi District Secondary School, with a particular interest in promoting student literacy (hence my choice of research topic). Prior to coming to Delhi in 1998, I taught for nine years at Port Dover Composite School, in a wide variety of subject areas including English, drama, French, law, family studies, and mathematics. Teaching has by no means been my only career: I have worked as a chief secretary, law office administrator, court reporter and clerk, and computer programmer. In all these areas, too, language and literacy has been of prime importance.

Balance in my life is provided by my interests outside the school: my family, my small farm, my volunteer activities in the community, and my friends. Of course, one of my favourite pastimes is reading. In taking the MEd programme with the Grand Erie cohort, I have been able to indulge many of my passions: for friendship, for reading, for writing, for learning, and for personal growth. It has been a wonderful experience that I hope others will be able to repeat in the future.

HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY PRACTICE BY CREATING MY OWN LIVING THEORY IN EDUCATION?



PROJECT ABSTRACT

In conducting an action research inquiry, which this project describes, I was able to assume an active role in my own professional learning as I studied my own practice. Action research is about reflecting on one's actions in an effort to make improvements. My initial concern was how I could improve my students' computer skills, but as events transpired in my practice I found the focus of my investigation changing in response to new concerns. Taking on a new teaching position, I was confronted with a situation in which my values as a teacher were being denied in my practice. I was unable to teach in the manner I believed was most beneficial for student learning. It was reflecting upon my actions in an attempt to resolve this problem that ultimately guided my research. As I was drawn into the "act, reflect, revise" cycle characteristic of action research I gained a greater appreciation of what was important to me as a teacher. I progressed through several levels of understanding before arriving at the conclusion that I can best articulate my own theory of education.

This is an account of my educational development over a 2-year period as I asked, researched and answered the question, "How can I improve my practice by creating my own living theory of education?"

Lindsey Stewart

Biographical Information

I have been teaching in Brantford for 10 years, the first two of which were as an occasional teacher. Over the past eight years I have taught physical education for grades k-5; kindergarten, grade 2/3, and 4 years in grade 1. I am presently in my second year as a grade 5 teacher at Riverview School in Brantford.

HOW CAN I HELP STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR WRITING SKILLS?



PROJECT ABSTRACT

This paper is a personal story of my development as a reflective practitioner, researching ways in which I can improve my practice as a teacher of English, focusing on writing skills in particular. In order to examine my development, I have had to search into my past, so that I could account for my values and actions in the present. I have attempted to document the conflicts I experience when the values I hold internally are not reflected in the way I behave externally, and the satisfaction I feel when my values and actions are in harmony.

In order to carry out this research, I have used elements of action research and reflexive practice which fitted both my personal learning style and the nature of this self-study. In my account of the research, I have summarized my experiences, methods, strategies, and findings as a story of my development as an educator, researcher, and writer.

As a result of undertaking this research and recording it, I have obtained new insight into the teaching of writing skills, my values as demonstrated in my actions, the reasons why I act as I do, and myself as a writer. By observing and accounting for my practice, I have become aware of my own development and improvement. Continually, as I have documented my learning, I have been conscious of my own writing skills and style, as I attempted to provide a model for my own students, and, I hope, for others who may take the time to read this story.

Marilyn L. Davis

have been employed by the Grand Erie District School Board and its predecessor, the Norfolk Board of Education, for many years. I have experience teaching in all divisions, most recently as a teacher of core French from Grades 4 to 8. From 1991 to 2000, I held appointments as Vice-Principal in 4 schools: Delhi Public, Walsh, Doverwood and Teeterville-Windham, and since April 2000 I have been Principal of Delhi Public School.

My research question was, “Conscience, a Compass for the School Principal?”, and was based on work by Thomas Green, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Education at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. The opportunity to engage in action research and study my own practice as a school principal was both challenging and rewarding. I learned a great deal about my practice from my own journal entries, as well as from reading, and receiving feedback from members of the school community. Just as classroom teachers work in isolation from other adults for much of each day, the situation of the school principal is increasingly detached from other administrators. I first worked as a Vice-Principal in the school in which I am placed at present. There were fewer students at Delhi Public School at that time and I had 0.25 administrative time as a Vice-Principal, in addition to the full-time principal. Today, there is no Vice-Principal. As a result, it is important to encourage school administrators to engage in this type of research and to share the findings. I was greatly touched by the stories of some of the principals I read during my research, although they were placed in schools very different to my own. Their voices reached across time and space and spoke directly to me.

I would like to express again my thanks to Jackie DeLong for her vision and commitment to making the Masters cohort reality, and to the Board’s senior administration and trustees for their support. In addition, I would like to thank the faculty members of Brock University, as well as the visiting professors, for their ability to lead, challenge and support us throughout the 2 years of the course. Dr. Michael Manley-Casimir and Dr. Susan Drake were unstinting in their efforts to promote our success.

The experience of working with a group of educators, all employed by Grand Erie, was unique, and the participants acted as a strong support group. I would not have completed the course successfully without the encouragement of individual participants and the shared commitment of the group members. I strongly advocate the continuing existence of this and similar programs.

HOW DO I BEST EXCITE AND INTEREST THE LEARNER?



PROJECT ABSTRACT:

My action research project is a description and explanation of my life as a teacher, consultant, and practitioner-researcher for the Grand Erie District School Board from 1997 to 2001. I share narratives of my professional growth and relationships that are my living and developmental values (Laidlaw, 1998) to explore the question,

How can I as a teacher-consultant support teachers to improve student learning and improve the quality of my influence through an exploration of my living and developmental values in my professional practice?

My inquiry includes a study of the consistency of my values in my “Living Standards of Practice” in my relationships with teachers, curriculum support staff, program coordinators, administrators, and parents. It is my goal “to add to the ‘disciplines’ of education which can be established by all those who are creating their own living educational theories” (Whitehead, 1998, p. 5), thus contributing to our ongoing professional knowledge base.

Janie Senko

Biographical Information

Janie has been a teacher for the past 13 years. She began her career working in the primary division and then moved into the junior division. She recently accepted the position of Junior Teacher Consultant out of the Simcoe School Support Centre. She passionately believes that teachers need to establish strong, caring relationships with their students. She also embraces teaching in an integrated fashion and has witnessed first-hand how this approach can motivate both students and teachers. Janie firmly believes that school should be an exciting and engaging place to be.

CONSCIENCE, A COMPASS FOR THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL?



PROJECT ABSTRACT

This paper documents my attempts to work at improving my practice as a school principal. It covers the first year that I was appointed principal and so provides an illuminating insight into that challenging and interesting experience. I considered my practice in light of the voices of conscience as described by Thomas Green in his book, Voices, the Educational Formation of Conscience (1999), and against the personal pedagogical standards I have formulated over my teaching career. I documented my practice in regular journal entries over a two-year period, invited comments from partners in the school community, reflected on the discoveries I made, and made changes in order to improve. Staff members, students and parents were aware of my research and will continue to provide direction.

Along the way I made discoveries about myself and the way I work, reaching back into my childhood in Scotland. I am now close to the end of my professional career and it has been illuminating to recognize the many influences which shaped my life as a teacher and school administrator. These insights have changed the way in which I look at students and staff members because I have come to realize that all the decisions I make, consciously or not, have a profound impact on them.

The process confirmed my understanding of my role and reassured me that I am capable of meeting its demands. I need to work at letting staff members take responsibility for their decisions and not to intervene unless invited to do so. I also need to share my pleasure in the role so this is evident to students, parents and staff members.

Biographical Information

In her seventh year of being an educator, Trudy Gath teaches junior and intermediate Core French as well as grade eight Math, Physical Education and Health at Lynndale Heights Public School in Simcoe, Ontario. Trudy is an Honors graduate of the University of Guelph. During her third year at Guelph, Trudy moved to Quebec City where she attending Université Laval to study French language for ten months. Trudy earned her teaching credentials at the University of Western Ontario. Trudy is currently a resident of Port Dover, Ontario.

HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY PRACTICE AS A FRENCH TEACHER?



PROJECT ABSTRACT

This paper is a narrative of my professional practice. It outlines my educational values as a French teacher and the type of classroom environment I tried to create in support of those values.

Modernist research maintains that including the “I” in researching one’s own practice is not rigorous enough and is too subjective to generate valid data about teaching. However, according to Whitehead (1989) including the “I” and embracing subjectivity is fundamental to creating a living theory of education. My first aim in researching my practice and writing this paper was to improve my practice and develop my own living theory of education. Second, I hoped to contribute to the professional knowledge base of teaching and provide guidance and motivation to others who are also doing an action research project.

My research recounts the steps I took to investigate my professional beliefs that negotiating the curriculum with students is a good way of increasing student motivation.

My choice of an action research methodology was a deliberate attempt to place my research in a setting where my students and colleagues were collaborative participants with me and my practice as the focus.

Through this action research project I have learned much about the way I run my class and the way I want to run my class. I hope that others will find information and ideas that they can use to help improve their own practice.

Phillip Sallesky



A TEACHER'S QUEST TO IMPROVE HER PRACTICE

Biographical Information

I was a Core French Teacher at King George Public School and now a

French Immersion Teacher at Dalewood Middle School, Hamilton.

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Action research is a method of practitioner research which is becoming increasingly popular among professionals as a means to induce positive change in systems or in individual situations. This paper depicts a teacher-researcher's story of how she used the action research method of inquiry to improve her practice, her influence on her student's learning, and further, her own professional development. This teacher-researcher focuses on sustaining her strengths and improving her weaknesses through her caring relationships with students. The author explores her progression toward the awareness of her espoused values through narratives of her personal and educational experiences and shows how she tried to align her values with her actions in practice. The author shares the pertinent events of her action research project chronologically and reveals her attempts toward making ameliorations to her pedagogical methods. Journal writing, surveys, evaluation rubrics, videotaped recordings, and the opinions of colleagues and students were used to promote the continuous reflective processes of the teacher-researcher. In the final chapter, the author discusses the significant learning that the inquiry process provided for her.

Trudy Gath

Biographical Information

I began this journey about 15 years ago as a primary classroom teacher. As I traveled along the path of teaching I stopped at many grade levels in the elementary panel. It fascinated me how my passion for teaching and for my students led to meaningful activities and strategies, engaging the students in their own learning. Eventually my journey led me to grade eight where I have spent the last 5 years of my career. Having completed my Master of Education through the Grand Erie District School Board/Brock University Cohort, I moved into a new phase of my story in life. I am currently an Intermediate Teacher Consultant based at the TRC in Brantford. My interest is in integration, multiple intelligences and the human connections that so greatly influence our experiences, perceptions and attitudes. My journey does not end there, for learning is a life long endeavor filled with both good times and difficult times leading to more questions, challenges and growth.

COHORT STORY: RE-SEARCHING AND LEARNING TOGETHER



PROJECT ABSTRACT:

This paper is the story of the pilot cohort program that operated as a joint venture of Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario and the Grand Erie District School Board, headquartered in Brantford, Ontario, from September 1999 until August 2001. As an experiment in collegial education, the program was unique to that point, and graduated 15 Master of Education candidates in the space of 2 years. As a member of the cohort, I had the opportunity to both observe it and participate in the program. I have chosen to portray the experience as my reflective journey of learning, examined and reported on by all of us who were members. The paper is also a call for renewed efforts to pursue desperately needed professional development opportunities for teachers.

Robert Ogilvie

Biographical Information

Bob Ogilvie recently retired from Grand Erie, after 33 years with the Board and its predecessors. A classroom teacher at various grade levels for 29 years, he spent the last 4 years of his career as an intermediate and senior division Curriculum Assistant and Teacher Consultant. Since retirement he has returned to the classroom, as a part-time member of the faculty in the pre-service teacher education program at Brock University and as an instructor in the private pilot ground school at the Brantford Flight Centre. Bob resides in Brantford with his wife Linda, and when not involved in his teaching activities enjoys cycling, woodworking and of course, flying.

UNDERSTANDING TEACHING: AN ONTOLOGICAL EXPLORATION



PROJECT ABSTRACT

"What communicative qualities exist that allow my teacher/student relationships to develop? How can I improve my practice using this knowledge?"

The notion of teacher "presence" and the magical classroom fascinated me. But what was it? Could I discover the essence of creating and maintaining such a place? The question of presence and magic in the classroom are a reflection of the teacher's ontology in the mirror of her students. The magic comes from inside, in unique, personal, and wondrous ways: ways which are waiting to be acknowledged.

Marion Kline

Biographical Information

Heather Knill-Griesser is a Teacher Consultant - Primary Division for the Grand Erie District School Board. She has recently completed her Master of Education Degree in Integrated Studies from Brock University. Heather has used action research as an intervention in her personal practice to bring about educational improvement for the past five years. Her second action research project "Attitude is the Key to Success", a study to improve math attitudes of Grade 3 students, originally appeared on-line in the Ontario Action Researcher, Vol. 3, Issue 1, (2000) and in Voice, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Volume 3, Number 4, Summer 2001.

In her professional and personal life, as the mother of four teenaged children, Heather stresses the importance of lifelong learning creating opportunities and environments that support her values of care, trust, empathy, respect, autonomy, collaborative decision making and risk taking.

A HANDBOOK TO SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS: A NARRATIVE APPROACH



PROJECT ABSTRACT

The project is the fictional dialogue between a new school administrator and an experienced one, close to retirement. They each represent different philosophies of school leadership and through their conversation each comes to the realization that their ideas are not as different as they first thought. Managing the curriculum, discipline, supervision and maintaining health are all issues discussed through the lense of one guiding principle of leadership - relationship building. This is accomplished while using the format of the narrative, in the hope that it will be more engaging and meaningful to the reader.

Mike McDonald

Biographical Information

Mike McDonald is the Vice-Principal of Hagersville Secondary. Prior to that he was Curriculum Consultant working out of the Cayuga Support Centre, and prior to this he was the Head of English at Dunnville Secondary where he also worked as the behaviour Resource Teacher.

A VISION QUEST OF SUPPORT TO IMPROVE STUDENT LEARNING: VALIDATING MY LIVING STANDARDS OF PRACTICE © AUGUST, 2001



PROJECT ABSTRACT

My action research project is a description and explanation of my life as a teacher, consultant, and practitioner-researcher for the Grand Erie District School Board from 1997 to 2001. I share narratives of my professional growth and relationships that are my living and developmental values (Laidlaw, 1998) to explore the question,

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Heather Knill-Griesser

Biographical Information

Art and Guidance Teacher

Dunnville Secondary School.

Academic Background:

B.A. in Visual Arts, Brock University

M.Ed., Brock University.

Areas of current interest:

Action Research, Art and the Learning Process.

HOW CAN I POSITIVELY INFLUENCE MY STUDENTS' ABILITY TO BE SUCCESSFUL?



PROJECT ABSTRACT

The focus of my inquiry is on the role of visual arts and the culture of responsibility with regard to student success. If “we teach who we are,” then it is critical for teachers to know the whys of their teaching practice in order to improve the hows. Self knowledge is key to professional development. Therefore, teachers can be much more effective simply by examining how they learned best. Stories of our past, autobiographical narratives, are one way to reflect upon what influenced us and came to form our values. Once recognized, we can then reflect upon our present practice in order to determine whether or not we are living espoused values or not. This “living contradiction” between espoused and lived values are what Jack Whitehead encouraged us to examine using the action research method. By identifying and researching, we can then act to improve and reflect in order to determine our progress, and the cycle begins again.

I have blended the methods of action research together with autobiographical narratives and portraiture in order to embrace the personal, contextual, and complex nature of not only my self study but the nature of teaching as well. This blending provides the flexibility necessary, allowing me to address the many challenges of collecting, analyzing, validating, and presenting a medley of data.