

Researching Practice: Findings from Teacher Inquiry into the Implementation of the Grade 12 Global Issues Course in Manitoba

By Dr. Lloyd Kornelsen
University of Winnipeg

Occasional Paper Series

Teacher Research, Number 1

The logo for the Manitoba Education Research Network (MERN) consists of the letters 'MERN' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters are closely spaced and have a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance.

Manitoba Education Research Network

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INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE GRADE 12 GLOBAL ISSUES
COURSE IN MANITOBA

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Introduction

This paper describes findings from a study with the Global Issues Teacher Inquiry Project (GTIP) in Manitoba. Now in its third year, GTIP was initiated to support the implementation of a new Grade 12 social studies course. *Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability* (GI) is the only inquiry-guided, project-based course in the Manitoba Kindergarten to Grade 12 social studies curriculum to date, so it was not surprising that teachers were encountering implementation challenges as it replaced the very popular *World Issues* course. Enrolment numbers were dropping; teachers were becoming reluctant to teach the new course; and, in some high schools, the course was being dropped entirely. It was time to take a closer look at this situation.

In the spring of 2013, members of the Manitoba Education Research Network (MERN)* met to discuss these implementation challenges. Representatives from the University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg faculties of education, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, and other education partner groups decided to initiate a teacher inquiry project that would engage teachers, faculty, and department consultants in a collaborative study of practitioner-generated questions related to the implementation of *Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability*.

The Global Issues Teacher Inquiry Project (GTIP) invited participation from teachers who had pilot taught the GI course the previous years and were currently teaching it. While MERN maintained a coordinating function overall, meetings were organized by department consultants; release time, facilities, and other resources were provided by school divisions and other education partner groups; and the sessions were co-facilitated by two education faculty members.

As the faculty facilitator from the University of Winnipeg (UW), I worked with my colleague from the University of Manitoba and nine high school teachers, along with three department consultants. This group had five meetings during the fall/winter of 2013/2014 to discuss their experiences piloting GI. The teachers represented a range of teaching experience and a diversity of schools from across the province. The meetings' express purpose was for classroom practitioners to share their impressions, observations, and insights on teaching the new course, with a view to making recommendations for curriculum implementation and teaching practice—in short, to (re)search their practice. An important component of the project was the agreement that participants would share their findings at a MERN forum in spring 2014, as well as contribute articles about what they had learned for publication in a special issue of the *MERN Journal*. Beyond the dissemination purposes, these commitments served as critical benchmarks for the project.

* The Manitoba Education Research Network members include the five faculties of education, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, provincial education partner groups, school divisions, and the field.

At the culminating MERN-sponsored forum at the University of Manitoba in Spring 2014—attended by university professors, school administrators, and department consultants—the participating GTIP teachers shared their findings with an enthusiastic and approving audience that readily supported the value of this teacher research. The project was recognized in a national education publication (*Education Canada*, Spring 2015). MERN continued its coordinating role, and funding for a second year came from the Manitoba Social Studies Teachers Association (MSSTA), UW, and Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning. This second year included five returning teachers and five new ones, and followed a similar pattern with similar outcomes. It was at the end of Year 2 that I worked with my co-facilitator on this study to explore GTIP teacher-participants' perceptions of the project.

It is useful to note here that my previous work background significantly affected my perspective and influenced my role as GTIP co-facilitator and research project co-investigator. When I was asked to co-facilitate the GTIP, I had just recently been appointed as a member of the Faculty of Education at the University of Winnipeg—following 25 years of teaching high school social studies. Apart from contributing to the learning of others, the GTIP opportunity was a good fit for me in several important respects.

First, in the past several years, many of my social studies teaching friends and colleagues, master teachers, had begun to retire, taking with them rich insight into educating youth for citizenship—insight and wisdom that comes from years of seeking to engage students in dialogue about themselves and their world. It seemed a waste, teachers leaving in midlife—a lifetime of energy expended and irreplaceable understandings acquired—taking their educating acumen and teaching wisdom with them. I saw my new academic position as an opportunity to seek out social studies teachers and ask them about their teaching insights and understandings; to investigate what their interpretations unveil, their reflections reveal, and their stories illuminate; and to examine how their offerings broaden our horizons of teaching practice and social studies education. GTIP offered a means of doing so—having social studies teachers articulate and share their educative insights.

Second, in my new position, I was struggling to reconcile field and academy, high school and faculty of education, trying to explain—to myself and to others—how and why previous work served as a necessary and seamless function for my new academic endeavours; and how the work and thinking that teachers do in the field informs, advances, and nuances research, teaching, and service undertakings—often in unique and indispensable ways—and is worthy of more formal recognition. Both critical theory and narrative inquiry were especially helpful in explicating one to the other, and for articulating the scholarly worth of teaching experience; however, GTIP offered an actual and practical opportunity for bridging field to academe—a way of exploring how teacher-practitioners inform teacher education and education research. In short, my leadership of GTIP

and this subsequent investigation was embedded in a deep respect for teachers' lived experience and a desire to help make their practical knowledge recognized and accessible.

Theoretical Framework

Multiple strands of literature in education speak of the value and importance of teachers participating in education research. Two research traditions in particular, critical theory and narrative inquiry, argue that the teacher voice is critical and necessary in advancing understandings of education and the practice of teaching. In addition, recently, action researchers in Ontario and Alberta have reported on contributions teachers have made in collaborative research endeavours.

Critical theorists, calling attention to issues of power, challenge the notion that university researchers, often operating at great remove from the teachers and students they are researching, should have a disparate influence on education policy. Freire (1970, 1997) stated that only those who encountered problems themselves could most effectively and meaningfully engage with the problem. What this means, in the case of educators, is that classroom teachers are most able to inquire into and address significant problems that arise in the life of the classroom (Aulls & Shore, 2008). Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) concur, arguing that

teachers must have more voice and more respect in the culture of education. Teachers must join the culture of researchers if a new level of educational rigor and quality is ever to be achieved . . . they [teachers] realize that they have understandings that go far beyond what the expert researchers have produced. (p. 165, 166)

It is from a critical perspective that Aulls and Shore (2008) review literature on the contributions of teacher-led research. They list its benefits, including increased teaching confidence and awareness, and new ways to value and think about teaching. Furthermore, they draw attention to conditions that are necessary for teachers to do research, including being respected as researcher equals with the university counterparts, and "discussing all aspects of the research project from the start . . . developing a common language through dialogue, and . . . making ample time for teachers to ask questions, reflect, and form conceptual frameworks" (p. 78).

Narrative inquiry theorists, speaking from both an ontological and a research philosophy perspective, raise the critical questions of whose stories are being told (Senehi, 2009) and whose experience is being represented in education research (Cain, Esefan, & Clandinin, 2013)? Often it is not teachers' experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1988), drawing on John Dewey's experiential learning philosophy, claim that education, life, and experience are one and the same. They argue that since experience informs practice, uniquely and indispensably, and since there

are few other ways of thinking about experience or modes of its inquiry other than narratively, teachers' stories are critical to the field of education research. This speaks to the need for teachers to share their stories in researching contexts, as indicated by Huber, Caine, Huber, and Steeves (2013): "We want to emphasize here how important it is for teachers to have spaces where they can attend to their narrative histories and to all that is at work in the meeting of their and children's diverse lives" (p. 231).

Teaching practitioners agree, and talk of how their stories are crucial to educational research, but are often marginalized. Kathy Carter, writing in 1993, said

We can readily point to instances in which we have felt excluded by researchers' language or powerless in the face of administrative decrees and evaluation instruments presumably bolstered by scientific evidence . . . only the teacher owns her or his story and its meaning. As researchers and educators, we can only serve by getting this message across to the larger society and, perhaps, by helping teachers to come to know their own stories. (p. 8)

Carter believes that maybe the best that we in teacher education can do is help teachers know their stories. Almost 20 years later, in 2011, Patrick J. Lewis concurred; speaking as a middle school history teacher, he also questions the mediating role of the narrative researcher:

We need to move the space to create a place for the storyteller to share her story without the interpretation of the narrative researcher. . . . It is in the stories of our every day being, in our trying to live well with the challenges of being that we may engender some insight or percipience. (p. 506)

The benefits of practitioner research are many and may be as simple as raising the consciousness of school teachers and university researchers (Noddings, 2016) or as far-reaching as contributing to a nation's PISA test scores (Sahlberg, 2015). There is evidence that a key reason for Finland becoming an international leader in educational excellence is that the Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system provided teachers time to collaborate with their peers—for them to develop professional learning communities.

Ontario (The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2010) and Alberta (Adams & Townsend, 2014) report the practical benefits of teacher-based research. They have found that when teachers are collaboratively and meaningfully involved in research, educational policy is affected, classrooms are transformed, and opportunities for new understandings and actions are generated.

In short, whether seen as research methodology or as ontology, teachers' experience as constructed and co-constructed in their stories, and their storytelling is critical and necessary for understanding teaching and education and should play a valuable role in education research.

Context, Purpose, and Question

GTIP, a teacher-mediated collaborative inquiry project group that began meeting in September 2013, was set up to investigate the challenges of implementing the new Grade 12 Social Studies course, *Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability*. As project facilitators, we assembled no formal research design; however, implicit in structuring the meetings and conducting the discussions were three interweaving research sensibilities: phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and participatory action research.

- Phenomenology: The research was seeking to understand the essence of teachers' common experiences and their recollections of those experiences in order to develop practices and policies.
- Narrative Inquiry: Teaching experiences were often evoked and conveyed through stories. Thinking narratively served as a portal to experience—as a way of thinking about and understanding phenomenon.
- Participatory Action Research: The participating teachers were researchers, endeavouring to understand their teaching experience, with a view to informing, enlightening, and transforming ongoing teaching practice; participants helped shape the research questions and determine meeting/workshop agendas.

In the end, each teacher was required to present his/her research findings at a MERN-sponsored forum, findings that evolved from cycling back and forth between group discussion and individual reflection. The papers that resulted, the written artifacts, were published in a special volume of the *MERN Journal*. One of the papers was reprinted in a national publication.

Initially, the day-long meetings of GTIP followed a clearly prescribed agenda: a 30-minute check-in at the beginning of the day, followed by participant progress reports, mentoring meetings with university faculty members, individual work time (e.g., literature searches), and a 30-minute end-of-day debrief session. However, after the second meeting, it became apparent that the teacher participants were interested in simply meeting with their teaching colleagues and having open freewheeling discussions, sharing stories and anecdotes, from past and present, about teaching issues, challenges, and learnings; and in the end, eight months later, participants agreed that the richest research findings were those that derived from group discussions, when the meeting agenda was loosened and the group “went where it needed to go.”

Inadvertently, or at least without conscious intent, and more by happenstance than by design, GTIP became a way of doing research of the kind embraced by critical pedagogues and narrative inquiry theorists and lauded by action researchers. However, several challenges have recently presented:

- accessing funding (funding from government sources is diminishing due to changes in research priorities)

- finding ways to broaden the scope of the research group(s) to involve more teachers and disciplines
- continuing to ascertain the merit, scholarly and otherwise, of this type of teacher-led, experientially based research
- negotiating what each, the academics and practitioners, can and need to offer the other
- seeking broader public engagement and support

Working with GTIP made clear to us that, as teacher educators, we have a necessary responsibility in addressing these challenges—so that teachers’ lived experience can continue to be accessed, publicized, and valued. It was this that motivated this study—an inquiry into GTIP, an inquiry-based collaboration for professional learning and education research, looking at (a) how it relates to teaching effectiveness and professional growth, and (b) how it informs teacher-led education research. The five returning teachers enthusiastically agreed to participate in the study.

Method

This study was conducted as an interpretive inquiry, and the data were derived mostly from participant interviews and a focus group meeting that my U of Manitoba colleague, Gary Babiuk, and I conducted with five teachers who had participated in both the first and second years of the GTIP. The stories of researcher and researched overlapped significantly (Schnee, 2009).

While the interviews and focus group meeting were conducted and facilitated by the two university professors of GTIP, the U of M colleague and me, in many respects, our relationship with the teacher-participants was that of equal collaborators, people with whom we shared similar and overlapping experiences and educative perspectives. Like them, we had spent many years teaching middle years and high school social studies. Although we had not taught the GI course, we worked on the department’s curriculum development team that initially developed the course. We had served as research facilitators for GTIP and, together with the teacher-participants, wrestled with the challenges of implementing and teaching the new course.

Ellis (1998) and Van Manen (2000) talk about the unique and indispensable value of researchers’ caring concern and worrying mindfulness in gathering data, and in analyzing and interpreting it. Because of our common history, in many ways, the worries and concerns that imbued this process were similar to those of the teacher-participants. Consequently, in many respects, this study served as a seamless activity for the whole group, one where we reflected on shared experience.

So, in the end it must be said that, while there are differences between the gaze of university researchers and teacher-participants (affected by such things as differing researching responsibilities, analyzing and interpreting undertakings, publishing motivations, and teaching geographies), the interests and concerns of this study, and its research question, derived from a shared quest: addressing the challenges of implementing *Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability*, and doing so from similar sensibilities. Invariably then, the study's data and data collection, and their analysis and interpretation, were embedded in overlapping stories of researcher and researched.

Data Analysis

Data from participant interviews and focus group transcription were analyzed using Creswell's (2007) analysis spiral, beginning with several "naïve" readings of the compiled transcripts, sketching ideas and seeing emerging patterns. In the describing, classifying, and interpreting phase, specific categories were identified and coded. The data analysis process was iterative: reading and rereading transcripts and texts, and categorizing and then recoding and re-categorizing.

Qualitative researchers guided understanding. Creswell (2007), speaking to the messy nature of qualitative research and how researchers often learn by doing, advises of the importance of insight, intuition, and impression. Ellis (1998), warning that understandings of research problems or questions may change through the process of research analysis, suggests visualizing interpretive inquiry as an unfolding spiral. Both of these sensibilities were experienced and heeded.

Findings/Results

What then were teacher-participant perceptions of GTIP? What did they say? Three themes emerged in the interviews and focus group discussion—about which there was much talk, animated discussion, storytelling, and general agreement:

- GTIP served as a unique and invaluable form of in-service **teacher education** for combatting professional isolation, offering teaching supports, and inspiring accountability.
- **Writing and presentation** requirements were helpful for developing concrete artifacts, focusing personal reflection, and enlightening teaching practice.
- GTIP should continue and grow to include **more teachers and more sharing time**.

With respect to presenting the findings, lengthy quotes are used, often with limited editorial comment or frame, and sometimes lists of quotes are presented without interruption or conscious juxtaposition. The objective is to keep participants' voices independent, authentic, and true as much and whenever possible—and to counter the temptation of wholly shaping what others say to "fit"

my narrative or interpretation—respecting the multi-subjective nature of the study. I hope that with this approach, relevant layers and textures of meaning might be rendered that otherwise might not be.

Teacher Education

Most participants were unequivocal in their assessment of GTIP. (The names used are pseudonyms.) Jayne spoke for most when she said at the outset that, “It is far and away the best and most useful [professional development or PD].” All participants, in varying ways, concurred, and elaborated on why this was so. Here is Kyle: “It’s by far the best [PD] because it’s teachers talking to teachers and like-minded people.” Karen and Paul agreed and compared it to other forms of professional development:

Often professional development is something that is top-down. Somebody says, “Okay this is what we are focusing on, this is the new theory, fill in the blanks, and let’s do it,” and then it’s filtered down and people don’t usually buy in because they’re like, “Well, why is this important to me?” Like we say to our students, “We want learning to be meaningful for you because you will be more engaged.” The GTIP is like that. It’s meaningful because it’s teacher-directed and it’s teacher-centred and it’s coming from what we need to help us in our own practice. It’s not somebody saying, “This is what you need to be focusing on, this is the next trend in education, and here we go.” – Karen

How is this compared to other types of PD I’ve done? It’s qualitatively different, right? So much of what we do is going to see professionals who have a set thing, they present to you, and then you either internalize some of it or you don’t and you walk away. I think the fact that it’s been so participatory, that the research that we’ve been doing has been again, inquiry based—based on what we actually care about in the course—yeah, it’s made it much more meaningful. – Paul

So what was it about GTIP specifically, it being participatory, “teachers talking to teachers” that was seen to make it so valuable—“the best PD ever”? In varying and different ways, and oftentimes with themes overlapping, participants talked of three elements: GTIP served as a community of support; it served as a source for teaching resources; and it raised teaching expectations.

Combats Isolation

Every one of the teachers talked about how isolated or alone they felt in their work, and how GTIP functioned as a means of connecting, supporting, and being supported by colleagues. In their words:

[The GTIP community] is absolutely significant and I think it is vital. In any profession, if you are isolated from your colleagues—and in so many schools, the social studies teacher, especially in this course, is entirely isolated from a colleague. – Jayne

I always looked forward to the sharing component of the GTIP team, to be able to go and meet with teachers who are teaching that. Part of that reasoning is because I am on an island in [rural school division]. There is no other teacher in my division teaching this course, and just to be given the time to talk to other teachers teaching the Global Issues course was huge . . . A lot of times when I would go to the GTIP, and then come back to my classroom, what I heard at the GTIP reinforced what I was doing. – Kyle

I mean I think one of the most beneficial aspects to this type of teacher PD is again there's so often Global Issues courses there's one teacher in the building teaching. So it's very isolating. – Paul

And collaboration, that is something we don't get to do enough of in this job. A lot of people are very isolated and collaboration is in any facet of any job or career, to become better at what you are doing, you need to collaborate. Teachers so rarely do. – Karen

Finding more folks that are islands to themselves, that have no one to bounce their ideas off. – Jim

Using the word *community*, Paul concludes and echoes what others said:

I am just thankful for being part of the process and being part of the community for the last two years. It has been really useful for me. – Paul

Offers Teaching Support (as only fellow teachers can)

GTIP was seen by all participants as serving as a resource for teaching tools, teaching ideas, and professional affirmation.

Kyle, talking about the intragroup sharing at the beginning of each session, describes why he found it so beneficial:

Especially in the beginning, even now, the resources are great. We would go around and talk about seeing this video or this document. . . . that was huge, in the beginning. Because I still refer back to these certain videos. Even today in our group, the BBC thing I haven't heard of, nor the Red River women. Ken had mentioned the story, the TED talk on the one story . . . resources like that. Now I am going to go back and use it and probably share it with my kids. That to me, is the biggest thing . . . because then, going back to the island. – Kyle

Because as Karen says,

And I think teachers, if it's too abstract or too outside of what they can do on a Monday morning it's not as beneficial. And this project, even though it's not just taking things you can use, it is something that you can use in your own classroom so it makes it more meaningful because it's something you're doing, and I think that's important. – Karen

Not only did participants talk about teaching tools and tangible resources, they spoke of the value of discussing and sharing teaching ideas and experiences.

Opening up that door, having that conversation has helped tenfold. You see different styles and different ways of doing some things. They might take a risk that you thought about doing, and thought it couldn't work and now you can try it too. Then you can compare it, was it a flop or was it good? You have someone to bounce it back. "When you did this, did this happen or what?" Sitting around the table and sharing experiences has helped too. "What happened when you talked about this controversial issue?" You have someone to share your worst stories with and get their feedback. – Jim

There were so many times in these meetings where I came in and even if I didn't verbalize my concern, someone else did. Or it was touched on in some way during the day, and I thought that is how I am going to solve this. I am thinking about this wrong. I need to think about it this way. – Jayne

The biggest thing for me was just getting together with other teachers, talking about the course, reminding ourselves about the importance of the course and what it can accomplish. I really appreciated those things. – Paul

And in the end, many spoke of the affirmation they felt, as teachers, as a result of the intragroup sharing. Kyle sums up what others said:

A lot of times when I would go to the GTIP, and then I come back to my classroom, what I heard at the GTIP reinforced what I was doing . . . So that to me, this group is like a therapy group, a support group in that sense it is good to hear that people are having the same challenges but we are also having similar successes. – Kyle

Inspires Accountability (as only a community of fellow teachers can)

Every one of the participants, one way or another, talked about how, as a sense of community developed, so did an implicit sense of expectation and accountability. Kyle and Jayne describe it as coming from

. . . talking to like-minded people that are all concerned about global issues and they all have things that they bring to the table and share. – Kyle

. . . no one was pretending anything other than what they truly did, bringing that to the table and having this very honest, very open conversation about wanting to improve and wanting to change. . . [For example:] "This is where I was coming from but I think I am wrong now," and they would say, "Yeah, I don't think you are on the right track there, why don't you go in this direction?" and it's fantastic because you grow and you change and you move and you bring it in and it either strengthens your sense that you are really going in the right direction or you think no. . . I am going to shift a bit. – Jayne

Jim talks about how this sense of accountability and expectation helped him be a more thoughtfully engaged teacher, and Paul tells how it helped him be a better, more critically aware teacher.

Because you know you are going to meet again in a couple of weeks, we are going to go around the table, I'm going to make sure that I have something, either learning or

questions, for other people. “How did you introduce that? How did you record that?” The fact that you see the people again makes you held more accountable to it. It’s also that you want to be more involved in it. You want to be able to talk about something or ask those questions. You aren’t just leaving it; you are coming back to it. You know next week when we meet again that something has to be done and we are going to talk about it. – Jim

It has definitely raised the bar for me. I felt fairly comfortable in how I taught the course, and I thought I was doing a pretty good job with it, and I think seeing how other people have focused on other parts of the new curriculum has got me thinking and more deeply probing into what inquiry means. It has definitely challenged me to do more with how I teach the course. I think that is probably the biggest thing being on this committee has done for me—it has challenged me to be an even better teacher, thinking critically about how I approach those different things and trying to incorporate parts of it into what I want to do and move forward. – Paul

Writing and Presenting Their Work

As mentioned earlier, a condition of participating in the GTIP was making a presentation at a MERN research forum and writing a paper for the *MERN Journal*. Indeed, much of each of the GTIP sessions was given over to preparing those presentations and papers. They were to be based on biographical/reflective research, done singly or in pairs, on a particular question/challenge regarding the teaching of GI. Several respondents expressed some initial ambivalence about the value of this aspect of GTIP. In fact, here is Kyle’s initial response when asked about the future of GTIP:

I really think, to be honest with you guys, the research part has to go away . . . if we want to get other teachers involved, we can’t scare them off with research. That to me is the bottom line.

Jayne voiced similar concerns, worried about over working overworked teachers. However, in the end, both Jayne and Kyle acknowledged the importance of spending time writing and preparing presentations, but reminded facilitators/organizers to be sensitive to teachers’ busy work lives. Overall, the participants recognized that the “research piece” (writing and presenting) played a necessary role, as it served a higher purpose. For Jim,

it [research] forces you to think and move to the next level. Some days you turn on the autopilot and you don’t really have to think. When you sit down and think and put down your ideas and research you are awakened again. – Jim

For Jayne, it was something else. After she and Kyle discussed the relative merits of making the research mandatory (see above), she talked about the concrete artifacts that were being developed:

I agree with Kyle, there is some anxiety about [writing articles]. Don’t tell a bunch of overworked teachers that they have to come in and do a bunch of research, but the other

end of that is that now we have all these fantastic references and resources. So that is one very concrete piece that is so very valuable. And you can actually talk to the person that wrote the resource. So these resources are not just for research, they can be applied and used in the classroom. I think that is hugely beneficial. – Jayne

In the end, all participants talked about, or alluded to, how the formal research requirement helped them to reflect on their teaching practice and to be more focused in their reflections. Here Karen and Kyle echo the group consensus:

I think too, in the madness of the day and all the demands that teaching involves, we rarely get an opportunity to spend a lot of time reflecting on what you are doing in your practice because you are just so involved in the day-to-day demands. This gives you a chance to step back and do some more formal reflection on practices. Every day you probably think about what happened and what you could do differently, but this is a more formalized way to do that and also to have a group to discuss and dialogue with, to enhance practice in the future . . . The GTIP project . . . allows you to talk about your experiences, run things by people, talk about what works, what doesn't work and then doing this actual research were you're reflecting on what you're doing. – Karen

[What is the best part of the writing/research process?] The reflection process, absolutely. It forces you to think. A lot of times writing that paper thinking about assessment and stuff it forced me to think about these things because self-reflection is super important. – Kyle

More Teachers, More Sharing Time

The most transcribed text, the most animated discussion and expressed emotion, particularly in the focus group, revolved around the question of advice: What advice would you have for future iterations of the GTIP? Responses were clear, direct, and mostly unequivocal: Extend the GTIP opportunity to other teachers, and protect and expand teachers' sharing time during meetings.

On extending the opportunity to other teachers, the following comments were made:

(Talking about addressing the special challenges of teaching GI) You know what you should do? You should set up a permanent GTIP-like organization for social studies department heads, for the teachers they teach. . . . I love that about this group, that there are so many people from so many different backgrounds who have different ideas about all of these things but. . . . I think that if more social studies teachers were part of that and felt that . . . they would understand how they were already doing inquiry and how to do more inquiry and feel confident that the way they were doing inquiry was okay. – Jayne

I wish we could do it more often. In an ideal world it would be fantastic to talk about all other courses too. . . . There are other global issues teachers out there. Let's get them on board here. Do they have any ideas? Where are those teachers? Let's get them in those conversations that we had two years ago and have them with new people. I think that's super important. – Kyle

The GTIP project it would be great if more teachers had access to this kind of resource, this teacher-centered PD. . . . [Also] if we could get to a larger audience with what we've been doing I think that's important. We have to find a way to get this out. . . because, let's be honest, we go to present at this MERN forum but how many people are actually Global Issues teachers? I haven't seen that many in the ones that I've been to. It's been mostly like academics, superintendents, administration. But how many classroom teachers have had a chance to be a part of this? – Karen

Oh okay, yeah, so other disciplines absolutely. Yeah, like it would be wonderful to have these types of conversations with other teachers who are teaching the First Nations, Métis, and Indigenous studies courses . . . It'd be really nice to make those connections amongst those lines. So other disciplines, for sure. History? Yeah, like what are we doing that's working? What's not working? What are peoples' final assessments? – Paul

Find individuals that are islands to themselves, build in more time for them to work and share with others, the research is good, although it might scare some off. But it helps you grow as a professional too. It might open your eyes to other things, like working on your master's. Make sure there is time to sit around and talk, have a buddy system in place to ask, "What are you doing?" – Jim

On teachers' time, the following remarks were made:

Finding more folks that are islands to themselves, that have no one to bounce their ideas off. Giving them that time. Time is a huge thing. That's one thing we heard from the speaker from Alberta who had the young family. Just building that time somehow. – Jim

Release time. In hindsight I should have got release time. So I think maybe making that clearer to people who participate in the future just saying, "Go to your admin, or go to your division and get the release time you need." – Paul

Ideally, if this project was going to happen next year, it would be rounds of sharing. Let's talk about how the course is running in your classroom. Let's talk about resources you've used. Let's talk about your experiences . . . lots of sharing, some theory for sure to help provoke a few things, but the sharing component is so huge and can't be rushed. Allowing that discussion to flow. If you start putting expectations on – "We want you to do this and then report back on that" – that's when you lose it. – Kyle

That reflecting doesn't often happen unless you're in a university course where you are doing it for your master's or post-baccalaureate. But this gives teachers the opportunity to actually sit back and talk to somebody else and reflect on what they're doing. And being able to have time to do this is huge, because it sounds great; it would be nice if we just all got together over coffee and "Oh let's talk about what works and what doesn't in our course," but because this is a mandated project we have that time. I don't know how often that happens in real life if it wasn't for this project, how often you get together with people teaching this course and have that dialogue. – Karen

So unless the time was there and I know the research is important and I know absolutely that the self-reflection piece is important, reflection on your own teaching and what has

happened . . . but I suspect people will tell you and the conversations I have had over beer, that it is the actual time talking and having those concerns addressed. – Jayne

Discussion/Recommendations

This study confirmed that teacher-based/led research, as practised by GTIP, could be a means of (a) creating a professional learning and research community; (b) accessing knowledge that only practitioners have; and (c) disseminating that knowledge to people who need it most, classroom teachers. Furthermore, for these goods to be fully realized, facilitators/organizers of GTIP-like research projects need to be especially heedful of teacher voice, story, and collaboration—freeing the time and space for teacher-participants to meet and think together. It may mean embracing chaos and welcoming unpredictability on the one hand, and requiring participants to write and present for public audiences on the other.

Community

Participants stated time and again that one of the most valuable aspects of the GTIP was being a part of a learning community made up of fellow colleagues. The benefits, or nature, of this community were experienced in a number ways—feeling supported and affirmed; being challenged, revitalized, and introduced to new teaching ideas and resources; meeting with peers struggling with similar challenges; telling their stories and being heard; or just, in the end, “feeling less alone.” This corresponds to one of the most significant memories we also had of the GTIP. Participants after each meeting consistently and frequently expressed gratitude for having had the opportunity to meet: “This day has changed my week”; “I have more hope and confidence now”; “It is too bad more teachers don’t have the opportunity for this type of community”; “I feel less alone” (Kornelsen, 2014).

In the end, it was mainly for this reason—experiencing this type of community—that all five teachers were unequivocal and insistent on extending the GTIP opportunity to other teachers. In 2008 Aulls and Shore argued that the social conditions of teachers’ work are such that they might undermine the confidence and devalue the knowledge, credibility, and wisdom of the best teacher’s efforts in action research. Furthermore, they suggested that it was not going to change any time soon, given the social/political pressures of teaching privatism and the bureaucratic structure of school systems, which can diametrically oppose teacher involvement in research communities with fellow educators. The GTIP represents a hopeful counternarrative. It may serve as a model for building a community of professional support for teachers, one that honours teachers and trusts their ability to do research, and provides opportunity for teachers to tell their stories, feel more confident, and “feel less alone.”

Teacher Knowledge

Participants were emphatic in their belief that experience-derived teaching ideas and insights, their own and others'—for helping address teaching challenges and conundrums, develop their teaching confidence, and making real differences in their classroom practice—were preferable and more trusted than those ideas and practices derived from “outsider” or “top down” PD. Oftentimes participants said that GTIP was the best PD in which they had participated—for this reason: It provided an opportunity to meet with fellow teaching colleagues and discuss common problems and shared challenges, thereby gaining invaluable teaching insights, ideas, and resources. They also agreed that the practice of writing and making public presentations about their practice helped them access teaching insights otherwise not accessible. Participants did not discount knowledge derived from other sources, but believed that their teaching peers had access to knowledge outsiders did not have. The GTIP teachers are not alone in so thinking. The theorists, philosophers, and practitioners in critical pedagogy and narrative inquiry cited earlier concur, speaking of insights and perspectives that only those intimately familiar with the classroom can offer.

On a second salient point, findings from a recent extensive province-wide study in Alberta by Adams and Townsend (2014) correspond with GTIP participants' sentiments on the relevancy of GTIP to classroom practice. When teachers in Alberta were asked to identify those aspects most beneficial to their growth in a school-based collaborative inquiry process in which they had been involved, they spoke of how

mandatory attendance at centrally organized PD events offers no guarantee that new ideas will find their way into educators' practice; nor does reading a book by the superintendent. . . . Professional learning occurred under an ethos of shared responsibility and participants assumed greater ownership of the direction and results of their efforts.

. . . When collaborative inquiry was site-embedded, matters of context were more fully attended to, and accordingly, professional learning was more likely integrated into classroom practice. (p. 13)

Throughout the two years of GTIP, and in this study's interviews and focus group meeting, teachers consistently spoke of how their classroom practice had been directly affected and influenced by the GTIP sessions—and for reasons not unlike those given by the Alberta teachers.

In short, involving teachers in education inquiries will

- in unique and indispensable ways expand horizons in education as teachers can offer knowledge/insight that only practitioners have
- make it more likely that the professional learning derived from those involvements will become a part of classroom practice

Teacher Time

Finally, teachers made it clear that more time should be made available for teachers to do the sort of reflective collaborative research that had been available to them in GTIP and that a priority should be placed on sharing, dialogue, and reflection—teachers talking with teachers about their work and work experiences. This corresponds to what Gary and I witnessed in the 2013 to 2015 GTIP sessions—increasingly meetings being taken up with teacher sharing time. It felt messy and a little chaotic at times, like we were losing control of our neatly organized research meeting agenda, but it was from these discussions that participants claimed the richest research findings were derived. And this is as it should be if our purposes are to (re)search experience according to Huber, Caine, Huber, and Steeves (2013). Citing Clandinin and Connelly (2000), they say that if one’s inquiry focuses on experience, one must be willing to let go of the strategies and techniques of narrative research theory to follow where experience leads. This not unlike how critical pedagogues Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) describe recent developments in bricolage research:

Researchers’ interactions with the objects of their inquiries, bricoleurs understand, are always complicated, mercurial, unpredictable, and, of course, complex. Such conditions negate the practice of planning research strategies in advance. . . . [Bricoleurs must] always respect the demands of the task at hand, the bricolage, as conceptualized here, resists its placement in concrete as it promotes its elasticity. (p. 168)

The implication, for people who inquire into teacher and teaching experience, narratively or otherwise, is that, as middle school teacher Patrick J. Lewis writes, they need to trust in the stories and storytellers and “move to create a place for the storyteller to share her story without the interpretation of the narrative researcher” (p. 506). It is this that the GTIP teachers called for, claiming that research into teaching challenges must make room and time for teachers—their stories, their insights, and their collaboration—even if it means a bout of messiness and unpredictability.

Recommendations

To enhance and ensure the success of inquiry-based collaborations for professional learning and education research, I recommend that

1. facilitators/organizers of meetings follow the teacher-participants’ lead and respect their discussion interests and teaching worries—this may mean being open to and working with a measure of chaos and unpredictability
2. teacher-participants be expected to write papers and prepare presentations about their practice for public audiences to help them access and articulate heretofore unknown teaching insights

Conclusion

This interpretive study of teacher-participants' perceptions of the Global Teachers Inquiry Project, an inquiry-based collaboration for professional learning and education research, confirmed that teacher-mediated research collaborations enhance teaching practice and professional growth, and that teacher-based research must include time and space for teachers to talk about their experience. Furthermore, and more specifically, the study showed how the GTIP might serve as a model for building a community of professional support, and it shed light on how and why experience-derived teacher knowledge might be indispensable in expanding horizons and advancing perspectives in education.

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