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## **Unit 2 Paper: Reflections on Vivian Paley's Way of Teacher Inquiry**

Vivian Paley used teacher inquiry daily in her final years of teachings as a way to improve her understanding of her students, classroom, and herself. One feature of Paley's way of inquiry is to write down events of the day in her journal and then let her own personal reflections of the events lead her to a new and deeper understandings of students, situations, content, herself, and the classroom. In the book *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* the events surrounding the story *Tico and the Golden Wings* gave insight on Paley's journal reflection inquiry technique. It was through Paley's journal reflections on this book that she was driven to go to the library and find the intention of the author for this book that almost caused her to avoid all Leo Lionni books. This led her to investigate other Leo Lionni books and discover the sense of a struggle between characters and community evident in all the books. This ultimately led to her deciding to add these books to her curriculum for the year. A lot of time teachers have their interpretations of stories and when students offer other ideas they might accept it and move on or dismiss it as not the "real" meaning. Paley, however, through reflecting on the interpretation of a kindergartner, was able to learn more about the story and dive into other texts. Thus, her reflection and inquiry method took her to a whole new understanding as a teacher and led to an entirely new curriculum for her classroom.

Another event that demonstrated Paley's journal inquiry method was the experience with Walter and the book *Pezzettino*. Paley's reflections of the situation of Renny running in the room with "Walter's book" led Paley to learn more about the way in which Walter operates in her classroom then she had throughout the entire year of asking him to write. She reflected on her own personal impact on Walter and why he said, "I not can it". This statement was only said to adults in the room not to the children. Through her journals she is able to reflect on her personal impact on Walter, but also more generally on the school system in and how it breaks children up. She then comes to the conclusion that as teachers, "we need only to give them the proper context in which to demonstrate and fine-tune their natural gifts". It is through her inquiry that Paley learns not just about what occurs in her room on the surface, but deeper insights about learning and people. Through her journal reflections she looks deeply at students, the curriculum, families, herself, her teaching methods, her impact on students, the school, and society. This leads her to answer questions about all of these separate parts that need to work together in a school to make it most beneficial for the students.

Through Vivian Paley's writings she reveals more about her method of inquiry and her reasons for why it works. In her essay *Talking to Myself in a Daily Journal* Paley discusses the idea of eliminating staff meetings in exchange for time to write in a journal and reflect. She believes that through self-reflection more understanding and knowledge can come then in collaborative environments. Paley felt that people wouldn't really listen if you were being too critical of yourself, however, in your journal you can be as critical as you want and knowledge will develop as you reflect. Paley shows this idea in *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* when Nisha and Paley are discussing using Leo Lionni for the year. Paley doesn't reflect as deeply with Nisha as she does in her journal. In Paley's writing *Must Teachers also be Writers?*, she reflects more on her writing as a tool for inquiry and she says that teachers should write what they don't understand and what doesn't work and try to figure out why. She said, "The road to discovery lies waiting to be mapped out in each day's journal pages". Paley demonstrates, through her writing and stories, that self-reflection as a technique for teacher inquiry can lead to deeper understanding of all aspects of teaching.

## Assignment:

### Unit 2 Writing Assignment:

Write a paper of approximately 500 words about the feature (or features) of Vivian Paley's way of inquiry you believe to be most important.

Your paper should display attention to: a) An episode, relationship, encounter, or some other significant element of *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*. Be sure to do more than simply describe it--explain what it reveals about Paley's way of inquiry; and b) An example of Paley's thinking about what is characteristic of her work as she explains it in one or more of the Unit's online resources (her essays and interviews). Again, do more than summarize such an example,--show what it tells us about Paley's way of inquiry.

You can devote the entire essay to one feature of Paley's work, or recognize more than one feature of it, according to the directions--in (a) and (b) as above--for what the essay should include. Remember, our subject is teacher-inquiry, or what Paley does, and not inquiry-based learning among her students, although that is, of course, a theme in her books.

Your paper should be single spaced, with your name and the date at the top. There is no need for a cover page or for formal citations. Simply incorporate brief references to whatever resources you use into your paper.

### Instructor Feedback:

This is an excellent paper and one highlighting several important features of "Paley's way of inquiry." You get right to the point noting the emphasis and value that Paley ascribes to writing, which you connect with her habit of transcribing the events of each day and then journaling. And so, you note the very personal and self-reflective quality of this form of inquiry. As you suggest, writing is at the heart of Paley's commitment to inquiry, though this task represents quite a broad spectrum for Paley, right? You make this very point in your recognition of Paley's strong commitments to journaling as well as the significance of her publishing to those who read her. In addition, we get a hint at another of Paley's forms of writing in observing that her recording and analysis was a "daily" commitment. So we see the very practical value of Paley's commitment to only use one tape in her process of inquiry. We undoubtedly applaud her very disciplined approach to both transcribe and analyze these conversations for the purposes you outline in your essay. Thus, writing is multifaceted for Paley. It is a means through which Paley "makes sense" though not only of her classroom, but also of herself as a teacher, and as a woman. Certainly, your reflections from TGWTBC reveal both of these consequences. And your summary of Walter and Pezzettino is the perfect choice for what you write here. You sum it up nicely as you state: "Through her journal reflections she looks deeply at students, the curriculum, families, herself, her teaching methods, her impact on students, the school, and society. This leads her to answer questions about all of these separate parts that need to work together in a school to make it most beneficial for the students." However, what I appreciated most was your recognition that Paley's commitment to writing has also provided a means through which others can now become a part of the conversation. Thus, although Paley describes her own transformation from a teacher content within the routines of her classroom to one consumed with growing as a teacher, so too her reluctance to see herself as an author gave way to a willingness to "leave behind traces of her work" for those who might come after her. These thoughts help us to recognize that even a career as a teacher can in fact reflect a certain mobility within the profession. That a teacher can grow in unimagined ways through the processes of teacher inquiry. In this way, whether we reside in the kindergarten classroom or not, we can see Paley as an exemplary model of what might be accomplished within the contexts of our own teaching.

Excellent work!

Grade: 4.0