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# Detached and Unsustainable: Central Tensions in Teacher Research Capstones and the Possibilities for Reimagined Inquiry

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**Cover Page Footnote**

The authors wish to thank Sherry Deckman and Kathleen Riley, who offered suggestions on earlier drafts of this manuscript, and the young people who we learn from and with each day.

# Detached and Unsustainable

## Central Tensions in Teacher Research Capstones and the Possibilities for Reimagined Inquiry

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### Introduction

With increased frequency, teacher education programs in North America, and elsewhere across the globe, require candidates to engage in practice-based research capstones as a culminating experience (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Lattimer, 2012; Mule, 2006; Rich & Hannafin, 2008.). While these projects range in scope and intent—some are grounded formally in an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), while others stem from action research orientation (Herr & Anderson, 2015)—they have in common a broad definition of teacher inquiry: It is practitioner-driven, systematic research into one’s own classroom, revolving around a central, teacher-determined question. In our experience, institutions hold high standards for these practitioner inquiry theses, including expectations of a substantial paper and presentation at an on-campus teacher inquiry conference, as examples. Yet, experience also provides evidence that newly credentialed teachers regularly disregard the practice of engaging in teacher inquiry immediately after graduation. The latter knowledge leads us to ask, as others have done: What is the purpose of the teacher research thesis, and who is it for (Massey et al., 2009)? Going further, we ask: How can the teacher research thesis be better utilized to foster a career-long inquiry stance? In response, we highlight in this article central tensions in the practice of teacher research in teacher education, and propose a vision for change.

This article articulates the possibilities for a transformed teacher research capstone centered in tenets of practitioner inquiry, in contrast to other more action-focused forms of teacher research, each of which are outlined below. To forward this vision, we rely on the practice of narrative resonance (Conle, 1996) to help us gain insight into our experiences. The move towards a transformed teacher inquiry master’s thesis connects with calls for a reflective pedagogy of teacher education (Loughran, 2007), establishing quality in beginning teacher-researchers’ work (DiLucchio & Leaman, 2012), and cultivating a sustainable teacher research practice (Massey et al., 2009). Rooted in our experiences teaching and advising teacher inquiry (Fulmer), and being former teacher-researchers/graduate students ourselves (both Fulmer and Bodner), we offer insights in the form of recommendations. We suggest that teacher educators foster inquiry by (a) grounding preservice teacher research in the tenets of practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009); (b) inviting practicing K-12 teacher-researchers to be primary research guides; and (c) transforming product expectations from an academia-oriented paper to participation in a

network of teacher-researchers. Such a reimagined practice of preservice teacher research suggests increased likelihood of cultivating life-long teacher-researchers.

### **Teaching Teacher-Researchers in the Academy: Current Formulas**

Teacher research is often cultivated in higher education through thesis requirements. In these contexts, teacher educators lead prospective or in-service teachers through well-established protocols that guide teachers through cycles of classroom-based inquiry (Lattimer, 2012; DiLucchio & Leaman, 2012). Our literature review revealed that a majority of these institutions require candidates to author a substantial paper and/or to present findings at an on-campus teacher inquiry conference. Examples of such capstone projects include those described by Cochran-Smith (2004) at the University of Pennsylvania; Conle (1996) at the University of Toronto; Crawford-Garrett, Anderson, Grayson, and Suter (2014) at Ithaca College; Degago (2007) at Haramaya University in Ethiopia; DiLucchio and Leaman (2012) at West Chester University of Pennsylvania; Price (2001) at the University of Maryland; Lattimer (2012) at the University of San Diego; Shosh (2013) at Moravian College; and Truxaw, Casa, and Adelson (2011) at the University of Connecticut, to list just a few. Practitioner inquiry serves as a means and an end to professionalism that impacts learning within and beyond the act of teaching (Nichols & Cormack, 2016).

While specific features of individual requirements vary, these projects possess similar undergirding principles, including intentions to cultivate teacher research that impacts ongoing classroom instruction, help candidates develop a critically reflective professional identity (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Crawford-Garrett et al., 2014; DiLucchio & Leaman, 2012; Shosh, 2013; Truxaw et al., 2011), and sustain

They are virtually devoid of explicit practices intended to sustain a new teacher's ongoing classroom inquiries after graduation.

new teachers for the long term in this challenging profession (Beck 2017; Degago, 2007; Zambo & Zambo, 2006). The present paper is concerned with this unique type of teacher inquiry that is conducted by students in the academy (whether undergraduate or graduate), and is based in our observations that this practice may be aimed inaccurately at its target. This paper starts from the position that various forms of teacher inquiry—including preservice teacher research—is a beneficial practice for multiple reasons, including sustained professional growth, a form of resistance to damaging political waves that undermine teacher professionalism, teacher resiliency (Beck, 2017), and support of historically marginalized students (see Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999 and 2009, for more discussion on the affordances of teacher inquiry). With this in mind, we hope to contribute to the improvement of how new teachers are inducted into this critical practice.

Based on our knowledge of the programs with which we are personally familiar, as well as scholarship we reviewed on the topic (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2004; Conle, 1996; Crawford-Garrett et al., 2014; Degago, 2007; Shosh, 2013; Truxaw et al., 2011), teacher education programs have some similar traits with regards to their capstone inquiry projects. It is worth noting that these tenets are almost exclusively academy-centric: They are virtually devoid of explicit practices intended to sustain a new teacher's ongoing classroom inquiries after graduation. Typically,

capstones invite candidates to research a question emerging from their teaching placement, oftentimes centered on a method the candidate wishes to try. Candidates conduct literature reviews and are supported in their queries mainly by the guidance of one or more college/university faculty advisors. Some programs also structure critical collaborative research groups with fellow students as additional support (DiLucchio & Leaman, 2012). The culminating experience of these projects is usually a substantial thesis paper, and sometimes also a presentation of the work at an on-campus teacher inquiry conference made up of other candidate-researchers and their guests. Sustaining career-long teacher inquiry does not seem to often weigh heavily in the program. Opportunities to do so are explored in this article.

Current formulas for conducting preservice teacher research are fairly onerous, and, we argue, unsustainable for teaching candidates to carry forward into their practice beyond the teacher education program. Indeed, the process itself may actually dissuade preservice teachers from further cultivating their inquiries after graduation (Degago, 2007; Massey et.al, 2009). In addition, as we uncover here by exploring Bodner's example, teacher research comes across to candidates, at times, as inauthentic to the day-to-day practice of teaching, and may even represent a missed opportunity to connect with existing teacher-researchers by centering the research process in the academy. In this paper, we explore the reasons behind this aforementioned unsustainability through critical analysis of one student teacher's experience, followed by our recommendations and implications for a reconceptualized preservice teacher research capstone experience.

### **Authors' Positionality**

Fulmer, this paper's first author, completed a teacher research thesis as a part of her own graduate teacher education program about 15 years ago, and has since advised master's candidates on their preservice and in-service teacher research studies at three institutions over 10 years. She is a former elementary school teacher. Bodner, the second author, is a certified elementary teacher and recent graduate from a master's program where she completed a preservice teacher research thesis in the same vein. Relevant to this article, by way of example, Bodner found the premise of the inquiry process meaningful, but felt the experience to be disconnected from the ways that in-practice teacher-researchers she learned about truly conduct their inquiries. Importantly, as a practicing teacher entering her fourth year, she no longer engages in systematic teacher research. We met as graduate student advisee (Bodner) and advisor (Fulmer).

### **Methods**

Bruner (1986) reveals that narrative is a fundamental aspect of humans' sense making, thus perception (or creation) of story can work to bridge one's sense of self with one's understanding of larger society, and in this spirit we examine Bodner's narrative of her preservice teacher research. In so doing, we hope that our analysis may contribute to heightened consciousness of the tensions and possibilities for these capstone projects. In studying Bodner's story, we have been led to suggest alternatives for the future. Further, Conle (1996) reminds us that finding connections between and among stories is itself educative. In this case, the juxtaposition of Bodner's research story preceding the story of our share vision offers insights relevant to

improving our practice. Conle refers to this as “narrative movement” (1996, p. 308), where separate stories and the practical knowledge within them are together made different by their interaction. As such, in a process of narrative resonance (Conle, 1996), we explore the reasons behind the aforementioned tensions in teacher research capstone projects by retelling Bodner’s research experience and the story of reimagined possibilities for the teacher research thesis experience. Through this process, this article contributes to an expanding knowledge of possibilities for teacher educators engaged with our candidates in teacher research.

Our analysis begins with a narrative of Bodner’s preservice teacher research experience as a backdrop for the primary focus of our argument. We see several favorable outcomes when teacher research theses are approached from a practitioner inquiry standpoint, including an opportunity to authentically position the teacher-researcher as a *learner*. This approach also removes the project quality from the inquiry and replaces it with authenticity of purpose, by conveying that inquiry is something that effective teachers do, not a project disconnected from regular day-to-day teaching. Lastly, it cultivates a disposition towards collaborative learning through discussion with peers, mentors, and colleagues that becomes an essential source of establishing cogency and sustaining new teachers in the field for longevity.

### **Feeling Disconnected (Bodner’s Voice)**

#### **Introduction to My Experience**

At the beginning of my graduate preservice teacher education program, we gathered on campus in early June to watch the previous cohort present their teacher research projects prior to their graduation. In this way, the concept of *teacher inquiry* was introduced to us as the culmination of our education as future teachers, and it remained in the back of our minds from that point forward, months before we even began formally working on our papers. Though it seemed logical to assume that our work across the 13 months in the program was leading us towards this final challenge, my teacher research project quickly grew to feel detached from the rest of my teaching and learning. My student teaching placements felt like authentic preparation for a future in the classroom, due to the frequent feedback from my mentor teacher and faculty supervisor, and the explicit expectation that we should approach the time as a way to explore and try new things in our teaching. However, in contrast, my experience of the research project felt rigid and focused on the performance goal of creating a finished product grounded in findings.

I eventually found value in the teacher research experience, though the things I valued were, perhaps, not the primary intended value. The task of choosing an inquiry question required me to analyze what I was seeing, and not seeing, in the classroom. This led me to explore my own expectations, wonderings, and confusions about teaching. Conducting my research gave me experience in linking existing research and theory with classroom practice, and in taking on the new identity of a teacher-researcher. In particular, my inquiry question prompted me to interview each of my students about an activity I implemented, which was a unique way to connect with them individually, and something that I would not have otherwise made time to do. Finally, completing the research, thesis, and presentation was an accomplishment towards which I worked hard, and having these finished products made me feel successful and confident in my ability to communicate cogently to an academic audience. These positive aspects of the teacher research project speak to the power and potential of the endeavor.

### **Finding My Question and Doing the Study**

When I entered the classroom as a student teacher, I looked to reflect on meaningful experiences in my own childhood schooling to help me envision the kind of teacher I wanted to be. I knew that I hoped to empower my own students to be independent learners with the skills to self-evaluate, but I began to notice that the schools and classrooms in which I observed and taught were not set up to encourage in-depth self-evaluation as a part of the learning process. I wondered why this was the case, and what it would take to incorporate more opportunities for student reflection. My teacher research question became: How can I incorporate meaningful student self-evaluation into my classroom?

I began to explore my inquiry question during my spring student teaching position in a fifth-grade class—a six-week placement. In this context, I began to consider the ways in which I could ask elementary students to practice self-evaluation. Immediately I realized it would be a challenge to meaningfully pursue this inquiry question within the frame of my six-week student teaching placement.

Beyond the time constraints, my role as the student teacher meant that I didn't have the authority to make drastic changes, such as beginning student-led conferences or student portfolios. Yet, I wanted to try something new that would give the students and me a snapshot of what increased self-evaluation in the classroom could look like. I decided to ask them to pick a school-related goal and monitor their progress each day. Goal setting and monitoring have the advantage that students have multiple chances to practice assessing themselves in relation to an ongoing target, versus a singular activity (White, Hohn, & Tollefson, 1997). Though we would only be practicing for a limited time, I was curious what kinds of reactions the students would have to the activity, what kinds of goals they would set, and what strategies they would use to meet their goals.

I gathered the students on the rug and explained that we would all be doing a series of activities about self-evaluation. My intention was both to explain the project and gauge their familiarity with the idea of self-evaluation. I explained that we each would be picking a personal goal about school to keep track of over a short time. Then I asked the group what they thought it meant to self-evaluate. Comments from the children offered different views of self-evaluation: personal evaluation of skill and evaluation as formal assessment. This revealed their understanding of the ways self-evaluation can be used, but I soon realized that not all of the class had this familiarity and the two explanations did not clarify it for everyone. I had jumped into our discussion without defining the term. I thought by allowing the students to define it for each other, they might be able to tap into common background knowledge, but this had not been helpful enough for at least these two students.

I decided to explain to students that the best kind of goals, the goals that people are most likely to achieve, are realistic, close-at-hand, something you truly care about, and specific (Schunk, 1991). I communicated that, stating, “I want to learn high school math this week,” would not fit this description, but something like, “I want to do all of my homework each night,” would. Students then shared examples of realistic goals that met these criteria.

The next day, I gave them each a sheet with a space to write down their goal, why it was important to them, and some steps they planned to take to help them achieve it. I stapled these sheets into individual folders, along with a progress tracking sheet and a final reflection sheet. I designated time to update our goal progress each day for one week, and then we completed the reflection page on Friday. I made sure to emphasize that I was participating, too—my goal was to finish all of my work for student teaching the night before so I wouldn't have to rush in the morning.

Sixteen students participated in the activity. Five students set learning goals related to reading, six set goals related to getting to school on time, and four set goals about raising their hand more/calling out less. The remaining student's goal was to do all of her homework at night. It is unclear why there were these three trends in goal themes—reading, getting to school on time, and calling out less—and I didn't explore the source of the trends in the course of my research. None were an idea that I had suggested during our brainstorming activities (though doing homework was), though they were ones that students had volunteered aloud. By the end of the week, all students had recorded that they were either completely successful or somewhat successful in meeting their goals during the week. No student recorded that they were not successful on a majority of days.

The week after we completed our goal activity, I recorded short interviews with each student. Especially given that their written reflections were not very revelatory, I hoped that by speaking informally with them I could find out more about their thoughts on the activity and their understanding of self-evaluation in general.

The interview question that generated the most interesting responses was: Do you ever self-evaluate in school, besides this activity? I was intrigued that many students answered with a very specific time, often from previous grades, when they remember being instructed to self-evaluate. This suggests that they do not identify as self-evaluators, and that conscious self-evaluation is not a regular part of their academic lives. This does not mean, however, that they don't intuitively evaluate themselves. When I followed up by asking if they think about their mistakes when looking over a test or project, or whether they just look at the grade, many students were quick to say that, yes, they do self-reflect on past work (though several were honest in saying that they usually just look at the grade). For example, one student told me she never looked back at written feedback from a teacher on a test, unless she was told to. Instead, she just looked at the grade.

Others focused on goals as motivators, such as one student who said, “Because if you set a goal, you're more likely to do it than if you don't set a goal. You have to do that goal; it's like homework.” I heard this idea of motivation from several other students as well. This demonstrates that students modified their behavior in positive ways based on their desire to achieve their goal, thus engaging in the self-regulated learning behaviors proposed by Bandura (1986). The act of keeping track kept them accountable to their goals and caused them to take steps to help themselves succeed, as in the instance of the boy who asked his mom to help him get up earlier. I was pleased to hear this, because this is the kind of self-driven behavior that I hoped students would practice in this activity.

### **Interpretation and Analysis**

### **Reflections on My Teacher Research Experience (Bodner's Voice)**

As my students grappled with self-evaluation in the classroom, I grappled with my own reflection of my teaching of the topic. Despite my enthusiasm for self-evaluation, I would not have intervened in my placement classroom in this way had it not been part of a requirement for my teacher education program. To ask students to start self-evaluating at this point in the school year (our placements began in March) felt unnatural and ineffective. If I had my own classroom, we would have been learning about and practicing self-evaluation since the first day of school. Instead, I started it three quarters of the way into the year, and with a brief activity. In this way, the realities of my teacher research assignment began to feel somewhat contrived.

The fact that this was an assignment also meant that my focus was on fulfilling the requirements as they were given to me by my program, and not adapting my research to my classroom setting and needs. For example, as much as I was genuinely curious to interview students, I found myself preoccupied with obtaining prime quotes for the thesis paper, or which could readily serve as title slides for my later presentation. Having these purposes as my ultimate goals may have changed the kinds of follow-up questions I asked the students. In my own classroom, I would be free to conduct teacher research with my own curiosity and the needs of the students as driving factors, without the focus on the aesthetics of an upcoming presentation.

Furthermore, the assignment's expectations felt as though they were seeking positivistic, linear conclusions that could be neatly contained within the deadlines of the graduate program.

Furthermore, the assignment's expectations felt as though they were seeking positivistic, linear conclusions that could be neatly contained within the deadlines of the graduate program, something also noted by DiLucchio and Leaman (2012). I felt pressure to produce outcomes by the end of the semester, to have answers by the time my program ended. The stress of a looming

deadline and the need to gather conclusive raw data became the driving forces behind my research. In retrospect, I wish I had undertaken an exploration that possessed the freedom to wind recursively, unfolding organically, and where the expectation was that my inquiry would be ongoing beyond the limits of the semester.

Even though I was given much freedom during my time as the student teacher, the classroom and its norms were not mine and my presence there sometimes felt like an imposition. In order for me to have time to conduct my research, the classroom teacher had to change the daily schedule, highlighting that what I was asking students to do was new and extraneous to their typical school day. Whereas in my own future classroom, self-evaluation would be integrally woven into our daily schedule, in my placement classroom, our goal-setting activity became an isolated moment of the day. The students' understanding of goal-setting and self-evaluation had not especially evolved by the end of our activity. In my interviews, several students were honest in saying that the activity did not feel useful to them. It was an illuminating experience to hear such opinions in my interviews.

### **Reflections on Bodner's Research Story (Fulmer's Voice)**

Through examining the practical knowledge collected here in Bodner's narrative, we can engage with and come to new understandings regarding preservice teacher research. The analytical tool of narrative resonance (Conle, 1996) offers the opportunity to juxtapose Bodner's research story with practices and assumptions of teaching candidates' capstone

theses. Our college faculty's expectations for Bodner's and her peers' theses were too focused on the outcomes of how students performed on the activities that were implemented. If we had explicitly constructed the scope of the research endeavor to be more emergent and naturalistic, Bodner's focus may have found space to broaden, and her research may have centered more holistically on inquiring into the tensions between her ideals of practice and the students' enactment of them. As we explore below, the central complexities of preservice teacher research are highlighted by Bodner's narrative: the bounded timeframe of student teaching and the location of someone else's classroom, for which we see no nearby remedies. But through revisioning the possibilities of teacher research capstones, we may be able to honor the enigmatic complexity of preservice teacher learning. Such work is arguably more nuanced than we led Bodner and her cohort to consider, and, in addition, as Conle (1996) suggests, "The process of change is subtle" (p. 217). By modifying our expectations, and opening up possibilities for more narrative constructions of knowledge, preservice teacher research may become more holistic and sustainable, as we explore below.

Our most urgent recommendation is that teacher research capstones become critical autobiographical practitioner inquiries.

## Implications for Teaching Teacher Research

### Practitioner Inquiry Framework

Our most urgent recommendation is that teacher research capstones become critical autobiographical practitioner inquiries, not wholly dissimilar from what some refer to as self-studies (Garbett & Ovens, 2016; Samaras & Freese, 2006). Drawing from critical and feminist research paradigms, the practitioner inquiry tradition has long included the process of examining one's own researcher-, teacher-, and personal-self in a deeply analytical manner (Achinstein, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2000, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009; Fulmer, 2012; Lytle, 2000, 2006; Shosh, 2017; West & Crookes, 2017). We extend this assertion to advocate that the teacher research thesis would be better informed to draw inspiration from a framework that places emphasis on personal renewal, followed by professional growth and classroom improvement (Conle, 1996; Samaras & Freese, 2011). However, many projects are framed—intentionally or not—in ways that are more akin to action research geared toward instructional improvement, including the one that Bodner conducted. Much has been written about action research's relationship to practitioner inquiry (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), and, though it is beyond the scope of this article to detail their interplay, we offer here a brief discussion.

The core difference between the action research-style project that Bodner and many of her cohort members conducted versus that which we propose here can be found in the direction of the researchers' lens. Samaras and Freese (2009) contrast reflective autobiographical work with action research, explaining, "Action research is more about what the teacher *does*, and not so much about who the teacher *is*" (p. 5, emphasis added). By way of explanation: A majority of

Bodner's data centered on students' responses to her questions and activities, thus relegating her inquiry to classroom moments that were intentionally constructed around these interactions. Consequently, Bodner felt that her study was disconnected from her practice of teaching. Bodner implemented new ideas in her cooperating teacher's classroom, and merely set about documenting the effects. In contrast, rather, if Bodner were invited to develop an autobiographical narrative approach—a hallmark of practitioner inquiry—this would have framed the work around personal and professional realms of the teacher, herself.

As can be seen in our data, Bodner's study resides squarely within the realm of action research, and given these parameters, the experience was limiting, instead of liberatory. Practitioner inquiry, on the other hand, urges teachers to look into narratives of their own lives, both within and beyond school walls, as not only teachers but as racialized, classed, and gendered humans enacting curriculum in this politicized world. Bearing these human narratives in mind as we enter new contexts, such as collaborations with teacher inquiry groups, increases our capacity for experiential knowledge (Conle, 1996). If Bodner's preservice research had been framed within the architectures of practitioner inquiry, the inquiry would have had an increased possibility of being more personally and professionally transformative.

### **K-12 Teacher-Researchers as Primary Research Guides**

Bodner intimated one afternoon as we were writing this paper that she wished she'd learned through the teacher research process that an inquiry stance is a key feature of becoming a practitioner. Instead, she told me, she understood this later, at the conclusion of her graduate program, when a guest speaker addressed her cohort at the college's annual teacher inquiry conference (the culminating experience of our 13-month graduate program). It was disappointing to hear that something so many members of our department faculty colleagues, including myself, had assumed was a core component of the process had not been clearly conveyed to the teaching candidates themselves.

The guest speaker was a local teacher and a long-time teacher-researcher, who presented her own recent inquiry that she conducted while on sabbatical. As a practicing teacher-researcher, she offered Bodner a vision of what Bodner's own study could lead to: a sustained practice of inquiry that was inseparable from her teaching. That day, Bodner came to understand, in her own words, "If you're not studying yourself, then you're missing a key part of what it means to be a teacher." But why is it that Bodner acquired this knowledge at the *end* of her graduate teacher education program, instead of during the initial stages of her research? The answer to this is likely found in the orientation of the program itself. Faculty members of our program, including myself, were positioned as advisors to preservice candidates as the main methodologists and principle investigative partners. In fact, this holds true for the vast majority of teacher education programs we know of. While in some cases practitioner collaboration is happening between graduate students and the inquiry work of veteran teacher-researchers (e.g., Grossman 2005), this practice is not widespread.

We envision that capstone projects feature practicing teacher-researchers by partnering them with preservice candidates. This reconfiguration offers the opportunity to place students alongside experienced teacher-researchers who can "provide teacher candidates with both support and a perspective on teaching that is inquiry-oriented" (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner,

2005). As a starting place, this culture shift may begin with local teachers being invited to serve as regular advisors on candidates' studies. Teacher research advisors could vary in role and capacity, perhaps serving as informants on methods that mitigate the challenges of data collection, or serving as periodic touchstones who can help maintain candidates' critical stance on practice. At the very least, practicing teacher-researchers can act as proficient representatives, enacting, firsthand, the habits we want to encourage in our candidates. Indeed, our program at Ithaca College is moving in this direction, and we are eager to see the impact. For instance, such mentors could demonstrate, in practice, their processes for identifying meaningful questions, and moving to first stages of discovery, elements Bodner felt were elusive and perplexing, and which is furthermore suggested by Degago (2007). As we urge our candidates to become teacher inquirers through the foundations of reflective practice, we could better support them by locating advisors who practice these ideals in the settings we expect our candidates to do so.

### **Transform Final Products from Theses to Contribution**

We offer a third recommendation. If the underlying goal of teacher research is to cultivate practices for ongoing inquiry in part by equipping candidates with the tools they need to continue research into their own classrooms, then, by this turn, preservice teacher research studies should not end with the composition of a final paper or formal research presentation. Yet, capstone thesis papers are awarded magnitude by departments of teacher education and seemingly deemed indispensable rites of passage. We urge the question, passage into *what*? Others have pointed to this curious state of formality as well (Beck, 2017; Massey et.al, 2009).

As mentioned above in recommendation two, when faculty members view the endeavor of teacher research through our own scholarship lens, we tend to focus on the kinds of outcomes that make the most sense to us from our position, namely academic papers and conference presentations. These products may not be the most practical outlets for encouraging candidates to participate in regular, ongoing teacher research practices, or to communicate their findings to audiences of practicing teacher-researchers. As Fenstermacher (1994, p. 50, cited in Conle, 1996) cautions, "The critical objective [of teacher research] is not for researchers to know what teachers know, but for teachers to know what they know." Thus, if we ask ourselves what would be the most usable and transferable format for our candidates to share their new understandings, the answer may be very different from what is currently in place. Could participation in an inquiry community serve in lieu of, or in conjunction with, writing thesis papers and presentations?

Long-sustaining teacher inquiry groups such as the North Dakota Study Group (Elliot, 1976), the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative (1984), the Brookline Teacher Research Seminar (Ballenger, 2003), and the National Writing Project (Lieberman & Wood, 2003) have rich histories of regular meetings where the core of what happens centers on sustaining networks of critical thought, while a few members pen monographs or present in outside conferences where they would disseminate findings to academic audiences. In addition, new possibilities for communicating teacher research are rapidly emerging with online communities. The wider teacher education community can learn from these groups that academic meetings and publications can be an invigorating and provocative product of teacher inquiry, but it needn't be the unwavering goal. Teacher inquiry groups like these teach us that participation in a tenable teacher inquiry network is perhaps the greatest resource a beginning teacher can have in order to

cultivate ongoing critical reflection into one's practice, and, moreover, to become agents of change.

In such groups, “going public” with the findings of a teacher inquiry may very well mean writing for academic audiences, but it may also mean “the kinds of opinions and reflections that might be found in newspapers or diaries” (Hatch, 2005, p. 6). As things are currently done, by placing the emphasis on solo-authored, traditionally formatted thesis papers, we may be misinforming candidates that teacher research is a solo endeavor existing only within the realm of the graduate school setting, and other forums for sharing are unvalued. Instead, we might share knowledge of the diverse channels for communicating findings. As one suggestion, teacher research capstones could be transformed to feature *process* as the most important element. Programmatic performative components need not be obligatory when the goals of teacher research are more profoundly understood. For instance, the North Dakota Study Group (NDSG) highlights its network and seminar meetings themselves as a key product of their work:

The NDSG has been a kind of informed democratic conscience of U.S. education [since 1972], constantly reminding the mainstream of alternatives and possibilities, and offering a criticism of educational reform and practice in the light of its enduring concerns with democracy and the estate of childhood...The tone is serious, intense—we often address a particular text or question—and yet informal. The network of friendships and professional connections are strong and grow stronger each year for those who attend regularly. Home groups welcome and create a place for newcomers, often, young teachers. (NDSG, n.d.)

NDSG's purpose statement points to their efforts to offer educational critique while maintaining that these forms of scholarly endeavor are additional products alongside the network of friendships and professional connections that come out of their meetings. Recognition of the diversity of outlets and networking possibilities are key elements in revisioning preservice teacher research capstones.

### **Conclusion**

Core tensions in preservice teacher research stand out: For emergent teacher-researchers, the capstone formula is largely unsustainable to maintain beyond graduation requirements, and current structures invite investigation of inquiries that are largely disconnected from actual teaching practice. These tensions are likely to dissuade beginning teacher-researchers from further cultivating an inquiry stance once their program requirements have been met. Whereas taking an inquiry stance signals the adoption of a sustained practice of inquiry that can lead to teacher self-efficacy, critical reflection, and teacher leadership (Parkinson, 2009; Truxaw et al., 2011), the ways in which many teacher inquiry capstone projects are currently conceptualized limit these chances.

In a process of narrative resonance (Conle, 1996), we have explored the reasons behind the aforementioned unsustainability through juxtaposition of one teacher candidate's research experience and the story of our reimagined possibilities for the teacher research capstone experience. Our vision for teaching teacher research includes recommendations to (a) ground the

program requirements in a framework of practitioner inquiry instead of an action-oriented approach that runs the risk of reductivism; (b) invite practicing K-12 teacher-researchers to be research guides, instead of relying exclusively on college/university faculty advisors to govern the process; and (c) transform the final product's expectations from a higher education-oriented academic paper to participation in a network of teacher-researchers (for whom academic writing may or may not be a central outcome). Reimagined in these ways, we believe teacher research may possess the potential to cultivate an inquiry stance in our teaching candidates that will not only impact their classroom instruction, but will inform construction of a critically reflective professional identity, sustaining teachers as researchers in this challenging profession.

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