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## Teacher In-service: Emotional Experience that Moved Teachers to Action

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### Abstract

During professional development in different regions of the country called field studies, Appalachian teachers learn about teaching, experience results, and consider teacher benefits as part of their reflections on their in-service program. Field studies offer teachers the opportunity to engage in inquiry activities that enrich their life experiences by showing them more of the world outside their homes. The teachers travel in a peer group that sets the context for their learning. The decision making that results as part of this reflective model documents their background and classroom experiences tied to culture and place. Elementary teachers in this situation are motivated to make decisions and take civic actions by emotional appeals or visiting sites that create empathetic bonds. Initiation of civic action and inquiry question generation may profit from empathetic in addition to purely knowledge-based sparks to spur investigation.

**Keywords:** field studies, Appalachia, civic action, inquiry, elementary teachers

Is there such a thing as Appalachian culture? Not everyone agrees that there is such a thing, but most observers would recognize some cultural traits are unique if not generalizable to all people living in the region (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 2013; Denham, 2016; Jones, 1991). After years of attention the residents of the Appalachian highlands remain impoverished.

Residents seem unable to successfully transition from the industrial boom years of coal mining and railroad industries. Resident demographics include government benefit recipients, high rates of diabetes and obesity, low-income, and low collegiate obtainment rates. Multiple generations of descendants connected with a place is different from living in a region. A claim to a specific site heritage dependent on myths, legends, and stereotypes about people from a specific region such as environmental disaster, feuds, hopelessness, joblessness, mine wars, and stills may mask the truth about the region that makes it unique from individuals in the wider society. Disturbingly Andreescu et al., (2011) found counties in Appalachia where most community members belonged to a conservative Protestant denomination which had on average significantly higher homicide rates related to arguments.

### Literature Review

Social studies professional development offered a way to gather new knowledge, skills,

values, and dispositions. Specifically, elementary social studies professional development tended to provide new knowledge and skills. Professional development provided an opportunity for participants to develop inquiry experiences in civic efficacy and decision making while also describing the social interaction inherent in the process. The emotional experiences of teachers determined how empathetic events might impact decision-making. The organization of the literature review follows this outline.

Previous researchers have described the nature of in-service and professional development. Collaborative support and interactive experiences helped teachers make improvement toward teaching history as inquiry. In-service may not completely work, but it may help teachers improve their skills (Callahan, Saye & Brush, 2016). Presenters for professional development needed to work to capture the imagination of the teachers just like the teachers worked to capture the imaginations of their students. Teachers conducted their own inquiries examining place, culture, and historic sites while learning the dispositions to spend extended time learning a site, and the skills of reading the landscape for clues to the past. All these experiences contributed to the teachers' historical understandings.

Morris (2017) described how elementary social studies teachers engaged in in-service to increase their abilities to meet social studies standards when they engaged with cultural and historic sites. Teachers encountered multiple perspectives, technology, and controversial issues through their travels. They determined that extended time was required to experience the place, to value it, and to harbor the disposition to teach about it. Teachers learned knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions; furthermore, they wished to consider this type of professional development to understand the sense of place and how it related to the curriculum they taught. Each teacher expanded their point of view because of new experiences they encountered through their field studies. The teachers transferred their individual experiences into knowledge they used to enrich their classroom environment.

Similarly, elementary teachers who taught social studies and history also engaged as learners with opportunities to gather information through an inquiry process. Through these vicarious experiences, they remained interested as they explored disciplinary content. Some of the experiences engaged teachers with virtual field trips as an imperfect substitute for the real event (Kenna & Potter, 2018). However, they could see replayed events that enhanced their sense of history. There remain multiple formats for vicarious experiences. Yet another vicarious experience for elementary social studies involved the use of film (Buchanan, 2015). Teachers who used film viewed personified stories that helped them to empathize with individual circumstances. The individual of film expands into social groups or mass movements. Other elementary social studies teachers used technology to enhance disciplinary content knowledge (Leaman & Corcoran, 2018). These teachers offered the results as an opportunity for professional development to improve social studies instruction and increase efficacy. In addition, teachers engaged in question examination that successfully involved social studies content.

Furthermore, teachers linked social studies content and collaboration skills that

helped them to be successful. Ideally when teachers engaged in professional development, they investigated something rather than listening to people expound on how to teach. Teachers constructed an inquiry to explore their understanding of social studies instruction as part of an in-service program. That inquiry included the social studies inquiry arc and the C3 curriculum (Thacker et al., 2018). Most teachers believed in the ideals of a liberal democracy that required students to receive an education that obligated them to analyze information and, in a citizenship tradition, make informed decisions. Teachers then constructed the question they wished to explore. Moreover, teachers identified the questions to pursue that were relevant to the classroom (Shear et al., 2015). Teachers learned skills, such as question formation and evaluation as part of their professional development experience. Teachers used their knowledge of history, culture, geography, civics, and economics to help frame their understandings of the content. As teachers conducted an inquiry, they wanted to set their investigation within a disciplinary context and explored content through that lens (Brugar, 2016; Dündar, 2019; Maguth & Yang, 2019). Teachers already had a foundation of understanding in those disciplinary areas. As part of that inquiry arc it required gathering information. Gathering information included oral history and field work or working with the internet to find primary sources (Dutt-Doner et al., 2016; Milson, 2002; Morris, 2004). Gathering information also included comparing sources, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the sources, and determining which sources to use. Furthermore, teachers wanted to interrogate sources and shared information while taking action in their classrooms. Teachers took content and transferred it into individual action through activism, agency, and resistance to learn citizenship skills (Aidinopoulou, & Sampson, 2017; Busey & Walker, 2017). Teachers learned important lessons about civic action through this experience. They engaged in democratic participation both within their school and classroom community. Transforming in-service from didactic oration to interactive investigation was a welcome change.

There is a social element where people create human connections through educational institutions and similarly teachers also create these bonds as they engage in professional development. People enjoy learning together and find human connection through shared inquiry tasks (Kucan et al., 2019; Morris, 2018). These tasks include experience with the past and present and interactions with community individuals or institutions. These interactions explore multiple local narratives about historical events, culture, justice, and policy. However, the common component in each of these experiences is the interaction between the individual and peers (Demoigny & Ferraras-Stone, 2018). Similarly, the role of peer interaction in the professional development should not be overlooked. Teachers engaged in professional development, learned, and explored together. Generally, they enjoyed their professional development experiences where they gathered to learn new ideas.

Teacher emotional experiences in decision-making settings were discussed in some literature. The role of emotions was little explored but had a potentially large impact in idea origination. While emotion and intellectual functions tended to be separated, social interaction

predicated teacher development. Teachers made independent decisions in emotionally supportive environments (Cassidy et. al., 2017). The role of others in the development of intellectual thought might be tied to their interactions with emotional content. Professional growth and development used emotional experience as a resource (Yang, 2019). Emotional support expressed from others created new conceptual understandings. The key element of emotional experience may result from a playful environment, and ideas may originate from emotional situations.

## **Background**

Thirty-five elementary social studies teachers from the Appalachian region of southeastern Ohio gathered together for a week of teacher in-service. Teachers matured from youth in this region, attended school in the region, and obtained jobs in the region; to ameliorate this lack of perspective the field studies program helps provide significant experiences away from the region. They have a two-day teacher in-service to learn content and methods in February and the one-week professional development in the summer. The elementary school teachers visited museums, schools, a research hospital, historical sites, preservation sites, and cultural manifestations. The teachers travel in an area to learn social studies content, dispositions, skills, and values that related to the social studies standards they teach in their classrooms; in 2019 it was Tennessee. The teachers traveled by motor coach for one week to investigate the culture, history, and geography of Tennessee from Memphis to Bristol.

## **Significance**

Coal mining stripped the land of Appalachia, cheated residents from access to economic prosperity, removed them from physical well-being, and prevented them from opportunities for advancement or mobility. The descents of the company-dependent residents of a generation ago cannot slip the bonds of the lingering effects of economic, health, and industrial environmental disasters. Robinson (2015) states that communication technologies may advance cross-cultural understanding, education, or employment, but they may undermine the foundation of Appalachian highlands culture. Appalachian highlands culture insulated the residence to survive successive waves of exploitation and isolation. Appalachian residents have created a rich culture based on community pride, fatalism, kinship, and religion. This is the legacy of the communities where this group of teachers work with the grandchildren of the mines. In the paper that resulted from this experience the research question under consideration examined in the fieldstudy: What role did emotion play in creating an environment to help teachers want to take civic action?

## Method

### Sample

The teachers were all white, all female except two males, and had taught from more than five years to one year before retirement. They worked in rural and small-town schools, in a postcoal economy, and in remote locations. They shared an evangelical religious tradition and were acquainted with Appalachian culture, rural poverty, and the problems of rural education. The thirty-five reflections were on average three to four paragraphs in length and from teachers representing seven school districts.

### Data Collection

At the conclusion of the trip the teachers each wrote their reflections about their top three favorite events and an honorable mention of the in-service while they were riding home on the bus. By using a forced choice selection, the teachers had to reflect upon their criteria and arrive at a solution for what they valued the most from the events and sites they experienced during the field studies professional development. The quantitative data was all gathered at the same time and in the same place to standardize the experience rather than creating variations by some participants completing the reflections in retrospect.

### Data Analysis

Using a constructivist and interpretivist philosophical framework, phenomenologically methodology was used to discern the essence of the experience for the teachers. The authors used open and axial coding on these reflections to create grounded theory. Teacher reflections were used as data for open coding. Open coding was used to analyze, discriminate, and categorize the data (Casey, 2016). After completing open coding, then axial coding was used to develop connections between the data. Axial coding was the process of joining, aligning, and creating new connections between categories (Fadzil, 2017).

## Findings

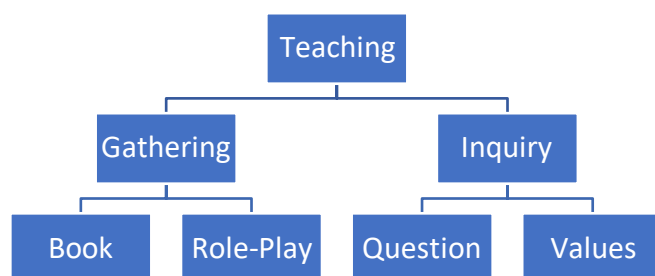
The initiation of civic action and inquiry question generation in elementary social studies teachers may profit from empathetic in addition to purely knowledge-based sparks to spur investigation. Themes of teaching, experiencing results, and teacher benefits provided motivation for educators questioning what they could do to initiate inquiry investigations. The themes were related to the focus of the study in three ways. First there was the emotion of excitement for teaching. Next the teachers felt the exhalation of refreshment. Finally, the teachers felt the benefits of the experience as reflected in the feeling of a calling to accomplish. The data connected with the research question by illustrating the emotional environment created by the professional development and causing teachers to raise questions as the first part



of an inquiry arc. Emotion played a role in developing an environment where teachers wanted to involve their students in taking civic action. Emotions played a role in creating an environment where teachers wanted to take civic action. Elementary teachers in this situation made decisions and took civic actions by emotional appeals or visiting sites that created empathetic bonds.

The elementary teachers identified the idea of teaching as being one of the most important trends that resulted from the in-service. This idea was represented by the teachers every time they commented on what they would take to their students. Candice said, “I can’t wait to share with my students my experiences.” Teachers wanted to share what they had learned with their students and were eagerly thinking of how to engage their future students. Even though they had not yet met their students, the teachers contemplated future educational adventures. The trend of Teaching was supported by the assertions of Gathering and Inquiry.

**Figure 1.**



The idea of Teaching was supported by the first assertion of Gathering. This idea characterized all the times that teachers mentioned acquiring items from the in-service that would aid them in instruction when they returned to their classroom. Jayme said, “I was able to find and purchase several hands-on activities for my classroom at this facility. I will use these materials this year and the coming years in my own classroom.” Teachers used their own resources to purchase items for their classroom as well as gathering free items like brochures and flyers. Moreover, they create their own media products by making their own photographic, audio, and video records with their phones. The assertion of Gathering was supported by the sub assertions of Book and Role-Playing.

The idea of Gathering was supported by the first sub assertion of the Book. The category of Book was indicated every time a teacher talked about reading a book, finding books, or using books in their classroom. Melinda said, “*The Girls of the Atomic City* . . . held my attention so tightly that I read the book in one setting. I even read it twice to paint a mental picture of the people and the area. I found the format of the book engaging.” This wide category included teachers reading books about the sites they visited ahead of time, gathering books for students, and thinking about how they will get students to read about

similar topics. Teachers reflected upon their experiences and automatically linked them to books they could use in the future with their students as they constructed lessons. As they thought about their future lessons some teachers gathered a role-playing idea from a museum they visited with the intention of taking that idea back to school.

The second sub assertion that supported Gathering was Role-Play. The teachers entered amuseum that required them to take an identity and learn the fate of their character at the end of the tour. Jenny said, “I love the idea of taking a person and give them a small biography that tells a little about who they are and the mystery behind if they survive a specific historical event we study.” Teachers thought that this type of activity would help students focus on the topic and help them wish to investigate to see how their person fared in the future. In this case the teachers were gathering a methodologically tool. Some teachers planned to use role-playing to start their students with inquiry investigations.

The second assertion that supports Teaching was Inquiry. This is where teachers said that they would engage their students in an inquiry process to conduct research as a result of information they encountered in the professional development. Denise said, “I would love for my students to research the history of different types of music we have experienced on this trip, and possibly the different people who made the music important.” Teachers saw ways for their students to investigate topics to learn about the subject matter with their own investigations. Learning was defined by student engagement with research rather than teacher talk as lecture or story. The sub assertions of Questioning and Values support the idea of Inquiry.

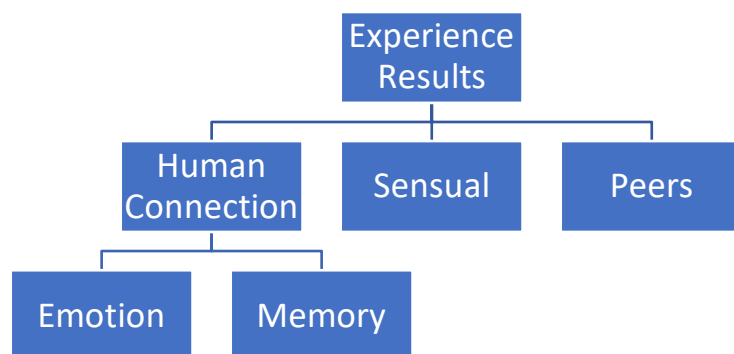
The first sub assertion that supports the assertion of Inquiry is Questioning. When the teachers said that they would raise questions or that the experience raised questions for them it indicated supporting investigation. Hannah said, “The students can look at them [photos of the trip] . . . I believe that it can spark curiosity, and they might ask questions that in turn can allow me to share about that historical site.” Discerning a question is the first step in a research project, and it allows the learner to determine what they wish to know. Helping elementary students to raise questions is an important first step in developing autodidactic learners. Moreover, teachers need to Value the process of letting students ask and explore Questions as a fundamental component of democratic education.

The second sub assertion that supports the assertion of Inquiry is Values. When the teachers discussed making choices and decision-making, they were indicating that they were thinking about democratic values. Tondra said, “I . . . will . . . use my experiences on these trips to help students better understand the importance of . . . the effects of the choices people have made.” Teachers acknowledged the civic values implicit in decision making required by Inquiry. When teachers display willingness for students to engage in decision making, they are exercising values found in democratic life. The teachers found that the Nature of the Experience comes in direct contact with the Benefit of the Experience.

The second trend explored the Nature of the Experience for the teachers. Teachers described the experience as being essential for their professional development. Andrea said,

“I am refreshed as a teacher, [and] reminded of my responsibilities to teach my students.” The professional development was refreshment, enrichment, and extension for elementary school teachers. The professional development experience allowed them new opportunities that extended their perspectives. Their reactions to the experience clustered in three assertions of Human Connection, the Sensual, and Peers.

**Figure 2.**



The first assertion of the Human Connection described how the teachers reacted to the Experience. By encountering new people, the elementary teachers developed new ideas from their reactions. Eileen said, “We, as humans, often don’t understand each other like we should...I, personally, need to take the time to get to know other people. We all need to do the same. Maybe then, we could all find the middle ground to peace.” By encountering new people and ideas teachers made connections with people they would not necessarily ever encounter in their Appalachian homes and schools. The introduction to new people allowed teachers to create new understandings about others and themselves. The assertion of Human Connection was supported by both the sub assertions of Emotion and Memory.

The sub assertion of Emotion described how the elementary teachers experienced Human Connection. The teachers had emotionally powerful experiences that resonated with them when they visited a childhood research and treatment hospital. Dian said, “I broke down and wept for these children . . .” The teachers saw children with their families between treatments and met survivors who had beaten childhood cancer and now worked in the hospital as development officers. Teachers had experiences on the trip that triggered emotional responses from the people they encountered, the events they witnessed, and the places they observed. Emotions come into play in both the construction and recall of Memory; they can shape the way we remember an event or how we feel when we recall a Memory may shape our perceptions of the event.

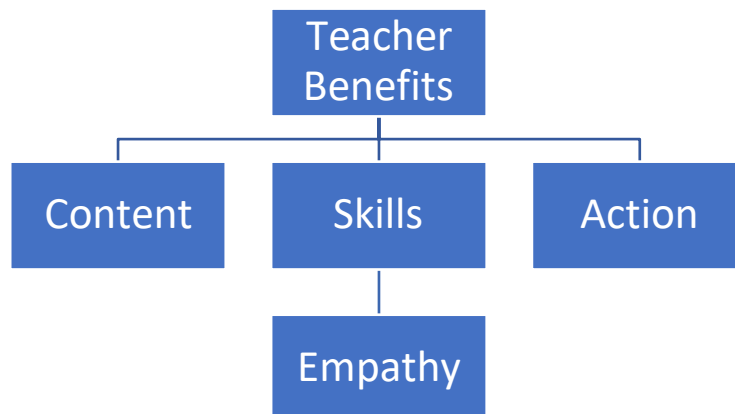
The next sub assertion of Memory also described how the teachers experienced Human connection. The teachers had an experience that helped them receive a memory from their past that connected the event with the memory of former events. Stephanie said, “As a child, music

provided an escape from the chaos of growing up in a dysfunctional family.” Teachers accessed both pleasant and unpleasant memories to connect with events. The teachers found themselves pulling memories from the past and interpreting their experiences through those reveries. Using Sensual details Teachers create Memories and conversely the Sensual stimulation of a smell or sight can trigger the Memory in the future.

The second assertion of the Sensual described how the teachers reacted to the Experience. The Sensual is not used here in the erotic form but in the understanding of the events through sensory stimulation including smell, sight, auditory, taste, and touch. Heather said, “I was able to stand where former presidents stood, walk through homes of music icons, and look down from the same balcony where the most notable civil rights leader was assassinated.” Teachers used their senses when they discussed the Experience as smelling the sulfur in the coal smoke of a steam powered locomotive and putting their fingers in the bullet holes of Civil War-scarred buildings. The teachers described their experience as mediated through their senses. Teachers Sensually encounter Peers through oral exchanges.

The third assertion of Peers also described how the teachers reacted to the Experience. Teachers talked with their peers to debrief from their classroom during portions of the in-service. Angela said, “The greatest way that this trip has helped is by creating the atmosphere (on the busride, at dinner . . .) for teachers to sit and talk with one another. One of the major items of discussion was the school year that just closed. We hashed through the changes we would like to make in the classroom for the upcoming year and even brainstormed ideas to that end. We offered advice and a listening ear to those that struggled in the classroom this year and provided reassurance about the next.” The teachers enjoyed the confidence, professional relationships, and sociability of their peers. The experience for the teachers helped them as they developed peers and worked with this cadre to explore classroom topics and methods. The assertions of Human Connection, Sensual, and Peers all support the trend of the Nature of the Experience.

**Figure 3.**



The teachers identified Teacher Benefits as those things derived from the professional development program as the third trend. Teacher Benefits are the concepts teachers indicated that were valuable from the in-service that enhanced their professional life. Marlene said, “This trip is always very enlightening. I always learn so much.” The different benefits of the trip vary in importance by the individual. However, the individuals identified benefits that propelled them forward in ways that clustered with the assertions. The assertions of Content, Skills, and Action all support the trend of Teacher Benefits.

The first assertion that supports Teacher Benefits is the idea of Content. Teachers mention that they learn content that enriches their professional life, and they will communicate this information with their future students. Ashley said, “Learning more about these topics will allow me to present more authentic information to my students.” Elementary teachers may not start with a rich content background, but as a result of the in-service they encounter new topics, events, and groups of people. The new content may originate from areas of study they did not have time to specialize in while taking the broad curriculum required by the state to prepare for elementary teacher licensure. Teachers use new content with skills to create new experiences for their students.

The second assertion that supported Teacher Benefits is the concept of Skills. When teachers identified processes or methods they wanted to use with future students, these ideas clustered around the idea of Skills. Kellie said, “Examining the difference and similarity . . . and understanding patterns . . . is essential in historical and social studies.” Teachers gather skills and methods from docents, interpreters, and museums that they can use with their students. These skills may come from disciplinary fields the teachers did not encounter in the elementary teacher preparation undergraduate experience. The sub assertion of Empathy supports the assertion of Skills.

The sub assertion of Empathy supported the idea of Skills. Teachers acknowledged Empathy when they visited a Civil War site and learned how the family found shelter from the war in the basement of their home though other examples also were present. Joyce said, “. . . the historical perspective of a family caught between two armies and how they survived and how they became involved when the war came to their home.” Teachers found nine empty chairs in the basement some adult sized and others child sized to represent the people who cowered in this space during the battle. Teachers found historical empathy as they learned about people and situation from the past. Teachers help students learn the skill of historical empathy as a sub assertion that supports the assertion of Skills.

The third assertion that supported Teacher Benefits included Action. Action was indicated by the teachers when they talked about wanting to take action or working with their students to take steps to raise funds after visiting a child research and treatment hospital. Nancy said, “This made me feel that I need to do more for my students and community.” Teacher responses ranged from very specific and pragmatic ways to help to general commitments to take action. Teachers felt called to action as part of a transformational

experience, and from this desired to make a personal commitment to that hospital. The assertions of Content, Skills, and Action all support the trend of Teacher Benefits resulting from the field study.

### **Discussion**

The trend of teaching was supported by the literature review of professional development, elementary professional development, contents and skills, and inquiry/decision making. The trend of experiencing results aligned directly and solely with the literature review of the social aspects. Finally, the trend of teacher benefits linked with the ideas from the literature review of elementary professional development, content and skills, and the emotional. The presented study was limited to the teachers in this field study; however, it opened a variety of possibilities to examine teacher decision making in relation to emotionality and emotion-based experience through quantitative studies of past and present choices and how teachers feel about making those selections.

### **Conclusion**

The religious experience of the evangelical protestant tradition as experienced in the Appalachian region begins with an emotional, personal, and transformation experience such as a response to an event, that is transformed into a personal commitment. In a cultural parallel this same dynamic metaphor manifested itself in an emotional, personal, and transformation experience such as visiting a research hospital where the teacher made personal commitments to engage in service with their students to help others in need. While it is not the typical way to think of decision making in civic life, it certainly seems to mirror how individual teachers made decisions in their environment to become socially involved and rally their community to civic action in this field study. Regardless of the methodology the results seem to look the same. The teachers became committed to creating a difference in their community and helping people in need.

The elementary social studies in-service provided a forum for this to occur. While this was hardly what the writers were expecting it does seem to reflect the reality of the situation. Teachers gathered content from the sites they visited on the field study; they enhanced and expanded their skills by examining human structures and the landscape. The professional development created the opportunity to expose the teachers to needs of the community by leading the teachers into the community through field trips where they encountered real needs. Teachers gathered information about the real needs in the world and how they could work with their students to meet those needs.

The inquiry the teachers engaged in was part of a group process and group profession of intent to make a difference. As part of a group they were in some ways like congregants responding to the travails of fellow parishioners as they connected to fellow humans. Furthermore, the sensual experience of stimulus from hearing, seeing, and watching patterned

the participation in an emotional based congregational singing, exhortation, and audience response only this time the stimulus was more subtle. Peers were close, supportive, and encouraging as teachers emotions welled up and they made personal pledges to help. They placed detailed plans in their reflections on how they intended to help and how the teachers went back to school resolved to make a difference through their actions.

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