Discovery: A Movement Toward Understanding

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# INTRODUCTION

Entering into a doctoral program later in life has challenged my stamina, but it has also encouraged and surprised me. I find that there is more happening behind the educational curtain than I realized, that research and critical thinking are valued and applied, and that there are efforts being made constantly to employ more open attitudes and creative methods to the system in ways that value students and seek means to reach them effectively. Too often I had observed what seemed to be an adversarial relationship between educators and students blunt the effect of learning. Through this program I have realized that this is not the case universally and that much work is being done to create student-centered schools.

I certified to teach later in life, and found that I did not tend to think like a teacher. Having not been a part of the system in a way that allowed me to internalize the process, I at times found it difficult to feel that I was a part of school culture. Working mostly as a substitute, including a few long-term assignments, I began to understand some of the reasons that schools operate as they do. When I obtained a full-time teaching assignment, I found myself in a particularly strict setting in which the school administration had restricted student freedom because of previous behavior problems. I found myself unable to teach effectively in this system, which limited the methods and approaches I was allowed to use, and resigned after a year, intending to leave this sort of teaching for good. I then took a position as an adjunct English professor. I received a call the next year, however, asking me to substitute in the county where I had started, and soon I found that there were teachers and administrators who were actively attempting to reach their students in more effective ways. Encouraged, I decided to re-enter the school system.

With a particular interest in literacy, I have observed how student participation and engagement in reading seems to wane over the course of an educational career. As part of my coursework, I have been able to research this phenomenon and to learn theories and philosophies that may both discover the factors that lead to this occurrence and seek to remedy the problem. I have been pleasantly surprised at the amount of research that has gone into creating more open learning environments and the practices that have developed as a result. What I have discovered as part of this program has given me more hope for our nation’s school systems than I had before.

# COURSEWORK

As I began my coursework, I was still uncertain of exactly what the program I was in, Curriculum and Instruction, encompassed. I had looked at a list of classes, and I thought I understood the purposes of some, while others seemed ciphers. I had no thoughts of the program presenting a unified theme and expected the end result of the classes to be a supply of information that I would need to sort through. I had no idea what I was beginning.

I entered into the program in the summer of 2015 with two classes that would help set the stage for the discoveries I would make as I moved through my coursework: CI 706, Multicultural and Diversity Issues, and CIRG 622, Literacy Technology. In CI 706, taught by Dr. Eric Lassiter, we read works that provided an anthropological overview of culture (Lassiter, 2014) and looked at specific issues involving a Kiowa Indian school (Ellis, 2008), a girls’ program in the rural West Virginia area where I have lived most of my life (Spatig & Amerikaner, 2014), and first and second-generation immigrant students at a school in Texas (Valenzuela, 1999). Through these works we explored the idea of allowing people and cultures to define themselves in ways that express their own worth. One of the significant insights of this class was the degree to which we, as educators within a system that functions in a traditional way, may discard the gifts students already possess in favor of developing skills that the dominant culture considers more important, and how this leads to the probability that we as a society are losing value in the process. While this idea was most prominent in *Subtractive Schooling* by Angela Valenzuela (1999), it was also evident in the other cultural groups considered and is an important consideration when working with any group of students or adults. Too often we limit our values to what we desire, and thus we make our society poorer. CIRG 622, an online course taught by Dr. Isaac Larison, explored technological practices while providing my first indication that the methods I had accepted because they were current practice, even though I personally disliked them, were not sacrosanct. In creating a lesson plan, I included a read-aloud segment, a method I had often avoided because this seems to hinder story flow and student understanding, and was told that this was not a wise practice. Instead, we were encouraged to find creative ways to use technology to engage students in the learning process. This gave me an initial moment of hope, as it seemed that the program I was beginning would not simply confirm the accepted way of doing things but would instead attempt to discover practical methods that connect with students.

This introduction would serve as an accurate indicator of the program ahead. In the fall of 2017, I entered into my coursework full-tilt, with a schedule consisting of three courses that were said to be the program’s most demanding. Now that I have completed my classes, I am not sure this was true; there were others as time consuming. It would perhaps be more accurate to say these courses were foundational. CI 702, Curriculum Theories, taught by Dr. Elizabeth Campbell, introduced me to (or deepened my understanding of) the historical theorists who had shaped current education thought. John Dewey’s (1897/2013) ideas were influential to the point that most theorists who came after attempted to base their work on his, even when their basic philosophies seemed to contradict his humanistic approach. Maria Montessori’s (1915) late nineteenth and early twentieth century views seemed frighteningly contemporary, as many of the very problems she addressed, particularly that of the lack of democracy in the schoolhouse, are still present. Elliot Eisner (1985/2013) presented a view of educational objectives that provided flexibility not allowed by the way we have applied the ideas of Franklin Bobbitt (2013, pp. 11-18) and others and suggested that not all that is important can be measured. His ideas made me think of the ways that we have perhaps made tasks such as reading less enjoyable in our quest to quantify all that we do. Nel Noddings (1983/ 2013) did not initially resonate with me as she had with others, but after reading more deeply, I understood both why this was and the value of what she promoted. Noddings suggestion that individual student interest was being underserved spoke directly to my concerns about reading enjoyment, yet I accepted these ideas with some difficultly because of my own predispositions. Because I have always enjoyed classic literature, I have been reluctant to let go of the idea that this canon has universal value. Through considering Noddings and others, I believe I made some progress in accepting the practical application of the idea of a democratic curriculum that I had long supported in theory.

Also during this semester, I enrolled in Dr. Campbell’s EDF 625, Qualitative Research in Education. I had considered qualitative research, since I was interested in discovering possible reasons that lay behind literacy statistics, but I was not yet sure that this type of research would satisfy my curiosity on its own and was also considering a mixed methods study. By reading ideas concerning a variety of qualitative methods as well as observing others’ approaches, I began to become open to the idea of engaging in solely qualitative research. A realization that numbers would themselves always exist in a subjective environment, that bias would always play a part in research and should perhaps be named rather than avoided, led me to move toward the type of research that would provide the sort of data that would be most useful.

Of the courses on my fall 2015 schedule, the one that was perhaps the most foundational to the program was LS 703, Research Design. Through a demanding sequence of dissecting and constructing research proposals and learning the technical requirements of APA style, we became familiar with the process that lies at the heart of the research program. Examining doctoral study after study, I became aware of the imperfections involved in the process and saw further evidence that qualitative research is no less valid than quantitative research. Dr. Ronald Childress helped us understand the ways that research functions, particularly how research design leads us through a process that uses specificity and critical thinking to arrive at a place where we can gauge the meaning of research both by describing what we have discovered and understanding the limitations of this discovery. In this class, I developed a research proposal involving student and adult literacy that would become the basis for a later survey and conference presentation.

This first set of classes established the framework for the program, and, unlike when I had begun a few months before, I had an idea of what was expected and what I would need to do to move forward. Spring classes added to this knowledge, as Statistical Methods (CI 517) with Dr. Edna Meisel made the world of statistics, which I would still use in future research, even though my dissertation work would take another direction, approachable, and Dr. Childress’s Theories, Models, and Research of Teaching (CI 703) delineated different practical methods of teaching and helped me understand the purpose of each. In addition, Advanced Qualitative Research (EDF 625) with Dr. Campbell deepened my understanding of the type of research I would be focusing on with my dissertation work, taking a practical approach to the purposes of this method.

Both summer 2016 classes saw work created that would result in conference presentations. In Survey Research in Education (EDF 711), with Dr. Childress, I designed a school and adult reading survey, as previously mentioned, connected to my LS 703 proposal. The results of this proposal were presented in a conference in spring 2017, and details of this will be included later in this paper. In addition, as part of Policy Studies in Education (EDF 635), also taught by Dr. Childress, I co-created a research paper with Lee Ann Vecillio that we would present in a conference in September of that year. This class also helped me understand how current education policy had developed, particularly the political implications of this policy.

In the fall of 2016, I enrolled in my first area of emphasis class since my first semester, Writing in the Literacy Curriculum (CIRG 615) taught by Dr. Barbara O’Byrne. In this class I again began to understand how limited the options I believed were present in the classroom actually were. I found that practices I had accepted as unquestionable sometimes had a weak foundation, and I discovered an increased freedom to implement writing strategies and activities that engaged students. This process began when I discovered that one of our texts, *The Writing Thief*, by Ruth Culham (2014), called into question the basic structure of this five-paragraph essay, something that had seemed too ingrained in the curriculum to be questioned, calling it a “zombie practice” (Start Here: Stop Doing Dumb Things section, para. 6) This reinforced the idea that every assumption should be questioned and every practice should be evaluated. These were scary ideas.

The previous summer I had attended the International Literacy Association conference in Boston, and presenters had revealed student-centered practices that seemed to contradict what I had been told was required in the reading classroom; this class presented accepted and innovated writing practices in a similar light. I was discovering the very real strategies that teachers were using to engage students in reading and writing and to make these activities seem less like required assignments and more like natural, enjoyable parts of students’ lives.

These experiences melded with the previous year’s studies, and as I moved through Curriculum Development (CI 701) with Dr. Campbell, I matched the practices I was uncovering to theories I was discovering. I gained a new appreciation for Nel Noddings, at last seeing her in the same light that several of my classmates had the year before (Flinders & Thornton, 2013, pp. 187-194). The practicability of teaching in ways that were primarily concerned with reaching students and valuing their preferences and needs was at last emerging. Also that semester, I enrolled in Expository Writing for Research (HUMN 604), taught by Cat Pleska. In this class I explored several types of non-fiction writing while reading and learning to appreciate others’ work. I also used this opportunity to fine-tune the research proposal I had created for Research Design, merging this with the reading survey that I had created and conducted a short time before, which I would present in the spring.

Spring 2017 brought two classes that I would combine to create related projects, which I would test through a class that I was teaching simultaneously (details on this will be presented later in this paper.) Dr. O’Byrne’s Multi-modal Literacy (CIRG 610) challenged us to create lessons based on several modes of learning, including visual, auditory, and technological, while Dr. Lisa Heaton’s Technology and Curriculum (CIEC 700) introduced us to a variety of technological programs and approaches as well as formatting helps that would become useful when creating research reports. Using the one class to create practical uses for programs discovered in the other seemed a natural progression.

In summer 2017, I completed my coursework with Program Planning and Evaluation (CI 627), taught by Dr. Childress. Through this course I discovered the methods used to determine the worth of a practice. An interesting facet of this was examining actual evaluation reports and seeing that such evaluations do take place, even though it sometimes seems that programs run on a preferential basis only. Another facet of this was considering how programs that implement ideas I have discovered might be evaluated. It seemed important to understand how choices are made regarding school reading programs as well as how decisions are made as to whether these programs provide value.

In the end, the program’s coursework fits together as a whole, creating a picture of current education conditions and how ideas to further learning might be implemented. Perhaps the biggest takeaway for me was the realization that the unchanging, policy-driven approach to education I had been superficially exposed to was not omnipresent, that ideas I had heard and sometimes advocated, rather than being dismissed as impractical and naïve, were being discovered by many to be effective. The future of education, perhaps, is to focus on the student rather than the process. This remains a comforting thought.

**PORTFOLIO SPECIFICS**

## SCHOLARSHIP

### Conferences and Workshops

My first conference presentation took place at the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration in Charleston, West Virginia, on October 8, 2016. I had co-created a paper called “Does Current Research Support Employing Retention and Promotion Activity in the School System?” with Lee Ann Vecillio (this involved her school psychology specialization) the previous summer as part of Dr. Childress’s Policy Studies in Education class. My section of the research focused on the historical facet of the issue. In researching this subject, which I previously knew little about, I discovered how the concept of retention had developed and how current practices had been affected by political considerations stemming from “A Nation at Risk” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and the policies developed in the decades afterward. I was surprised to discover that the popular push for retention (opposing “social promotion”) contradicted the results of research from the same period. In addition, research seemed not to back up the perceived dangers of promoting students beyond their age peers. This paper suggested that policies had developed in this area with little regard for the results of scholarly research (Shoemaker & Vecillio, 2016).

The following April, I participated in the Central West Virginia Writing Project Workshop on Marshall’s South Charleston campus, co-presenting with Jennifer Jackson and Sarah K. Redd. Our presentation focused on Multi-Modal Literacy as an outgrowth of the class by the same name that the three of us were enrolled in at the time. Dr. O’Byrne, who taught this class, shepherded our presentation. Each of us demonstrated a separate approach. Mine involved the talking avatar program Voki, using short demonstrations that had been created by students in the Psychology of the Middle Childhood Student class that I was teaching. The demonstrations involved the students in this class imagining the concerns of a middle school student by creating a visual representation and writing a short paragraph, which the Voki avatar would read. Workshop participants then discussed how this program could be used in their own classrooms.

My final conference presentation was the culmination of a project I had begun in Research Design in my first fall semester and continued with a questionnaire created in Survey Research in Education. I co-presented the results of this study, now titled *Comparing Student Reading Choice and Preference with Adult Reading Practices*, with Dr. Ron Childress at The National Social Science Association Las Vegas National Technology & Social Science Conference on April 10, 2017. In addition to the aforementioned classes, this study made use of ideas I had encountered in my curriculum theory classes as well as approaches suggested by speakers at the 2016 International Literacy Association Conference in Boston, particularly those championed by Pernille Ripp, a middle school language teacher in Wisconsin, which built on writings I had come across by Penny Kittle (2013) and others when researching my initial paper. These ideas involved reading choice, that is, allowing students to choose the books they read in class rather than prescribing a set list (Little, McCoach, & Reis, 2014; Morgan & Wagner, 2013). This idea, which seemed to produce results, piqued my curiosity, so I made this a part of the general reading survey, which asked adults to compare their current reading practices and enjoyment to their school practices and enjoyment.

The experience of designing and conducting the survey and then presenting the results led to my better understanding the weight of the process. Dr. Childress guided the survey creation, and his suggestions pointed up the need for precision in both the questions stated and the answers offered as well as the problems inherent in this type of survey, particularly those involving memory. After some discussion, we eliminated the qualitative questions and created a solely quantitative survey. While this would not provide all of the desired information, it worked to create ideas for further research. I conducted the survey using a snowball approach, presenting a link to the questionnaire on Facebook, a Cincinnati Reds discussion board, and Twitter, and asking participants to forward the link to others. The first two of these sites engendered a steady flow of participation. This method skewed the results, as those who were active readers were more likely to choose to take a survey concerning reading. Besides connections between school reading choice and enjoyment and a decrease in reading between elementary school and later grades, the survey showed the strongest correlation being between level of education and adult reading.

This survey served as a preliminary step toward the dissertation work I hope to pursue. After presenting in Las Vegas, a middle school teacher talked with me about the idea of choice and how this was an area that interests her. She mentioned her own daughter’s differing attitudes toward books she was told to read and books she read on her own. This is an area I would like to pursue further. This experience both introduced me to the rigor involved in creating research and moved my particular interests forward, creating an eagerness for taking the next step.

### Publications

*The Central West Virginia Writing Project Spring 2017 Newsletter* published an article I had written titled “A Year Long Journey in Writing: Literacy Experiences in WV’s Alternative School System” (Shoemaker, 2017). This article reviewed two experiences I had participated in with Dr. O’Byrne in 2016 in which we taught poetry and fiction writing workshops in residential schools. This activity will be detailed later in this paper.

Also, the paper “Comparing Student Reading Choice and Preference with Adult Reading Practices”, which I co-authored with Dr. Ron Childress, was accepted for publication by the *Las Vegas National Technology & Social Science Conference 2017 Proceedings Publication*. This paper was the culmination of work begun in Dr. Childress’s Research Design and revised in Cat Pleska’s Expository Writing for Research.

## OTHER PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC PURSUITS

### Teaching

In fall 2015, I met with Dr. Malaphone Phommasa and LeeAnn Price to help design EDF 610**,** Trends and Issues in Education, which Dr. Phommasa would teach the following spring, with LeeAnn and I acting as co-teachers. As part of this class, I created lessons covering educational standards and standardized testing, charter schools, Teach for America, flipped classrooms, and school violence and the role of teachers in student safety, as well as assisting with grading and discussion board responses on these and other topics. In the process of assisting in this class, I became more familiar with issues that are prevalent in today’s schools, both through researching and writing class modules and through reading student research and evaluating student work, which included videos, charts, written papers, and presentations. I feel as if I was able to move my understanding of these topics through co-teaching this class in much the same way that I would have if I had been a student in the class, or possibly more so, as I had the opportunity to view several perspectives and learn the factors that led to each. I also gained an appreciation of the political interconnectedness of many of the issues involved, such as charter schools and the Teach for America program.

 In the fall of 2016, I was given the opportunity to teach EDF 616, Advanced Studies in Human Development. This would be the first class at Marshall where I was the instructor of record, with sole responsibility for teaching the class. Stepping in as classes were ready to start, I used the syllabus and content designed by Dr. Bizunesh Wubie, keeping assignments, which consisted of a variety of papers, discussion board posts, and tests, while making adjustments as needed, answering concerns, and grading student work. My greatest benefit from teaching this class was learning to deal with a variety of student approaches and spot potential problems. One student, for instance, turned in most of his assigned papers before the due date, but had to be reminded to complete discussion board work as the class went along. I attempted to address questions quickly and keep students moving through the course.

 For the spring 2017 semester I again became the instructor of record for a course, EDF 502, Psychology of the Middle School Student. As I was teaching this class as I was taking both Multi-Modal Literacy and Technology in the Curriculum, I applied what I was learning in those classes to this course, adjusting the assignment to include different technologies as well as the types of lessons we were covering in the literacy class. This was done while insuring that the needed material from each of the classes four units was covered. For instance, a social media use and bullying assignment involved students working in groups to create a newsletter, a physical development assignment, as discussed earlier, saw students creating talking avatars (Voki) representing students and voicing their concerns, and the multi-part final project, covering all four units, involved visual representations, relevant videos, and written research.

 This, like the co-taught issues class, provided an opportunity to design assignments using new approaches while covering a set of standards. This became a real-world experience that helped make what I had learned practical and allowed me to use this material while communicating with students, gauge their understanding, and make appropriate adjustments.

*Outside Work With Faculty Member*

In July 2016, I participated, through the Central West Virginia Writing Workshop, in planning and implementing a series of poetry workshops carried out at the Barboursville School, a middle and high school residential facility located inside Barboursville Park in Cabell County. We began by selecting a series of images and a number of poems that the students could possibly relate to. We created a slide show using these pictures, which included scenes of rural and urban areas and different types of outdoor and indoor activities, among other images, and asked the student to choose which were for them and which were not for them. We taped the poems on large sheets of paper and placed these around the room, then asked the students to place different colored sticky notes on the poems indicating which were for them and which were not for them. Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask” and William Blake’s “The Tyger” were among the students’ favorites.

We moved from there into creation mode, as the students wrote poems, using prompts, templates, and their own ideas, and cooperatively painted images, using color as well as both abstract and realistic representations to demonstrate the mood of their poems. Sheila McEntee came in with a collection of bongos and other drums and led the students in a reading and rhythm activity. At the end of the sessions, we collected poems from the students for inclusion in a book, with the cover being chosen by the students from their own designs.

These students showed remarkable enthusiasm for their poetry. It seems difficult to picture similarly aged students in standard schools committing themselves to a poetry project as these students almost unanimously did. Their poetry showed their hopes and their vulnerabilities, and they seemed to gain an appreciation for the form even as they opened themselves up to their classmates. The specific methods, including the poetic forms, which Dr. O’Byrne brought into these sessions fit the students and the context in a way that allowed the young writers to immerse themselves in the endeavor.

One short poem by an awkward-seeming younger student made a particular impression. I am not sure whether I am reading too much into these lines, but, as I told him, his images stuck with me:

**The Dark Woman**

She was dark

And wicked,

But she was so beautiful

She lived in a haunted house,

But it looked like an ark. (C.H., 2016)

The ending of this poem struck me in a way that the author might not have intended. Was he, perhaps, being more literal with this than I at first assumed, or was he suggesting that the danger looked like a safe haven? I am not certain, but this is often what poetry does, so I was impressed.

The following winter, I assisted Dr. O’Byrne in another writing workshop, this one at the Tiger Morton Juvenile Center in Dunbar, which also housed middle and high school students, although the ages skewed more toward high school age. For this workshop, we covered prose as well as poetry. As part of this workshop I presented a series of images representing the different elements needed to create a story, such as character, setting, problem (what does the character want?), obstacle, and solution. Students then worked individually and in groups to write their own stories. We followed this with a poetry session, again introducing students to poems posted throughout the room, with Sheila McEntee again bringing in her drums to help students find and demonstrate rhythm.

Both of these workshops introduced students in less-than-ideal situations to writing opportunities, and the students responded. I began thinking about ways that I could possibly engage students in the classrooms I have taught that would present poetry, and writing in general, using methods that would make these natural processes for students to express themselves rather than chores that must be accomplished in order to move on to the next grade.

# SUMMARY

Reviewing my time in the program, I see a unified awareness having developed from my initial piecemeal thoughts. I entered with the idea of looking at the reasons students enjoy reading less as they grow older, while at the same time questioning whether the adversarial relationship between educators and students, which seems too common in my experience, is a necessity. Through my coursework, research, and pursuits, I learned that I am far from alone in asking these questions.

I am grateful for the thoughtful research conducted by theorists, teachers, and other specialists who have sought to open up our understanding by questioning what we sometimes think are foundational ideas, then constructing new theories based on what they discover. I have been amazed by the amount of work that has been done in this area. Sometimes it has seemed that the school system exists as a self-perpetuating entity that has time only to ensure its own smooth operation while being reluctant to consider ideas that may make the process more complicated. I have been relieved to discover that this is not always the case, that many who labor in the field are seriously dedicated to discovering the best ways to engage students in reading, writing, and learning. I have long understood that continued demands, involving learning that seems targeted toward the testing that has been the basis for the system’s existence, has at times made innovation that is not directed toward immediately measurable results difficult to fit in. The constantly moving clock and the overwhelming required learning seems to leave time for little else. Now, however, I realize that there is a movement advocating both change and finding ways to promote real learning within the current system.

I am also grateful for the work that is continually put in by the program’s professors and how they seem concerned with constructing workable theories and methods rather than perpetuating the status quo. Dr. Campbell introduced me to a number of theorists, such as Eisner (1985/2013) and Noddings (1983/2013), whom I had not heard of who had important things to say about the foundations of learning and teaching and also opened up the world of qualitative research, helping me understand the value of subjective research. Because of this, I was able to formulate theories that undergirded the work I wish to do. Dr. O’Byrne allowed me to assist her with programs that demonstrated ways to reach students and make them enthusiastic writers in contexts that I might have thought would prevent such things, then presented me with the opportunity to write about this experience in the Central West Virginia Writing Project Newsletter. Dr. Childress introduced me to the research and surveying process and worked with me patiently, shepherding me through the experience of applying to Marshall’s Internal Review Board, creating a survey in ways that eliminated confusion and obtained the information I needed, and compiling the results of this survey in an understandable form. He then presented the results of this survey with me in Las Vegas and helped me have the accompanying paper published in the conference proceedings. Dr. Heaton introduced me to new types of technology, including several programs I have already found useful, as well as methods that make the creation of a research paper easier. Dr. Meisel presented statistics in a way that was less scary than I would have thought. Dr. Lassiter and Dr. Larison made my first semester worthwhile, presenting ideas involving multicultural understanding and discovering technological methods that help when teaching literacy, with these ideas carrying through the doctoral process. Cat Pleska opened up non-fiction writing and helped me understand the intricacies of writing essays.

On the whole, the program could not have been more beneficial. The way that it considered my specific ideas and needs and led me forward, allowing me to think more deeply about these ideas and understand other views, surprised me. The logic and honesty of the research available and the professors presenting this allowed me to move through my work in a way that seemed natural and did not require me to bury the misgivings I have had about the educational system. Just as significantly, this allowed me to realize that hope for the system exists.

I have at times wondered whether I would have the stamina needed to make it this far, but the help has always been there to allow me to proceed. I finish my coursework with some relief, and now I look forward to what comes next. I am anxious to dig deeper into the scholarship surrounding teaching literacy and to begin research that gives me an idea of the way students negotiate the process. I feel that this program has given me what I need to move forward.

As I begin work on my dissertation, I hope to discover further research involving the point in time at which students begin to lose interest in reading and possible reasons why this occurs. Has research shown a strong correlation between students’ age and interests? Do teachers in middle grades relate to students in significantly different ways than they relate to younger students? Do methods of teaching change around the time that student reading decreases? Do these methods affect student interest and understanding? Is there a shift in focus, possibly from story to story elements? Have researchers looked at possible connections between such shifts and student reading enjoyment? What part does physical development play? How do peer attitudes affect the process? Are there ways to connect reading to outside interests more so than is currently common practice? Can reading choice play a significant role in stimulating student interest? What other practices have proven to be successful?

A large part of the research process will involve formulating further questions. As I investigate practices by teachers such as Pernille Ripp (2015), Penny Kittle (2013), Kelly Gallagher (2009), and others who have had success fomenting student reading, I hope to research the scholarly evidence behind their approaches as well as research that has pointed other directions. This process will establish a framework for the next step.

I hope to center my dissertation around interviews and focus groups involving current middle school students. This process will involve obtaining permission from Marshall’s Institutional Review Board and the board of education of the county where I conduct this research, possibly Cabell County. Since these conversations will involve minors, strict attention will need to be paid to observing ethical standards, including obtaining permissions from parents and/or guardians. The review process will thus be more involved than if the study had surveyed adults.

This focus, however, will provide what I believe to be the best opportunity to discover relevant perspectives on the question. By talking to students who are currently in the age range where reading interest seems to wane, I will be better positioned to discover and evaluate possible reasons that this happens. Adults, as I discovered in the survey I conducted, look back at their childhood through a haze of memory that tends to see most clearly what affected them most, either positively or negatively. While students may tend to focus on current experiences, carefully constructed questions may help them recall the recent past and unearth the causes of any changes that may have taken place in their reading habits. They are also in the best position to express fresh feelings about classroom assignments and the material they are reading and to possibly reveal what activities may have replaced reading and what has motivated these changes.

But again, research will formulate further questions, as will the interview process itself. While this approach may prove difficult in many ways, it stands a chance of producing insightful results, I believe, by focusing on the affected group. I am looking forward to beginning this work.

Thank you.

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# APPENDIX

For representative artifacts of the work discussed in this paper, visit <https://marcshoe.wordpress.com/>.