
**Genius Hour as Teacher Inquiry:
Professional Learning for Teacher Candidates and Teachers**

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Abstract: Adapted from K-12 classrooms, Genius Hour serves as a framework for teacher inquiry in a professional development school. Through Genius Hour, teacher candidates and practicing teachers in a PDS identify questions grounded in their passions for teaching and learning, explore relevant resources, gather data, reflect on what they learn, offer recommendations, develop resources, and pose new questions. They share their learning with authentic audiences through blogs and a Genius Hour Fair on-site at the PDS. Our case in point highlights the emerging impact of Genius Hour as a framework for teacher inquiry and a form of effective and reciprocal professional learning in the PDS.

KEYWORDS: teacher inquiry, professional development school, teacher education, professional learning, professional development

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need.
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants.

Introduction

Professional learning is a critical component of a teacher's professional life (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 2016). Opportunities to deepen content knowledge, learn about research-based instructional strategies, experiment with technology to enhance teaching and learning, and explore effective ways to engage families are examples of the types of professional learning that contribute to the development of teachers over the course of their careers. Traditionally, professional learning experiences have been provided through a one-time, one-directional method in which content is delivered to participants, with little to no follow-up with the practitioners who are expected to implement the newly acquired content, skill, or tool (Worsham, 2015). Additionally, professional learning opportunities are oftentimes determined by school, district, or state administrators, with little regard for what teachers say they need or want to learn (Calvert, 2016). To be effective, professional learning experiences should be "ongoing,

long-term,” (Zepeda, 2012, p. 8), and embedded in the daily work of teachers (Fullan, 2007; Learning Forward, 2011; National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future, 2016).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) define teacher inquiry as the systematic, intentional study by educators of their own practice. Teacher inquiry as a form of professional learning has the potential to meet the expectations for effective professional learning in that it provides for teacher ownership of learning, encourages teacher reflection, is rooted in the daily problems of teacher practice, and can lead to meaningful change in teaching and learning in the classroom (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014).

Research on teacher inquiry in the context of a professional development school (PDS) highlights benefits for teacher candidates and teachers (see Crocco, Faithfull, & Schwartz, 2003; Dana, Silva, & Snow-Gerono, 2002; Mule 2006). Teacher inquiry in the PDS positions educators as change agents (see Mule, 2006; Price & Valli, 2005) in keeping with “inquiry as stance” (Cochran-Smith, 2013; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009). As described by Cochran-Smith, an inquiry stance “is a theory of action that positions the collective intellectual capacity of teachers and other practitioners at the center of the transformation of teaching and learning in schools” (2013, p. xii). In reporting on her study of teacher candidates engaged in inquiry in a professional development school, Mule (2006) notes, “The concept of preservice teachers as inquirers allows for the development of future teachers needed for the renewal of the cultures of teaching and education that is the central aim of PDSs” (p. 216). With its focus on professional learning and reflective practice, teacher inquiry relates to two of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) essentials for PDS work:

3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need.
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants. (NAPDS, 2008, p. 5)

In this article, we describe how we adapted and used Genius Hour (see Juliani, 2015; Maiers, 2010; Pink, 2009) as a framework for teacher inquiry in a professional development school. Through Genius Hour, teacher candidates and practicing teachers in a PDS pursue passion projects related to middle grades education and engage in reciprocal and effective professional learning.

Genius Hour

Genius Hour is grounded in the 20%-time idea used at Google, 3M, and many other companies and organizations, including National Public Radio, Flickr, and the *Huffington Post* (Tate, 2012). Employees use 20% of their time each week to pursue their passions, providing dedicated time to explore, create, and incubate innovations. For example, at 3M, 20% time resulted in the creation of Post-It notes, and at Google, 20%-time yielded innovations like Gmail, Google Earth, and Google Sky (Juliani, 2015).

Daniel Pink, author of *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (2009), and Angela Maiers, an educator who focuses on student-centered learning and author of *The Passion-Driven Classroom: A Framework for Teaching and Learning* (2010), were among the first to talk about using the idea of 20% time in K-12 classrooms and calling it “Genius Hour.” For Genius Hour in the K-12 classroom, students develop their own inquiry questions about whatever they want to explore and take time each week to work on new ideas or master new skills or both. In the process, students demonstrate their genius and share it with authentic audiences through blogs, videos, community events, etc.

Going beyond the connection to 20% time in the work place, Genius Hour also reflects the progressive education approaches of Maria Montessori and John Dewey (Juliani, 2015). *The Montessori Method* (1912), the definitive source for Montessori's ideas about children and learning, centers on tapping into children's natural curiosity as the engine to drive learning. In *Experience and Education* (1938; 1998), Dewey offers a concise treatise on his educational philosophy that emphasizes the freedom to explore purposeful learning sparked by desire.

A lively and far-flung community of K-12 educators use Genius Hour in their classrooms, sharing their experiences and ideas on web sites, blogs, and Twitter chats (Krebs & Zvi, 2016). Genius Hour in the classroom supports learning, creativity, and innovation in ways that both Montessori and Dewey likely would find heartening and familiar:

- Individualized learning based on interests;
- Hands-on learning opportunities;
- Freedom to explore;
- Don't interrupt a work cycle or "flow"; and
- Work at your own pace. (Juliani, 2015, p. 16)

In our work, we have adapted Genius Hour from the K-12 classroom, using it as a framework for teacher inquiry in the PDS. Teacher candidates and practicing teachers pursue passion projects related to young adolescents and middle grades education. They explore resources, gather evidence related to their questions, reflect on what they learn, offer recommendations for other educators, (in some cases) develop tools, and pose new questions. They share their learning from Genius Hour with authentic audiences through blogs, professional learning events on-site at the PDS, and presentations to other educators at local and national workshops and conferences.

Intrinsic motivation is integral to both teacher inquiry and Genius Hour. In describing the fundamentals of motivation, Pink notes:

Type I [intrinsically motivated] behavior depends on three nutrients: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Type I behavior is self-directed. It is devoted to becoming better and better at something that matters. And it connects that quest for excellence to a larger purpose. (2009, pp. 78-79)

Autonomy is central to teacher inquiry, a self-directed professional learning practice that emphasizes teacher "ownership of ...classroom-based investigation" to "improve classroom practice" rather than advance a university researcher's field of study (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, p. 9). Genius Hour as teacher inquiry embeds autonomy into professional learning. Because it starts with personal passions related to middle grades education, Genius Hour seems to make the entry into teacher inquiry non-threatening for teacher candidates and practicing teachers alike.

Through teacher inquiry, educators seek mastery through a cyclical process of thought and action, reflection and inquiry focused on what Cochran-Smith and Lytle call "knowledge *in practice*" (1999, p. 262). As Casciola explains, "Knowledge *in practice* is the knowledge developed as teachers learn how to respond to the everyday happenings in the classroom.... [Teachers] construct knowledge *in practice* when they try out an idea within their classrooms" (2016, p. 54). Genius Hour is not a term paper requiring grudging research into irrelevant topics or tedious data collection and reporting in response to a mandate. Instead, educators involved in Genius Hour as teacher inquiry appear motivated to read, listen, ask, observe, create, innovate, reflect, share, and ask new questions.

With ongoing, iterative cycles of inquiry motivated by the purposes and passions that brought them to the classroom, Genius Hour supports educators in the PDS to serve as leaders

and standard bearers for transforming schooling (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Price & Valli, 2005). Inquiry focused on problems of practice has the potential to make a positive impact on the quality of school experiences for students and educators, as well as inform our understanding of the teaching and learning processes that are at the heart of all educational endeavors (Cochran-Smith, 2013).

With Genius Hour, we aim to support practitioners and teacher candidates in navigating inquiry processes and improving their classroom practices, while simultaneously strengthening our PDS partnership through reciprocal learning. We will feature three examples depicting how our PDS partnership used Genius Hour as a framework to encourage and support teacher inquiry.

Background: School/University Partnership

The Southern University (SU, pseudonym) has partnered with a nearby school district to form a Professional Development School District (PDSD) partnership that relies on “developing trusting relationships and considering complex contexts” (Andrews & Thompson, 2016, p. 5). Genius Hour builds on those trusting relationships and accounts for complex contexts by engaging middle grades education teacher candidates and practicing teachers in a local middle school in using their passions to drive inquiry that will enhance teaching and learning.

The PDSD partnership between SU and a school district officially launched in 2007 as the result of meaningful collaboration between the two institutions going back several decades. Every school in the district is involved in the PDSD at varying levels of intensity (Andrews & Thompson, 2016). Small City Middle School (SCMS, a pseudonym) is heavily involved in the partnership work with co-Professors-in-Residence (PIR) onsite, university teacher candidates placed in classrooms for field experiences, on-site university courses, and professional learning opportunities connected to the PDSD. Professors-in-residence, or PIRs, are university faculty who devote a percentage of their budgeted university contract time to working with and in a PDS for the academic year.

In 2011, Gayle Andrews and Kathy Thompson became the first Co-PIRs in the PDSD. As faculty members in the SU middle grades education program, they developed and taught undergraduate and graduate courses together. Because they valued their collaborative approach to teaching and learning and believed that it enhanced the educational experiences of their teacher candidates, they proposed a Co-PIR model that would allow them to share in the duties, responsibilities, and benefits of the PDS work at SCMS.

Southern University’s middle grades education program prepares teachers for grades 4-8. Middle grades teacher candidates—both bachelor’s (BSED) and masters of arts in teaching (MAT) students—enter this two-year program in cohorts. The teacher candidates choose any combination of two content areas from language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Every other cohort is based at Small City Middle School. Andrews and Thompson teach a series of middle grades courses on-site, looping with the teacher candidates in the PDS cohort for their entire two years in the teacher education program.

Genius Hour as Teacher Inquiry: The Teacher

Conor Naughton is a teacher at SCMS, a graduate of the middle grades initial certification program (2014), and a graduate of the Master of Education (MED) program in middle grades

education (2016). He completed a year-long internship at SCMS his final year in the undergraduate teacher education program, 2013-2014. He attributes his unwavering dedication to finding a teaching position at SCMS to the exceptional experience he had while he was placed at the PDS as a teacher candidate. In fact, Naughton spent the 2014-2015 school year as a full-time graduate student and a part-time substitute teacher at SCMS, eager for any and every opportunity to maintain his connection to the school. He turned down at least two other job offers in spring 2015 while he hoped and waited for a position to become available at SCMS. He got hired at SCMS in June, so in the summer of 2015, Naughton was wrapping up his graduate coursework and preparing for his first year in the classroom.

Naughton took an online graduate class, *EDMS 7030e: The Middle Grades School*, with Gayle Andrews in summer 2015. The course enrolled both teachers and teacher candidates connected to SCMS. Graduate students in the course completed a service-learning project that benefited SCMS students and teachers, designing standards-based activities to engage children and youth during the August festival that serves as a non-traditional open house to launch the school year (Blankenship, Nix, Andrews, & Thompson, 2015).

Andrews used Genius Hour as a framework for teacher inquiry for the first time in that summer 2015 graduate course. Here's how Genius Hour was introduced to the class:

Genius Hour gives you a chance to identify something you're passionate about within the world of schooling for young adolescents and then spend this semester delving into your passion, reading, researching, and creating tools/resources that you and others can use. Instead of a formal paper that only your instructor would read to report what you discover, you'll write blog posts, seek feedback from your Kid Consultants [young adolescents who worked with the graduate students throughout the course], and give feedback to one another on your projects. You'll come up with a strategy for sharing your work with your classmates, create a rubric to assess your work, and then share your Genius Hour Project with your classmates and submit to me your assessment of your work on the project using your rubric. (Andrews, 2015, p.38)

Naughton joined his SU graduate student colleagues in working on Genius Hour projects. They explored topics of personal interest to them that fit within the bounds of the graduate course, specifically by focusing on topics connected to middle grades education and the lives of young adolescents in their homes, schools, and communities. They investigated everything from how to use Genius Hour in a middle grades science or math classroom with young adolescents to strategies for increasing student voice and choice in the classroom and measures that middle grades teachers can take to combat the unrealistic ideals for young adolescents portrayed by appearance-focused media.

Naughton describes his Genius Hour experience from that summer 2015 graduate course. *The question I chose to pursue for my Genius Hour project – How can middle grades math educators teach for social justice? – felt like a natural progression in my professional development, as the topics of social justice education and critical pedagogy have long been engaging and compelling to me. From there, the manner in which each student in the graduate class researched their Genius Hour question was very flexible and student-centered. I perused through various literature on topics related to mine, looked through online databases, and even participated in Twitter chats. We were also given the freedom to present our findings in whatever way we chose. Some students made posters while others*

wrote papers, but I chose to create a Wordpress blog separated into different sections in an attempt to coherently organize my findings.

My biggest, overarching takeaway from doing my Genius Hour project was that the answer to my question wasn't necessarily about finding specific lesson plans or resources (although I did find those). Rather, teaching for social justice, regardless of content or grade level, is about adopting a particular mindset, and it is this mindset that I have tried to carry with me as I conclude my first year of teaching (2015-2016). My research also lives on in the qualitative [action] research that I am conducting in my final semester of graduate school, in which I am interviewing several middle grades teachers on the topic of teaching for social justice.

Naughton offers a compelling answer to the reflection question we often ask our graduate students and teacher candidates as they complete a project: "So what?" For him, the takeaway from his Genius Hour project is a mindset, an approach to thinking about teaching for social justice that continues to guide his decisions as a beginning teacher and prompt new questions about his practice.

Based on Naughton's experience, as well as feedback and reflections from the other graduate students in the course, it seemed clear that Genius Hour could help teacher candidates and teachers establish the habit of inquiry to transform practice. When passion informs inquiry, that passion drives focused investigation, yields ideas and innovations, and generates energy and enthusiasm for more inquiry.

Genius Hour as Teacher Inquiry: The Teacher Candidate

In the Co-PIRs' fall 2015 on-site course at Small City Middle, Andrews and Thompson made the decision to use Genius Hour with the new cohort of middle grades education teacher candidates, giving them the opportunity to explore questions of personal interest to them that also connected to middle grades education and young adolescents.

The teacher candidates brainstormed ideas in class with some prompts to guide their thinking, and when they settled on their Genius Hour focus, they each recorded a brief video (no more than 90 seconds) using an application called *Flipgrid*. In the video, the teacher candidates described their own Genius Hour questions, explained why they were interested in that question, and how they planned to pursue the question. With 40 teacher candidates and videos lasting only 60-90 seconds, they could all watch everybody's videos in well under an hour and get a sense of the scope of the questions, find overlaps with their own questions, and see what their colleagues were excited about investigating.

The teacher candidates created *Wordpress* blogs to document what they were learning and share their emerging genius. They researched their Genius Hour questions using relevant literature and other resources, social media, surveys, interviews, observations, etc. They also followed each other's progress on the Wordpress blogs and in-class Genius Hour work sessions, sharing ideas and relying on each other for support and resources. Here are a few examples of the Genius Hour questions that the teacher candidates pursued:

- Why is talking about mental health important in the middle grades?
- How are extracurricular activities beneficial to students?

- How can we make a positive difference in addressing the racial achievement gap?
- How can we keep grammar relevant in the classroom? How can we do it without boring our students?
- How does a middle school student's insecurity hold them back from participating in the classroom, and how can I as an educator help them develop confidence in the classroom?
- How can we ditch the desks and get students more actively engaged in learning?
- How can I incorporate social-emotional learning in my English/language arts classroom?

One of the teacher candidates, Morgan Waters, actually has done two Genius Hour projects: one for the summer 2015 master's level course that Andrews taught and then another in the fall 2015 course taught on-site at Small City Middle. Waters chose two different Genius Hour questions, and she describes the one that she used for the fall 2015 on-site methods course below:

My Genius Hour took the theme of the widely recognized movie, Mean Girls, which incorporates many perspectives from adolescent girls and depicts their lifestyle and struggles. Through taking aspects of the movie—such as bullying, self-esteem, and belonging—I found that while the movie may be considered “fiction,” these struggles are actually occurring among our adolescent girls every day, everywhere.

I surveyed 67 young adolescent girls in grades 6-8 to investigate their perceptions related to bullying and peer pressure. The girls described from what sources they feel the most pressure:

- 28.4%: Parents
- 23.9%: School/Teachers
- 22.4%: Friends
- 22.4%: Government officials/police
- 2.9%: Internet

In response to more open-ended questions, the girls depicted tensions they experience.

- *More freedom, but more pressure from adults*
- *New peers in the middle grades, but also a struggle to fit in ever-evolving cliques*
- *Puberty with hormonal and physical changes that could be positive, negative, or just confusing*

They also highlighted the impact of various forces that they described in negative terms, including comparisons to their peers often resulting in negative body/low self-image issues and the internet with the constant comparisons to the media's depictions of females and the potential for social media as a source of cyber-bullying.

I asked these young adolescents what we as adults can do, and their responses focus on proactive instead of reactive possibilities. I also did research to identify options that would address concerns the girls raised. Here are some things we as adults can do to make the existence of “mean girls” less likely:

- *Educate kids about the media and its perceptions and effects on women.*
- *Engage with students in settings outside the classroom.*
- *Create and support Girls' Clubs.*
- *Exercise patience. What is a big deal to girls might not seem like a big deal to us, but remember you were once there, too.*
- *Get to know students; don't pass judgment.*

When Waters completed her Genius Hour project on “mean girls” in fall 2015, she was in her first full semester as a teacher candidate. As her Genius Hour investigation and targeted recommendations make apparent, her experience with Genius Hour helped propel her both into professional learning and into seeing herself as a change agent in her classroom and community. Waters completed a year-long internship at SCMS in 2016-2017. She took the lead in organizing the annual fall festival at SCMS in fall 2016, just one example of how she has taken up one of her own recommendations—engage with kids outside of school. She organized a fund-raising and gift collection campaign for a SCMS family who lost their home and all their possessions in a fire just before the winter holiday break. In the process, she helped others in the school and in the community “see” that family as their neighbors and friends. Communities are built on trusting relationships. Waters seems to have used her Genius Hour work on mean girls as a launching pad for a broader effort to build relationships and communities.

Genius Hour as Teacher Inquiry: The Genius Hour Fair

At the end of fall semester 2015, Andrews and Thompson organized a Genius Hour Fair in the SCMS media center during teachers’ planning periods. Teacher candidates shared their Genius Hour projects and engaged in conversations with practicing teachers, and they also had opportunities to learn from one another. The Genius Hour Fair served as reciprocal professional learning for all involved, generating ideas and excitement about pursuing passion projects related to middle grades education and young adolescents.

The teacher candidates reflected on their learning and experiences related to Genius Hour, including in connection to the Genius Hour Fair. Some of their comments are excerpted below:

Teacher Candidate 1—Genius Hour Project: Pushing Through Insecurity

One thing I realized as I was presenting was that I care more about my topic than I realized. I found myself going off on tangents about how to make students feel loved and valued because I discovered that the root of my original interest in my topic was a deep desire to let each student know that they are loved and special, regardless of what they think about themselves. The methods I found to encourage students’ confidence in the classroom are methods that I am so excited to use in my own classroom one day. In my opinion, each student should be able to walk into a classroom and feel safe, comfortable, important, and confident in their ability to learn and achieve.

Teacher Candidate 2—Genius Hour Project: Math Technology in the K12 Classroom

[Genius Hour Fair] was such a fun day, and I learned a lot from other math teachers who provided me with more apps they enjoyed, teaching strategies, and tips for my own classroom! I am so grateful to have had this time with them today in the library!

Teacher Candidate 3—Genius Hour Project: Educating the Black Child: Exploring the Achievement Gap & Making A Change

My sharing hour went very well. I had amazing conversations about racial issues in education and the real world. I learned so much today, and I am inspired to do even more research on this question!

Teacher Candidate 4—Genius Hour Project: Getting Grammar: Refocusing on the Beauty and Complexities of the English Language

The biggest thing I learned is that, as educators, we must accept that grammar is fluid. Language is fluid, and organic, and ever-changing...therefore, we must treat it as such in our classrooms. I talked about changing the stigma of the standards, which ask our students to “command” (read: be commanded by) grammar practices. I find this term troubling and would prefer the term to be “explore” or “question.” We need to create a generation of students who are comfortable talking about language and discussing different dialects. Standard English will always be important, but so many other types of language are important as well. Let’s keep the conversation going—don’t forget grammar!

One teacher candidate’s comment seems to capture the sense of the cohort regarding their Genius Hour experience: “I found that *passion drives teaching!*”

During the Genius Hour Fair, SCMS faculty and staff had an opportunity to comment on their thoughts related to Genius Hour using an online virtual wall called *Padlet* for conversation, brainstorming, and feedback. A sampling of their comments reflects the inspiration they found and how impressed they were with the teacher candidates’ Genius Hour work, with the first example listed showing an undeniable parallel to a teacher candidate’s reflection:

- “*Passion drives teaching*, and if the passion I saw here this afternoon is any indication of our future, I think we have reason to be hopeful.”
- “Love that these future teachers are already thinking about the realities that they will see within their own classrooms.... Good luck incorporating all of this into your own classrooms (because you should!)”
- “Thank you for some excellent strategies and ideas I will use in my classroom TODAY! Everyone I talked to was knowledgeable and passionate!”
- “It is good to see how thoughtful these upcoming teachers are. Every one of these presenters knew how they were going to apply their work in their future classrooms.”
- “The questions presented showed a keen insight into the issues we face every day in a middle school. The very timely topic of Graphic Novels was astutely expressed, as I have been one of those who hasn’t used them, but one who really wants to.”

Naughton summarizes the reactions of his SCMS colleagues to the Genius Hour Fair:

Feedback from Small City teachers was overwhelmingly positive. Some said that they left the fair with ideas that they felt they could use in their own classrooms that very day. Many were blown away at the breadth of knowledge that these preservice teachers now possessed, while others simply took inspiration from how these students’ passions were driving their future teaching.

The idea that passion drives teaching is perhaps the most striking takeaway from the Genius Hour Fair for novices and veterans alike. Genius Hour offers an open approach to inquiry that supports any question, so long as it can somehow be connected to middle grades education. The key elements of intrinsic motivation—autonomy, mastery, and purpose—were evident as the teacher candidates had the freedom to follow their hearts. The teacher candidates and the SCMS teachers seemed to revel in the opportunity to share their passions and learn from one another.

Genius Hour as Teacher Inquiry: To Be Continued

We used Genius Hour as a framework for teacher inquiry in the hope that it would provide a non-threatening, even energizing, approach to delving into problems of practice. If passion drives teaching, then we hoped that passion would also drive inquiry. Data from teacher candidates', graduate students', and SCMS teachers' reflections appear to support the value of Genius Hour as an initial framework for teacher inquiry. The reciprocal professional learning, especially in the context of the Genius Hour Fair, seemed to generate ideas and excitement around passion projects related to middle grades education and young adolescents.

Nancy Dana's extensive work on teacher inquiry (see Dana, 2013, 2016) provides rich and comprehensive guidance for our next steps. We are trying to build a bridge from a Genius Hour framework for inquiry in the PDS to a more formal and structured approach based on Dana's articulation of an inquiry cycle. During the 2016-2017 school year, the teacher candidates who did Genius Hour projects in the PDS are conducting teacher inquiry throughout their year-long internships. At the end of spring semester 2017, the teacher candidates will share their teacher inquiries with the faculty of SCMS in a Teacher Inquiry conference. The TI conference will feature individual breakout sessions for each teacher candidate's inquiry with time for in-depth conversations between and among SCMS teachers and teacher candidates. Hopefully, the TI conference will yield reciprocal professional learning akin to the Genius Hour Fair. In their examination of teacher inquiry in a PDS, Dana, Silva, and Snow-Gerono (2002) commented, "Mentor teachers gained space to understand inquiry through inquiry projects conducted by preservice teachers" (p. 71). Like the Genius Hour Fair, the TI conference is intended to support teacher candidates and SCMS teachers in considering how their passions can fuel their professional learning, enhancing their genius with autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

In a final post to his original Genius Hour blog, SCMS teacher Naughton captures essential elements of an approach to professional learning grounded in inquiry:

"The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." –Socrates

This is where I find myself as I conclude this project. In reflecting upon what I have learned, I am left with the realization that I still have so much left to learn. This is a daunting thought to wrap my head around, one so overwhelming that at times it may feel a bit discouraging. However, I think there is comfort to be found in the idea that I will never be perfect and that there is always room to grow, especially if we embrace the belief that educators are lifelong learners. Hopefully, this new understanding is the first step in my development as an effective teacher of social justice, particularly within the realm of middle grades mathematics.

Our goal is to support teacher candidates and practicing teachers in taking "inquiry as stance" in the PDS (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009). An inquiry stance is a theory of action for school improvement that positions teachers and other practitioners as change agents whose "collective intellectual capacity" (Cochran-Smith, 2013, p. xii) drives transformation. Educators who take an inquiry stance toward their practice lead improvements in teaching and learning as a natural outgrowth of their ongoing engagement in the cycle of inquiry related to their professional passions: identifying problems of practice and related questions centered on student learning;

investigating those questions; trying out interventions, actions, and strategies; and discovering new questions to investigate (Hine & Lavery, 2014; Johnson, 2012).

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