Teacher Research: Toward Clarifying the Concept

Traditionally there has been a disturbing distinction between the wisdom of school-based teachers and the wisdom of university-based researchers. Generally teachers' wisdom has been regarded as practical, action-oriented and experiential, while researchers' wisdom has been thought of as theoretical, analytic and empirical. The current reform agenda in education has centered on ways to make teaching and teacher education more systematic, rigorous, and knowledge-based. Yet efforts to construct and codify a knowledge base for teaching have primarily relied on university-based research. The equation between knowledge and university research is implicit in *The Handbook of Research on Teaching* (1986), widely viewed as the most comprehensive synthesis of research in the field. However, it contains no articles written by school-based teachers themselves nor, as far as we can determine, are published accounts of teachers' work cited. Even the collaborative projects cited usually construct teachers' roles in the research process and thereby frame and mediate teachers' perspectives through researchers' perspectives. Consequently, not foregrounded in this collection of reviews that purports to define our knowledge of teaching are teachers themselves - the voices of teachers, the questions that teachers ask, and the interpretive frames that teachers use to understand and improve their own classroom practices.

Limiting the official knowledge base for teaching to what academics have chosen to study and write about disenfranchises teachers and relegates their knowledge to the status of practical information or common sense. This contributes to a number of problems: discontinuity between what is taught in universities and what occurs in classrooms; teachers' ambivalence about or disregard for the claims of academic research which often seems counter intuitive or unconnected to the daily demands of their work lives; and, because teachers are seldom recognized as potential contributors to the making of knowledge, a dearth of coded information about the reality of classroom life from the perspectives of insiders. Unfortunately teacher research, which by definition has unique potential to address issues that teachers identify as significant, does not yet have an acknowledged place in constructing the knowledge base for teaching.

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Relating Teacher Research and Research on Teaching

Many teacher-researchers model their classroom and school-based inquiries on more traditional university-based social science research. Myers (1985) has been influential in arguing for me adaptation of basic and applied social science research paradigms to teacher research. He suggests that the norms of generalizability, tests of significance, and optimizing controls of problems apply to teacher research, but need to be defined differently by classroom teachers. Myers calls for teacher-researchers to be well-grounded in problem definition, research design, and quantitative data analysis, and suggests that they begin by replicating the studies of university-based researchers. In contrast to Myers, Mohr and MacLean (1987) and Bissex and Bullock (1987) argue that teacher research is essentially a new game not necessarily bound by the constraints of traditional research paradigms; they urge teachers to identify their own questions, document their observations, analyze and interpret data in light of their current theories, and share their results primarily with other teachers. Berthoff (in Goswami and Stillman, 1987) puts little emphasis on data gathering and, instead, asserts that teachers already have all the information they need and should reexamine, or in her word "RE-search;" their own experiences.

Each of these sets of recommendations for teacher research contains an image of what the game might look like—an approximation of university-based research; a more grass-roots phenomenon that has its own internal standards of logic, consistency, and clarity; or a reflective or reflexive process for the benefit of the individual teacher. Yet each of these images, although quite different, also implicitly compares teacher research to university-based research on teaching. In this section we explore what we consider a problematic relationship between research on teaching and teacher research.

Research Questions. Although it may appear self-evident that the research questions in teacher research emanate from the day-to-day experiences of teachers themselves, this is not a trivial issue. In traditional university-based classroom research, researchers' questions reflect careful study of the existing theoretical and empirical literature. Teachers' questions, on the other hand, often emerge from discrepancies between what is intended and what occurs: initially these are experienced as a concern about a student's progress, a classroom routine which is floundering, conflict or tension among students, or as a desire to try out some particular new approach. This questioning process is highly reflexive, immediate, and referenced to particular children and classroom contexts: What happens when my "high-risk" second graders shift from a basal reading program to a whole language curriculum? How will I know when my students are on the way to thinking like mathematicians and not simply learning new routines? How do my digressions from lesson plans contribute to and/or detract from my goals for the students? How do students' theories of teaching and learning shape and become shaped by writing conferences?
Although these questions are not framed in the language of educational theory, they are indeed about discrepancies between theory and practice. Although they are not always motivated by a need to generalize beyond the immediate case, they may in fact be relevant to a wide variety of contexts. The questions of teacher-researchers are, at once, more general than questions that concentrate on the effectiveness of specific techniques, materials, or instructional methods and more specific than interpretive questions which explore the meanings of customary school and classroom events. Teachers' questions are not simply elaborated versions of "What can I do Monday morning?" or "What will work in my classroom?" Embedded within the particular questions of teacher-researchers are many other implicit questions about the relationships of concrete, particular cases to more general and abstract theories of learning and teaching. For example, when a teacher asks, "What will happen if I use journals with my first graders at the beginning of the school year before they have begun to read?" she is also asking, more generally: How does children's reading development relate to their writing development? Does some explicit instruction in letter-sound relationships have to precede children's expressive uses of those relationships? Do children have knowledge of these relationships before they begin formal reading instruction? If they do, where does this knowledge come from? What is the relationship between "errors" and growth in writing? One feature of the questions that prompt teacher research is that they emanate solely from neither theory nor practice, but from critical reflection on the intersection of the two.

**Generalizability.** The criterion of generalizability has often been used to discount the value of research prompted by the questions of individual teachers and conducted in single classrooms. However, as Zumwalt (1982) effectively argues, there is a growing realization in the research community that the positivistic paradigm which attempts to formulate general laws is not the appropriate one for understanding educational phenomena. Zumwalt points out that generalizations about teaching and learning are by definition context-free. Zumwalt is arguing that rather than laws about what works generically in classrooms, we need insights into how things work within the contexts of particular classrooms.

A similar point is made by interpretive researchers who argue that understanding one classroom helps us better to understand the complexities of all classrooms. Teachers are uniquely situated to conduct such inquiries: they have opportunities to observe learners over long periods of time and in a variety of academic and social situations; they often bring many years of knowledge about the culture of the community, school, and classroom; and they experience the ongoing events of classroom life in relation to their particular roles as teachers. This set of lenses sets the perspectives of teachers apart from those of others who look in classrooms. Knoblauch and Brannon (1988) make a related point in their recent article on the phenomenological basis of teacher research. "The story-telling of the teacher-inquirer in a classroom devoted to language practices has its peculiar features and makes a distinctive contribution to our knowledge of school experience ...The telling aims not at selectivity or simplification but at richness of texture and intentional complexity" (p. 24).
Theoretical Frameworks. There is also considerable disagreement about the ways in which teacher research may be theoretically grounded. In a discussion of practical theories of teaching, Sanders and McCutcheon (1986) argue that teaching requires intentional and skillful action within real-world situations. The success of these actions depends on the ability to perceive relevant features of complex, problematic, and changeable situations and to make appropriate choices. The knowledge necessary to perform these professional tasks has been called "theories of action" (Argyris, 1982). Rather than make a distinction between professional knowledge and educational theory, as is usually done, Sanders and McCutcheon make the case that professional knowledge is essentially theoretical knowledge. This position contrasts with North's (1987) recent analysis of practitioners' knowledge in composition. North calls professional knowledge "lore," and defines it as "the accumulated body of traditions, practices, and beliefs in terms of which practitioners understand how writing is done, learned and taught" (p. 22). Although North seems critical of the fact that practitioner knowledge has been devalued, conceptions like his may contribute to its devaluation by suggesting that the structure of this knowledge is experiential and driven only by pragmatic logic. From Norm's perspective, then, teachers' knowledge would hardly qualify as theory, and indeed in North's discussion of practical inquiry - his version of teacher research - there is little mention of theory.

Just as our earlier discussion indicated that there are controversies within the academic community about the feasibility of discovering generalizable laws about teaching, there are similar questions raised about the kinds of theory appropriate to applied fields like education. In applied fields, it has been proposed that various combinations of facts, values and assumptions may better capture the state of knowledge than conventional scientific theories (House, 1980; Zumwalt, 1982). This combination may be particularly compatible with, and productive for, the emerging game of teacher research which reflects the diverse perspectives teachers bring to the process.

Editor's Note

A major challenge of our research is to find creative, thorough and exact ways to discover what we don't yet know about language learning and development and the social and cognitive processes that underlie them. A major challenge of our teaching is to find, within the context of the classroom, creative, thorough, and exact ways to make similar discoveries about our students and about how they learn to read and write. In a sense, teachers hone, daily, the science of investigation that we call research. Casting new light on this crucial process, teacher research makes visible the critical system that constitutes what we have come to name "practical knowledge" and opens it up to professional scrutiny. This issue of The Quarterly is devoted to this important subject, addressing it from a variety of angles.

Susan Lytle and Marilyn Cochran-Smith offer ways to conceptualize teacher research, supporting its validity as a way of knowing and showing how teachers across the country are applying its principles both inside and outside the
classroom. Marian Mohr introduces three teacher researchers whom she works with in Fairfax County, Virginia, who tell stories of how teacher research has supported their development in the classroom and their development as resources to other teachers. Jane Juska reports on her own teacher research, a project to discover the effects of computers on the writing of at-risk high school students. And, finally, an unmanned bibliography points the way toward useful readings on the subject of teacher research. Veering from our teacher research theme, in this issue, too, we present a review by Donald McQuade of Mike Rose's Lives on the Boundary, new from Macmillan's Free Press.

This issue of The Quarterly is an introduction of sorts to future issues that will focus on teacher research. We look forward, for example, to three interrelated articles to appear later this year that address the relationship of teacher research to university research. We invite your contributions and your response on this subject.

--M.S.

Documentation and Analysis. In many respects the forms of documentation in teacher research resemble the forms used in academic research, particularly the standard forms of interpretive research. Field notes about classroom interactions, interviews with students and teachers, and collections of documents (e.g. students' writing and drawing, test scores, teachers' plans end handouts) are commonly collected by teacher-researchers. In addition, teacher-researchers often keep extensive journals and audio and video tape small and large group discussions, peer and teacher-student conferences, students' debates, role plays and dramatic productions, as well as their own classroom presentations. Like rigorous university-based qualitative research, a strength of teacher research is that it often entails multiple data sources which can be used to confirm and/or illuminate one another. Some university researchers equate data collection with training in the traditions of social science research, yet many teachers already collect some of these data systematically in the course of the normal activity of teaching. Further, a variety of teacher-to-teacher collaborative arrangements, mentioned in the next sections, enables teachers to acquire sophisticated and sensitive observation skills grounded in the context of actual classrooms and schools. Like their forms of documentation, the methods teacher-researchers use for data analysis both resemble and differ from those of university researchers. In our next section, where we posit a working typology for teacher research, we look carefully at the interpretive frames teachers use to analyze classroom data.

A Working Topology for Teacher Research

In arguing for the inclusion of teacher research in the knowledge base for teaching, we are not simply equating teacher research with practitioner knowledge or all kinds of teacher writing, nor are we attempting to attach to the term "teacher" the higher status
term "researcher" in order to alter common perceptions of the profession. Rather we think it is important to broaden the concept of teacher research. To do so we take as a working definition for teacher research - **systematic, intentional inquiry conducted by teachers**. Derived from an ongoing survey of the literature of teacher writing, this definition highlights the fact that there already exists a wide array of writing by teachers that is appropriately regarded as "research." By "systematic" we refer primarily to ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record. By "intentional" we signal that teacher research is an activity that is planned rather than spontaneous. Our emphasis on intention is in keeping with Boomer's (1987) suggestion that "to learn deliberately is to research" (p. 5) and with Britton's (1987) notion that "every lesson should be for the teacher an inquiry, some further discovery, a quiet form of research ... (p. 15). By "inquiry" we suggest that teacher research stems from or generates questions and reflects teachers’ desires to make sense of their experiences - to adopt a learning stance toward classroom life, or in Berthoff's sense (1979), to interpret and REsearch the information one already has.

We propose four categories as a tentative typology of teacher research. By describing examples of four types and showing how each is "systematic, intentional inquiry;" we make the case that many kinds of teacher writing can and should contribute to the knowledge base of the school and university communities.

**Teachers' Journals.** *A (Philadelphia) Teacher's Journal* (1985), contains selections from a narrative journal written by first grade teacher Lynne Strieb over a school year. One way to read and understand Strieb's journal is as a teacher's attempt to make sense of her daily work life as a teacher. She seems to be addressing how she connects with her students, how students learn to make sense of the world around them, and how she uses writing to perceive and understand her evolution as a teacher. In Strieb's words,

> The more I wrote, the more I observed in my classroom and the more I wanted to write. As I reread my journal I got more ideas for teaching. I expanded the journal to include other aspects of teaching--anecdotes, observations of children and their involvement in activities, interactions with parents both in and out of school, my plans, descriptions of the pressures on public school teachers. I also wrote about my continuing education through my own reflections and the questions that emerged, through books, and through association with colleagues. (p.3)

In Strieb's journal we find records of lessons, conversations, children's questions, and detailed descriptions of specific interactions with particular children. In some entries Strieb provides a narrative account of the ongoing daily stream of classroom events; in others she consciously breaks that frame in order to synthesize retrospectively her efforts in certain areas. The journal seems to function here as a way for Strieb to step back from the daily stream, take stock of what is happening, and assess the ways that children respond. In her journal Strieb searches for meaning: the patterns or structures which
organize her own teaching and which characterize the children's efforts to learn and cope with the classroom environment.

As inquiry, Strieb's journal contains many implicit and some explicit questions: How can I help children learn English? How can I make children feel comfortable in my class? How can I help this class become a community? What counts as play, what counts as work, and how do the children figure out the differences in my classroom? What do I do about issues of race and gender in my classroom; what is my role here as a teacher? How do children learn to read in this class? What roles do they play in each other's learning? When should I go with a child's ideas, when do I intervene? How can I connect with children's emotions?

There are rich data here about many of the central issues of schooling: how a classroom becomes a community, how a teacher uses children's questions to build, plan and interweave class discussions, how a teacher connects with the interests and needs of individual children, and how a teacher's routines express what counts most to her in her unique context. Strieb's journal also reveals the inherent uncertainty and tentativeness of teaching. The restless questioning that punctuates her journal contrasts dramatically with the certainty of the instructional principles asserted by the literature in effective teaching. Strieb's journal helps to make clear that teachers' journals are more than anecdotal records or loose chronological accounts of particular classroom activities. As systematic intentional inquiry, journals provide windows on what goes on in school through teachers' eyes and in teachers' voices and on some of the ways they use writing to shape and inform their work lives.

**Essays by Teachers.** We include in the category of essays full-length monographs as well as briefer essays regularly published in academic and professional journals. Despite many forums, teachers' essays are not generally counted as part of the formal knowledge base about teaching, perhaps because they are usually personal, retrospective, and often based on the "narrow" perspective of a single teacher. Rather than disqualifying essays from the knowledge base, however, it is our view that these characteristics are part of what recommends them. All are systematic intentional inquiries. They use as their data teachers' experiences often over long periods of time. To explore teachers' questions, essays select and analyze significant events and features from the ongoing stream of classroom and school life. By analyzing the patterns and discrepancies that occur, teachers use the interpretive frameworks of practitioners to provide a truly emic, or insider, view that is different from that of an observer, even if that observer assumes an ethnographic stance and spends considerable time in the classroom.

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Like rigorous university-based qualitative research, a strength of teacher research is that it often entails multiple data sources which can be used to confirm and/or illuminate one another.
Sometimes A Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience (1985), Eliot Wigginton's recent monograph on twenty years of high school English teaching, serves as a highly visible example of an extended essay written from a teacher's point of view. As Wigginton points out, the book attempts to answer the broad set of questions which he encountered in talking about his work and to encourage other teachers to continue asking questions of themselves, their students and others. To tell the story of Foxfire, Wigginton draws heavily on his own journals, letters, in-school memos and directives, passages from student writing, and the writing assignments he set for himself. Like Strieb, Wigginton comments directly on the ways writing functioned all along for him as a way to make meaning of his daily teaching life.

Sometimes a Shining Moment contains many explicit and implicit questions. All of these seem to be subsumed by the search to understand how teachers can make schools work for adolescents. Among his questions are: How can teachers get students to come together for a "common cause"? How can they integrate innovative projects into the normal curriculum? How do schools relate to communities? What is power in education? Who has it and who doesn't? What is the extent of the teacher's power? How can teachers help adolescents understand the problems of the world outside the school? How can teachers help students move beyond themselves and their new understandings "into a caring and active relationship with others"? (p. 308). What are the purposes of public high schools? How can teachers find compelling activities which serve all the goals of education simultaneously? Structured by Wigginton's questions, the essay moves from a primary focus on students to concerns about teaching and the assumptions of teachers in general to exploration of curriculum and schooling. At least two themes function as interpretive frames throughout the book: the discontinuities and connections between life inside and outside of school and the forces which constrain and support the integration of adolescents' lives and the school curriculum.

The centerpiece of Sometimes a Shining Moment is a long chapter Wigginton calls "Some Overarching Truths." In this chapter he proposes a number of characteristics common to effective teaching which he has generalized from twenty years experience. The evidence for each proposition is Wigginton's skillful synthesis of events and interactions that occurred within his own classroom and school as well as his reading of educational philosophers and theorists. The validity of Wigginton's generalizations is the extent to which they resonate with the experiences of other teachers, his primary audience for this analysis. Fenstermacher (1986) reminds us that only some educational research improves educational practice; this happens, he suggests, "if [the research] bears fruitfully on the premises of practical arguments in the minds of teachers" (p.47). Wigginton's essay has unusual potential to inform the "practical arguments" or interpretive frameworks that teachers use to understand, articulate, and ultimately improve their own practices.

Accounts of Oral Inquiry Processes. Like teachers' journals and essays, oral inquiry processes represent teachers' self-conscious and often self-critical attempts to make sense of their daily work by talking about it in planned ways. The reflective-descriptive
processes developed by Carini and her colleagues at the Prospect Center and School in Bennington, Vermont, provide a good example of formalized teacher inquiry procedures which are documented through written transcription or thorough note-taking. Prospect's Documentary Processes structure the oral interactions of groups of practitioners who convene specifically for the purpose of exploring teachers' and children's learning, among them The Reflective Conversation, The Description of Children's Work and The Staff Review of a Child. Many other teacher groups engage in similar activities. Wigginton and his staff members meet weekly to talk about their courses by sharing proposed and already-tried activities which others then critique and analyze. The Philadelphia Teachers Learning Cooperative and the Boston Women's Teachers' Group regularly convene to explore issues and practices across contexts by examining particular cases. Unlike teachers' journals and essays which may be completed by a teacher researcher writing alone, oral inquiry processes as a type of teacher research are by definition collaborative: the primary outcomes - the conjoined understandings of the participants - have immediate and obvious value.

An example of systematic intentional inquiry, Prospect's Documentary Processes are based on a phenomenological view of knowledge and learning; by participating in these experiences, teachers grapple with children's meanings as expressed in their projects and with the varied meanings that their colleagues find in these. An important part of the procedure is that a recorder keeps careful notes of each participant's insights which are used to create periodic summaries and statements of the organizing concepts perceived in the work at hand and in some cases added to school records. The result is often an unusually rich and complex rendering of patterns which invites rather than forecloses further interpretations.

In addition, when documentary records are preserved, teachers can return to the texts of their deliberations to "REsearch" their own knowledge and insights. These acquire additional significance over time as teachers confront new situations in their own classrooms and schools. Like the archive of children's work preserved at the Prospect Center, records of teachers' oral inquiry processes are potentially of great value for the broader community of teachers, teacher educators, and university researchers. Buchanan and a group of Philadelphia teachers (1988) are currently working toward this end by proposing the development of an urban archive of teachers' writing and oral inquiry as well as the children's work from which it stems. Buchanan makes an eloquent case for the need for an archive and essentially a case for teacher research:

Every day teachers' observations and reflection on the teaching process, on their students, and on educational issues are irretrievably lost because there is no provision for preserving them. Such materials are essential for shaping and recording the evolution of the profession. Similarly the day-to-day writing, art work and number work of students is rarely saved in a systematic manner. What children don't take home is often thrown away. Other than the presentation of test scores, there are few large-scale efforts to demonstrate what and how children are learning in school. (p.2)
The Archive will serve as a rich resource for teachers, researchers and other professionals who are interested in the long view of what is happening to children in our society. (p.1)

Buchanan's proposal emanates from a decade of work with her colleagues and from her frustration about the relationship between academic research and teacher knowledge. As she points out, the systematic collection of teachers' inquiries and children's work will "give scholars an unobtrusive, 'inside view' of classrooms which is currently not available" (pp. 1-2) and which is, we believe, sorely needed.

Classroom Studies. Our final category, classroom studies, includes most of what others currently term "teacher research." Several volumes describing this work have recently been published (Bissex & Bullock, 1987; Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Main & MacLean, 1987; Myers, 1985). Classroom studies most closely resemble university-based research and are the type of teacher research best known to readers of The Quarterly. Classroom studies exemplify the potential of teacher research to reform classroom practice by prompting powerful intellectual critiques of assumptions, goals and strategies. Many demonstrate the recursiveness of the teacher research process wherein questions are continuously reformulated, methods are revised, and analysis is ongoing. The value of teachers' classroom studies is not necessarily self-evident to the academic research community although in many cases the issues addressed are the same as those addressed by university researchers. For example, teachers also address discrepancies between intended and enacted curricula; authority, power, and autonomy in writing classrooms; and the culture of classrooms as social constructions of students and teachers. We are suggesting that the evolving questions of teachers studying their own classrooms often indicate avenues of inquiry that traditional research may not have considered or found important.

Communities For Teacher Research

Participation in teacher research requires considerable effort by innovative and dedicated teachers to stay in their classrooms and at the same time carve out opportunities to inquire and reflect on their own practice. While university-based research occupies an unquestioned position at the center of the institution's mission, teacher research unfortunately struggles on the margins of K-12 schools. Many teacher-researcher groups operate only peripherally within, and some entirely outside of, school systems and sometimes represent teachers' resistance to the role of teacher as technician. Myers (1987) has argued persuasively for the institutionalization of teacher research. He cautions against adding teacher research to educational institutions as they now exist. Recently a few school districts have considered institutionalizing the role of teacher-researchers by establishing new positions that combine teaching and researching responsibilities: as lead teachers, teacher mentors, peer supervisors, or, as has been proposed in the Pittsburgh public school system, as researchers-in-residence who collect and manage data for the school principal and faculty. It is unclear at this time what the impact of innovations like these will be. It would be unfortunate, however, if they
inadvertently buttressed the traditional association between gaining increased power and responsibility in the school system and abandoning the classroom.

Realistically the complex and extensive demands on teachers' time and attention place obvious limitations on what teachers can manage to do. The wry comments of Philadelphia Writing Project teacher Rayon Goldfarb illustrate this dilemma:

*I finally determined why I felt such strong resistance to the notion of teacher as researcher. My view has always been that the primary purpose of a teacher is to TEACH. There are lessons to be prepared, papers to be read (the first draft), conferences to be held, papers to be graded (the final copy), exams to be designed and graded, report card grades to be calculated, questions to be answered, college recommendations to be written, essay contests to be supervised, monthly attendance reports to be calculated, students' personal problems to be attended to, lessons to be prepared for students who are in the hospital or who are going out on maternity, bulletin boards to be changed, journals to be read, and PA announcements, classroom disruptions, disciplines, IEP’s, CEH 14's, and standardized exams to be endured. And I am not even one of those compulsively obsessed teachers who believes in devoting every waking hour to my teaching and my students. How can someone do research without neglecting her responsibilities to her students?*

Goldfarb's remarks remind us that much of what is involved in conducting systematic inquiry inside classrooms is outside of the range of activities normally expected of or rewarded in teaching. Supporting teacher research clearly involves dramatic structural and organizational changes. Agendas for teacher research and school restructuring clearly need to be linked. In order for teachers to begin to play a prominent role in identifying and studying important school and district issues, standard school routines and practices would have to be altered and power and decision-making distributed among teachers, specialists, and administrators.

In many school systems, however, teachers have not been encouraged to work together on voluntary, self-initiated projects or to speak out with authority about instructional, curricular, and policy issues. When groups of teachers have the opportunity to work together as highly professionalized teacher-researchers, they become increasingly articulate about issues of equity, hierarchy, and autonomy, and increasingly critical of the technocratic model that dominates much of school practice. The need for highly professionalized teachers is consonant with Aronowitz and Giroux's (1985) call for teachers as "transformative intellectuals" who have the potential to resist what Apple (1986) refers to as "deskilling" mandates and to change their own teaching practices. In a recent collection of case studies conducted by teachers of writing, editors Bissex and Bullock (1987) suggest that "by becoming researchers teachers take control over their classrooms and professional lives in ways that confound the traditional definition of teacher and offer proof that education can reform itself from within" (p. xi). In the same vein, they also argue that teacher research is a natural agent of change: "doing classroom research changes teachers and the teaching profession from the inside out, from the
bottom up, through changes in teachers themselves. And therein lies the power" (p. 27). While we agree with the direction of these claims, we are concerned about school reform that depends primarily on the efforts of teachers without school restructuring. Because many features of school systems constrain bottom-up, inside-out reform, it seems unlikely that systems traditionally organized to facilitate top-down change will readily acknowledge and build upon the potential impact of teacher-initiated reforms. Furthermore, as teachers empower themselves by adopting a more public and authoritative stance on their own practice, they are more likely to create the contexts for their own students to be empowered as active learners. Ironically, and indeed unfortunately, many school systems are slow to realize the potent link between teacher research and enhanced student learning.

A variety of arrangements have been proposed to enable teachers to do research. These include: reduced loads, released time, paid overtime, or summer seminars or institutes in which teachers write and reflect about their teaching practices (Mohr & MacLean, 1987); collaborative networks, study groups, or research teams; opportunities to visit voluntarily the classrooms of teachers in other grade levels, subject areas, schools, and school districts; financial support for their research projects; and a variety of formal and informal channels for the dissemination of teachers' work. The most important factor in determining where and how these arrangements work is whether or not school systems allow teachers, on a voluntary basis, to participate in designing and revising these new structures.

In order for teachers to carry out the systematic and self-critical inquiry that teacher research entails, networks need to be established and forums created by teachers so that ongoing collaboration is possible. These networks begin to function as intellectual communities for teachers who, more typically, are isolated from one another. Two examples in which we are involved are PhilWP (The Philadelphia Writing Project, a school-university partnership and urban site of the National Writing Project at the University of Pennsylvania) and Project START ("Student Teachers as Researching Teachers," a school-university collaborative teacher education program). Both involve groups of experienced and beginning teachers who meet regularly to read, write, problem-solve, and particularly, to ask each other a wide range of questions about theory and practice.

In PhilWP, teachers engage in several forms of teacher research. Teachers bring their journals and students' writing collected over time to monthly meetings where they conduct staff reviews, frame and reframe their questions, and reflect on children's work. So far four collections of teacher essays, entitled Work in Progress, include informal analyses of classroom practice, adaptations of oral presentations, proposals for curriculum revision, and commentaries on issues in teachers' work lives. The cross-visitation program, invented and designed by project teachers, makes it possible during the school day for teachers to visit, be visited by, and consult with other teachers not in the project. Teachers study collaboratively the range and variation of writing that occurs across classrooms and schools. A smaller research group is documenting the
evolution of the cross-visitation program as a model of collegial learning and staff
development.

In Project START experienced teachers, student teachers, and teacher educators work
together in three settings which support teacher research - weekly in-school meetings of
teacher-researcher teams composed of three to four student teachers, their cooperating
teachers, and one university supervisor, monthly meetings at the university of all the
teacher research teams, and the graduate course in which these student teachers are
concurrently enrolled. These three settings provide the contexts in which participants
study learning and teaching in single classrooms from their three perspectives and make
comparisons across classrooms and grade levels as well as across urban and suburban,
independent and public, and small and large schools. Student teachers, cooperating
teachers and supervisors also keep dialogue journals on theoretical as well as practical
issues. Through weekly and monthly meetings they inquire into ways to observe children,
form classroom communities, and ask questions about and plan for language and literacy
development in the classroom.

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Although we are arguing that teacher research constitutes a legitimate arena of formal
knowledge about teaching, its status and value have yet to be determined by school-based
teachers, the interpretive community for whom it is primarily intended. Just as university
researchers have evolved a complex set of criteria and standards for judging the quality
and contribution of research in the academic community, teachers over time will develop
a similarly complex set of standards for evaluating the research generated in and for their
community.

We are not suggesting that teacher research ought to be the entire agenda for the
enhanced professionalization of teaching. There are obviously complex problems
involved even in calling for teacher research. Certainly, as Myers (1985) rightly argues,
"telling teachers they should do teacher research is...an inadequate way to begin" (p.
126). To encourage teacher research, we must first address incentives for teachers, the
creation and maintenance of supportive networks, the reform of rigid organizational
patterns in schools, and the hierarchical power relationships that characterize most of
schooling. Nor are we arguing that teacher research ought to occupy a privileged position
in relation to research on teaching in general. To resolve the problematic relationship
between academic research and teacher research it will be necessary to confront directly
controversial issues of voice, power, ownership, status and role in the broad educational
community. If school and university researchers begin to address these problems, perhaps
the issues dividing research on teaching and teacher research will become instead
catalysts to enhance research in both communities.

Through their research, teachers can contribute to the critique and revision of existing
theory by describing discrepant and paradigmatic cases as well as providing data that
grounds or moves toward alternative theories. What teachers bring will alter, and not just
add to, what is known about teaching. As the body of teacher research accumulates, it
will undoubtedly prompt reexamination of current assumptions about learners, language and classroom processes.

References


*Susan Lytle is Director of the Philadelphia Writing Project. Marilyn Cochran-Smith is Director of Project START. Both are on the faculty of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.*