

## Teacher Research, Professional Growth, and School Reform

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In a casual conversation during a teacher research meeting in Chicago, Tom Daniels commented on how teacher research meetings and especially the sustained opportunity to talk to other teachers helped him and his peers learn and grow:

We can never discount the value of having the time for teachers to sit around a table and talk to each other about what they do, how it's affecting them, and how they feel. Teachers notoriously never get the time to do that and I think that's really crucial to helping them understand what they do. (M-CLASS Chicago local meeting)<sup>1</sup>

In San Francisco, Phi Potestio, who was part of the same network as Daniels, explained how the more solitary act of doing research yielded similar benefits for him:

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<sup>1</sup>All transcriptions consist of the exact words of the speaker. They have been edited to delete speech hesitations (e.g., "uh," "um,") and repetitions (e.g., "I I um I think" becomes "I think"). In addition, when other speakers interrupt the flow of talk with backchannel cues (e.g., softly spoken "Uh um" and the like), these are included only if they are necessary to make a point and then are placed inside backslashes, e.g., /Postestio: Yeah/ where they occur in the flow of talk. Insertions to clarify the speaker's meaning are included in brackets. Sometimes talk is included in parentheses with UC to mark that the tape-recorded language was unclear and that the transcriptionist made a best guess. Insertions made to clarify the meaning are included in brackets.

Because of the nature of my research question [How do students learn to support their opinions in my multicultural middle school social studies classroom?] and because of my total infatuation with reflection as part of my role, I'm indebted to this project. . . . I'm taking small deliberate steps a lot of times that I either didn't notice that I was doing before or that I never realized I was doing. . . . And I think I also am seeing things more clearly in the kids' development, especially as far as their writing goes. And a part of that is just because I'm focusing in on them. (M-CLASS San Francisco local meeting)

By the end of the year, Potestio went even further: "I think [teacher research is] much more valuable than anything you learn in education school." He continued by suggesting, "It would be nice to institute it so that training teachers, or even student teachers, are to some extent evaluating themselves this way" (M-CLASS San Francisco site meeting).

Those who write about teacher research frequently comment on its power to stimulate teacher growth and often assume that professional development is the main purpose of the enterprise (e.g., in the United States, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Hubbard & Miller, 1993, 1999; Mohr & MacLean, 1987; and see also British, Australian, German and cross-national writing and collections by Boomer, 1987; McTaggart, 1997; and Winter, 1989). My Berkeley colleagues and I have also observed that almost all of the teachers in the three teacher research networks we have participated in share Daniels's and Potestio's feelings about the growth that comes when they talk to other teachers in teacher research groups and when they conduct their research.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines the growth process in these teacher research networks. It reaches beyond the claim that growth occurs to attempt to characterize the nature of that growth.

Ironically, we did not even conceptualize the first two networks primarily as professional development activities. In the first, the original Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools (M-CLASS), of which Daniels and Potestio were part, we and a number of teacher collaborators designed a teacher research/university research collaboration to generate knowledge about literacy and learning in urban multicultural classrooms. This network consisted of groups of experienced and highly recommended English and social studies teachers in Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and the San Francisco Bay Area. When these teachers entered the network, neither we nor they thought that they had much growing to do; they were chosen for their expertise. Our goal was to write a book that would reflect that expertise. The book that resulted contains the writings of the teachers in the M-CLASS network and is titled *Inside City Schools: Investigating Literacy*

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<sup>2</sup>My Berkeley colleagues for the first two networks included Elizabeth Radin Simons and Julie Kalnin as major collaborators. In the third network, I worked alone.

*and Learning in Multicultural Classrooms* (Freedman, Simons, Kalnin, Casareno, & the M-CLASS teams, 1999).

The second network, the M-CLASS Site Based Network (SBN), had a somewhat different profile. This network was located in three schools in three different school districts (Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco) and had as its goal action at school sites and, secondarily, contributions to knowledge by teacher researchers (see Freedman, 2001; Kalnin, 2000). It was composed of three experienced teacher researchers from the San Francisco site of the original network, and three less experienced teachers from their schools. The third network, M-CLASS Multicultural Urban Secondary English (MUSE), was the only one with learning as a central goal. It was a graduate seminar for Berkeley's Credential/MA program. The goal was to teach new teachers to reflect on their practice in ways that would help them solve problems throughout their careers (see Freedman et al., 1999).

In all three networks, the learning process was a protracted one. It took at least 4 months and sometimes longer for the teachers in all three networks to even begin to comment on the benefits of the process. They did not initially see teacher research as especially worthwhile. That was the case for Daniels and Potestio in the first network, in spite of their ultimate high praise for teacher research and Potestio's desire to institutionalize it, just as it was the case for Jessica Gilmore, a first-year teacher in the MUSE program. Reflecting back on the flow of her experience over her teacher research year, Gilmore recalled, "I was really reluctant coming in. I didn't think I wanted to do it my first year." However, in the end she concluded, "I've *really* enjoyed doing it. I loved it" (MUSE exit interview).

This chapter explores what it is about being part of a teacher research network that ultimately leads teacher researchers to report having reaped significant benefits. Understanding precisely how and why teacher research can lead so many teachers to change from skeptics to engaged learners and to deepen their professional commitment can inform us about the principles that underlie both meaningful professional development programs and successful teacher research groups, even those with purposes other than professional development.

## OVERVIEW

These three networks shared many of the characteristics of Wenger's (1998) "communities of practice" (p. 86), where meaning is negotiated across time and where learning is part of the practice. In all three networks the teachers talked and wrote about three broad topics that led them to elaborate and often change their notions of teaching and learning: dealing with teaching problems, taking teaching risks, and understanding students.

to:

;- "Gilmore" above/?

Other descriptions of teacher research meetings (e.g., Mohr & MacLean, 1987) portray teachers engaging in discussions on similar topics. What I found surprising was the fact that different teachers participated in systematically different ways. Some tended to discuss their teaching problems, whereas others mostly gave advice or listened. Some talked about experimentation and risk taking and received support from other group members for these activities. Some discussed their students and got help in understanding the motivations behind their students' actions and the details of the learning processes. Some focused on more than one of these topics, whereas others did not.

In the teacher research networks, participating as an initiator of talk on any one of these topics provided space for the teachers to shift their stance toward their work and to renew their commitment to their profession and ultimately to their students and their students' learning. They all reported rarely finding space for any of these kinds of supportive talk and writing in their everyday teaching lives. In the end, they worked to renegotiate their identities as teachers as they discussed these topics. In Wenger's (1998) terms, such identity work is essential to the learning that occurs within a community of practice where "it is a matter of investment of one's identity and thus of negotiating enough continuity to sustain an identity" (p. 97). The next sections illustrate how different teachers took advantage of or initiated different learning opportunities.

## DISCUSSING PROBLEMS

In all three networks, the university facilitators presented research as a process that requires tackling and therefore explicitly admitting and discussing problems. In this way, we encouraged problem-focused writing and talk about both research and teaching. As one of the project leaders, I explained to the experienced teachers in the original M-CLASS project during a Chicago site meeting at the start of the research year how I expected identifying problems in one's classroom or school to play a central role in decisions about research questions:

I think [the research question is] most interesting if you take something that's a hard problem for you, and that [is a] problem for other folks too. . . . And it's going to be a problem that we need collective minds to start to work on.

Immediately after I offered this opinion, several of the teachers admitted that they continually struggled with difficult issues, an approach that they felt was a characteristic of good teaching.

The MUSE students were first-year teachers, so as the teacher of their graduate seminar I raised the issue differently. I tried to show them how teacher research could actually help them solve problems in their classrooms:

The thing to look out for when you start teaching is things that are problems for you. Day to day there are going to be things that are problems. This happens when you're teachers. Sometimes you get overwhelmed by the problems, and you just want to go into the bathroom and cry. But if you can turn the problems into something interesting to try to figure out, if you can turn them into puzzles, instead of letting them overwhelm you, then that's the kind of thing that teacher research can do. (MUSE class)

Across all the networks, the teachers talked freely during teacher research meetings about problems that were extrinsic to their teaching and their classrooms—safety in the school, administrative incompetence, violence in the neighborhoods, poverty, gang activity, and the like. But the teachers varied in their comfort levels in talking about and ultimately writing about problems intrinsic to their teaching. Readings often stimulated problem-focused talk. Readings on multiculturalism and literacy in the original M-CLASS network and model teacher research articles in all three networks led to these discussions. Members of the original M-CLASS network read and discussed Lisa Delpit's article "The Silenced Dialogue" (1988), which evoked many complex emotions about issues of race and entitlement. In Boston, Delpit's article stimulated Nancy O'Malley to describe a dilemma she faced when interacting with Asian students in her creative writing class:

The students who want the authoritative figure and want to listen most to me as the teacher are the Asian students who, in fact, need the verbal and oral skills the most. Because most of them are coming into a new language after only 2 and 3 years. And so there's some great dichotomy in the class where they're the ones who need it [oral practice] most, and yet they're the most unwilling because their culture says to them, "It's not so important to listen to Eileen's piece of writing." They want to know what the answer is, and we have this constant tension. (M-CLASS Boston site meeting)

O'Malley then said, "It's gotten better. They have listened to each other but it's a constant struggle." After voicing a problem, the experienced teachers often used this strategy of diminishing the significance or difficulty of the problem. This is perhaps a face-saving gesture, but in O'Malley's case it was also a move that seemed preparatory to taking the bigger risk of ruminating about her role in the problem: "I have to watch myself, too. In en-

couraging everyone to listen and all, I don't want to be too much of just the orchestrator. So it's a balancing act."

O'Malley did not directly ask the group for help, but she left space for its input. Group members first entered the conversation by disagreeing with her analysis of the problem. After acknowledging O'Malley's interpretation, Junia Yearwood, a Black teacher from the Virgin Islands, used her personal experience to provide an alternate interpretation of the Asian students' lack of participation, identifying with them and then looking from their points of view:

You kept saying it's a cultural thing, and that's true. But it's also that the Asian kids want access to the keys of knowledge, which for them is the mechanics of language, of your language, and that's why they're impatient. I'm not Asian, and that's how I felt when I came to school here in America. I came to college with specific /O'Malley: Yeah, sure./ reasons and the reasons was to get access to this great wealth of knowledge that I just knew was in these gates. /O'Malley: Mmhmm/ And when American kids took up half the period talking and arguing, I was livid. /O'Malley: Sure./ I did not want that because to me, and I heard Asians say the same exact thing, it is not that they are culturally programmed to do this; it's just that they're focused. They know what they want, and they think that they're being cheated of it.

The university facilitators (Liz Simons from Berkeley and Boston site leaders Roberta Logan and Joe Check) voiced agreement with Yearwood, but Simons also identified differences in Yearwood's and O'Malley's teaching contexts that might lead them to analyze the same problem differently: "Junia is dealing with kids who need a lot more. . . . Your [O'Malley's] kids are much more skilled writers just as starters. So that makes a huge difference."

Following this alternate analysis of the problem, one of the teachers, Eileen Shakespeare, moved the talk toward a solution. She suggested increasing the rigor of classroom talk so that immigrant students might benefit more. She referred O'Malley to the Jesuit discussion tradition, which she had appreciated as a student and which she called "hard intellectual discussion." She explained that Jesuit "discussion is managed in such a way that you can't just get away with just bullshitting. . . . There's a certain excellence expected of that discussion."

It is unclear whether O'Malley found Shakespeare's advice useful, or how she felt about Yearwood's point or the university-based facilitators' agreement with Yearwood. O'Malley neither agreed nor disagreed with any of these comments. However, she used her research to continue to grapple with her varied students' interactional styles as she supported their discoveries about themselves in her creative writing class, finding ways to create a classroom community in which participation structures ensured that all

of her students would speak. They all took a turn sharing their writing and elicited responses from the rest of the class. O'Malley discovered through her research how to teach her students explicitly to listen to their classmates, to notice what made professional writing and other students' writing strong and effective, and then to articulate their observations during the class discussion. Ultimately she found that she taught her students "interpersonal skills—ways of listening and responding—and analytical skills—ways of interpreting and expressing experiences" (Kalnin, 1999, p. 210). After analyzing O'Malley's process, Kalnin (1999) concluded:

The dual emphasis . . . on students' first writing their personal stories and then reading them out loud to their peers created a community in which students had the opportunity to listen to many stories and that did not necessarily match the narrow vision of success or failure communicated in media portrayals of family and culture. (p. 207)

O'Malley wrote about how one of her Asian students, Eric, a Vietnamese immigrant, first shared orally and then drafted and redrafted the story of his father's struggle to carry him from Vietnam to an Indonesian refugee camp. O'Malley commented on the power of his words and their impact on his fellow students:

Nothing that we could have read about Vietnamese struggle during the war could have been more vivid than that firsthand account, told by the infant who was saved, now a writer telling his own father's story. (Boston site meeting, October 31, 1992)

Eric himself stated in an interview, "When I write, I feel like I am in a holy world—a world of my own. I feel powerful because anything I want I can just write it down. It's in my head" (Kalnin, 1999, p. 207). O'Malley concluded that through her research with Eric and other students, "[I] recovered my own sense of worth as a teacher, privileged enough to witness great beauty and fortunate enough sometimes to help make it happen" (Kalnin, 1999, p. 205).

This example shows a teacher admitting and discussing problems she faced in her classroom. Teaching and research are intertwined in interesting ways. It seems more comfortable, at first, for O'Malley and the university facilitators to discuss research problems rather than teaching problems. The distance of talking about research and of discussing research-related readings seemed ultimately to allow O'Malley to grapple with topics in her everyday teaching. The challenges posed by Yearwood and others in her research group about her response to one of the readings seemed to merge into her research project. O'Malley engaged in a recursive process that involved discussion with fellow teacher researchers, doing research, and writing.

In the group context, O'Malley presented herself as having problems while Yearwood assumed the role of critic and Shakespeare the role of helper. Neither Yearwood nor Shakespeare discussed her own teaching problems; in addition, their research topics dealt with problems that were, at least on the surface, distanced from their teaching, whereas O'Malley dealt directly with her teaching. Such differences in role taking were typical across the three teacher research groups.

### TAKING RISKS

The second topic that led teachers to interrogate their practice and change their stance toward their work focused on taking risks in the classroom. In all three networks the university facilitators set risk taking as a goal for the teachers' research but not necessarily for their teaching. However, taking research-related risks often implied taking risks in the classroom. These risks involved the teachers in reconceptualizing important parts of their teaching. The teacher researchers sometimes used the group for support in taking teaching risks and then in dealing with the consequences.

In the Chicago M-CLASS group, Griselle Diaz-Gemmati showed how the other group members supported her risk taking. In the process, she revealed the multiple kinds of risks she took—with her research, her writing, her curricular decisions, and her interactions with her students. From the start, her research topic felt risky to her. She studied explicitly raising issues of race, ethnicity, and social class in her classroom. She also found writing about the topic risky. She told of her fears about the ways her audience might respond:

Will . . . a lot of people look at my piece and say, "Okay, so you've got them thinking about race. So what?" I still have that fear of committing it to paper, and pouring my emotions out. (Chicago site meeting)

Brenda Landau-McFarland offered support, asserting that public interest in Diaz-Gemmati's topic would be high:

I think it [your writing] will be very relevant to what's going on in the larger realm of society because we're making some tremendous transitions by the sheer fact of the political environment being different at this time.

Diaz-Gemmati interrupted to discuss the risks she was taking in her classroom. She was concerned that introducing sensitive curricular issues for her research was pushing her students to grow up too rapidly, to worry about issues that are too adultlike:

But you know what really shocks me, Brenda, is the fact that these 12- and 13-year-olds, the stuff that they say, and it's spontaneous, it's not rehearsed, the stuff that they say about inequality in society, gender issues, racial issues, ethnic issues [is] shocking.

Again Landau-McFarland provided support, this time by taking a less emotional stance toward the problem that Diaz-Gemmati perceived. What seemed shocking to Diaz-Gemmati seemed normal to Landau-McFarland: "But they're a microcosm of society." Diaz-Gemmati retorted, "You never think that these kids worry about stuff like that." Landau-McFarland reassured Diaz-Gemmati that her students' behavior was normal: "Sure they do. It affects them every day." A few turns later I reinforced Landau-McFarland's point:

I think bottom line for Griselle is that these kids live in a really complex world that they /Landau-McFarland: That's right./ have to navigate in, and they're not oblivious to it. Even though they're little, it affects them. And they are going to cope in various ways, but if everything is pushed under the table at school where they have people who can guide them and who can help them through it, if those people don't do that, then I think [the students are] missing something.

In the course of the discussion, Diaz-Gemmati began to feel more comfortable about introducing her new curriculum, but she still voiced lingering doubts:

[One student] in my classroom, quiet kid, one day came up to me after a heated discussion and said to me, "Why are you bringing all this crap into the room?"

Other group members joined Landau-McFarland in providing a perspective intended to reinforce Diaz-Gemmati's decision to follow the tack she had chosen. They expressed surprise that the students wanted to see only what one of the teachers called an "Alice in Wonderland" view of the world. At this point I asked Landau-McFarland to provide additional support for Diaz-Gemmati. She responded by saying:

Now what you basically have to tell them is that, "It's something that has to be learned, and this is what we're working on, and this is the way the world is. You may not have experienced it yet, but it will come your way. If it doesn't come your way, you're very fortunate, but you need to be aware that it's there." And that's what I tell them. I'm not saying I have a perfect classroom or anything of that sort because God knows I could tell you stories of me, but by the same token, you're getting to some point where they respect that they recognize that the tension is there, and that they will deal with it. Before they

didn't even want to recognize it. /Diaz-Gemmati: Mmm./ And they were killing each other, literally.

Landau-McFarland had begun by assuming the role of expert, giving directives to Diaz-Gemmati ("What you basically have to tell them is . . ."). However, to maintain her peer role, she quickly denied or at least modified this position when she demurred: "I'm not saying I have a perfect classroom."

An extended discussion ensued among the other teachers about what they consider a mistaken sense that school should be "antiseptic," a place where difficult and potentially explosive issues are avoided. Diaz-Gemmati did not contribute; she still had reservations about the wisdom of raising explosive topics. Only when the conversation turned to an issue that related less directly to her dilemma—how different teachers handle sexually explicit talk—did Diaz-Gemmati enter the conversation again.

Regardless of her discomfort, this conversation, and the many others like it across the year, provided Diaz-Gemmati with the support she needed to pursue her research about explicit discussions of race, ultimately to write about it, and to grow as a teacher. She concluded the chapter she wrote for the book about the M-CLASS project (Freedman et al., 1999) with the following admission:

I would be lying to myself if I pretended to be the teacher I was before I had initiated this project. If anything, this research has taught me that hard talk on candid issues can take place within the safety of classroom walls. I know that a society that is free of prejudice is many, many years away, but it's something I hope to keep striving for—even if it's only in the microcosm of life that comprises my classroom. (p. 76)

Just as O'Malley was willing to discuss her problems openly, Diaz-Gemmati positioned herself as a teacher willing to take risks (and to reveal her problems). Landau-McFarland assumed the role of helper, as Shakespeare and Yearwood did with O'Malley.

Members of the M-CLASS/SBN had similar feelings about the importance of taking risks as teachers, and they too received support from their teacher research group during the process. In the MUSE program, the new teachers did not talk about taking risks in the same ways that the more experienced teachers did. Everything they did felt like a risk. They did not yet have safe classroom routines from which it would feel risky to deviate. Instead, they discussed the importance of the group in providing "a safe place" where they did not feel threatened or criticized.

Across all three networks, the university facilitators worked with the teachers to create "safe" and nonjudgmental research groups where everyone would feel comfortable taking risks as researchers and writers and talk-

ing about risk-taking. For the more experienced teachers, this risk taking in the research arena and the support in the group setting fed into risk taking in the classroom. For the new teachers, it made the whole act of teaching, which was generally a risky business, more manageable.

## UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS

Although many of the teachers focused their research on changing their curriculum and taking risks in the process, another focus of research and group talk was learning about students' lives, with a goal of better understanding why students acted as they did and how they learned. Much of the time the need to understand students emerged because of a need to solve a problem related to the student or to teacher-student interactions. On many occasions, however, teachers wanted to learn about students independently of perceiving a problem. A key way the teachers got to know their students was by eliciting their stories, both oral and written.

A major reason to listen to students was to help them become more engaged in the academic enterprise and thereby reap its benefits. In New Orleans, Karen Alford, who was White, was having difficulty with one of her Black students. This student vocally expressed a negative attitude toward Whites and refused to write or do other school work. This example originated with a classroom problem but then became a research problem. Alford's fellow teacher researchers, several of them Black, collectively brainstormed with her about the possible motives behind the student's behavior. These teachers offered ideas for engaging the student in writing activities, which Alford thought in turn might help the student reflect on and possibly change her attitudes.

Alford opened the conversation by reading the New Orleans group a vignette about the time when Tracey told the whole class that she didn't like White people, not even her teacher "Ms. Karen." Alford explained her conflicts about handling the incident:

*She's entitled to a feeling. Still if a White child had said, "I do not like Black people," in my class, I would at least have a private conversation with that person. Somehow that remark would sound so hateful. But now I wonder how some of my White students might feel about Tracey's comment. It separates her from half of the students. (New Orleans local meeting, December 22, 1992)*

Alford explained that Tracey's academic difficulties began with her refusal to do homework. She believed that the curriculum she was developing for her teacher research would help Tracey if only she would do the work:

I think that some of this writing, the kind of writing and learning in the learning logs, would help her put things in perspective. If you put yourself into other people's stories, you see different points of view. It seems like that would help Tracey. Adolescents are so wrapped up in their lives. Everything is important and immediate. Maybe part of the reason we study history is to slow down a little.

Alford then revealed that Tracey had recently been suspended. The social worker had concluded that Tracey "has a real problem with authority." However, Alford saw the problem as more complex and offered the following evidence:

The only teacher she likes is Bernie, our P.E. coach who's Black. But to me, Bernie has been angrier at Tracey than any of us have. He's much stricter with the kids than I am. She likes him because he's African American, and she doesn't like us because we're White. And you know, I just have to live with that.

Group members tried to help Alford move beyond accepting Tracey as she is. They explained that Tracey's apparently oppositional actions might not be intended that way. Following up on something Alford said earlier about Tracey's difficult home life, site coordinator Cindy Roy hypothesized that Tracey sounded like a child for whom "things are probably out of control in her life at home." Alford concurred, and then Roy offered her explanation of the source of Tracey's difficulties; others voiced their agreement (note the many backchannels):

Maybe school is a place where she feels some control over what she can do, and she's in an environment that allows her to say those things and /Alford: Yeah./ that may not be such a bad thing. . . . It sounds to me like in your classroom she feels like she can be in control of what she thinks. /Ward: Uh huh./ And that's really /Valenti: Wonderful, yeah./ kind of exciting and wonderful because I have to admit, social workers always kind of choke me up when they say, "These children have problems with authority." Children don't have—[Alford laughs] /Williams-Smith: (UC)/ children have problems in that their lives are out of control, and they don't /Alford: Yeah./ have any way to take it back and control. And certainly this middle school years, are those years of, how much power can I get from a parent, from a school, from my friends.

Alford agreed that Tracey "digs herself in a hole":

If somebody likes her and supports her, she starts putting up /Roy: Barriers?/ this outright thing, "I do not like White people, and not even Ms. Karen" thing. Seemed to be like she was trying to get me to say, "Well then, I don't like you either." /Roy: Hmm./ /Herring: Uh huh. Uh huh./ And I'm not going to fall for that.

Then Alford and the rest of the group discussed in some detail the social worker's analysis and recommendations and their shock at how wrong they thought the social worker was:

- Alford: The social worker told me to stop caring about it. That's what she told me to do. She said—
- Herring: You can't stop it. You can't stop caring.
- Galley: What? The social worker told you?
- Alford: "You aren't gonna change her." She said, "You aren't gonna change things for her."
- Galley: It that right? Jesus Christ.
- Valenti: I don't think she meant stop caring about, did she use those words?
- Alford: She said, "Stop taking a personal—" Caring wasn't the word. She said, "You get personally involved with your students. Don't get so personally involved with them."
- Williams-Smith: Involved.
- Galley: You can't help it.
- Alford: To me that means stop caring, but—
- Galley: You can't help it.
- Herring: How can a teacher not become personally affected with.

The discussion began with Alford giving the facts of what the social worker said and the others responding. Sarah Herring and Reginald Galley were adamant in their disagreement, repeatedly saying "you can't" think the way the social worker does. Meanwhile, Elena Valenti at first tried to see the social worker's point of view, saying she couldn't have meant what Galley and Herring said she meant, "to stop caring." Alford agreed with Galley and Herring and then guided the group back to a discussion of Tracey's refusal to participate in the academic opportunities: "If Tracey would write more, I think it would help, but she doesn't do her homework." Alford explained that calling Tracey's parents is "not gonna bother Tracey," and concluded, "I can't make her sit down and write. /Roy: Right/ When she writes she's a very good writer."

The others continued to try to help Alford find a solution. Sarah Herring recalled how she handled one of her difficult students:

This is another story of one of the other kids that I had who was having problems and everything, and what I did. I told her to get a diary, make sure it has a lock and key. That's your personal partner there that you can talk to at any time you want to. So maybe you could suggest that she get a diary.

Alford built on Herring's idea with an even better one: "Maybe I could give her one." Herring added optimistically, "Then maybe, she would feel

personalized to you, and you could have a dialogue that way. And you could probably help her because I know it really helped this young lady."

Valenti offered another suggestion, related to what has worked for her as a teacher: "Those personal notes from the teacher usually bring them out a little bit." Others agreed that any personal contacts made a difference. As Herring said, "She may be looking for that attention, and she's saying that to you because sometimes they are rebellious." Alford appreciated these suggestions, and all of the teachers of color, led by Galley and Herring, made an attempt to reassure Alford that all would end well, that Tracey really liked her even though she said the opposite. Their explanations for Tracey's behavior moved from she wants "attention" to she likes you but she "doesn't know how to express it" to if she really disliked you "she wouldn't have anything to say to you" to she's conflicted because you're White and good.

At a later meeting, Alford spontaneously told Sarah Herring, as though it was now her own idea, "I think I'm going to give Tracey her own diary. I'm gonna buy her something like this and give it to her" (New Orleans site meeting). Although it is unclear whether Alford ever gave Tracey a diary, Alford concluded that the process of watching students, which she worked on as she became a teacher researcher, is critical to her teaching:

Doing this research project too. We had to be, so observant of our kids and so noticing them and noticing who they really were as learners that it helped me I think this year be a better teacher. (New Orleans local meeting)

Amy Bloodgood, one of the new teachers in the MUSE credential and MA program, illustrated how the new teachers used the research process to learn about their students. She wrote about how, as a first-year teacher, she felt too overloaded to focus on what was really most important to her, her students. She used her research to direct herself back to this most important classroom resource. She wrote in a letter to "the reader" that opened her teacher research MA paper:

I wanted my [research] question to provide me with a place to hear my students. I wanted my question to provide a place for my students to shout out silently. Ultimately, my question became: What insights can student weekly reflections reveal to me as a teacher? How will their revelations develop with time? . . .

After analyzing the initial data I believe in the importance of student feedback as an integral part of the classroom. They offered me valuable reminders about positive classroom practices, which I will share with you. However, the reflections took on a different form as I began to see students' lives peering through, as I began to understand what I was looking for. My students began to utilize the reflections as a place to let me in on their private lives.

As the year went on, because Bloodgood had created a weekly classroom space where her students knew she would ask for their thoughts and feelings, she learned not only about their private personal lives but also about heretofore secret academic needs. A most important moment occurred when one student wrote the following PS to her reflection: "PS will you tech me hwo to read" (Bloodgood, 1999, p. 22). Bloodgood explained:

After reading the reflection, I sat stunned in class and stared out at her as she held her book up intently during silent reading. She, after three months, asked me for what she needed. I could no longer sit idly and wonder how to best accommodate Alexis. She called out in a moment of vulnerability, in a moment of strength, and told me. In all honesty I do not know that Alexis's inability to read was a revelation to me, but it was a reminder that each of these individuals has his or her own needs and no matter how overwhelming that sometimes feels, I can't stop trying to meet them or at least understand them. (pp. 22-23)

Alexis's admission spurred Bloodgood to consult a reading specialist and together with the specialist to organize a focused tutoring program for Alexis. Later in the year Alexis wrote in her weekly reflection:

Hi how are you. Gas what my reading is getting bater I like being in you'r class. You are one of my favrit techers. I hope I am you'r favrit to. You diserv an award. (Bloodgood, 1999, p. 24)

As with the other two topics, when the teachers talked about and studied their students, they intertwined making changes in their teaching with doing their research. At times, they talked about their changes as local to their classrooms; Bloodgood shifted her teaching strategy. At other times they also discussed changes that involved interactions with other school personnel; Alford analyzed her talk with a school counselor about one of her students, and strengthened her disagreements with the counselor's points of view and her own analysis of the problem.

## CONCLUSIONS

The growth process in these teacher research networks was slow and complex. It required teachers to spend time reflecting on and analyzing their work and it depended on structured time for them to interact with peers and others who had something to contribute as well as time to collect and analyze data and think and write on their own. After identifying how the teachers interacted in the group meetings and then carried those interac-

tions over into their research, I now turn to aspects of how we jointly created the research process that seemed critical for the teachers' growth.

First, as happens in communities of practice, the teachers decided what they wanted to learn to improve their practice as teachers. They were not told what to learn. They decided on the basis of the issues they faced in their classrooms and schools. Many of the highly experienced teachers entered these teacher research networks with the idea that they would take the opportunity to write about what they did well, to tell other teachers about curriculum they had developed and found successful over the years, and to share their expertise. However, most quickly learned that the idea behind research is to look critically, not merely to share successes. It was through this process of critique, analysis, and self-challenge that the teachers found ways to learn and grow, regardless of where they began (see also Kalnin, 2000).

Second, the more detailed analysis of the talk shows that different teachers took different routes to learning, depending on their interests and comfort levels. In particular, they focused their attention during group meetings and often their research on different topics. Some took risks and discussed their fears but were reluctant to discuss their problems. Others did just the opposite. Others did both. Still others analyzed their students' classroom interactions, progress as learners, and responses to school work, sometimes in tandem with the other two topics and sometimes separately. Kalnin (2000) further found that what teachers were able to learn varied, depending on their level of experience and expertise when they entered the group.

Third, a supportive community where teachers can take risks as they work together to analyze their classroom life seemed essential to the process. This setting provided a space where teachers could learn through social interaction in a Vygotskian (Vygotsky, 1978) and Bakhtinian (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) sense. In particular, each community member came to the group with varied sorts of expertise, which they shared with others. Teaching and learning occurred quite naturally within Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development," that space where one can manage with the help of others what one cannot yet manage alone. Diaz-Gemmati, for example, could not have helped her students discuss issues of race and ethnicity without the ongoing support of the other teachers in her community. Further, as Bakhtin emphasized, the social interactions that lead to learning include multiple voices all coming together—from the university, the other teachers in the group, the students, the school social workers, the texts the students read, and the texts the teachers read.

Fourth, the situated research process gave teachers permission to focus narrowly and deeply, something that seemed luxurious in a work world where teachers must attend to so many competing demands. Not all chose

to narrow their focus, and those who did were hesitant at first. They feared that it was unfair to focus on one student more than another. They knew that they were responsible for the whole curriculum, not just part of it; they had to cope with large chunks every day. However, once they began to focus, they felt relieved and quickly saw how they could turn what they were learning about a student or a slice of school or classroom life into something that would have greater benefit and wider implications for them as teachers. Focusing narrowly was especially important to the new teachers. JoAnna Buechart in the MUSE program reflected on this aspect of the research:

I can just look at one thing and not feel like, "Okay, well, how am I in classroom management? How am I in this, how am I in that?" . . . I really think that it was nice to just allow myself to just think about one thing and didn't feel guilty that I was thinking about just one thing. (MUSE exit interview)

In many ways the teachers in these three groups assumed the kind of inquiry stance that Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2001) defined as "knowledge-of-practice." In this stance,

It is assumed that knowledge is generated when teachers treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation at the same time that they treat the knowledge and theory produced by others as generative material for interrogation and interpretation. In this sense, teachers learn when they generate local knowledge-of-practice by working within the contexts of inquiry communities to theorize and construct their work and to connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250)

The research process involved teachers in interrogating their practice alongside the knowledge and theory generated by others. They ended by standing in a different relationship to their knowledge than when they started (see also Kalnin, 2000). The inquiry community was central to their learning, and many responded to highly political agendas in what they studied and how they studied it, thus connecting their work to larger social and cultural issues.

However, in other ways the experience of teachers in these three inquiry communities does not conform with widely held views about the definition of research as well as the role of university-based research approaches in teacher research and professional development. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argued that knowledge-of-practice "does not build on the formal-knowledge-practical-knowledge distinction" but instead "stands in contrast to the idea that there are two distinct kinds of knowledge for teaching, one that is formal in that it is produced following the conventions of social sci-

ence research, and the other that is practical in that it is produced in the activity of teaching itself" (p. 273). In the process of arguing against this dualistic conception of knowledge, they placed teachers in a new space, which they defined as based neither on the conventions of social science nor on teachers' reflective stories.

For the teachers and university-based coordinators in the three teacher research networks; a dualistic conception of knowledge also proved unproductive and even logically indefensible. However, the teachers and university-based coordinators spent much time wrangling over what counts as knowledge. These wranglings situated the teachers in what I would like to call a blended space rather than a new space. The concept of blended space is derived from Fauconnier and Turner's concept in cognitive linguistics of "conceptual blending" (e.g., Fauconnier, 2001; Fauconnier & Turner, 2003; Turner, 1998). According to Fauconnier (2001), "conceptual blending is a basic mental operation" that involves "constructing a partial match between two inputs, to project selectively from those inputs into a novel 'blended' mental space, which then dynamically develops emergent structure" (p. 1).

In a blended space for teacher research, formal knowledge and practical knowledge would be inputs, and knowledge from teacher research would result from a blend of the two. Thus, teacher research would include some but not all of the social science conventions associated with formal research, as well as the special methods that emerge because teachers are studying their practice. For example, teachers can collect information that outsiders cannot collect in their classroom, integrating data gathering seamlessly into everyday assignments. In one case, the teacher researcher assigned her students journal entries that asked them to reflect on their writing process when she wanted to learn about that process. In this way formal and practical knowledge blend together. New data are collected for the purpose of detailed study, as happens in formal research; however, these data may also be a seamless part of everyday teaching practice.

The M-CLASS teachers also defy categorization in the way in which their individual research agendas related to larger social agendas. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) claimed:

The point of action research groups or inquiry communities or teacher networks is to provide the social and intellectual contexts in which teachers at all points along the professional life span can take critical perspectives on their own assumptions as well as the theory and research of others and also jointly construct local knowledge that connects their work in schools to larger social and political issues. (p. 283)

However, our experience suggests that a move toward a more democratic educational agenda works differently for different teachers. Many of the

teachers we worked with began by doing somewhat formal and individually focused research. Some of the M-CLASS teachers gained as individuals but did not see themselves as part of anything larger professionally; others became politicized as part of the research process; still others used the process to deepen and develop longstanding political commitments. We often saw teachers begin with a local, individually critical, and rigorous research process, which then led them to develop a more broadly critical and political stance.

Just as the research process for teachers in these communities of practice was the result of a conceptual blend, so too was the teachers' learning process, in which they alternated between the roles of learner and teacher and could opt to learn by admitting problems, taking risks, or studying their students. Mary Ellen Bayardo in the M-CLASS Site Based Network prepared her workshop about her research for an audience of other teachers. She hoped to share the power of the discovery process that is part of teacher research with her audience. She explained:

My goal is that these teachers leave saying, "Hey, maybe if I did a teacher research process, perhaps I would look at my teaching and the lessons and my students in a different way. It could give me a whole new perspective. And you know, maybe I will take a few risks as a teacher. Maybe I won't just let students sit wherever they want, and you have African Americans here, Asians here, Latinos here. Maybe it's my responsibility as an educator to create a state where they can all come together." So . . . that's my goal . . . in an hour and a half. (Site Based Network meeting)

Bayardo's goal resonates with the goal of this chapter: that teachers and potential facilitators come away open to "a whole new perspective," a blended perspective developed in a community of practice that will lead to change and growth.

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