Chapter 14

Practitioners' Voices in Trying Times: A Readers' Theatre Script

Rebecca Akin and Gerald Campano, Editors

Stage Directions: All readers are seated in a double semi-circle behind five microphones.

Stage Directions: Gill standing at microphone #1.

Gill Maimon: September 8, 2003. On this, the first day of school, I cannot help but hate the new students a little bit. I realize how harsh this sounds, harboring such negativity toward all of these eager-eyed children decked out in back-to-school clothing that will never again look quite so pristine, but I miss my previous life, when I knew all the people in the room and they all knew me. Judging by the death grips that the new kids lock on their former kindergarten teachers when they see them this morning, I am not the only one starving for a little familiarity. What I wouldn't give for just a bit of shared history.

While the first day is a trial, it is at least an anomalous trial. It is the only time in the year that the children and I will have no shared past. By the second day, we will at least be able to look back on what happened the day before. By the second day, we will have known each other across a span of time, which, though tiny, will be long enough to begin noticing things that are different than they were before. On the first day, I have nothing to go on. On the first day, I am gripped by the fear that the year will pass by and nobody in the room—not the children, not I—will change. By tomorrow, this fear will no longer be stark, because we will have already started to change.

On the first day, I have more trouble than I ever will again distinguishing individuals from the mass of students. I confuse Rain and Raquelle because their names start with the same letter. Deja and Lana are about the same size, so I have trouble remembering who is who. All morning I avoid calling on certain children because I am not sure who they are. I am feeling outnumbered, disoriented, and useless. I can't see the trees for the forest.

One of my friends has likened the cumulative sensation of a first day to being hit with a bat. At the end of this day, as I am reeling from the wallop, the principal comes to my room and informs me that, because there are more students on roll in my classroom than in the other first grades, that I will be losing two of my students. This is not news that I greet happily. All day long I have wanted nothing more than to cast off every one of the new students. Now that two of them are actually going, their departure is the last thing I desire. It seems only fair that, if I had to be resistant to them today, they should at least stick around long enough for me to like them.

Stage Directions: Gill sits down.

PART I: STUDENT PORTRAITS

Stage Directions: Rob stands at microphone #1. Alan stands at microphone #2. Elizabeth stands at microphone #3. Gary stands at microphone #4. Maria stands at microphone #5.

Maria Ghiso: Writing is a way to share from your life, I tell my students. With them I write about traveling home to Argentina and how my grandmother used to make me *café con leche* and say it tasted so special because she used *leche de vaca negra*—milk from a black cow. In class Daniela writes about a visit from the *ratoncito*, the large rodent that is the Latin American version of the tooth fairy. Lenny only writes about Pokémon. Alejandra writes about playing mom in the housekeeping corner, and the baby is always sick with fever. Bianca writes about visiting her dad in jail. Paul's dad worked at the World Trade Center and walked all the way to 109th Street to pick him up from class, showing up at 5 P.M. drunk and with scuffed feet. On September 13th, Paul draws tall buildings with stick figures standing at the open windows looking down or plummeting to the ground.

Gary McPhail: During our personal narrative unit, David wrote about the fact that his mother was living in Denver for the year while she completed her residency. It gave me pause to realize that David was doing everything in his power to not write about his own feelings and about how he was processing this very powerful personal experience. He wanted his story to be told in an indirect way, but he did not want to document on paper how he actually felt about his mother living away from him. The cover of David's story showed an airplane ascending into the sky. The illustration was done completely in black crayon. The title of the story was "Sadness." In the story web box marked "Characters," David had drawn a picture of the airplane and explained that, as opposed to himself or any person he knew, the airplane was the central character of the story. Pushing further, I asked David if there were any other characters in the story. He looked at me for several seconds with a strong gaze and then replied, "Yes, my mother is on that plane." I said, "OK, then you need to write 'Mom' in the character box of your story web. After much pause, he finally did this. Then I asked him if there were any other characters in his story. He said no. Finally I asked, "Your title is 'Sadness.' Who is the one feeling sadness in your story?" He continued by saying, "Well, I'm the one feeling sadness, (and then softly) obviously." I replied by saying that he should write his name in the character box as well. "But I'm not focusing on me in this story, I'm focusing on my mother and the plane," he was quick to reply.

It struck me that David was trying desperately to diffuse the intensity of his own sadness, the emotion that he chose to write about, by having his mom and the plane be the main characters instead of focusing on his own emotions. I told him that next writing time we would work together to figure out how to do this but also on how to include his perspective into the story. "Because it is a personal narrative and writing about yourself is what *personal* means," I said. His somber look showed me that he understood.

Looking back, I realized that it was much more difficult for David to write a personal narrative that required him to directly focus on his own emotions than it was to write fiction because he had to process and share his true emotions and experiences with his peers. He desperately wanted to diffuse the emotional component of his story by not casting himself as the main character and not deliberately focusing on his own emotions. Eventually, I gave David the freedom to do this and he wrote a very powerful piece.

Elizabeth J. Cantafio:

THIS IS A BLANK SHEET OF PAPER.

(I am the student in the back row. I am the student with her head down. I am the student wearing sunglasses. I am the student who doesn't speak. I am the student you will never know. I am the student who won't let you in. I am the student who is not *in* her papers. I am the student who is not. I don't want to talk to you. I don't want you to know me. I don't trust you. I don't like you. It's none of your business. Get out of my business. That's my business. Why are you always in everybody's business? Leave me alone. I want to sit alone. I want to work alone. I want to be alone. Go away. Get out of my face. I am the student who won't answer your questions. I am the student who never smiles. I am the student you refer to the principal's office or the counseling center or the learning lab or the school psychologist. I am the student being disruptive in the hall. I am the student who's always late. Don't ask me what's the matter. Don't ask me what's wrong. Don't ask me if I'm in trouble. Don't talk to me. Ignore me. Pretend you don't see me. Don't excuse me. Don't put up with me. Don't let me get away with it. Don't lower your standards for me. Don't take any time with me. I don't deserve it. I won't appreciate it. I'll never get it. I don't want it. I don't need it. I am the student you want out of your class. I am the student you hope stays home. I am the student you never look in the eye. You don't want me in your classroom. You don't want me in your office. You don't want me at your school. Give me away. Bump me off on someone else. Pass me around. Send me back. Test me. Diagnose me. Drug me. Restrain me. Punish me. Fail me. Reject me. Don't try to talk to me. Don't reach out to me. Don't try to understand me. Don't be patient with me. Don't accept me. I'm just getting over. I'm using you. I'm taking advantage of you. I'm playing with you. I'm laughing at you. I hate you. I'm all right. I'm cool. I'm hanging in there. I'm doing fine. I'm OK. I'm doing the best I can. I'm trying as hard as I can. You can't understand. You can't know. You don't get it. You just don't get it.)

Alan Amtzis: "Oh, I'm just not creative," Eleanor said, apologizing beforehand for her portfolio. Her comment made me both sad and angry. "How can you be a teacher and not believe that you are creative?" I thought, but didn't say. I hear this too often from teachers and wonder how they've been prevented from seeing themselves as creative.

The portfolio is an assignment that asks teachers to assemble images of themselves by exploring artifacts from their professional life. Most students submit a scrapbook-like document with artifacts encased between plastic protective layers, as they might for a job interview.

Eleanor, however, brought in a huge poster board with a cut-out construction-paper depiction of herself. Velcroed on top of that, like a paper dress-up doll, were layered outfits. She assembled dresses, skirt–blouse combinations, pants, and separates—a full array of professional attire. As she presented her portfolio, peeling away layers adorned with photos, lesson plans, journal pages, and other aspects of her teaching profile, Eleanor narrated each deepening layer with a story about classroom conflict or tensions. Often these concerned her own questions about teaching writing more creatively or organizing lessons more meaningfully.

Never had I seen a portfolio that so deeply and creatively seemed to embody the self-study spirit of the assignment so literally and metaphorically, simultaneously.

"You don't think you're creative?" one of the teachers shouted.

Rob Simon: I went into teaching and researching my English methods class in 2005 with some idea of wanting to research "with" my students—all student middle and secondary English teachers—and little idea of what that might look like. In October, at my invitation, eight student teachers and I formed an inquiry group with the goal of presenting at the University of Pennsylvania Ethnography in Education Forum. We continue to work together. I learned immeasurably—and still learn—from our conversations, but I sometimes struggle to simultaneously write *with* my students and *about* them.

Case in point: I wrote a dozen drafts of my two pages for that first group presentation. In what I believed to be my final version, emailed to the group for suggestions, my pronouns still vacillated between *they* and *you*. At a weekly group meeting, Nicole

responded to what she perceived to be tentativeness in my writing. It might have had something to do with, among other things, my uncertain pronouns. Nicole challenged: "You shouldn't be afraid to write about us—we're *your* students." I thought, but didn't say: Can I be anything but? And I wonder as I write this now: How do I write about people I care about in the shadow of Adrienne Rich's cautionary words: "Everything we write / will be used against us / or against those we love"?

As in previous years, in this year's methods class we read Debra Britzman's analysis of the cultural myths of teaching. This reading I noticed for the first time that Britzman writes in the third person about someone called "the student teacher": *them.* I was struck by how naturalized this kind of representation is in academic prose, and I was again reminded of my persisting difficulties in trying to write with and about my students. How do *they* read an article written about *the student teacher*? As practitioner researchers, how might we write differently if we think about our students not as subjects but as our co-authors and audience?

Stage Directions: Rob, Alan, Elizabeth, Gary, and Maria sit down.
Stage Directions: Swati stands at microphone #2. Gerald stands at microphone #4.

Gerald Campano: I think of how easily, how naturally, my grandfather's migration sounds like a narrative of intergenerational upward mobility through hard work and sacrifice. I still have trouble letting go of this parable. It is challenging for me to see his life in its full complexity and contradiction, to hold in mind at once the sense of historical plausibility and idiosyncratic personal odyssey that was his story and is my story to (re)discover, to realize his life could have taken very different turns and to understand both what was gained and what was lost on that trip across the Pacific.

I believe it is also challenging to view the lives and learning of contemporary urban and immigrant students with equal complexity. Nevertheless, it may be the work that needs to be done if we are to transform their all-too-often-imposed secondary status in the educational system and create alternative communitarian spaces conducive to their capacities for survival, self-definition, and social empowerment. It may also be necessary for us to surpass our own boundaries and grow as educators.

Swati Mehta: We say the mission of our school is to focus on immigrants and to honor our students whom we label refugee, English language learner, coming from the South Side. Do we? There is not a single piece of literature in our school discussing immigrant stories not having to do with Ellis Island! What about my Indian parents and my students' families? Where do their stories live? How would my 5th-grade students define the concept of an immigrant story?

Gerald Campano: Leticia was a Filipino student in my 5th-grade class. In response to Langston Hughes's (1994) poem "Mother to Son," she wrote:

"Daughter to Mother"
Mom I know you work hard and you work to feed me
I remember that you told me that you have to walk on your knees and scrub the floor
Your boss would treat you like a slave
Your back hurts, your knees hurt, your hands hurt
And your heart hurts
I want to help you get an easy life
You emigrated from Mexico
When you were small you had no papers and no home in America
You worked in the fields in the hot sun
Sweat would come down your back
Then again your back, hands, knees, heart and your soul hurts
Dollars a day
I love you mom because you did the hardest thing that a child shouldn't do
I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you

Swati Mehta: There is a power in my question—how would 5th-grade students define immigrant stories?

Who can forget how these fifth graders wrote their versions of immigrant narratives with images, videos, and writing? They owned their research, while I helped them navigate the tricky path. They pointed out important themes, while I helped them see the depth. They shared their stories, while I made sure they had an audience. They made me the proudest teacher when their voices, images, and knowledge made it, and made it far; all the way to Boston, all the way to Harvard, all the way to a forum where they

shared their work among other Indian educators. The power of the question validated my own story.

Gerald Campano: Leticia's concern for her own family's experiences would eventually translate into a commitment to migrant families more generally. She researched the history of the United Farm Workers of America, specifically the life of Dolores Huerta. Leticia even attended a rally for more expansive health care sponsored by an interfaith community organization. The students' writings and interests often indicated alternative sources of value that privilege cooperation and collective well-being. Today, 7 years after writing this poem and now in high school, Leticia is a leader in the immigrant rights movement.

Stage Directions: Gerald and Swati sit down.
Stage Directions: Gill stands at microphone #2.

Gill Maimon: September 26, 2003. At choice time this afternoon, Danny and Taerem are building together when, all of the sudden, Danny is by my side looking very upset. I ask him what is the matter and he tells me, "Taerem said I'm Black." Of course, White and Black are generalization, each encompassing varying shades. On the White spectrum, Danny is one of the whitest children I have ever seen. His skin is so pale that, in certain lighting, the veins under his barely pigmented face cause him to appear slightly blue. With hair and eyelashes as light as his skin, only his deep green eyes, which are now brimming with tears, provide him any color contrast. Taerem is as dark as Danny is light. I am fearful of all of the potential implications of Taerem's comment: Was Taerem teasing Danny because he is White? Did Taerem call Danny Black because Taerem perceives his own race as a negative? Does Danny perceive "Black" as a negative?

In my head I am contemplating possibilities, but I force myself to tread lightly with this one. I must not jump to any conclusions. I ask Taerem, "What did you mean when you said Danny is Black?" Taerem looks surprised—and a bit worried that I am asking him about this. He explains to me that all people are Black, but some are just lighter than others. He says that all he meant to say was that he and Danny were the same in some ways.

Danny's upset takes Taerem by surprise. He cannot imagine what causes it, and I want to make sure I understand the cause. I

ask, "Why did it make you feel bad when Taerem called you Black? Is it bad to be Black?" Danny looks at me like I'm crazy, tells me there's nothing wrong with being Black, puts his arm in front of my face, and says, "But I'm not." In some ways, my adult worries are projecting onto this incident much higher stakes than the boys experienced. Taerem was simply saying to Danny, "We are alike." Danny's upset simply signified, "But you're not seeing me." In fact, none of this is simple. The terrain we are trying to inhabit in a classroom, the space between "we are the same" and "we are different," is full of ambiguity.

Stage Directions: Gill sits down.

PART II: QUESTIONS

Stage Directions: Elizabeth stands at microphone #1. Andrea stands at microphone #2. Miriam stands at microphone #3. Monica stands at microphone #4.

Monica Rowley: Eight weeks into school, Kyle asked me, "What is Women's Studies?" I felt pretty small in that moment.

How had I managed to teach a high school elective for 8 weeks and not provide the students with a clear definition of what it was I was teaching them? Was I totally off the mark? Was I doing a disservice to my students by not having a clearer definition for them? I, who in conversations with friends and colleagues readily admitted that Women's Studies was not something I could easily define, was not comfortable without having a "right" answer for Kyle regarding what Women's Studies is. I felt that my answer to him—versus, say, responses to friends or acquaintances—needed to be something that I could later go back and test. How could I be a good teacher without a testable definition of the subject matter I was teaching? This disconnect between what I expect out of my conversations in "real life" compared with my expectations of conversations from "teacher life" still unsettles me. It also brings me back to my continual struggle with assessment: What are we asking our students to really do, know, and become?

Miriam Fife: Carlos, a student who has just moved here from Mexico, has begun to write stories in which his whole family is

present. He writes a primary sentence such as "I went to the movies" or "I went to the mall" and then he lists everyone's name in his family, including his dog, in attendance. When he is done, he walks around the room holding his paper and saying, with a somewhat skeptical look, "What does this say?" as if to test prospective readers and check if he has really written what he was aiming to write. He is elated when he hears what he's written read as he intended and often asks for a reread. Is he impressed that he has written something others can read in this new language, is it the sound of familiar names that makes him smile, or is it the satisfaction of hearing someone read the words he has worked so hard to write that he enjoys?

Andrea Stairs: Before beginning my career as an urban teacher educator, I taught high school English at what was considered by many to be one of the best public high schools in the state of Colorado, if not the best high school. But something was missing. I was encouraged to observe master teachers in action with students and emulate their practices. Every classroom was teacher-centered, and, much like my college English classes, the teacher was telling the students about the "right" interpretation of the classic texts we were required to teach. As I kept plugging through *Macbeth* every year, trying hard to conform to the culture that silenced the voices of less experienced teachers and encouraged didactic instruction, I began to wonder, "Whose knowledge counts?" The master teachers didn't encourage me to inquire into my practices; they expected me to conform to their way of teaching, believing it was best for all students. At this point early in my teaching career, I began to question whether teaching at the supposed "best" high school was right for me, since it meant becoming a teacher I didn't want to be.

Monica Rowley: Upon returning from a class trip to the Brooklyn Public Library, Cathy—another student from this class—remarks as soon as I walk in the room, "Ms. Rowley! We saw *Whistle for Willie* at the library." Marissa, who has severe speech impediments, excitedly tries to tell me about *The Snowy Day*. My month's lessons plans with this class involved a study of Ezra Jack Keats's work. We examined his art, characters, colors, and word choice. We created art. Some students worked on developing their own stories, while others worked on phonics lessons that were

taken from our texts. Still, I wonder, am I being too frivolous with my students' time? Do they need me to be more practical with their lessons? I hope not, but I wonder. My students' recognition and excitement in seeing the author they studied in a different context—outside of school—inspired me to believe that I was making the right choices for my students. Is the work I am giving them too "academic" and not tied to future realities of their lives? What exactly does it mean for a special education student to read his or her world?

Elizabeth J. Cantafio: From my perspective, taking an inquiry stance as a teacher and conducting research for social justice and educational change are intimately related. Questioning my assumptions means I am perpetually asking myself: What am I doing here? What am I doing it for? Who am I to be doing it? What am I paying attention to? What am I overlooking? What am I ignoring? Why? How? What does it mean? While these questions are descriptive of my pedagogy, they also provide a dynamic that enables me to work within the hegemonic structure of the school, a place of constant "unease" (Greene, 1988). As a framework for my teaching and research, these questions provide the possibility for the construction of what I consider an ethical practice, a practice characterized by ongoing inquiry and grounded in the struggle to assist my students in creating a literacy that, as Lankshear and McLaren (1993) describe, "makes possible a more adequate and accurate 'reading' of the world . . . in which people can enter into 'rewriting' the world into a formation in which their interests, identities, and legitimate aspirations are more fully present and are present more equally" (p. xviii).

Stage Directions: Elizabeth, Andrea, Miriam, and Monica sit down.
Stage Directions: Rob stands at microphone #2. Alan stands at microphone #4.

Alan Amtzis: "What are the questions you ask yourself on the car ride home from school when you are alone?" I want the teachers I work with in my master's program to speak the deepest level of question they have about their work, the questions that seldom get voiced. "Who are the students you sometimes wish were absent?" I ask and they nervously laugh with embarrassed

recognition. "What are the issues underneath that?" Such questions have a central place in our classroom.

In class we journal about who our best and worst teachers were. I hear rich and moving stories about humiliating, scornful teachers or teachers who went out of their way to be nice and to appreciate individuality. No one ever writes, "Wow, could she differentiate!" but I do hear that a teacher cared and had a way of showing and enacting it. The stories highlight the interpersonal, interactive, and relational aspects of teaching.

"For which students are *you* not a good teacher?" I often ask as a follow-up. "Who might be likely to write about you in 20 years? What are the issues and attitudes toward teaching embedded in that relationship?"

The journaling we do, both in and out of class, offers a way of getting at our deepest images of ourselves as teachers, often leading to meaningful, workable, and provocative questions that generate and support further inquiry into our own teaching and classroom cultures.

Rob Simon: In my English methods class at the University of Pennsylvania, I continue to try to make my work more relational, more connected to students' questions about what is at stake for them in learning to teach in urban contexts. I teach about inquiry, encourage my students to consider inquiry as a stance on practice and an approach to pedagogy and curriculum and pursue my own inquiries into my teaching. But writing about my practice has, to say the least, been less than straightforward. Questions about goals, audience and representation in my work persist. Who I am writing with, and in what ways? Who I am writing about, to, and for? I worry them, maybe too much, as students sometimes remind me. This fall I teach this class again, transcribe the one last year, and recall Adrienne Rich: "These are the terms/Take them or leave them."

Stage Directions: Alan and Rob sit down.
Stage Directions: Gill Maimon stands at microphone #3.

Gill Maimon: March 17, 2004. At recess time, I happen upon one of my former students, a second grader, being consoled by her teacher in the hallway. I hover for a minute or two, unable to walk by without finding out more, and ascertain that the source of the

upset is a snack that the child brought in to share with her classmates. Today is St. Patrick's Day, and the snack in question is Irish potatoes, candy I recall fondly from my childhood but assiduously avoid along with all other sweets now that I'm grown. The second grader is upset because, once she and her classmates arrived outside with their snacks, a number of the children took one look at the confections in their hands, pronounced them "poisonous rocks," and tossed them in the garbage can. Wanting to console the child, I say, "Oh. I just love Irish potatoes." To which she responds, "I'll give you one." "Great," I say, as we walk down to her classroom, to retrieve the box of candy, plotting all the while that I will simply palm the treat and dispose of it back in my classroom. But when we reach the girl's room, she hands me the potato, then looks at me expectantly. I have no other choice than to take a bite. The girl is still watching, so I take another. For me—a person admittedly a bit irrational about sugar consumption—this is tantamount to taking a bullet.

Teachers commit fraud for the benefit of children all the time. My little falsehoods do not always have caloric implications. I feign fascination with a child's account of a cartoon show that, in truth, sounds both inane and incomprehensible. I react with surprise when another child tells me for the first time that his mother is expecting a baby, even though the mother shared the news with me weeks ago. I tell the class that the standardized test is a collection of interesting activities that we don't need to worry about even though I believe it is something altogether different. It is not insignificant that the second grader watches so closely what I do with the candy. She must have at least an inkling of my potential for false declarations. In one way, I suppose, I should celebrate this child's doubtfulness, as it seems to be evidence of a critical take on the world. But in other ways, it makes me sad to acknowledge that, even though my intentions aren't bad, I do not always deserve to be believed.

Stage Directions: Gill sits down.

PART III: GENDER AND RACE

Stage Directions: Delvin stands at microphone #2. Diane stands at microphone #4.

Diane Waff: Soon after I took the job as teaching and learning coordinator in the school district of Philadelphia's northeast cluster, I was invited by a principal to discuss his elementary school's test scores and the district's accountability index. Once an exclusively White enclave, Black, Asian, and Latino families were just beginning to purchase homes in northeast Philadelphia. According to the Philadelphia City Planning Commission Census Tract data for the year 2000, 75.1 percent of the Whites who lived in the city resided in the northeast (Simon & Alnutt, 2007). Staff and students of color in this section of the city were in the minority. In 1997, there were only two Black administrators in the northeast cluster, a Black principal and me, the teaching and learning coordinator. The principal introduced me by saying that I would work with the staff to help them raise their test scores. He was clearly upset that his school had been outperformed in every category by other northeast cluster schools. The school's demographic data for the 1996–1997 school year was 20.9 percent African American, 9.7 percent Asian, 8.4 percent Hispanic, 0.6 percent Native American, and 60.4 percent White. The public documentation of scores put the staff on the defensive, and I was stunned by how quickly they were blaming the poor and minority students for the school's low performance. One teacher said, "How can we be held accountable for students who come from dysfunctional homes, students who come to school unable to read and write?" Another staff member said, "The neighborhood is changing, and we will never be able to raise test scores with these students." And another particularly irritating comment from a recent college graduate: "They don't have any cultural capital. They already come to school with a distinct disadvantage."

Delvin Dinkins: As a classroom teacher at Clearfield, a predominantly White suburban school, I noticed that African American students comprised 30 percent of the lowest-level course offerings at the school. Upon returning to Clearfield as an assistant principal after a leave of absence, I found the teachers had formed a group to discuss the achievement gap between White and African American students.

There were many teachers who believed that the negative stereotypes attributed to Black students were justified because of their coarse behavior. One teacher remarked that she had noticed

a decline in student respect, which she regarded as non-negotiable. "Some of these students are constantly wandering the halls, cutting classes, putting their heads down while in class, hanging out in the cafeteria," she lamented. Other teachers felt similarly. For example, Jan said, "I don't know if it's the oppositional culture that students are a part of or what. They defy authority, are almost always negative and confrontational, and sometimes disrespectful. I don't know if it's the peer group or the glorified images they see on MTV."

Another teacher, Jim, said: "I feel like there is going to be some kind of confrontation whenever I ask them to take off their hats or do-rags. One time one of them told me that I was picking on him because of his race, and I told him that wasn't true. I said he was breaking the rules and needed to be respectful of the school like everybody else. He told me I was singling him out. This is why I won't ask him or probably most of his friends not to take off their hats any longer. I don't—no one wants—to have the race card played or be called a racist."

Along these same lines, Kent told of a similar experience in which a student mentioned that wearing a hat or do-rag was part of his culture. Kent felt that the dress code should be revisited to ensure that sweatbands are "outlawed items." A number of teachers wanted to know whether the school should "allow culture of this sort."

However, another teacher believed that many Black students did not share the same resources as other students. She observed: "We work in an environment in which we assume students have all the materials they need in order to learn: computers, transportation, and other things. We think they have just as much as some other kids around here. As someone who grew up and did not have a lot, I can see it. I was discouraged from becoming an English or music teacher and was geared towards health and physical education instead. I feel for these kids. I know what it is like to look around and have everyone have stuff you don't and for teachers to expect you to be able to get materials and resources at the drop of a hat and are not able to."

Ty concurred. He believed that, he, too, with his working-class background, unlike many of the other teachers in the building, had "felt a subtle kinship with students who have less than the typical Clearfield student."

Diane Waff: As I listened, I was numbed by the statements I heard and saddened that many of the teachers truly believed that poor children could not learn. I wondered how useful it would be to share the test scores of racially isolated schools in other parts of the city where poor and minority students are achieving. Would it change the conversation? Would the staff begin to question the goals they set for their students and the beliefs they hold about students they teach? Would giving this staff the opportunity to meet over time to engage in collaborative discussion, dialogue, and critique about their instructional program make a difference? Was I the right person to facilitate the conversation? Would I have the courage to raise the tough questions? The deficit rhetoric wore me down spiritually, and I left the meeting that day feeling defeated but still determined to find a way to work with teachers to develop strategies for change.

Delvin Dinkins: The entrenched deficit perspective that was applied to Black students unfolded in significant ways. Even though teachers occasionally theorized about cultural, political, and structural realities that affected the lives of students, the discourses they took up followed from the widespread belief of teachers that Blacks are, in strong part, responsible for their academic failure.

Stage Directions: Delvin and Diane sit down.

Stage Directions: Kelly stands at microphone #1. Robert stands at microphone #2. Gary stands at microphone #3. Diane stands at microphone #4.

Kelly Harper: What happens when sixth graders in an affluent, almost all-White school community read children's literature specifically selected to address issues of race and diversity? At first, students were overwhelmingly positive. After reading *Cart and Cwidder,* for example, Cassie commented: "I think that the author is making a point about the world today, and I think it's sad that people are always living in fear. This is a great story, though, and I look forward to reading what happens next."

In the coming months, however, as our conversations got deeper, my students' receptivity levels shifted—growing enthusiasm for many, but emerging resistance for some. Cassie wrote in her reading journal: "I think that *Olive's Ocean* doesn't really have a moral or lesson. . . . I think we should read a funny book next. I think we should read:—a fantasy book—a happy book—whodun-

its—a ghost story. *Not*:—historical fiction—[*not*] depressing books. Good books: *Jade Green, Last of the Really Great Wangdoodles.*"

The social issues books we shared raised issues of many kinds that were both familiar and unfamiliar to the lives of my students. Among them, issues of race, socioeconomic status, and peer pressure helped bring in voices otherwise missing in the all-White community in which I taught. Resistance to the diversity of ideas expressed in the books we were reading didn't come from just within the walls of my classroom. While we were discussing one of Mildred Taylor's novels on African American issues, for example, one parent commented, "We never had to think about these issues until these books came along."

Robert Baroz: One year, via a fellowship through Middlebury College's Breadnet Teacher Network, an Arizona teacher and I used email to participate in a writing exchange with our 11th-grade high school classes. The students in Vermont and Arizona exchanged drafts of essays and responses to those drafts, and without our planning, a classroom inquiry arose from a spontaneous conversation in my class one day.

Looking at a draft of an essay by a student in Arizona, Hillary asked me, "Is Jerry a guy or girl, Mr. Baroz?" "It's a girl," Mary answered. "How do you know?" Hillary asked. "She spells her name with a *J*; that's the way girls spell it." Mary said. "No, girls spell it with a *G*, right, Mr. Baroz?" Hillary queried. "Well, when I was a kid, I remember the Mets had a catcher named Gerry Garote," I said. "He spelled his name with a *G*. But Jerry Seinfeld spells his name with a *J*. Does it matter if it is a boy or a girl?" "Yes, I think it does," Hillary said. "I'd like to know where they're coming from." At this point, another girl overheard our conversation and added, "Jerry's a boy. I remember reading his memoir, and he wrote about mountain biking. Girls don't mountain bike."

At this point, I had several questions swirling in my mind. What did Hillary mean by "know where they are coming from"? How are my students reading gender, and how does that matter in what we're trying to do?

Gary McPhail: As a male teacher in the primary grades, I have often been struck by the fact that my female students tend to both perform at a higher level with regard to writing proficiency and are

far more interested in writing than my male students. Many genres and styles that boys gravitate toward (comic books, adventure stories, silly fictitious stories, sports pages, etc.) are considered to be of low status and are not welcome in many classrooms during writing time because they are either "inappropriate" for school or deemed not worthy of instructional time.

As a teacher researcher, I have become increasingly more interested in the role that a more open writing curriculum could play in closing the gender gap in writing. I have been curious to see what topics the boys would bring into the classroom if their interests were allowed to permeate the writing curriculum.

Diane Waff: It is Friday, and the period 2 English class is about to begin. The students have just finished reading "Spilled Salt," a short story about the rape of a young woman by a man who offered her a ride home. The girls in the class, a mix of African American and Latina young women, begin pulling their chairs into a circle to begin our whole-group discussion of the text. The boys crowd in from the hallway, find seats, and fumble through their book bags for copies of the short story. Omar, a vocal student with a long white shirt and baggy pants, jumpstarts the discussion by stating, "Dress like a hooker, you get what you deserve." I pull up my seat and ask, "Does the way you dress determine who you are or how you should be treated?" My question fuels lots of comments from male and female alike that begin to challenge sexism and demeaning stereotypes. Maritza, normally a quiet student, comments, "You should be able to wear what you want without fear of being groped or raped."

I constantly reiterate the norms for a text-based discussion, such as talking one at a time, respecting each other, and using the text as a reference. The students engage in an impassioned discussion of what constitutes a "hooker" and what constitutes a "good girl," challenging the notion that a single woman without a man is sexually suspect or asking for trouble when she goes out alone. Brian, an African American male, questions, "Didn't her mother teach her not to get in a car with a stranger?" and is decisively answered by Tamika, a female student in the class, "Didn't his mother teach him not to rape people?" Omar, with some sheepish laughter, adds, "I guess you can't put it all on the woman either." Another female student adds, "Yeah. Why does the rapist's mother think

she's responsible for her son's behavior? Why not put it on the abusive father?" At one point, Maritza quietly asserts, "It is the duty of fathers as well as mothers to teach their children." The discussion ends with a classroom of students labeled "special needs" beginning to question the universal perception that it is a female responsibility to teach moral behavior.

Stage Directions: Kelly, Robert, Gary, and Diane sit down.
Stage Directions: Andrea stands at microphone #2. Swati stands at microphone #3. Sarah stands at microphone #4.

Swati Mehta: It cannot be. I must be missing something. Everyone has been talking about minority teachers for what feels like a really, really long time. Everyone has been talking about shifting the discourses and making a call for people of color. A lot of people have been talking about people of color defined through Black teachers and Latino teachers. Do Asian teachers not have much color?

And more than Asian, I guess South Asian teachers just don't exist. I found data and studies on Chinese American teachers, Japanese American teachers, Vietnamese American teachers, Cambodian American teachers, but this does not equal Asian or Asia. Asia is a continent, not a country, not one culture, and not one language. And part of Asia is the South Asian teachers—teachers whose history stems from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan. I talk to these Indian American teachers all the time, but I guess we have not talked enough. In order to actually make our voices heard, we need to talk to the field, not just to each other. Sure, we are a minority within a minority in the research literature, but the question of why there is such a paucity of research is daunting and marked by a weight of professional responsibility. I don't really know what to do with what I am finding.

Sarah Hobson: Mr. Smith, a counselor who had worked with young people in his north Philadelphia neighborhood, came to my 7th-grade drama and writing for social change class to share his narrative. They had loved and trusted him instantly, his football player size, his rapt attention on them, his transparency. I spent only 1 day a week with the seventh graders, helping them write a play I had suggested be titled "A Revolution of Respect." Many

students were hesitant to believe they could make a positive impact in their communities. When I went in the next week, I asked the students what they remembered about their visitor and how many people's lives they thought he had impacted?

The students said 25, 50, but didn't go much higher. So I asked them: What impact did he make on you? We went around the room, one person at a time. "When I talked, he really listened." "He made mistakes, but he learned from them." "He was able to forgive himself." "He's big, but he's not scary." "He didn't have to, but he really cares." "He wanted to be here with us." "He spends time getting to know kids." "He was kind to us." "He believed in me." "My life, I've had to overcome some really tough things, and I like that he could overcome them." After 30-plus students had shared, I asked them again. How many people's lives do you think he has impacted for the better? The number had changed: 1,500! 2,000! 10,000!

That day was a turning point for the students and for me. I think throughout our first 7 months together, the majority of the students wanted to believe they could make a difference in their communities but had been skeptical. Once they met Mr. Smith, a man who had lived and experienced similar circumstances to them and had applied his life in service to youth like them, the momentum for their playwriting began. They had both experienced his love and belief in them and witnessed his impact on their peers. Now they wanted to take the lead in writing and staging their play on behalf of the rest of their school.

Andrea Stairs: Dave said, "It's time for Blacks to get over it. I'm tired of talking about race and inequality. Blacks were discriminated against a long time ago, and I had nothing to do with it, and I don't know why we keep talking about this in this class." Melinda, an African American woman who was the president of the Black student association at the college, patiently explained to Dave that discrimination and racism were still very much a part of life in America, while his other White classmates more directly told him he was wrong and even "ignorant" for making such a statement. The tension in the room was palpable, and as the instructor, I felt a bit helpless. Here I was trying to model a proper Socratic seminar for these preservice teachers in an urban teacher preparation experience, so I didn't interject my opinion, but I reminded students

that we needed to trust each other and maintain a classroom environment where everyone could share their views without feeling like they were being judged. But the young man withdrew from the urban immersion experience the very next day. This was a salient moment for me as an instructor. I simply wasn't sure how to react. I felt vulnerable trying to model a student-centered, hands-off approach to class discussion that had moved in an unanticipated direction, and looking back, I'm not sure I handled the moment appropriately at all.

Stage Direction: Swati, Sarah, and Andrea sit down.
Stage Direction: Gill stands at microphone #4.

Gill Maimon: April 27, 2004. This morning after recess, we head off to a children's festival for the first of two visits this week. The event draws students from all over the metropolitan area, and we are lucky to be in walking distance from the university where it is being held. The university that is hosting the event also happens to be the one that Kelly, our student teacher, attends. The children are as eager to see her in her academic habitat as they are to take part in the activities that await them at the festival. Wanting to capitalize on their interest, Kelly and I have arranged a special opportunity for the children. Since January, Kelly has been a member of a dance team to which she has devoted many hours of practice. With considerable planning on her part, Kelly has arranged for the members of her team to mount a command performance this morning for an audience of us. The children are delighted to see Kelly in this context, and she seems equally glad to be able to show off our class to her fellow dancers. I sit back and congratulate myself for capitalizing on this opportunity.

I begin to get a whiff of what we are in for when I take a closer look at the dancers' costumes and notice that the colored strips of tape attached to the backs of a number of them are, in fact, crosses. I should have seen this coming. Kelly is so committed to her church work that it should not be surprising that her dancing has a religious element to it as well. Pleased with myself just a moment ago for arranging this performance, all I can do now is watch the scene unfold through half-closed eyes. The dancers are enthusiastic and well rehearsed. To a certain extent, the performance is no different from any contemporary dance presentation, but for the

up-tempo exhortations to Jesus that serve as musical accompaniment and the fact that supplication is the most frequently employed dance move. There is absolutely nothing that I can do about it but hope that it doesn't last much longer. I glance over at the children, and they are completely enthralled by the exhibition. Next, I peek at the parents who are here with us. By all appearances, nobody seems excessively outraged. It is, no doubt, a mercy that the family members who accompanied us today all happen to be regular churchgoers. Despite the inappropriateness of this presentation for a public school group, it does appear that the performers are dancing to the choir. If I am the only one traumatized by this unanticipated unification of church and state, then I've gotten off easy.

Stage Directions: Gill sits down.

PART IV: PORTRAITS OF TEACHERS AND PEDAGOGY

Stage Directions: Robert stands at microphone #2. Joan stands at microphone #4.

Joan Barnatt: "Slow learning," is characterized by reflection, attention to nuance and detail, and a willingness to explore without knowing what you may be looking for. My first lesson as a 7th-grade humanities teacher came when time seemed more precious to me than ever before: as a National Board candidate. This conversation was recorded at the end of a video session for my portfolio. It started an entirely new way of looking at my practice: through the eyes of the students.

Sarah: Mrs. B, why do you keep videotaping us?

Mrs. B: It's part of a project that I'm doing that helps me look at how I teach and hopefully helps me to see what I do well and what I need to change. I'm supposed to reflect on my own practice.

Josh: Why do you want to do that? You've been teaching a long time.

Mrs. B: Sometimes doing things for a long time makes it harder to change. How do I know I'm doing the best that I can?

George: Can we look at the video? We can tell you what we're doing; give you ideas?

Stage Directions: Maria, Rob, Swati, and Elizabeth stand at their seats and read the parts below.

Robert Baroz: Back in 1998, I did a teacher research study with two student researchers, funded by the Spencer Foundation, on how students talked in student-led discussions within small groups. We did our research in an 11th-grade American literature elective course. The student researchers helped to tape and transcribe the talk. This is the transcript of student talk the researchers brought to our first meeting to code, a discussion of Thoreau's *Walden* [participants read students' parts]:

Maria: I wouldn't even think to write stuff like that.
Rob: I know, I'm like ahhhh, nature. I love it.
Swati: I'm like there's a chipmunk on the log next to me, that's about as deep as I get.
Rob: I actually started thinking about Thoreau, sadly enough, when I was sitting there.
Swati: I started thinking that it was cold.
Maria: I thought about outward bound. I was thinking about how on my solo, I was sitting there, and I'm usually afraid of the dark, but on my outward bound it was awesome, on my solo.
Elizabeth: I always thought that they just take you out to this island and just left you there.
Maria: That's the sailing one, but I was in the middle of the woods. You know what else, all the girls had to go to the bathroom . . . and the girls have to pull down their pants, like when the guys are standing there.
Elizabeth: That's what gets me, no toilet paper.
Maria: No toilet paper, but you know what, though—we learned sticks, rocks, and pine cones are the best if you do it the right way.
Swati: Rocks? Pine cones? What if you do it the wrong way!
Maria: You don't want to use leaves, 'cause then you can get like poison ivy.
Rob: Well, you look at what kind of leaf it is first.
Elizabeth: Sticks and rocks!
Swati: Imagine getting like spiky rocks!
Rob: Pine cones, that can't be comfortable.
Maria: The right way it is; if you do it the wrong way, then you're in trouble.

I looked up at this point into the smiling faces of my student researchers and they asked: How do you code crapping in the woods?

Stage Directions: Maria, Rob, Swati, and Elizabeth sit down.

Joan Barnatt: I invited my students into the process of reflection. I chose a brief segment of video, and my classes and I reviewed it. This is what I heard:

Sarah: The boys are talking too much. At least some of them. Yup, they always have something to say.
Josh: No, the boys don't talk most. Mrs. B does.

We counted and timed the exchanges: The boys talked more frequently; the girls talked longer. There were dominant figures among both sexes, but most girls participated, while only about half the boys were likely to offer a comment.

And I talked more than anyone.

This gave me the basis for critiquing my own work and changed, for all time, the way I took part in discussions, because I drew my students into the process of structuring, examining, and reacting to my teaching as I documented what we experienced in the classroom. Inquiry, like slow learning, demands listening, reflection, and collaboration—time to think, to question, to discuss, to act, to learn.

Stage Directions: Joan and Robert sit down.
Stage Directions: Sherri stands at microphone #1. Lynne stands at microphone #2. Maria stands at microphone #3.

Lynne Strieb: In 2000, I retired from teaching first and second grade in Philadelphia public schools after 31 years. Every day I miss being with children in the classroom. I've spent most of the past 6 years working on a book about parent–teacher relationships, based on my experiences as both an activist parent and a teacher. From the beginning, as I pulled entries on parents and families from my complete journal and newsletters to parents, I kept a separate chronological list of all the things parents did with—and for—the children and me. I have many wonderful stories connected to this list, but for me, even a portion of the much longer list of parents' both large and small contributions is itself a powerful record.

Parents helped organize the classroom: They unpacked and packed at the beginning and end of the year; organized and maintained the class library of about 7,000 books; sorted, organized, and filed papers; organized my desk, with children's help.

Parents ran errands to home and store for things I forgot to bring.

Parents suggested and chaperoned many, many trips both on bus and on foot.

Parents set up or fixed bulletin boards, an aquarium, computers, broken bookcases.

Parents marked math papers, homework, workbooks, spelling tests.

Parents worked at home making books, typing children's stories, marking papers, sewing costumes, helping their children with homework.

Parents contributed food and decorations; set up, served, and cleaned up for birthday and Halloween parties, Thanksgiving feasts, authors' breakfasts.

Maria Ghiso: Bulletin boards at my school were considered indicators of learning. They had to be eye-catching and vibrant, with a process chart in the middle, student work surrounding it, a detailed explanation of what we did, explicit links to the standards, and pictures of students at work, preferably with smiles on their faces, extra points for racial diversity. I had been warned that I needed to change each of my three bulletin boards every 2 weeks. The night before an observation, weary from a day that began before dawn, 7 P.M. and my steps the only ones in the dark hallway, I began the arduous process of crafting appearances. In the pile of student work was Eduardo's, a self-portrait true to life, and I remembered how carefully he had looked at the hand-held mirror before putting his pencil to the paper. But that night I looked with different eyes, and I noticed with panic that Eduardo's self-portrait was uncolored. The main objective in this mandated science lesson was to use flesh-colored crayons in various shades of pink and peach and brown to learn about "differences," and the stark absence of color could be read by others as an absence of learning. Paralyzed, my mind a blur of requirements I struggled to meet, I colored in Eduardo's self-portrait myself, using my left hand in an effort to mimic his developing small motor skills. I hung the work high on the bulletin board, half-hidden behind the process chart—betrayal of myself, of Eduardo, and of our relationship. I had literally crafted him for my benefit. The following day,

when my principal and district observers came to check the boards, they did not notice anything amiss about Eduardo's picture.

Lynne Strieb: Parents supported curriculum: They brought and sent animals, plants, and objects for science; brought babies for the children to observe; shared origins of their children's names. They made, taught, and played math games. They prepared paints and clay; supervised sewing, tie dying, weaving; made clay objects alongside the children; taught how to make Ukrainian and Yugoslavian Easter eggs.

Parents cooked with the children. They supervised children using knives to cut apples, pumpkins. They cooked and baked: peanut butter fudge, cookies, breads, tomato sauce from our class garden, potato latkes, chapatti, stir-fried string beans, spring rolls, stone soup, gingerbread sleds, sweet potato pie. They lent me equipment.

Parents shared their cultures and backgrounds. They taught written and spoken words; dances; songs and stories in Swahili, Chree, Hebrew, Russian, Serbian, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, Malay, French, German, Urdu, American Sign Language. They shared foods, rituals, family customs and celebrations of Ireland, Pakistan, India, China, Yugoslavia; of African American families, Jews of Eastern Europe.

Sherri Wu: As a teacher of English in Taiwan, I was always able to surprise my students in one way or another in our first class—youngish appearance, casual way of talking, integration of some innovative techniques, and tolerant when being "authority challenged," etc. Yet no matter how we started, what we normally ended up doing was "following the script" given the condition that, whatever you do, just make sure the test results are good. In consequence, when the "honeymoon" was over and the sense of curiosity wore off, the students and I realized we did not go very far from where we were (supposed to be). Regardless of all the novelty, in the end we would find ourselves remaining in a traditional classroom, dissecting English, transmitting knowledge, and polishing test-taking skills. Not this time. This time I was determined to ride with a critical literacy curriculum and see where it would lead us.

Thus, even though there were still rows of desks and chairs, a blackboard, and an altar in the front, and even though I still took

a roll call on the first day as I used to in the traditional classroom, my college writing students knew they were going to experience something different as soon as they realized that I was serious about my questions for them, to which I did not have ready-made answers. Questions such as "Why do people write? Why do *you* write? Who do you write to/for? Under what circumstances?" that opened the class were not rhetorical questions but inquiries that did not (and could not) require single "correct" answer. Questions like those continued to remind us why we were in this class, doing what we were doing.

Lynne Strieb: Parents demonstrated and described their own work and interests in great depth: sign painter and carpenters, pathologist, pediatrician, internist, ophthalmologist's assistant, secretaries, homemaker, computer expert, union organizer, musicians, filmmaker, architects, artist, Fairmount Park team leader, teacher, nurse, truck driver, and barber.

Parents gave me suggestions: about homework, for end-of-year picnics, about African American history activities, about my tension, about things their children wanted to do, about handling difficult kids.

Parents helped the children in the classroom: with writing conferences, reading, math, handwriting, project time. They walked children to the bathroom, stopped fights, calmed a child having a tantrum, noted who seemed to need help. They helped make things go smoothly. They calmed me.

Stage Directions: Maria and Lynne sit down. Sherri stays standing at microphone #1.

Stage Directions: Sherri stands at microphone #1. Sarah stands at microphone #2. Miriam stands at microphone #3.

Miriam Fife: Names—whose and in what proximity—are a big deal for these 1st-grade writers. There are a plethora of stories developing in which a child who has helped a fellow writer with spelling soon has his or her name added to the story as a character. Recently, Lisa wrote about planting daisies in a pool in her front yard. As the daisies grew, so did the words on her paper, physically representing the flowers outside her home. She included everyone in her family who helped plant the flowers, and soon added all the classmates

at her writing table and with whom she's discussed her piece, in her planting daisies story. Is it that they helped her write about the daisies, and thus became a central part of her story? What significance does adding classmates' names to a story have for students?

And then there is the relevance among students concerning the proximity of names on paper. One morning during my first days working with students, the children sitting with me at a writing table asked me to spell my name and then to write their names as they spelled them. They asked me to add class members sitting at other tables, spelling the names for me that they had suggested and explaining their relationship (friends, cousins). I wrote their names in a simple line down the sheet of paper. Students from neighboring tables wandered over to see. Pretty soon Mari, who started the activity, was grinning, with two front teeth missing, and shouting: "Look! My name is closest to hers!" Mari pointed to her name next to mine on the paper as proof, an observation that the other 6-year-olds greeted with furrowed brows and frowns. A heated conversation ensued about whose name was second and third closest—and here I'd thought I'd been engaged in a simple name-spelling, getting-to-know-each-other exercise. Do names together imply friendship, favoritism, or some mix of each? Or was it simply a bother that Mari had pointed out this fact with a grin, enough of a bother to prompt an argument over the placement of names on paper?

Sarah Hobson: It was a slow morning. I was tired. The students were tired. We were seated in a circle, and I had planned to have them perform the poems they had written for one another. No one wanted to share. "OK," I said, "you don't have to." And then we just sat and looked at each other. "What would you like to do instead?" They just looked at me, still not quite awake. I waited and waited. Finally, one student said, "Someone else can read mine." Another student agreed to read. She stood and read it quickly, not capturing its rhythm, not enunciating so that we could really hear the words. She sat back down. "OK," I said. "Did anyone notice anything in that poem that they would like to know more about?" A few students pointed out two lines that were back to back that had particular appeal. "OK," I said, "would two students be willing to just read those two lines together?" Two girls came forward. I asked them to use their bodies and their voices and to develop a relationship with each other so that they were truly performing together. They did. The rest of the class began to smile. I asked the

rest of the class to direct the two performers, to try the words in different ways, to use different gestures, different emphasis on the words, a different rhythm. We looked at where the breaks in ideas were, what kind of beat was in play, and how the meaning of the poem might change with each reading. We practiced collectively responding to moments in their performance. "Who wants to go next?" I asked. Almost every hand went up as students vied to be the next performer.

Sherri Wu: When I returned to Taiwan to conduct my practitioner research study, I was not sure what kind of composition teacher I would become. I was anxious about the way my students and I would approach each other and come to know each other (better). So the first assignment for everybody in this class, including me, was a sketch of our own literacy autobiographies. I wasn't confident about defining the term *literacy*, so I read to the class "My Name" from Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, with its eloquent narrator Esperanza, and Leah's essay from Elizabeth Cantafio's doctoral dissertation. Hopefully, the students would "get" the kind of autobiographical writing I was looking for.

When I stopped, the class was quiet, which was unusual and even a bit scary because, after all, it was a class of 50 students. And then when I looked up I saw some sad faces and watery eyes. "This is good," I said to myself, not only because it was the first time in our first class that I seemed to get everybody's attention, but also because from their reactions, I was glad that I didn't have a group of students who would perceive expository essay as the only thing worth doing in a writing class. Nevertheless, in our second class I got almost 50 identical sketches, which all followed a certain format, one that is usually adopted for a job interview. I couldn't say I was not disappointed, but I decided not to show my feelings, at least not before I found out what was going on. So I began our third class by asking the students to share experiences of writing their first assignment. Dan stood up and said it was difficult because "how can you write an autobiography as worth reading as Leah's when your life is just not as interesting?" Many nodded in agreement. It was at that moment that I realized: They did "get" it. They knew what I was looking for. Yet they were not ready to "give," perhaps because to some writing like Esperenza and Leah was beyond their familiar realities, while to the others, it meant making themselves vulnerable.

Stage Directions: Sherri, Miriam, and Sarah sit down.
Stage Directions: Gerald stands at microphone #3.

Gerald Campano: There is a physical, material component to teaching, an emotional and bodily strenuousness. There is no separation between contemplation and "menial" labor, between intellectual inquiry and social responsibility. We are literally "on the ground" with our students, spending countless hours planning, completing paperwork, organizing our rooms, sitting in meetings, performing for evaluators, attending to emotional needs, comforting children with asthma, visiting homes, participating in community events, administering tests, and responding to children's work long into the night. These are daily facts.

Sometimes we are resolving conflicts, breaking up fights, protesting misguided policies, spending hours in the office trying not to have a child suspended or tracked. After the bell rings, we meet with former students trying to figure out what happened, why they are so disaffected when once so excited about school. We continue to advise students who have gone on to college or ones who have found themselves in the criminal (in)justice system. We pay our respects at funerals and try our best to counsel children about death and loss. In one year, three of my students' caretakers passed away due to poverty-related causes. These realities of the heart and body are indispensable to the nature of our inquiries and the very material from which we theorize our practice and shape our political stance.

Sometimes this resistance takes an overt political form and is aligned with larger activist movements. Other times it is more subtle, but resistance nonetheless; for example, our efforts to dilate time and open opportunities for reflection, creativity, and bonding with our students may radically interrupt the institutional drive for efficiency and standardization.

One of the most urgent challenges for urban teacher researchers may be to reformulate a progressive language that has political efficacy because it is grounded in the actual lives of children and is persuasive about what is required for urban students to flourish. We need to communicate the complexity of our work with pragmatic effects.

Stage Directions: Gerald sits down.
Stage Directions: Gill stands at microphone #5.

Gill Maimon: June 15, 2004. On this last day, it all goes so fast. The children suggest that center work for today be a time for them to make things for me and for each other, and I gladly agree. Manuel makes me a card that says, "Thank you for teaching us," and it is the first of many instances of teariness for me. At lunchtime, Lola's mother and father bring pizza to celebrate her birthday, which is tomorrow, so we have one last meal together. I present the memory books and the farewell gifts that I have purchased for the children. I load them down with the work they have produced over the course of the year, and then we are done.

And so we go on from here as different people than we were on a day as warm as this one when we met 9 months ago. That a school year lasts exactly as long as a gestation period seems fitting somehow. From here, there will be summer camp, and trips down South to see the relatives, and long afternoons at the public pool, and scorching sidewalks, and incessant ice-cream truck jingles, and opened-up fire hydrants. Then, for most, there will be second grade. Many in rooms just across the hall from mine, but some farther away than that. Quanice and her sister will be going to a charter school in the fall. Adam has already left our city for Boston. Taeshawn is back for today, but beyond now, who knows? Maybe the new 3rd-grade teacher will come back, maybe she won't. Maybe the principal will move on to a better-paying job in a district not quite as insane as ours. Maybe our student teacher will find a classroom where she can share all of herself with her students. Maybe our district will find a leader who knows as much about education as he or she does about business. Maybe the scripting of curriculum and the testing of babies will be recognized as obscenity. Maybe I will prevail, and maybe I will be worn down. Maybe I will be lucky enough to stay right in this room for the rest of my career.

Eventually the yard clears out, it is quiet, and that's when I know that it's done. The teachers will be back tomorrow for an inservice day, but it will likely be more a day for celebration than for work. Summer starts now. I gather my presents into a bag and walk out of the building. There is far greater treasure than the loot that I carry in my hands.

I knew these children.

AFTERWORD

Rebecca Akin and Gerald Campano

What is the phenomenology of teaching? How do teachers make sense of their work? How is teaching political? How does teaching involve both the messiness and joys of human relationships? How can the ever-evolving intellectual and ethical deliberations of teaching be captured in research? As teacher researchers ourselves, we know that writing from the location of the classroom entails the often ill-fitting task of freezing in text perceptions and understandings that in reality are fluid, continually changing, and often contradictory. While teaching is highly interpretive "cultural work" (Freire, 1998), its understandings are in a continual process of (re)vision. This is particularly true when teachers adopt an inquiry stance that frames the work through questions rather than certainties.

The genre of readers' theatre is uniquely suited for capturing what the philosopher Maria Lugones (2003) might call the "subordinate world of sense" of schools, or an alternative world of value, creativity, and perception that is largely invisible to dominant instrumental views of teaching and learning. In positioning multiple representations of teaching side by side, this format allows the reader to enter into a space where teaching is experienced as moving, changing, contradictory, and fluid—an "ontological multiplicity" (Lugones, 2003) rather than the impression of homogeneity and stability. This is not to suggest that the robust diversity of perspectives represented in the script is ungrounded and floating; the vignettes are in fact grounded in the realities of classroom life. The varied "practitioners' voices" are also motivated by a shared understanding that current educational arrangements are too often inequitable and that the process of creating more just classrooms involves critically working through uncertainty, self-doubt, and conflict rather than dogmatically clinging to preconceived ideas.

It is in this spirit that we invite readers to engage the script. Often, when audiences encounter representations of practice, a first impulse is either judgmental critique or uncritical affirmation. While both reactions have their value, we caution against them as the place either to begin or end. A more productive way of encountering this script might be with a focus on the questions it raises. How do the social locations of the authors shape their readings of the situations represented? What resonates with you? What seems remote? What interpretive frameworks are the authors using? Which ones are you using? How do the vignettes reflect the structural constraints of teaching? How do the various practitioners enact agency within these constraints? Cer-

tainly readers of this script will have their own pressing questions that relate to their local contexts. The script, therefore, becomes something of a "writerly text" (Barthes, 1970/1974) requiring readers to adopt an inquiry stance themselves: to read with as well as against the script, all the while keeping in mind that what might be most generative about engaging with it is not simply critique but the opportunity it affords to raise new questions and gain alternative perspectives. An essential part of the work of reading this script is to fill in the gaps with one's own experience.

It's important to note that the actual written text of a reader's theatre, as opposed to the performance, loses something of the interplay of varied perspectives. At a performance, the audience moves between readers and therefore among different scenes, classrooms, perspectives, locations, contexts, and understandings. There are different voices, literally, and varied tempos and tones. They carry their regional, class, and ethnic dialects as well as the idiosyncrasies of individual personality. At times the voices are in solidarity; at times they are in tension with each other. What is powerful about the actual performance is that it embodies the immediate emotions and visceral struggles of classroom life. We therefore recommend that the text be rendered in multiple voices. We also hope that other communities of teachers and teacher educators are inspired to create their own readers' theatre.

As editors who have given the text a close reading and heard it performed, we are struck by the humility in the words. While the script invokes the "I," it is not an omniscient "I," but rather a dialogical one that invites response. We are also struck by how the ensemble of voices, though varied, conveys a "resistant intentionality" (Lugones, 2003) against dehumanizing readings of teachers, students, and schools. The juxtaposed voices defy a "unitary and reductive logic" (Lugones, 2003) that too often informs educational policy and practice. Although there are ways in which the writing here is critical, the script is not a treatise on critical pedagogy. It is not another "how-to" on teaching. The script is unavoidably political while at the same time deeply personal.

Resistance to hegemonic understandings extends to the research process itself, which is too often conducted "on" rather than "with" those in educational settings. The script grew organically out of classroom inquiries, whether as part of formal dissertation studies, in the context of local or national teacher inquiry communities, or through self-initiated research. Regardless of where they fall in the spectrum of practitioner inquiry, these voices illustrate the relational nature of being an "observant participant" (Florio-Ruane & Walsh, 1980). Although we had (and raised) some questions about representation with several of the authors, we realize that the

teachers were not representing abstract "others" but individuals with whom they worked and advocated for daily and whose lives were in many ways intertwined with their own. Unlike research where the researcher makes his or her appearance primarily to extract data, teacher researchers have developed methodologies for listening to and learning from students. The script illustrates how teaching from an inquiry stance is about shared knowledge construction with one's students and colleagues. While the authors work to expose this process, they also make themselves vulnerable to scrutiny. They partake in this "risky business" (Lytle, 1993) because of their greater commitment to illuminating the true complexity and value of teaching.

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