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## Teachers as Researchers: Writing to Learn about Ourselves—and Others

Every fall for the past four years, I've started the academic year by teaching a class called "Teacher as Researcher" in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. I've looked forward to the beginning of that university class much as I did the opening of the school year as a classroom teacher. When those first summer mornings began to smell, feel, and sound like fall, I began to get anxious to go indoors, to trade my backpack and hiking boots for a new list of student names and a stack of books. This fall, instead of going to my Berkeley class, I'll find myself relocating to Michigan and to classes and students yet unknown. So, on this late summer morning in the Sierras as I'm thinking of fall and the teacher-researcher partners I've known at Berkeley, I want to reflect on what I've learned from the experience of our work together. I want to use this space in *The Quarterly* as an example of writing to learn about myself, as both a teacher of teachers and a teacher-researcher, and of writing to learn about those teachers with whom I've worked.

As I organize my own reflections, I hope to convey a sense of the process of our work as well as the products, and of how our discussions and written products served as focal points and vehicles for clarifying what we'd come to know through our classroom investigations. With the teachers' permission, I am using real first names, including my nickname, Sam.

### Teaching as Research

I began teaching at UC Berkeley with an assumption about teaching which still holds true for me. I believe that teaching is the best form of educational research (Hollingsworth, 1989b). The art of teaching represents not only critical thought about practice, but continuous change as a result of that thought. Thoughtful teachers regularly question their teaching and their students' learning, gather information to inform themselves about those questions, experiment, document, summarize, and apply what they've learned. I've tried to model those processes in my own teaching and then write about what I'm learning.

The distinguishing aspects of teachers' daily reflective practices from more formal reflections summarized in

journals such as *Classroom Research* occur in the areas of report and influence. Unlike inquiry performed and reported by university-based researchers, teachers' reflective processes are rarely reported to others. Within teachers' daily lives, in fact, they may perceive neither time nor reward for articulating the processes—even to themselves. As a result, they (and others) undervalue their natural ontological capacities for reflecting and learning from experience. Too often, teachers feel they have to move outside of their classrooms to think about and fully articulate what they know, and to receive professional credit for their knowledge. The need for reflective time and for validation may be part of the reason that many teachers come to study at the university. Perhaps it is also why many don't return to the classroom when their studies end.

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The institutionally enforced undervaluing of teachers' own reflective processes represents a loss to humanity. Teachers' power as professionals is not fully realized and the educational community is robbed of the rewards of learning from that knowledge. It is historically apparent that we cannot engage in meaningful educational reform unless teachers' inquiry is institutionalized and classroom teachers join in the conversation (Myers, 1987). Teachers with whom I've worked bring valuable but private theoretical abstractions of their own classroom experiences with them to the university, after a full day of teaching, because they're rarely invited to make their learning public in their own workplaces. Given the opportunity, teachers' personal theories and beliefs are then clearly, richly, and sometimes surprisingly articulated through conversation and writing.

These convictions grew out of both my own career as a classroom teacher and my longitudinal classroom work

on learning to teach (Hollingsworth, 1989a, 1990). In an effort to act on those convictions, I developed a course on teacher research. I had three interrelated goals for the course. The first was a personal goal for my own learning. It involved an epistemology of educational practice, or the nature of knowing about teaching. I wanted to increase both my understanding of teaching as research and my ability to practice as a teacher and researcher. I wanted to listen while teachers articulated what they'd learned from reflecting on their classroom experiences—to find out more about the discoveries of day-to-day educational research. I also wanted to analyze collaboratively transcripts of our discussions and examples of our writing, both during and after the course, to see how I might better organize and facilitate our meetings.

The second course goal was political. I hoped that the class meetings would be a first step toward helping teachers systematically recognize and organize their reflective teaching as research, give it voice to gain the acceptance and rewards (time and support) due their work, and then to influence policy changes in concert with others who traditionally control those roles. I also held a third and related goal: I wanted teachers to write papers which reflected their learning about themselves as teachers and their professional worlds. The main barrier keeping teachers' voices from policy level decisions, it seemed to me, was not their knowledge, nor their commitment, nor their capacity for reflective research, but simply rested in the lack of opportunity to translate their knowledge into written research products.

#### *Working Toward Writing to Learn: Changes in the Class Framework*

The first year that I taught the class I was fresh out of a graduate program grounded in experimental research. Therefore I structured the class around a rather traditional five-step approach to research. That is, I taught teachers how to select a research question, design a research plan, collect data, analyze the data, and report the results. I then attempted to have them critique that positivist approach to research and revise it for their own use by clarifying the terms "teaching" (following Green, 1971) and "research" (following Ashton-Warner, 1963). My intent was to use these alternative definitions of teaching and research to build a case that their own teaching was research, then have teachers apply their new formal understandings through a revised research plan which would incorporate the "real" but unarticulated research methods they'd always used in the classroom. I didn't do very well. The teachers didn't come to believe that alternative research approaches were

valid—much less begin to understand that their teaching was research.

As a result, I got very acceptable written "products" at the end of the course—much like I would have expected from any graduate class. Technically, the class had met my instructional goal. It appeared, though, that the products resulted from asking "my" (or traditional, acceptable) research questions using a standard method. All eight teachers enrolled turned in very similar papers with different topics. The products didn't match my notion of the more flexible forms of teaching as research I had seen while observing teachers interact with students in their own classrooms.

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The teachers' reports seemed to be acceptable forms of research on teaching, but they were not particularly amenable to teaching as research. That is, the "results" did not appear to be meaningfully related to teachers' classroom lives, nor were they implemented in classrooms. They may have learned something from their writing about their own teaching, but it wasn't evident from either their papers nor their post-course practices. Since I did most of the talking in class and answered most of the questions, I didn't find out what they'd learned through class discussions; thus I failed to meet my epistemological goal. Further, from follow-up interviews conducted a semester after the class ended, I learned that the teachers did not approach the goal of applying the principles of their research to their teaching. Their learning, project results, and products were shelved like term papers. In short, the teacher research I had directed in that first class suffered from many of the same problems as traditional research. Teachers' research problems were framed in a simplified manner which appeared sound both methodologically and intellectually. Their findings simply weren't valid for the complexity of actual classroom use.

I saw that there were too many variables to control to give them technical and mechanical formulae which would work with any research project. More importantly, I found that the teachers—like me—aspired to something more intuitive and intellectual than a "sci-



ence of education" promoted by educational leaders and explained through much of the published research (Carnegie Forum, 1986). They, like me, had to determine what was personally interesting in their classrooms in order to have something meaningful to learn through their research and writing.

#### *Feminist Pedagogy as*

#### *Environment for Writing to Learn*

Seeking such a learning environment, I've begun to use principles of feminist pedagogy in my classes (Laird, 1987, Weiler, 1988). I now try to create the conversational environment for teachers to articulate and expand their notions of their own power, their own values, and their own dreams, all of which are often devalued in the educational system. From such a conversation, they can then articulate and write about their own natural or narrative teaching research frameworks. They learn to listen, value, and critique other perspectives from their own particularly defined and redefined knowledge bases. To make sure my own goals, questions, and frameworks for teacher research would not overpower their own, I stopped giving competitive grades.

After many attempts to control a passion for talking, I eventually spent more time in class listening to what teachers were saying than I did telling them what I knew. Through that single change, I came to value honestly, and not just intellectually, their specialized knowledge. By the time I taught the class in my third year at Berkeley, teachers actually responded to each other's questions as much as I did. I suspended attention to methodological procedures until we were clear what teachers' own research questions were, and how those questions came from their own theories and experiences of teaching and learning. I also suggested that the examples discussed in class come from the participants' own written works in progress, and not from the more polished assigned readings. And I wanted all of us to set the agenda for our work. My personal goal of learning from the teachers in this group was easily achieved. Turning the class over to the teachers was the key.

#### *Writing to Learn*

By the fourth time I had taught the class, I had also learned the importance of encouraging both discussion and writing as a means of clarifying learning. We paid close attention to the articulation of both personal theories in selecting projects and potential solutions for surmounting the obstacles we faced in writing about those projects. Each week we wrote letters to each other about the problems involved with summarizing our learning in writing while trying to maintain the integrity of asking real or meaningful questions. Attempting

to attain the freedom to write in the spirit of Maxine Greene (1988), we "named the obstacles" in front of us in order to transcend them. Based on an analysis of class letters, transcribed interviews, papers, and tape-recorded class transcripts, these were the major obstacles running through all four of the classes.

1. *Lack of opportunity to engage in conversation about personal views of teaching before writing.* Too often we began our work using someone else's research framework, including the questions we selected and the methods we used. Lacking sufficient opportunity to talk to each other about how individual world views and personal experiences influence what we see in classrooms, teachers often did not come to class with previously articulated theories and beliefs about schooling. Thus, they were naturally apt to defer to university researchers' theories, questions, and methods. Integrative discussions and weekly written letters appeared useful in clarifying images and theories of teaching and learning, and in contrasting them with alternative theories.

Teachers also found it helpful to step aside momentarily from the content of their projects and relate their stated beliefs about schooling to more familiar personal world views. When there was a discrepancy, it often suggested that the educational theories expressed actually "belonged" to someone else. Many teachers, for example, began their projects by looking at test score improvement, when they were really more interested in the relationships and feelings of self-esteem which led to improved scores. Susan, a high school psychology and social studies teacher and Master's student, told the class about the process she used to determine her own research framework:

*I was thinking that I'm not very subject oriented. I don't primarily notice kids' test scores, the information in a unit. That's almost like a currency at hand. That's how we do what we do. What I do pay attention to is what I want in life. I want people to be able to function independently. To be engaged in what they're doing. I want life to be a negotiation, so that involves them taking responsibility for what they do. Those are the things I look for when I hold a lens up to see whether or not things are working. ...The other dynamic that leaps out at me is how I help those students see themselves. That's what I look at, not the subject matter.*

2. *Projects too big to tackle while doing full-time teaching.* Susan and other teachers found that even when meaningful, their projects often became unwieldy, and thus had a potential for becoming useless. We found it helpful, again, to use personal theory to narrow the

process. First, theories were translated into classroom pictures or images, and then the images were analyzed to see which problem stood out as a place teachers were "stuck," or prevented from achieving that image. That "stuck place" usually provided a manageable, meaningful research focus, at least temporarily. Valuing the uncertainty in teachers' evolving work was also important to a manageable project.

Teachers then brought samples of their written (and visual) data and tentative analyses to class. Having us read the material, give feedback, and ask clarifying questions led to tightened written revisions and subsequent feedback rounds.

3. *Using a method of analysis which did not fit the problem.* When teachers began to write about their research plans, there was an initial tendency to overstructure their work. Many feared that using flexible codes and methods which evolved with their projects would reflect a less systematic analysis. Thus they tended to use rigid plans which did not get at the meaning in the work. Aileen, a Japanese-American teacher of primarily Black middle school students, analyzed and wrote about changes in her students' academic knowledge (which could be measured), but failed to include in her first written report the rich interpersonal (and difficult to measure) changes in the classroom interactions which made possible the academic progress. Thereafter, when she told the classroom stories that augmented the written academic reports, we simply taped them. Aileen incorporated the transcriptions, with the full and humorous descriptions of how she interacted with students to change their feelings about themselves and their learning, into her final report.

4. *Lack of sufficient guidance, support, and expectations.* Once teachers became clear about their own work, most class members benefited from structured feedback from their classmates and me as described above.

Some teachers, whether beginning or not, needed even more structure in the form of accountability. For example, insisting on regular attendance was important for building a sense of our own group. I also provided consistent reminders that a written course product was both a focus for our process, an excellent means of clarifying our learning, and a course expectation. All the teachers seemed to profit from structured discussions of observing and interviewing techniques, coding and analysis schemes, and other technical information, using their own projects as examples. Finally, both analyses of their specific needs through the class transcripts and weekly letters helped me provide the structure needed to write.

5. *Standard expectations for writing.* Even with something meaningful to say and a structure for saying it, the feeling that the written product would not meet others' expectations became another block to completion. Teachers often perceived that some of their peers were gifted writers and their own work could never compare. What seemed useful here was (a) an acknowledgment of the pain and discomfort that comes from risking in writing, (b) the safety of the group to risk "uncertain" writing, (c) collaborative projects where teachers wrote together, (d) different types of writing practice to develop a narrative voice and an expository voice (including the letters to me and formative written analyses as well as the final product), and (e) a guaranteed audience beyond our class.

6. *A need for professional valuing of their work.* Teachers, like all researchers, needed to feel that the difficult effort of formalizing their writing was not only meaningful to them but to others as well. Discussions about how writing was a valuable process for learning about themselves, their schools and classrooms was insufficient. Teachers had already obtained information from their teaching and reflective research sufficient for practice in advance of the arduous task of writing. An interested external audience was needed to formalize the process.

Many class papers intended for interested audiences led teachers to take action as change agents within their classrooms, schools, and professional communities. Several teachers analyzed their in-progress research and presented the results at conferences. Some of their products are summarized in the *Northern California Division of American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference Research Proceedings* (Current & Hirabayashi, 1989). One class member served as a co-editor of those *Proceedings*. Susan was the keynote speaker at the same conference. One version of her course product is available in the *Proceedings* (Threatt, 1989); another is in her Master's Thesis (Threatt, 1990). Susan also used her new understanding of her own work to organize the *Teacher as Researcher Special Interest Group* within AERA. What for one student, Pat, began as an in-process means of clarifying her evolving views of teaching as research for herself can now be used as information for other interested teacher educators:

*Before I returned to the University to continue my studies, my beliefs about what was required of me as a teacher of reading and language arts methods and as a supervisor of student teachers was based to a very great extent on my close observations and interactions in the field, informed by the current research in the field of reading education. I felt comfortable acting*



as a kind of interpreter of school 'reality' to teachers-in-training . . . Whatever I did, it was successful enough from the feedback, via course evaluations and personal comments. But now, I want more for teachers in training. I want them to learn how to think about teaching in a very different way. I want for them to be able to . . . seek and find their own answers . . . I want them to develop the habit of curiosity and the spirit of inquiry . . . to do so I find I must begin with myself. (Gallagher, 1989).

Other class members are reporting their work and educating other teachers in different ways. Aileen, for example, has submitted her written discoveries as a district curriculum. Matthew (and many other teachers) left the classroom to pursue classroom research interests through further university studies. Some class members have remained in school, but have defined new roles for themselves. After a project which uncovered Wendy's real teaching framework and research plan and enabled her to gain the trust of her peers, she successfully challenged her district's policy about teachers' rights to determine acceptable topics for children's writing. Wendy is currently developing and editing a new journal (to be called *The Urban Teacher*) which will feature the written research of teachers in urban settings.

What we've accomplished together serves as support for reconsideration of how we perceive teachers' professional knowledge. From a different perspective, especially for teachers who rightfully question their own political power as researchers, these stories may seem like extreme cases. To demystify the results and look more into the process of teachers' systematically identifying, reflecting, and writing about their learning within and beyond the course, I conclude with a specific example which highlights one student's changed research perspective and the political consequences of her work.

### Wendy's Story

Wendy was one of fourteen teachers who met with me for one of the semester-long courses on teacher research. Wendy is both a doctoral student and full-time eighth grade teacher in an inner city school. In telling the story of her work, I'd like to explore the process through which she came to (1) describe what she did in her work as a teacher; (2) name her own framework for research; (3) summarize her learning in writing; and (4) change both her teaching role and her school environment.

#### Wendy's Initial Research Framework

Like the other teachers, Wendy came to this class with a particular perspective which shaped her interactions

and her interests. Partly as the result of having lived and taught in Iran for a significant part of her life, Wendy had become very critical of dominant authoritarian approaches. To avoid the potential authoritarian trappings of her instructional position as the English department chair at her middle school, she'd adopted a critical stance to improve her own work and that of the teachers whom she supervised.

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Unlike some teachers and administrators, Wendy had given up (if she indeed ever had) a belief in teaching recipes and scripts. In her work with other teachers, for example, Wendy had moved past the point of telling others what they needed to know. When she arrived in my class, she wasn't making the same kinds of didactic mistakes that I had made in my earlier collaborative work with teachers. Wendy endorsed the idea advocated by Schon (1983) of reflection-in-action. Wendy believed teachers to be capable of intelligent thought, and believed that their intellect and their passion interacted in such a manner that they were capable of constructing and creating their own knowledge. ("Knowledge construction" is a term first used by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986.) Wendy promoted a series of discussions and peer coaching plans among her teachers to facilitate instructional change. She took over their classes so that they could observe and assist each other as they were learning. Wendy exhibited the qualities of caring and commitment that Noddings (1986) suggests teacher educators embody. As a member of our class, she wanted to research the peer coaching process, but wasn't quite clear about her focus.

What Wendy hadn't yet sorted out was that she was still a victim of standard research designs that involved a less caring, more judgmental approach to distinguishing "good" from "bad" teachers. That perspective unwittingly colored her research framework:

*. . . My project . . . is about peer visitations. We know they're valuable; other researchers say that they are valuable, do good things, collegiality and so on. That's all fine. But nobody ever does them at school that I know of. So I thought, sounds like a great idea, but whoever does them? I don't know anybody who does them. So I thought that I would have peer visitations in the English Department of ten teachers—about five*

*who are terrible and five who are wonderful. And they are all fairly experienced. And then I thought: what am I going to look for? We know that [peer visitation] is positive. I don't need to prove that . . . One of the things we touch on a lot is how to make a bad teacher aware, or how to make a good teacher aware of the things that are missing. So I felt that with interviews—before and after the visits—I could try to bring out whether or not something was illuminated as a result of visiting someone else's classroom.*

Wendy's research plan did not match the emancipatory spirit of her project. It revealed an evaluative criteria which I've found to be shared by most teachers before they begin the process of reflecting on their own work in critical conversation with others. Their early reflections are based on an external, invisible, linear framework familiar to them—and silently accepted. I found the "good-bad" reflective frame to be particularly powerful as teachers begin to think of their own teaching as "research" in the context of a particular class on that topic. Alice, a teacher in Wendy's class who was also interviewing her peers as part of her own research project, explained how that phenomenon applied to her own work:

*A problem I have is that we've read so much . . . positivist research. My study last year started off looking very much like a traditional scientific study. I had a theory and I was trying to test it, and then as I got into it I realized that I didn't want to test as much as I wanted to illuminate the experience; what was going on. But the way I started out I was heavily into testing. . . . The bottom line was I was looking to see [whether the teacher's teaching] was good or bad. . . . I wonder if anyone else feels that way too.*

When I recognized that teachers were using research questions and plans which were clearly outside their own instructional intentions, I changed the nature of my own contributions to the discussion. My comments then pertained to my own struggle to free myself from the same external framework that had trapped Wendy. I found it was important to risk my own imperfect attempts at classroom research with the class; to bring the seemingly polished but private process out in public. That seemed to give permission for all of us to expose our struggles, and become open to alternative views.

We were working toward a "connected class" where all class members could develop and articulate personal educational theories and create research frameworks for reflecting on classroom practice using those theories. As such, we were all participant-observers in our own research to uncover our own theories, questions,

and ways of reflecting on our work. To understand and guide each other required that we not (usually) confront others in a "good/bad" model, but find routes through our common connections. Other teachers' questions, their humanness and humor, led Wendy to initially risk and then acknowledge her borrowed framework for reflecting on her work.

*Alice [to Wendy]: Listen to your instincts. What are these teachers saying to you? What is your question that you want to ask them? You probably have a sense.*

*Wendy: I'd really like to ask, you know, basically those kinds of questions like, Why are you so bad? (laughter and responses . . .)*

*Susan: Why are you less than 100% perfect? (more laughter).*

*Alice: What on earth made you teach that way? (more laughter).*

*Matthew: When are you going to retire? (and more laughter).*

The conversation demonstrated the care and empathy essential to reconstructing knowledge, and which led Wendy to appreciate and locate her own focus and reflective frame for her work. It also attended to the practicality and immediacy of the work:

*Susan [to Wendy]: You know it seems to me that it may be very difficult to find out and answer your original question. That gets into a long-term research project. What might be answerable is to try to get into teacher beliefs about what stops them from being the kind of teachers they would like to be.*

*Wendy: Ahhh.*

*Susan: It doesn't seem to me that you are answering a question about what really stops them, you are answering a question about what they believe stops them.*

That wasn't the exact question for Wendy, but Susan and the other teachers' probing led them all to broader ways of thinking about the questions and designs they initially identified in order to picture what they'd like to see and then to find a meaningful focus in identifying the obstacle preventing them from achieving the vision. The fluidity in the process also taught them patience with themselves in their work and taught them to fight the "itch for closure" (Elbow, 1973). In response to Alice's questions about the deeper purposes behind the



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research projects, Wendy talked about the time and subconscious reflection needed to make integrated changes, to trade others' perceptions for her own:

*I just had a thought about how long it takes to really learn. I mean, I don't think you are going to get very accurate results in the short term. Courses that have changed me in the past took root there, and then a year later, I did something . . . But there's no question that during that time, I had the freedom to explore something kind of strange. I guess maybe non-threatening, I don't know.*

Wendy's comments honor the time-illusion of coming to know for ourselves. We may think we know before we really know. They are consistent with the words Belenky's group suggested might occur in classes which lead to self-constructed knowing. "In connected classes no one apologizes for uncertainty. It is assumed that evolving thought will be tentative" (Belenkey, et al., p. 221). That atmosphere allowed Wendy to spend some time without an exact research plan, then to revise her written project many times and return to the group for feedback and structural assistance. She received encouragement from group members who were involved in a similar process.

#### *Changes in Wendy's Research Framework*

Looking at and discussing our personal histories and current life experiences also enabled us to clarify our own frameworks and agendas as opposed to those we've been told we ought to have. As Wendy and the others became more involved in their projects, they began to bring in more of their own questions—and to redefine their frameworks. In talking about her life and her school, Wendy revealed her frustration that her school had the "worst administration in the city." . . . We have filed more complaints than any other school in the history of the district." Wendy began to raise questions about administrative authority to control teachers' rights to determine what was effective or lacking in their own teaching, and then make personal changes to improve it. For Wendy to be able to reach that new position also required some out-of-class research about what she was coming to articulate in class:

*I don't know why I keep going back to this intrigue I have with administration . . . but I went to a lecture Thursday night . . . I sat next to a lady who works . . .*

*on legislation packages in Sacramento to try to alter the licensing for new teachers and the mentor stuff and all that . . . She asked . . . what I would do if I could change anything I wanted. It was one of those cocktail conversation types of questions . . . I said that I would . . . instead of worrying about educating teachers . . . focus on educating administrators. That everybody is trying to re-educate and restructure teacher training and staff development but nobody looks at that group, you know. How can we re-educate these people? I was laughing as I talked, but this lady literally walked away and was very upset.*

By the end of the course, Wendy had come to see that her focus was less on the teachers who were "bad," but on the system which isolated and devalued them and which kept them from working together to understand themselves and others. Prompted by probes for people to articulate the tentative results of their work before committing them to paper, Wendy talked about her refocused project, and its results:

*All right, I can verbalize it a little bit. It started with a change in my whole focus, which was a change from being judgmental about those teachers that I didn't feel were up to par, and becoming one with them in what it was that was the truth. And feeling compassion. I think that's the key word for me.*

She talked to us about the resultant changes in her project:

*So that was the first step in changing my focus away from looking at changes in good and bad peer teachers. And that generated the things that I started to talk about in the peer discussion groups in school. Although I think most of us are probably leaders in our schools for a lot of different reasons, that subtle change in me made me very much a different sort of leader. Now people outside of my peer teaching group seek me out to help with change—the librarian; I was asked to sit in on a grievance conference—just because I am trusted. People know that I won't judge. The interviewing process of the peer visitations has created enormous trust within the ten people in the English department. Nothing spoken, just trust, that kind of freedom to feel like it's all right to talk. And through their talk, they are changing—and seeking more change. The results of it, though, for me, have now turned into a lot of frustration and a lot of pain. I've been in trouble. Now I've been in trouble all my life, so I deal with that just fine. I mean, that's OK, but it doesn't lessen the confusion of why I've been in fairly serious bureaucratic trouble within the system because of that change. There's an incredible resentment on the part of the administration. I am almost usurping their power. But they can't*

*put their finger on it either. People are coming to me, and they know it. And it's not political, it's just a sort of sharing of the knowledge. That doesn't normally exist in schools. There's no place to go to share your knowledge.*

As a result of the tacit institutional criticism of her work, Wendy's in-progress research report—revealing the changes in herself as well as in the teachers with whom she worked, and which illuminated institutional constraints inhibiting positive change—was not used professionally by her district. Nevertheless, I think it's safe to say that Wendy's story shows that she met all of my goals for the course.

#### *Writing to Learn Doesn't End with the Paper*

What began as a course project evolved into other projects which generated even more personal success and administrative trouble for Wendy after the course ended. As the school literary magazine editor, Wendy and her peer teacher team created a magazine for articles written by their inner city junior high students. In the emancipatory spirit so strong in Wendy and strengthened further in the course of her project, Wendy and the other teachers encouraged their students to develop their own narrative voices and name the obstacles to their own success. Just as the magazine was ready for distribution in the local community, it was confiscated by the district as being "inappropriate" for release. District administrators felt Wendy had overstepped her bounds as English department head and literary magazine editor by permitting students to write about street life in the inner city. Though the material was perceived by Wendy and the other English teachers to be well written, a step toward emancipation for the students, and potentially consciousness-raising for the community, school administrators felt such stories did not reflect well on the district.

Wendy could not agree that the district's opinion of the work had more validity than hers and her teachers'. Although she was afraid of rejection and punishment, she argued publicly for the teachers' right to decide what their students wrote. She also employed curriculum arguments for experience-based writing and audience as reasons for including the "offensive material" in the school magazine. When the local press picked up the story and local support for the students and the teachers mounted, the district withdrew its ban on the publication. However, they did not withdraw their attack on Wendy. Her fear of professional rejection came true. She was asked to step down as the school literary magazine editor.

Wendy's project has not ended, it's simply changed. This year, she's joined with another teacher to create

another magazine—and to seek funding outside of the district—as a place for other urban teachers to publish their own teaching research.

#### **Conclusion**

Wendy's story is helping me understand the complexity and difficulty of the work of teacher-researchers. To some, her story might suggest that it is safer not to identify personal frameworks, create environments for meaningful change, and explore uncharted educational areas. It might appear especially unsafe to do so through the public media of print. Like another story told by Sylvia Ashton-Warner in *Teacher* (1963), Wendy's story may appear to have had an unsatisfactory ending—while the telling of it in print gives it an enduring quality, a faith in its unforeseen evolution.

It is important also that I not oversimplify the complexity of changes in Wendy's and her classmates' learning. Engaging in the process which led to a meaningful teaching and research focus did seem to earn them many personal and professional rewards, while moving beyond the reflection into action required a risk of professional rejection.

Obviously, Wendy's story isn't finished, nor are her colleagues', nor is mine. After the stress of adopting new perspectives, we will inevitably experience some regression as well as integration of the old and new reflective lenses. And it is important to acknowledge that the process of casting aside "acceptable" external ways of viewing education, teaching, and research in order to find and write about our own evolving perspectives will probably continue to cause discomfort with each transition. I spoke about this pain as a necessary process of writing to learn in reflecting with Wendy's class about my own learning as a teacher and classroom researcher:

*The complexity of it is, I think, when we first started to reflect on [this process], we reflected on what it means to do research, or to know something. We had a lot of words. They came from our experience. And as long as we treated research as an intellectual exercise up in our heads, trying to find more words, trying to find someone else's theory that matched our words, the process wasn't too painful. That's pretty mechanical, finding those words. I can go to the library and find a lot of words to document what I'm saying, but that internal risking to find the true voice is what causes the struggle and stress.*

*Matthew: I think the anxiety is in accepting the credence of your own voice, and then knowing that everything that you've done up to then has been wrong. You know, to throw over everything else you have and*



rebuild it from the end, that's massively stressful. . . .

Sam: Well, let me potentially temper that just one tiny bit with another perspective. Everything you did up to that point, you did with the best knowledge that you had at the time. You can't really judge the old data with new eyes. . . . Maybe it was right for us at one time and now it seems wrong, and maybe later there'll be an integration of the different perspectives—or a new one which directs our reflections and our ways of seeing things. It seems the important thing here—one that will continue to validate our changing reflections—is that we have a pretty healthy conversation going.

And out of the conversation and the struggle come written reports which reveal teachers' interpretations of their classroom worlds with a currency and immediacy that complements the more distant classroom research of the university researcher. Teachers' writing to learn contains a message: that the movement is not an end in itself, but an important means of furthering the larger conversation on educational reform.

#### Note

1. This paper overlaps with Hollingsworth, S., "Reclaiming Teaching as a Woman's Profession: A Case for Voicing Invisible Barriers to Reflection," submitted for publication to the *Harvard Educational Review*. Although the organization and the arguments in the papers differ (i.e., the *Quarterly* paper focuses on writing to learn, while the *HER* article focuses on a feminist approach to making invisible knowledge visible), the example of Wendy's story is used for both.

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