

Student and Teacher Co-Researchers *Ten Years Later*

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Collaboration, laboring together, is an essential construct in teacher/student inquiry. Metaphorically speaking, it is the taproot of a shared community that often anchors that community as it experiences growth, dissension, success, and change. Its interactive nature is one of the community's means of building shared knowledge. Its multiple perspectives and the coordination of those are other essential aspects necessary for the creation of a community identity that values and practices cooperation, negotiation, shared space, and shared power in order to solve problems and make decisions. Because of these dynamics and others involved in true collaboration, teachers who advocate classroom practices that incorporate collaboration often find themselves in research situations with their students and with administrators, other teachers, and parents. After all, collaborative work changes one's perception of what's important, what works, and what's acceptable in schooling.

The teacher researcher movement in education has encouraged collaborative learning and shared inquiry by proposing that teachers and students work together on topics that relate to their community, their language, their writing, and so on. Many teachers who have used classroom research and have engaged in collaborative inquiry with students and other teachers are now questioning whether such inquiry offers students anything more than a novel experience. True, we are aware that students score higher on their standardized tests during and

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after they have collaborated with their teachers in classroom research (Heath & Branscombe 1985). We have also found that students develop positive attitudes about school when they collaborate in classroom research (Goswami & Stillman 1987). In fact, we have documented situations in which children's lives have been temporarily changed so much that they become leaders in their school and valued members of their community (see Chapter 9). However, our testimonials aren't enough. We want to know more about what happens when students and teachers collaborate. We want to know how effective those methods are for students' daily lives. Finally, unlike most university researchers who maintain contact with their collaborators through professional organizations, conferences, and academic networks, classroom research collaborators (teachers/students) often lose contact because of high school graduation, students moving, and students attending other schools within the same district. Just as with the university researchers' need to maintain contact, we, teacher researchers, have a need to know how and what our classroom research collaborators are doing. We also want to know the long-term effects of our research just as the university professors. This was one of the reasons that I contacted Charlene Thomas, one of the student collaborators in the 1981-82 classroom research project that Shirley Brice Heath, my ninth-grade basic English students, and I had done.

During my first visit with Charlene, I found that she was eagerly making plans to write her own story. She explained that she had been preparing to write it for some time and had been reading autobiographical pieces in *Reader's Digest*, *People*, and *Jet* as models. She said:

One of my dreams is to write my story and my family's story. It was because of my work back in ninth grade with Shirley Heath and Amanda Branscombe that I got to thinking that I would write my own story. I started thinking about writing my story because I think that it might help others like me deal with their problems. That year, they helped us learn about school and work and how to do them. Then they had each of us doing projects about our neighborhoods. They worked with me in a project about Dede, my first child, and the ways I read to him. To do that they showed me how to use a tape recorder to tape mine and Dede's words. Then they got me to write field notes to help me remember what happened. I've been doing that ever since.

Last summer I didn't have nothing to do, so I started writing down stuff when I had a mind to. I was planning on moving to a city that is about fifty miles away because I had heard that I could get better education opportunities for my children and better after-school programs for them. I decided that while I was making plans to move, packing up, and getting moved I could write. I didn't write every day

'cause it was too much. I did try to write whenever I put my mind to it. What you read here is my story!

This chapter is the result of our renewed contact and collaboration. It will chronicle how Charlene has used and continues to use the ethnographic methods she learned as a student researcher in the collaborative project with Heath and me. Furthermore, it will describe what it means to her to be an ethnographer of her children's lives and of her neighborhood. Finally, it will suggest that the role of participant observer has a distancing and objective aspect that allows an individual to see the reality of his/her world, neighborhood, and family, while not being crushed by those systems.

Background

Throughout the 1981-82 school year, I engaged in a collaborative classroom research project about language and literacy with my ninth-grade basic English students and Shirley Brice Heath (Heath & Branscombe 1985; Branscombe 1987). Because Charlene and I met during that study, a brief summary of it and our first collaborative inquiry with her seems necessary.

The original classroom research project had several phases. The first phase, a letter-writing exchange between my eleventh- and twelfth-grade expository writing students and my basic ninth-grade English students, occurred during the first semester of that school year. The second phase was developed when Heath and I realized that the older students' course was only one semester. That phase involved Heath corresponding with the ninth graders to ensure that they continued to have a real audience and purpose for their writings.

The third phase, use of ethnographic methods, evolved because of that correspondence. Heath decided to invite the students to become co-researchers who studied their community's oral and written language. She pointed out that if they chose to join her, they would have to have some systematic way of sending her the information they were gathering. Because of her interest in ethnography and their interest in her work, we all agreed that they would learn various ethnographic-data-gathering methods. Heath explained that those methods should include field notes, observations, interviews, tape recordings, administering and tallying surveys, collecting various kinds of writing samples, as well as analyzing their data. Because the students had a desire to learn those methods (to become co-researchers and provide Heath with information about their communities' language use) and knew that someone really needed and wanted their data, they not only learned how to use the methods but were also willing to work for accuracy and clarity in the use of those methods. Furthermore, they were willing to learn how to

use those methods as they did their work; this sequence was preferable to mastering a method and thereafter applying it to a situation. Their use of ethnographic methods led to the fourth phase of the classroom research project.

Heath and I designed various team projects for the students so that they could practice their ethnographic approaches and gather the data she had requested. After we designed them, the students discussed all of them, modified some, omitted others, and added their own. The final list included some of the following: (1) a study of baseball language and its rule structure, (2) a study of the ways people read to young children, (3) a comparative study of rap music and Elizabethan poetry and prose, (4) a comparative study of rules and strategies for video games and English grammar, (5) an autobiography of each student and a videotaped presentation of those for Heath, (6) a class newspaper, (7) a study of poetry written by two of the students, (8) a study of games and contests and their uses in the English classroom, (9) a study of the ways publishers write textbooks, workbooks, and standardized tests, (10) a survey administered by students on writing and reading behaviors in their communities, (11) a study of the folktales and folklore in their communities, (12) audiotaped interviews and written observations of people at work within their communities and people talking about literacy and learning, and (13) a study of questioning strategies used by teachers, students, and others.

Charlene was one of the students in the class. She took part in the letter-writing exchange and did her project on her young son, De, and his language learning. Although she dropped out of school during November of the 1981 school year because of a school absentee policy, she continued to collaborate with Heath and me about his language development and daily activities (Heath with Thomas 1984). At that time she was sixteen and a ninth grader in my basic English class. She had missed the previous year because of her mother's prolonged illness and death and Dede's birth (her first child). When she found that she was pregnant with her second son, Tutti, she decided to drop out of school permanently.

Charlene's original project with Heath and me consisted of reading to De, tape-recording those sessions, and taking field notes of their interactions and his activities. I occasionally visited Charlene to monitor the project, give her more tapes and materials, and gather the data she had collected. Heath would write to the two of us, provide books and materials, and comment on the project's progress. By school standards Charlene was not literate, from a literate environment, or even a marginal student. A detailed account of her literacy development (Heath 1984) indicated that before this project she had never written a letter, read a book, or succeeded in a formal learning situation. Neither

Heath nor I had any reason to believe that she would follow through with the project; however, she did. In late February 1982, she provided us with her first field notes. According to Heath (1984) the field notes contained specific details of De's speech, her attempts to get De to label objects and people in the room, conversations others had with De, and his daily activities.

Because of Charlene's initial efforts, Heath and I encouraged her to read to De on a regular basis, talk with him about those reading events, and record her impressions of his interest during those events. In June 1982, we discovered that when Charlene had reading sessions with De she made him sit or stand in front of her and "say" the object pictured in the book. Then she read the story to him as he stood or sat quietly looking at the cover of the book. If he moved during the reading event she disciplined him. I quickly intervened by modeling a reading session with Dede. I had him sit by my side or in my lap, so that we could both see the pictures and print. Because Tutti was a "lap baby," I explained that he should be present during the reading events and involved with the interactions.

Charlene adjusted her reading style so that both children were sitting with her and noted that reading to De became much easier as a result of that intervention. After that, she began constructing her own strategies for the reading sessions and recorded those strategies through her use of the audio tape or her field notes. Next, she began to experiment with times to read to them, ways to hold the book so that all could see, ways to talk to and question them about the stories, and ways (such as pointing to the text) to focus their attention on the print and pictures.

Because of the early reading events and Charlene's interaction with De and Tutti during those events, they began to develop a predisposition for reading and rudimentary notions about literacy and schooling. All three looked forward to their story time. De retold stories that had been read to him, and attempted to write stories, his name, the alphabet, and his numbers. Because of his age, Tutti watched De and listened. Charlene maintained her role as participant observer during the sessions and provided us with the notes she had made about those reading events. But during that time, neither the children nor Charlene developed their literacy notions to the point that they could be described as proficient practitioners of mainstream literacy events.

In October 1982, I moved. As a result of that move, I maintained minimal contact with Charlene; however, from 1982 to 1984 she continued to take field notes, mail Heath and me letters and tapes, and visit with me when I stopped by. We lost regular contact with Charlene and the children during the next few years because of my sporadic visits, the children's school schedule, and Charlene's home and work

situations. During those years Heath and I did not encourage Charlene to continue with her field notes. In fact, we had no idea whether she even remembered the ninth-grade research project, much less utilized any of the ethnographic tools she had used earlier with the children. In 1988 I contacted Charlene to find out what had happened to her.

When I found Charlene I discovered that she had had three more children (twin boys and a girl). I also learned that she had moved several times within the community and was currently living in a six-room frame house with her two brothers, some friends, and a boarder. According to her, she had been living in that situation for about a year. Before that, she and her family had lived in a trailer that had burned. It seemed that each time she faced a crisis (a fire destroying their trailer, a report of parental neglect, relatives telling the family to get out, etc.) she chose or was forced to move. In her view, these moves had not caused the family any problems because De and Tutti still attended the same school.

When I asked Charlene about the children's schooling, she explained that the school's staff had added to her problems by retaining De in first grade because he was two points below the system's cutoff score on the Stanford Achievement Test, was very active and somewhat immature, and had a parent who seemingly wasn't interested in his schooling (because she was a cook who worked for hourly wages and couldn't get off work to meet the school's scheduled conferences). She also recounted that Tutti was viewed as a troublemaker and fighter who couldn't get along with others in his kindergarten class.

Her earlier expectations of school success for her children had been destroyed. According to her, she just wanted to keep De and Tutti from being tested and placed in a special education program like the one she had experienced. She noted that she couldn't understand the school system's assessment of De and Tutti since they did well on their schoolwork, report cards, and test scores. Furthermore, she noted that De loved to read. She recounted numerous times when he would sit at the kitchen table and read to Tutti and his twin brothers as she cooked dinner. She said that she took him to the library to get books because she couldn't afford to buy as many as he read.

When I asked if she had any records of De and Tutti's schoolwork, she opened a drawer that contained a two-year collection of data consisting of their papers, report cards, standardized testing reports, as well as letters to her about their progress. After examining those and talking with De and Tutti, I, too, questioned the incongruities between the children's standardized scores, their grades, and their teachers' subjective complaints regarding neatness, correctness, and behavior.

It was through the questions and concerns I had about De and Tutti's schooling that I inadvertently discovered that Charlene had

continued to use her ethnographic skills to gather data on her children and their schooling. Her use of data collection caused me to ask her why she had saved all of the children's schoolwork. With a surprised look, she noted that she had learned to do that during *our* research project about De and Tutti. I then began to question her about other ways she had used these research methods. She noted that she employed them all the time. She elaborated her point by describing her methods for doing her own self-initiated study about alimony payments and the laws regarding them so that she could get her ex-husband to pay her appropriately. She pointed out that that study had helped her know how to get information from the local library about alimony, interview some legal services employees, gather data from court proceedings regarding her divorce, and so on. As she talked, she explained that her work with Shirley and me had given her methods to use so that as an adult she could gather the data necessary to go to the court, the housing authority, the mental health workers, the welfare office, and the school and tell them her side of the story. Furthermore, she noted that when she went to those people with her data, they listened.

The Story: "There ain't no once upon a time here!"

My name is Charlene Thomas. I am a single mother at the present time and am trying to do my best to raise my children. I am not working, because work would cause me to lose my children's benefits. I tried working outside the home but found that I could not attend school meetings or care for my children when they were sick. I also found that my hourly wage was less than what I could get from government benefits. Even though I do not work outside the home, I am a full-time mother who is interested in my children doing the best that they can in school and in life. I have had my two oldest children attend school experiences at a local university and day camp. I did this so that they would stay off the streets and continue to learn during the summer.

Dede, he was smart and would catch on fast. He liked to have me talk to him and read books Shirley and Ms. Branscombe gave me. I like children, so it weren't a problem to do it. I could see how excited he got about books and school. Now, Tutti, Dede's little brother, would be around when I was talking and reading to Dede. I didn't pay much attention to what Tutti was doing but he must have been listening 'cause he loves books and reading more than Dede.

Now that they are in school, Tutti is so smart that he is going to be a smart child. He's going to make it. I'm working with Dede and trying to make him realize how things is. I got to be hard on him because he want it all without working. He want to be grown before his time. It seems like if I talk to him, it helps a little. See, I make him do book work

every day even though he's not in school. Tutti, he just reads or does on his own. He just sits back and observes, listens at you or Dede doing his work, and then catches on all at once. That's hard for De. He sees Tutti going up to their room and doing work 'cause he wants to. Then I makes him go up and do work that I pick out for him. If I let him do like Tutti he won't do nothing except draw. He draws all the time. Like I say, he just wants to be grown before time.

The twins, they do the best they can. It just takes them longer, and they don't take to books like the others. They had to stay back in Head Start an extra year. They are just now learning to say their ABC's, to count, and to tie their shoes. It takes them so long to put learning together. I think I can teach them right from wrong and how to get a job. They won't ever be like the others. Asalia, the baby, she as smart as De and Tutti were. She already looks at books and points to pictures when I say the word or says the word when I point to pictures. She's only three and doing pretend reading. She knows her name when she sees it and is learning to spell it. She's putting on her shoes, buckling them, and even trying to tie the twins' for them. She talks all the time.

There's not no life out there for the kids if they don't make it for themselves in school. Now, I'm trying to encourage them about what's right and giving them a place to learn. When they reach the teenager stage I hope they'll honor me as to what I am and always respect me and my teachings. If I can teach them, help them get their lessons, and work with them steady until they get out of high school, who knows maybe three of them will be able to go to college. Who knows!

Like I wrote earlier, I am moving to another town 'cause I hear that I can get more for the children. This new place has after-school programs, better school services for the twins, more government help, and the YMCA. Some folks are shame to use that kind of help. I don't see a problem with taking it, if it means I can raise my children better. I've been thinking about doing this for a long time. Before I decided to move, I went over to see the schools, the town, the people in the agencies, and the housing. I like them a lot. The only thing I didn't like was that the school people told me my children would go to different schools. All three of the youngest go to school together. Dede, he will go to another school 'cause he's in third grade. I don't like that. I'm going to try and see will they switch him over to the same school as the others. All the kids have to walk since it's not five miles from the house. I'm going to carry them because I never have let them go that far over to school.

I have made helping my children be all that they can my goal in life. My other two goals are to help other people with their children and to help older people with trips to the grocery or doctor. Because I help Ms. Branscombe and have helped Shirley, I am able to write and tell

ways I learned to get my children to love school and reading. I also try to counsel teenagers about the problems of being a single, teenage mother.

I work hard, sets my mind to a goal, and achieves it. I also try to problem-solve to accomplish my goals. You see, I have saved five hundred dollars for the down payment on a house and am saving the necessary money for insurance and property taxes. Owning a home is one of my lifetime dreams. My daddy owned his house until it burned. My mama and daddy thought that owning a house was one way of being who you are. I know I can get this dream for me and my children. I am trying to get my house through Habitat. I read about it in Reader's Digest. It's where you can help people help you get a house. They takes a house that needs work and helps you with it. Then you pay them so much a month. If you leave, you can sell it, give them their loan money, and keep any that's left. I have told them that my children and I can help them. The children can carry paint cans, do clean-up work, carry wood and nails, and other stuff. I can cook for them. If I don't get the house through them (Habitat), I will save more money and get one another way.

Amanda's Comments

After Charlene finished writing this section, she couldn't decide what to write next. I suggested that she write about her own memories of her children's early years or her own childhood. None of my suggestions seemed to fit her design for the chapter. Finally, after several false starts and several months had passed, she decided that we should write about the ways she had used "them field notes and stuff" over the last two years. She noted that she wanted to write about getting into the housing project, moving to the new town, and finally trying to move into her own home. She noted that the opportunity to reflect on those events by using her field notes and her writings would allow her to have more awareness about those events and would act as a record for her as she wrote her family history.

A Talk with Charlene

When I decides I want something, I think a long time about how to get it. I guess I think about what I have done to get things and then decide if doing like that will work this time. I wanted to move out of that house with my family and into the projects so my kids could have a bedroom. I tried going over and filling out the forms. I didn't hear anything from them, so I went back. They said that they had me on "The List!" I got a letter saying that I made too much money.

I was working at a family steak place cutting up stuff for the salad bar and frying chicken. They weren't paying me nothing except hourly wages so I couldn't figure it out. I had five children and made about \$130 a week. I decided that I better find out how folks got into them projects. I started asking people who lived over in there, in the ones I wanted to live in, how they got there. Some told me to send a letter saying why I wanted to move and why I needed to live there. Some told me to get some peoples who know me to write for me. Then I asked around to see who'd be moving from the apartments I wanted. When I found that out I got me some references and wrote a letter about why I wanted to live in the projects. I told them in that letter that I have five children and didn't make enough money to pay for my rent, lights, and heat through the winter. I told them where I wanted to live, so my kids would be messing with no drugs. Finally, I told them that I know some of the apartments over in that section of the projects would be vacant soon. It took a few weeks, but I got my letter saying that I could move into the ones I wanted.

I stayed in there for a little over a year. We took good care of it, and I even had me some flowers in front of the porch. But the kids from up the street started hanging out at the playground behind my place. Dede and Tutti, they wanted to go over there and play with them kids. I knowed they were messing with drugs 'cause I could see out my kitchen window. When that started, I decided I needed to move.

When I started thinking about moving, I thought I'd leave and go to another town. I had always lived around my grandmama, daddy, and brothers and had them there to help. I thought it would be nice to try raising my family on my own. I had a sister up in Ohio. I thought about moving up there with her, but when we went to visit I knew that wasn't for me. I had another sister who lived about forty miles away. She was doing okay over there. When I went to visit her, I rode around. It seemed like the best place for me. I took several trips over there to see how I liked it. Then I started trying to meet people to see what they had to say about it. I went to the food stamp place and the welfare place and talked to them. I drove around to the schools to see what they were like. I got the newspaper and read it whenever I went. After a few visits, I decided I wanted to live there. Once I made up my mind I went back and started filling out forms, writing letters, and making application. When I got them through, I moved.

It been different. We had two tornadoes last year go down our street. At first I lived in the projects. A fast food place was across the street. There was noise all of the time, day and night. Now, I moved into a house which is better. I am still trying to get my own house, but I'm making friends and taking older peoples to the grocery and doctor. I really likes working with them and helping them. I also brought my

family here with me. My sister up in Ohio was having a terrible time, so she's here now. My brothers are within fifty miles of us. If we need them, we can get them. See, I think we can help each other cause we are a family. We can raise our children together. We ain't got Mama, but we got each other. If we all pull together, we can have the courage to face life.

Charlene's Comments about Learning

When I asked Charlene about getting an education she explained that she might go back after the children had theirs. In the following statements she comments about schooling, education, and learning.

Maybe when I get my kids out I can go back to school, but not right now. It ain't the time for me to go to school. I tried it. I tried it again just recently. Now, I know that I got to go all the way back and learn everything. School ain't the place for me either. Never was. It just didn't work for me. It put a lot out of my life. See, if I go to school it'll be like before. I'll have to have somebody to look after my children and help them get ready for the rest of their education. I would be going to school and getting my lessons when my children needed me to help them with their lessons. I couldn't go to their assemblies or conferences. I think I need to stay with the children and their education now.

I got enough education to get by. See, I had a choice. I could either go to school and do what was right by the teachers and my lessons, or I could stay at home and be the mother who's tending to my children. I made my choice to be a mother. Schooling, I can always go back and get it. I can't go back and be a mother and change those kids after they're grown up.

It's not like I don't do any learning. I read books. I read the newspaper and magazines. I also observe the children while they learn. I write about what I see them doing. I write other stuff too. For example, sometimes I just sits back and watch them as they are getting their lessons. I watch to see who's gonna ask the other one a question. I'll watch to see who's gonna finish first. While I'm observing, I'm learning the stuff they are learning and learning from what they're doing. I also learn when they asked me to help them. Dede, he is almost ahead of me. The work he's bringing home now, I might not be able to understand it. It just different. Maybe when they get older, then I can go back to night school and get a degree. I have to steadily work along with them. If I do that steady working, I'll be ready for night school.

Somebody might wonder where I got interested in knowing about children. I learned about them from my grandmother. She was keeping children at her home. When she had to run an errand or go somewhere I'd keep them. Back then there wasn't nothing wrong with kids watching

kids. Kids became a question to me. I would just take up a child and start playing with it, changing it, washing it, and learning about it. I would watch everything that child did, everything it said, and try to make sense out of the way it acted. Sometimes, all I could say was that that's children. That's why they be doing that. Other times like when they started to walking and talking, they made more sense to me. I knew I had done the same things that they be doing so that helped me make sense of them. Then I would try to guess what step they might be taking next. I did the baby sitting for my grandmama all of my life, until I moved here. Doing it helped me learn what was natural for a child to be doing and what wasn't.

My mama wasn't around but for six months after I had Dede. She died then. She had the cancer. Even before that she was so sick, she couldn't help me. She tried to help me, but there just wasn't no time for Mama and me. I guess Mama thought, "Charlene, she done made her bed hard, and she's gotta learn the hard way how to raise her children. I ain't gonna be here to help her."

When Shirley and Ms. Branscombe asked me about working with them, I was eager to do it 'cause I do love to watch children. It's fun to me to see who's gonna do what when. It's fun to me to watch them learn. From my studying and working as an ethnographer, I've learned about the way children learn in books and from what's happening around them. I know that if things aren't right in the home, the children can't think straight. They'll be worried about what's happening there instead of their schoolwork. See, the children know what's going on. See, they've got it all up in their heads. They watch, observe, and then put it all together just like Tutiti done. All we can do for them is give them a place to learn that don't have all of that fussing and fighting and drugs. We can also give them the materials they need. I got paper and books and stuff for my children to use at school and at home. They don't ever have to worry about not having paper, pencils, and books.

Then we also gotta talk to them about what they are learning. I'll have Dede working on a math problem. He'll be having trouble and ask me a question. I try to help him by asking him that same question without him knowing it. Then he'll think some more and finally turn around and just work that problem. That's why I say that children got it up in their heads and we just gotta help them get to it.

Charlene's Comments on Being an Ethnographer

After we had discussed the methods Charlene used to talk with agencies, officials, and others, I asked her several questions about whether she thought ethnographic methods helped her. Some of those questions related to her ability to state what steps she used. Others related to

what it meant to her to consider herself an ethnographer. Still others related to her notions of power and her need to have her story heard outside of her family and community. Finally, I asked why she did not use those steps to get more education. I have summarized her responses.

According to Charlene, seeing herself as an ethnographer allows her to have several roles (mother, observer, worker, recorder, and writer), which make up an identity of success rather than a member of the underclass. By being an observer, she is able to confront bureaucratic agencies, fail to get what she wants, step back, and start over. She recalled doing field notes for Shirley. According to her, she would write the best she could, think nothing had been omitted, and then find that Shirley would write asking for more detail or more information. She also explained that when she thought she had gotten to the end of a project, Shirley would ask for more. Charlene noted that having to deal with the agencies is no harder than having to gather data. According to her, "You just have to be willing to be patient and go back and back and back. The ones who don't try, don't go back, but give up are the ones who don't get what they want. They don't have the courage to face life."

Concluding Comments

Since 1981-82, this is the fourth chapter that has been written about the literacy development of Charlene and her family. When I first walked into her home in 1981, I did not see books, magazines, notebook paper, pencils or crayons, newspapers, family pictures, but I did hear the television and radio playing at all times. When I walked into her new home this past week, I saw novels that Charlene had been reading, children's books that the children read to each other, notebook paper, pencils, crayons, a photo album that documented the children's lives, magazines, a Bible, and paintings on the wall. I also saw a small television in the other room that the children are allowed to watch after they have done their homework, played outside, and talked with Charlene about their school day and their work. In her first home, the furniture simply served its utilitarian function. In her latest home, the furniture is both functional and attractive. Her schooling experience had been a failure when I first met her. Her children's schooling experience is becoming more and more successful. This past year, her two oldest sons won school awards for academic excellence. Dede won two essay writing awards for his essays on Christmas and fighting drugs. Tutiti received awards for having the top standardized scores in math and reading for his grade level. Furthermore, he was awarded a certificate as an outstanding academic student in the second grade.

These aren't the only changes in Charlene's life. She is beginning

Dede
1981-82

Shift
to
the family
literacy

I served
responsibility
to
my
children

to believe that she must be more political so that she can be heard. At this point, she is attempting to get local and state officials to allow her to help them in their fight against drugs, gangs, dropping out of school, and their efforts to help single mothers. Although she has contacted the mayor in her hometown and has written several local television talk show hosts to get them to work with the problems she sees facing children, she has found that they will not listen to her. Charlene believes that our leaders must listen to people who live in and survive the struggle of the underclass. Furthermore, she has said that the problems she sees are deeper and more complex than telling children to "just say no to drugs."

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Response

Ethel White

My comments with regard to "Student and Teacher Co-Researchers: Ten Years Later" are based on my observations and experiences as a teacher, educational director, and director of a Head Start program where we served 240 children from less advantaged homes. My response also reflects my current work as director of a day-care center serving infants and school-age children whose parents are working or going to school. On a more personal note, my responses are influenced by my own experiences as the single parent of an adopted daughter whose academic performance was quite short of what the teacher expected; this teacher's approach, however, focused narrowly on academics without regard to the whole child.

My idea of collaboration and shared experiences in the raising of today's children began in the Head Start programs, where agencies kept close relations with the children's parents. There, collaboration between teachers and parents was aimed at promoting optimal performance of children and optimal development of parental skills as the principal influence in the children's growth and development.

In those instances where true partnerships evolved between the parent and teacher, we found that changes and improvement took place not only between the children and the agency but between the agency and the entire family. Parents became more assertive, and were more likely to risk group involvement and participation. They began to be more likely to seek other means of self-improvement and to search actively for employment if they did not have a job. Many were hired as permanent aides in our program and moved up to positions of increased responsibility when they were exceptionally competent or gained new academic skills.

Parents were encouraged from the outset to become team players and to reinforce the activities of the center in their homes—which they did on an informal basis through:

1. observation of techniques used in the center
2. self-study, training, workshops
3. planning, preparation, and use of available resources as teaching tools