



**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*Inside City Schools: Investigating Literacy in Multicultural Classrooms* by Sarah Warshauer  
Freedman; Elizabeth Radin Simons; Julie Shalhope Kalnin; Alex Casareno; M-CLASS  
Cindy O'Donnell-Allen

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are organized to address various frequently-asked questions surrounding “A Teacher Research Process” and “Questions and Issues” in the field. Part 1 consists of twelve short chapters, each devoted to an essential component of conducting a teacher research study such as choosing a research question, recording observations in a research log, working with other teacher researchers, collecting and analyzing data, and going public with one’s results. Immensely practical, these chapters feature numerous tools and strategies, including general timelines for completing a yearlong study, focus questions and suggestions to consider at each stage of the process, excerpts from teacher researchers’ logs, data samples, and systems for managing the overwhelming accumulation of data. The chapter on data analysis—undoubtedly one of the most challenging stages of any study—contains useful writing and visualization strategies “designed to help you move in and out of your data, from discrete parts to whole views” (59). The following strategy, for example, helps teacher researchers “abstract and distill” their tentative findings:

State the essence of your findings as if you had to explain what you had discovered in 50 words or less. Write as if you have been invited to speak extemporaneously at a conference or as if conference planners have asked you to FAX an abstract of your research to them the next day. (63)

This prompt is followed by an actual form MacLean and Mohr have used for this purpose.

Part 1 concludes with two chapters in which MacLean and two other teacher researchers draw on studies they’ve conducted to explain their personal renditions of the general teacher research process. Their concluding of Part 1 with such candid voices emphasizes that even though the previous ten chapters might make conducting teacher research appear to be “methodical, purposeful, and thorough,” in reality, one’s study may feel “haphazard, almost slipshod” at times (90). Beginning teacher Julie Fisher’s account of her first attempt at teacher research confirms that the process is often fraught with false starts, doubts, and questions, though it eventually leads to greater understanding, especially with the support of a teacher research group. “The important things are to *observe, record your observations and reflections, and talk about what you see,*” Fisher reminds us. “For only by learning about what goes on in our classrooms can we truly teach not only the students but ourselves” [Fisher’s italics] (104).

In Part 2, the authors address the tensions inherent in assuming the dual role of teacher and researcher, as well as tackling such crucial issues as the validity, reliability, and ethics of teacher research; finding time to conduct it; facilitating a teacher research group; and sharing one’s findings beyond the classroom. The collection of teacher research articles that comprise Part 3 of the book demonstrates the wide variety of forms teacher researchers’ final reports can take, depending on their original purposes and their intended audience. Finally, Part 4 alone is worth the book’s purchase price. Here, MacLean and Mohr provide a gold mine of resources intended to “introduce you to the teacher research community and . . . support you as you become a part of it” (259). They not only describe opportunities for networking both locally and nationally, but even list their own e-mail addresses “in hopes that some of you will let us know how your research is coming along” (262). (And yes, they will reply!) They also provide contact information for several agencies committed to funding teacher research, including NCTE, IRA, and the Spencer Foundation, and they offer models of courses, school-based programs, and university degree programs centered on teacher research. They conclude the book with a bibliographic essay of works that have influenced their thinking as teacher researchers and a conventional bibliography grouped into three sections: texts that provide a background for teacher research, texts written about teacher research, and works by teacher researchers.

### ***Inside City Schools: Investigating Literacy in Multicultural Classrooms***

Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Elizabeth Radin Simons, Julie Shalhope Kalnin, Alex Casareno, and the M-CLASS teams. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999. 267 pp. \$24.95 paperback. ISBN 0-8077-3840-9.

Truth no doubt rings with the most authority when told by someone who’s “been there.” Although M-CLASS members were new to teacher research when the group originated, their studies reported in *Inside City Schools* (Teachers College Press, 1999) prove that they have “been there,” struggling right alongside their ethnically diverse students and one another to address the great American question: In our nation comprised of many cultures, how do we honor diversity and celebrate community at the same time?

The Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools (M-CLASS) was formed in 1992 when a team of university researchers from

Berkeley invited a diverse group of twenty-four eighth through tenth grade English and social studies teachers from urban schools in Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco to participate in a multicultural teacher research community, where they would examine literacy teaching and learning with diverse populations in urban schools. While M-CLASS members tackled “their own most pressing questions” (15) arising in their respective classrooms, they were united by a vision of “multicultural literacies—literacies that provide students with an understanding of the variations within these United States but at the same time bring us together as one nation” (6). To attempt to realize this vision, members met regularly over the course of a year to support one another in the process of conducting teacher research studies for the first time and to allow their “multiple voices to play off of and inform one another” (10) as they attempted to “provide alternative visions for thinking about multiculturalism, literacy, and learning” (20). At the same time that the Berkeley team was supporting these efforts, they were also studying the group’s collaborative processes and M-CLASS members’ development as teacher researchers. One of the recent books in the Practitioner Inquiry Series (edited by Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle and published by NCTE and Teachers College Press), *Inside City Schools* presents both the teacher researchers’ individual studies and the findings of the Berkeley team. Like other books in the series, these findings emphasize that the purpose of teacher research is not to come up with easy, all-purpose answers to the “great American question,” but to systematically investigate the issues and complexities present in actual classrooms with the hopes that increased understanding will lead to better teaching and learning.

The book is divided into five parts. Part 1 contextualizes the book by describing M-CLASS’s goals and origins and explaining the nature of the school-university collaboration as well as their methods for conducting teacher research. While the general teacher research process described by MacLean and Mohr maps nicely onto this portion of the book, transcripts from M-CLASS meetings and excerpts from members’ writing provide a frank but inspiring account of these accomplished teachers as they struggle through the entire process for the very first time. The collaborative thinking evident in M-CLASS discussions also demonstrates the value of teacher

research groups in supporting individual members’ inquiries.

The fruits of their labors comprise Parts 2–4, which make up the bulk of the book. Two chapters in each part are written solely by M-CLASS members, while a third, led by a member of the Berkeley research team, synthesizes the findings of several members in relation to a particular theme, since time and space constraints prevented all M-CLASS members from presenting their findings at length. Part 2 (Chapters 3–5), entitled “Seeing Beyond Stereotypes: Looking Across Boundaries of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class, and Generation,” is a report of the teacher researchers’ efforts to “get to know their students, to see beneath their surfaces” and to “create communities of learners in their classrooms, in which their students got to know one another” (53). Since all but two M-CLASS members made dramatic changes in their teaching and/or curricula as a result of their teacher research, the authors focus in Part 3 (Chapters 6–8) on the realities of “Constructing an Inclusive Curriculum: Talking Explicitly About Race and Ethnicity” (107). In Part 4 of the book (Chapters 9–11), entitled “Constructing an Empowering Curriculum: Achieving High Standards,” the authors turn to the teacher-student relationship and examine the influence on students’ sense of empowerment when high standards are held by the teacher. The book concludes in Part 5 (Chapter 12) by addressing implications for practice and research based on the findings of both M-CLASS members and the university researchers.

Although the Berkeley research team expresses concerns in the book’s final chapter that their voices have overshadowed those of the M-CLASS team, the teacher researchers’ accounts are the heart of this book. As I read, I was struck again by the distinctiveness of teacher research and its unmatched perspective in traditional educational research. In Chapter 3 of Part 2, for instance, I witnessed Griselle Diaz-Gemmati’s honesty and compassion as she painfully recounted how her attempts to use writing and literature to confront racism forever jarred the superficial calm in her diverse eighth-grade classroom. Midway through her study, she realized, “The students and I would never—could never—go back to the place we were before the project started” (66), and though she feels like quitting, she perseveres to these messy and difficult conclusions:

I would be lying to myself if I pretended to be the teacher I was before I had initiated this project. If

anything, this research has taught me that hard talk on candid issues can take place within the safety of classroom walls. I know that a society that is free of prejudice is many, many years away, but it's something I hope to keep striving for—even if it's only in the microcosm of life that constitutes my classroom. (76)

In Chapter 6 of Part 3, I was likewise impressed with Deborah Aruchuleta Juarez's commitment to constructing a curriculum from scratch that would help her junior high English students deal productively with topics of race, culture, and class. Acting on her conviction that "[e]ither we deal with issues of race, culture, and class or the issues will deal with us," Juarez helps her students use literacy practices as tools to "intellectualize and articulate their concerns" (125). In the process she discovers that multicultural education is possible in diverse classrooms only if teachers are willing to "create a disciplined setting where we can practice it" (124).

Finally, in Chapter 9 of Part 4, Ann Lew's willingness to reexamine her role in teaching the conventions of writing to second-language learners also caused me to challenge the indirect methods I often privilege in my teaching of writing. Her case study of one student's writing development from ninth to twelfth grade suggests that "the role of the writing teacher is extremely active—there must be a good deal of facilitating and coaching." Based on her findings, Lew argues convincingly that the assignment of extensive outside reading, careful attention to student writing "via the red pen and other methods," and the maintenance of a "caring, language-rich environment" are essential to helping second language learners become more proficient users of standard English (177).

These and other voices in the book demonstrate the incomparable power of the perspectives only teacher researchers can supply and the necessity of sharing the findings only they can reach. Emerging from real classroom contexts and asked by teachers who have "been there," teacher research questions challenge all of us to pursue inquiries, and perhaps truths, of our own.

### ***Action, Talk, and Text: Learning and Teaching through Inquiry***

Gordon Wells, ed. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000. 231 pp. \$24.95 paperback. ISBN 0-8077-4014-4.

"Transformation. That is the chief purpose of education—that all who are involved should transform

their capacities to act, think, and feel in ways that contribute to the common good and enrich their own individual lives" (1). As this opening quotation and their group's name suggest, members of the Developing Inquiring Communities in Education Project (DICEP) share a concern for "creating opportunities for inquiry-based learning and teaching at all levels and in all areas of the curriculum" (2). Begun in 1991, this school-university partnership is made up of educators (grades 1–8) from Toronto public schools and university personnel from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), who meet regularly to support one another in studies of their own practice. Incidentally, DICEP uses the broader term "action research" to describe their work, since their membership is not limited to teachers but includes administrators, media specialists, educational consultants, and other educational personnel whose primary work takes place outside the classroom.

Like *Inside City Schools*, this book is a report of individual members' findings, as well as the group's collaboration. The opening chapter by editor Gordon Wells historicizes the group's mission and theoretical orientation and is followed by Part 1 (Chapters 2–5), which contains action research studies conducted in elementary schools. Action research in secondary schools is the focus of Part 2 (Chapters 6–9), while the contents of Part 3 (Chapters 10–11) are a reflection of the preceding sections.

Although many of the chapters in Parts 1 and 2 are authored by action researchers in elementary classrooms and discipline areas other than English, each of them addresses problems, issues, and challenges most teachers face as they attempt to build communities of inquiry in their classrooms, regardless of the population or subject they teach. Their accounts reflect DICEP's concerted efforts to answer two overarching questions through inquiry into their own practice:

- How do teachers create and sustain communities of inquiry in their classrooms?
- What kinds of discourse promote and extend inquiry and enable participants to transform their individual and collective understandings?

In the process of tailoring these questions to their own classroom contexts, DICEP members tackle subjects of interest to all teachers such as how to balance teacher responsibility for teaching specific concepts with student-initiated processes of