

# Teacher Researchers Together: Delving into the Teacher Research Process

by

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*As we got together every two weeks and shared and compared, we had an opportunity to put on the table very difficult issues such as racial problems — as you can see we were a diverse group. And sometimes somebody would disagree, but sometimes I think we were in awe of what we had to say about what was going on in our own separate classes. So we came away from that learning process enlightened about how we could go back and take that same process and share it with the kids.* (Reginald Galley, AERA M-CLASS Symposium, New Orleans, April, 1994)

Reginald Galley and five other New Orleans teachers presented their reflections on their teacher research process this past April at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans. They were part of the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy's M-CLASS (Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools) project. Designed to forge new and strong connections between teacher and university researchers, M-CLASS is now entering its third year. The focus of M-CLASS has been on understanding literacy in multicultural urban English and social studies classrooms, although this is only one of the many possible areas that teacher and university-based researchers working together might address.

As the teachers from the New Orleans site spoke to the mostly university-based audience, they reflected on the teacher research process, and we all used the opportunity to begin to think about how our work with M-CLASS is fitting into the national teacher research scene.

Some of the issues the New Orleans group raised, especially the underlying idea that teacher research often leads to teacher change, have been discussed by many others (e.g., Bissex & Bullock, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Mohr & Maclean, 1987; Stenhouse, 1985). Often, however, the M-CLASS teachers raised issues that were somewhat different and often more specific than those that have been raised before.

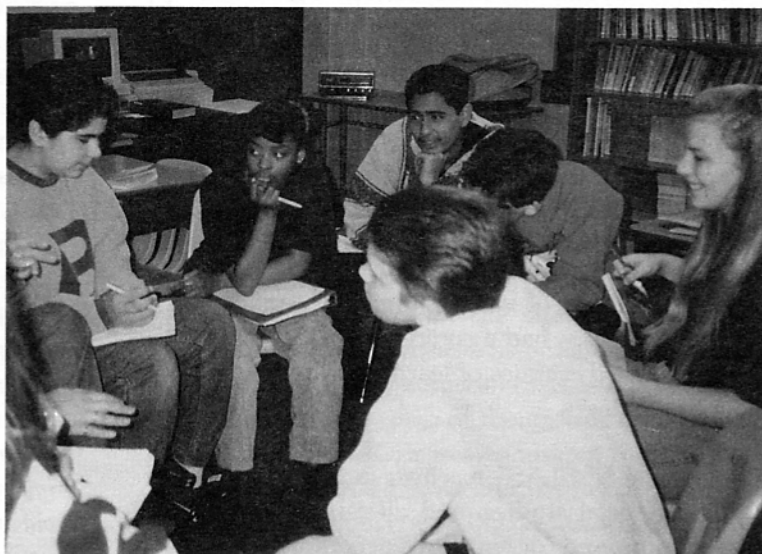
First of all, a number of the M-CLASS teachers in New Orleans and elsewhere found that they drew their research questions from important personal experiences, often experiences that went back to their childhoods. These experiences focused them on what really mattered to them as teachers. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) discuss teachers' research questions and trace them to teachers' everyday experiences in their classrooms. The M-CLASS teachers also wrote about

their classrooms, and some of their questions originated from their teaching experiences. But when the roots of their questions were grounded in earlier experiences, we found that those experiences were key in what they noticed as important and in leading them to think carefully and write with passion and commitment about their practices.

The New Orleans teachers next explained that being part of a teacher research group gave them enough confidence and support to take risks. This risk-taking, for them, was at the heart of any changes they made in their normal instructional practices. As part of their teacher research, they often asked questions that led them to make radical changes. They reflected on how difficult such change was and how much support they needed to feel safe enough to take risks. Others who discuss how teacher research encourages change do not focus on risk-taking as being essential to the change process. Stenhouse (1985) defines teacher research as "self-critical" inquiry which leads to action or change. And one could infer that risk-taking would be part of any honest self-critical journey. But even Stenhouse does not acknowledge risk-taking in the explicit way the New Orleans teachers do.

Third, the New Orleans M-CLASS teachers found that the process of doing teacher research encouraged them to observe their students carefully and get to know their needs. The teachers also found that conducting research afforded them the opportunity to collaborate with their students in structuring the curriculum. This theme permeates the literature about teacher research and is well demonstrated in the work of prominent teacher researchers like Nancie Atwell (1987) and Vivian Paley (1981, 1984, 1986). Studying students is a favorite topic for teacher researchers, and it is a critically important area of teacher inquiry. It deserves explicit attention, since getting to know students is fundamental to effective teaching and is prerequisite to effective curriculum building (Freedman, 1994). Importantly, teacher researchers who work with their students daily are in a unique position to document and analyze the ups and downs of development. They are in much the same position as child language researchers who study their own children in order to gain the kind of insights that are only possible with nearly constant interactions with their "subjects" (e.g., Bloom, 1970; Brown, 1973).

Finally, the New Orleans teachers discussed how being involved in teacher research provided a positive opportunity for collaboration with university faculty, with each having areas of expertise and with each learning from the contributions of the other. Only some teacher research is conducted in collaboration with uni-



M-CLASS students practice collaboration.

versity faculty, and of the projects that involve university collaborators (e.g., Cochran-Smith and Lytle's groups in Philadelphia), few teachers have explicitly written about its costs and benefits. Since many teacher research groups were set up explicitly to offer an alternative to university-based research, from the inception of the teacher research movement in the United States there has been a tendency for the two communities to shy away from one another. From our experience in M-CLASS, we would argue that the communities of teacher researchers and university-based researchers can both be more powerful and effective in the change process through collaborative action.

### Research Questions Grounded in Personal Experiences

Doris Williams Smith and Sarah Herring are African American teachers from homes with rich literacy traditions. Doris writes about how she used those experiences to construct her learning theory and then how she modeled much of what she did in her classroom on literacy activities she experienced in her home. After explaining that she "wanted to examine how audience awareness can be enhanced by creating an environment where there was a real audience, authentic communication and positive motivation," she recalls why this issue is so important to her. In particular, she

## M-CLASS: Who, What, When, Where

The M-CLASS (Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools) project brings together six teachers from each of four urban sites — Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco.<sup>1</sup> This community of twenty-four teacher researchers spent two years examining, discussing, and writing about their work with multicultural groups of students in order to articulate the underlying tensions in their schools and classrooms and to understand the opportunities within them. In their classrooms, where students of varied ethnicities came together, teachers had a common interest in exploring the dynamics of learning to write and writing to learn.

All of the M-CLASS teachers taught English and/or social studies, and all taught grades eight, nine, and/or ten. The teachers are themselves a multi-ethnic group: ten are African-American, nine are white, three are Latino, and two are Asian-American.

To locate interested and experienced teachers, Sarah Freedman and Liz Simons worked with contacts from the National Writing Project [NWP] sites, relying on the NWP Urban Sites Network, as well as other local educational leaders. Essential to the success of M-CLASS was choosing a group of teachers interested in engaging in a lengthy reflective process. Although there was some variation, the teachers for the most part were inexperienced in teacher research.

We organized the M-CLASS community to provide plenty of support for the teachers throughout their research process. Besides the Berkeley team<sup>2</sup>, the major support person was a site coordinator for each city who was an experienced university-based researcher or teacher researcher.<sup>3</sup>

We began the research year by bringing the teachers and site coordinators to San Francisco for a conference on multiculturalism, literacy, and teacher research.<sup>4</sup> At the conference, held on the first weekend in September 1992, the

explains how her family experiences with audience influenced her own literacy development:

*As one of seven children, born to a couple who migrated to New Orleans from a small rural community in northern Louisiana, I grew up in a home where, although there was a dearth of material possessions, there was an abundance of unconditional love and acceptance. We were encouraged to share our own experiences with family members who were always ready to provide an attentive ear. If one of us had to memorize a poem for school, all the others listened to the repeated attempts so often that we all ended up memorizing it.*

*We've created a family tradition that lasted over 20 years that I think epitomizes our love for playing to an audience. Every year we get together on Christmas morning and have a family Christmas program. And over the 20 years we've had everything imaginable, from an original poem by my ten-year-old niece to an original rap by my son and my nephew entitled 'Hey Homeboy, It's Christmas.'*

Doris then theorizes about the aspects of her environment that welcomed her into literacy:

*The factors in my upbringing that stand out most as aiding in my own literacy development were that I was provided with: (1) repeated opportunities to actively engage in all four communicative strands: listening, speaking, reading and writing; (2) an accepting nonthreatening environment; (3) a real responding audience; (4) opportunities to work cooperatively with others; (5) opportunities for sharing which were pleasurable experiences I wanted to repeat; and (6) access to others who listened to and valued my ideas.*

She goes on to explain how she attempted to replicate these theoretically important conditions for her students in their school experiences:

*Since literacy development does not take place in a vacuum, I tried to establish the same sense of a discourse community in my eighth grade classroom—that is, to have students from diverse backgrounds feel a spirit of cooperation and acceptance in a nonthreatening environment where they could engage in all the communicative strands: reading, writing, speaking and listening. This, of course,*



*necessitated that others would listen to and value their ideas, which was particularly important in this teaching situation, where my students were not basically unicultural. (Doris Williams Smith, 1994)*

In her research Doris went on to explore the particular complexity of creating a respectful, supportive, and well-functioning literacy community with students from multiple cultural groups.

Sarah Herring, who also discusses how her past experiences shaped her research question, puzzles over why she and five of her siblings had positive experiences with school and literacy while one of her brothers had negative experiences. Knowing that for her and her siblings home background was relatively constant, she explores what schools can do to make a difference for students, like her brother, who are not successful:

*I have always been and still am an eager learner. I enjoyed school immensely. Since I enjoyed school so much, it seemed only natural that everyone else should also. Yet, my brother did not. He dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade. At first, I thought he had quit school because two of his friends had dropped out, but that was an incorrect supposition. I was perplexed because of the seven children, everyone completed high school and went on to college except one child. There was always ample encouragement from my parents to excel, so what happened to the one? Wasn't school interesting to him?*

*The M-CLASS project presented an opportunity for me to really search for answers to these questions. Since all of the children in my family had been encouraged to succeed by loving parents, I felt that the answer to my questions lay in the classroom. I felt that motivation or the lack of it had to be a key factor. I began by asking my brother questions about why he dropped out of school, and I really listened to his answers.*

*Contrary to what I had assumed as the reason for his dropping out of school, my brother said, 'I was ashamed because I couldn't speak clearly, so I didn't read or get up in front of the class. I was ashamed that I would fail. And then the teachers had picks that they called on all of the time. The other children were ignored. I was ignored. That was wrong. I don't*

teachers formulated their initial research questions. Teachers then met locally with their site coordinators to refine their questions and discuss how they would conduct their studies in their classrooms, schools, and communities. Either Liz Simons or Sarah Freedman visited each site three times during the year to help the teachers refine their questions, analyze their data, and write draft reports.

During the research year, interaction was frequent and intense, both among the teachers and between the teachers and the local site coordinators. The Berkeley team kept in close touch with the teachers through the site coordinators, through three scheduled meetings at each site, and through telephone calls and letters to individual teachers. Two of the groups (San Francisco and New Orleans) continued to meet locally for a second year, and the Berkeley team kept in close touch with the Boston and Chicago teachers as they completed their writing.

<sup>1</sup> The teacher researchers included: from Boston, Nancy O'Malley, Eileen Shakespear, Darcelle Walker, James Williams, Walter Wood, Junia Yearwood; from Chicago, Kathy Daniels, Tom Daniels, Stephanie Davenport, Griselle Diaz-Gemmati, Brenda Landau, and David O'Neill; from New Orleans, Karen Alford, Reginald Galley, Sarah Herring, Doris Williams Smith, Patricia Ward, and Elena Valenti; and from San Francisco, George Austin, Verda Delp, Deborah Juarez, Ann Lew, Susanna Merrimee, and Phil Potestio.

<sup>2</sup> The Berkeley team was directed by Sarah Warshauer Freedman and Elizabeth Radin Simons, with the ongoing leadership of Alex Casareno. The other members of the team included Stan Goto, Maribel Gonzalez, Ayana Hudson, Julie Kalnin, Cathy Leak, Barbara McClain, Cristina Santamaria, and Carol Treasure.

<sup>3</sup> The site coordinators were: in Boston, Roberta Logan, teacher researcher with the National Writing Project's Urban Sites Network, supported by Joe Check, co-director of the Urban Sites Network, director of the Boston Writing Project, and faculty member at the University of Massachusetts, Boston; in Chicago, B.J. Wagner, director of the Chicago Area Writing Project and faculty member at National Louis University; in New Orleans, Cynthia Roy, director of the New Orleans Writing Project and faculty member at the University of New Orleans; and in San Francisco, Elizabeth Simons, M-CLASS project co-director, supported by Carol Tateishi, director of the Bay Area Writing Project and director of dissemination for the NWP Urban Sites Network.

<sup>4</sup> The conference was funded by CHART, a project of the Rockefeller Foundation. Presenting and leading workshops at the conference were: Wilma Chan, Barbara Christian, Troy Duster, Kris Gutierrez, and Jabari Mahiri on multiculturalism; and Joan Cone, Mary K. Healy, Jane Juska, and Patsy Lockhardt on teacher research. Special guests included: Phyllis Franklin, Executive Director of the Modern Language Association; Miles Myers, Executive Director of the National Council of Teachers of English; Judith Renyi, Director of CHART; Richard Sterling, Director of the New York City Writing Project and Co-Director of the National Writing Project's Urban Sites Network.

*know if they still do that now, but they did then.'*  
*My brother's remark seared my heart.*

Next Sarah explains that her reflections on her brother's words led her to her research question: "What motivates students to read and write, and more specifically, what could I do to motivate them?" Her brother's difficulties led her to focus on one of her most difficult students:

*As in previous years, I had several students who could provide the data for my questions; however, I will only speak of one, Couvillion. Couvillion was an excellent candidate to drop out of school. He had been ostracized in my class; I had considered him a case for special education, and he had experienced suspensions and failure in the past. He detested reading and writing, and he was disruptive in class. Since he didn't appear to care about his education, and after I had been unsuccessful at motivating him, I decided to ignore him. Perhaps failing would teach him a lesson.*

*Then I heard my brother's words, 'The other children were ignored. I was ignored. I don't know if they still do that now, but they did then. Soon I stopped caring.'*

*I had been guilty of ignoring Couvillion, wishing the problem would go away. I was jarred back to reality. From that time on, Couvillion became one of my special projects. We worked together as writing pals. I gave him more individualized attention, and I did varied activities with him. He rewarded me by doing his projects and homework more consistently. He even did his reading and writing exercises as we worked as writing pals. He passed the Graduate Exit Exam, a test that the state of Louisiana mandates that all students pass to receive a high school diploma.*

Sarah concludes by connecting her student Couvillion to her brother and explaining what this reflective process taught her as a teacher:

*I'm glad my brother reminded me that ignoring the problem was not the solution. Couvillion might have become a statistic. Just as I had made a supposition about why my brother dropped out of school, I originally thought Couvillion's inappropriate behavior was indicative of his intelligence and his desire to fail. (Sarah Herring, 1994)*

Doris and Sarah's personal experiences led them to their research questions and then guided the ways they structured their classrooms and responded to their students. Both built their teaching from their own positive literacy experiences that led them to become English teachers. And Sarah unraveled a family dilemma that had haunted her for years. Her discoveries allowed her to understand and devise ways to meet the needs of her most difficult students.

### Taking Risks

Pat Ward is an African American poet who had always been afraid to teach poetry. She wanted to share her love of poetry with her students, but she feared that if she introduced poetry in school, her students might miss the magic and music of the words. Her nightmare was inadvertently doing harm rather than good. Her impetus came from the San Francisco meeting:

*Professor Barbara Christian, when she addressed the large group of teachers involved in M-CLASS [at the San Francisco meeting], planted a seed in my mind when she spoke of bringing material into the classroom that was different from the traditional material, books and poems 'that spoke to something occurring in the student's life.'*

Then with the support of her teacher research group, she gained enough confidence to take the risk of teaching poetry:

*The support of our teacher research group empowered me to take the first step, to take a risk and choose poetry as the subject of my research ... The support from the group grew naturally because from the beginning of our research project, at the core of this study, has been a sense of community and cooperation. We listen to each other, we brainstorm and freewrite together, we offer suggestions for improvements, we challenge each other to take risks, we criticize, and we praise. This sense of helpfulness has prevailed throughout our collaboration. (Patricia Ward, 1994)*

Pat would try new activities in her classroom and then use the group to help her reflect on the effectiveness of them. This cycle of testing-confirming in the group, and testing yet again, proved essential to the change process for her.

Like Pat, Elena Valenti used the M-CLASS group to confirm her efforts as she tried new activities. Elena,

who immigrated to the U.S. from Cuba as a young child, had recently reentered the workforce. Although she had grown children of her own, she was relatively new to teaching social studies. She was still working out her class routines and wanted very much to get her students more involved in what they were learning. She worried that they did not participate enough in class. Elena began her M-CLASS research wanting to get her students to talk more but ended up shifting her focus. She took advantage of the multidisciplinary group of teachers in M-CLASS to support her in taking the risk of instituting a multidisciplinary approach to teaching geography. In the end, the multidisciplinary approach yielded the participation she originally hoped for:

*As I thought about it, I realized that there is a lot of background in a culturally diverse classroom, and I wanted very much to find methods that allow for students to see different perspectives. How is an Islenos different from a Cajun? Do they both celebrate Easter? In what ways? And how can I link these cultural differences to literacy in our classroom? Students come to literacy in different ways, and I was determined to find different ways for my students. Specifically, I wanted to know what is involved in promoting student dialogue, both written and oral, in my social studies classroom.*

Elena goes on to describe one of her multidisciplinary activities:

*Students were reading novels in their World Geography class, and ... they were being asked to read for a different reason than they were used to. Instead of being instructed to read for character, plot and point of view, students were looking for references to location, land forms, climate and most importantly, culture. They were reading to reference location and movement of goods and ideas, to identify ways in which people have adapted to the environment or changed the environment to suit themselves. This was something they had never done with a novel before, and it was no wonder some thought that surely I was ready for retirement. They were being asked to think about how geography can be a part of literature.*

Like Pat, Elena credits the teacher research group for helping her take this new path:

*It is the members of my 'support group,' my fellow teacher researchers, who I must thank for helping to make my geography assignments more varied and more learner-friendly. They encouraged me to look for new ways to help my students become more literate, to participate in discourse — both silent and written — with themselves and with others. My fellow teacher researchers listened patiently and intently while I read from my own journal and from the writings of my students. They asked hard, pointed questions about what I was learning about how my students learn; these questions forced me to reevaluate and revisit data collected in the classroom.*



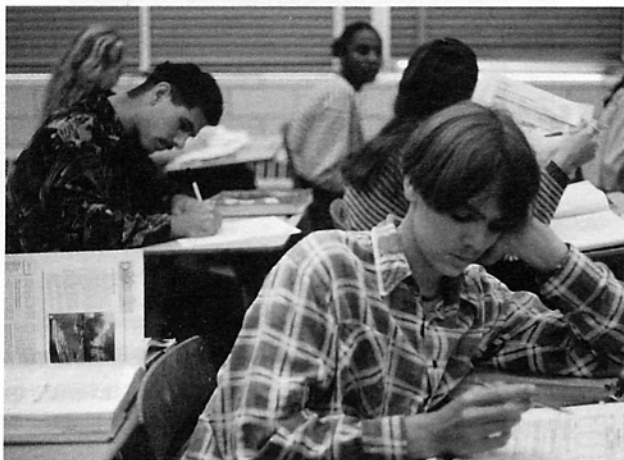
Elena then describes how she took her interdisciplinary work even further — moving from using novels in her geography class to getting her students to correspond with a barely literate trucker:

*With the help of my group I was encouraged to look for new ways to connect interdisciplinary skills. We learned to use writing in our geography class to promote written dialogue with others in the form of pen pal letters. My students swap letters with a trucker who travels the United States delivering those goods we talk about exchanging. We follow his routes on a map mounted to the wall in the back of the classroom, he sends us material and information from historical sites across the country. To help with our observance of Black History Month, our trucker buddy sent audio tapes of songs sung by African American soldiers during the Civil War. My support group gave me encouragement and suggestions when I wondered*



*how to handle postcards and letters from this man who wrote my students that he had graduated from high school with the ability to read only one in twenty five written words; his letter writing skills reflected that struggle. My group helped me to see the learning possibilities in letters written by this man who, in every letter, encouraged the students to finish school and send him an invitation to their graduations. (Elena Valenti, 1994)*

Pat and Elena both set out to change something about their teaching. Both relied on the support of the teacher research group to help them make decisions and effect changes in ways that had immediate benefits for their students. Their experiences argue the importance of teacher support groups for any project that expects teachers to change. Teachers want to do their best for their students. They are understandably nervous about taking risks that they fear could compromise their effectiveness. The support of their peers helps them through rough spots and helps them solve problems that inevitably arise.



### **Collaborating with Students**

Drawing on her past experiences, Sarah Herring ended up collaborating with Couvillion to help him learn. Similarly, Elena Valenti collaborated with her students to design the activities she did; in fact, the trucker activity was initiated by a student who heard an ad on late-night radio about truckers who wanted to correspond with students. Elena's piece concludes with a note about how teacher research both stimulated her to learn about how her students learned and to involve them in the curriculum-making process:

*Doing teacher research in my own classroom has helped me to realize how my students learn best. I*

*asked them how they learned best and they told me. I wrote them a letter asking them to tell me how they learned best, and they responded. I asked sincerely, in their language, in their way, you know the way, in one of those folded up letters they pass to one another in the hall between every class — and they responded sincerely. The very best part was that some of them even thanked me for asking.*

*How my students learn best. What a valuable thing for a teacher to know. It was very important to me to find out how my students learn. I knew what the educational research said — vary your lessons, vary the structure, vary the approach. But I wanted to know about my students in our classroom, not some abstract room full of students from a different part of the country and from someone else's point of view. My own research helped me to find an avenue to get responses from my students. It helped me to see that learning is going on when my students respond to themselves and to others because it is through learning to understand others that we can best understand ourselves. (Elena Valenti, 1994)*

As an African American, Reginald Galley talked about how the teacher research community helped him learn about the needs of his students who come from cultures that are different from his. He writes about Michael, a Vietnamese student:

*I think often of one of my students whose name was Michael, who stated to me that, and I quote, 'I don't know why I am in this class. I don't want to finish school. I have no desire to.' This comment was stated to me at the beginning of the project, and I decided at that time that Michael would become a personal goal of mine — to see that he would eventually learn to respect himself and learn to respect the other students in the class.*

*I feel that the M-CLASS project was a conduit for Michael to go on and to feel good about himself and his culture and his family. (Reginald Galley, 1994)*

In the question and answer period after his presentation, Reggie talked more about his analysis of Michael's difficulties:

When I speak about turmoil, there was just a tremendous amount of turmoil among the groups of kids because of what they didn't know about each other. The Vietnamese kids, for example, would stay among themselves at lunch time and all during the school day. They would not communicate with other students, they would not play in any sports or activities, they would not participate in any after school activities whatsoever. They came to school as a group, they ate lunch as a group, they went home as a group. And it's very very difficult to break through those barriers.

And as I talked to these kids, and I got to know about them, I even went to their church on Sundays and Saturdays to try and find out more about their background so I could use that to share with the other children in the class. And after a while it began to work because as we all know, children are children. Once you get beyond the barriers and the problems that they bring to the classrooms, then you find out that they're just twelve-year-old kids who are experiencing the same thing as other twelve- and thirteen-year-old kids in every part of the country.

But I thought it was very important for me to show personally that I cared, and beyond the academic process, beyond what I had to do as far as learning objectives and that type of thing, I tried to put myself in their place, being in Vietnam, and being in Honduras, or being anywhere else. What would I do as a person who was trying to learn more about where I was and to be able to just fit in? And I think as I look back on Michael's situation, he was truly embarrassed, I think, to be Vietnamese, at first. But I think as he'd begun to read more and more about his culture, and we talked about it just so the other students could understand where he was from and what his country was about, that everybody gained a real appreciation for his culture as well as the other cultures that we shared in the classroom.

Reggie then explained that he felt he would not have learned so much about Michael had he not been doing this teacher research project:

One, it taught me to be very reflective and learn to listen. Kids come to us and tell us all sorts of things that are going on at home, that are going on in their lives, and that they're afraid about, and I think as

teachers we have to be able to listen more carefully to what kids tell us. They have a wealth of knowledge that they can share with us, and I think sometimes we adults tend to fail to listen to what children have to say because we write them off as being children who don't know specifically what they are talking about. But they do have a very good sense of where they are and what they are talking about. And when they come to us as teachers, I believe, seeking help and asking for guidance, I think it's incumbent upon us as teachers to stop and say, 'OK what is the problem? Can we deal with it, now?'

Some of the problems that they brought me I couldn't deal with, I wasn't allowed to deal with because of the rules and regulations of our school district, but I at least made sure that I referred those children on to counselors. This guy Michael, to share with you just for a second, there was a tremendous drug problem in the Vietnamese community in the east and his brother was a drug dealer who on any certain day would probably carry around four, five, six thousand dollars in cash. Go buy brand new cars. As a matter of fact, he [Michael] brought four thousand dollars in cash to me, and this is a kid who was in eighth grade. He showed it to me, and I asked him why did he have such large amounts of money on him. And he said, 'Mr. Galley, I really don't need to come to school cause I can buy you. I make more money than you do.'

'You possibly do now,' I said. 'But the point is will you live to experience the joys of all that money? Let me share with you an experience, through reading, through learning, so at least that you can maybe have alternatives to move away from that life to another life that's more acceptable.'

And I felt so proud when I saw him several months ago, after the project was over, after the writing was over, that he embraced me at this shopping center and told me that he was going to school, that he had continued, and he thanked me for taking up the time. Because he was really a problem kid in the classroom. He always wanted to fight; he always wanted to be confrontational. So I felt a personal satisfaction that at least this one kid had at least listened to what I had said and moved in another direction that could possibly help himself and help his family.



Both Reggie and Elena's caring is apparent as they listened to their students and used what they learned to adjust how they taught. Their caring earned them their students' trust. Elena's understanding of the different ways her students learned led her to adjust her instruction to meet their sometimes conflicting needs. As Reggie established a relationship with Michael, he was in a position to help Michael reassess his opinions about the potential usefulness of an education. Teachers cannot successfully negotiate a motivating curriculum with students until they have the kind of knowledge that Elena and Reggie acquired.

### **Collaborations with University Researchers**

For all of the teachers, not only their peers but also the university research team provided important structures both for their research activities and the teaching that was intertwined with their research. Karen Alford discusses the nature of the collaboration between M-CLASS teachers and the university research team, including Cindy Roy, the site coordinator from the University of New Orleans, and Sarah Freedman and Liz Simons, the Berkeley project co-directors:

*As university researchers, Cindy, Liz and Sarah knew the theories and the questions. I know I could not have analyzed my class without their support, but they could not learn about my class without me. We were all vital to the process. In a multicultural class, it seems especially vital to have the classroom teacher's input ... And who gains from this collaboration? Well, I think Cindy, Liz and Sarah have learned more about how classrooms really work. They've observed and reflected on my relationship with my students. I know that I've learned a lot. Cindy reminded me that my students have stories and I learned from those stories. Liz encouraged me to question my own practices. Why do you do that? What do you think about it? Sarah pushed me to go for deep research. For example, in her most recent letter, she asked me to revise my chapter, focusing more on the multi-cultural aspect of my classroom.*

*She wrote: 'What makes your school the way it is? What happens at the school level? What do you do in the classroom to sustain it? Are there cracks ... what are the fault lines?'*

*She also pushed me to look more closely at the student I was writing about: 'How did the act of writing and learning about history change him?*

*How did it change his understanding of history? His way of acting in the world?'*

*You see what I mean? Those are not superficial questions and I really have to look at my students and at my practice as a teacher.*

Karen then explains how shifts in her classroom practice benefited her students:

*While I'm glad that we adults are learning from this process of classroom research, I think the real winners are my students. One of them noticed that I had changed. I had asked my students to reflect on lots of aspects of their writing for their third quarter writing portfolio. Deborah was working on this — papers all over her desk. She said in a frustrated voice, 'Ms. Karen, you're different than you were last year.'*

*'What do you mean?' (More gray hair?)*

*'Well, now you make us think. Thinking's hard!'*

*Thinking is hard. But it all starts with wondering. As I was reading about classroom research, I found a quote in a book by Glenda Bissex: 'A teacher-researcher may start out, not with a hypothesis to test, but with a wondering to pursue' (Bissex and Bullock, 1987, p. 3). My research question led me to wonder what my students in my class would learn about history if they wrote in the voice of people from the past. Cindy, Liz and Sarah helped me pursue that wondering.*

*But now my wondering travels further — I wonder about my students, their writing, their work on projects, their relationships with their peers and their teachers, their places in life. I know I do this because of my participation in M-CLASS. I would ask those of you at the university level, 'What can you do to help a teacher pursue that wondering?'*

Karen leaves us with a sense of the collaborative spirit of M-CLASS. She also leaves the university community with a challenge. We teachers and university-based researchers in M-CLASS feel that by working together we all learned and grew, and we hope others will have an opportunity to reap similar benefits. We join Karen in our heartfelt goal of having students as the ultimate beneficiaries of all our wonderings.

## In Conclusion

Sarah Herring reminds us:

*We must all find what motivates students in a multicultural classroom. Even if one student fails to succeed, it is a serious casualty. So what do we do — rusticate using antiquated methods, seek the easy way out and ignore the problem, or do we seek diverse ways to bring even the most reluctant learner into the fold? Can we afford to lose even one student, or shall we work to motivate every student in a multicultural classroom to succeed?*

Through our work together for M-CLASS, we are writing a book that will include the contributions of teachers from every M-CLASS site as well as contributions from the university team. We have set out to achieve one of the goals that Cochran-Smith and Lytle set forth for the future of teacher research: to bring together teachers' results in such a way that they formally contribute to the general knowledge base about education.

It is significant that all the M-CLASS teachers were working in multicultural settings and were focused together on issues concerning literacy in multicultural classrooms. It is also significant that they are a multicultural group themselves. Questions about literacy learning in multicultural settings beg for insights from the kind of multicultural mix of researchers the M-CLASS project brought together. They also are informed by the forum for discussion between academics and classroom teachers that the M-CLASS project and events like the AERA symposium provided.

The research energy of the M-CLASS teachers likely has become as focused as it has because of the strongly felt importance of their common goal. As Pat Ward puts it:

*I think that everything that we are doing, all of the research that we are doing is really geared to one thing: people learning how to live together, to work together, and to have a harmonious world. So any reading or writing or thinking that we do, probably from whatever direction it comes, has that big question to answer: How do we live together?*

The AERA session on which this article is based includes not only the teachers' presentations but also audience discussion and introductions by Sarah Freedman, Liz Simons, and Cindy Roy. A tape recording of the complete session is available for \$7 prepaid to U.C. Regents, c/o NCSWL, 5513 Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.

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