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[Search]

- Current Issue
- Past Issues
- Book Notes
- Coming Soon
- Subscriptions
- Permissions
- Subscribers-Only Website

Summer 2001 Issue

Abstracts

The Relative Equitability of High-Stakes Testing versus Teacher-Assigned Grades :
An Analysis of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)
Robert T. Brennan, Jimmy Kim, Melodie Wenz-Gross, Gary N. Siperstein

Poverty and the (Broken) Promise of Higher Education
Vivyan C. Adair

Affirmative Action and Education in Fiji :
Legitimation, Contestation, and Colonial Discourse
Carmen M. White

Voices Inside Schools: The Poet, the CEO, and the First-Grade Teacher
Mary Ellen Dakin

Voices Inside Schools: Moving Beyond Polite Correctness :
Practicing Mindfulness in the Diverse Classroom
Barbara Vacarr

Book Notes

Understanding Schools as Intelligent Systems
Edited by Kenneth Leithwood

Escaping Education
By Madhu Suri Prakash and Gustavo Esteva

Schools that Learn

By Peter Senge

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Editor's Review of Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research: Constructing Meaning through Collaborative Inquiry and Inside City Schools: Investigating Literacy in Multicultural Classrooms

Sarah W. Beck

Studies of cognition in education continue to suggest that learners acquire and internalize knowledge through social interaction with others. A term often used to describe this model of knowledge acquisition is *inquiry*, as in "inquiry-based learning." This model assumes that knowledge results from a process of constructing answers to questions about which learners are genuinely curious and in which they have some personal or professional investment. Two recent books from prominent literacy researchers illustrate the value of inquiry as an analytic approach to understanding how people learn about literacy. *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research: Constructing Meaning through Collaborative Inquiry*, edited by Carol Lee and Peter Smagorinsky, expands upon and illustrates the theories of the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky through analysis of literacy learning and literacy research in communities of practice. *Inside City Schools: Investigating Literacy in Multicultural Classrooms*, by Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Elizabeth Radin Simons, Julie Shalhope Kalnin, Alex Casareno, and the M-CLASS teams (Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools), describes and analyzes the collaborative process by which a network of literacy teacher-researchers explores themes of cultural difference with their students, and how this process contributes to the teachers' professional knowledge. Though these two books discuss learners in different settings, they both support the argument that teachers themselves need to engage in sustained inquiry into their practice in order to support students' inquiry in the classroom. Both books do much to explain the value of inquiry in literacy research. At the same time, they illustrate the importance of literacy, and language, to meaningful inquiry. As Vygotsky (1962) proposed, written language mediates thought and scaffolds higher-order thinking processes such as reflection and analysis.

Literacy teachers and researchers know this through experience as well as through theory; thus it is not surprising that the contributors to these two collections support an inquiry model of research.

While these books share a concern with the collaborative nature of knowledge creation, they differ in theoretical orientation and purpose. The contributors to *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research* are primarily concerned with investigating collaboration in literacy learning and with using this investigation to expand upon Vygotsky's theory. Freedman and her coresearchers, on the other hand, are less explicitly concerned with theory. For this team, the purpose of studying collaboration in teachers' learning was to extend their analysis beyond a discussion of what the teachers learned through their investigation of their own multicultural classrooms. In addition to presenting the teachers' findings, they aimed to document and analyze the process by which these teachers generated knowledge about their teaching practice.

Models of learning that advocate inquiry or knowledge construction are frequently presented within the frame of sociocultural theory. This theoretical perspective, of which Michael Cole, James Wertsch, and Lev Vygotsky are prominent representatives, is concerned with how human mental activity is influenced and constrained by cultural, social, and historical conditions. In this theory, human activity includes, but is not limited to, learning. While Vygotsky is often associated with this school of thought because of his concern with cultural and material influences on knowledge construction, he focused more narrowly on learning. The concept for which he is arguably most famous is that of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (Vygotsky, 1978) — or ZPD — which refers to the range of skills that a learner is developing but has not yet mastered. Vygotsky was especially interested in how "experts" at cultural activities such as reading and writing could assist novices within the novices' ZPD. He believed, and found evidence to demonstrate, that what a learner could do with assistance at one point in time she would eventually be able to do on her own.

The idea of cultural expertise is a prominent theme in Vygotskian Perspectives, a latent one in Inside City Schools. This theme speaks to larger questions about the challenges facing literacy educators today. For example, literacy education in the United States seems to have two competing aims. One is the preservation of cultural traditions and institutions — for example, through the imitation of traditional literary forms, as when high school students are asked to memorize a soliloquy from one of Shakespeare's plays or to write a sonnet. Another label for this aim might be "prescriptive," as it sometimes manifests itself in treatises such as E. D. Hirsch's (1988) controversial text, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. The other aim is to develop individuals' literacy capacities such that they use print to express themselves in novel ways and make a unique contribution to our cultural environment. One contemporary example of such innovation may be found in the use of the Internet as a medium for publishing students' work for audiences other than their teachers. A sociocultural theory of literacy education can accommodate both of these aims (Wells, 1993) because it can account for how human beings function individually and at the same time in concert with the dynamics of a particular cultural, historical, or institutional situation (Wertsch, del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995). The majority of literacy teachers and learners today find their cultural and institutional situations made increasingly complex by the intermingling of multiple cultures and languages. If we believe that the preservation of a democratic society is contingent upon everyone sharing a common written and spoken language, then literacy educators face the challenge of finding a bridge between students' out-of-school language and literacy practices and the literacy traditions and

conventions that schools are charged with upholding.

According to editors Peter Smagorinsky and Carol D. Lee, the ten chapters in *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research* demonstrate that shared activity in literacy learning and in learning about literacy is essentially democratic. It does not involve "a process of one-way appropriation," they write, "but rather . . . a process of multidirectional change over time. In such joint collaborative activity, teachers, students, and even the nature of the task all change over time and are negotiated among interlocutors in complex ways" (p. 5). This account of shared activity complements the definition of inquiry that Gordon Wells offers in chapter four of this collection: a distinguishing feature of the inquiry model of learning is open-mindedness among participants. Questions for investigation are not to be "fixed" from the beginning, and "all possible answers to any question are to be taken seriously" (pp. 64–65). Although the teachers described in the empirical chapters in this collection are all "experts" at some cultural practice, they tend to use their expertise with strategic subtlety, setting a flexible agenda for inquiry rather than dictating what learners need to know. One conclusion that can be drawn from the research on teaching in this volume is that democracy is not just a political philosophy, but also a pedagogical one (see also Dewey, 1916).

The authors whose work Lee and Smagorinsky have compiled in this volume use Vygotsky's theories to describe the literacy learning trajectories of learners in high school, postgraduate, and professional settings. Their goal is to show how literacy-related practices that occur within communities are transformed as they are internalized within the individual learner's mind. As schools become increasingly polyvocal, serving students from increasingly diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, educators are in search of more diverse methods to document how students learn. The editors argue that Vygotsky's concern with individuals' appropriation of cultural practices and beliefs has become highly relevant to the investigation of educational issues in a diverse society. If one important goal of education in the United States is to give all students equal access to the ways of speaking and writing that will increase their opportunities for social and economic power, then a Vygotskian lens offers a way of analyzing how they achieve this access.

Part One of this collection provides a theoretical introduction in two chapters. A chapter by Vera John-Steiner and Teresa Meehan considers the relationship between Vygotsky's theory and current views of creativity, but leaves the reader to speculate about how this relationship extends to literacy practices. In the other chapter in this section, James Wertsch, the foremost interpreter of Vygotsky in the English language, explores an inconsistency that runs throughout Vygotsky's account of how humans learn to use language to construct meaning. Wertsch notes that, while making it clear that *thought* and *word* are distinct in form and function, Vygotsky suggests that they are somehow related in the development of human consciousness. The inconsistency, according to Wertsch, is that he never explains how they are related. Wertsch proposes that Vygotsky's theory of mental development was constrained by the cultural resources at his disposal, which were embodied in two philosophical traditions: the Enlightenment, with its belief that language represents external reality, or *designates* meaning to external things; and Romanticism, which holds that we use language *expressively*, to access our innermost thoughts. Wertsch's subtle and brilliantly Vygotskian reading of Vygotsky suggests that the work of researchers and theorists is always constrained — or, depending on one's view, inspired — by the cultural traditions on which they draw as resources. Perhaps the same analysis could be applied to the literacy researchers who contributed to the two volumes under

discussion in this review. Their collaborative approach to exploring how students learn about literacy, and how teachers learn about students' literacy learning, reflects current assumptions that knowledge about literacy has social origins.

The second part of this collection presents reports and reflections on studies of collaborative inquiry in literacy research. Three chapters in this second part highlight the potential of Vygotsky's conceptual framework to capture the complexity of culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Kris Gutiérrez and Lynda Stone sketch out the conceptual framework and methodology they have developed in pursuing ethnographic research on literacy learning and social practices among linguistically and culturally diverse students in urban learning environments. Although this framework and methodology are difficult to appreciate without reference to the research articles cited extensively in the chapter, the authors make clear their criticism that much literacy research focuses simplistically on the individual as distinct from the social context. Stone and Gutiérrez thus have shifted their focus to the "activity system," which they define as "a social practice that includes the norms, values, division of labor, and goals of the community" (p. 151).

The other two chapters that focus on linguistically diverse classrooms offer data from interactions among students and teachers to illustrate that language, as a mediating tool, is always undergoing a process of change. These chapters show how collaborative learning environments shape the nature and direction of this change. Anne Dyson describes ideological clashes among elementary school students as they negotiate roles for reading student-authored stories. Interpreting the students' interactions through a Vygotskian lens, she hypothesizes that "no one ever masters a mediational tool like written language. Written words, like oral ones, are a means for participating in an always changing social community, a never-ending process of societal history-making; and thus, their meaning, their appropriate use, is always changing too" (p. 144). Classroom interactions may also help students to transform their knowledge about language and literacy practices that take place outside of school, such as verbal sparring or composing rap lyrics, into a tool for academic success. Carol Lee describes an intervention that she calls "cultural modeling," which allows students to gradually appropriate the discursive and metacognitive practices of expert readers. Lee shows how, as a high school classroom teacher, she drew on her knowledge of the African American linguistic practice of "signifying" in order to apprentice her African American students into the practices of formal literary scholarship. Through this example from her own teaching, she illustrates how Vygotsky's distinction between spontaneous concepts and scientific concepts — between concepts acquired through practical experience and those acquired in formal, school-based learning — can illuminate ways of helping students from a nonmainstream cultural background develop the academic skills that they need to succeed in schools. It is important to stress that Lee bases her lessons on student-initiated questions about the literary works they are studying, and she spends considerable instructional time modeling how to ask the complex and authentic questions that are the hallmark of sophisticated literary analysis. A collaborative classroom environment, in which the teacher guides rather than directs students' thinking about literature, is thus a crucial component of Lee's teaching approach.

Two other chapters in Part Two of the book present examples of collaboration between university researchers and classroom teachers, with the classroom teachers sharing authorship of the chapters. Peter Smagorinsky and Cynthia O'Donnell-Allen report on what happened when high school English

teacher O'Donnell-Allen attempted to construct an environment to foster students' independent and responsible expressions of thought. She believed strongly in a democratic classroom and built into her class a range of activities that encouraged students to make meaningful connections between literature and their lives. Her curriculum required students to make substantive choices about the form and content of their work and to collaborate respectfully with one another. In this chapter, Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen focus on the sharp contrast in the relationships that developed within two small groups working on an assignment for a "body biography" of a character from *Hamlet*. One group exemplified what they call "constructive social process," which is marked by affirmation, inclusion, and courtesy; the other represented "destructive social process," marked by the opposite characteristics — discourtesy, resistance, and apathy. Presenting telling excerpts from transcripts of discussions within these two groups, the authors discuss how the teacher's efforts to facilitate her students' development into model citizens were powerless to counteract the effect of certain students' past experiences with schools, experiences that had led them to develop their own, contradictory goals for schooling. The theoretical basis for this study is the assumption that every society contains an idealized, motivating vision of an endpoint for individual development: in a Vygotskian framework, "the social and physical organization of schooling implies and encourages an ideal student and, eventually, an ideal adult and citizen" (p. 166). O'Donnell-Allen's faith in democratic pedagogy represented such a vision, which she hoped to realize by creating a classroom context radically different from what students typically experience in schools. Yet designing a democratic context in one classroom, in this case, could not counteract the influence of the larger institutional context of schooling on certain students in her class. As the authors conclude, it is essential "to conceive of social contexts in terms of the deeper histories that comprise them" (p. 186).

Like O'Donnell-Allen, the teacher in the class described in a chapter by Leanne Putney and her coauthors allowed students to construct their own opportunities for learning in her fifth-grade bilingual class. Putney and her colleagues document how Jared, one student in this class, developed an understanding of "point of view" in writing as he rewrote different versions of *The Three Little Pigs* from different perspectives. The authors use field notes, students' writing, and transcripts of class discussions to document the collective environment of the classroom. They then analyze Jared's writing "to explore how he perceived his world and what he valued as a member" (p. 116). In their analysis, the authors employ interactional ethnography and critical discourse analysis to understand how literacy-related practices in one classroom over time become a resource for students. For these researchers, relying on multiple analytic tools is a way to improve documentation of what counts as learning and whether a child has learned. As Wertsch notes in his contribution to this volume, Vygotsky never coherently accounted for how concepts and skills are internalized. Apparently, his intellectual descendants continue to wrestle with this question.

Equally concerned with the potential of integrated research methods to capture dynamic learning processes in multicultural and multilingual communities, Luis Moll describes the benefits of enlisting teachers to explore the "funds of knowledge" in their students' home communities. Moll and his coresearchers employ Michael Cole's technique of synthesizing ethnographic observations and experimental tasks in order to realize "more dynamic, processual, or practice interpretations [of culture], what we call in Spanish l*a cultural vivida*, how people live culturally" (p. 256). Teachers who participate in Moll's ethnographic inquiry learn to appreciate their students' home cultures in ways that take them beyond limiting perceptions of the literacy practices and beliefs of working-class

and language-minority families. The practical outcome of this professional development activity is that teachers recreate aspects of everyday home life in the classroom so that students can draw on their out-of-school experience as a resource in an academic context.

In the teacher-education classes that Arnetha Ball describes, the practical goal is to encourage prospective teachers to articulate a commitment to using literacy instruction to empower students from socioeconomically and ethnically diverse populations. In her chapter, she focuses on several preservice teachers from the United States and South Africa who evolved from having no special commitment to teaching diverse students to expressing unique and precise opinions about why and how they would use literacy to address issues of diversity in their teaching. For these preservice teachers, Ball finds evidence that they internalized the course material when "information that was once represented on an external level (the theories and teaching strategies of others) beg[an] to take on personal meaning for the students and interact[ed] with students' prior perspectives to create new perspectives" (p. 250). Ball's research on teacher education uses the Vygotskian principle of transformation to account for teachers' shift toward an actively inclusive approach to addressing the specific needs of cultural minority students in literacy instruction.

While Ball's chapter suggests how teacher education may be transformed through the application of Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Gordon Wells discusses how this theory lends itself to a program for reforming elementary classrooms. According to Wells, a Vygotskian definition of reform "means reconstituting classrooms and schools as communities of inquiry" (p. 61). "Inquiry" in this case is not simply a matter of asking questions in a formulaic way for the purposes of satisfying requirements for isolated classroom projects or professional development credentials. Rather, inquiry involves asking real questions in which the learner has some sort of personal stake. A hallmark of inquiry-based learning is a goal of finding answers that the student or teacher really cares about, in contrast to a goal of acquiring knowledge for instrumental purposes such as meeting standards for student performance or professional certification. Furthermore, in inquiry-based learning, problem-solving is not limited to wrestling with difficult questions about subject-matter content (though it may include this), but extends to other aspects of classroom life such as planning field trips, organizing classroom materials, and resolving disagreements. Central to inquiry is dialogue, which Wells defines as all interactions that contribute to knowledge construction, including those that involve written texts and visual modes of representation as well as face-to-face interactions involving speech.

Wells's extensive theoretical discussion serves to introduce several vignettes from elementary school literacy and science lessons drawn from the classrooms of teachers who participate in the teacher-research collaborative he directs at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). In discussing this collective project, Wells argues that, by inquiring into their own practice, teachers can learn how to provide richer opportunities for students to appropriate "cultural tools for knowledge building" (p. 81), such as ways of asking questions about science and language that deepen their own understanding. Through a process of inquiry, teachers can also learn to understand better what features of classroom activities make it possible for students to learn how to use these tools. The importance of the expert's role in assisting novice learners to make meaning of experience is implicit here. By practicing inquiry themselves, as teacher-researchers, teachers become experts in the process of constructing meaning and thus are able to guide learners through that same process.

Wells's writing on the work of his teacher-researcher collaborative (see also Wells, 1999) provides one compelling illustration of an inquiry model of professional education; another may be found in *Inside City Schools: Investigating Literacy in Multicultural Classrooms*. This collection presents the results of a collaborative investigation into literacy learning and teaching in urban schools, jointly carried out by groups of teacher-researchers in several U.S. cities and a team of university-based researchers. During the 1992–1993 school year, Sarah Warshauer Freedman and Elizabeth Radin Simons coordinated a network of twenty-four English teachers in four different cities who were concerned with investigating the literacy and learning experiences of students from culturally diverse backgrounds. This project was called the M-CLASS project (for Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools); its magnitude, and the logistics entailed in sustaining it, suggest that Freedman and her colleagues believe, along with Gordon Wells, that teachers who actively pursue independent systematic inquiry into their own teaching processes are likely to be more effective in cultivating students who themselves are inquisitive and independent learners.

The researchers designed their project as a two-tiered inquiry. On one level, participating teachers researched questions about literacy learning and curriculum that were meaningful to them. At another level, the university research team at Berkeley ("the Berkeley team") studied the teachers' research process and their writing. The Berkeley team strove to recruit teachers who represented a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In her introductory chapter, Sarah Warshauer Freedman explains:

> As a group, the research team had experienced more of the complexities of the lives of students who come together in multicultural classrooms than any one teacher or researcher or even small research team could experience. A primary goal of the teacher-research process and of this book was for these multiple voices to play off of and inform one another. (p. 10)

This statement of the research team's goal echoes the view put forth by Lee and Smagorinsky in *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research* that learning through a process of shared inquiry encourages a different type of understanding than learning on one's own. Whether the learners are children or adolescents in classrooms, or teachers in professional development workshops, the activity of asking questions and finding answers together allows learners to consider their questions and possible answers in new ways, to see relationships among formerly disparate points of view.

Although Freedman has drawn on sociocultural theory in much of her previous literacy research (see, for example, Freedman, 1994, 1987), she does not invoke this theory in her latest project. Instead, she and her colleagues frame their project in the context of the literature on teacher research. While not a theory per se, the stance of Freedman and her colleagues regarding teacher research leads to a twofold goal for the M-CLASS project: first, to help the participating teachers grow as professionals; and second, to make a meaningful contribution to the existing literature on educational practice in the field of literacy. This view of the purpose of teacher research pays tribute to Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle's (1993) assertion that teachers' field-based knowledge makes an essential contribution to the science of education.2

The M-CLASS project departs from precedents in teacher-university collaboration, such as Moll's project of enlisting teachers to document the funds of knowledge in students' homes (described in chapter eleven of *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research*), in that the teachers, rather than the university researchers, chose the questions to pursue. All of these questions, which are listed in an appendix to the book, address issues of multiculturalism either explicitly or implicitly. This focus evolved from the teachers' own concerns about their practice rather than from a review of the research literature. Appropriately, the evolution of the teachers' specific interests within the larger topic of multiculturalism are usually explained through narratives about their teaching experience or, sometimes, about their personal experience as a student.

That the university researchers who initiated the project gave the teachers freedom to generate their own research questions indicates how concerned they were to establish a truly collaborative inquiry. Throughout the project, the university researchers "were concerned that the support from the university be helpful but not overbearing" (p. 24). In the end, the Berkeley team wanted "the teachers' voices [to be] dominant in this book" (p. 44). The university team focused its efforts on assisting the teachers in several key aspects of their work: refining their research questions, developing methods for collecting and analyzing data, and deciding how — that is, through what written genres — to disseminate the results. In these supportive efforts, the Berkeley team practiced a dialogic exchange of ideas in a manner consistent with the sociocultural model outlined by Gordon Wells. For example, when Freedman responded in writing to the teacher researchers' suggested research questions, she offered this disclaimer:

> Liz [her research collaborator] and I have found it helpful to collaborate as we sort out our own research questions, and so it's in a spirit of collaboration that I'm writing this letter. . . . None of what I am writing here is meant to be directive; I just hope it's in some way helpful. I apologize if I've done damage to your questions. Just let me know, and we'll change it back if I have. (p. 30)

While offering revised versions of the questions was intended to encourage the teachers to think more like researchers, Freedman and her colleagues also wanted to avoid dampening the spirit of inquiry that motivated the teachers to undertake the research.

Although Vygotsky and his contemporaries make no appearance in this volume, they cast a shadow as if from offstage, as if Vygotsky's influence is embedded in the very notion of inquiry. For example, the Berkeley team explains to the teachers that it is important to collect and analyze data in writing because doing so will "help them make unconscious activities conscious" (p. 31). Using writing to shape their thinking reflects the Vygotskian view that language organizes thought. As James Wertsch observed in the first chapter of *Vygotskian Perspectives*, Vygotsky was always concerned with the relationship between *thought* as an internal, implicit, and abbreviated form of sense, and word as an external, explicit, and expanded form of meaning.

The mingling of practitioner and university cultures in Inside City Schools produces a genre that, the authors argue, is unique to teacher research. A distinguishing feature of this genre, according to Freedman, is that an account of the teacher's pedagogical beliefs and methods is presented as more

than just background information. Instead, the teaching narrative is actually woven into the research narrative. In this way the teacher research on literacy in this volume represents a different treatment of teaching practice than the kind of university-based research on which Freedman herself established her reputation as a literacy researcher (see, for example, Freedman, 1987, 1992, 1994, 1995). An especially moving example of such interweaving occurs in Giselle Diaz-Gematti's chapter. Diaz-Gemmati wanted to know whether, in their discussions of and writing about literature, her eighth-grade students would be able to separate how they felt about issues of racism and prejudice from how their families, friends, and communities had suggested they should feel. After an explosive moment in which one student asserted, "Whites hate everyone," Diaz-Gemmati relates how she told students to return to small groups and write clusters of words related to "prejudice," a pedagogical strategy designed to diffuse the tension in the room. This description is followed by a more analytical commentary on the results of this writing activity:

Issues on the prejudice of gender, age, religion, race and roles surfaced in these class reports. In a fervent circle discussion, Allen, a Black student, helped everyone realize an important truth.

"Today's society," he reasoned, "makes us be prejudiced against each other." (p. 65)

Woven into the moment-by-moment account of the building tension in her classroom is the teacher researcher's reflective recognition that Allen had realized what she hoped the students would realize: that prejudice is socially constructed. This observation is connected to her pedagogical goal of helping students to understand how, as a social group, they can begin to deconstruct prejudice.

One of the two major goals that the Berkeley coordinators had for the M-CLASS project was that it should contribute something to the existing body of knowledge about instructional practice. Because the studies presented in this volume involve small numbers of students, they do not offer generalizable findings. Instead, and just as valuably, they raise important questions for further inquiry and the development of practice-based theory. For example, in the chapter "Writing Correctness and the Second-Language Student," Ann Lew (a Japanese American who immigrated to the United States at a young age and was once a second-language student) challenges received wisdom about writing process instruction that line-by-line correction of students' writing will damage students' self-esteem and inhibit their development as writers. Her case study student, Linda, who defines herself as "not a model student," insists that "the only things the teacher could do [to help second-language students] is constantly remind them and correct them and try to be more strict at it" (p. 175). Reflecting on how her strategy of meticulously correcting errors benefited Linda, Lew observed that "my scrutiny of her papers did cause her to look closely at her own work and helped her realize that I care about her progress, but it did not lead her to fully internalize all the features of edited written English" (p. 176).

This observation raises questions about the effects on students' writing development of learning to look closely at their own work and of knowing that a teacher cares. In a short essay that is part of a collaboratively authored chapter on creating communities of achievement, Nancy O'Malley presents another original angle on a traditional practice in writing instruction. Somewhat discouraged when the assignment to "write your family history" yielded mostly tales of loss and failure, she invoked a classic dictum of writing pedagogy and asked students to shift their focus from the general to the

particular by writing about a treasured object. She found that with this new, more specifically focused task, "even when the story was one of loss, as was often the case, the shaping, the hewing out in strong and loving details, carefully remembered and recorded, gives to that individual an identity of a strong person, not of a victim" (p. 205). For this project O'Malley had chosen to study how her students developed identities as writers. Evaluating the disappointing results from the first assignment, which had done nothing positive for these identities, led O'Malley to refocus the assignment in a way that encouraged students to write texts that were not only more specific but also more empowering. Through her classroom research, O'Malley demonstrated how a change in curriculum could have a powerful impact on students' social and emotional, as well as academic, identities.

That successful teaching in a multicultural environment rejects the dichotomies of traditional versus progressive and skills-based versus process-oriented methods of teaching literacy is a recurring, albeit implicit, theme in *Inside City Schools*. For example, in chapter ten, Verda Delp illustrates how a strategy as concrete and specific as teaching the terminology of literary interpretation (e.g., *tragedy, symbol, setting*) helped students to engage in more substantial ways with the literature they read. The teaching of literary terms is a frequent practice in traditional classrooms in which the teacher sets the agenda for what the students will read and how they will interpret it. However, through an analysis of the writing logs of students in her ethnically diverse junior high English class, Delp found that instructing students about the meaning and use of these terms actually helped them to make meaningful connections with literature and to articulate these connections in an authentic personal voice. Much like Carol Lee's study of how students used their knowledge of signifying behaviors to interpret literary devices in African American literature, presented in *Vygotskian Perspectives*, Delp's work in the M-CLASS project shows that literary traditions are not necessarily resistant to innovation.

Such principled rejection of dichotomizing influences is perhaps the most valuable contribution that this collection of teacher research has to offer the educational community. Gordon Wells (1994) has suggested that, if we are to expect students to become intentional and reflective learners, then we must support teachers in developing these same intellectual habits. *Inside City Schools* is one of the latest accounts of this kind of supportive enterprise, although Kalnin, Freedman, and Simons, who cowrote the final chapter in the book, are hesitant to proclaim their success. They observe that in *Inside City Schools* "our own voices and points of view have taken a more dominant position than we originally intended. It is our hope that the diverse perspectives offered by the teachers have not been too much altered in the process" (p. 222). Some alteration is evident in that the university researchers arranged teacher-authored chapters into thematically organized sections, and in a few chapters the university researchers synthesized short, teacher-authored essays and surrounded them with commentary. Yet if they altered the teachers' perspectives, they nevertheless acknowledge the particular value of teacher research in contributing to theory:

> Teacher research, by setting forth these real and grounded examples, can play a critical role in the generation of theory. Ideally, theory grows from specifics, and is refined when new information supports or contradicts its tenets. Bringing teacher researchers' findings into the literature about teaching is essential, we believe, if educational theory is to grow and thrive. Unless university researchers are seeking out the broadest possible array of examples to drive and enrich their theories, the theory itself becomes limited by its own

insularity. (p. 225)

These final reflective comments may explain why Freedman, who conducted most of her research prior to this project within a sociocultural frame, chose not to rely on this familiar perspective in her most recent project. She and her colleagues may have felt that a single theory would have limited the possibilities for genuine inquiry among the M-CLASS teachers.

In their introduction to *Vygotskian Perspectives*, Lee and Smagorinsky suggest that the activity of collaborative inquiry should result in goal-oriented, positive change over time. The outcome of this change will vary depending on whether teachers or university-based researchers set the agenda for this inquiry, as these two professional groups typically have different goals in their work (see also Huberman, 1999). As studies of collaborative inquiry into literacy learning and learning about literacy, these two books together set a new agenda for literacy research. If, as Vygotskian theory would suggest, teaching teachers how to inquire into their own practice should render them more adept at fostering inquiry-based learning in their own classrooms, then we need evidence that this learning is ultimately benefiting students. We need to know what kind of effect this inquiry has on students' literacy learning, on the depth of their understanding of what it means to be an expert at reading and writing. As the most experienced participants in classroom culture, teachers have the greatest power to transform it by initiating inquiry into their own teaching practices. Yet an important role for researchers remains: with their expertise in the practices of data collection and analysis, they are in the best position to assess the extent and impact of such transformation.

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