CHAPTER 12

Teacher Research and Professional Development: Purposeful Planning or Serendipity

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I've been working with teacher research networks for almost 10 years now, but only recently have I begun to think seriously about the relationship between teacher research and professional development. I first became involved in teacher research almost 20 years ago when I came to Berkeley as a new assistant professor in the School of Education. Since I was the first faculty member hired in the area of writing research, Jim Gray, then director of the Bay Area and National Writing Projects, asked me to teach a summer course on teacher research. I had no sense of what teacher research was and could find little guidance in the literature, but I didn't want to turn him down. So I organized a class in university-based research methods. In the five weeks allotted, there was not enough time for the teachers to learn much about research or even to get much of a start on a research project. The course bore little relationship to what we call teacher research these days, and certainly did not offer much of a professional development opportunity for the participating teachers.

In retrospect, I should never have agreed to teach something I knew so little about. I buried the memory as quickly as I could, considering the course a relative failure. It was not part of my regular teaching job in the School of Education; it was not part of my research agenda; and it was not part of the teachers’ normal jobs. It had no institutional home. At the end of that summer, I was convinced that the interest in teacher research was destined to fade away.

How wrong I was! Over the next decade, I watched a movement take shape (Elliott, 1991; Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1989; Mohr & Maclean, 1987; Schön, 1983; Stenhouse, 1985). By 1991, with Liz Simons, who had been a leader in many of the Writing Project’s professional development projects, I started another teacher research effort. This time it was connected to a relatively well-funded research project. Our goals were to involve teachers in the knowledge generation process, something I had been doing for a decade in increasingly more collaborative arrangements in my research projects on the teaching and learning of written language (Freedman, 1994; Freedman, with Sperling, & Greenleaf, 1987). Teacher research was a natural next step in this collaborative research program (Freedman, Simons, Kalnin, Casareno, and The M-CLASS teams, 1999). For 10 years now, I have been involved with three different teacher research networks, one of which included the institutionalization of teacher research-based Master of Arts (MA) to Berkeley's secondary English teacher credential program.

Given my experience in the early 1980s, I came to these three teacher research networks with a number of reservations. Why would teachers take time from already packed days to do research? What rewards would be significant enough to keep them interested? What would be the rewards for me and my university-based colleagues? How would we manage the time commitment? I knew from the start that even with a relatively well-funded grant, the compensation would be inadequate for the time all of us would need to contribute. I also worried about the danger of using teachers to achieve my ends rather than theirs. Finally, what would happen at the end of the project?

Although I cannot answer all of these questions, I have begun analyzing the teachers’ talk and writing in these networks to try to understand the teacher research process and what motivates the participating teachers. I have found that teacher learning is at the heart of all of the networks, whether I planned it that way or not, and that the opportunities to learn seem to be central to sustaining the teachers’ interest. In this chapter I will explore what and how the teachers learned.

THEORETICAL POSITIONING

Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, Chapter 4, this volume) useful and important theoretical framework, which characterizes competing conceptions of professional development, offers a helpful way to frame the teacher
learning in the three Berkeley-based networks. In addition, my close look at this learning may also help elaborate on and further define the professional development categories that Cochran-Smith and Lytle have proposed.

Since Cochran-Smith and Lytle describe their theory fully in their 1999 chapter in Review of Research in Education as well as in Chapter 4 in this volume, I will only summarize relevant parts here. The first conception of professional development that they propose, knowledge-for-practice, is common in the profession. In this approach, university-based researchers provide knowledge and theory, which teachers are then supposed to use to improve their practice. This approach is anti-theoretical to what happens inside teacher research groups, where the focus is on teachers generating knowledge for themselves.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle label their second professional development category knowledge-in-practice. In this approach the assumption is that expert teachers come to professional development activities with tacit practical knowledge that underlies their everyday decision making in the classroom. Professional development consists of helping them reflect on this tacit knowledge and thereby learn to make it conscious and available for examination. This approach is consistent with what happens inside many teacher research groups, including those in the Berkeley networks.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s third and final category, knowledge-of-practice, describes teachers who study their schools and classrooms in ways that lead them to look critically at and interrogate both their own learning and the research of others. These teachers ultimately aim to “theorize and construct their work and to connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues” (1999, p. 250). This type of professional development contrasts with knowledge-in-practice in that teacher knowledge is grounded in more than the teachers’ reflections on the choices they make in their classrooms and carries with it a critical and political force. Like knowledge-in-practice, this kind of professional development is consistent with the goals for teacher growth in many teacher research groups and is also consistent with what occurred in the Berkeley networks.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s distinctions between knowledge-in-practice and knowledge-of-practice are clear on the surface. However, I found that both categories applied to how teachers learned in the Berkeley networks, even though the categories are meant to be distinct. I will use specific instances of teacher learning, which I analyze in the rest of this chapter, to consider how one might begin to elaborate these categories and perhaps connect them.

THE NETWORKS AND THEIR PURPOSES

Before discussing the types of teacher learning in the three Berkeley-based networks, I will provide background on the structure and goals of each network and the university participants’ changing intent with respect to professional development. In the first network, Simons and I set out to work with classroom teachers to better understand what we and many teachers thought was one of the most complex and important issues of our time: literacy learning in urban multicultural settings. With funding from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) through the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy, in 1992 we recruited 24 teachers who were ideologically committed to and experienced in offering high-level instruction to inner-city students in complex teaching-learning environments. The teachers were a multi-ethnic group who taught English and social studies—six each from Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and the San Francisco Bay Area. The network was called M-CLASS, Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools, and included the teachers, university-based site coordinators in each locale, and a Berkeley-based team led by me and Simons, with Alex Casareno playing a major role in the early phases of the project and Julie Kalnin in the later phases. The goal of the M-CLASS network was to complete a collaborative research project that would generate and synthesize knowledge from the academy and knowledge from teacher researchers (reported in Freedman et al., 1999b). The teachers in this network were chosen because they were known for their expertise in the classroom. The university facilitators saw them more as collaborators in making contributions than as in need of professional development. And many of them began with the same idea. Ultimately, it was as much professional development as the opportunity to contribute to knowledge that kept these teachers involved and that led to an increased professional development focus within the subsequent networks.

The second network was an extension of the first. Three experienced teacher researchers from the San Francisco site of the original network (Verda Delp, Deborah Juarez, and Ann Lew), two university-based colleagues who had collaborated with me on the original M-CLASS project (Liz Simons and Julie Kalnin), and I designed the M-CLASS Site-Based Network (SBN). We received funding from the Spencer Foundation’s Practitioner Communication and Mentoring Program and the University of California Office of the President. Delp, Juarez, and Lew each invited two other teachers from their schools to participate. The
nine teachers in the SBN taught in three schools in three San Francisco Bay Area school districts (Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco). This network's goal included action at these school sites and, secondarily, contributions to knowledge by the teacher researchers (see Freedman & M-CLASS/SBN team, 2000; Kalnin, 2000). Although the main goals were not focused on professional development, the university and teacher facilitators were attentive to the professional development possibilities for the teachers who were new to teacher research and the leadership development potential for the more experienced teachers.

The third network was explicitly a professional development network. I designed a teacher research seminar as the final course in the newly designed Multicultural Urban Secondary English (MUSE) Credential and M.A. program. I taught this seminar for 12 first-year teachers who had received their credential in the Berkeley program the year before. For their final M.A. projects and as the paper for the teacher research seminar, the new teachers were to conduct teacher research projects related to their teaching. As the course instructor, my goal was to use teacher research to teach new teachers to study their practice in ways that would help them solve problems throughout their careers (see Freedman, 1999).

On the surface, the first two networks fall quite neatly into Cochran-Smith and Lytle's "knowledge-in-practice" category. The teachers in the original M-CLASS network were recruited because of their expertise in literacy learning in urban multicultural classrooms. We at the university thought that by reflecting on their practice, a multiethnic group of English and social studies teachers with experience, interest, and special competence in urban teaching in multicultural settings would be especially well positioned to add to our understandings of literacy and learning in the classroom. In the SBN, we also worked with a multiethnic group of teachers whom we thought would offer especially interesting contributions. However, we also had a critical political agenda that involved bringing teachers together to act as key agents in the school change process, and we did not work just with teachers whom we thought had special expertise. Teachers in the third network could fall into either category, depending on the political force of their work.

**DISCUSSING PROBLEMS OF PRACTICE**

During teacher research meetings across all the networks, the teachers talked freely about problems that were extrinsic to their teaching and their classrooms—institutional or societal problems that affected their schools and their students' abilities to learn—such as safety in the school, administrative incompetence, violence in the neighborhoods, poverty, gang activity, and the like. But they varied in their comfort levels in talking about and ultimately conducting research on and writing about intrinsic problems—such as their ability to control the class, difficulties teaching certain types of students, and their failures in getting students interested in grappling with difficult curricular material. The new teachers in the MUSE group felt somewhat freer to discuss varied kinds of problems. As first-year teachers, they fully expected to have problems and seemed generally used to coming to the university to get advice from faculty and from one another. However, like their more experienced counterparts, some talked more openly about problems during group discussions than others.
Readings often provided a sense of distance that created a comfort zone for this talk. Members of the original M-CLASS network read and discussed Lisa Delpit’s “The Silenced Dialogue” (1988), which evoked many complex emotions about race. In Boston, Nancy O’Malley responded by describing a dilemma she faced when interacting with her Asian students:

I think a lot about this [how members from different racial groups interact] in the writing workshop class especially, the creative writing class that I’m doing research on... The students who want the authoritative figure and want to listen most to me as the teacher are the Asian students who, in fact, need the verbal and oral skills the most. Because most of them are coming into a new language after only two and three years. And so there’s some great dichotomy in the class where they’re the ones who need it [oral practice] most, and yet they’re the most unwilling because their culture says to them, “It’s not so important to listen to Eileen’s piece of writing.” They want to know what the answer is, and we have this constant tension. (M-CLASS, Boston site meeting, October 31, 1992)

O’Malley then claims, “It’s gotten better. They have listened to each other... but it’s... a constant struggle.” After voicing a problem, the teachers often used this strategy of diminishing the significance or difficulty of the problem, saying something like O’Malley’s “it’s gotten better.” This is perhaps a face-saving gesture, but in O’Malley’s case it also was a move that seemed preparatory to taking the bigger risk of ruminating about her role in the problem: “I have to watch myself, too. In encouraging everyone to listen and all, I don’t want to be too much of just the orchestrator. So it’s a balancing act.”

Junia Yearwood, a Black immigrant from the Virgin Islands, provides an alternate interpretation of the Asian students’ lack of participation, identifying with them and then looking from their points of view:

You kept saying it’s a cultural thing, and that’s true. But it’s also that the Asian kids want access to the keys of knowledge, which for them is the mechanics of language, of your language, and that’s why they’re impatient... I’m not Asian, and that’s how I felt when I came to school here in America. I came to college with specific [O’Malley: Yeah, sure] reasons and the reasons was to get access to this great wealth of knowledge that I just knew was in these gates. [O’Malley: Mmhm] And when American kids took up half the period talking and arguing, I was livid. [O’Malley: Sure.] I did not want that because to me, and I heard Asians say the same exact thing, it is not that they are culturally programmed to do this; it’s just that they’re focused. They know what they want, and they think that they’re being cheated of it.

In this transcript O’Malley’s words are placed in brackets because they function as backchannels, the soft and unobtrusive language a listener uses to show that she is attending to what the speaker is saying and also to signal that she wants the speaker to continue talking and that she does not want to take a turn of her own. Given the fact that O’Malley only offers backchannels, it is unclear how she feels about Yearwood’s analysis of the students’ behavior. She neither agrees nor disagrees with her comments. She does not solicit help from the group and participates only minimally in the discussion. Following Yearwood’s alternate analysis of the problem, another one of the teachers, Eileen Shakespear, tries to move the talk toward a solution, suggesting increasing the rigor of class discussion. O’Malley does not respond to Shakespear’s suggestion, either.

As time went on, O’Malley used her research to continue to learn about her varied students’ interactional styles. She tells how she used the research opportunity to find ways to create a classroom community that included the participation of all of her students. She established ways for students to participate that ensured that they all would take a turn sharing their writing, eliciting response from the rest of the class, and providing response to others. O’Malley discovered how to teach her students to attend carefully to their classmates, to notice what made professional writing and one another’s writing strong and effective, and then to articulate their observations during the class discussion and apply those observations to their own writing. After analyzing O’Malley’s process, Kalnin (1999) writes that ultimately O’Malley found that she taught her students “interpersonal skills—ways of listening and responding—and analytical skills—ways of interpreting and expressing experiences” (p. 210).

O’Malley writes about Eric, an immigrant from Vietnam. She is pleased not only with his oral participation but with the results for his writing. Eric wrote about his father’s struggle to carry him from Vietnam to an Indonesian refugee camp. O’Malley commented on the power of his words and their impact on his fellow students when he took his turn sharing his writing:
Nothing that we could have read about Vietnamese struggle during the war could have been more vivid than that firsthand account, told by the infant who was saved, now a writer telling his own father’s story. (Boston site meeting, October 31, 1992)

Eric himself stated in an interview: “When I write, I feel like I am in a holy world—a world of my own. I feel powerful because anything I want I can just write it down. It’s in my head” (Kalnin, 1999, p. 207). His strong feelings about writing likely sustained him during the class discussion of his and the other students’ work. O’Malley concluded that through her research with Eric and other students, “[I] recovered my own sense of worth as a teacher, privileged enough to witness great beauty and fortunate enough sometimes to help make it happen” (Kalnin, 1999, p. 205).

**TAKING RISKS**

In all three of these networks the university facilitators set risk-taking as a goal for the teachers as researchers but not necessarily as teachers. Our idea was to create a community where the teachers would receive support for taking risks in their thinking about their research and in their writing. However, for the teachers in the first two networks taking research-related risks often implied taking risks in the classroom. In the MUSE program, the new teachers did not talk about taking risks in the same ways that the more experienced teachers did. They did not yet have safe classroom routines from which it would feel risky to deviate. Instead, they discussed the importance of the group providing a safe haven for them as new teachers, since everything they did felt risky.

In the first two networks, the risk-taking was associated with reconceptualizing well-established teaching routines. The teacher researchers sometimes used the group for support in taking risks and then in dealing with the consequences. In Chicago, Griselle Diaz-Gemmati changed her stance as a teacher as a result of the risks she took with her research, her writing, her curricular decisions, and her interactions with her students. Her talk during the group meetings revealed her perceptions of these intertwined risks and the ways group members supported her efforts. From the start, her research topic—what’s involved in explicitly raising issues of race, ethnicity, and social class in her classroom—felt risky to her.

She was nervous about the political tone of her research topic and her new curriculum. She was concerned that introducing sensitive curricular issues for her research would push her students to grow up too fast. She was shocked by their adult-like worries “about inequality in society, gender issues, racial issues, and [ethnic issues].” What seemed shocking to Diaz-Gemmati seemed normal to Landau-McFarland, “But they’re [Diaz-Gemmati’s students] a microcosm of society.” When Diaz-Gemmati retorted, “You never think that these kids worry about stuff like that,” Landau-McFarland again reassured Diaz-Gemmati that her students were behaving normally: “Sure they do. It affects them every day.” A few turns later I reinforced Landau-McFarland’s point:

I think bottom line for Griselle is that these kids live in a really complex world that they have to navigate in, and they’re not oblivious to it. Even though they’re little, it affects them. And they are going to cope in various ways, but if everything is pushed under the table at school where they have people who can guide them and who can help them through it, if those people don’t do that, then I think they’re [the students] missing something.

In the course of the discussion, Diaz-Gemmati began to feel more comfortable about her new curriculum, but she still voiced lingering qualms because one of her students asked her, “Why are you bringing all this crap into the room?”

Group members were surprised that Diaz-Gemmati’s student wanted to see only what one of the teachers called an “Alice in Wonderland” view of the world. I asked Landau-McFarland how she would deal with such a student, hoping she would suggest strategies that Diaz-Gemmati might find helpful. She replied that she thought students should explicitly be told:

It’s something that has to be learned, and this is what we’re working on, and this is the way the world is. You may not have experienced it yet, but it will come your way. If it doesn’t come your way, you’re very fortunate, but you need to be aware that it’s there.

She also notes that because of these tensions many students end up “killing each other, literally.”

An extended discussion ensued among the other teachers about what they consider a mistaken sense that school should be “antiseptic,” a place where the difficult and potentially explosive issues are avoided. Like O’Malley, Diaz-Gemmati remained uncomfortable. She
was not immediately convinced about the wisdom of raising potentially explosive topics.

But this conversation, and the many others like it across the year, provided Diaz-Gemmiati with the support she needed to pursue explicit discussions of race in her classroom, to ultimately study and write about them, and to grow as a teacher (see Diaz-Gemmiati, 1999). She concludes her chapter for *Inside City Schools* with the following admission:

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 comprises my classroom. (p. 76)

Across all three networks, the university facilitators worked with the teachers to create "safe" and nonjudgmental research groups where we all would be comfortable taking risks as researchers and writers and talking about our risk-taking. For the more experienced teachers, this risk-taking in the research arena and the support in the group setting fed into risk-taking in the classroom. For the new teachers, it made the whole act of teaching, which was generally a risky business, more manageable.

**UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS**

Many teachers focused on learning about their students' lives, with a goal of better understanding their students' behavior and their ways of learning. Of these, many were especially interested in the teaching-learning interactions between their students and themselves. Much of the time the need to understand students emerged because of a need to solve a problem related to helping a particular student, as was the case with O'Malley and with the example I will present in this section. Still, understanding students was also a large concern for these teachers on its own, independent of problems with particular students.

The teachers in all three networks began with knowledge of the importance of "listening" to their students and "hearing" what they say. However, they learned from the multiethnic group of teachers and university facilitators in their teacher research groups and from the multiethnic students in their classrooms that it is not always easy to "hear" in multiethnic classrooms. For this reason, many focused their research on figuring out how to listen better, especially across cultural, class, ethnic, gender, and generational divides. They learned about their students both through their teacher research and through their conversations with others in their research groups.

For these teachers a major reason to listen to students was to figure out how to help them become more engaged in the academic enterprise and thereby reap its benefits. In New Orleans, Karen Alford, who is White, was beginning to open her eyes to signs of resistance from many of her Black students. She studied and wrote about her experiences with several of them as part of her teacher research project (see Alford, 1999). Here I will tell the story of one of these students, Tracey, whose resistance was not subtle. Tracey openly voiced a negative attitude toward Whites and also refused to write or do other schoolwork in Alford's class.

Alford opened a conversation about Tracey with her colleagues by reading a vignette she wrote about the time when Tracey told the whole class that she didn't like White people, not even her teacher "Ms. Karen." Alford explained her conflicts about handling the incident:

She's entitled to a feeling. Still if a White child had said, "I don't like Black people," in my class, I would at least have a private conversation with that person. Somehow that remark would sound so hateful. But now I wonder how some of my White students might feel about Tracey's comment. It separates her from half of the students. (New Orleans local meeting, December 22, 1992)

Soon thereafter Tracey was suspended for other reasons, providing Alford with an opportunity to discuss Tracey's behavior with a social worker. The social worker concluded that Tracey "has a real problem with authority." However, Alford told the group that she was not comfortable with this analysis. She saw the problem as more complex and offered an alternate analysis to suggest that the issue was more specifically race-based:

The only teacher she likes is Bernie, our P.E. coach who's Black. But to me, Bernie has been angrier at Tracey than any of us have. He's much stricter with the kids than I am. She likes him because he's African American, and she doesn't like us because we're White.

Cindy Roy, the site coordinator, also disagreed with the social worker's analysis, but she suggested a more general psychological explanation:
I have to admit, social workers always kind of choke me up when they say, "These children have problems with authority." Children have problems in that their lives are out of control, and they don't [Alford: Yeah.] have any way to take it back and control.

Alford had mentioned earlier that Tracey's home life was difficult. Roy hypothesized that when life feels out of control at home, Tracey may see school as "a place where she feels some control over what she can do" and that her behavior may be a way of exercising that control. Roy also reminds the group that adolescence is a time when students normally think "how much power can I get from a parent, from a school, from my friends." Others concur with Roy's analysis, offering many backchannels of agreement while she speaks.

Alford then offers yet another possible psychological explanation, that Tracey may be trying to protect herself from rejection:

If somebody likes her and supports her, she starts putting up [Roy: Barriers?] this outright thing. "I do not like White people, and not even Ms. Karen" thing. Seemed to be like she was trying to get me to say, "Well then, I don't like you either." [Roy: Hmm.] [Herring: Uh huh. Uh huh.] And I'm not going to fall for that.

Alford tells the rest of the group that the social worker recommended that she "stop caring," basically that she protect herself emotionally and in effect not try to solve the problem with Tracey. Alford's fellow teacher researchers, several of them Black, respond with shock and outrage:

Herring: You can't stop it. You can't stop caring.
Galley: What? The social worker told you?
Alford: "You aren't gonna change her." She said, "You aren't gonna change things for her."
Galley: Is that right? Jesus Christ.
Valenti: I don't think she meant stop caring about, did she use those words?
Alford: She said, "Stop taking a personal—" Caring wasn't the word. She said, "You get personally involved with your students. Don't get so personally involved with them."
Williams Smith: Involved.
Galley: You can't help it.

Alford: To me that means stop caring, but—
Galley: You can't help it.
Herring: How can a teacher not become personally affected with—
Williams Smith: Involved.
Herring: Especially if you carry those problems around, you've weighted down.
Alford: I've been with Tracey since she was in fourth grade—
Herring: because I was the teacher's aide in her class. So I mean it's not like somebody I could just go off and do what you want to do.

Roy: Ah, right, it's not like some child who's new.

Sarah Herring and Reginald Galley are adamant in their disagreement, repeatedly saying "you can't" think the way the social worker does; from their points of view, teachers inevitably become personally involved if they care, and caring is necessary for good teaching. Meanwhile, Elena Valenti tries to see the social worker's point of view, saying she couldn't have meant what Galley and Herring say she meant, "to stop caring," Alford, however, agrees with Galley and Herring's interpretation.

In the end, all the teachers of color, led by Galley and Herring, make a touching attempt to reassure Alford that all will end well, that Tracey really likes her even though she says the opposite:

Galley: She really doesn't dislike you.
Sarah H: When they [unclear word here] how to get the attention that they want.
Roy: Uh huh.
Galley: She really likes you.
Herring: She probably does. From all those years, she probably does.
Galley: But she really doesn't—
Herring: But she doesn't know how to express it at first.
Galley: —know how to say it to you or express it you in terms of your way. . . . But she really doesn't dislike you. She likes you. . . . Because if she disliked you, she wouldn't have anything to say to you.
Alford: Mmmmm.
Herring: Mmmmm. And you would know it.
Valenti: That's true.
Sarah H: She'd be really hostile. She would be hostile.
Doing this research project too. We had to be, so observant of our kids and so noticing them and noticing who they really were as learners that it helped me I think this year be a better teacher. (New Orleans local meeting, April 4, 1993)

CONCLUSIONS

The professional development process in these teacher research networks was slow and complex. It required that teachers spend time reflecting on and analyzing their work, and it depended on structured time for them to interact with peers and others who had something to contribute, as well as time to collect and analyze data and think and write on their own. There were a number of ways in which the research process seemed to contribute to the teachers’ growth.

First, the teachers decided what they wanted to learn about. They were not told what to learn. They decided based on the issues they faced in their classrooms and their schools. They could choose whether the difficult issues. In fact, many of the highly experienced teachers entered these teacher research networks with the idea that they would take the opportunity to write about what they did well, to tell other teachers about curriculum they had developed and found successful over the years, and to share their expertise. But most quickly learned that the idea behind research is to look critically, not merely to share successes. It is through this process of critique, analysis, and self-challenge that the teachers found ways to learn and grow, regardless of where they began (see also Kalnin, 2000). This learning is consistent with what Cochran-Smith and Lytle describe for knowledge-of-practice.

However, different teachers took different routes to learning, depending on what was comfortable for them. Not only did they focus their attention during group meetings and oftentimes their research on different topics, but they often took different developmental paths. What and how they learned seemed to depend on their initial interests and comfort levels. It was common that the process of becoming a teacher researcher led the teachers to grow in confidence and prepared them to take a more consciously political stance. Still, some teachers gained as individuals from the process but did not see themselves as part of anything larger professionally, while others became politicized as part of the research process or used the process to deepen and develop longstanding political commitments. Whereas Cochran-Smith and Lytle define the inquiry stance in knowledge-of-practice as fundamental, in M-CLASS the politics often seemed to emerge from the work, and seemed to emerge for some more than for others. Within the same network, then, some teachers followed more of a knowledge-of-practice route while others followed more of a knowledge-in-practice route.

Consistent with Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s knowledge-of-practice, I found that building a supportive community where teachers can work together to analyze their classroom life seemed essential to the process. Although the data here do not support Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s claim that the inquiry community is “the central context within which teacher learning occurs” (1999, p. 282), it does support a modification of this claim, that the research community is integral to the research process. For a number of the teachers in the three networks in this project, the independent research process itself seemed equally central. Nevertheless, the research community, if not the central context for every teacher, was central for many and necessary for the rest.

Another aspect of the research process that seemed critical to teacher growth was the fact that it gave teachers permission to focus narrowly and deeply, something that seemed luxurious in a work world filled with so many competing demands. Although not all chose to focus narrowly and some even resisted (see Kalnin, 2000), those who did often were hesitant at first. They feared that it was unfair to focus on one student more than another; they did not want to show favoritism. As teachers, they were responsible for the whole curriculum, not just part of it; they had to cope with large chunks every day. However, most teachers felt relieved once they began to focus, and they quickly saw how they could turn what they were learning about a student or a slice of school or classroom life into something that would have greater benefit and wider implications for them as teachers and for their students generally. Focusing narrowly was especially valuable for the new teachers. JoAnna Buechart in the MUSE program explains:

It was very relaxing to just be like, okay, I can just look at one thing and not feel like, "Okay, well, how am I in classroom management? How am I in this, how am I in that?" ... It was very nice too because that's what you don't have time as a teacher to be thoughtful, you know. (JoAnna Buechart, MUSE exit interview, May 5, 1993)

Finally, teachers in all three networks worked on a research product for an audience beyond their local group—either a paper or a re-
port or a workshop for other teachers. This research process and the pressure to produce a product took the group talk to increasingly higher levels; the group talk and its rigor then cycled back into the research and according to the teachers into their teaching.

Mary Ellen Bayardo in the M-CLASS Site Based Network prepared her workshop about her research with the hope of sharing the power of the discovery process with other teachers. She explains her goals:

My goal is that these teachers leave saying, “Hey, maybe if I did a teacher research process, perhaps I would look at my teaching and the lessons and my students in a different way. It could give me a whole new perspective. And you know, maybe I will take a few risks as a teacher. Maybe I won’t just let students sit wherever they want, and you have African-Americans here, Asians here, Latinos here. Maybe it’s my responsibility as an educator to create a state where they can all come together.” So . . . that’s my goal . . . in an hour and a half . . . (Site Based Network meeting, March 20, 1999)

Bayardo hopes that other teachers will become teacher researchers and get "a whole new perspective," one that will lead them to change their stance. Bayardo thinks that then teachers might, among other things, begin to "look at . . . students in a different way" and "take a few risks," two of the three ways the teacher researchers in these three projects changed. These changes might lead the teachers to enter the larger political arena, but they might also lead to small but significant personal accomplishments. It is all of these accomplishments, be they large or small, that seem to be central to what teacher research is.

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