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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an ongoing case study of how a group of teachers are becoming researchers and what this means for their classrooms and the professional development school where they work. A collaborative teacher development program was implemented in Dickinson Elementary School of Albuquerque (New Mexico) which serves a mobile and mixed ethnic community. In phase 1, a group of teachers in the school worked with graduate students enrolled in a university ethnography class to formulate research questions and to engage in ethnographic inquiry. In the second phase, a collaborative, onsite course was taught at the school that helped teachers use qualitative research methods in their classrooms. A year-round professional development school is now in place. Findings indicate that teachers learning to be researchers: learn to see research as praxis and develop their understandings of the world; learn the language of research and critical analysis; and develop true collaborative relationships. The next step is to understand how subordinate student groups are silenced in their schools. University professors in colleges of education must join with school teachers in rethinking and reforming the pedagogy in teacher education programs which has promoted an ideology of teachers as technocrats and public servants. They must begin to be seen as active, reflective scholars and empowered practitioners in their school. (Contains 13 references.) (LMI)

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SCHOOLS AS CENTERS FOR REFLECTION AND INQUIRY: RESEARCH FOR TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

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Schools as Centers for Reflection and Inquiry: Research for Teacher Empowerment

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We are witnessing a transformation in the educational research paradigm as more and more teachers are learning to do research in their own schools and classrooms. These are teachers who wish to improve their own, as well as others', pedagogy, and who wish to work towards more reflective teaching and greater empowerment as professionals with a voice in the administration and decision making of their school.

If one views schooling as a form of cultural politics as Giroux and others do (Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 1988; Apple, 1989), then pedagogy itself is a political act. It is a socially situated construction within an historical moment. As teachers learn about how they teach, they are drawn into an investigation on what teaching means, and whose voice is heard within the classroom. They begin to question whose values about classroom knowledge are accepted and discussed, as well as whose definition of roles of teachers and students is perpetuated.

One way for teachers to examine and study their own as well as other teachers' pedagogy is through their own research in the

classroom. Hopkins states that teachers who do research "take more control of their professional lives", and that "teachers who engage in their own research are developing their professional judgement and are moving towards emancipation and autonomy" (Hopkins, 1985:25).

This paper will provide data on an on-going case study of how a group of teachers are becoming researchers and what this means for their classrooms and the professional development school where they work. The empowerment they draw from learning research and the new sense of professionalism which the process engenders (Copper, 1991), enables them to demand a voice in the administration of the institution.

The Process

I turn now to an explication of the process which led to the class on teachers as researchers as part of their professional development. In the fall of 1989, I went to Dickinson Elementary School in Albuquerque to observe a student of mine who was doing her student teaching in order to qualify for a teaching credential. The school of 700 is in a poor and working class section of this southwestern U.S. city and serves a very mobile and mixed ethnic community. Out of thirty children who begin the year in an average classroom, only four or five of the same children are still there at the end of the year. This high mobility creates a challenging environment for the teaching

staff. When I arrived at the school I met many teachers who had been former students of mine during their student teacher preparation and they invited me to look around and consider conducting some on-site teaching and research.

I was soon asked to teach a university class as a forum for the teachers to discuss the professional development process currently underway at Dickinson and to help process the changes undergone by the school. Professional development to them meant enhancing the work environment for the staff, developing governance structures which empowered the staff and gave them control over their workplace, and developing pedagogy relevant as well as enriching to the children. This included a desire for on-site university courses. I agreed and taught the course in the Spring of 1990 at their school. We worked on many topics, including research as a power base for teachers, and school/workplace control. We also addressed the issue of institutional collaboration and how the university and they could begin to mutually develop an agenda of research to serve the many needs of their school.

Some of these issues came directly from the Holmes Group Reports which had initially set up the basis for the professional development schools. The second Holmes Group Report, Tomorrow's Schools, focuses on the relationship possible between colleges of eduction and the public school system. The principal vehicle for this relationship is the Professional Development School, broadly defined as "a school for the development of novice professionals,

for continuing development of experienced teachers, and for the research and development of the teaching profession" (The Holmes Group, 1990:1).

Out of that first class we developed plans for an on-site course to teach teachers' how to become their own qualitative researchers. This concept is at the core of the Holmes Group's fifth principle which directly addresses the professional development schools as a center for inquiry which involves teachers at every level. With these schools, the opportunity for teachers to begin to engage in their own research, on issues relevant and paramount to their classrooms, can be seen as a move to change the status quo of the teacher within the school. "Doing classroom research changes teachers and the teaching profession from the inside out, from the bottom up, through changes in teachers themselves. And therein lies the power" (Bissex and Bullock, 1987:27).

That following fall and spring, we began to implement the collaborative research agenda. The first phase was an attempt to encourage teachers to do research by having them work as collaborators with graduate students who wanted to do work with the schools. Interested Dickinson teachers identified themselves, and I matched them with university students who were enrolled in my research course Ethnography in the Classroom. Together the teachers and graduate students attempted to formulate research questions which would provide needed data for the teachers and fulfill the ethnographic inquiry necessary for

the class. Many interesting data emerged from that semester's work, however it was often difficult for the teachers and students to communicate sufficiently about the research questions and how best to address them.

The result of that first research attempt brought the classroom teachers one step closer to realizing that one of the best ways for them to get at the questions they had concerning their classrooms was to learn how to do research themselves. They gained a better sense of what the typical research project actually was when it was broken down into component parts; they learned the language of qualitative research; and they saw how the graduate students struggled with learning the field techniques.

Finally, in the spring of 1991, I taught an on-site course at Dickinson for teachers on learning qualitative research methods to use in their own classrooms. The process we all underwent was almost as important as the products the teachers produced. As Watts (1985) points out, the teachers and university researchers had to settle into a relationship of equality and parity. On the one side were the researchers from the university, myself and a graduate student. On the other side were the classroom teachers. We, as academically trained professional researchers, had the knowledge about research, the terminology, and the procedures. However, the teachers knew the classroom in all its complexity.

Within the research class, the teachers were able to develop

a frame of mind about research that allowed them to look at and reflect upon their own work in order to make changes in their own classrooms and school. Their "praxis" empowered them in their own classrooms as well as in the school at large as they shared the data.

For example, Garcia, a Title V Academic Tutor for Native American children, read with interest the initial articles about qualitative research and thought about how it would be relevant to her. The research class work and the discussions with the other teachers provided an opportunity to look critically as well as theoretically at her classroom and she decided to change the environment. At the same time Garcia began to realize that this transformation of space to enhance learning provided a unique source of research data. She recorded data by drawing pictures of the room and the changes, and writing descriptively about each stage and what process she went through in order to see the room as a place she could manipulate to enhance learning. Garcia moved furniture, pushed back bulletin boards and utilized a refrigerator as a place for magnetized letters of the alphabet.

At each juncture, she explained to the research class both her own transformation and the changes in the classroom. The class was able to give her encouragement as well as additional suggestions and references to the existing literature. What Garcia reported was that "she grew professionally as well as personally in the process of researching and implementing change in her classroom". Of the research class and her work in it,

Garcia says that:

> it has brought about great sparks and challenges. The class has created a spiralling effect in the way I view learning and environment within myself and the Title V Program. I am grateful for having been a part of an agent of change...We as educators need to take time and become aware of the things around us and learn from our students (Garcia, 1991).

Another teacher, Keefe's research, involved a series of interviews with teachers and staff from Dickinson Elementary School. She hoped to document the "impact that starting a professional development school process has on a school as it begins on the road to restructuring" (Keefe, 1991). Keefe was interested in seeing whether she could capture the process the teachers had undergone over the last three years while building models of self government and staff development.

The class had read the Holmes Group's Tomorrow's Schools, (1990), which advocated a collaborative relationship between professional development schools and colleges of education. In the report, the assumption is that colleges of education will initiate professional development schools. Keefe's experience was different with the two schools in Albuquerque. In these cases the schools initiated professional development, and the university entered into a partnership afterwards.

Her examination of Tomorrow's schools led Keefe to question the implied differing patterns of development. She decided to

interview teachers and staff at Dickinson, hoping to discover how they viewed professional development and how this viewpoint affected their process of restructuring the school. She reflects on her interviewing:

> During the first interview, I was having difficulty separating myself from the professional development school experiences I carry with me. I also entered the interview with rigid preconceptions of 'participation in the decision making process' which I made the centerpiece of the interview. When I read the first interviews, I realized that I had missed some potentially important information by this tactic. I entered the third interview with a determination to make the 'familiar strange' (Spindler, 1986). This leads me to speculate that long term ethnographic study of the school, including observations as well as interviews, may yield some very useful data with implications for professional development schools locally and nationally (Keefe, 1991:8).

She began to investigate what questions the participants really were addressing, and this helped her to see that an interviewer could direct a response from a participant by shaping the question. This discovery about questioning also had implications for her classroom. Keefe's work will join other research which will form a history of these two professional development schools. This history is both being made and being

recorded by the teachers in the schools.

Discussion

The teachers offer four points which illuminate their emerging role as teacher researcher. One, they are learning how to do research that will enhance learning in their classrooms. Two, they are learning how to ask and answer questions about their school which will empower them as professionals. Three, they are doing research which will break down the barriers of isolation that teachers feel in their individual classrooms. And four, they are learning to seek theories which will explicate and highlight their research data.

I can only second Watts (1985) in my discussion; teachers find research can be praxis and can mean that the staff develops in their understanding of the world and schooling and how to influence it. Second, teachers as researchers not only learn the language of research but develop an ability to read others' research more critically. Finally, teachers learning to be researchers allow the development of true collaborative relationships, both equitable and egalitarian, between professors and graduate students at the university and classroom teachers in the elementary school.

Teachers have been viewed as public servants since the time of Plato (Bullough, Gitlin and Goldstein, 1984), and not as intellectuals or even as reflective professionals. How the

teachers mentioned above were able to challenge their culturally negotiated role and move into the sphere of intellectual and researcher is an important process. What the teachers and the research class did was to "construct a pedagogical project that legitimated a critical form of intellectual practice" (Giroux, 1988:xii), they reconstituted the base of knowledge and, therefore, power. They began the task of understanding that all knowledge, far from being objective, is part of the power relations that not only produce it but also those that benefit from it (Foucault, in Gordon, 1980).

Part of this new understanding has come as the school has evolved into a professional development school and has moved into year-round schooling. Teachers in the school see that possibilities are open to them to help administrate and provide leadership. For example, the school is now beginning its examination of the curriculum and how it facilitates the interaction of the nineteen different cultures it serves; the skills and knowledge of the teacher researchers could be a valuable tool in that process of questioning and information gathering. They have valuable and needed abilities during this critical time.

Many questions have developed during these changes about the pedagogy, curriculum and governance at the school. Research is needed which can directly speak to this confluence of theory and practice as the teachers build new structures within the school. As workers who are on the scene the teacher/researchers

are in a crucial position to aid in the questioning and research. And very importantly, they are teachers themselves and can be trusted and believed as no outside researcher could be.

Conclusion

The cultural politics of teaching is "a pedagogical enterprise that takes seriously relations of race, class, gender, and power in the production and legitimation of meaning and experience" (Giroux, 1988:xii). Teachers who become researchers must decide whose culture to legitimate in their schools, and whose voice is to be heard. Teachers could transcend the role of public servant and technocrat (Bullough, Gitlin, and Goldstein, 1984) and take the tools of learning into their own hands (Nihlen and Kunz, 1973).

The next step for the teachers, in their own words, is to begin to understand how subordinate groups of students are silenced in their school. As these women researched, discussed and understood their powerlessness, and thus empowered themselves, so they can now begin to understand how minorities are deskilled and disempowered.

> For many of us, "it is essential that schools be seen as sites of struggle and possibility and that teachers be supported in their efforts both to understand and to transform schools as institutions of democratic struggle (McLaren, 1988:xvi).

University professors in colleges of education must join with school teachers in rethinking and reforming our pedagogy in teacher education programs which has promoted an ideology of teachers as technocrats and public servants. We must begin to see them as active, reflective scholars and empowered practioners in their schools.

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Research for Teacher Empowerment

Dr. Ann S. Nihlen

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