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ABSTRACT

Included in this paper is an outline for the book "Multiculturalism in the Mainstream: Teacher Researchers Build Multiethnic Literacy Communities in Urban Multicultural English and Social Studies Classrooms." The paper presents full descriptions of the chapters; a draft of the first chapter; a draft of a completed teachers' chapter; and a sample of an approach to creating multiauthored teacher chapters, which will be used in the final draft as a way of consolidating a number of the proposed individual teachers' chapters as well as the work of teacher participants not represented in the book outline. The editors of the book outlined in the paper plan to use this multiauthoring as a way to highlight key themes that are prevalent across all sites. Although the sample multiauthored chapter focuses on one site only and on the issues of doing teacher research rather than on teaching and learning in multicultural settings, the multiauthored chapters in the book outlined in the paper will span the four sites and will focus on the issues that are focal to the teachers' research. (RS)

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DELIVERABLE: PROJECT 4

LITERACY LEARNING IN THE MULTICULTURAL SECONDARY CLASSROOM

Sarah Warshauer Freedman and Elizabeth Radin Simons

University of California at Berkeley

December, 1994

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Included in this deliverable is an outline for the book on M-CLASS, with full descriptions of the chapters; a draft of the first chapter; a draft of a completed teachers' chapter; and a sample of an approach to creating multiauthored teacher chapters, which will be used in the final draft as a way of consolidating a number of the proposed individual teachers' chapters as well as the work of teacher participants not represented in the book outline. We plan to use this multiauthoring as a way to highlight key themes that are prevalent across all sites. Although the sample multiauthored chapter focuses on one site only and on the issues of doing teacher research rather than on teaching and learning in multicultural settings, the multiauthored chapters in the book will span the four sites and will focus squarely on the issues that are focal to the teachers' research.

Sarah Warshauer Freedman
Elizabeth Radin Simons

Outline

Multiculturalism is the Mainstream: Teacher Researchers Build Multiethnic Literacy Communities in Urban Multicultural English and Social Studies Classrooms

Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Elizabeth Radin Simons, and Alex Casareno, Editors

Section 1: Building Teacher Research Communities

Chapter 1: "Introducing M-CLASS (Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools)," Berkeley team

> This opening chapter will introduce the goals of M-CLASS (Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools), how the teacher researchers came to be involved, the nature of the collaboration between the university and the schools, and what we hoped to discover through our work together. It also will introduce each of the four sites, with a couple of pages written by each site coordinator about the educational setting in the city in which the teachers at their site work. In the end, it will show how we formed a national teacher research community, comprised of 24 teachers, from different cultural groups and geographical areas, but all teaching in inner city schools serving multicultural groups of students. The schools cover the spectrum from magnet schools to more traditional schools, with multicultural populations concentrated in different types of schools depending on the city.

Chapter 2: "Teacher Research," Berkeley team

> This chapter will explain the M-CLASS teacher research model. It will show how the M-CLASS model fits into the larger history of the teacher research movement and other current models for teacher research. It will analyze both the strengths and limitations of the M-CLASS approach. Chapter 2 also will explore the benefits of teacher research for the M-CLASS teachers and will include an examination of the relationship between teacher research and teacher change.

Chapter 3: "Theories that Guide Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom," Berkeley team

> This chapter will examine the varied theories the 24 teachers hold about teaching and learning in the multicultural classroom. It will include theories about becoming literate, using literacy to learn, and teaching in a multicultural environment.

Chapter 4: "Teaching and Learning in the Multicultural Classroom: National Concerns," Berkeley team

> This chapter will introduce the central challenge that the teachers face as they

classroom communities: (a) explicitly confronting issues of race and ethnicity, (b) deciding on curricular content and how to uphold high academic standards while motivating students to learn; and (c) understanding the politics of schooling in order to become players in the school reform and the change process. Throughout, the focus will be on the relationship between creating community and literacy in these multicultural English and social studies classrooms. The points of tension will each be explored in greater depth in the next three sections.

Sections 2-4.

Each of these sections will focus on one of the three areas of tension described in Chapter 4 as they affect the building of well-functioning communities of learners. The first chapter of Sections 2-4 will be compiled by members of the research team to feature voices of varied teacher researchers who explore the theme in particularly enlightening ways. It will raise key issues pertinent to the area and explain how the group of 24 teacher researchers from the M-CLASS sites (Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco) handled it. This chapter will be followed by a selection of chapters written by teacher researchers. Each of the teacher's chapters will explain how a particular teacher researcher deals with a key aspect of the theme in his or her classroom. Each section will be concluded with a comment by an authority on issues of multiculturalism and literacy.

What follows are titles of sample chapters for each section. Final decisions about which chapters will be submitted for inclusion will be made after all chapters are complete and have been reviewed by another M-CLASS teacher and by the Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy's Publications Review Board. We do not have definite commitments from authorities who will write the summary section, but have suggested names of people we plan to contact.

Section 2: Building Multiethnic Literacy Communities by Confronting Issues of Race and Ethnicity

"What Teacher Researchers Say about Confronting Issues of Race and Ethnicity," Berkeley team

This synthesis chapter will argue for the importance of explicitly discussing issues of race and ethnicity in the multicultural classroom. Without frank discussions on these topics, students in multicultural settings have little opportunity to explore their own feelings about their ethnicity or to explain who they are and the experiences that have shaped them. Providing an opportunity for students and teachers to develop informed understandings about one another provides an essential base for nurturing cross-cultural understanding and ultimately is essential to building productive multicultural learning communities. When issues of race and ethnicity become explicit topics for classroom discussion, conflicts between students and between student and teacher often arise and the teacher researchers discuss how they meet the challenge of dealing with such conflicts.

"And Justice For All," Griselle Diaz-Gemmati, Norwood Park School, Chicago

This chapter explains what happens when adolescent students begin to explore the themes of racism and prejudice as they discuss and write about

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literature. It looks expressly at how their ideas are often invisible, how the students come to understand their views, and how they begin to separate what they think from what they've heard from their family, friends, and communities?

"A Question of Fairness," Deborah Juarez, Calvin Simmons Junior High School, Oakland, California

This chapter also explores what happens when race, culture and class become explicit topics in an English class. It focuses on the process of curriculum creation and the effects of a multicultural curriculum on the students' understandings of themselves and others in relation to the larger society. She shows how such curriculum creation must be purposeful in its conception yet responsive to the issues students raise.

"What I'd Tell a White Gal (or) A Different Kind of Dance," Eileen Shakespear, Fenway Middle College High School, Boston

Shakespear's chapter focuses on the relationship between black male students and white female teachers, providing guidance for these white teachers who make up the majority of inner city teachers. She also explores how teachers can strengthen their relationships with and their ability to teach Black males, widely identified as among the most statistically "at risk" of all inner city students.

"Experiencing the Happenings: Writing about Slavery," Karen Alford, Audubon Montessori, New Orleans

This chapter explores what's involved in teaching the difficult topic of slavery to a multicultural group of students, a large percentage of them African American. Alford shows how she provides ways for her students to express their emotional reactions to the topic, orally and in writing and how she helps her students take the perspective of varied historical characters during the time of slavery as a way to help them both come to understand one another and learn history. Through her study of the students' logs, Alford tracks their growing historical understanding.

"How Ethnic Literature Affects the Comfort Level of Students: Respect My Comfort Level," Darcelle Walker, John W. McCormack Middle School, Boston

Walker describes how students feel when the class reads literature that contains negative depictions of their ethnic groups.

"Closing Commentary"

Section 3: How Do We Decide What to Include in the Curriculum? How Do We Get Students Interested? How Do We Uphold High Standards?

"What Teacher Researchers Say about Multicultural Curriculum, Standards, and Student Motivation" Berkeley team

This synthesis chapter will examine how teachers decide what to teach: multicultural literature, the traditional literary canon, historical facts,

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historical understandings. It also will consider the skills teachers feel students must acquire, including the value they place on grammatical correctness and the standards they expect their students to reach. It also will explore how the teachers raise their expectations to help students achieve those standards and how they meet the challenge of creating literacy-based activities that motivate a variety of students who come to social studies and English classrooms with very different background experiences and interests. Finally, the introduction will explore the special challenges teachers face in understanding what will motivate their students when their own backgrounds are very different from the backgrounds of their students. It also will explore the unique opportunities of the multicultural classroom.

"And Now Poetry," Patricia Ward, McMain Magnet School, New Orleans

In her chapter, Ward explains how she and her students constructed a multicultural poetry curriculum. She then explores what her students reveal in their writing and discussions when they are exposed to multicultural poetry. She focuses on how she motivates her students to explore poetry and how their explorations lead them to understand themselves and others.

"A Reflection on the Phoenix," Verda Delp, Willard Junior High School, Oakland

Delp explores using a mix of canonical literature and multiethnic offerings. She writes about the academic gains in writing and thinking skills for her multiethnic students who follow a structured and carefully scaffolded approach to thinking and then writing about the literature they read.

"Toneya and the Gift from her Mother," Nancy O'Malley, John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science, Boston

O'Malley examines the role of listening in learning to write. She examines what it takes to get her students to listen to one another and to themselves, and to get others to listen to their words.

Untitled, Ann Lew, Burton High School, San Francisco

Lew explores how best to help non-native speakers of English write grammatically correct English. She follows the overall development of a young person's writing, looking at how that students' writing develops generally and then how control over the conventions develops.

"Closing Commentary."

Section 4: The Politics of Schooling, Effecting Change

"What Teacher Researchers Say about What's Involved in Changing Schools."

This chapter will examine the challenges teachers across the sites face in dealing with issues from outside the classroom that affect classroom life.

They tackle such institutional issues as tracking, attendance policies, and teachers' working conditions. It also will examine regional differences.

"The Other Side of the Road," George Austin, El Cerrito High School, El Cerrito, California

Austin's chapter shows the effects of ability group tracking on student motivation. He also graphically illustrates the disproportionate effects on students of particular ethnic groups. To demonstrate the academic meaninglessness of the practice of tracking, he provides a case study of a student who when switched from the regular class to the advanced class, went from being a problem to a model student.

Untitled, Walter Wood, South Boston High School, Boston

In his chapter, Wood examines school attendance policies and the real reasons students are absent. He further shows that school policies and the assumptions that support them are so out of sync with students' lives that they are incapable of changing poor attendance patterns.

"Closing Commentary," Sonia Nieto, University of Massachusetts

Section 5: Conclusions

This section will contain one chapter to summarize and synthesize: (a) what the teachers from cities in the United States have learned through teacher research, both about themselves and about their teaching; and (b) our conclusions about the theoretical underpinnings that can best guide literacy learning in multicultural classrooms.

Section 6: Epilogue

This section will consist of an epilogue to provide an update on the continuing effects of teacher research on the lives of these 24 teachers.

Note: We continue to work with the teacher researchers on their chapters. We expect in the end to include at most six pieces by individual teachers in the final volume. We have indicated on the largest possible set; however, all are not complete enough to make final judgments on. There are also several other teachers with whom we continue to work, who are not included in this outline because at this point their pieces do not seem to us to be nearing publishable form; however, it is possible that some may develop into publishable pieces and could be substituted for some currently on the list. In the end, however, the voices of all of the teachers will be included as part of multiauthored papers that introduce each section. In our final manuscript we expect to consolidate a number of the proposed individual teachers' chapters in ways that highlight key themes prevalent across the sites.

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Chapter 1: "Introducing M-CLASS (Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools)"

Sarah Warshauer Freedman, with sections by Roberta Logan, B.J. Wagner, Cynthia Roy, and Elizabeth Radin Simons

Reginald Galley: I feel one of the best ways to educate children of color is to examine their cultural background to include socio-economic, religious, family make-up, and all other factors that could possibly have an impact on their- and I underline "their"—understanding of the world in which they live. I strongly believe before you can teach a child, you must be able to understand all of the dynamics that affect that child. Only then will that child be able to learn.

Patricia Ward: When you talk about the child's background in needing to know all of that, that doesn't just apply to Black children.

Reginald Galley: No, no.

Patricia Ward: Any child, right?

Reginald Galley: Oh no, no. Any child, any child, any child. . . It's Vietnamese kids. It's White kids. It's all the same. You have to understand everybody's background because everybody sitting there is in the 8th grade, the 9th grade, the 10th grade, and they have a right to learn. You have the responsibility to teach them, and you must be able to,

as a teacher, to make yourself rise above that Black/White situation. Uh we have to do that in order to make sure that that child sitting there gets an equal shot at education.

Patricia Ward: What you said just now made me think about um, this is my fifth year at McMain and prior to coming to McMain um I had been at Green School [an all Black school at that time] for seventeen years. . . And um when I went I was asked to come to interview for that job [at McMain]. . . I have a very good friend. We taught right across from each other for seventeen years, and she's a White woman, and I said to her, we talk almost every day, I told her at that time- I said Theresa I've never taught . . . any White kids. And she said, "Children are children." . . . I was worried. I mean I taught Black kids all of that time. And I'm wondering how am I going to do this with the mixture of kids at McMain. And she said, "Children-" And she didn't say it gently. She said it a little--with a touch of [emphasis]: "Children are children." . . . And that was a very good thing to say to me because it relaxed me, and it made me more comfortable and not so afraid of a new aspect to what I had been doing. So it was good. (Teacher Researcher Meeting, New Orleans, October 31, 1992)

English teacher Patricia Ward and social studies teacher Reginald Galley carried on this conversation during a meeting with four fellow teacher researchers who teach in New Orleans secondary schools. The six New Orleans

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teachers were members of a community of teacher researchers who spent two years thinking about, discussing, and writing about their experience of teaching multicultural groups of students. As Pat and Reggie emphasize, when we confront a complex mixing of cultures inside our classrooms, we face a situation replete with new resources, responsibilities, and challenges. We meet students from many backgrounds whose varied experiences and knowledge can be e riching for all. But we also face the somewhat daunting task of learning about and coming to understand all of our students and their backgrounds. As Reggie and Pat explain, to teach successfully in a multicultural setting, "you must be able to understand all of the dynamics that affect that child," while remembering that, "children are children."

What's M-CLASS?

Pat and Reggie were part of the larger M-CLASS (Multicultural Collaborative for Research in Secondary Schools) community, a national teacher research group sponsored by the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy. We began the M-CLASS teacher research project because we wanted to understand what's involved in literacy learning and using literacy to learn in urban multicultural classrooms. M-CLASS teacher researchers from four urban areas across the country (Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco) were chosen in part because of their common interest in explicitly exploring the dynamics of learning to write and writing to learn as students of varied ethnicities come together. Like Pat and Reggie, the other M-CLASS teacher researchers worked together for two years to think through and articulate the underlying tensions in their schools and classrooms and to understand the opportunities before them. At the university, we provided a structure to help the teachers do their research, some financial resources, and information about research in general and teacher research in particular, about theories of literacy

11

learning, and about multiculturalism. The teacher researchers, who are experienced teaching in urban multicultural settings, contributed critical insights about the issues they grapple with in their classrooms and in this volume offer many insights to others working in similar situations.

Who's Part of M-CLASS?

Besides the six teachers in the New Orleans group, M-CLASS includes six teachers at each of the three other sites, for a total of 24 teacher researchers. Like Pat and Reggie, all of the M-CLASS teachers taught either English and/or social studies. All taught either grades eight, nine, and/or ten. The teachers are themselves a multi-ethnic group: ten are African American, nine are white, three are Latino, and two are Asian American. Questions about literacy learning in multicultural settings beg for insights from this kind of mix of researchers with the capacity to understand the complexities of varied multicultural communities of learners.

To locate interested and experienced teachers, Liz Simons and I worked with local site contacts: (a) National Writing Project [NWP] site directors (relying particularly on the NWP Urban Sites Network); (b) directors of nationally-funded projects focused on literacy and involving large numbers of teachers of students of color (e.g., the members of the Rockefeller Foundation CHART group); and (c) other prominent educators and/or teacher educators at the site. Before making the final selections, we telephoned each nominated teacher and conducted an extensive telephone interview. We wanted to be sure that the participating teachers understood the goals of the project and the nature of the research process in which they would be involved. In addition, we wanted to select teachers who were interested in confronting difficult issues and who understood something of their complexity. Essential to the success of M-CLASS was choosing a group of teachers interested in engaging in a year-long reflective

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process. Although there was some variation, the teachers, for the most part, were inexperienced in teacher research.

Creating a Supportive Teacher Research Community

We organized the M-CLASS community to provide plenty of support for the teachers throughout their research process--from conceptualizing their research questions to writing about their results. Besides the Berkeley team[1], the major support person was a site coordinator for each city who was an experienced university-based researcher or teacher researcher: in Boston, Roberta Logan, teacher researcher with the National Writing Project's Urban Sites Network, supported by Joe Check, co-director of the Urban Sites Network, director of the Boston Writing Project, and faculty member at the University of Massachusetts, Boston; in Chicago, B.J. Wagner, director of the Chicago Area Writing Project and faculty member at National Louis University; in New Orleans, Cynthia Roy, director of the New Orleans Writing Project and faculty member at the University of New Orleans; and in San Francisco, Elizabeth Simons, M-CLASS project co-director, supported by Carol Tateishi, director of the Bay Area Writing Project and director of dissemination for the NWP Urban Sites Network.

We began the research year by bringing the teachers and site coordinators to San Francisco for a three-day conference on multiculturalism, literacy, and teacher research.[2] At the conference, the first weekend in September, the

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

[2]The conference was funded by CHART, a project of the Rockefeller Foundation. Presenting and leading workshops at the conference were: Wilma Chan, Barbara Christian, Troy Duster, Kris Gutierrez, and Jabari Mahiri on multiculturalism and Joan Cone, Mary K. Healy, Jane Juska, and Patsy Lockhardt on teacher research. Special guests included: Phyllis Franklin, Executive Director of the Modern Language Association; Miles Myers, Executive Director of the National Council of Teachers of English; Judith Renyi, Director of CHART; Richard Sterling,

ERIC

teachers formulated their initial research questions. After the conference the teachers in each city met locally with their site coordinators approximately every other week. At these meetings, they refined their questions and discussed how they would conduct their studies in their classrooms, schools, and communities. One of the Berkeley project directors, Liz Simons or myself, visited each site three times during the year to help the teachers refine their questions, analyze their data, and write draft reports about their research. During the research year interaction was frequent, both among the teachers and between the teachers and the local site coordinators. The Berkeley team kept in close touch with the teachers through the site coordinators, through the three scheduled meetings at the local site, and through telephone calls and letters to individual teachers. Two of the groups, in San Francisco and New Orleans, continued to meet locally for a second year, while the Berkeley team kept in close touch with the Boston and Chicago teachers as they completed their writing.

The other ongoing support that was essential to the success of the project occurred during the group meetings as the teachers helped one another. Verda Delp, one of the San Francisco teachers, put it this way:

> I was receiving support, consistent support. The meetings at Cal [U.C. Berkeley], where I would talk with the other teacher researchers, and receive their responses, were having an effect on me. It was like an honoring of my teaching and thinking. I had been given the luxury of a place and a time to be heard. And it felt good. Pretty amazing, I would say. (Paper presented at the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy, National Advisory Board, June 4, 1994)

Director of the New York City Writing Project and Co-Director of the National Writing Project's Urban Sites Network.

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Similarly, at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual meeting in New Orleans in April, 1994, during a session that featured the New Orleans M-CLASS group, Pat Ward explained:

> The support from the group grew naturally because from the beginning of our research project, at the core of this study, has been a sense of community and cooperation. We listen to each other, we brainstorm and freewrite together, we offer suggestions for improvements, we challenge each other to take risks, we criticize, and we praise. This sense of helpfulness has prevailed throughout our collaboration. The support of our teacher-research group empowered me to make the first step, to take a risk and choose poetry as the subject of my research. Simply put, the group helped me to change from the comfortable and stale, to an energetic spirit willing to try a new way; thus, my students began to learn in new and exciting ways. (Ward, 1994, p. 1)

During the question and answer period at AERA Reginald Galley added information about how the group supported him, both as a teacher in a multicultural classroom and as a researcher who needed to keep focused on his research topic:

> As we got together every two weeks . . . and shared and compared, and throughout we had an opportunity to put on the table very very difficult issues of race and problems and everything across the board, and as you can see we were a diverse group. And sometimes there somebody would disagree, but sometimes I think we were in awe of what we had to say about what was going on in our own separate classes. So we came away from that learning process enlightened about how we could go back and take that same process and share it with the kids, and I think that entire thing, along with the help that Liz [Simons] and Sarah [Freedman] gave

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us, kept us focused. It was so hard from my standpoint as an educator to stay focused on what was important to these children, and my colleagues helped me to do that in so many ways that I don't think I ever would have been able to make it through it.

As Reggie's words indicate, for many of the M-CLASS teachers, research and teaching remained intermingled, concepts they could not or did not want to separate. In their minds, they ultimately measured the value of their research in terms of its effects on their ability to teach their students. In essence, they seemed to reason, if they couldn't teach well themselves or if they couldn't figure out something about what it would take to teach well, how could they write anything that would be seen as valuable by another teacher?

The Sites

Most of us probably feel that we know something about the urban school systems in our country. They certainly are often featured in the nightly news and the daily tabloids, as well as *The New York Times* , *Time Magazine*, and *Newsweek*, as students riot, as teachers are attacked, as gangs infiltrate, as metal detectors are installed, and also as reforms are attempted and pockets of excellence located. However, as we visited schools in the varied cities and listened to the M-CLASS teachers we saw important differences and subtleties rarely highlighted by the popular media.

Inner city schools in Boston, Chicago, and New Orleans are mostly African American, but the histories that led them to this place are different. In these cities most multicultural classrooms are located in magnet schools which draw from all over the city; however, in every city there are exceptions. Some schools find themselves with multicultural populations because students are bussed to achieve racial balance; some schools are caught in the shifting demographics of neighborhoods in transition. The San Francisco area is

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fundamentally more integrated than the other regions, and schools in the S.F. Bay Area reflect that integration. The concentration of varied ethnic groups differs in the four urban areas, with more Puerto Ricans on the east coast and Mexican Americans in Chicago and especially in the San Francisco area; with more African Americans in Chicago, New Orleans, and Boston than San Francisco; with more students of Afro-Caribbean origin in Boston; with more Asian Americans from varied countries in the San Francisco area. Even within what on the surface seem to be similar ethnic groups, they may have different characteristics, depending on the location. For example, the "Mexican Americans" in Chicago have a different cultural sense of self than "Chicanos" in the Bay Area.

To understand the work of the teachers in this volume, one must understand the variations in the particular contexts in which they teach. To provide a context for the schools at their site, the site coordinators have each written a brief overview of the school system in their areas. Their pieces follow:

"Teaching amid Anti-Urban Bias and Radical Reform"

Betty Jane Wagner, National-Louis University

The Chicago public schools operate in a climate set in large part by the Illinois General Assembly. Like most state governments, Illinois is facing severe financial crisis. This affects Chicago disproportionately. The Chicago public schools face three serious constraints: (a) Illinois has been for decades and continues to be one of the lowest states (48th out of 50) in the proportion of its gross wealth that is spent for education; (b) state and local resources are distributed to schools inequitably, making Chicago comparatively disadvantaged--this is somewhat offset by programs targeted for the children of

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the poor; and (c) the state legislature is dominated by non-Chicago representatives, termed "down-staters," although they share views with many of the suburban representatives in northern Illinois. State officials often cite the fact that Chicago has a higher proportion of welfare recipients than the rest of the state, in large part, of course, because that is where poverty is concentrated. There is a widespread perception that the state legislature is biased against persons of color.

The most glaring example of the city versus non-city bias is the law that will not allow the Chicago Public Schools to open unless they can show a balanced budget. Other districts in the state continue to open each fall with serious deficits. In the fall of 1993, it took a series of judicial decisions to get the Chicago schools open at all, and then only after delays in the start of school. Another example of anti-city bias is the state funding formula for additional money for low-income students. Although three-fourths of the Chicago students come from low-income homes, the state legislators, in order to limit the proportion of funding coming to Chicago, have stipulated that districts can count not more than 62 percent of its students as low-income.

The most heartening development for improving the lot of the Chicago Public Schools is school reform. In 1988, the Illinois General Assembly enacted the Chicago School Reform Act. It has been called the most radical experiment in the history of public education. It had three major components: (a) a set of ten goals to provide urban students the same academic opportunities as suburban students and stipulating that all schools reach national norms in academic subjects and graduation rates; (b) a reallocation of the system's resources from the then bloated central administrative offices to the local school level; and (c) a system of school-based management.

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The change in governance is at the heart of the reform experiment. Each local school elects a ten-person Local School Council (LSC) made up of parents, community residents, teachers, and the school principal. These LSCs have three functions: (a) to adopt a school Improvement plan each year, based on a needs assessment, (b) to adopt a local school budget, designed to implement the improvement plan, and (c) to decide to retain or change the principal of the school.

Perhaps the most noticeable effect of school reform is principal turnover. In the first four years since the enactment of the law, approximately two/fifths of the principals either have resigned or were replaced; a higher proportion are now African American (up from 39 percent to 49 percent, Chicago Sun-Times, October 12, 1994, p. 8) and a lower proportion, white (down from 52 percent to 42 percent).

School reform, however, has not yet had much impact on the classroom. It has been a reorganization of the ways schools are governed, not how students are taught. Most teachers simply find they have more work to do outside of class as they take on school improvements, budgeting, and governance duties. As yet there has been little effect on student achievement, except in the area of writing, where the Chicago Area Writing Project, based on the National Writing Project model, has had a statistically significant impact.

Nor has reform affected the racial balance in schools. School reform in Illinois is not about multi-culturalism, but about local control. Although Chicago schools are legally desegregated, only 12 percent of the student-body is white, so most schools are made up completely of minority populations. Fifty-seven percent of Chicago students are African American, 28 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent other.

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Because most of the schools in Chicago have students of predominantly one ethnic or cultural background, the first challenge for the M-Class team was to find schools with students from a mix of backgrounds. David O'Neill, who teaches at Lane Technical High School, has classes with approximately equal numbers of persons of African-American, Asian, European-American, and Latino backgrounds. Stephanie Davenport and Brenda Landau taught at Lake View where 51 percent are Latino, 25 percent are African American, 20 percent are European American, and 4 percent Native American or East Indian. Griselle Diaz-Gemmati, at Norwood Park School, had 45 percent African Americans, 31 percent European Americans, 18 percent Latinos, 3 percent Asian, and 3 percent East Indian.

Kathy and Tom Daniels teach at Farragut Career Academy High School, where approximately 80 percent of the students are currently Latino and the rest African American. Farragut's community is a particularly turbulent one, rapidly changing now from African American to Latino. The principal has had to shut the school down on several occasions in recent years because of violence between warring African-American and Latino gangs both in school and in the community. In 1955, Farragut's graduating class was all white. In 1975, it was all African American. In 1985, it was half of each.

Chicago does better than most cities, with the exception of Detroit, in hiring African-American teachers (almost half) but lags in hiring Latinos (seven percent). Forty-four percent of Chicago teachers are white and two percent, other.

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"Multicultural Teaching in New Orleans"

Cynthia Roy, University of New Orleans

From the beginning, issues of race have proven barriers to change, progress, and innovation in education in New Orleans public schools. As people often note, New Orleans is a city of European colonial traditions colliding with African-Caribbean traditions of free people of color, and thus a city of paradox and mystery. During an early era, New Orleans public school officials provided bilingual instruction in French and English, and after the Civil War, a model system of integrated students, faculties, and administrators. At other times in the school district's history, school officials deliberately forced blacks into illiteracy, limited education, and segregation. Throughout the years, New Orleans has been home to a vocal and persistent black community who led the South in confronting inequality and segregation and was among the first to persuade federal courts to enforce Brown vs. the Board of Education (DeVore & Logsdon, 1991).

Prior to the Civil War, New Orleans was a city where public authorities deliberately excluded all black New Orleanians--free or slave--from public education, while providing instruction in French or English to waves of immigrants. As the Civil War began, Union generals seized control of the public schools and ran them by martial law. When the war ended, Reconstruction leaders brought about integrated schools, an experiment unparalleled elsewhere in the United States. However, when federal troops pulled out of New Orleans, local reactionaries immediately segregated schools by race (and gender) and stripped the schools of financial support. Between 1877 and 1900, the quality of schools declined drastically.

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During the first part of the twentieth century the white schools of New Orleans flourished while the black schools deteriorated. Throughout this downward spiral was the tenacity of black leaders agitating for change, a legacy of the city's large and assertive ante-bellum free black population, a characteristic which sets New Orleans apart from other Southern cities. The black community's success in achieving equal pay for teachers and in achieving a measure of equality in higher education, encouraged local and national NAACP leaders to successfully pursue federal litigation in desegregating public schools in New Orleans in spite of white reluctance and violence. Since then, white flight and the eroding tax base have taken its toll. Twenty years after desegregation, the majority of black public school students are attending predominantly black public schools (DeVore and Logsdon, 1991: 226).

Currently, New Orleans public schools enroll about 80,000 students, with 88.6% of these African-American and 90% on free lunch. Of the graduating seniors, 38% expect to attend a four-year college, 20% expect to attend a two-year college or technical program, 28% expect to go into the military or work, and 13% are unsure of their plans.

Affecting the New Orleans public schools is a long-standing tradition of private and parochial schools, particularly Catholic schools. The Catholic schools enroll about 52,000 students. Of these, 74% are European American, 22 % are African American, and the rest come from other ethnic groups (Hispanic, Asian, and Native American). The Catholic schools, some of them over one hundred years old, do not mandate segregation of races, but they are not well integrated because of the choices made by both black and white families to send their children to the schools that have traditionally served their families, friends, and neighborhoods. Prior to 1980, Catholic schools were easily an alternative to public schools because the Catholic religion played a large role in people's lives,

and the use of a religious teaching faculty kept costs low. Now these schools are affordable mostly to upper-income families.

It is still a widely held belief among many New Orleanians that this system of Catholic schools does a better job of preparing students for college than the public schools, even though teachers in public schools have stronger teacher preparation and more education than their counterparts in the Catholic schools. It is the case that somewhere between 85% and 90% of Catholic school students students expect to go on to college. Parents report that the primary reason for selecting private or Catholic schools is a belief that their children will get a better education and that discipline is not a problem. However, since the Catholic schools selectively draw children of upper income parents who intend to go to college and since these children traditionally do well in school independent of the quality of the instruction they receive, the actual quality of the education as compared to a public school education is difficult to judge.

As an attempt to achieve racial balance and stop the flow out of public schools into private and parochial schools, particularly the large system of Catholic schools, in the late 1970's and early 1980's, New Orleans established magnet schools. These schools do not receive enhanced funding, and most but not all have entrance criteria that include academic ability and "good behavior." In these magnet schools one finds a multicultural mix in New Orleans schools; other schools are exclusively or almost exclusively African American. Five of the New Orleans M-CLASS teachers teach in New Orleans schools, four of them in magnet schools (Karen Alford, Sarah Herring, Doris Smith, and Patricia Ward), and one (Reginald Galley) in a regular school that happens to have a multicultural mix. The sixth M-CLASS teacher (Elena Valenti) teaches in adjoining St. Bernard Parish in a magnet school with only behavioral entrance

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requirements. Her students are predominantly the sons and daughers of blue collar workers.

BOSTON AND SAN FRANCISCO DESCRIPTIONS TO BE INSERTED

Book Overview

Following this opening chapter, Chapter 2, written by members of the Berkeley team, situates the M-CLASS project in the context of the teacher research movement today, explaining in some depth the kind of working community M-CLASS strove to create, elaborating its guiding principles, and exploring both the strengths and limitations of the M-CLASS model. Chapter 3, also by the Berkeley team, will examine the varied theories the 24 teachers hold about teaching and learning in multicultural classrooms. It will include theories about becoming literate, using literacy to learn, and teaching in a multicultural environment. Chapter 4, compiled by the Berkeley team and the teacher-researchers, introduces the three major themes that the teachers chose to explore in their research: (1) reading, writing, listening, and talking explicitly about race and ethnicity in the classroom, (2) deciding on curricular content and how to uphold high academic standards while motivating students to learn, and finally, (4) dealing with issues beyond the classroom community but that affect it, with a particular focus on the politics of schooling and the school reform process. These themes are each elaborated in one of the sections that follow, with a first synthesis chapter for each section compiled by the Berkeley team and M-CLASS teachers followed by a set of chapters by M-CLASS teacher researchers.

The fifth section will bring together the themes discussed by the teacher researchers, showing what they collectively have learned through their teacher research about literacy in their multicultural English and social studies

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classrooms. This section will bring together the teachers' findings to articulate a theory of teaching in multicultural classroom.s

The book will conclude with an epilogue to provide an update on the continuing effects of teacher research on the lives of these 24 teachers.

Multiculturalism is the Mainstream celebrates the work of this community of teacher researchers and in the process provides guidance for teachers working with literacy learning in multicultural settings.

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...And Justice For All

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Chicago, Illinois

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I was beginning my tenth year as an educator. I smiled as I remembered entering this school for the first time; my very first teaching assignment. I recalled my apprehension. A Latina teacher in an Anglo neighborhood, hired to teach a handful of bussed kids in a Spanish bilingual program that spanned grades one through eight. The school's community was the last affluent White neighborhood within the city limits. It is a place that borders the suburbs, looks like the suburbs, but gives the city's police and firefighters the job's required city address. I was insecure and inexperienced, but determined.

I overlooked the non-existent and sometimes inadequate materials, the makeshift classroom, and the school clerk's bigoted rudeness. Resourcefulness soon replaced my fears. My bilingual program became a working reality of a multi-age, student directed curriculum.

I dreaded when my kids left my safe classroom and entered the mainstream student population; it was then that I saw the old look of apprehension and fear rekindled in their eyes. I taught them how to stand, but I could not follow through to watch them run.

Three years after I first walked into the school, I told the principal I would be interested in the newly vacated eighth grade teaching position. Once he agreed to place me in a regular classroom, the old feelings of uneasiness assaulted me once more. What would the community think? What would they say about a Latina teacher taking over the eighth grade class? In a "regular" classroom? Surprisingly, it was not the community that had misgivings about my ability, but my own faculty, the people I considered my colleagues. They were a group of very traditional Anglo teachers who had about one hundred years of teaching experience among them. Some were bold enough to ask me outright if I was qualified to teach typical subjects in a genuine classroom.

My apprehension developed into a passion for success. Their trepidation became my motivation. That was six years, twelve teachers, and three principals ago. Again I withstood challenge and did not fail.

I was awakened from my ruminations by my eighth graders sauntering into the classroom. Although it was the second day of the new school year, I knew each of them well. I was their seventh grade teacher last year. My new principal and I were concerned about this group. We knew they had been subjected to a parade of teachers during their fifth and sixth grades. They were not cooperative; they lacked motivation, and they took no initiative. We decided that I should follow them for two years to see what impact, if any, I could have on them academically and emotionally. Our risk paid off. This class was now becoming a cohesive group of adolescents who were well liked by the entire faculty. I have grown very attached to them.

Before I relate our story, I would like to share some background information about my kids. My class consisted of thirty-three students--nineteen girls and fourteen boys. Of these, twenty-one were bussed from inner city schools. The class' median age was 13.8. The racial demographics of my group were as follows: 45% African-American, 31% Euro-American, 18% Latino, 3% Asian-American, and 3% are of East Indian heritage. 9% of the students in my classroom are of racially mixed parentage. The class's reading abilities, according to their latest standardized test scores, ranged from the latter part of fourth grade to the beginning of eleventh grade.

My class is part of a unique school of two hundred sixty students, with one grade per class and one class per grade. It is a microcosm of the idealistically integrated community of the future. Our realm encompasses physically, emotionally and academically challenged students in a beautiful blend of colors and cultures. We are an urban school set in an open nine acre campus on the northwest

ERIC

edge of the city. Our bussed children, about 48% of the school population, love the sprawling grass playgrounds where softball, soccer, football and basketball games are played simultaneously. The setting contrasts sharply with the black-topped, gang-riddled, fenced in playgrounds of their inner-city home schools. They enjoy the opportunity to play with their schoolmates on self chosen teams during the fifteen minute morning recess or the daily forty-five minute lunch break.

We are the only one of three neighborhood public schools in this northwest area of the city that is truly, and according to federal law, desegregated. Yes, so the immediate neighborhood at first did not look at our integration with favor. Who cared? Our nine acres were our sheltered zone, our paradise. It seemed to work. The kids were getting along. Their fights were more the rumblings of dubiously scored points, ignored rules or rowdy games of "Johnny Tackle" than directed racial instances.

Being the eighth grade teacher, I relish the task of putting the finishing touches on all who graduate from my school. I try to assure my students that their final year of elementary school will not only be enlightening and challenging, but memorable. It's a teacher's utopia. It's an advantage to be able to work with all these ethnically diverse children from varying socioeconomic levels. They are somehow brought together in one place to work, study, play, and coexist for their grammar school years.

I embarked on my journey of teacher researcher with a single vision focus. I wanted to showcase my kids--a group of thirty-three fabulous adolescents who had responded enthusiastically to a literature based, student directed curriculum. I had before me all the ingredients of a thousand success stories. I initiated my research certain that it was going to be effortless. I actually believed that all I would need to do was state what I thought was the obvious. I held fast to the credence that all children can overlook their physical, ethnic, and cultural differences, if all the

conditions for learning are just so. I truly believed that if they are provided with a nonpartisan, caring, and safe environment. As I look back to the beginning of my study I wonder, was this my reality, or was it all an illusion?

I began my research by asking a specific, and I thought non-controversial, question: What happens when adolescent students begin to explore the themes of racism and prejudice as they discuss and write about literature? Expressly, can they separate how they feel from what they have heard from their family, friends and communities?

I saw my research question as a challenge, a dare. I wanted to take what I thought I saw and prescribe it to society in general. I now understand the true meaning of naiveté. Not one of my students or I will ever be the same. Together we have stepped onto uncharted territory. We went beyond the boundaries that hold tight the floodgates of innocence. The infectious scabs of society penetrated our pseudo-dreamlike classroom world of equality. That place, that never-never land we thought we owned, did not exist.

The rude awakening that my students and I experienced has caused havoc in our classroom, on our playground, in our homes, in our communities. I find it difficult and agonizing to talk about our transition. Truthfully, the mere thought of committing the story of our realization to paper leaves me raw and emotionally depleted. I could not begin to narrate our experience without first admitting to feeling like an imbecile. How could I not have detected the snags in this magical, imaginary fabric we had woven? What was I thinking? Seeing? Ignoring?

I'll begin by providing some background information about how my classes work. First, to establish a student directed reading environment, I organize an individualized literature program. All students are responsible for selecting their own novels, keeping a log of what they have read, and a journal in which they react to and critique what they are reading. They also are responsible for reporting their

reading progress to the members of their literature group. I provide a daily twenty to twenty-five minute sustained silent reading time. We have a reading rug where students can sit or lie down on throw pillows they have brought from home, as they read silently. I want them to get comfortable and relaxed when they read. I believe that this atmosphere fosters a pleasant and inviting attitude towards what the students once believed was a tedious task.

Literature discussions usually take place two to three times a week. The literature groups consist of five to seven members of varying reading abilities. I make sure the members of each particular literature circle contain both boys and girls from varied ethnic groups, with varied reading skills and reading interests. Sometimes I choose their groups and sometimes I help them with the choice. Each circle is responsible for selecting a scribe and a leader. The scribe records in the group's journal what each of the members is reading and group members' particular reactions to each piece of literature. The leader prompts each member to talk about different literary aspects of the book, such as character analysis, setting, plot.

The literature leader keeps everyone to a specific time limit, usually no more than three to five minutes, and briefs the entire class on the discussions that have taken place in his or her meeting. Responsibilities are shifted every two weeks or so to assure that everyone gets an opportunity to be a leader and a scribe. Since five literature circles meet at once, I go from one to the next as an observer and as a member, not as a supervisor. I speak about what I happen to be reading and relate my reactions to the author's writing. I have had to disband and regroup literature circles at one time or other because of obvious problems, but overall, I have been pleased with this reading workshop. Students feel empowered by the ability to choose what they read, and there is no "grouping" of children according to capability.

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Once the independent reading workshop becomes an accomplished part of our daily routine, I initiate class novels into the program. The concept is the same as for independent reading, except that now at some points everyone reads the same novel. Reading the same novel helps us build a close intellectual community as we share a common intellectual experiences. We get to know and discuss characters we all are familiar with; we interpret the same dialogues together; we discuss the structure of a commonly known plot. I still assign independent reading as a nightly task. The record keeping for both kinds of reading remains entirely the responsibility of the individual student.

To assist the students with the choice of a class novel, I present them with a list of prospective paperbacks on the same general theme. I also present a brief synopsis of each of the suggested titles. The novel is then selected by a majority vote. Usually they go with something on my list, but there are times when they negotiate with me to select a book they've heard about that isn't on my list. I really get a charge from listening to my students discuss the same character from different perspectives and watching them attempt to substantiate their opinions from passages in the novel. Generally, I believe that this class' attitude towards reading has greatly improved.

To understand what happens when adolescent students explore themes of racism and prejudice as they discuss and write about literature, I encouraged my class to select two novels, both dealing with racial prejudice, but from different perspectives. Before the class vote on which novel we were to read, I initiated a strong campaign to kindle specific interest in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. I had read the novel years before and was haunted for weeks by its poignancy. Scout, the main character and narrator, was a pre-pubescent girl who was not afraid to speak her mind. Her relationship with her father was unique. At several junctures in the novel, Scout flagrantly opposes her father's opinions. Scout is one of two children

ERIC

in a one parent family, something I felt many of my students could relate to. I was also intrigued by the subtle understanding that the nucleus and mother figure in this White family was their Black maid, Calpurnia.

I romanced the children by announcing to the class, "There's this novel I've read about a man who gets accused of rape. At his trial, all evidence points to his innocence. It becomes increasingly obvious to the reader that this accused man is physically incapable of committing this horrendous act of violence."

"What happens to him?" asks Nick.

"Well," I answer, "you'll have to read the book to find out."

The class emits a mixture of moans and chuckles.

"Mrs. Gemmati!" smiles Melissa, "why do you do us like that? O.K. I'm curious, where's this book?"

Slowly and deliberately, I pull a big cardboard box from the closet. I tear open the flaps to reveal thirty-three copies of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Some students smile knowingly. I love the fact that this class is so good natured.

After the paperbacks have been distributed, I let the kids skim through them for a while. I encourage them to read the back cover. Some ask me questions about the time in history when this story takes place. We talk informally about the South, especially after the Civil War. We discuss what type of bird a mockingbird is. We review our general knowledge about Alabama.

I deliberately focus at first on injustice rather than racial prejudice. I want my students to arrive, if they ever do, at the topic of racism by themselves.

The group's enthusiasm to read *To Kill A Mockingbird* was varied. Some were hesitant to start such a "fat" book; others waded through its heavy metaphoric descriptions as if trying to sprint through water, but ultimately, the animated discussions that started coming from the literature circles were worth the apprehension.

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Initially everyone was on equal footing. We explained the descriptions of the town to each other. Some of the metaphors Lee uses were taken quite literally by some students. When we discussed the description "tired old town," I was amused to discover that some children envisioned a town of elderly people.

Then something altered the discussions. I happen to be sitting in on a circle discussion when a major disagreement erupted. The word "Nigger" offended the White students in the circle much more than the Blacks. Shelly, a bright White girl brought this point up in the discussion. In not so many words Shelly let us know that it was one of those words everyone knew, but did not use. Nancy, an equally smart Black girl and a strong rival for the top of the class's pecking order, resented Shelly's taking offense.

"I don't see what your problem is," she sarcastically responded to Shelly. "No one ever called you guys nothing but 'Master'."

Shelly insisted, "Doesn't it bother you to see that vulgarity in print?"

"No, why should it?" retorted Nancy. "We know where we come from."

At this point I asked Nancy if she or people she knew addressed each other by the term "nigger" and how she felt about it.

"It don't bother us, we know we mean no harm by it."

"Then why does it tick you off when I get offended by it?" Shelly persisted.

"It takes on a different meaning coming from you," Nancy snapped.

I was perplexed. I knew it was one of those things that you wondered about, yet never vocalized for fear of being misinterpreted. Shelly did not possess the inhibition I felt.

I asked Nancy to explain why. She thought for a moment and replied, "Mrs. Gemmati, it's like different. If my mama is complaining about her boyfriend and calls him an ass, that's O.K. But if I call him an ass, she gets all over me. It's like that."

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Still Shelly refused to give ground..."It's like using a swear word."

"It depends who's doing the swearing!" Nancy shot back.

The battle lines were drawn. Others joined the fray. Soon the entire group was talking at one another rather than talking to each other. The rest of the discussion volleyed back and forth around the conjecture that "the word 'Nigger' was a White man's way of ensuring the imposed lower status of the Black man. It also touched upon how some Blacks refer to each other as 'Nigger' without offense because they know where they come from and share some common ground." I sat back dumbfounded. Being neither Black nor White, I felt inept at defusing the mounting tension. I knew exactly what Nancy was talking about. I too used nuances with relatives and close friends that would take on an offensive tone if used by someone other than a Puerto Rican.

The bell reverberated in the hallway, but no one paid attention to it. The discussion was becoming a heated argument. I felt I had to intervene. I knew the issue was unresolved, but there was no getting them past this one point without appearing to side with one person or the other. I uneasily shooed them out to recess. A heavy tension lingered in the room for the rest of the morning. The final entry in my journal that day was, "God, what have I gotten us into?"

My drive home felt unusually long that evening. The discussion from Nancy's literature circle was on constant replay in my mind. There was no drowning it out. My resolve to do something about it was overwhelming. A strong part of my personality consists of being non-confrontational. This was certainly uncomfortable territory. I didn't enjoy finding myself in this predicament. I wanted to discuss my situation with someone. I thought of my colleagues and was apprehensive about their reactions. After quite a bit of deliberation, I decided to keep this incident to myself.

I arrived at school early the next morning. The previous night's fitful sleep did nothing to enhance my usually grouchy morning disposition. I listened to my voice making the morning announcements. It sounded terse. The students seemed edgy. Was I imagining this tension, or was it really still there?

The morning's opening activities went on as usual. Larry collected the lunch moneys, Maria passed out journals, Jose took attendance, Freddy watered the plants, Shelly vacuumed the reading rug. The rest of the students talked among themselves as is their custom. Eventually, when the chores were done, we quieted down to start writing in our personal journals. I attempted twice to write in my journal. Nothing came. The stark white page dared me to write about my inner turmoil. I couldn't. I said a silent prayer and stood up to start the class.

"Today I'd like you to help me do a word cluster." The exercise was not new to the class. I often use this procedure to introduce new vocabulary words. I find it often helps one understand words or phrases in context and individually. The students' stirrings told me that they were fishing in their desks for their thesauruses and/or dictionaries. "Put them away," I announced over my shoulder as I turned towards the blackboard, "You'll only need your honest opinions and beliefs for this cluster." I printed the word "stereotype" on the board. The class sat strangely still for a few moments. The members of Nancy and Shelly's literature group silently stared at the word, Other hands around them shot up.

"A belief about something."

"A notion."

"A judgment."

The chalk in my hand tap-danced as I hurriedly wrote their responses on the blackboard.

"Is a stereotype good or bad?" I prompted.

"Bad!" was their chorused reply.

"Why?" I attempted to look directly at each of them as I spoke.

"Because," Nancy spoke for the first time that morning, "it's like saying all blondes are dumb." Shelly's head shot up and her icy blue glare bore into Nancy's face.

Fearing a repeat of yesterday's heated discussion, I quickly wrote the word "prejudice" next to our first cluster.

"O.K., now let's cluster this word." Did my voice sound as tense as I felt?

"White."

"Black."

"Hispanic."

"Hindu."

"Chinese."

Again I hurriedly wrote on the board. After a moment, I stood still, with my back towards the class. I ignored the names of the other ethnic groups that were shouted out. Ultimately, the room settled into an uneasy silence.

"What," I asked still facing the blackboard, "do any of these ethnic groups have to do with the meaning of the word 'prejudice'?" I slowly turned to face a group of kids I thought I knew.

"Blacks hate Whites."

"Whites hate everyone," someone abruptly countered.

"The word in question is not hate!" I snapped harshly. Again I tried to look directly into each of their faces. The strained tone of my voice did not elicit any other comments or responses. I felt they had plenty to say, yet I knew that the general tone of their answers was not conducive to a productive discussion.

Thinking I might be able to diffuse some of the tension by stopping the whole class discussion, I said automatically, "Get in your literature circles, and cluster the

word prejudice with your groups." Divide and conquer. Was that what I wanted to do?

As was my usual practice for my teacher research, when students worked in groups, I went around to each group to set up tape recorders. The last thing I wanted to do was interfere or disrupt their discussions. I did not want my presence to infuse their answers with whatever responses they'd think I would want. As I later listened to the tapes of their circle discussions I felt like an intruder. I felt as if I were eavesdropping on something confidential, something personal.

Their discussions that morning bounced back and forth for nearly half an hour. I asked each group to instruct its scribe on exactly what the members wanted reported to the whole class. I hoped that this impromptu system of channeled reporting would harness some of the negative energy that threatened to ignite my classroom.

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, made everyone realize a very important truth...

"Today's society," he reasoned, "makes us be prejudiced against each other." He stood up to emphasize his point when the others in the circle told him he was way off base.

"If you see a big guy," he directed his comments to the girls in his circle, "with a black, bulky leather jacket, face not shaved, funny looking eyes, earrings on, hands in his pockets, walking over in you direction when you on a street, and it's getting dark and you alone, don't tell me you ain't going to be scared. You going to imagine the worse, and you going to try to get out of his way. Right?"

The group did not respond.

"Hell," he continued, "even the cops say we should report stuff like that . . . call if we see anybody suspicious. Who gets to define suspicious? Our prejudices!"

Not one person in the group countered Allen's argument. All knew he had a valid point.

For a while the scribes held personal attacks at bay. Although the intensity of the student's convictions ebbed slightly during our attempts at proper classroom etiquette, it burned just as profusely just beneath the surface of our decaying facade.

In *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the town's attitude towards Blacks and those who helped Blacks sparked heated exchanges in literature circles. I tried to put everything in a historic perspective by having my students research the Jim Crow practices. I also tried to explain the social, economical and moral climate of the South after the era of reconstruction. I by no means tried to assuage the feelings of frustration the class felt by realizing that these were the way things were not only regarded, but accepted. The class could not come to grips with the way the town's people treated each other with such flagrant disregard for human dignity.

Alas, common ground! Everyone agreed that the treatment of Blacks in the South during that period of history was deplorable. The minority students felt angry and vengeful. Their journals and their writings reflected one common underlying theme--pent up resentment. The White students felt defensive and their writings told me they were angered and confused about their feelings.

I convinced myself that if I prompted them to channel their energies into their reading logs and journals, I could help them deal with their anger. My strategy helped, as I watched their writings take on a new, sharper hue. Through them they exposed themselves to me in a way that was personal, sad and confidential. They became as individual as snowflakes. They shared dismal chunks of their lives via the silent screams of their pens. They pressed their darkest secrets between the sacred pages of their personal writings.

Mary confessed to being afraid of fights arguments and confrontations. She related that her literature circle forced her to take stands on issues through

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combinations of unrelenting stares and uncomfortable silences. Her passions were constantly in check and she was afraid of being wrong. Her temper violently exploded at several times during circle discussions and she completely lost control. Her question to me in one journal entry will plague me forever: "Why you have to bring all this garbage into the classroom? This was the only place I could be without being made to think about stuff like who don't like who. Why you doing this to us?"

The accusation of rape in the novel was another burning issue during circle discussions. Once again my class divided itself into separate camps--this time the dividing factor was gender.

The issue was not whether the character Luella was raped. It is obvious that she wasn't. It was the attitude of several males in the classroom:

"If she wanted Robinson that bad, he should have done it. After all, he was convicted of the crime anyway."

This viewpoint made me seethe and the girls were angrier still. It was difficult to keep my emotions from interfering in their discussions. Many times I abruptly left a circle whenever a comment I passionately disagreed with was made. The girls brought up the issue of prejudice again.

"If a girl talks or dresses a certain way, it's your belief that she's asking to be raped if she doesn't agree to a man's advances?" Nancy was livid.

A graphic description of a rape from an actual police report was brought in by a student who has a police officer in his family. Slowly and carefully, I tried to steer these boys clear of the ignorant, but generally accepted assumption, that rape is a crime of passion. I gingerly reminded the class of the number of innocent children, including boys of all ages, who are violated or molested every year. Some male students defended their belief that the punishment for rape depended on who the victim was.

Discussions continued to volley back and forth. Shelly sarcastically reminded the boys that all female victims were someone's mother, sister, daughter.

"Pray it never happens to anyone you love." Her words were tainted with acid. Some boys started mumbling among themselves.

Nancy commented that Black men in the old days were done away with for looking at a White woman, and those stupid ones that went with White women were killed like dogs in the street. But any White man could do what he wanted to a Black woman.

I don't know what prompted Larry to say "Joe's mother's White."

Before I knew it Larry and Joe were exchanging blows in the middle of the classroom. I watched frozen with shock as they rolled over each other on the classroom floor. Once I could get to where the melee was taking place, I found myself incapable of separating them. Nancy appeared, as if from no where, and grabbed one boy from behind . They got to their feet and continued exchanging blows. Nancy somehow got one of the boys into a full Nelson while I pressed the other to the wall with all my strength.

"Go ahead," she yelled, "Kill each other off. Isn't that what we doing to ourselves? Isn't that why we have no Black brothers hanging around? How many of you got your daddy home? Black men can't discuss nothing without killing each other. No wonder we in such a sorry state."

In the quiet aftermath of a classroom left in utter disarray, long after I heard the busses pull away from the curb, I wrote in my journal--"The sludge of today's society has permeated our classroom."

The novel was finished, much to my relief. I sat and pondered its ramifications on our class. I knew that the kids' feelings were still raw. Yet they seemed hesitant to let the issue go. I asked the class if there was some unresolved

ERIC

sentiment about the novel we had not explored. One question that stirred up an animated discussion was: "Were the children in the novel prejudiced?"

All in the class agreed that they were not. The students observed that the kids in the book saw the town recluse more as a mystery than anyone to be shunned. They also realized that the children believed in Robinson's innocence, and they supported their father's defense of him.

"Why then" I asked, "do you think that these particular children in the novel were not prejudiced, when most of their neighbors and school friends were?" Subsequently most agreed that it had to do with the children's father and upbringing. I prompted their circle discussions with questions such as--"Have you ever been discriminated against?" "If so when and why?" The obvious responses of color, nationality and religion surfaced. When I suggested they write whatever they did not feel comfortable talking about, other responses started to trickle in...

"Some people don't like me on their team, I'm kind slow when I run."

"Some kids say I'm ugly, my brothers do too. When they have their camera in school they don't want me in the pictures."

"Some of my friends make fun of me cause I go to L.D. classes. They think I'm dumb and don't want me on their science team."

Kathy, a stunningly beautiful blend of White South American and Black Caribbean American had usually sat inert and despondent during class discussions about racial issues. No matter what type of peer pressure was exerted, she refused to comment and countered the group's questions with stony silence and hostile glares. She also previously wrote journal entries that carefully skirted the issue of racism, but concentrated frequently on injustice. It wasn't until I asked for this writing that I was to find out the source of Kathy's misery. She explained:

> My aunt had all the family over for Easter a few years ago. When it came time to take pictures of the kids with their baskets, she asked me, my brother

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and my sister to step out of the way. She don't like my dad 'cause he's Black. I guess she don't like us cause we're not White. My cousins on my dad's side say he had to marry my mom. They make fun of me too. My mom's always depressed. My stupid sister is going with a White boy. I guess I don't ever feel like if I'm going to fit anywhere, and it's not my fault. It's not fair.

"I can't be part of their group," another student wrote. "Everything they do costs money. My parents can't just hand over money for the movies or the mall. So I make believe I'm not interested in their activities. They'd make fun of me if they thought I was poor. My mom and dad would kill me if I said to someone we had to count our money twice before spending it. No one in this neighborhood is supposed to be poor."

Another student of Asian and White parentage told me, "My dad acts real cool when I have my friends come over. He even drives them home. But afterwards he says, " 'Why don't you have more White friends from our own neighborhood?' He's decided that I'm White, though I don't even look it."

It bothered me that this particular student checked "White" on his high school application form. I never had the courage to ask him why. Later that semester, I proofread a description of himself in a letter he wrote to a prospective mentor. In it he stated he slightly looks Asian.

I read their comments and saw the ugly shreds of our social fabric that are woven into their personal lives and that destroy their self-confidence. That day I saw my students as vulnerable children, carrying on their shoulders the ills of our civilized world.

The class concluded the novel with new insight and raw feelings. The general consensus was that people are taught to be prejudiced and that racism and injustice have their roots in the home. Our frank discussions and open writing, I think, helped them air some of their previously hidden feelings and helped them

begin to separate their opinions from their parents'. Some of the students told me about a commercial that they have seen on television. In it, the first scene is of bassinets with newborns of different ethnic origins. Then the camera fades into a panorama of a graveyard. The narrator at this point says: "In our world, these shouldn't be the only two places where people don't care who's next door. Stop racism now." The students continued to worry, though, that there really were few cures. To quote Kathy, "Words are cheap. Actions come too late after the hurt has been done."

I asked the children to explain if affirmative action and civil rights have helped ease the division of the races. All agreed they had to a great extent, but that there is still much to accomplish. Most did conclude, however, that they were just kids and were subjected to following rules and not making them. They had no choice but to accept the fact that their parents and the adults in their lives constantly exposed them to preconceived beliefs about racism and prejudice.

"It is not easy to tell my dad not to call some of my friends Spics. He's my dad. He gets mad when I tell him not to say things like that. He's the boss. What he says goes."

I knew that I would never be able to answer their questions, or assuage their fears. Their pain was real and intense. They were hesitant to drop the issue, and I was reluctant to continue. Yet I wanted this decision to be their call. I felt as if I no longer was directing the orchestra, but that the music was propelling me forward.

The next novel I had in mind was a mirror image of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor. It was set in approximately the same time frame and also dealt with racial conflicts. *Roll of Thunder*, however, presents the racial conflict from the point of view of a Black child subjected to the horrors of racism in the South during the Depression, not from the point of view of White children. Taylor is a wonderful children's writer and her stories inflict

ERIC

reality from a historical perspective. I proceeded with the same selection process as before, only this time the student's voted unanimously in favor of reading *Roll of Thunder*.

Again we started the literature circles with redefining the words prejudice and racism. Their answers this time were not so hostile, not so combustible. I think the initial shock and reaction of talking about something that's always present, yet avoided had worn off. They logically concluded, in one circle, that prejudice "is the result of preconceived judgments dictated by certain behaviors in the home and society." I was not only impressed, I was proud.

Issues of discrimination again surfaced, catapulted by certain issues in the novel. One of these issues surfaced when the Black children in the novel received used textbooks from the White schools. The textbooks were tattered and torn. One of the Black children in the story questioned why they had to learn from these old used up books. We learned that it was the accepted practice in the South, to give unusable materials to the "Nigra" schools. This fact brought on a new discussion of the "Separate but equal" ruling.

We researched and examined the Brown vs. Board of Education case and dissected and discarded the separate but equal practice as a Band-Aid cure for a social malignancy. We reviewed and applauded Rosa Park's courageous and non-violent stand against bigoted laws.

The children asked older relatives if they remembered the "White Only" drinking fountains and rest rooms. Recollections of these times lived by grandparents and great aunts were the topic of discussion for the entire day. Horror stories of midnight lynchings and cross burnings were told again and again. Allen pointed out that a neighbor of his great aunt's in Mississippi had been set on fire for supposedly stealing something from a White man's field. Allen's story made *Roll Of Thunder* more real, more atrocious.

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One part of the novel graphically describes the physical condition of a Black man set on fire by a group of night riders, a posse of Klan members, because he had allegedly looked at a White woman with a "degree of undisguised lust." The students compared this incident with Tom Robinson's trial in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The circumstances were similar, the outcomes were similar, but as Allen put it, "Robinson had a White lawyer protecting him. It did nothing but buy him some time. This guy here had nothing but his words, and a Black man's word ain't worth nothing."

Nancy continued, "He was set to set an example and make others afraid. I'm sure that if they wanted him dead they would have lynched him in the woods. They needed to send a message to the other Black folk that this could also happen to you. They had to spread fear, to intimidate."

All my students were disturbed by the fact that the Black children in the novel were expected to walk miles each day to school, while they were passed daily by a bus full of White kids going in the same direction. Their daily walks to school included being the object of humiliation as the White bus driver tried to run the children off the road and into muddy embankments each day.

At this point I asked the students to try identify the improvements that they felt have occurred in public education since that time. I asked them how they would try to insure that all children receive a similarly effective public education. The majority of their answers revolved around the need for the improvement of school facilities and the communities that surround them. Bussing and integration, however, were the issues that reopened the proverbial can of worms. I was once again faced with an explosive issue in my classroom full of bussed and neighborhood kids.

"Now minorities can get into colleges and jobs first just because of what they are." Shelly spoke without malice. The bussed students, I detected, took offense at her statement.

"And if they are the token, they better watch their back, and they got to work twice as hard as their White peers." Nancy's words were spat out like rounds from a machine gun. Their target was obvious. Shelly seemed to gear up for another confrontation.

"Whites are just trying to play catch up for all the years of inequality. They owe us." Kathy reasoned out loud, before Shelly could answer.

Larry commented next, "Who's kidding who? Yeah so we come to this nice clean school in a White neighborhood. Who are the ones standing on a street corner in the early morning, in the rain and the snow and in the cold to catch the bus while most of the kids from around here are still in bed? You ever heard of a White kid being bussed to our neighborhood? The Whites gave us rides to school all right, away from our own. Every time we try to get a piece of what the Whites got, it backfires on us. They fix it so we are pissed and then they can say, 'Hey, ain't this what you wanted?' We always gonna be wrong, no matter what we get."

All the bussed kids nodded their heads in agreement with Larry's comment. Not one of them had been spared the frustration of waiting for late busses during inclement weather.

Allen spoke slowly, deliberately, "Yeah we come here and see all the stuff our neighborhood ain't. It's just like the textbooks that the Black kids got in the book. Our neighborhood's like that. We get the leftovers, the areas no one else wants."

I asked the group, "Do you feel that the environment here or the environment of your home school is more comfortable for you?" I wanted them to be specific and I wanted substantiated answers. I did not want the class discussion to turn into an "Oh I'm so grateful I'm here" testimony. I asked the class to name

ERIC

specific examples of the pros and cons of bussing, on the students being bussed and on the schools receiving them. As I expected, the cons outweighed the pros. Some of the most indisputable reasons were:

"All our neighborhood friends are scattered all over. We all go to different receiving schools. The kids from here stay together. They grow together."

"I leave this place at 3:15, so I guess this place is integrated from 9:00 to 3:15, Monday to Friday, September to June, excluding all holidays." "If the neighborhood kids want to stay for the after school programs and social center, they just walk back to school. If we want to stay we need an act of Congress, a way to get home after dark, a White family that will take us home with them until the activities start and three notes from our momma. It ain't worth all that."

"It is fine if one of the neighborhood kids learns to speak Spanish. Wow how smart, how intelligent! But we're expected to learn English. Our Spanish ain't so smart. If we don't learn to speak like them, we're dumb."

One of the neighborhood kids asked if the bussed kids felt just a little safer here, rather than in their neighborhood schools.

"Sure, but you better run like hell when those busses let you off in front of the home school. Then we got to walk the rest of the way to our house. Sometimes the gangs are there waiting for us to beat us up. At times it's like we're delivered right to them. It ain't all the time but it happens often enough."

The issues they mentioned as pros were touching:

"I've made some good friends."

"I see the kind of neighborhood I want my kids to grow in."

"I met Mrs. Gemmati."

"We do stuff like this--reading novels that kids in other schools don't do. We kinda have a say in things here."

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One neighborhood student spoke up. "We don't have it all so great here. Some of the kids from this neighborhood that go to private schools won't talk to us because we talk to you."

Another neighborhood kid continued. "Yeah, they chase us and throw rocks at us, and if we are caught around their house, they try to beat us up because we go to this school. Because there's minorities at this school."

"The people around here don't care how good you are or what you do, and it ain't only the kids, they'd hate Mrs. Gemmati too because she's Puerto Rican."

The moment this was said, a hush permeated the classroom. All eyes turned towards me. I tried to remain unfazed but I felt yanked out of my neutral zone. I now was categorized, labeled, seen differently. I was no longer just the teacher. I was now one of the 'sides' I so desperately tried to stay out of. I hoped that this was the wedge I needed to help them realize that they need to look at a person's qualities first.

I tried to ask for reasons for their persecution other than being members of Norwood Park School. None were offered. The bussed kids promised to help the neighborhood kids "show these bigots a lesson." I saw a subtle change in the kids towards the end of that particular discussion and at the end of this novel. The theme of inequality again was analyzed and cast as a result of racial prejudice. They discussed the fact that in *Roll of Thunder,* Cassie's family was targeted more than others because they had the distinction of being landowners. The students arrived at the conclusion that the Whites were uncomfortable with Blacks who had the potential for material equality--especially as landowners. Ultimately, the students felt torn at the end of the book. They realized that Cassie's father had deliberately set his crop on fire to distract and ultimately stop the lynching of a neighbor's boy. They knew that this crop was the only thing the family counted on to pay the taxes on their land. The students concluded that the family would either have to sell part

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of their land or loose it outright. They also knew that the boy who was saved from the lynching would now stand trial for the murder of two White store keepers and be convicted because of the improbability of a fair trial due to his color.

The children had a hard time dealing with the author's decision at this juncture. They compared the ending of *To Kill A Mockingbird* to this one, and agreed that it was possible in *Roll of Thunder* for the Black family to keep the land their White neighbors so desperately wanted. "Their decision was a poor one," most maintained. "The kid couldn't be saved anyhow. What was the point?"

"Cassie's dad was faced with choosing between his beliefs and convictions, and the land that had been his since birth. He chose what he believed in," I announced quietly.

"Is that what you want from us Mrs. Gemmati?"

"What's that?" I asked Shelly

"You know, to let go of the stuff we see at home and make up our own minds about prejudice?"

Shelly's assumption took me by surprise. I literally had no idea that this was what I had unknowingly conveyed. I looked at this group of students that I have unconditionally learned to love.

"No," I responded. "What I want is not the issue. It's what you feel is right that's important. If I ask you to follow my convictions, I am doing no better than the person who tells you to believe that all Blacks are bad, that all Whites are racists or that all Hispanics are ignorant and loud. I strongly believe that the way to end prejudice is to stop taking another's judgment as your own. Don't let someone else prejudge for you."

The abrupt ending to the novel left them wanting answers and solutions to the problems we discussed. The novel tied no loose ends.

I attempted to explain that society's ills nowadays were the same, but different. One of the kids brought up the case of the Rodney King beating, and the subsequent beating of the truck driver during the ensuing riots in Los Angeles. Another student brought up the Jeffrey Dahmmer case. All his victims were minorities.

"I wonder if the police would have returned that last Asian boy to Dahmmer if the kid was White and Dahmmer was the minority." Larry's comment took everyone by surprise.

An animated discussion on many "what ifs" followed. I sat back and listened. Their logic was, I thought, beyond their years.

My eighth graders have read their novels. The numerous tapes, papers and journals they've created in the process, have changed our class forever. They declare a silent tribute to the changes we've seen happen before our eyes

Our feelings are still somewhat coarse, our nerves still exposed. These kids no longer tip toe around issues of race. In many cases, the issue of race became a negative point of persuasion, as in the following exchange between two students in my class. The following tone of conversation has now become quite common among them.

"Let me have a pen."

"Don't have another one."

"You won't let me have one 'cause I'm White, you think I should have my own pen. If I were Black you'd lend me one. You're a racist."

"I don't care what color you are, girlfriend, I ain't got another pen."

"Why," I asked Nancy's literature circle a few days later, "haven't you ever discussed how these racial differences bothered you before?"

They always were there Mrs. Gemmati," she answered, "we just never acted on what we thought."

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"Explain."

"It's like how do you act in church? Or in a library? Or when your mamma has company over? You don't act the same as when someone's there watching you, or when you're home and your mamma ain't there."

I knew exactly what she meant. I've become very sensitive about bringing up issues in class that could eventually lead to further rifts between what I once thought were a close knit group of kids. Ignorance is bliss and safe, but can I truly affect the lives of my students by reciting pre-rehearsed lines on a make believe stage? Do I want to defer these discussions of race and prejudice to dark alleys which are constantly punctuated by occasional gunshots? Do I let the neighborhood children continue to be seeped in the thick smog of superiority that is so choking and prevalent? It was a thick armor of racism that my students had been dressed in for years of upbringing, one that was difficult to dent. I did find, clues, hints maybe, that the confusion, frustration and ordeal of adolescence was bleeding into another issue--the questioning of their parent's beliefs about different nationalities, races and religion. As the year progressed, they wrote in their journals:

"I don't know how long he's felt that way [about others], but lots of things he grew up with ain't even around anymore. The movies ain't a dollar, and damn ain't considered a swear word."

"So what if I bring home someone who isn't Black. If that person loves me and respects me and doesn't do me wrong, why should I refuse him for a Brother who sells on the corner and is a player?"

"Why does she call them rag heads? God that pisses me off. How would she of felt if her Jewish grandfather married another Jew instead of her grandma? She isn't the puritanical Protestant she acts on Sunday all the rest of the week."

"I don't care if my dad says we have to stick to our own. If someone doesn't try to move into more desirable places and show other people we ain't the loud and

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dirty Spics they say we are, how are they going to know different? Someone has to cross over to other neighborhoods and show that we want the same things they do."

The year was ending and I still did not sense a feeling of closure with my students on these issues of prejudice. Their attitudes were shifting but their sense of one another was still fragile. I felt as if the children felt this way too.

We were slated to go on the eighth-grade school trip to Washington and after our difficult year, the trip began to seem more of a necessity than an option. A few days away from Norwood, parents, teachers, books and students in other grades seemed like the perfect cure for what felt like a nagging cough. I figured if we didn't bond after being on a bus for umpteen hours and sharing sleeping quarters, there would be no hope.

Interestingly, the tension seemed to dissipate the further we got from Chicago. As some kids dozed off, others left their groups to form new groups with those who remained awake. We talked about everything and nothing. The boundaries that identified us as people from specific places and with distinct roles got fuzzier and fuzzier. By the time we reached Philadelphia, we seemed to be one group of people, from Chicago, eager to spend uncurfewed time with one another. We cared about each other's luggage, comfort, and likes. We cared.

The tours of Washington were important, yes, and of course educational. But what I was looking at was more than the monuments that mark our country's growth. I was seeing in my students the behavior that is displayed when children are allowed to follow their basic friendly instincts--uncurtailed by adult rules of choosing the who, the what, or the where.

On the last night before our long bus ride back to Chicago, my student teacher, came banging on my door late at night. She was on the verge of hysteria, and it was a good long minute before she informed me that ten of the kids had not returned to their rooms yet. She had fallen asleep and the kids had sneaked out. Just as I was

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about to dial the hotel security, Melissa ran into my room yelling that Nancy wouldn't answer the door, no matter how hard she banged on it. I dropped the phone and hurried down the hall in my Garfield pajamas. I yelled, I screamed, I kicked, but no one answered the door. I had my student teacher run down to the lobby to get a master key. I shuddered as the security guard opened the door.

The scene inside the room was incredible. Pop cans and popcorn were everywhere, the T.V. was blaring, and 15 of my students were asleep fully clothed, minus shoes which were in a pile, fermenting in a corner. The kids were in an array of sleeping positions, with multicolored legs and arms tangled everywhere. Nancy slowly opened her eyes and saw Shelly, Larry, Joe, and Maria sleeping on the same bed she happened to crash in. Slowly and one by one they started to waken. They looked around and seemed surprised to find themselves in such an overcrowded room, with their teacher and a security guard standing in the doorway. I started laughing. Freddy took one look at my Garfield sleeping shirt, my one sockless foot and tangle of hair and he started laughing. Pretty soon everyone was giggling at someone's sock, thumb in the mouth, open mouth, half closed eyes or disheveled hair.

The security guard looked at us as if we were truly nuts. "These your kids Miss?"

"Yep," I answered. "Each and every one of them."

I would be lying to myself if I pretended to be the teacher I was before I initiated this project. Perhaps the lack of candid discussions in classrooms is what alienates minority students from the mold mainstream society has tried to shove them into. I can never again take the so-called safe road in my classroom and feel as if I'm doing the best for my kids. I have learned that people should be my focus, not all of civilization. A society that is free of prejudice is years away, but something

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I hope to keep striving for--even if I only create a few ripples in the pond of life that comprises my classroom.

55

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"Teacher Researchers Together: Delving into the Teacher Research Process"

Sarah Warshauer Freedman, with Elizabeth Radin Simons, and Cynthia Roy, and with New Orleans teachers Karen Alford, Reginald Galley, Sarah Herring, Doris Williams Smith, Elena Valenti, and Patricia Ward[1]

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> As we got together every two weeks . . . and shared and compared, and throughout we had an opportunity to put on the table very very difficult issues of race and problems and everything across the board, and as you can see we were a diverse group. And sometimes there somebody would disagree, but sometimes I think we were in awe of what we had to say about what was going on in our own separate classes. So we came away from that learning process enlightened about how we could go back and take that same process and share it with the kids, and I think that entire thing, along with the help that Liz [Simons] and Sarah [Freedman] gave us, kept us focused. (Reginald Galley, American Educational Research Association, M-CLASS Symposium, New Orleans, April, 1994)

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

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

Some of the issues the New Orleans group raised, especially the underlying idea that teacher research often leads to teacher change, have been discussed by many others

(e.g., Bissex & Bullock, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Goswami & Stillman, 1997; Mohr & Maclean, 1987; Stenhouse, 1985). Often, however, the M-CLASS teachers raised issues that were somewhat different and often more specific than those that have been raised before.

First of all, a number of the M-CLASS teachers in New Orleans and elsewhere found that they drew their research questions from important personal experiences, often experiences that went back to their childhoods. These experiences focused them on what really mattered to them as teachers. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) discuss teachers' research questions and trace them to teachers' everyday experiences in their classrooms. The M-CLASS teachers also wrote about their classrooms and some of their questions originated from their experiences in school. But when the roots of their questions were grounded in earlier experiences, we found those experiences were key in what they noticed as important and in leading them to think carefully and write with passion and commitment about their practices.

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

Third, the New Orleans M-CLASS teachers found that the process of doing teacher research encouraged them to observe their students carefully and get to know

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

Finally, the New Orleans teachers discussed how being involved in teacher research provided a positive opportunity for collaboration between them and university faculty, with each having areas of expertise and with each learning from the contributions of the other. Only some teacher research is conducted in collaboration with university faculty and of the projects that involve university collaborators (e.g., Cochran-Smith and Lytle's groups in Philadelphia), few teachers have explicitly written about its costs and benefits. Since many teacher research groups were set up explicitly to offer an alternative to university-based research, from the inception of the teacher research movement in the United States there has been a tendency for the two communities to shy away from one another. From our experience in M-CLASS we would argue that the communities of teacher researchers and university-based researchers can both be more powerful and effective in the change process though collaborative action.

Research Questions Grounded in Personal Experiences

Doris Williams Smith and Sarah Herring are African American teachers from homes with rich literacy traditions. Doris writes about how she used those experiences to

construct her learning theory and then how she modeled much of what she did in her classroom on literacy activities she experienced in her home. After explaining that she "wanted to examine how audience awareness can be enhanced by creating an environment where there was a real audience, authentic communication and positive motivation," she recalls why this issue is so important to her. In particular, she explains how her family experiences with audience influenced her own literacy development:

> As one of seven children, born to a couple who migrated to New Orleans from a small rural community in northern Louisiana, I grew up in a home where, although there was a dearth of material possessions, there was an abundance of unconditional love and acceptance. We were encouraged to share our own experiences with family members who were always ready to provide an attentive ear. If one of us had to memorize a poem for school, all the others listened to the repeated attempts so often that we all ended up memorizing it.
>
> We've created a family tradition that lasted over 20 years that I think epitomizes our love for playing to an audience. Every year we get together on Christmas morning, and we have a family Christmas program. And over the 20 years we've had everything imaginable, from an original poem by my ten-year-old niece to an original rap by my son and my nephew entitled "Hey Homeboy, It's Christmas."

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

> The factors in my upbringing, that stand out most as aiding in my own literacy development were that I was provided with: (1) repeated opportunities to actively engage in all four communicative strands: listening, speaking, reading and writing; (2) an accepting non-threatening environment; (3) a real responding audience; (4) opportunities to work cooperatively with others; (5) opportunities

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for sharing which were pleasurable experiences I wanted to repeat; and (6) access to others who listened to and valued my ideas.

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

> Since literacy development does not take place in a vacuum, I tried to establish the same sense of a discourse community in my eighth grade classroom, that is to have students from diverse backgrounds feel a spirit of cooperation and acceptance in a non-threatening environment where they could engage in all the communicative strands: reading, writing, speaking and listening. This of course necessitated that others would listen to and value their ideas, which was particularly important in this teaching situation . . . where my students were not basically unicultural. (Doris Williams Smith, 1994)

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

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

> I have always been and still am an eager learner. I enjoyed school immensely. Since I enjoyed school so much, it seemed only natural that everyone else should also. Yet, my brother did not. He dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade. At first, I thought he had quit school because two of his friends had dropped out, but that was an incorrect supposition. I was perplexed because of the seven children, everyone completed high school and went on to college

except one child. There was always ample encouragement from my parents to excel, so what happened to the one? Wasn't school interesting to him?

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

Contrary to what I had assumed as the reason for his dropping out of school, my brother said, "I was ashamed because I couldn't speak clearly, so I didn't read or get up in front of the class. I was ashamed that I would fail. And then the teacher had "picks" that they called on all of the time. The other children were ignored. I was ignored. That was wrong. I don't know if they still do that now, but they did then." My brother's remark seared my heart.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Taking Risks

Pat Ward is an African American poet who had always been afraid to teach poetry. She wanted to share her love of poetry with her students, but she feared that if

she introduced poetry in school, her students might miss the magic and music of the words. Her nightmare was inadvertently doing harm rather than good. Her impetus came from the San Francisco meeting:

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

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

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

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

Like Pat, Elena Valenti used the M-CLASS group to confirm her efforts as she tried new activities. Elena, who immigrated to the U.S. from Cuba as a young child, had recently reentered the workforce. Although she had grown children of her own, she was relatively new to teaching social studies. She was still working out her class routines and wanted very much to get her students more involved in what they were learning. She worried that they did not participate enough in class. Elena began her M-CLASS

research wanting to get her students to talk more but ended up shifting her focus. She took advantage of the multidisciplinary group of teachers in M-CLASS to support her in taking the risk of instituting a multidisciplinary approach to teaching geography. In the end, the multidisciplinary approach yielded the participation she originally hoped for.

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

Elena goes on to describe one of her multidisciplinary activities:

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

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

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

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

With the help of my group I was encouraged to look for new ways to connect interdisciplinary skills. We learned to use writing in our geography class to promote written dialogue with others in the form of pen pal letters. My students swap letters with a trucker who travels the United States delivering those goods we talk about exchanging. We follow his routes on a map mounted to the wall in the back of the classroom, he sends us material and information from historical sites across the country. To help with our observance of Black History Month, our trucker buddy sent audio tapes of songs sung by African American soldiers during the Civil War. My support group gave me encouragement and suggestions when I wondered how to handle postcards and letters from this man who wrote my students that he had graduated from high school with the ability to read only one in twenty five written words; his letter writing skills reflected that struggle. My group helped me to see the learning possibilities in letters written by this man who, in every letter encouraged the students to finish school and send him an invitation to their graduations. (Elena Valenti, 1994)

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

Collaborating with Students

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

> Doing teacher research in my own classroom has helped me to realize how my students learn best. I asked them how they learned best and they told me. I wrote them a letter asking them to tell me how they learned best, and they responded. I asked sincerely, in their language, in their way--you know they way--in one of those folded up letters they pass to one another in the hall between every class--and they responded sincerely. The very best part was that some of them even thanked me for asking.
>
> How my students learn best. What a valuable thing for a teacher to know. It was very important to me to find out how my students learn. I knew what the educational research said--vary your lessons, vary the structure, vary the approach. But I wanted to know about my students in our classroom, not some abstract room full of students from a different part of the country and from

someone else's point of view. My own research helped me to find an avenue to get responses from my students. It helped me to see that learning is going on when my students respond to themselves and to others because it is through learning to understand others that we can best understand ourselves. (Elena Valenti, 1994)

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

> I think often of one of my students whose name was Michael, who stated to me that, and I quote, "I don't know why I am in this class. I don't want to finish school. I have no desire to." This comment was stated to me at the beginning of the project, and I decided at that time that Michael would become a personal goal of mine to see that he would eventually learn to respect himself and learn to respect the other students in the class.
>
> I feel that the M-CLASS project was a conduit for Michael to go on and to feel good about himself and his culture and his family. (Reginald Galley, 1994)

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

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

ERIC

about their background so I could use that as a basis to come back and share with the other children in the class. And after a while it began to work because as we all know, children are children. Once you get beyond the barriers and the problems that they bring to the classrooms, then you find out that they're just twelve-year-old kids who are experiencing the same thing as twelve- and thirteen-year-old other kids in every other part of the country. But I thought it was very important for me to show personally that I cared, and beyond the academic process, beyond what I had to do as far as learning objectives and that type of thing, I tried to put myself in their place, being in Vietnam, and being in Honduras, or being anywhere else. What would I do as a person who was trying to learn more about where I was and to be able to just fit in. And I think as I look back on Michael's situation, he was truly embarrassed, I think, to be Vietnamese, at first. But I think as he'd begun to find out more and more about his culture and read about it, and we talked about it just so the other students could understand where he was from and about what his country was about, that everybody had then a real appreciation for his culture as of the other cultures that we shared in the classroom.

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

One, it taught me to be very reflective and learn to listen. Kids come to us and tell us all sorts of things that's going on at home, that's going on in their lives, and they're afraid about, and I think as teachers we have to be able to listen more carefully to what kids tell us. They have a wealth of knowledge that they can share with us, and I think sometimes we tend as adults to not to listen to what children have to say because we write them off as being children and not knowing specifically what they are talking about. But they do have a very good sense of where they are and what they are talking about. And when they come to us as

ERIC

teachers, I believe, seeking for help and asking for guidance, I think it's incumbent upon us as teachers to stop and say, "OK what is the problem? Can we deal with it, now?"

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

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

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

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

Collaborations with University Researchers

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

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

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

She also pushed me to look more closely at the student I was writing about: "How did the act of writing and learning about history change him? How did it change his understanding of history? His way of acting in the world?"

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

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

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

"What do you mean? (More gray hair?)"

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

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

But now my wondering travels further--I wonder about my students--their writing; their work on projects, their relationships with their peers and their teachers, their places in life. I know I do this because of my participation in M-

ERIC

CLASS. . . I would ask those of you at the university level, "What can you do to help a teacher pursue that wondering?"

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

In Conclusion

Sarah Herring reminds us:

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

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

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

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

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

The AERA session on which this article is based includes not only the teachers' presentations but also audience discussion and introductions by Sarah Freedman, Liz Simons, and Cindy Roy. A tape recording of the complete session is available for $7 prepaid to the Center for the Study of Writing, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.