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ABSTRACT

This serial issue contains eight articles all on the theme of "Becoming Teacher Researchers." "Becoming a Network of Teacher Researchers" (Scott Christian) discusses how portfolios of classroom work provide documentation and encourage more systematic teacher research involving established research techniques. "Identifying Features of Language: Listening, Writing, Performing" (Ellen Temple) describes how fifth-graders developed language skills by studying oral genres--examining and classifying their everyday language use. In "Teaching Standard English to African American Students: Conceptualizing the Research Project" (Renee Moore), results from teacher research indicate that teacher attitude compensates for Black students' resistance to learning standard English. "The Golden Age of Teacher Research: An Interview With Marty Rutherford" (Chris Benson) pursues questions concerning the importance of the relationship between teacher, student, and community; the characteristics of good teacher researchers; wider acceptance of ethnographic and qualitative research; and the importance of online collaboration among teacher researchers who are spread out across the country. "Watching and Listening in and outside the Classroom" (Sheri Skelton) recounts how a teacher in an Inupiaq village in northwestern Alaska incorporated aspects of Native learning and teaching styles in the classroom. "Students Teaching: In Season at Peoples Academy" (Moira Donovan) documents a Vermont high school's use of high school seniors as teaching assistants and mentors in inclusive classrooms. "Have You Graded Our Essays Yet?" (Risa Udall) discusses teacher research on how ungraded writing allowed Arizona high school students to improve their writing skills. In "Something Invisible Became Visible" (Robert Baroz), a teacher-student research team studied the value of classroom language use in reinforcing learning. (TD)

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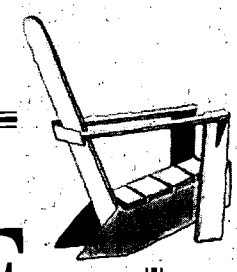

BREAD LOAF

Rural Teacher Network

M a g a z i n e

Alaska	Arizona	New Mexico	Georgia
Mississippi	New Mexico	South Carolina	Vermont

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A Publication of the Bread Loaf School of English
Middlebury College
Middlebury, Vermont
Summer, 1998

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From the Director

by James Maddox
Bread Loaf School of English
Middlebury College
Middlebury, VT

The subject of this issue of our magazine is "becoming teacher researchers," the collaborative reflection upon classroom practice by teachers and their students. Under the guidance of Dixie Goswami, teacher research has long been a major Bread Loaf pursuit, both during the summers of study and, of course, throughout the subsequent academic years.

At the time this issue goes to press, both Bread Loaf and its Rural Teacher Network are expanding their scope. Bread Loaf itself will be opening its fourth site for a full six-week summer program at the University of Alaska-Southeast in Juneau in 1999. The BLRTN, too, has expanded. This past summer, rural teachers from two new states in our network, Colorado and Georgia, attended Bread Loaf; we were also joined by rural teachers from Connecticut, supported by funding from a Connecticut foundation. For the second summer, the Kentucky and Alaska Departments of Education contributed funding in 1998 to support rural teachers at Bread Loaf, and representatives from the Ohio Department of Education visited Bread Loaf to explore their own possible partnership with us. Another state, New Mexico, honored BLRTN this year by naming April 24 Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network Day in recognition of our work there since 1993.

In addition to this good news, the National Endowment for the Humanities this past spring awarded a grant for Bread Loaf faculty members to work on line with the classrooms of secondary teachers. During this current academic year, twelve Bread Loaf teachers have organized cohorts of two, three, four, or even more classrooms to work together on texts with college and university faculty members. (I'm happy that I will be personally involved in this project, in a study of *Jane Eyre* with several classrooms nationwide, led by recent Bread Loaf graduate Rosie Roppel in Ketchikan, Alaska.) It is especially gratifying that the NEH is funding this work, of the kind that has been modeled by BLRTN teachers for the past six years.

Although BLRTN continues to expand its scope, its deepest impact remains, of course, within individual, often very isolated classrooms, with students and teachers doing work such as that described in this issue. ❦

DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellowships for Rural Middle and High School Teachers in Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, and New Mexico

The Bread Loaf School of English of Middlebury College announces the seventh year of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network. The Bread Loaf School is offering full-cost fellowships for rural middle and high school teachers; preference will be given to teachers in low-income communities. These teachers will be eligible to reapply for fellowships for a second and third summer at any one of the four Bread Loaf campuses, in Vermont, Lincoln College, Oxford, New Mexico, and Alaska. The DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellows will spend their first summer session at the Bread Loaf campus in Vermont, taking two courses in writing, literature, or theater. Only full-time public school teachers are eligible. The DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellowships for rural teachers will cover all expenses for the summer session: tuition, room, board, and travel. The 1999 Bread Loaf Summer session in Vermont runs from June 22 through August 7.

During the summer session, Fellows will receive training in Bread Loaf's telecommunications network, BreadNet, and will participate in national and state networked projects. Each Fellow will receive a $1,000 stipend to finance telecommunications costs, to make modest equipment purchases, and to finance the implementation of a classroom-research project in his or her school.

The mission of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund is to foster fundamental improvement in the quality of educational and career development opportunities for all school-age youth, and to increase access to these improved services for young people in low-income communities.

Applications must be received by March 15, 1999. For application materials and a detailed description of the Bread Loaf program, write to:

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Or visit the Bread Loaf website: http://www.blse.middlebury.edu

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network

Summer—1998

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Plus more stories about teacher research and the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network.

The Advent of Teacher Research Networks

by Bette Ford
William Carey College
Hattiesburg, MS

How do the attitudes and performance of student writers change when they know that their writing will not be graded? How does learning subsistence-skills in an Alaskan village affect Native students' learning in the classroom? What happens when African American parents, students, and a teacher collaborate in exploring effective ways to teach Standard English? What kinds of classroom discourse provide the best learning opportunities in specific contexts?

What do all the questions above have in common? Each represents the focus of a teacher research project currently under way in the classroom of a member of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network. During the academic year 1997-98, The Spencer Foundation sponsored and supported the research of these teachers, and that support is continuing to aid the dissemination of the findings of these projects for the current year. The dialogues and collaboration among teachers and students participating in this network result in new knowledge about teaching and learning—knowledge that extends far beyond their own classrooms.

Such networking provides a nurturing environment for classroom inquiry in which students and teacher-researchers can learn from each other in questioning, describing, analyzing, and refining their work. For example, each of the projects cited above, as well as others described in this publication, has been developed and reported via BreadNet, the online communication system of the Bread Loaf School of English. This system has supported ongoing conversations related to the inquiries in particular classrooms. In addition, Bread Loaf faculty member JoBeth Allen, an expert mentor in the field of teacher research, responded on line to teachers' projects. Her responses affirmed the value of the inquiry and offered helpful questions or suggestions.

The same kind of support is evident in the work of Renee Moore, her students, and their parents in Cleveland, Mississippi. On one Sunday afternoon during the spring of this year, Renee opened up a BreadNet "chat" through which some members of the Network participated in a roundtable discussion she conducted with her students and their parents on effective methods of teaching Standard English. The technology gave Renee and her student co-researchers a familiar and enthusiastic audience for this phase in their continuing inquiry. Many teacher researchers in the Network, including Renee Moore and Karen Mitchell, are investigating language development of students and have opened up opportunities for student dialogues on line, further diversifying and sharing data sources.

BLRTN Teacher Research Consultant Bette Ford

Sometimes the online activity takes other forms, such as discussion of publications and theories related to our inquiries. Such was the case last winter, after BLRTN Editor Chris Benson, called network participants' attention to Nancy Martin's chapter in *Reclaiming the Classroom* (Goswami and Stillman, eds., Boynton/Cook, 1987). Chris's comments on line about Martin's chapter, titled "On the Move: Teacher-Researchers," encouraged further dialogues and discoveries among network participants.

While much of this sharing happens on line, email constitutes only one medium for support and collaboration among BLRTN teachers and student-researchers: periodic face-to-face conferences allow teachers—and sometimes their students as well—more intimate engagement to reflect on each other's work. Fellow teachers also share and help one another develop strategies to write about their research for publication. All the pieces published in this issue of the *BLRTN Magazine* have grown out of intensive collaboration among teachers on line as well as in face-to-face meetings. Networking works for teacher research in a variety of ways.

Ultimately, networks of teacher researchers can bring together the questions, descriptions, and analyses of what happens in remote classrooms across the nation—from an Alaskan village to the Mississippi Delta—presenting a new kind of authentic scholarship on learning in the classroom. Whether the participants collaborate on a central question, examine prominent theories, or exchange personal writing in the process of their inquiry, networking among teacher researchers helps create conditions under which schools and their wider communities can flourish. ❦

Becoming a Network of Teacher Researchers

by Scott Christian
University of Alaska-Southeast
Juneau, AK

A Fellow of BLRTN since 1993 and an early member of the Alaska Teacher Research Network, Scott Christian currently coordinates the documentation initiative for the BLRTN. He has conducted teacher research projects on a variety of topics including students writing about writing, student decision-making, student poetry writing processes, and online discourse. His book, Exchanging Lives: Middle School Writers Online *was published in 1997 by NCTE. A middle school teacher in rural Alaska for twelve years, Scott is now the Director of the Professional Education Center at the University of Alaska-Southeast and the coordinator of the Bread Loaf School of English program in Juneau. He is also a research associate for the Harvard Research and Evaluation Team for the Annenberg Rural Challenge.*

When I lived in Missoula, Montana, several good friends were avid fly fishermen. From March through late October, every gathering featured at least one eloquent narrative of man, fish, and fly. Inspired by these tales, I found a cheap rod and reel at a yard sale, hiked to the head waters of the Rock River, and spent a weekend untangling my line from bushes, trees, rocks and occasionally my waders. Several weeks passed before I could keep the fly on the surface of the fast water for a few moments. Then, after talking with several of the experts, I discovered that the flies you select must match the hatch of insects for a specific section of the river at a certain time of the season. Even a few days can mean the difference between many fish and no fish. After fishing for nearly a month without so much as a ripple near my fly, I was absent-mindedly making my way downriver, on a drowsy Montana morning, my mind far from the river, when a ten-inch rainbow surfaced with my fly in its jaw, flipped in the air, and dove deep between the rocks. I was so startled that I dropped my rod and had to retrieve it from the current. When I finally made it to the bank, the fish was miraculously still on the end of the line. To this day, I wonder if I caught it or it caught me. I had caught many fish in my life, but never on a fly and never in a cold, swift Montana river. I held the fish up by the gills and admired it, basking in the sun and glory. It was at that moment that I became a fly fisherman.

The pursuit of learning through teacher research is much like the pursuit of trout through fly fishing. You can learn a great deal from listening and watching others. In fact, collaboration and support are critical in the process. But, like teaching itself, learning to become a researcher in your classroom is sometimes an isolated act. You have to find yourself in the classroom on a cold November day, with five phone messages from parents, assorted debris from six classes of students on the desks, tables and carpet, a dozen unread email messages on the monitor, a stack of ungraded papers in your bag, while your teaching journal annoyingly beckons to you, before you realize that only *you* can do this research. All the meetings, articles, and wonderful inspiring conversations over the summer aren't going to carry you through the difficult business of analyzing teaching and learning.

When we talk about becoming teacher researchers, I think it's important to acknowledge that with all of the demands on teachers' time, from planning, teaching and assessment to the countless committees and other assignments that are a part of teachers' professional lives, it is very difficult for teachers to integrate sustained, systematic inquiries into their classrooms. The problem, as it is with people learning to fish, is that you can't fully anticipate or appreciate the epiphany about learning—or teaching—until you have been tangled in the bushes, trees, and rocks, survived the challenge, and found the reward of a powerful new insight about the art itself. *Reading* teacher narratives, qualitative research about learning, and professional articles is very different from embarking on your own journey. Unfortunately, the kinds of school systems where teachers work do not often allow, let alone encourage, the intellectual climate and supportive structures where this difficult work can thrive. There is much talk about teacher research in professional organizations and universities, but in reality there are very few practitioners who are actually doing research in their classrooms and writing about it. But despite the challenges and complexity, we foresee a close examination of student and teacher work will be at the very center of our discussions and writing about learning and teaching in the BLRTN.

As we huddled during the summer of 1997 at Bread Loaf and imagined ways to begin the documentation initiative for the network, we decided we wanted a plan that would build on the classroom inquiry that was already taking place. We hoped to encourage teachers to continue the process over a period of time, perhaps

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Becoming a Network . . .

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years. We adapted a portfolio guide developed by Harvard research specialist Evangeline Stefanakis, and we expected the guide to help teachers to "tell stories" about their classrooms through a systematic process of inquiry. Our worst fear was that we would invite teachers to document their work, but it wouldn't happen. Even with our highly motivated and skilled network of teachers, we were concerned that we would end the school year with nothing to show for our efforts.

So far, we have been pleasantly surprised by the number of teachers participating and the wide diversity of approaches to the work. The portfolios that have been submitted fall into three emerging categories. One category includes teachers' compilations of everything that happened during the school year that was associated with the BLRTN: online communication, letters, student writing, photos, videos, and more. A second category shows an effort to select work that is representative of classroom work and networked learning, including some reflection and analysis of the learning by students and teachers. The third category contains portfolios that are even more selective and representative, often containing transcripts from only one online project, a description of the classroom context, student and teacher reflection and some other analytic/reflective writing relating to the network experience. These portfolios are useful snapshots of successful "fishing trips" and serve as a means to begin discussion and interpretation of our work as a network of teachers. The portfolio documentation is a steppingstone to more systematic teacher research and a way to help the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network develop its capacity as a network of collaborating teacher researchers.

How does portfolio documentation build research capacity among teachers in our network? Many of the elements of the portfolios are standard, tried-and-true classroom research activities, including surveying, interviewing, observing, writing and others (see "Documenting the Classroom," next page). There isn't a single teacher who is engaged is all of these activities, but a variety of research activities has been represented in the work thus far.

What happens when teachers engage in these activities? First, their self-perceptions change as they begin to see themselves as teacher researchers, with their documentation informing not only their own work but their students' learning and that of other teachers and students throughout the network. As the work is shared and discussed, there will be a growing awareness of how research can be an integral, vital aspect of teaching.

BLRTN documentation coordinator Scott Christian and Bread Loaf faculty member Andrea Lunsford at the Penn Center, St. Helena Island, SC.

Gary Montaño's exemplary portfolio is a case in point. It contains photos of his family, students and classroom; a rich and lively narrative of his teaching life and his experiences at Bread Loaf; interviews and surveys of his students; reflections written periodically during the school year about his membership in the BLRTN; and transcripts of online exchanges. It is a beautiful, compelling view of teaching and learning in a classroom that is connected on line to a network of thriving classrooms. Classroom documentation like Gary's helps a reader to understand the interconnectedness of the learning experiences of students, teachers, and principals. Students can learn by examining their own work and the work of others and writing about it; teachers can learn by looking at this writing, by closely observing their students, and by adding their own layer of analysis and reflection. Principals can also participate in the classroom research by supporting and encouraging teachers and students in the activities. Finally, the webbed structure of the network enables all these participants—students, teachers, and principals— to share critical questions and findings with each other across geographical, cultural, and institutional boundaries.

One of the most interesting sections of Gary's portfolio is his students' analysis of the transcript of an online exchange with Steve Schadler's class in Rio Rico, Arizona. For years, Dixie Goswami has been urging Bread Loaf teachers to document learning processes by examining transcripts of online exchanges and by looking at patterns of discourse, content, and the types of rhetorical strategies that students use in their writing. Gary's portfolio is one example in which this has actually happened. For example, when Gary surveyed his students, he found that when they wrote on line to peers, they were more conscious of choosing rhetorical strategies. Twenty-four of twenty-five students felt that their writing was different on line, for a wide variety of rea-

sons. They mentioned their desire to impress their audience, to avoid embarrassment. They talked about how the need for clarity influenced their writing. Twenty of twenty-five students indicated they felt their approach to literature was different during an exchange. Many claimed they did closer readings of the literature and developed different perspectives through writing on line to other students. Gary's impressions of this development confirm his students' views:

> I've noticed that when my students write essays about Shakespeare, for example, they are better able to make connections between the history and the literature. . . . My sophomores were able to connect the personal life of Shakespeare to his writing of Sonnet 18. On more than one occasion I've had to rewrite lesson plans to account for the intense discussions that unexpectedly took place [on line].

The survey of Gary's students provides valuable insight into how learning that incorporates computer conferencing technology, for example, is different from other kinds of learning activities in the classroom. The credibility of teacher research rests on the assumption that students' observations and speculations about their learning and their experiences in school are critical factors in the analysis.

As we continue documenting the classroom research of teachers in the BLRTN, we need to ask ourselves, "Are we systematic in the ways we gather and record information? Are we making written records?" The majority of documentation consists of collecting. There is some selection, some consideration about representation, and we are steadily moving toward systematic documentation that enables teachers to plan and conduct individual research projects in their classrooms. We won't direct teachers to do specific studies, but all of us in the network can offer suggestions related to others' specific research questions and begin to share our findings in a variety of formats: articles, online conferences, face-to-face meetings on campuses, as well as state meetings and professional conferences. Through this process teachers will naturally see common areas of concern and interest to pursue in the future. The documentation effort of the BLRTN so far has vigorously reinforced the view that BLRTN teachers take a "learning stance" in the classroom and in their participation in the network. We need to shape, guide, nurture and sustain this driving force as we find ways to make it more intentional and systematic. ❦

Documenting the Classroom: Some Key Activities of Teacher Research

Collecting: In the rapid pace of teaching, it is to easy find oneself at the end of the year with nothing but bulletin boards and grade books to mull over. A notebook of student written work, photos, artwork, correspondence, videos, and conference transcripts can be a powerful tool for learning.

Selecting: Anticipating that others (fellow teachers, students, administrators, parents) will read the portfolio should help teachers make choices about what is representative of their work, what is interesting, what merits further consideration and discussion.

Reflecting: Written reflection helps teachers understand and document substantive causes of feelings of success and frustration in the classroom.

Interviewing: Focus groups and interviews of teachers, students, parents and administrators allow multiple voices to be heard in the research.

Surveying: Nothing is more difficult than creating a good, focused survey that actually yields the data one hopes to gain. Students can be valuable resources in designing and implementing a survey.

Writing Narratives: Teacher "stories" are a vital and critical element in a teacher network; the writing of them provides background information, processes the sequence of events, and also creates a discussion forum with others.

Describing Learning Cultures: Teachers must be self-consciously mindful of such issues as gender, family culture, and race as they contribute to the culture of the classroom.

Discussing: Engaging in sustained conversations about student work can be a compelling and fruitful way for teachers to learn from each other.

Analyzing Online Transcripts: Online computer conferences, which can be easily downloaded, are rich sources of student writing—or data—that provide detailed records of writing as a process of learning.

Identifying Features of Language: Listening, Writing, Performing

by Ellen Temple
Camels Hump Middle School
Richmond, VT

Ellen Temple is a BLRTN Fellow and 1997 graduate of Bread Loaf. She is a veteran Special Education teacher and has taught middle school for eight years.

For the past two years, my fifth and sixth grade middle school students and I participated in a study of what I have begun to call "oral genres" of everyday language. I define an oral genre as speech that has a particular form deriving from features such as purpose, the number of speakers, grammar, vocabulary, syntax, speed of delivery, intonation, accent, overall length, audience, background sounds, place and time. A few of the many examples of unique oral genres my students identified are baseball play-by-play, sickbed talk, school bus talk, mother-daughter and mother-son talk after school (yes, we identified gender differences), mall talk, casual phone talk, teacher talk, TV sitcom dialogue, sales clerk and customer dialogue, top ten radio DJ talk, country music DJ talk, hockey play-by-play. The lists we generated and hung around the classroom were long and endlessly fascinating to my students. Their fascination with the subtleties of language surprised me and continued to feed the study.

The students I work with at Camels Hump Middle School in Richmond, Vermont, are a diverse group. Many of their families are tied to the land as farmers, farm laborers, maple syrup producers, and homesteaders. Others make up the growing Chittenden County professional upper-middle class. Others are Vermont working class families, making ends meet with two or three low-paying jobs. Because of this diversity, my students enter fifth grade with wildly different abilities to negotiate school language. For example, here is Annie, from a tape made in January, 1998, discussing another student's piece of writing: "I think the focus of Tom's writing is to tell about an occurrence that happened and you'll usually find that kind of thing in a newspaper or magazine." Another student's attempts to contribute to such a discussion might go like this: "I don't . . . I think . . . well . . . it's like . . . Uh, I don't know."

My students' varied ability with language skills presents challenges to me as a teacher because I can't ignore that some have more skills than others. The challenge of teaching to such a variety of abilities eventually got me interested in learning more about how middle school children acquire language skills. Following this interest, I designed an ongoing research project focused on my students' language competency, including speaking, listening, writing and reading. My goal was to study my students' competency with language, those skills they already used effectively in their homes and communities. I hoped to help them be-

Ellen Temple

come conscious about what they knew, in other words, to help them become metalinguistic. This process of becoming aware of the language skills they do possess, I hypothesized, would help them to learn new ways of using language and to become competent users of the language of the school, i.e. academic language.

Language As a Lens for Learning: Theoretical Considerations

At the outset, my students examined the forms of their everyday language use, naming the genres, classifying, generalizing and elaborating the features of these forms. As James Moffett writes:

> All that can be abstracted from something is form. The basic idea of informing is to put into form, and that's exactly what happens in matching experience with thought. Form is not a something but a relation—succession in time, direction and position in space, conjunction of circumstances or conditions. Relations are intangible, like mind itself. So thought can consist only of relating. Concepts result from sorting things into classes, and sorting is relating different things according to common traits like spottedness. (12)

By naming and classifying a genre like "giving directions to a place," for example, I believed my students would be better able to understand the language of instructions on a test or a math worksheet and use that understanding to their advantage. This was the hypothesis I set out to examine.

The specific ideas for this study developed out of a class—"Ethnography, Language and Learning"—I took with Shirley Brice Heath at Bread Loaf in the summer of 1996. During this class, I made connections between language and cognitive and social development. Dr. Heath introduced me to three remarkable texts, *Ways With Words* (Heath, 1983), *The Discovery of Competence* (Kutz et al., 1993), and *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice* (Hillocks, 1995). I was intrigued by how these texts are interrelated.

In *Ways with Words*, Heath describes several classroom projects in which teachers engaged their students in an ethnographic study of their own oral language for three purposes:

> (1) to provide a foundation of familiar knowledge to serve as context for classroom information; (2) to engage students in collecting and analyzing familiar ways of knowing and translating these into scientific or school-accepted labels, concepts and generalizations; and (3) to provide students with meaningful opportunities to learn ways of talking about using language to organize and express information. (340)

I am convinced that my project's success depended on my incorporating these purposes into my teaching.

From both the Kutz and Hillock texts, I began to understand Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's idea that learning develops fundamentally in a social context. Kutz et al. identify two ways educators commonly think about the relationship between language and learning: either language shapes thought or thought shapes language. But

> research on children's thinking and language suggests that the developmental process, at least, is not one of language giving rise to thinking, but rather of actions and engagement with others giving rise to both thought and language. (Kutz et al. 77)

Therefore, I wanted to create a discourse community in which discussions about language and concepts were commonplace in both large and small groups. Our oral genre study started off the school year with such discussions and became the norm for the year, whether we were talking about oral genres, written genres, text books, math tests, science concepts, or worksheet directions. We were paying attention to language no matter what content was under discussion.

Hillock gives several examples of classroom tasks both designed to be within the students' "zone of proximal development," as defined by Vygotsky, and designed to help move them to new ways of thinking. In addition, he defines the two most common modes of teaching: the "presentational" model, which assumes knowledge can be given to the students from the teacher, and the "natural process" model, which assumes students can create knowledge naturally given time and experience. A third mode, the "environmental" model, shares some features with the other two but is essentially different since it is "teaching that creates environments to induce and support active learning of complex strategies that students are not capable of using on their own" (55). By definition, the environmental model and the natural model insist on student engagement because "without it no amount of support will enable reluctant students to work beyond their current independent levels" (57). Knowing that the everyday oral language of my students was within their "zone," I wanted to observe the effect of having them engage in sustained discussions related to their language use outside of school.

Here, I'll outline what we did in class this year, using as data student writing, oral transcripts, and my own observations. I will also use a record of my own thinking, planning, and reflection that comes from an ongoing online conversation I had with Lauren Sittnick, a teacher on the Laguna Indian Reservation in New Mexico who was attempting a similar project with her seventh and eighth grade students. We each participated in a small network of teachers funded by The Spencer Foundation and received a small stipend to conduct research during the 97-98 academic year.

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Identifying Features of Language

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Listening to Talk and Performing

On the first day of school, I asked students to identify three areas in which they felt they had certain expertise or knowledge; I asked them to describe how they learned the skill to identify the vocabulary specific to the skill, and to reflect upon the process of learning the skill. For example, Emily offered her skills as a writing expert: "I could bring my writing skills to this class. If we made up a play I could help write the script. Or if someone had to write something and was absent I could maybe help! Or at writing time, if somebody was having trouble I could give them ideas."

From these pieces we made a list of all the ways my students believed they learned new skills and information. The list included practicing, watching, listening, teaching, writing, having a mentor, doing hands-on, making mistakes, and talking to others who are learning. From this first assignment, I hoped to have the students recognize themselves as resources for each other in the classroom. This concept, that I viewed students as resources, was essential in changing the power structure of the class from the very beginning. It also started a way of thinking about and discussing learning. In early June, for example, I one day noticed Kate was attentive but that she was not copying down the study notes that the class and I were creating for a science test. I went over and asked why she wasn't copying the guide we created. She responded, "That's not the way I learn best. I'm taking my own notes and I'll bet you, Ms. Temple, I do good on the test." She was right.

I introduced the idea of studying oral genres by bringing in tapes I made of conversations, and radio and TV programs. I asked students to see if they could identify genres. I defined genre as I did at the beginning of this paper. It took them about ten seconds to identify each of the genres I taped. This was language they knew instantly. Students took home tape recorders and made recordings of two or three genres from home, and we listened to them in small groups and identified each genre and listed its features. By looking at features of this discourse, I introduced the concept of form to students. The groups began to identify who was talking and for what purpose, the time of day, the place, and vocabulary specific to the context. One group identified a "mother-daughter-home-from-school conversation" this way: "Mother-daughter, in the TV room, normal conversation, relaxed," and listed topics of discourse as "swimming, soccer, homework, tired, snack, movies." Another genre, initially called a "brother-sister conversation" was amended to a "sickbed conversation" as students listened more closely to the topics of the discourse: homework, a request for a Coke, (sneezing noise), tissue, nap, and a request to be left alone. Once students were comfortable identifying features of taped genres, they were ready to begin creating their own.

During the next phases of the study, students wrote, performed, and evaluated three oral genres, one of which I assigned. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the performance aspect of the project. Students introduced each performance by identifying its genre, and each performance was critiqued by the whole class. They rehearsed performances which sometimes involved up to five or six participants. This was the highlight of the study for my students. Props and costumes were minimal, but it became clear that students began to see the performances as small plays or skits. Several students stretched the limits of realism when they wrote and performed scripts they called "weather reports," involving "a hurricane in the gym" and "a flood in the girl's bathroom." When I challenged these as authentic genres, they countered by saying they were "comedy skit weather reports." I realized they were actually doing parodies of the genres, a creative enterprise some might think is beyond the intellectual development of average fifth graders.

Students evaluated their own work, using a rubric we wrote together, which included criteria for both the written script and the performance. In the written scripts students had to use accurate vocabulary, present clear organization, state a clear purpose (stay on one genre), show minimal development (at least one handwritten page long), refrain from excessive spelling and punctuation errors. In the performances, students had to deliver lines smoothly, speak clearly, use correct tone and accent, and employ appropriate costumes or props when needed.

Critiques after each performance were primarily focused on whether on not the genre was accurately presented according to the criteria. Students took the critiques seriously, listening carefully to each other's comments. In general, students evaluated their own work as "meeting requirements." Three or four of my students came into class with a genuine fear and loathing of writing, and while they enjoyed performing and discussing oral genres, they did not like writing them down. As a result their scripts were short, half a typed page or less, and performances were too short for the audience to get a clear sense of what was going on. I want to return to this issue later when I discuss the connections students were required to make between the spoken and the written word.

Students' language use became increasingly complex as they wrote the series of oral genre scripts. Here is Emily's first oral genre script, which she identified as "mall talk" (including errors):

Emily: Hey, Josey! It's not every day I see you here.

Josey: Well, I did also just move here, so I decided I would check out the place.

E: Your a brave girl! Well, what are you going to buy, the cool, the calm or the outragous?

J: Well, as long as it fits it's mine!!!

E: Well, does your mom have a job yet?

J: No, but she was wondering what your Mom does.

E: My Mom doesn't exactly work, she owns half the mall.

J: That explains why you have so many cool clothes and why your always mostly here. Which half does your mom own?

E: K-B Toys and up. Oh, gosh it's 12:00. Bye Josey, see ya!!!

Emily's third script was initially identified by her as "Radio DJ" but was amended after performance to "Two friends listening to a rock and roll DJ." Here is her script:

K: Hi Jess, how was your day?

J: Just peachy!

K: Not the best I can tell, well, I know something that will cheer you up.

J: What?

K: If you notice the time, it is time for your favorite radio DJ.

J: Cool!!! Turn on the radio.

DJ: Hey all you guys and gals out there your listening to EMP#1. Callers, now's your chance to win a Sony CD player!!!

J: Lets call.

K: You can. Ring, ring.

DJ: Hello can you tell me what radio station your listening to, then your name?

J: I'm listening to EMP#1. Oh, and my name is Jessica.

DJ: Cool! You just won a brand new Sony, thank you, and now a word from our sponsors, then 45 minutes of your favorite radio station before I come back. BYE!!!

Sponsor's voice: This was brought to you by Nestle! Nestle makes the very best!!!!!

The performance of this script required four actors, each of whom was required to have a significantly different mood, tone of voice and purpose. After the performance this fact was noted by other students who identified J's "peachy" line as sarcasm, the DJ's speech as quick and loud, and the advertisers voice as "fake." I myself noted less frequent use by Emily of "well" as an introductory word, indicating she was listening more carefully to how speech actually sounds when spoken.

Moreover, a handwritten note at the bottom of Emily's typed third script reads, "Changed a little in performance." By the time the third genres were being performed, several students were not following their scripts exactly in performance. We had several class discussions about this point. Students were quick to recognize how some scripts left out words which would be part of normal conversation for the genre or included words which sounded "wrong," and these were words they left out or changed in performance. While I encouraged students to write exactly what they wanted their actors to say, in retrospect, I believe this crucial difference between oral and written language was not given the attention it needed early on. And it produced ongoing problems for my students as we moved, in January, from spoken genres to written ones.

From Spoken Genres to Written Genres

At first, when we began gathering types of writing, identifying their features, and classifying them, things went well. Again, we made lists of written genres, using resources from home and the classroom. Students brought in many types of writing and discussed them in small groups. The following is from a tape recording I made in class of a group of five students discussing a text:

Rachel: This is an Applebee's advertisement.

Johannes: A what?

Rachel: An Applebee's advertisement. For their food.

Johannes: Hey, it's . . . you stole a menu.

Rachel: No, it was in the newspaper. I didn't steal a menu.

Brittany: And you could tell because it has food and the prices.

Johannes: That's more like a menu. Why do they send out menus?

Rachel: So you'll know what the food is.

Teacher: Is this a menu? Let's be clear about this. What is...

Rachel: Actually, it's more like an advertisement. For what the foods are.

Several voices (overlapping): It's prices. What about the price of them? It's a menu.

Rachel: So when you go there you'll know.

Kyle: You don't want to spend five hundred dollars.

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Identifying Features of Language

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Johannes: Yeah, but they don't include the tax.

Kim: I think it's an advertisement 'cause it says introducing skillet seasoning and it . . .

Rachel: You know what? I think it's introducing new foods. So like . . . it's a new food and they're telling how much these new foods cost. It's like a menu but it's an advertisement telling how much these new foods cost.

Johannes: It's like both.

Rachel and Kim: Yeah.

Kim: I think it's more like an advertisement.

Johannes: Yeah, I think it's an advertisement. But it's really hard to decide. Here, can I see it?

Kim: It's definitely an advertisement.

Johannes: Normally a menu doesn't have their brand name all over the place.

Rachel: It says Applebee's on it. On the back. It says it in three places.

Kim: And the vocabulary.

Rachel: Yeah. It says "Cooking at Applebee's." They wouldn't say that on a back of a menu.

Johannes: Yeah. They wouldn't say that. Look at the pictures. They spice it up. Look, these are ribs. They look pretty good, though.

Several voices: Yeah. (laughter)

Johannes: You know what they do. They make it look perfect. They say they have pancakes with a perfect piece of butter and beautiful syrup pouring down.

Rachel: Yeah, and when you get it, it doesn't look like that.

Unidentified voice: Yeah. (laughter)

Rachel: So we can definitely say this is. . . what?

Voices: Yeah, it's an advertisement.

In this discussion, students are dealing with the complexity of written genres and discovering more than one purpose can be embedded in a text. Furthermore, they discussed how ads try to make a product more appealing to potential customers.

As we continued to look closely at written genres many questions arose. One student brought in a sports biography which contained a story, including dialogue, about a Super Bowl game. The class tried to classify this piece but found it very difficult, and we struggled over questions it raised: what distinguishes a newspaper article about the Super Bowl from a story in a biography about a player's experience in a Super Bowl, and how does a writer know what someone said if the writer wasn't there? Students asked about dialogue in nonfiction historical books and questioned the difference between history and historical fiction. In our social studies text, we found some quotes attributed to people long dead. As Harriet noted, "The writer made that up or found it written down somewhere else. They don't know what someone said. The writer wasn't there." These early nuanced discussions of written genres were exhilarating, but I soon discovered my students' difficulty distinguishing between oral and written genres.

When I asked students to choose a genre to write, one of the first questions they asked was if they could perform them for the class. I responded by saying they could certainly read them to the class. I was concerned that they did not see a clear distinction between speaking and writing despite discussions we had in class about how some writing was meant to be read out loud. My concern arose out of my own need to have clear distinctions between oral and written genres, a distinction I wanted my students to accept so I could teach some very specific written genres: personal narrative, argument, literature response and research reports.

After assigning my students to bring to class an example of one written genre of interest to them, I got a wide variety of genres including an electric bill, advertisements, a missing-child poster and recipes. I then asked students to turn those texts into other genres. Interestingly, most students wrote some form of narrative. The missing-child poster turned into a script depicting the abduction of the child. The electric bill turned into a narrative letter to the electric company complaining about the high cost of the bill and the family's financial difficulties; the recipe became a childhood memory. Though I was thrilled with the creativity students employed in transforming one genre to another, the assignment wasn't easy for them. From a tape made in early February, here is a group of students discussing how to help Rachel turn her newspaper genre, containing a missing-child advertisement, into another genre:

Teacher: Can you think of a way for her to turn this advertisement into a different genre? To make it a different type of writing?

Rachel: To make the missing-person's ad different?

Teacher: Yes. What's happening in this advertisement?

Rachel: There's a girl missing and no one can find her.

Teacher: What kind of writing might get written down around this?

Kim: Information.

Teacher: Yes. Who would write it down?

Kim: The Missing-Person's Bureau.

Kyle: The town clerk.

Rachel: The school.

Johannes: The newspaper.

Teacher: Yes. What kind of writing might be in the newspaper?

Johannes: But this is a newspaper.

Teacher: But it's an advertisement in the newspaper. What other kind of writing might appear in the newspaper about this?

Kim: An article.

Teacher: Yes, an article about the disappearance. Written by a reporter.

Rachel: It would be a different layout.

Teacher: Yes. Maybe you could read some articles in the paper and see what they are like.

Looking at this transcript, one can easily see me trying to lead my students out of confusion in a way that was not necessary during their discussion of the Applebee's advertising menu. The concept of changing one genre into another proved difficult for my fifth graders and ultimately not as engaging. I believe the difficulty sprang from their lack of familiarity with written genres. I had moved them too far out of their "zone of proximal development" and did not provide them with the appropriate kinds of support they needed to understand what I was asking of them. The type of writing they are most familiar with and most practiced in as writers is narrative. It is no wonder then that many of the written genres they were to transform turned into narrative.

From Analyzing to Synthesizing Language

Despite their difficulty with written genres, my students were able eventually to observe the features that make specific written genres distinctive: they could see the classic plot of a story, the subtle persuasion in an ad, and the dense information packed into the lead of a newspaper article. My hope is that studying features of language in this way will give them specific information and skills they can use to be more successful in school. When taking math tests, for instance, we sometimes referred to the instructions as a "math test genre," and the students' familiarity with the features of the language in the instructions, I believe, helped them interpret the instructions successfully. Once when reading some confusing directions on a social studies worksheet, one student said, "It's a particular genre. You have to figure it out." We went on to look more closely at the language of the directions. Typical comments that indicated critical thinking included "What are they asking here?" "How is this text organized?" "Look at the picture." "Why did they include this part?"

Later in the year I had written a complex set of instructions for doing a research paper. After reading them out loud, Jessica said she didn't understand what I wanted her to do. Rachel, perhaps in my defense, said, "Ms. Temple's directions are like a genre. We have to understand her language by looking at it."

My primary goal in undertaking this study with my students was to improve their school performance by helping them become conscious of the many forms, features, and uses of language, both oral and written, in the school institution. In effect, I was testing the theories of Vygotsky and others. The data I gathered and presented here indicate to me this study is achieving moderate success. My students are interested in talking about language, and they can participate in sustained discussions and arguments about classifying language. They are comfortable speaking in front of each other and adults about language. This last indication of growth was made clear to me on the last day of school when my students held a "poetry cafe" for parents and friends. I casually mentioned the day before that poets frequently spoke about their poems before or after reading them. I was surprised the next day when one student after another got up to read a poem and confidently, in unrehearsed language, described their motivation for writing the poem, its source of inspiration, or the time and place in which it was written. Unfortunately, I was unable to tape the reading, so I cannot quote their comments about their poems; however, I am certain that my students were speaking of the poems in metalinguistic and metacognitive terms.

As I continue this project for a third year, I will need to define and identify more clearly the linguistic and cognitive skills that indicate students' growth. I am certain after this initial study that such growth is occurring as a result of the continued focus on language and learning. Once I define these cognitive skills, I will begin to determine how best to evaluate and document that growth. Moreover, I hope to continue my online conversations with Lauren Sittnick, who generously provided me an opportunity to form ideas, test them, and revise them in a collaborative manner; these collaborative activities are highly important but often missing from the lives of busy teachers. ❦

Teaching Standard English to African American Students: Conceptualizing the Research Project

by Renee Moore
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Renee Moore has been a member of BLRTN since 1994. She received her M.A. at Bread Loaf in 1997. Lead Teacher and Curriculum Coordinator at Broad Street High School in Shelby, Mississippi, Renee is the recipient of several awards and fellowships, including teacher research grants. Renee is interested in issues surrounding African American students and their relationship to language arts instruction. She says, "One of the most intriguing aspects of this research has been the discussions and dialogues with students, parents, colleagues, and mentors about the issues surrounding the research. We teachers, who are usually just the subjects of educational research, are indeed the ones to be asking (and answering) the questions. It's fascinating."

The Background

The best questions for classroom-based research are the genuine, heartfelt ones that involve what we do everyday. For several years, as a high school and part-time college English instructor, I have watched another generation of African Americans struggle with our unique relationship to Standard English. On the one hand, African Americans have survived the ravishing of our original languages and other aspects of our culture through creative resistance. Our home language, now officially known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), is a living testament to the perseverance of our foreparents as they passed on a significant amount of African culture, including language, in spite of the many brutal attempts to erase it. On the other hand, we are constantly told that our home language is a hindrance to social and economic success. Hence, most Black Americans perceive learning to use Standard English as a painful dilemma.

For African American teachers, this dilemma has added tension. As teachers of English, regardless of whether we accept AAVE, we are still expected to produce students who can use Standard English proficiently. Historically, nonstandard language users within the American educational system

> have been encouraged (or commanded) to give up the languages of the home and embrace the language of the school. Accompanying these exhortations are promises of social mobility and a better life, promises that often mock the reality of these students' daily experiences. (Moss and Walters 148)

After the long struggle to obtain educational opportunities and break down the inequities of segregation, African Americans continue to discover that

> schools have failed to make good on the promise that those literacy instructions [would] reward African American students socially and economically. (Fox 291)

Thus, African American ambivalence toward Standard English is a phenomenon, much like an immune reaction, against hostile social and political forces. As Gilyard notes,

> What has been commonly referred to by educators as "failure" to learn standard English is more accurately termed an act of

Renee Moore at recent Grantees Meeting of The Spencer Foundation in Chicago, September, 1998

> resistance: Black students affirming, through Black English, their sense of self in the face of a school system and society that deny the same. (164)

My students could not articulate this point, but hundreds of years of collective experience have produced an almost automatic defense against what Standard English represents. At the all-Black high school in the Mississippi Delta where I taught until recently, I enjoyed a genuine fellowship with my students, many of whom I worked with outside of school. Nevertheless, whenever I began teaching grammar or usage, my students put up a fearful, sometimes hostile resistance. Yet, in my routine family surveys and course evaluations, these same students and their parents consistently requested that I and the rest of the department teach more grammar.

In 1994, looking for more answers, I started what ended up being a two-year independent reading project on the teaching of Standard English to African American students. From my reading of others' research and my own observations, I noted that African American students have mastered Standard English conventions in speaking and writing under a variety of teachers using different, even conflicting, methodologies. Many studies suggest that successful Black teachers in the segregated schools of the rural South provided effective literacy instruction because the schools were part of a social network whose elements were mutually supportive and symbiotic. Home, church, and school within these segregated communities were deliberately interwoven, and the "training" of children was very much a community affair. The real question appears to be not whether Black students can master Standard English but whether they will be offered the opportunity to do so on culturally acceptable terms.

My readings and my experiences suggest that we cannot ignore the impetus of history, yet an appalling number of professional educators working with Black children remain unnecessarily ignorant of basic facts about African Americans. From this history spring the cultural influences affecting African American students' interactions with Standard English. African American culture, in my view, resists both actively and passively those factors in American society that are responsible for, or represent, its historical oppression. *Not* being like white Americans is a source of ethnic distinction and, to some extent, pride by many in the Black community. Consequently, there is a great emotional price for African American students who adopt Standard English uncritically to the exclusion of their home dialects, for along with the standard usage come certain social conventions. The well-meaning grammar teacher who insists on "correcting" cultural markers in Black students' writing or speaking is often, and rightly, resisted.

Black teachers in the segregated schools of the rural South provided effective literacy instruction because the schools were part of a social network . . . and the "training" of children was very much a community affair.

Our knowledge of and respect for students' histories and cultures are reflected in both our curricula and our methodologies. Successful and empowering language arts instruction with African American students depends not so much on any particular methodology as on the context in which the material is presented. I have come to believe that empowering language arts instruction is a dynamic practice shaped by informed and collaborative analysis of the particular cultural experiences, strengths, and learning goals of a specific group of students within a particular community. I refer to this type of practice as "culturally engaged instruction" (CEI), a term drawn from the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings and the writings of cultural critic bell hooks.

But what does this culturally engaged instruction look like in the English/language arts classroom, and can its effectiveness be measured or replicated through training? A year ago, I set out to accomplish three things during this research project:

1) To refine, primarily through critical discourse, the theoretical framework for culturally engaged instruction.

2) To generate a case study of grammar instruction and learning in my classroom.

3) To learn how to perform an analysis of the case study using the theoretical framework.

My plan was to emerge from this process prepared to design and execute a more formal study of culturally engaged instruction using the strategies acquired in this project.

The Supporting Cast

I have been aided in this enterprise by my research mentors: Jacqueline Jones Royster and Andrea Lunsford, both of The Ohio State University; my student research assistant, Ms. Stephanie Herron; Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, of the University of Wisconsin, who graciously participated in an online exchange; Hazel Lockett, a Bread Loaf colleague and a high school teacher in East Orange,

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Teaching Standard English to African American Students

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New Jersey, whose students and their parents were also part of the email exchange; and Bette Ford, another Bread Loaf colleague and a professor at William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

The Process

Stephanie and I closely observed two of my senior English classes, focusing on five students. We collected a variety of data including videotapes of my teaching, student writing samples, objective tests, standardized test scores, surveys, and transcripts of an email exchange. I conducted individual and group interviews with the students on their experiences with grammar instruction, particularly in those classroom situations in which they felt they had learned the most and had done their best work. Stephanie also helped me plan, lead, and record a roundtable discussion with the five students, their parents, and our online partners on the question "What makes a good English teacher?" I wanted to examine the responses of the students and their parents in the context of my developing ideas about culturally engaged instruction as well as in the context of my current classroom teaching practices. Stephanie kept her own project log, and we frequently compared notes on our observations of the students.

As a teacher who is also a researcher, I should comment further on my methodology. I teach 125-150 students per year. Like many teachers in my area, I work other jobs on the weekends and sometimes in the evenings. This year, I did not have my spring break or my summer to reflect, to study data, or to write up my research. My district did not cooperate with me as much as I would have liked to provide necessary release time. When I made observations of students, I noted where I was when I made the various entries: I took notes as I was standing on hall duty between classes (I almost lost my journal one day breaking up a fight); I made notes while I was working the concession stand at the basketball game (those notes were written on the back of a popcorn bag); I wrote notes on my chalkboard or on Post-It notes which I stuck to my classroom walls while I was teaching. I took notes as I rode a school bus while chaperoning a field trip. I was most likely to email my mentors or colleagues at midnight or 1:00 a.m. after putting in a 12-14 hour day at school. This was *truly* practitioner research.

I made observations of students . . . as I was standing on hall duty between classes (I almost lost my journal one day breaking up a fight), while I was working the concession stand at the basketball game (those notes were written on the back of a popcorn bag). I wrote on Post-It notes which I stuck to my classroom walls while I was teaching. I took notes as I rode a school bus while chaperoning a field trip. . . . This was *truly* practitioner research.

The Initial Results

The more I worked on this project, the more I was convinced of the value of collaborative discourse as a research strategy. As part of the online exchange and roundtable discussion, I prepared and distributed a summary of the twenty characteristics of culturally sensitive teachers identified by Ladson-Billings in her book *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Students.* Noting that no single teacher or classroom situation possessed all of these characteristics, I looked for similarities between her list and the attributes of a "good" English teacher as described by a focus group of students and parents whom I interviewed.

One Sunday afternoon, the parents and I talked, over punch and cookies, about how and when their children learned English best. Among the parents I interviewed, a strong consensus emerged on the question "What makes a good English teacher?" The parents' main consideration was that a teacher "cared" about her or his students. As one mother put it,

> if the children know that the teacher cares about them, they'll do anything, try anything to please that teacher. But if the teacher doesn't care, she can't teach our children anything.

The specific examples of caring they cited matched Billings' descriptions of teachers who have "relationships with their students which are fluid, humanely equitable, [and] extend to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community."

In fact, there was correlation between six other items from Ladson-Billings' study and the priorities listed by my focus group. Five of those items dealt with teacher attitude; only one related to classroom methodology. The parents' reaction seemed to imply that a teacher's positive attitude toward the students compensates for the dilemma I identified at the beginning of this article.

Another pattern from the dialogues was more evidence of the deep resentment many of my students and their parents feel towards Standard English grammar instruction. One parent, who was educated in the old seg-

regated school system, was particularly livid:

> Personally, English offends me. It insults me. I'm an American; I've been speaking all my life. I refuse to stop using my "cum meres" and "git dats." Why do I have to be corrected? It makes you feel like a captured slave; like we're still slaves!

Even those parents who accepted the necessity of Standard English for their children did so begrudgingly, with varying degrees of frustration and resignation.

All the students interviewed used the same expression to describe how a good English teacher provides grammar instruction. They agreed a good teacher "breaks it down" for students. Urged on by my mentor/colleagues on line, I looked more closely at the students' descriptions and explanations of the term. The students indicated that a teacher who "breaks it down" uses teacher-made examples more often than textbook ones, or uses words and phrases familiar to the students. Certainly, a teacher's ability to "break it down" would depend on how well he or she knows the students and understands their culture. Likewise, a teacher's desire to "break it down" would depend on his or her respect for the students and their culture; indeed, a measure of respect is the teacher's realizing the need to "break it down." So it seems to me that when students talked about a teacher "breaking it down," they were referring more to a teacher's attitude than to her actual methods.

A third important point from the data so far has been the mention by almost every student that a "good" teacher does not leave anyone behind in the classroom. Bread Loaf professor Courtney Cazden noticed that point in a draft article about my project and asked,

> Could that be just a response to you, and to the inclusive and collaborative ethic you establish in your classroom? Or do you think it's more general?

While I do consciously promote such an ethic, according to Ladson-Billings and others, such a communal, non-competitive atmosphere is also one of the culturally relevant traits of the African American classroom.

The parents' main consideration was that such a teacher "cared" about her or his students. As one mother put it, "If the children know that the teacher cares about them, they'll do anything, try anything to please that teacher."

The Future

Such findings suggest to me that in order to study culturally engaged instruction further I need to develop instruments and criteria for determining teacher attitudes towards African American students and their culture. My work also introduces more questions: for example, students and parents may desire these particular characteristics in teachers, but does having a "caring" teacher necessarily result in greater learning or better retention? According to my students, my classroom practices seem to match those that the study indicates are culturally relevant. What I need next is enough data to determine whether my students' retention and use of grammar are better than those of students in settings that are less culturally engaged.

In *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*, George Hillocks concludes that successful writing teachers must have a strong knowledge not only of their subject but also of their students:

> The evidence is that learning to write . . . does not take place in the absence of appropriate environments to promote such learning. (214)

For African American students, the appropriate environment for effective learning of Standard English seems to have specific cultural parameters. In the coming year of my research, I will be continuing the search for those parameters. ❦

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The Golden Age of Teacher Research: An Interview With Marty Rutherford

by Chris Benson
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Marty Rutherford is a consultant for The Spencer Foundation and Advisory Chair of the Practitioner Researcher Communication and Mentoring Grants program. After many years out of the classroom, Marty is currently teaching first and second grade in Alameda, California.

Chris Benson: In an article in The Quarterly *by Susan Lytle and Marilyn Cochran-Smith, teacher research is defined as a "systematic, intentional inquiry conducted by teachers." The authors go on to explain in detail what they mean by those terms. Would you offer any addendum to their definition?*

Marty Rutherford: I agree with Cochran-Smith and Lytle, as far as the definition goes. However, one of the distinct qualities of teacher research is that there isn't a single definition that encompasses everything. If you ask ten teachers, you'll get ten different definitions. Teacher research is emerging and changing all of the time. Teacher research is a kind of research where the researcher and the subject have an intimate relationship; they are two parts of the same whole. The teacher researcher also has a personal relationship to the community.

CB: What does it mean to have that relationship?

MR: Again, it is impossible to say it is one kind of relationship. Like research generated in academia, different work by different researchers will have different structures and styles and different relationships to the people being studied. Likewise, different teachers will have different relationships with the children they teach and in the communities where they work. What is constant is that teachers do their research where they teach and live. Consequently, they have a very special relationship with the children who are involved in their research project. At the end of the day, the teacher is still with the children and in the community. That changes the work and how it is done in fundamental ways.

CB: Is classroom research a necessary parts of a teacher's profession? Should all teachers be classroom researchers?

MR: I don't think research is a necessary part of teaching. We would be misguided if we decided that all teachers had to be teacher researchers. However, for me, becoming a teacher researcher was an important element in my becoming a better teacher.

CB: What are the characteristics of a good teacher researcher?

MR: That's another complicated question. I can only answer it in terms of what qualifies "good" for me. What qualifies good for me is evidence that the work is carefully done and sensitive to all the particulars that are involved in the phenomena that are being looked at. A good teacher researcher is attentive to methodology and uses the right lens for the right project. One of the blessings of age is knowing that nothing will work for everything, and what constitutes the correct methodology will change over time and circumstance. Using the same methodology for all projects would be like using one of those disposable cameras that you buy in the grocery store all the time. Certainly that kind of camera will capture something, but it won't capture the details that one would see with the correct camera and the correct lens. I think of teacher research in the same way. You need to fit the way you do research, the way you look, with what you are looking at.

CB: Earlier in conversation you referred to this period as the "Golden Age" of teacher research. What does that mean?

MR: Just a few decades ago there was a perception that quantitative research in education was the only method that could provide information that could help educators improve learning. Numbers and percentages were all that mattered. But there has been a shift. In the early sixties, the value of ethnographic research became more widely recognized. The ethnographic work of Shirley Brice Heath contributed much to promote the acceptance of ethnographic research, particularly in education. By the late 80's when I went to graduate school, the validity of ethnographic work was widely recognized

in many disciplines. Ninety percent of my training as a researcher was in qualitative and ethnographic methods, and just a small part was in quantitative. Qualitative research is the kind of research most teachers do. Wider acceptance of qualitative research opens the way for teacher research. One of the many realizations I have had since going back into the classroom is a re-understanding that what one learns about children *in* the classroom is profoundly different from what one can learn as an outsider. For that reason, it is essential that teachers be the storytellers of the ways children learn and teachers teach. The conversations about teaching and learning have been one-sided for too long. Without under-valuing the contributions made in academia—and they are considerable—it is time for teachers to produce equally credible research inside the classroom. The work from teachers can complement academic research, providing a comprehensive picture of teaching and learning.

Marty Rutherford, consultant to The Spencer Foundation, met with several Bread Loafers at the Grantees Meeting in Chicago in August.

CB: What about schools? What kinds of schools are most supportive of teacher researchers? Where do these teachers thrive?

MR: If a teacher is going to do this kind of research, he or she is going to do it because of a passionate interest in doing this work. Passion drives the work. Of course it helps if the teacher has a supportive principal and lives in a community dedicated to learning. Teacher researchers seem to thrive best among colleagues who are willing to collaborate. Also, flexibility in scheduling is important, as is the ability to obtain release time for research endeavors. Flexibility can be obtained by starting small. For example, I taught in a school in which we added ten minutes of teaching time to the end of each day, which put us 50 minutes ahead of schedule by the end of the week. On Friday, we sent the kids home early and used that extra hour to develop and manage collaborative research projects. It was not a not a big thing. But is helped strengthen our research group. Having a community of people who work together for the benefit of the children and the school—which doesn't happen everywhere—is very helpful. Also, it's necessary for teachers to go to conferences and make presentations and be active in professional organizations. Obtaining release time to participate in these professional meetings also requires the support of administrators.

CB: Most of the teachers whose stories appear in this issue of BLRTN Magazine received modest stipends through The Spencer Foundation to support their research interests. You've been active on line with this network of teachers, responding to their questions and research findings. What is your sense of this network of teachers and their research interests? What do they have in common that makes their research endeavors important?

MR: What they have in common is that they are very focused on wanting to understand a particular phenomenon, whether it is critical pedagogy, discourse in math, or inquiry-based science classrooms. I think these teachers have discovered the important connections between the observer, the observed, and the process of observing. I also believe they have developed a kind of discourse that they share and which enables them to pursue collaborative interests, and this shared sense of purpose is rare among networks of teachers who are spread out across the country as the BLRTN is. But the BLRTN gives this group of teachers cohesion, a reason and a purpose for coming together to talk and build some work together. This group is building a body of work; they're building their professional identity; they're building collegial relationships. They've created a lifeline for like-minded teacher researchers. ❦

Watching and Listening in and outside the Classroom

by Sheri Skelton
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Sheri Skelton is a 1997 Bread Loaf graduate and a Fellow of the BLRTN. She attended Bread Loaf on a DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellowship in '94, '95, and '96, and on an Annenberg Fellowship in '97 and '98. Currently at work on an M. Litt. degree, Sheri says, "BLRTN has provided my students and me an opportunity to connect with people and places outside our small Alaskan island, a connection that gives me deep insight into my students, myself, and the community in which we live." Sheri has been a teacher for nineteen years.

From late October until early May, the Chukchi Sea—an extension of the Arctic Ocean just north of the Bering Strait—is silent, an endless expanse of frozen white extending to the edge of the world. The Inupiaq people who have inhabited this part of northwestern Alaska for centuries have developed a long-term, intimate relationship with the area and its natural resources. Indeed, their survival here depends upon their knowledge of the weather and the distribution of resources for living. The Inupiaq respect the sea, a force that can be violent and destructive, but one that also furnishes *ugruk*, or bearded seal, the most important food source for the people in the village of Shishmaref on the island of Sarichef. Although the sea continues to erode this tiny barrier island each year, people are reluctant to relocate since this same sea also provides the mammals that are the basis of the villagers' subsistence life-style.

During the winter months, interaction with the sea is minimal, but the arrival of spring and the initial break up of the ice creates a flurry of activity. Snow machines and sleds dot the ice, and the cold silence is broken by the droning of engines punctuated with gunshots as hunters begin the spring seal hunt. The subsistence lifestyle of Shishmaref involves hunting and killing the animal for food and using it as a resource to provide materials for a variety of other necessities: shelter, transportation, fuel, clothing, and tools. In addition, animals are used in producing and selling handicrafts, bartering, and trading for cash. Animals are also an integral part of the culture and are used in ceremonial practices.

The Inupiaq have depended on hunting, fishing, and gathering for survival, possessing a remarkable knowledge of the climate, animal behavior, and available resources of this land. Through the centuries, they have developed sophisticated and ingenious tools, effective modes of transportation, and efficient methods of hunting. The technical skills and knowledge of survival are passed down from respected elders, and the young people will in turn pass them on to future generations. As a serious matter of survival in this northern landscape, acquiring these skills and this knowledge is of utmost importance to every elder, adult and child in the village. As a teacher arriving here from a traditional Midwestern classroom in Iowa, I had to learn that my success in the classroom would be dependent upon my looking closely at the way my students learned, both in and out of the classroom, and determining how the modes of learning in these very different settings can complement each other.

Educating the younger generations for survival has always been a priority among the Inupiaq people of Shishmaref. Although the modern Western world has impinged upon the area, the basic skills passed down remain unchanged despite the marriage of new and old technology. The iron dog (snow machine) has replaced the traditional dog used for hauling, but the design of the basket sled has remained the same. The *unuq*, or ice tester, has always been and still is a stick with an ivory walrus tusk on the end. Young men are taught to evaluate ice conditions with the *unuq*, one chop indicating unsafe ice and a necessary detour, two chops a sign of safe ice. A hunter is aware of the weather and can determine the wind conditions by observing cloud formations. He knows that a north wind is safe, a south wind dangerous.

In May when school is dismissed for summer vacation, I sit on my back porch and become an observer of life on the Chukchi Sea. Day and night become indistinguishable. At midnight the sun often burns brightly in the sky. The ice splits into pieces of varied sizes—some small, some gigantic—and moves with the wind through the water. I watch children ice hopping, jumping from one piece of ice to another, in a game that has been played for years. At times I see a seal's head bob up in the water. Often in the early morning hours, people anticipating the return of hunters from the sea park their four-wheelers along the crumbling sea wall and silently wait for sound and movement in the distance. Boats are moored in various places on the ice, which also serves as a parking lot for snow machines and sleds. A constant lookout is kept for shifting ice, and in a matter of minutes the "parking lot" can be cleared, making way for open water.

Spring breakup is a process which requires days for completion. Small patches of open water become visible as the newer ice begins to melt, and hunters weave their way across the ice on snow machines, carefully avoiding thin ice. Shifting wind creates fractures in the ice, and large pieces begin to break off. Years of living next to this sea have enabled the Inupiaq people to anticipate when a floe might fracture and drift away, although occasionally a miscalculation has set a hunter adrift for several days. If the wind is still, the ice may remain almost immobile, but a shift in the wind can rapidly create a treacherous jumble of ice floes. Knowledge of the ice is critical to survival, and the Inupiaq language contains over twenty words referring to varying ice conditions.

Sheri Skelton (right) with Priscilla Kelley at the 1998 BLRTN meeting in Taos, NM

As I observe the spring activity in Shishmaref, I am aware of how much learning occurs when children *are not* in school. Their instruction in subsistence skills is independent from the public educational system, my employer. The young Inupiaq learn their traditional subsistence skills quite appropriately in the natural environment, a setting much different from the public school classroom. In the conventional classroom setting, the primary focus is frequently on textbook knowledge, and at times that textbook presentation might be completely alien to my Inupiaq students. During my first year of teaching in Shishmaref, for example, an assignment in our sophomore English text used the structure of an oak tree as an example in an exercise in writing spatial description. What seemed to me a rather simple process of placing sentences in a correct sequence that best described an oak tree created confusion among my students. Finally, one student informed me that he had never actually seen a tree, let alone an oak tree, and was having difficulty conceptualizing the assignment. The vastness of the gulf between my students' experience and the subject we were studying had never before seemed so great, and at that moment, I realized that my assumptions of what students might know needed adjustment.

Outside the conventional classroom setting, however, as my students hone their subsistence skills, they are engaged in learning that is integrated with a world view that is familiar, namely, their local natural environment. The knowledge they acquire is not gleaned from textbooks but from observation and actual participation. The importance of learning traditional Inupiaq knowledge and life skills is recognized by the school district in that students now are granted subsistence leave, which excuses them from school for activities such as crabbing, duck hunting, or reindeer corralling. All villagers have an extremely positive attitude toward such activities. Hunting in what might appear to some people a bleak and barren place is not perceived as an arduous or grueling task but is approached with enthusiasm. The classroom may evoke remarks of "boring" from my students, but camping, fishing, hunting, and berry picking do not. The fact that a student of mine can sit silently on a boat in the cold for many hours anticipating the appearance of a seal and remain zealous and alert to the task at hand inspires me as a teacher. I believe that my increased understanding of how subsistence defines knowledge for the Inupiaq can only enhance the learning possibilities in my classroom. In the village setting, knowledge is closely tied to the culture of survival that exists here, and student motivation for acquiring that knowledge, I believe, is sparked not only by a desire to learn survival skills but also by a desire to identify with the culture.

Western thought has had its impact on village life, and Western education, in attempting to exert its influence, has actually alienated villagers from their traditional way of life, resulting in competing notions of how knowledge is defined. The crux of the conflict is whether education can be defined to include information and skills associated with subsistence life-style. One elder remarked to me that today's young people think they know more than elders because they have more "education." That thinking, he says, is erroneous. They actually don't know as much because in order to survive they must know the old ways. He added that passing traditional knowledge to the younger generation is becoming more difficult as the village experiences a loss of the Inupiaq language, making explanations more difficult. One elder recounted going to school at the age of eight or nine until his father removed him from the school, saying that since he wasn't going to be a teacher, learning how to hunt, how to take care of

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himself, and how to survive would take priority over formal education. Another villager said that his formal education lasted until the eighth grade, and then he was told that he couldn't go on to higher education until he learned how to hunt. He had to take time off to learn important subsistence skills.

At the heart of Native teaching and learning are two important skills: observing and listening. One might contend that these are important skills in any classroom. That is true, but Native observation and listening are somewhat different from those skills in the conventional classroom. As a classroom teacher in Iowa presenting material in a lecture, I expected my students to listen and remember certain points, to generate discussions around those points, and to raise questions. I expected my students to retain the material, and I usually evaluated retention through written tests. The Native student, on the other hand, learns hunting skills by listening to stories told by successful hunters and by observing the actions of an elder he accompanies on a hunt. The Native student does not question what the elder is saying, and the student's successful acquisition of a particular skill takes place over an extended period of time, not in one test.

Teaching in Shishmaref has required me to rethink the way I evaluate students and to focus on making classroom materials and assessment as culturally relevant as possible. The task is a difficult one since testing is a central focus in Alaska's educational system, and the "effectiveness" of rural schools is, in turn, evaluated by test scores. But I also believe that the task is not an impossible one, and that by understanding Native teaching and learning styles and incorporating them in my classroom setting, I can become a more effective teacher.

As an inveterate observer myself, I was already engaged in one aspect of Native learning, and I decided that in my classroom I could increase my knowledge of Native teaching and learning styles by becoming a more active listener. Since subsistence is at the core of Inupiaq knowledge, I began to interview two students, who are not only avid hunters but also good students in school.

Racks of dried ugruk *(seal meat) on the beach of Sarichef Island: subsistence life-style skills such as hunting and preserving food are important parts of Inupiaq education.*

Traditionally, Inupiaq knowledge has been passed from generation to generation orally by the elders. Much of my knowledge of Inupiaq culture comes from listening to elders speak at informal social gatherings. During the past seven years, I have obtained a wealth of information simply by listening to several elders conversing. Direct questions in the form of formal interviews, however, never yield the type of information that informal conversations do. Over the years I have written in my journal many times about subsistence and the old ways, and through this sustained reflection, certain perceptions have begun to form about how the Inupiaq people in Shishmaref acquire knowledge and skills.

In interviewing the two students, I was not surprised to find that relevant information was more easily obtained through informal conversation. My direct questions to these students resulted in terse replies, but their self-consciousness faded when I encouraged them to tell stories about hunting, a way of passing on knowledge that was, in their culture, familiar to them. From these stories, I noted details about which I might later ask more specific questions, but in general, I just jotted down notes as the students recounted their experiences. If the Native style of learning relies on observing, listening, and then participating, then what I call "indirect" teaching should work better for me in my Shishmaref classroom. If I directly assign my students a specific task—write a legend about a landmark in the area—the assignment invariably poses obstacles. No one can get started. No one can generate an idea. But if I approach the same task in an indirect manner, the results are quite different. For example, when we discussed the resident and migratory birds in our area, we started talking about ravens,

the encounters students had with the birds, the perceptions they had of them, and stories they had heard about them. One student in talking with his grandmother learned that his great grandfather had been a shaman and had often turned into a raven. The student later used this information as a basis for a story.

One student I interviewed several times was Chris Ningeulook. He has lived in Shishmaref most of his life except for a few years spent in Washington when he was in junior high. He first started hunting when he was eight. "That's when I got my first B.B. gun, and I went hunting for snipes," he said. Snipes are little birds, which he gave to elders to eat.

Native knowledge is a blend of pragmatic, intuitive, and spiritual aspects, which provide a world view that is circular rather than linear.

Then in ninth grade Chris began learning how to hunt seal by following his uncle and grandfather whenever they traveled for ice. In winter, residents travel to the mainland about ten miles from the village and cut ice to melt for drinking water. Later Chris participated in *ugruk* hunting during spring breakup.

Chris learned his hunting skills from his grandfather, Davey Ningeulook, who taught him, he says, "to be quiet, to watch the wind, and don't scare the game away by smell; stay downwind." Chris also learned how to watch the ice and to evaluate its safety by using the *unuq*. "Any time that I walk across the ice, I carry some sort of stick," Chris stated. "I also carry my gun horizontally in front of me, so that if I happen to fall through the ice, there's a chance the gun might stop me." He also knows to carry a knife, which he could use to pull himself up onto the ice if he should happen to go through.

Much of what he knows about hunting, Chris says, is a result of watching what his grandfather does. This learning by observation is prevalent in Native teaching. An elder I interviewed stated that his grandfather told him when he was first learning to hunt that every time he heard of anyone coming home with any kind of game, he should go to that person's home and listen to the stories of how the game was killed. That was the first step in learning how to hunt. After listening to stories about hunting, then he would follow his brothers and older people on hunts, observing and gradually learning the techniques and skills needed to catch game.

Chris recounted going duck hunting with his uncle and grandfather, again allowing his grandfather to lead. His grandfather used binoculars, sighted the ducks, and then sent one hunter to each side of the game as he approached directly and flushed the ducks into the open. Chris said, "My grandfather tells me what to do and I watch." Chris feels that learning how to hunt from his grandfather is vital to his education because he is gaining knowledge from the past and knowledge from his culture. His grandfather often tells him stories of encounters with big animals. In one story his grandfather related how elders respect and learn not only the activities but the thoughts of animals. While out on the frozen ocean hunting polar bears, his grandfather happened upon two huge bears, one male and one female, lying about a thousand yards in front of him. He stopped to load his rifle but the load stuck in the chamber. The female bear rose and proceeded to walk farther out on the ocean. Even though his grandfather knew to stay upwind, the male polar bear saw him and began running. His grandfather managed to free the stuck load, and as he watched the running bear, he said in his mind, "No, don't go, wait." The polar bear stopped running and started walking toward his grandfather, who shot the bear in the lung, killing it instantly.

This respect for animals and the ability to communicate with animals through thoughts is an integral part of the Inupiaq culture. If a hunter who has run out of ammunition encounters a polar bear or other large animal, in his mind he can communicate to the large animal that he is hunting for smaller animals only and that he does not intend to hurt the large animal. The hunter can tell the animal which way to go, and it will listen. This communication with animals is also used if one just happens to be out, unarmed, on the tundra.

Chris feels that learning to listen is the most important knowledge that he has gained from his grandfather. He also has a respect and appreciation for the Inupiaq culture and for tradition. But he also believes that traditional knowledge and skills need to be supplemented with the education that school provides because in school he is gaining knowledge of another world.

Adhering to tradition, Chris gives the game he kills to his grandfather and grandmother who in turn distribute any excess meat to persons who have given them something, persons who have helped them out, or persons who are in need of meat. Traditionally, when a young man kills his first *ugruk*, that animal must be presented to an elder. Chris's experiences as a hunter have not included learning how to cut game, nor has he hunted big game such as moose and caribou. Those are skills he plans to acquire.

The other student I interviewed was Brice Eningowuk, a student who has spent his entire life in the village of Shishmaref in a family committed to the subsistence lifestyle. Brice hunts mainly *ugruk* and seals with his father and grandfather, and although he has been tempted by walrus, that animal has always eluded him. Of subsistence skills Brice says,

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> We learn these things from our respected elders and we will pass that knowledge on to the younger generations. Elders taught our parents. Our teachers are our parents and grandparents. It's like going to school that has no grades or tardies, but there are rules to follow.

The most important rule for preparing to hunt is to get ready. "When I say 'get ready,' I mean to tell someone in the village that you are going hunting, where you are going to hunt, and how long the trip is," stated Brice.

> You also need to get some food so that if you get stuck out on the tundra or the ocean, you won't starve to death. You must be dressed appropriately so you don't freeze or get hypothermia.

In harvesting seals, there are other rules to follow. Brice knows that silence is essential since the hunter does not know when a seal will pop up through the ice near him. Noise will scare the animal away, and the hunter might not see a seal again for a long time. Brice prefers catching *unmiaq*, young *ugruk*, because they make the best seal oil.

Harvesting also requires one to use the entire animal, wasting nothing. After a hunter takes a seal, the skin is removed but the blubber is left intact. The seal is then left on the ice for about a week, and then brought to shore and the blubber scraped. The seal on the ice must be watched carefully and quickly retrieved if the ice begins to move. Brice also knows how to prepare the storage area.

> In the summer we dig holes to the permafrost, place wood on the bottom of the hole so the buckets won't freeze to the ground, and then cover the hole with plywood and sand.

The seal blubber is stored in the buckets. In the past, pokes made from the seal were used for storage. Last summer Brice helped his grandmother make a seal poke by cutting the head off the seal and turning the seal inside out as its insides are pulled out with a hook. The seal skin is then inflated, dried out, and used for storing meats and *ooshuk* (stink flipper) or *ulkshuq* (seal oil with seal meat).

Seal meat is made into "black meat" by air-drying it on racks made from pieces of driftwood tied together.

> We have to turn the meat over every day if it is raining," said Brice. "We also hang a dead sea gull near the racks, so that other sea gulls won't bother the meat that is hanging.

Brice commented, "We respect our elders by following the rules. To do that you must listen." Listening and being quiet are two very important skills needed for hunting and for learning. When seal hunting, one must be very quiet since even when underwater seals can detect a noisy hunter. One must also be very observant, noticing which way a seal is going down as that knowledge will tell the hunter which way the seal will pop up. Training one's eyes is also a key element in hunting. An untrained eye will mistake a piece of ice for a seal, and a hunter shooting at that piece of ice not only wastes a bullet, but also scares away any seals in the area.

Through the acquisition of traditional knowledge, these two students have gained an awareness of their environment and an insight into their ancestors and heritage that are critical to their own survival as well as the survival of those who will depend on them. Subsistence activities allow families over generations to retain a sense of community. Native knowledge is a blend of pragmatic, intuitive, and spiritual aspects, which provide a world view that is circular rather than linear. This circular view is apparent in the Inupiaq perception of the cycle of life and death. When a hunter kills a seal, he pours water into the mouth of the seal to allow its spirit to return to the natural world. When someone in the village dies, the next child born receives the name of the deceased. This passing of the name opens a doorway to the deceased, allowing that individual to come back and visit. Traditionally, much of the knowledge passed on from generation to generation has been oral, and the skills of listening and observing are therefore key elements.

Up the coast from Shishmaref near Cape Espenberg is the skull of a huge whale and one side of its jawbone, placed there, according to legend, by Illaganiq. This strong Inupiaq man single-handedly killed the whale from his kayak and placed the remains there so his ancestors would remember his strength. The monument symbolizes basic Inupiaq values—being a good hunter, being strong, and providing for the family. These values have enabled the Inupiaq not only to survive but to thrive in a natural environment that can be indifferent, not to say hostile. Western education, too, has its place in the village of Shishmaref, offering more options for the young people today. Native students can optimize their education by incorporating into their lives the best of two worlds—the Native and the modern Western. As a teacher in this village, I've come to realize the necessity of developing an awareness and appreciation of Inupiaq culture, and curricular adaptations follow from that first realization. I now incorporate many aspects of Native learning and teaching styles in my classroom. A hunter knows that he has successfully learned the necessary skills when he kills his first *ugruk*, and he continues to use and expand upon that knowledge in each subsequent hunt. As a teacher I know that a classroom experience has been successful if a student carries a concept from the lesson and applies it to other concepts and ideas. In a world literature class one semester we read Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and talked about ambition. A few weeks later when Disney's *Lion King* made its appearance on video, one of my students remarked, "Scar was a lot like Macbeth; he'd do anything to have power." I realized that the student had internalized the concept of reckless and destructive ambition, and that knowledge of human nature is universal. ❦

Loving the Question

by Karen Mitchell
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Karen Mitchell earned an M.A. in English from Bread Loaf in 1996 and is currently working on her Bread Loaf M. Litt. She has been interested in teacher research for a decade and recently received a grant from The Spencer Foundation to research children's use of language in discussion groups and to improve communication among families in the school district.

Classroom-based research came slowly into my professional life, working its way into my conscious repertoire of classroom methods and madness. In the mid-eighties, our school district had a teacher research group, an outgrowth of the Alaska Teacher Researcher Network sponsored by our state's writing consortium. During this year, the group held their meetings, "out the road" at Annie Calkins's highly social gatherings replete with sumptuous food, wine, and much talk. I was a listener, drinking in the stories of those actively engaged in classroom research. I attended presentations, watched videos of local projects, and most of all heard many questions—more questions than I'd ever heard teachers ask— generated by this exciting phenomenon. I began to picture the potential of classroom research to help me evolve into the kind of teacher I aspired to be: a learner in the classroom along with students.

Evolving as a teacher did not come easily to me, an avowed skeptic, but I had begun to challenge my own assumptions a few years earlier by keeping track of third graders' progress as writers through examining their journals, something which I'd never thought to do before. As their writing progressed, so did my thinking about the children and the process of writing. Since that time, I have embraced the writing process and continually look for ways to improve my children's writing. Conducting teacher research seems an exciting way to put some of those nagging questions all of us have into positive action. For example, instead of asking, "Why isn't Diana writing?" I asked, "What happens when Diana does write?" Answers to these basic questions generated new information for me about Diana's learning, which in turn enabled me to generate more sophisticated questions. Eventually, I began to talk to Diana and engage her in the process of inquiry. Thus, questions have become a mainstay of my teaching.

I also found that engaging my students in the inquiry, asking them to speculate with me, helped me progress systematically; it certainly enriched my teaching and learning. An unexpected but welcome addition to my teaching came as I began to counter students' questions with questions of my own, pushing their thinking to higher levels, and allowing them to empower themselves in the pursuit of their own learning.

This semester, my second as a retired teacher and as an adjunct instructor at the University of Alaska-Southeast, I decided to ask preservice teachers in a classroom-based research class about their views of teacher research. These students are enrolled in the Master's in Teaching program and have been interning at secondary schools and taking classes all year. I asked them about their experience in their first classroom-based research project. Here's part of what I observed.

Several of the interning students discovered that participating in teacher research enriched their relationships with their host teachers. The host teachers helped them find reports of classroom research on which to base their questions. This, in turn, encouraged professionalism, respect, and collegiality between interns and their host teachers. Jeff, one of the host teachers, found himself asking other teachers in the building for suggestions and materials, and it was clear that engaging in the project not only enriched Jeff's classroom but encouraged collegial relationships among other teachers in the school.

Although I asked the interns about other aspects of teacher research, such as data collection, perhaps the thing that impressed me the most about these students' experiences was that several said they would likely begin such inquiries in their own classrooms in the future.

I envy these students. They are beginning their careers as active questioners in their classrooms. One of my many mentors, Marilyn Buckley, a retired professor from the University of Alaska in Anchorage, says, "Learn to love the question." To this statement I would add, "Learn to love the journey and be open to the many crossroads along the way." I found this to be true when my own elementary students completely disproved my hypothesis that freewriting in journals wasn't helpful to students. Other research projects I did regarding the development of teachers' literacy led me into a study of teachers' affective responses to books they'd read, a path of inquiry I had not expected to travel.

So, what can we learn from these meanderings? I would say, start slowly. Get support from friends and colleagues. Good food begets good conversation. Learn from the children. Believe there are no stupid questions. Good research ends with more questions, so there is really no end at all. ❦

Students Teaching: In Season at Peoples Academy

by Moira Donovan
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Morrisville, VT

Moira Donovan, a 1998 Bread Loaf graduate, has taught for six years at Peoples Academy, a public high school in Morrisville, Vermont. She received a DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellowship in '95, '96, and '97. An active member of BLRTN, Moira attends Vermont meetings regularly, where her colleagues discuss research, teaching partnerships, and issues such as assessment and the new Vermont standards. She uses BreadNet for many purposes and has published several articles.

My teaching style reminds me of the great soups of yesterday: not the packaged kind that calls for premeasured packets of ingredients or processed cans of vegetables, but soups created from abundant, local, and available harvests. On my morning commute, as I drive the twisting roads along the river, I inspect the raw ingredients, those ideas that I think will nourish my students. I teach with what is "in season."

Opening the Cupboard

Peoples Academy is a unique school in the state of Vermont. Many of the Vermont high schools are union schools, with the populations of several towns contributing to the makeup of the student body of a usually large school. Peoples Academy differs as it is a "one-town school" (although two neighboring towns have the opportunity to send their children to our school as well). Morrisville is a growing, prospering town with small companies and businesses employing many residents. In many small towns in Vermont, tourism provides much employment, and because Morrisville neighbors Stowe, a large ski area, this is certainly true here. Farms do continue to struggle in our community, and many students are missing from classes during maple sugaring or haying season. The district motto—"a community of learners with the courage to grow"—is certainly appropriate for this unique school.

Two years ago, preparing for a difficult spring semester, I opened every possible cupboard in my mind looking for the best ingredients to prepare for a challenging group of students. By some twist of scheduling, I was teaching three long-block classes in the spring semester, including students with a wide range of learning approaches, from the student who works full-time after school to the student who gives up trying because of past failures. I tried to imagine completing the coming semester with all the special accommodations I'd have to provide these students. It would require an enormous amount of energy on my part. Spring semester loomed ahead like a black cloud on the horizon.

About this time, at a BLRTN meeting in Vermont, a colleague told me he regularly enlisted college students to serve as interns in his classroom. This idea intrigued me. I knew I didn't have time to develop such a plan, but I wondered about the possibility of recruiting several seniors in my high school to be teaching assistants in my classes. The following week, I recruited six upperclassmen and with administrative help from the guidance office offered them English credit in exchange for their assistance. The logistics were relatively easy, but figuring out how to direct these students as mentors to younger students would be a work in progress.

Because our long-block schedule enables students to finish a yearlong course in one semester, some seniors finish all their requirements halfway through their final year. This available flock of ABD (all but diploma) students enabled me to round up several of them who were willing to serve as teaching assistants (TAs) in my classroom. The guidance office assisted by encouraging students with open blocks of time to earn English credit through working as TAs.

Vermont's mainstreaming law mandates inclusion of all students in the classroom, which poses challenges to every teacher. Many students attend classes assisted by special educators who help the students complete classroom tasks. These students do indeed need individual attention in the classroom; however, most high school students don't want to be singled out as a "special case," especially in front of their peers, and they often reject the help. In previous years, I often requested that no special educator be assigned in my classes because I felt their presence stigmatized students, making it very difficult to break through to them. In the spring semester, I spoke with all three special educators beforehand (I had one assigned to each class) and explained my plan to use student TAs.

Writing to Learn (to Teach)

One requirement I made was for the TAs was to write weekly letters to me about their work. I based this writing requirement on the cross-age tutoring programs described by Shirley Brice Heath, Amanda Branscombe, and Elspeth Stuckey, all

associated with Bread Loaf. I believed that writing regularly would enable my TAs to discover insights about tutoring peers in their learning activities. Janet Emig, among others, states that "Persons who don't themselves write cannot sensitively, even sensibly, help others learn to write. Teachers of writing, then, must themselves write, frequently and widely" (65). Because my TAs would be helping other students with their writing tasks, I felt they should also be writing regularly themselves.

I began the dialogue by writing weekly to each of the TAs, discussing as frankly as possible the situations in our particular classes, sometimes explaining what occurred in one class, and other times quoting sections of their letters and responding to their ideas. This method proved valuable to all, grounding us solidly in the same concepts about learning and teaching. I kept all the letters in a binder near my desk and encouraged the TAs to read them to see how others were adjusting. When I found common themes in their letters, I tried to point those out as well. Early in the semester I wrote:

> In your journals and conversations with me this week I found several common threads. K noted several times what she saw as lower expectations for these students, a point echoed by several of you. I would say that the rigor is not what many of you experienced in upper level classes; in terms of homework this comparison is valid. However, it is critical to keep a solid pace, to demand diligence in student work, and to maintain deadlines.

Straight talk filled their weekly writings. B wrote to me,

> I think you need to remind the kids about the book reports. I wouldn't give an extension because they have had a lot of class time and home time but they might have forgotten about the report or think that you have forgotten.

This honesty, developing over time, was a bonus for me. In my early conception of the program, I considered only the help the TAs offered my students; I soon realized that the TAs had as much to offer to *me*. Daily, I could depend on their frank assessment of our class activity, my planning, and the student involvement. Daily, I received their suggestions. I also found support for this kind of writing in Marian Mohr's article, "Teacher-Researchers and the Study of the Writing Process." She reviewed the benefits of journal writing about the classroom:

> Writing honestly about classroom problems, failures as well as successes, in a supportive atmosphere, led to more self-assurance and encouragement to change. The research logs, written under stress as they often were, in minutes between classes or during the times when students themselves were writing, were honest writing, harsh sometimes, despairing sometimes. (*Reclaiming the Classroom*, 101)

I wanted my TAs to do the same—to write about the whole experience, positive or negative. In the journals several TAs felt comfortable questioning me about anything, such as why I presented certain units and neglected others. I believe this frankness developed because the majority of TAs had established relationships with me through previous classes. Interesting to me were their comments about how the curriculum for lower-level students offered little challenge. I spent the semester rethinking, adjusting, and adding to our classes as a direct result of their insights. Using the full text of *Macbeth* with the tenth graders was one such new challenge. I also included *The Odyssey* in my ninth grade sections.

The initial weeks went by slowly while everyone sorted out their roles. I wrote in a letter to my TAs:

> In reading your journals and watching your interactions, I saw each of you striving to connect and make a difference for at least one student. I also observed some frustrations in the apathy levels for some of these students. You see, as I do, their potential. Yet somehow they don't respond. Or maybe they do for a short while until the unfocused behavior returns.

A TA responded:

> I am frustrated with M. He is a very bright kid—he says some really intelligent things, but he doesn't like to do it all the time. I am more frustrated with myself because I can't make him do his work. That's what I'm supposed to be able to do. I know he's done more already than he would've

Vermont colleagues Kate Carroll and Moira Donovan at BLRTN meeting in Taos, NM

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> done the entire course on his own, but I want him to be motivated. I don't want to have to keep pushing him.

Through such dialogue with me, these TAs, still students themselves, assumed the role of teacher. All the TAs experienced success, gave extraordinary amounts of energy to the class, and felt connected with their peers. Every TA was pleased with his or her involvement; and the students they mentored were receptive, giving the TAs the affectionate title of "Happy Helpers." I not only survived a difficult semester, I signed my next year's contract enthusiastically. The power of this experience persuaded me that I should continue to use TAs in the future.

Consequently, at the beginning of the 1997-98 school year, I again recruited seniors with an open block of time and the willingness to help. At this point, I intended to look more closely and more systematically at my classroom TA program. Through my first experience with TAs, I had identified traits successful TAs possessed, among them self-confidence and a level of comfort among diverse students. Also, successful TAs were usually comfortable disagreeing in a constructive way with something I said or did. Often the TAs acted as a liaison—or even as an arbitrator—between another student and me. In my second year of this experiment, I decided to focus my observations and look more analytically at the TAs' writing for evidence of these traits.

Using Students' Knowledge in the Classroom

In the second year, I did not assign specific TAs to specific students or do any orchestrating. I decided instead to observe the TAs themselves, looking closely at how they became involved in the class interactions or distanced themselves from them. One TA became so involved in the mentoring process that he wanted to receive the same grade as the student he assisted. He wrote:

> I am setting a goal for myself. I will consider that J and I share the same grade. If he passes, then I pass. If he fails, then I fail. This way, I will be motivated unconditionally to keep him motivated. If it is all right with you, I would like to subject myself to this for report card grades. This may seem peculiar, but if the stakes are high for me, then I will be most effective, because I certainly do not want to fail (especially in a class where I'm only a TA, and not a student of the subject).

How remarkable, I thought, that he was so dedicated. Another TA began tutoring a student after school, helping him with work he missed in many absences and extending the tutoring beyond English to include math. This level of involvement interested me immediately.

Interviewing the TAs, I learned most of them had participated in upper-level English classes in high school. A curious interest that they all shared, however, was drama club, chorus, or band. I suspected this interest had something to do with the TAs' comfort with "performing" as mentors. Generally, the TAs seemed to be popular and outgoing outside of my class, and these characteristics enabled them to command attention and respect as TAs.

I read over the letters of particular TAs to examine how they arrived at different levels of involvement. I looked back over their first letters, specifically for comments about their role in the classroom and their initial interactions with students. I examined the letters of one TA whose past scholastic achievements wavered but whose great musical talent with several band instruments kept her very involved in school and shaped her strong self-image. She assumed her role as TA with some doubt about her ability to work as a peer mentor. Early on she wrote, "I'm really glad you don't expect us to act as teachers. I feel more comfortable just blending in and helping as if I were just a smarter student."

Shortly after that entry this girl wrote, "I just want to go back to my middle school and freshman teachers and apologize for being such a pain." Although she stated she just wanted to blend in, she worked very diligently to keep students at her table in line. Midway through the semester I asked her what her strengths were in this class. She wrote,

> I think one of my strengths is that I can better relate to the students. I understand what it's like to be them. That's also probably why I'm more lenient and sometimes give them a break.

Her perception of herself interested me because when I observed her group, I *never* saw her ease up. Instead, she drove them to stay on task; she read aloud to them when they were behind in their novels; she even called them at home to remind them to prepare for tests or to make sure they completed homework assignments. Her perception of herself as a slightly off-task student drove her to keep them on task.

This particular TA's keen awareness of her classmates' lives and families outside of school reminded me of the harsh realities of some students' lives. In one letter she wrote,

> Something that I just noticed about a lot of the students—there is a major lack of parenting. I hear lots of them saying they're alone or their parent just stops by to shower or that they've been kicked out of their houses. Maybe they don't care about their school work 'cause no one at home does.

She brought with her a unique reflection on her past and always reminded the students of the importance of class work. She also let me know that she thought the students worked harder in this classroom than any other setting. Her compassion, coupled with her mature awareness of her own educational history, made her a strong ally in the classroom from whom I learned. We all did.

Another TA wrote in an early letter to me,

> I am not sure exactly how to reach out to them. I am trying to be a friend and someone they can turn to, but I did not know 95% of the people until I stepped inside this classroom.

The next day she wrote,

> Today's class seemed more productive. I think working in small groups with "one of us" at each group helps keep them on task. My group seemed more comfortable and contributed more than when it was a big class discussion. They also asked more questions. I actually felt like I made a difference.

Despite her previous unfamiliarity with the students, she successfully took on the role of helper. Several factors attributed to her level of comfort, such as small-group work and increased familiarity with the students.

As I read and analyzed the TAs' letters I identified several recurring themes and patterns. Initially most shared an awkwardness in finding their spot in the class, but discomfort was lessened by collaborative work. One TA wrote, "Everyone seemed a bit uncomfortable with each other." But by the second week that had begun to change. Another TA observed:

> I sense that they are free to ask me questions—even though they're more comfortable working with each other, which I think is probably better for them and the learning process.

This emerging knowledge of how groups related to each other prompted us to create a new seating chart, an issue we worked on until we achieved a more cohesive feeling in the classroom. Seating is often an ongoing struggle for classroom teachers. This particular class presented problems beyond my experience: one student had a restraining order against another student in the class; several long-term feuds existed between families of some students; and ironclad cliques had formed. My TAs, more aware of these situations than I, worked on variations of the seating chart. Without their perspective, I might have inadvertently encouraged war among groups. Instead only skirmishes ensued, and truces were made quickly.

The reflections written by my TAs profoundly affected my teaching. Their weekly writing illumined students' perspectives on classroom activity. One TA wrote,

> It's interesting to secretly look beneath the surface of the students, to find out what's underneath, what motivates them, or doesn't motivate them in some cases, to see people's reactions to others, us, and themselves. I'd like to think that some of these kids have been changed in the course of these last five (that long?) months. But "changed" may be too strong a word. "Altered" is more like it. Slightly altered. But this slight alteration has made the difference between a learning environment and a battle field. It's impossible to change someone's nature, but if you can sand it down in places, and push some parts in while pulling others out, it makes a world of difference. There has most definitely been a positive shift in this classroom from the beginning of the year. . . . The class finally became workable. And through the combined efforts we got the ball rolling, and it hasn't stopped.

From Action to Inquiry and Back Again

Our increasing dedication to looking closely at our program was a factor in our success. From this scrutiny, we learned that structured small groups worked better than other arrangements, and the evidence was the students' focused, cooperative involvement. The TAs gained authority and expressed it in weekly letters. One TA commented on his dilemma:

> I couldn't get anyone focused. A problem I'm sure B & A are facing (as well as myself) is the fact that we are not used to having authority, so we can't get control of our table when the chatter starts. Also the students don't see us as authoritative figures, even though during group work, we are.

Slowly they became more effective with students as I continued to write back to them:

> I think the honeymoon is over and we can see who needs a heavier hand and who needs a gentle reminder. All of you are jumping in there and dealing with these students squarely. This is quite effective, as they look up to all of you, and from my vantage, they are listening. Keep it up!

With the help of my TAs I created a classroom rubric to help us assess things such as timeliness, attentiveness, cooperation, and involvement. This rubric generated self-evaluation of students and TAs. The student received a grade at the end of every week based on this standard.

In addition to writing weekly to the TAs, I kept a journal of my own observations, ranging from the delightful to the frustrating, though all were useful as I started to look over the TAs' letters. In reviewing these documents, it seemed we all moved forward together. The class moved in spurts, sometimes forward, sometimes not, but the active discussion helped us continue making complementary progress.

By the end of the first semester I started thinking of my TAs as colleagues. Their modeling of interest and involvement made it okay for the students they were mentoring to act the same way. At the end of the semester I wrote in my journal, "I attribute any success I achieved as a teacher this year solely to this initiative." I became increasingly interested in documenting the changes that were taking place in my understanding of the interactive nature of teaching and in my beliefs about the kinds of knowledge that we construct as a teaching and learning community that

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crossed the boundaries of age, background, and other areas. This experience has motivated me to want to become a skillful and thoughtful researcher, and it suggests that students will be important co-researchers.

Students Teaching/Teachers Learning

I plan to continue using and observing TAs in the classroom as long as I can find students who are willing. Last year's group of TAs spread the word by saying they thought it was the best experience they had in high school. This year's TAs echoed similar sentiments. As during any profound experience, a camaraderie emerged. As a result, several TAs have given teaching serious consideration as a career. And I have made some serious considerations myself about my role and capacity as a teacher. I want to continue to listen to the TAs' honest reflections and to observe their interactions with my students. I close with the words of one TA who writes articulately about her learning experience, and I am content to let her words speak for me at this point in this project:

> Every day this remained the class I looked forward to. Rather than being only a student learning from a teacher, I was able to be a teacher, thus learning from my students. . . . This semester has taught me a lot about people skills, and about myself in general. By trying to teach something, I knew I was forced to really learn and know everything about it so I could make someone else understand and remember as much as I did when the lesson was over. It forced me to come up with different ways to understand and explain each topic for those who didn't have the same learning style as I or others in the group. I also had to alter things so students wouldn't get bored, as I have in so many classes, with moving too fast or waiting for others who took longer. . . . I truly believe this was a worthwhile experiment and should be continued.❦

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"Have you graded our essays yet?"

by Risa Udall
St. Johns High School
St. Johns, AZ

Risa Udall, a 1998 Bread Loaf graduate, has been teaching at St. Johns High School, a rural public high school in northeastern Arizona, for seventeen years. Risa was the recipient of a DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest fellowship in '95, '96, and '97 and has been active on BreadNet for the past three years. She has published several articles and involved her senior students in electronic exchanges and conferences of various types with classrooms across the nation. In response to the ineffectiveness of traditional teacher-directed grading of writing, she launched a classroom research project three years ago to determine the effects on students of writing without grades. This article describes the results of that research which is ongoing in Risa's classroom. This school year she will focus particularly on helping students achieve more autonomy in the writing process.

I take my title above from a question I had heard from my students so often during my years of teaching that it had begun to echo in my dreams, and rarely could I answer affirmatively because I seemed to take longer and longer to grade my senior students' essays despite my being a veteran teacher. Writing comments on the papers was not the difficulty, however; my inability to return the essays promptly hinged on my reluctance to assign what I believed to be counterproductive letter grades, and this reluctance translated into procrastination. I dreaded facing that question, which had been uttered at least once in every period I've taught. I also knew that my negative answer would be followed by groans, disappointed expressions, and, undoubtedly, an erosion of students' trust in my ability as an English teacher.

Risa Udall, St. Johns H. S.

Aversion to grading writing is not an uncommon problem among English teachers, nor is it a new problem for me. More than once I discussed grading with students, but those discussions never made the job any easier. Grades are important to students, yet their responses to questions in class and on surveys indicate that grades discourage them from developing independent learning goals. Simply stated, grades can easily obscure the purpose of learning; moreover, the threat of a low grade can actually stifle creative learning because it discourages students from taking risks. In addition, students are forced to compete with one another for grades, creating tension and anxiety in the classroom, which undermine cooperative learning situations. And, in the end, grades do not sufficiently describe the specific skills and knowledge acquired by students.

After learning at Bread Loaf about the power of classroom research to effect changes in teaching practice, I began writing in a teaching journal about the difficulties of grading. My observations, which had been mounting for years, became the basis of my research questions. After exploring the issue in my journal, I became interested in finding out how non-graded academic writing would affect students. Would they be more willing, able, and free to write if they didn't have to face a grade at the end of the process? Would their skills improve without a grade?

There is extensive research that supports my contention that grades can be arbitrary, irrelevant, and destructive to the process of writing. The early landmark research of Starch and Elliott demonstrated the arbitrary nature of teacher marks. In a simply designed study, approximately 100 teachers were asked to grade an essay on a scale of 100 points, with 75 as a passing mark. The scores covered a range of 39 points, underscoring inconsistency of grading among teachers. In another early study, Chamberlin et al. pointed out that the proportion of A's awarded by a single instructor on the same set of papers varies at different times.

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Supporters of traditional grading have argued that grades motivate students. Research does not support this contention, however; in fact, Chamberlin's study demonstrated that the reverse could be true (162). His research also suggests that students who earn low grades continue to fail because the "documentation" of their "failures" destroys what motivation they have. In another extensive evaluation, Kirschenbaum and Simon describe how grades have little relevance to what students actually learn (86).

Grades may motivate students to complete writing assignments, but they do not motivate students to improve their skills. Low grades in writing assignments reinforce students' perceptions that they aren't capable and can't learn. In my view, grades produce conformity, reduce substantive interaction between teacher and student, and encourage students to "rise" to mediocre standards. In their belief that they aren't as smart as others or can't write as well as others, students rely on formulas for writing to achieve a passing grade.

In a survey I've given each spring for the past three years, a great majority of my students, even 86% one year, admitted to having cheated on assignments during their high school career. When asked if they had cheated on writing assignments, most said they had plagiarized from books, other students, and the Internet. When asked why they had cheated, all replied that they had done so to get a better grade. The survey also indicated that in writing assignments students focused on the grade, and they didn't really care much about writing or what they were learning.

The final two questions on the survey were: "Would you feel freer to write if you weren't graded on your writing?" and "Would you be more willing and interested in writing if you weren't graded?" I was astounded to find that all but one of the twenty-five in the class answered "yes" to these questions. The one dissenter in the class clarified his answer by adding that he already viewed himself as a writer who would continue to write regardless of whether he received a grade.

I taped an ensuing class discussion about the merits of ungraded writing and was gratified to hear again the elation in the voices of the students as they expressed their approval of my proposal to assign writing that would not be graded. One student said, "This is like a dream come true. For ten years I have waited for a chance to write without a grade." Another student asked, "Is this a joke? I can't believe a teacher would really be willing to *let us write* without a grade!" [my italics].

"This year has been much better because I don't feel as terrible about myself and how I write since I don't have to look at C's and D's anymore."

With such enthusiasm from the students, I was compelled to move forward with the experiment.

The only obstacle I anticipated to experimenting with ungraded writing was the skepticism of parents and the school administration who might wonder how students would "earn" the requisite grades on their report cards. But this expectation was proved wrong. I sent a letter to the administration and the parents outlining my proposal to forgo grading students' writing and asking for their observations, reservations, or objections. I received just one skeptic's response asking how my proposal would affect the students' report card grades. Whether all parents and administrators endorsed my proposal or were indifferent is a question for further investigation.

Over the years, I have conferenced with students about their writing, but I had never been able to carry out conferencing successfully because of the time demands of a literature-based curriculum heavy in reading content. I asked my students how they would feel about "negotiating" for a grade. I would still, of course, give reading quizzes, literature exams, and other objective assignments that would total a percentage for their report card (a school requirement which I have also come to abhor). I told students that their report card grade would only improve if we agreed that their writing had improved during the term. We would conference about their writing to their satisfaction. They would maintain their rough and final drafts in a portfolio, which would be the basis for our conference discussions.

With these details worked out, I embarked the first year on my ungraded writing project in one class only. During the year I asked my students to reflect on their writing and their feelings about not receiving grades. For several months, students anxiously continued asking me what they *would have* received on particular assignments if I *had given* a grade. But by March, they stopped asking. By early May, only one student, Heather Broadbent, seemed still to miss getting grades, but she also felt relieved of the pressure of writing for a grade:

> I get stressed when I think of having to write something, especially if it's for a grade. Even though I miss seeing what kind of grade I would have gotten, I think it's better for me to write without worrying about what my teacher wants. I never realized before that the main reason I did my writing assignments was just to please my teachers.

I did some reflective writing myself, analyzing how the students adapted their writing process, identifying where I saw improvement, and wondering what motivated their writ-

ing now that grades were removed. As the end of the school year approached, many students told me that they felt much better about their writing that year, less anxious, less stressed. A number of students also commented that they felt free to write as they pleased without the restrictions of formulaic writing. I noted those observations in my research journal, adding how much more relaxed and less stressed I myself was feeling about not having to give grades on writing.

In the following year, I continued my project, expanding the ungraded writing approach to three classes. I received the same response to the survey in the second year that I had the previous year with my honors class, and this confirmed for me that ungraded writing appealed to the general student, not just to honors students. All the students were unabashedly enthusiastic about the idea of ungraded writing. Their responses served to underscore for me the counterproductive effects of grades, particularly in writing. One student's remarks were particularly compelling. Jay Platt said,

> I can't write as good as others can, I guess you could say I suck at writing. But I never feel like trying any harder after I get lousy grades on everything I write. I think it'll be good not to get grades on our writing this year.

Contrary to popular opinion, there is little evidence that grades supply strong positive motivation for most students. Usually the only students who find grades motivating are the better students. For example, one study reported that anxiety improved the grades of students who were already receiving good grades, but lowered the grades of students whose previous performances were poor or average (Phillips 320). This research supports my finding that the "regular" students were even more enthusiastic than the honors students were about my proposal not to grade their writing.

Although working with students in three classes was liberating and energizing, I had difficulty conferencing with a total of 79 students. Generally, conferencing with average students required more time because I had to spend part of the meeting instructing them in basic rhetorical concepts. I had them come in during lunch, during my prep period, and before school, in addition to the occasional conference times during their regular class periods. I found myself writing more extensively on their essays to address writing strategy; I even tried taping my comments to them. The problem with both of these methods was that they were entirely one-sided, with no opportunity for the student to respond to my ideas about their writing.

Although I noticed substantial growth and improvement in much of the student writing, I continued having difficulty adequately conferencing with my students. At the end of last year, I expressed my frustration and disappointment, but my students responded overwhelmingly with positive comments about our experiment:

> I haven't felt afraid to write this year like I always have in the past. It might be nice to have more conference time, but that's pretty impossible. It helps just to get comments and suggestions on my papers. —Norman Wall

> Even though Mrs. Udall feels bad about not being able to spend enough time talking with us about our writing, this has still been much better than we've ever had it before. I like to not worry about getting a grade on my writing. —James Badger

> It would be nice to have more time to talk over our writing, but it will never happen until high school English teachers have fewer students. —Arlene Turley

During parent/teacher conferences in November, I was visited by only a dozen parents, which is typical at my school, but I was able to give those parents information about their students' writing, based on my notes, the students' reflections, and the portfolios. Surprised and gratified to be able to see their children's growth, as well as shortcomings, parents were genuinely interested in the research project.

I have also enjoyed the support of colleagues who are members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, who have helped me see that there is no better place to do research than in my own classroom.

The parents' endorsement of the project was gratifying to me as well as critical for the success of the project. The word gets around in a small school and community. Although the members of my small department have not adopted my approach to ungraded writing, they have expressed continuing interest and have supported what I am doing. Talking through my ideas with them has helped me clarify many things about the project. I have also enjoyed the support of colleagues who are members of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, who have helped me see that there is no better place to do research than in my own classroom.

Reflections by students at the end of the year were encouraging enough to motivate me to continue with the project. Lon's and Ace's comments represent the attitude of the entire group of students in general:

> I've always hated to get my papers back because I always get a bad grade. I hated to look at the last page and see a real bad grade. This year has been much better because I don't feel as terrible about myself and how I write

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since I don't have to look at C's and D's anymore. —Lon Dimbatt

I'd like to tell the whole world about how great it is to write without a grade! For the first time in my life, I'm actually thinking about what I'm saying when I write. I never cared before when all I got was a grade. —Ace Morales

Though disappointed with the problems that I had experienced conferencing with students about their writing, I decided last summer to expand the ungraded writing project to all five of my senior English classes for the 1997-98 school year. The seniors embraced the proposal, and this year I have seen greater progress in their writing than ever before. I have also discovered that students who engage in reflective writing and self-assessment tend to become more realistic about themselves as writers; they have a greater understanding of where and how they need to improve. Witness this attitude in some of the reflections made by students this year:

I don't worry so much now about just trying to please my teacher. I'm more concerned about trying to please myself, to strengthen my ability to clearly express my ideas and to adequately support any position I take. —Annalee Brown

Without the burden of the grade, I feel like I've been released from my chains! I'm much more interested now in seeing where I really can improve. Now I'm not afraid to know where my weaknesses are. I want to know that I need more sentence variety in my writing. I can practice different types of sentences without worrying that it's going to bring my grade down if I don't get them just right. —Andre Mischel

Such responsible self-assessment takes a long time to develop. At first students froze when asked to assess their own work. But, as the comments above show, students will take the process seriously. Moreover, students spontaneously began prompting the self-assessment process by making suggestions and comments to one another about their writing. I have observed this increasing willingness to assess themselves as the school year has progressed.

In February last year, I asked the seniors to respond to three questions: (1) Do you miss getting a grade on your writing? If so, would you prefer to go back to grades? (2) What do you value in writing? (3) What are your goals for your writing? The responses were varied but unanimously positive, indicating that the seniors did not want to return to being assigned grades for their writing. The following remarks express the range of their responses:

I don't miss getting a grade on my writing. I like it the way it is now because I'm not a writer. When I have to do an essay I get nervous and it messes me up. It's hard with the different teachers to follow just what they want. They all teach different ways, and I get confused trying to figure out what I need to do to make each teacher happy. Without a grade I just have to worry about what I'm trying to say. —Candice Connolly

I don't miss having a grade in writing, and I wouldn't like to receive a grade. Getting a paper back with a bad grade brings down my spirits and puts me in a bad mood. Sometimes I feel like I've failed because I don't do well in writing. This year has been much better. I haven't felt so afraid of writing. —Kim Cox

It's been great not to have grades. It seems like I don't feel as pressured to have it right and done perfect. I can write what I feel. —Tomi Greer

I certainly do not miss a grade on my writing. I think that the dreaded "bad grade" has scared me into hating writing, all types. . . . A grade on my paper gives me only a minimal amount of help, supposedly telling me at what level I'm working at that particular time. I hate the pressure that is placed on college-bound students to get certain grades. We get to caring only about that instead of what we're learning. —Meghan Pulsipher

Not having a grade on my writing assignments has been one of the best things that has happened to me during my senior year. It really makes learning easier. I've actually noticed that when I got grades in the past on my papers, I'd spend less time trying to improve papers for the future. This year, however, I have spent more time on my papers. Since I'm not getting a grade, I think I'm now writing because I want to, not because I have to. —Carol Clark

Ungraded writing allows almost all students to focus on improving their writing skills. The "straight-A" students can no longer rest on their laurels and must struggle along with everyone else to continue to make progress.

As the school year drew to a close, the seniors at St. Johns High School appeared to enjoy a high degree of comfort with nongraded writing. One of the major conclusions of my research is that ungraded writing allows almost all students to focus on improving their writing skills. The

"straight-A" students can no longer rest on their laurels and must struggle along with everyone else to continue to make progress. In fact, I particularly noticed that the "A" students worked hard to improve their writing. Although they had begun the year by relying on the standard five-paragraph essay, a formula that had always guaranteed them a good grade, their writing became more substantive and original by the second semester.

An additional benefit of this shift in emphasis is that the iconoclasts (I teach at least a couple every year) feel free to express their hostility or anger toward the "system," be it government or public education, without fear of rebuke from the teacher in the form of bad grades. Once they have vented, these students have generally settled down and begin to support reasoned positions in their writing.

If students are focused entirely on grades, they can never be true advocates in their writing for any cause. In such cases, originality and advocacy will be subordinate to finding out what the teacher likes, as the student above mentioned.

There are still problems with the approach I have taken. I am still required to give a term grade, somehow to translate a student's performance into a letter grade for the report card. The "system" I am using to determine their performance level is, at best, loose and somewhat arbitrary. However, with a few exceptions, everyone is improving. The lack of sufficient time for conferencing continues to plague me, and I don't know how that issue can ever be reasonably resolved without decreasing the number of students and extracurricular assignments that compete for an English teacher's time.

I do not claim that the results of my research are a panacea for the woes of grading, but at least I am no longer phobic about giving writing assignments. More importantly, the students no longer seem phobic about writing. Because students no longer view me as a punitive grader, I am able to work more easily and collaboratively with them on their writing, like a coach. They seem more inclined to take coaching directions from me when they don't have to face a grade at the end of the practice session.

The scarcity of time for intense conferencing that is required by this ungraded approach to academic writing has prompted me to take another step in my research for next year. I plan to have the students work more productively in peer review groups and to involve their parents or other adults in providing substantive feedback to students about their writing. Certainly this process will continue to be one of discovery and modification for years to come in my effort to teach writing effectively. ❦

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Something Invisible Became Visible

by Robert Baroz
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Hinesburg, Vermont

Robert Baroz, a 1995 Bread Loaf graduate, received two Practitioner Research Communication and Mentoring grants from The Spencer Foundation, in 1997 and in 1998. These grants support his research with Professor Shirley Brice Heath from Stanford University on collaboration in the classroom. Student researchers Sahir Kalim and Liz Rocheleau worked with Robert during the first year of the study and will continue in the second year. Robert wishes to acknowledge their contribution in writing this article. Two new student researchers will join the project this year. Robert has also been awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to coordinate a telecommunications project on the poetry of Robert Frost, in collaboration with John Elder from Middlebury College. Robert serves as the Vice-Chair of the Ripton Elementary School Board in his hometown of Ripton.

"You're paid to be here! That's so-o-o-o cool," I hear a student say to Sahir, one of two student researchers who are working with me on a classroom research project, thanks to a grant from The Spencer Foundation. I look up from reading a letter to the class about the research project. The letter requests their permission (and their parents') to quote from samples of their work and to record class discussions. Looking closely at student discourse is at the heart of our research since we have proposed to study the roles students assume in learning, as recommended in the Vermont Framework, a state mandated curriculum. Through analyzing classroom discourse that includes speculating, planning, organizing, and presenting, we hope to understand how language and its various uses in the classroom create and reinforce learning. I glance over to my left and see another student whispering to Liz, the other student researcher, who smiles as she is recording her observations of our first day of class.

* * *

My two student co-researchers, Liz Rocheleau and Sahir Kalim, had been students in another course I had taught, a class in which we had studied and documented the implementation of the New Standards Language Arts Portfolio in my classroom. However, this year they joined my American literature class as researchers and were paid for their work. The three of us met at the Bread Loaf School of English during the summer to discuss plans for collecting and analyzing data, to provide Liz and Sahir with an email account on BreadNet, the computer conferencing system of the Bread Loaf School of English, and to meet with our mentor Shirley Brice Heath from Stanford University. Both Liz and Sahir on several occasions attended a class I was taking at Bread Loaf, Teaching As Action Research, taught by JoBeth Allen, from the University of Georgia. During our work together in the summer, we discussed the reasons for analyzing classroom discourse in the context of group work done by students. I explained to Sahir and Liz my belief that language is the foundation in the teaching and learning process. Yet students and teachers largely ignore its importance. Liz and Sahir admitted they'd never thought much about the importance of talk in the classroom.

As recently as 1990, Myra Barr had pointed out the status of talk in her introduction to *Language Matters*, published by the Centre for Language in Primary Education:

> Over and over again the evidence from schools shows that one of

Rob Baroz at Grantees Meeting, The Spencer Foundation, in Chicago

> the major problems about talk in school lies in people's perceptions of it: teachers, parents, and in turn, children, often find it hard to see talk as an important part of learning.

In looking at the Vermont Framework, I did not see the importance of classroom discourse being given consideration in the activities recommended for teaching and learning, and yet talk is critical to support learning.

Near the end of the summer, Liz, Sahir, and I had drafted the letter requesting students' and their parents' permission to participate in our research. I had written such letters in the past for other research projects, but I felt that including Liz and Sahir's assistance made this one better than any I had written previously. Liz and Sahir helped redraft the letter line by line, cutting the jargon out and making it more reader-friendly. After consulting with JoBeth Allen, I decided to tape the meetings I had with Liz and Sahir. The taping, JoBeth suggested, would help us review the way we worked together and enable us to capture our own discourse as a source of data. Little did I know at the time that our study of classroom discourse would draw our attention to our own use of language as a research team. This secondary focus would lead to some emerging new understandings about the role of discourse in learning and teaching.

Adapting New Ways of Working and Researching

At the beginning of the year, our research team tried to transcribe all of the discussion that had been recorded in focused group activities. The tedious process of transcribing and annotating transcripts was extremely time-consuming, as other researchers of language have noted. We had created a complicated linguistic taxonomy to analyze the discourse, but the language describing the different categories was loaded with jargon, and the list totaled 33 categories. Within a few weeks of beginning our project, we were searching for a better way.

The tapes we made of ourselves when we were using our taxonomy to annotate the transcripts sound more like a bingo game and less like an analysis of data as one of us would call out a code he or she saw in the discourse. The others would say, "yup" and scribble the code in the margin. In the wake of such sessions, the transcripts were marked with a column of incomprehensible abbreviations running down the left-hand margin of the page. In all honesty, little discussion about the transcript happened.

We knew we had to find more effective ways of using the time together; we knew we had to rewrite our linguistic taxonomy, creating and generating new categories for analyzing the transcripts, using our own language as much as possible. Finally, we reduced the taxonomy to fifteen categories, and we changed our process of transcribing the tapes: we drew up an outline of the taped discourse and identified sections in the transcript in which the group discussion was most productive. After reviewing the outline, we would decide what to transcribe and further discuss and analyze the discourse. The changes in the taxonomy and the process helped bring about a change in the roles of the student researchers and myself as teacher. We collaborated more, and the taxonomy became truly an instrument we each owned equally. In analyzing the transcripts, we relied less on a rigid taxonomy and more on our own free-ranging discussion, which included speculating, hypothesizing, theorizing, questioning, connecting, problem-finding, and problem-solving.

In email exchanged after a meeting, we each reflected on our work together over time. First, in a letter to Liz and Sahir, I wrote,

> Today's team meeting was not what I had imagined it would be like. To be honest I thought we would do some sort of audit of the tapes and transcripts. Then I thought I would talk about strategies for analyzing and transcribing the tapes. However, as you probably observed, our talk did not go in that direction. I think where it went was for the best. . . . You two have been the most active to date in shaping what is done and why. In the past I think I controlled our sessions. . . . This time I think I was listening more to what you were both saying. . . . Both of you raised questions about the work we were planning that I had not thought about. Without you two involved in this, I cannot imagine what would be happening in the project.

Looking back at what I wrote, I see that my willingness to listen and their willingness to ask questions were catalysts for changing the research process we had begun. I wondered if my views had dominated the earlier meetings. Who raised the questions about the data? Whose ideas were developed in the meetings? Without having taped our meetings and reflected on the talk recorded on those tapes, I don't believe we could have begun to see ourselves as co-researchers; without this revelation, I would have continued to dominate the project. As a teacher researcher, I needed to develop my ability to listen and learn what students were saying.

In email to Liz and me, Sahir summarizes the meeting and highlights the importance of Liz's talking and my listening in the process of our team-building:

> After today's team meeting, I feel like the group is really beginning to work as a group. Together we essentially mapped out the class plan for the next four classes based on what we have seen being done by the groups up until today. We began by a suggestion from Liz. . . . Mr. Baroz accepted Liz's idea. Then, together, the three of us worked out how and what the class could and should be doing to accomplish their tasks, as well as helping others. It was true col-

(continued on next page)

Something Visible . . .

(continued from previous page)

> laborative work as we all contributed, listened, and consented on various decisions. It is a cool feeling to know that a student's input to a class can actually be heard and applied. I view this as one more step in breaking the student/teacher barrier, where a teacher is simply a closed-minded authority and the student is just a "yes man," not able to offer input. . . . The more the group works together, the more comfortable, open-minded, and effective they become.

Sahir's comments apply also to the role students generally play in relation to other students and the teacher. Indeed what he says can be read as an echo of what I had said about "control" in my own letter of reflection.

And Liz writes:

> Sometimes I feel like the excitement that I had for this project gets lost in all the hard work I do. But when I talk to you two, or when I write a reflection, that same feeling of "Wow! I'm really doing something good here!" resurfaces. What I think is so beneficial to my progress as a member of this research team is that we do sit down and reflect on what we can do.

Liz's comments emphasize the power of inquiry and talk in reflection as a way of revitalizing the collaboration between students and teacher who work together as researchers. Moreover, our letters reveal a mutual view about collaboration becoming an important tool for changes in doing our research.

I would argue that we need to invite all students to reflect on what goes on in the classroom, and the sharing of their reflections can play a role in building and supporting the engagement of talk and inquiry within a community of learners.

As part of the final exam, Liz, Sahir and I agreed to have the class write letters to my next semester's class. We invited the students to look back at their experiences of working in groups and generate recommendations for the next semester's class to consider when doing group work. Among their many recommendations were:

- "Participate. Don't be left out of conversations. Let everyone speak: in the midst of a heated discussion, it is easy to allow two people to argue away while someone else with a completely new angle on the issue sits and waits for a chance to speak."
- "Don't be afraid to disagree with what people say, and tell your opinion. You never know, you may show them a new way of looking at the subject."
- "In literature discussions, ask follow-up questions to comments from group members. This give and take makes an engaging conversation."
- "While reading the books, take notes on what you'll want to discuss.

Underlying these recommendations from their reflections is a view of group work that is inherently democratic and communal—where each member's voice, personal knowledge and experience are valued, respected, wanted, and expected to contribute to the development of the communal knowledge.

Throughout the semester the class frequently reflected on the various activities and saw their words in these reflections valued, either through a discussion or change in the way we did things. Although we do not have the space here to show examples of the different forms of reflection about discussions, we would like to raise a question: how many opportunities do students have to reflect on their learning and talk about ways to improve it?

Emerging New Understandings

Just before the school year ended, I asked Liz how she would describe what she learned from being a classroom researcher. She was quiet for a moment before replying with a slight chuckle and a smile, "Something invisible became visible." She added that doing the kind of research we did is different from the sort of research that students are asked to do in most traditional curricula. I've thought about what she said, and I believe, as Egan-Robertson and Bloome have suggested, more consideration should be given to having students act as researchers in the classroom to determine the role discourse and language use play in it (Egan-Robertson & Bloome 1998). This sort of metacognitive activity can lead to a greater awareness and understanding about language as the foundation of learning. One of my students, Kevin, seemed to allude to this understanding in his letter of reflection on the final exam, in which he refers to a transcript of a small group discussion:

> Mr. Baroz said, "Look, he finished her sentence, that is listening!" That really threw me off. To me, listening was just making eye-contact and paying attention. Then I realized that he meant that [the student's] listening was so in tune that he finished her sentence.

Another student, Leahy, suggests, in her final exam, that students' awareness of the classroom discourse changed over time: "I noticed a big change in discussion in the class about literature. Our class started to become more critical of pieces of literature we had read." How such a change came about we suspect is embedded in the repeated times we discussed, reviewed, and engaged students in looking at the ways they talked about literature. This process of looking frequently involved showing transcripts of their discussion as models of collaborative thinking.

I wonder, with the present wave of reform and its increasing demand for accountability, how much attention will be given to classroom discourse and the roles of students and teachers. Moreover, as students and teachers begin to work together as co-researchers, I feel that such collaboration merits research in order to find

out, as Nancy Martin once put it, "What happens to the roles of students and teacher over time as they work together as researchers?" Analysis of their discourse may show how change occurs in this setting too.

Liz, Sahir, and I are grateful to have received another year of generous funding from The Spencer Foundation to continue working together as researchers with Professor Shirley Brice Heath serving as our mentor. As a result of our research project so far, we believe that the potential of students and teachers to work successfully as co-researchers in the classroom is greatly increased by listening to their language of collaboration. ❦

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1998-99 Announcements

Robert Baroz received a second $15,000 grant from The Spencer Foundation through its Practitioner Research Communication and Mentoring Program. This grant enables Robert to continue his work with Shirley Brice Heath from Stanford University, his mentor for the project. Robert was a presenter at the grantees meeting of The Spencer Foundation in Chicago in August. Robert has also been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to coordinate a telecommunications project on Robert Frost's poetry. This project is in collaboration with John Elder, Middlebury College, and several teachers in BLRTN.

In April, 1998, **Ginny DuBose** visited **Susan Miera** for two days at Pojoaque High School in Pojoaque, NM. Susan's and Ginny's students have participated in cultural exchanges on line since 1994. During the visit, Susan and Ginny selected books of local interest for their computer conference this year and visited locations that students will be studying in their collaborative literature project this year.

Karen Mitchell received a two-year $30,000 Practitioner Researcher Communication and Mentoring Grant from The Spencer Foundation to fund a project, "Stories of School," with two classroom teachers in the Juneau School District. The purpose of the project is to foster communication among students, teachers, parents, and families. Karen also published a chapter in a new publication from the Northwest Regional Educational Lab in Portland, Oregon, called *Teacher Stories of Curriculum Change*.

BLRTN friends and roommates **Gary Montaño** and **Stephen Schadler** were elected Class Co-Presidents of the Vermont graduating class of Bread Loaf in 1998. BLRTNers **Sharon Ladner** and **Mary Burnham** presided over the Oxford class of '98. **Mary Ann Cadwallader** addressed the 1998 graduating class at the Oxford campus.

Gary Montaño was selected to serve on a panel headed by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards created by Dr. Howard Stoker from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. Gary was recommended for this position for his work associated with the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network. Gary will travel to Chicago in the spring to examine assessment practices and judge their validity as they pertain to a range of curricula sampled from across the country.

Renee Moore accepted a new position as Curriculum Coordinator/Lead Teacher at Broad Street High School, Shelby, MS. Renee received a Practitioner Researcher Communication and Mentoring Grant from The Spencer Foundation and was asked to speak at the grantees meeting in Chicago on August 27.

Patricia Parrish is a member of the Mississippi Exemplary Teachers' Network, a leadership training group of approximately 40 teachers, formed by the State Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology. Patricia teaches several graduate courses at the University of Southern Mississippi. Her name appears in *Who's Who Among America's Teachers, 1998*. An article by Patricia, "The Connections Project," is forthcoming in an issue of *National Education Association Today*.

Stephen Schadler continues as head of his school English Department and was asked to facilitate the Language Arts portion of the district-wide curriculum overall.

Seventeen members of the BLRTN received masters degrees from Bread Loaf this summer: Mary Ann Cadwallader, Moira Donovan, Monica Eaddy, Annette Hardin, Mary Juzwik, Sharon Ladner, Gary Montaño, Nancy Olson, Prudence Plunkett, Jane Pope, Rosie Roppel, Steve Schadler, Phil Sittnick, Nan Talahongva, Peggy Turner, Risa Udall, and Carol Zuccaro.

Book Review—*In the Middle: New Understandings about Writing, Reading, and Learning* (Boynton/Cook, 1998)

by Jane Morelli-Johnson
Seabury Hall
Maui, HI

Jane Morelli-Johnson teaches English and journalism at Seabury Hall , Makawao, Maui, Hawaii. She writes regularly for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL) and is presently authoring a book about her most recent experience creating in-class reading and writing workshops at the high school level.

In the summer of 1991 I joined my dear friend and colleague Bob Boynton, cofounder of Boynton/Cook Publishers, and his eldest daughter Judy on a trip to visit Nancie Atwell's Center for Teaching and Learning in Edgecomb, Maine. Bob was Nancie's publisher, and Judy and I were interested in the mechanics of starting a school. A few years earlier, I had read *In the Middle* with astonishment and awe. Atwell was doing what rare, hard-working, capable teachers were doing in isolated pockets across the country, but she had the good sense to write about it, document it, and validate it to the world. *In the Middle* told teachers it was not merely okay to teach writing, it was essential. *In the Middle* told teachers it was not merely okay to give kids a choice of what they read, it was part of an authentic, sound education.

When we arrived at Atwell's home, she was still knee-deep in the just completed first year of her Center (Grades K-4). During these early years, she was administrator, in addition to everything else from fund-raiser to janitor! After meeting Nancie's daughter, Anne, we all sat down to a Maine lobster dinner and talked shop for hours. The building was already too small, Nancie told us, and there was much that needed to be changed. The earnings from *In the Middle* had helped fund her new Center, but in many ways she wished she hadn't written the book. The printed word seem to take on the characteristics of words carved in stone, and after only four short years, there was much Atwell had rethought about the book and wanted to change.

Our visit culminated the following day at the Center. Atwell was generous with her time, ideas, and materials. The school was everything we had imagined it to be. I also found Atwell to be everything I had imagined, including determined, always forthright, exhausted, but above all, honestly willing to do whatever it takes to give kids (including her own) the best learning environment possible. She remains one of the hardest-working teachers I have met.

There was a lot about the original *In the Middle* that I found forthright, too: the admirable creed to talk with children, to learn what is best for them. I took from the 1987 edition of *In the Middle* good ideas, mini-lessons and the like, and managed to overlook what I disagreed with. Atwell advocated—insisted upon, in my opinion—very little teacher direction. I loved the original *In the Middle*'s classroom focus and ideas, but I believed the ideal teacher implicit in Atwell's ideas was too passive. I remember thinking, I am not a coach; I am not a partner. I am a teacher. It is my responsibility to share my expertise with my students. Yes, I learn as much from my kids as they do from me (in different ways). But a teacher teaches. I intervened in students' writing. I made suggestions. I lectured in my classroom, with kids taking notes. In the late eighties, when I read *In the Middle*, and again in 1991 when I met Atwell, these were reasons why I took what I could from her book and continued following my own path; however, in 1998, after reading this new version, my earlier reservations have disappeared.

After almost a decade of life at the Center for Teaching and Learning and years of raising a child, Atwell is taking an important second look at the world of teaching, one that we all can applaud. Her Center has grown from a K-4 to a K-8. In addition to running the Center, she is back in the middle school classroom she loves. Most importantly, like Calkins and Graves in their recent work, she is re-evaluating the role of the classroom teacher. The new message: teachers need to teach more.

Atwell's 1998 edition of *In the Middle: New Understandings about Writing, Reading, and Learning* illustrates what is working for Atwell in the classroom, and it is an invitation to teachers to begin anew. There is also a different, unexpectedly exciting tone. Old ideologies are replaced with experiences of a teacher and mother

learning about kids from the inside out and growing with them as she grows a school. It is obvious that learning and growing with her daughter Anne and her role as a parent have caused Atwell to reevaluate her role as teacher. She is examining the kinds of knowledge adults can give kids at home and at school.

In her own words:

> The second edition of *In the Middle* differs in some significant ways from the first. I hope it is just as concrete in describing solutions to problems of managing writing instruction. I hope it invites teachers to imagine themselves and their students in new roles and relationships. I hope it shows the kind of student writing that is possible. But I also hope it is more explicit about the role of the teacher in the writing workshop—about how I present myself in the classroom so that students can learn how to put writing to work for them. (16)

She goes on to say:

> The key to this kind of teaching is that it's based on knowledge, not rules. The assistance I give Anne is selective. I think three kinds of knowledge inform the help that I provide her. First there's my personal experience of the thing being learned. There's my general knowledge of children at a particular age . . . finally I have specific knowledge of this particular child and her needs and intentions. (20)

And there's more:

> Just as there are times when kids need a mirror, someone to reflect back their writing to them, there are times when they need an adult who will tell them what to do next or how to do it. Bottom line, what they need is a Teacher. (21)

Classroom teachers teach. Good classroom teachers develop materials for individual children, build heterogeneous learning communities, and make time for authentic experiences most needed for a student's mind, heart, and spirit. I am thrilled that Atwell now says:

> I am no longer willing to withhold suggestions and directions from my kids when I can help them solve a problem, do something they've never done before, produce stunning writing and ultimately become more independent of me.

Of course. We knew that. But it's sure nice to hear Atwell affirm it.

As I read the new edition of *In the Middle,* my yellow highlighter was flying through the wide-margined pages. I love this book. I love it because it isn't preachy. Nancie Atwell studied, worked, parented, taught for a decade, and now explains with humility that there are no Ten Commandments of Learning. There are only sharing, working, ideas, and a constant willingness to begin again. In 1998 Atwell reminds us that we are first, and foremost, teachers—professionals obligated to share knowledge and guide kids. For this reason alone, the new *In the Middle* is a must for all English teachers.

Additionally, the book includes ways to keep conferencers on task, new approaches, and new expectations for writers and readers. Atwell, in her usual open way, provides readers ideas, directions, and language to use with students. The concreteness of her workshop methods gives readers the nuts and bolts that hold together a daily ninety-minute meeting. There is a whole chapter on Atwell's broadening of one of her favorite approaches, the mini-lesson, providing over sixty pages of ideas including workshop procedures, literary craft, conventions of writing, and strategies for reading. Another Atwell first: teachers needn't reinvent their work each September, (an old dictum of 1987). Now her opinion is to build, reuse, and expand what worked in the past.

Another important and significant step is Atwell's evolution away from personal-experience narratives and into the respected genre of memoir. She cites extraordinary writing from her students and invites the literature of memoir into their experience as she and they read Angelou, Capote, Herriot, Mowat, O'Brien, and many other memoirists.

Atwell's chapter on poetry expands the ideas in her book *Side by Side*, offers great poetry books for the classroom, and shares stunning writing by kids. For example, she says,

> In May, as Mother's Day drew near, I asked the group to brainstorm how they might approach a poem for their moms that would avoid cliché (thanks for being there, Mom) and get at the feeling they have for their mothers underneath the day-to-day traumas of the charged relationships that develop between parents and children during adolescence.

Atwell connects her kids to the real world every day, all day. As always, what matters to kids matters to her.

With Atwell's new insights come new ideas for teaching, new systems for record keeping, along with materials, suggestions for implementation, and classroom design. Yet there is no demagogy here, just good advice. As the Center for Teaching and Learning has grown to a K-8 school, and Atwell has returned to teaching as the Center's seventh and eighth grade teacher of writing, literature, and history, she has incorporated discoveries from the past with thoughtful guidelines for the future. Atwell gives her students the help and expertise they need, while every step of the way instilling seeds of independence. Her students leave with handbooks, materials, organization skills, independent thinking skills, competency, and, I suspect, the lifelong love of reading and writing we all dream of passing on to our students. I applaud her humility and her understanding of teaching. I applaud her willingness to share with us her mistakes and her successes. And I thank Atwell's daughter Anne for giving her mother a child's guidance and wisdom every step of the way. ❦

Going to the BreadNet Project Library

by Rocky Gooch
Director of Telecommunications
BLRTN

BreadNet is a FirstClass conferencing-based network, used by BLRTN teachers and their students for a great variety of online activities. Before the end of Bread Loaf summer sessions, members of the BLRTN from the four campuses have formed teaching partnerships and made plans for exchanges with their faraway colleagues. These partnerships, initiated by teachers and designed to build our capacity to collaborate across boundaries of difference, give us opportunities to create networked learning communities that stimulate critical thinking and encourage young people to take pleasure in reading and writing.

The BreadNet Project Library is a conference area where teachers post descriptions of their partnerships and exchanges. A good bit of browsing goes on in the Library, giving us a place to see what teachers are planning and how their BLRTN projects work. The Project Library is a private work area for BLRTN teachers.

What follows are brief descriptions of several of the many projects posted to the Project Library by new BLRTN teachers in August 1998:

• Eighth grade students of two teachers (Georgia and Arizona) will conduct joint inquiries about teen issues in their communities, about their different landscapes ("Where I am is what I am"), and about topics that they identify as they read and respond to each other's journals, poems, and narratives.

• A teacher in Nome, Alaska, whose high school sophomores enjoy the debate unit she's taught for several years, will work with several other teachers to form online student teams to explore issues, conduct research, write position papers, and engage in debates and post-debate online discussions.

• A teacher in rural Georgia with mostly African American students will work with a teacher in a small Colorado charter school to develop a collaborative service learning program. The Georgia teacher will visit the Colorado teacher to observe and develop plans and write grant proposals; the Colorado teacher and two students will visit the Georgia school to conduct workshops and meet their distant collaborators. Much online planning and communication among students and teachers are part of this project.

• Two teachers from rural New Mexico communities will bring their students together on BreadNet to study Hamlet; they will write about characters, perform scenes, view films, and work with yet another BLRTN class in New Mexico to publish the story of their collaboration. Some cross-visitation is planned.

• A Navajo poet and teacher will work with mostly Hispanic students who live in a border town. Students will read and respond to his poetry on BreadNet; he will answer their questions and encourage them to write their own poetry. He will visit his teaching partner's classroom several times as "poet-in-residence."

Partnerships and exchanges give young people a chance to step back and look with fresh eyes at their own communities and cultures as they connect and cooperate with distant classmates about other places and histories. Networked communities such as BLRTN have the potential, at least, to promote critical thinking and culturally engaged teaching and learning. ❦

1998-99 BLRTN State Conference Managers

The following BLRTN Fellows have been appointed to serve as State Conference managers for the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network. In this capacity these teachers are a liaison between BLRTN staff and BLRTN Fellows in their respective states, facilitate state meetings, and work to encourage the participation of all members of BLRTN.

Brad Busbee	Ocean Springs High School	Ocean Springs MS
Kate Carroll	Middlebury Union High School	Middlebury VT
Carolyn Coleman	West Laurens High School	Dublin GA
Ginny DuBose	Waccamaw High School	Pawleys Island SC
Joe Koon	Bethel Regional High School	Bethel AK
Juanita Lavadie	Taos Day School	Taos NM
Steve Schadler	Rio Rico High School	Rio Rico AZ
Sharilyn West	Cheraw High School	Cheraw CO

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Fellows

Since 1993, the following rural teachers have received fellowships to study at the Bread Loaf School of English through generous support of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the Education Foundation of America, the Annenberg Rural Challenge, and Middlebury College.

Fellow	School	School Address
Alaska		
Christa Bruce	Schoenbar Middle School	217 Schoenbar Rd., Ketchikan AK 99901
Patricia Carlson	Lathrop High School	901 Airport Way, Fairbanks AK 99701
Scott Christian	University of Alaska-Southeast	Bill Ray Center, 1108 F St., Juneau AK 99801
JoAnn Ross Cunningham	Haines High School	P.O. Box 1289, Haines AK 99827
Samantha Dunaway	Nome Beltz High School	P.O. Box 131, Nome AK 99762
Hugh C. Dyment	Bethel Alternative Boarding School	P.O. Box 1858, Bethel AK 99559
Pauline Evon	Kwethluk Community School	Kwethluk AK 99621
Patricia Finegan	Schoenbar Middle School	217 Schoenbar Rd., Ketchikan AK 99901
Allison Holsten	Palmer High School	1170 W. Arctic, Palmer AK 99645
David Koehn	(formerly of) Barrow High School	P.O. Box 960, Barrow AK 99723
Joe Koon	Bethel Regional High School	P.O. Box 1211, Bethel AK 99559
Danielle S. Lachance	Hydaburg City Schools	P.O. Box 109, Hydaburg AK 99922
Andrew Lesh	Akiuk Memorial School	Kasigluk AK 99609
Susan McCauley	Mountain Village School	Mountain Village AK 99632
Sandra A. McCulloch	Caputnguaq High School	P.O. Box 72, Chefornak, AK 99561
Taylor McKenna	Schoenbar Middle School	217 Schoenbar Rd., Ketchikan AK 99901
Rod Mehrtens	Matanuska-Susitna Borough Schools	125 W. Evergreen, Palmer AK 99645
Karen Mitchell	University of Alaska-Southeast	10012 Glacier Hwy., Juneau AK 99801
Natasha J. O'Brien	Ketchikan High School	2610 Fourth Ave., Ketchikan AK 99901
Mary Olsen	Sand Point High School	P.O. Box 269, Sand Point AK 99661
Clare Patton	Ketchikan High School	2610 Fourth Ave., Ketchikan AK 99901
Prudence Plunkett	Houston Junior/Senior High School	P.O. Box 521060, Big Lake AK 99652
Sandra Porter	Susitna Valley Junior/Senior High School	P.O. Box 807, Talkeetna AK 99676
Rosie Roppel	Schoenbar Middle School	217 Schoenbar Rd., Ketchikan AK 99901
Dianna Saiz	Floyd Dryden Middle School	10014 Crazy Horse Dr. Juneau AK 99801
Sheri Skelton	Shishmaref School	General Delivery, Shishmaref AK 99772
Janet Tracy	East Anchorage High School	4025 E. Northern Lights Blvd., Anchorage AK 99508
Patricia A. Truman	Palmer Junior Middle School	1159 S. Chugach, Palmer AK 99645
Kathleen Trump	Susitna Valley Junior/Senior High School	P.O. Box 807, Talkeetna AK 99676
Linda Volkman	Colony Middle School	HCO 1 Box 6064, Palmer AK 99645
Trevan Walker	Ketchikan High School	2610 Fourth Ave., Ketchikan AK 99901
Claudia Wallingford	(formerly of) Gruening Middle School	9601 Lee Street, Eagle River AK 99577
Arizona		
Priscilla Aydelott	Monument Valley High School	P.O. Box 337, Kayenta AZ 86033
Timothy Aydelott	Monument Valley High School	P.O. Box 337, Kayenta AZ 86033
Evelyn Begody	Greyhills Academy High School	P.O. Box 160, Tuba City AZ 86045
Sylvia Barlow	Chinle Jr. High School	P.O. Box 587, Chinle AZ 86503
Sabra Beck	Marana High School	12000 Emigh Rd., Marana AZ 85653
Celia Concannon	Nogales High School	1905 Apache Blvd., Nogales AZ 85621
Jason A. Crossett	Flowing Wells High School	3725 N. Flowing Wells Rd., Tucson AZ 85705
Chad Graff	(formerly of) Monument Valley High School	P.O. Box 337, Kayenta AZ 86033
Karen Humburg	Lowell Middle School	519 Melody Ln., Bisbee AZ 85603
Amethyst Hinton	Catalina Foothills High School	4300 East Sunrise Drive, Tucson AZ 85718
Vicki V. Hunt	Peoria High School	11200 N. 83rd Ave., Peoria AZ 85345
M. Heidi Imhof	Patagonia High School	P.O. Box 254, Patagonia AZ 85624
Beverly Jacobs	Marana High School	12000 Emigh Rd., Marana AZ 85653
Nancy Jennings	Ganado Intermediate School	P.O. Box 1757, Ganado AZ 86505
Rex Lee Jim	Navajo Community College	P.O. Box 6, Tsaile AZ 86545
Cecelia Lewis	Buena High School	3555 Fry Blvd., Sierra Vista AZ 85635
Jill Loveless	Globe Junior High School	501 E. Ash St., Globe AZ 85501
James Lujan	Ganado Intermediate School	P.O. Box 1757, Ganado AZ 86505
Jody K. McNelis	(formerly of) Santa Cruz Valley Union H. S.	9th and Main St., Eloy AZ 85231
Kevin T. McNulty	(formerly of) Calabasas Middle School	220 Lito Galindo, Rio Rico AZ 85648
Janet Olson	(formerly of) Chinle Elementary School	P.O. Box 587, Chinle AZ 86503
Robin Pete	Ganado High School	P.O. Box 1757, Ganado AZ 86505
Tamarah Pfeiffer	Ganado High School	P.O. Box 1757, Ganado AZ 86505
Lois Rodgers	Patagonia High School	P.O. Box 254, Patagonia AZ 85624
Joy Rutter	Window Rock High School	P.O. Box 559, Fort Defiance AZ 86504
Sylvia Saenz	Sierra Vista Middle School	3535 E. Fry Blvd., Sierra Vista AZ 85635
Stephen Schadler	Rio Rico High School	1220 Lito Galindo, Rio Rico AZ 85648
Karen Snow	(formerly of) Ganado Primary School	P.O. Box 1757, Ganado AZ 86505
Nan Talahongva	(formerly of) Hopi Junior/Senior High School	P.O. Box 337, Keams Canyon AZ 86034
Judy Tarantino	Ganado Intermediate School	P.O. Box 1757, Ganado AZ 86505
Edward Tompkins	Lake Havasu High School	2675 Palo Verde Blvd., Havasu City AZ 86403
Risa Udall	St. Johns High School	P.O. Box 429, St. Johns AZ 85936
Maria Winfield	Sierra Vista Middle School	3535 E. Fry Blvd., Sierra Vista AZ 85635
John Zembiec	(formerly of) Chinle Junior High School	P.O. Box 587, Chinle AZ 86503

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Fellows

(continued from previous page)

Colorado

Stephen Hanson	Battle Rock Charter School	11247 Road G., Cortez CO 81321
Sonja Horoshko	Battle Rock Charter School	11247 Road G., Cortez CO 81321
Mary Juzwik	Bridge School	6717 S. Boulder Rd., Boulder CO 80303
John Kissinger	Montrose High School	P.O. Box 1626, Montrose CO 81402
Joanne Labosky	Lake George Charter School	P.O. Box 420, Lake George CO 80827
Joan Light	Montrose High School	P.O. Box 1626, Montrose CO 81402
Maria Roberts	Peetz Plateau School	311 Coleman Ave., Peetz CO 80747
Sharilyn West	Cheraw High School	P.O. Box 159, Cheraw CO 81030

Georgia

Carolyn Coleman	West Laurens High School	338 Laurens School Road, Dublin GA 31021
Rosetta Coyne	Brooks County Middle School	Quitman GA 31643
Jane Grizzle	Ware County Middle School	2301 Cherokee St., Waycross GA 31501
Elizabeth McQuaig	Fitzgerald High School	P.O. Box 389, Fitzgerald GA 31750
Beverly Thomas	Warren County High School	509 Gibson St., Warrenton GA 30828
K.C. Thornton	Ware County Middle School	2301 Cherokee St., Waycross GA 31501
Mya Ward	Warren County High School	509 Gibson St., Warrenton GA 30828

Mississippi

Brad Busbee	Ocean Springs High School	406 Holcomb Blvd., Ocean Springs MS 39564
William J. Clarke	(formerly of) Shivers High School	P.O. Box 607, Aberdeen MS 38730
Leslie Fortier	Jones Junior High School	1125 N. 5th Ave., Laurel MS 39440
Carolyn Hardy	R. H. Watkins High School	1100 W. 12th St., Laural MS 39440
Myra Harris	Pascagoula High School	2903 Pascagoula St., Pascagoula MS 29567
William E. Kirby	North Forrest High School	693 Eatonville Rd., Hattiesburg MS 39401
Sharon Ladner	Pascagoula High School	2903 Pascagoula St., Pascagoula MS 29567
Renee Moore	Broad Street High School	P.O. Box 149, Shelby MS 38774
Terri Noonkester	(formerly of) Hawkins Junior High School	523 Forrest St., Hattiesburg MS 39401
Patricia Parrish	Sumrall Attendance Center	P.O. Box 187, Sumrall MS 39482
Patsy Pipkin	Oxford Junior High School	409 Washington Ave., Oxford MS 38655
Peggy Turner	Saltillo High School	Box 460, Saltillo MS 38866
Penny Wallin	(formerly of) Jones Junior High School	1125 N. 5th Ave., Laurel MS 39440

New Mexico

Kim Bannigan	Rio Rancho High School	301 Loma Colorado, Rio Rancho NM 87124
Anne Berlin	Lincoln Elementary School	801 W. Hill Ave., Gallup NM 87305
Wendy Beserra	(formerly of) Deming Public Schools	501 W. Florida, Deming NM 88030
Erika Brett	Hatch High School	P.O. Box 790, Hatch NM 87937
Dorothy I. Brooks	(formerly of) Ojo Amarillo Elementary School	P.O. Box 768, Fruitland NM 87416
Lorraine Duran	Memorial Middle School	Old National Rd., Las Vegas NM 87701
Ann Eilert	(formerly of) Los Alamos High School	300 Diamond Dr., Los Alamos NM 87544
Nona Edelson	Santa Fe Indian School	1501 Cerrillos Rd., Santa Fe NM 87502
Renee Evans	Crownpoint High School	P.O. Box 700, Crownpoint NM 87313
Daniel Furlow	Clayton High School	323 S 5th St., Clayton NM 88415
Emily Graeser	(formerly of) Twin Buttes High School	P.O. Box 680, Zuni NM 87327
Annette Hardin	Truth or Consequences Middle School	P.O. Box 952, Truth or Consequences NM 87901
Diana Jaramillo	Pojoaque High School	Pojoaque Station, Santa Fe NM 87501
Susan Jesinsky	(formerly of) Santa Teresa Middle School	P.O. Box 778, Santa Teresa NM 88008
John Kelly	Shiprock High School	P.O. Box 6003, Shiprock NM 87420
Carol Ann Krajewski	Pecos Elementary School	P.O. Box 368, Pecos NM 87552
Roseanne Lara	Gadsden Middle School	Rt. 1, Box 196, Anthony NM 88021
Juanita Lavadie	Taos Day School	P.O. Drawer X, Taos NM 87571
Leslie Lopez	Native American Preparatory School	P.O. Box 260, Rowe NM 87526
Timothy Lucero	Robertson High School	5th & Friedman Streets, Las Vegas NM 87701
Carlotta Martza	Twin Buttes High School	P.O. Box 680, Zuni NM 87327
Theresa Melton	Tse'Bit'ai Middle School	P.O. Box 1873, Shiprock NM 87420
Arlene Mestas	Bernalillo High School	P.O. Box 640, Bernalillo NM 87004
Susan Miera	Pojoaque High School	Pojoaque Station, Santa Fe NM 87501
Gary Montaño	Carlsbad High School	408 N. Canyon, Carlsbad NM 88220
Barbara Pearlman	Hot Springs High School	P.O. Box 952, Truth or Consequences NM 87901
Jane V. Pope	Lovington High School	701 W. Avenue K, Lovington NM 88260
Virginia Rawlojohn	Estancia High School	P.O. Box 68, Estancia NM 87016
Stan Renfro	Wingate High School	P.O. Box 2, Fort Wingate NM 87316
Zita Schlautmann	Bernalillo High School	Box 640, Bernalillo NM 8704
Norma Sheff	Hatch Elementary School	Hatch NM 87937
Philip Sittnick	Laguna Middle School	P.O. Box 268, Laguna NM 87026
Lauren Thomas Sittnick	Laguna Middle School	P.O. Box 268, Laguna NM 87026
Bruce R. Smith	Jemez Valley High School	8501 Highway 4, Jemez Pueblo NM 87024

Marilyn Trujillo	Taos Day School	P.O. Drawer X, Taos NM 87571
Michelle Wyman-Warren	Mountainair High School	P.O. Box 456, Mountainair NM 87036

South Carolina

Janet Atkins	Greenville County School District	301 Camperdown, Box 2848, Greenville SC 29602
Michael Atkins	Beck Middle School	302 McAlister Rd., Greenville SC 29607-2597
Polly E. Brown	Belton-Honea Path High School	11000 Belton Hwy., Honea Path SC 29654
Victoria Chance	Travelers Rest High School	115 Wilhelm Winter St. Travelers Rest SC 29690
Raymond Cook	Socastee High School	4900 Socastee Blvd., Myrtle Beach SC 29575
Ginny DuBose	Waccamaw High School	2688 River Rd., Pawleys Island SC 29585
Monica M. Eaddy	Mayo H. S. for Math, Science &Technology	405 Chesnut St., Darlington SC 29532
Barbara Everson	Belton-Honea Path High School	11000 Belton Hwy., Honea Path SC 29654
Doris Ezell-Schmitz	Chester Middle School	112 Caldwell St., Chester SC 29706
Anne Gardner	Georgetown High School	P.O. Box 1778, Georgetown SC 29442
Joyce Summerlin Glunt	(formerly of) Hunter-Kinard-Tyler High School	Box 158, Norway SC 29113
Linda Hardin	Beck Academy of Languages	302 McAlister Rd., Greenville SC 29607
Tracy Hathaway	(formerly of) Robert Smalls Middle School	43 Alston Rd., Beaufort SC 29902
Priscilla E. Kelley	Pelion High School	P.O. Box 68, Pelion SC 29123
Nancy Lockhart	Homebound Tutor, Colleton School District	P.O. Box 290, Walterboro SC 29542
Robin McConnell	Calhoun Falls High School	Edgefield St., Calhoun Falls SC 29628
Carolyn Pierce	Cheraw High School	649 Chesterfield Hwy., Cheraw SC 29520
Anne Shealy	John Ford Middle School	P.O. Box 287, Saint Matthews SC 29135
Betty Slesinger	(formerly of) Irmo Middle School	6051 Wescott Rd., Columbia SC 29212
Elizabeth V. Wright	Ronald E. McNair Junior High School	Carver Street, Lake City SC 29560

Vermont

Kurt Broderson	Mt. Abraham Union High School	9 Airport Drive, Bristol VT 05443
Mary Burnham	Waits River Valley School	Rt. 25, East Corinth VT 05040
Mary Ann Cadwallader	(formerly of) Mill River Union High School	Middle Road, North Clarendon VT 05773
Katharine Carroll	Middlebury Union High School	Charles Ave., Middlebury VT 05753
Moira Donovan	Peoples Academy	Morrisville VT 05661
Jane Harvey	Brattleboro Union High School	50 Fairground Rd., Brattleboro VT 05301
Margaret Lima	Canaan Memorial High School	1 School St., Canaan VT 05903
Suzane Locarno	Hazen Union School	Main Street, Hardwick VT 05843
Judith Morrison	Hinesburg Elementary/Middle School	Hinesburg VT 05461
Bill Rich	Colchester High School	Laker Lane, Colchester VT 05446
Gretchen Stahl	Harwood Union High School	RFD 1 Box 790, Moretown VT 05660
Ellen Temple	Camels Hump Middle School	Brown Trace Rd., Richmond VT 05477
Vicki L. Wright	Mt. Abraham Union High School	7 Airport Dr., Bristol VT 05753
Carol Zuccaro	St. Johnsbury Academy	Main Street, St. Johnsbury VT 05819

At Large

Rob Buck	East Valley High School	East 15711 Wellesley, Spokane WA 99216
Jane Caldwell	Board of Cooperative Educational Services	Dix Ave., Hudson Falls NY 12839
Jean Helmer	Belle Fourche High School	1113 National St., Belle Fourche SD 57717
Christine Lorenzen	Killingly Intermediate School	Upper Maple St., Dayville CT 06241
John Rugebregt	Maria Carrillo High School	6975 Montecito Blvd., Santa Rosa CA 95409
Peggy Schaedler	East Hampton Middle School	19 Childs Rd., East Hampton CT 06424
James Schmitz	Kennedy Charter Public School	P.O. Box 472527, Charlotte NC 28247
Patricia Watson	Floyd County Schools	Prestonburg, KY 41653

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March 5-6, 1999

Bread Loaf faculty member and Senior Consultant to the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, Jacqueline Jones Royster, will give the keynote address on Saturday, March 6, the second day of the conference, which will emphasize teacher research.

For more information,
call Wendy Hobbins at 215-898-3273

Teacher Research
The Journal of Classroom Inquiry

Edited by
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From the Editor

by Chris Benson

I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to The Spencer Foundation for supporting the work of teachers in the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, particularly those represented in this special issue of the magazine devoted to becoming teacher researchers. My colleagues Rob Baroz, Scott Christian, and Karen Mitchell were helpful and inspiring in this work. With continued support from The Spencer Foundation, Bread Loaf teacher researchers will begin work on a book of chapters addressing issues of learning important to students, parents, teachers, and communities. This current and future work of the BLRTN is built on a solid tradition of teacher research begun at the Bread Loaf School of English nearly two decades ago.

Since 1985, Bread Loaf has encouraged teachers to study language and learning in their classrooms and communities: providing support in the form of grants to support their inquiries; presenting courses that focus on issues of methodology, analysis, and representation; and—more recently—creating space on BreadNet, our computer conferencing system, to bring together researchers and mentors for collaboration over relatively long periods of time. Bread Loaf teacher researchers have worked intensively with JoBeth Allen, Michael Armstrong, Ann Berthoff, James Britton, Tony Burgess, Courtney Cazden, Dixie Goswami, Shirley Brice Heath, Andrea Lunsford, Ken Macrorie, Nancy Martin, Peter Medway, James Moffett, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and other members of the Bread Loaf faculty. Betty Bailey, teaching associate at Bread Loaf, and Bette Ford, consultant to the BLRTN, have made steady and significant contributions to all aspects of teacher research at Bread Loaf. Bread Loaf teacher researchers have won national awards, written popular and important books, and contributed articles to many books and journals. From the beginning, Bread Loaf teachers have included students as co-researchers: gathering information, analyzing, interpreting, evaluating, and writing.

Bread Loaf teacher researchers have demonstrated that teachers and students are sources of legitimate knowledge that are not often recognized. They have brought the voices and experiences of culturally diverse, often marginalized, students—and their own voices—into the discourse about teaching and learning. Their work is an essential part of the principles and practice of the BLRTN. ❦

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network
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Middlebury, Vermont
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