Building Inquiry Communities and Leadership for Equity

Introduction

Linda Friedrich, Elizabeth Radin Simons, and Carol Tateishi,
Section Editors

Any teacher who has been part of a successful collaboration with a friend, on a grade level team, or in an inquiry group, knows that two minds are more than twice as good as one. The essays in this section demonstrate that the benefits of teacher research multiply in collaborative groups. A research group whose members share a commitment to looking closely at their practice, at themselves, and at the cultural perspectives they bring to their work can challenge group members' assumptions, spark ideas, and instigate improvements in practice. Building this type of community and working together toward more equitable outcomes for students takes sustained attention and leadership. The five authors featured in this section speak with passion about what it takes to establish and sustain such communities.

Forms of Inquiry Communities

Teacher research communities come in myriad configurations and sizes. The essays in this section portray four types of collaborative inquiry communities: a subset of teachers from a large school (M. Williams); a schoolwide collaboration in a small school (Friedman and Juarez); a districtwide opportunity for professional development (Green); and a cross-school inquiry group facilitated by an external partner (Tateishi).

What do these collaborative inquiry groups have in common? Most significantly, each has the end goal of improved teaching and more equitable learning. To achieve this goal, each roughly follows a cycle of identifying a problem or question, taking action, collecting data, analyzing them, and arriving at findings. In order to support a rich analysis of data and discussion in a short period of time, three groups (Friedman, Tateishi, M. Williams) use protocols for examining student work or sharing inquiry.[1] Finally, each group disseminates its findings, either informally or through published writing.

Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions of Collaborative Leaders

Each author in this section serves as an inquiry group leader/facilitator, taking the initiative to call meetings, often taking responsibility for planning the agenda and activities; facilitating or cofacilitating the meeting; and keeping the group on course. These leaders include three full-time classroom teachers (Friedman, Green, Juarez), one writing project director (Tateishi), and one writing project co-director serving as a school coach (M. Williams). While the leaders take responsibility for convening the group's work, each takes a collabo-

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1   For examples of protocols, please see Carini and Himley 2000 and the Looking at Student Work website:
    http://www.lasw.org/protocols.html

rative approach to leadership. The purposes of this collaborative approach include creating sustainable school-based leadership for research (Juarez, M. Williams); developing a range of culturally sensitive leadership practices (Tateishi); and benefiting from other leaders' knowledge and experience (Friedman).

The essays in this section highlight three critical areas of expertise needed to lead inquiry for equity: inquiry tools and processes, understanding of equity, and facilitation skills.

- Inquiry tools and processes: Leaders need experience with and knowledge of the tools and processes that support teacher inquiry (Friedman, Green, Juarez).

- Understanding of equity: Leaders should examine their own assumptions and personal history, and how these influence their teaching and leadership. They should support others in the group to do so as well. They must also bring a range of cultural practices and understandings to group leadership (Friedman, Tateishi).

- Facilitation skills: Leaders should plan and facilitate straightforward, flexible meetings focused on teaching and student learning (Friedman, Green, Juarez, M. Williams).

With a collaborative leadership approach, these areas of expertise need not reside in a single individual; leaders can rely on one another for support.

Collaborating with External Partners

While the essays throughout this guide illustrate teachers' central roles in leading inquiry for equity, the articles in this section also acknowledge the important leadership roles played by external partners. The essays in this section point to five roles that external partners can play in launching and sustaining inquiry:

- Introducing a range of approaches and resources for conducting and leading inquiry (Friedman, Green, Juarez, Tateishi)

- Fostering honest conversations about equity (Friedman, Tateishi)

- Securing funding for stipends and food (Juarez, Tateishi, M. Williams)

- Facilitating research meetings (Friedman, M. Williams)

- Bringing together teachers from across schools, communities; and states to engage them in a larger movement (Green, Tateishi, M. Williams).

With support from an external partner or through site-based collaboration, each author has taken an important leadership role in a teacher research community. The essays in this section shed light on the role of the leader as well as on the benefits and challenges of participating in various types of teacher research communities.

References

Carini, P., and M. Himley. 2000. *From Another Angle: Children's Strengths and School Standards: The Prospect Center's Descriptive Review of the Child.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Looking at Student Work website: *http://www.lasw.org/protocols.html*

Developing a Culture of Inquiry for Equity: One School's Story

The San Francisco Community School has developed a schoolwide culture that uses teachers' inquiries into their own practice to work for more equitable outcomes for students. Here, Tanya Friedman examines the nine-year process that has produced this culture, emphasizing the importance of educators critically examining their assumptions, biases, and most cherished teaching practices as they work to ensure that all students learn. Friedman describes a range of inquiry processes that she and her colleagues have used over the years in their K–8 school—from multiyear, whole-school investigations of a core curriculum area to individual minicycles of two to four weeks, each focusing on a single teaching challenge. While there is no single inquiry structure that works for all teachers, notes Friedman, the key to making progress on raising student achievement comes from the continued willingness of staff to look at hard questions about teaching and to support each other in that process.

By Tanya Friedman

"The culture of inquiry for equity . . . enables us to interrupt inequitable patterns of student achievement."

I am fortunate to teach and learn in a school community where equity—all students meeting high standards of achievement and having positive and affirming school experiences—is our explicit goal. In 1996 when I joined San Francisco Community School, this vision of an equitable learning environment was gaining clarity and becoming our focus. We began searching for a path to help us get there. We have not found a single or direct path to equity, but we have experienced a shift in our adult culture, in how we look at our school and our classrooms, and in what we do with what we see. These shifts were the beginning of our transformation to a culture of equity-focused inquiry, a culture that is helping us get closer to our goal.

I believe that the culture of inquiry for equity at San Francisco Community School enables us to interrupt inequitable patterns of student achievement more successfully than any particular practices or policies. This success would not have occurred if we had focused on teacher inquiry without equity or on equity without using the tools and approach of inquiry. In this article, I share our experiences of learning to create, nurture, and sustain this culture—the conditions and strategies that help us to teach for equity. Although we've found no single model or perfect approach to inquiry for equity, I hope our story demonstrates the benefits of creating space for doing this work.

San Francisco Community School

This is my ninth year working at San Francisco Community School (SFC); for six of those years (the first three and the last three) I have worked as a classroom teacher and for three of those years (the middle three) I served as head teacher. San Francisco Community School is a K–8, teacher-run public school of three hundred students, grades K–8. All of our classrooms are multiage; we are organized as K–1, 2–3, 4–5, and 6–7–8.

Our student population is about 40 percent Latino, 20 percent Asian, 20 percent African American, and 20 percent white. Almost three-quarters of our students qualify for free and reduced-fee lunch, and almost half are limited English speakers. In each of our classrooms there are students living in poverty and students living in upper middle-class homes; students whose family members did not complete high school and students whose family members have graduate degrees.

Our faculty and staff (seventeen certificated teachers and thirteen support staff) is 15 percent Latino, 10 percent Asian, 30 percent African American and 45 percent white. We come from a range of class backgrounds, though the majority grew up in middle-class homes. Rather than a principal, we have a head teacher who serves a three-year term as the instructional leader of the school. The position rotates among experienced faculty members. An important part of our hiring criteria focuses on a candidate's understanding of equity and commitment to working toward equitable student achievement.

"It wouldn't happen if we focused on teacher inquiry without equity or if we focused on equity without using the tools and approach of inquiry."

Establishing a Foundation for Inquiry for Equity: Connecting Schoolwide Data Analysis with Classroom Inquiry

Although the culture of inquiry for equity at SFC—our particular structures, practices, and norms—evolved out of the specific experiences, personal commitments, and unique personalities of the teachers most involved in developing it, two external organizations played important roles in its development. In 1996, my first year at SFC, we joined the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC).[1] I learned about inquiry through a BASRC group that was exploring aspects of whole-school change that might affect student results. The group helped me connect my actions to a larger vision while pushing me to uncover my assumptions and clarify my theories. It was my first experience of how deep the intellectual life of a teacher could be. I wanted SFC to provide a professional space for all of our teachers that was as supportive and challenging as the BASRC group was for me.

In 1997, our school joined the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES),[2] a regional school-reform organization with a focus on equity. Over the past seven years, our partnership with BayCES has helped us to face the equity gap in new ways. In our partnership's

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1   More information about the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) can be found at *www.basrc.org.*

2   More information about the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) can be found at www.bayces.org. BayCES is one of the four partner organizations that form the Teacher Research Collaborative.

first year, a team participated in BayCES' weeklong summer institute, where we examined results of our writing assessments and uncovered disturbing achievement patterns. In every classroom, there was a clear pattern of African American and Latino students not meeting our school standards. In every classroom, white students were the only students who achieved the highest level on the writing rubric. We were devastated. While each of us could name reasons why our own students hadn't achieved the standards, there was no way to talk our way around the whole-school picture.

Uncovering that pattern of inequity, as we were learning how to conduct data-based inquiry inextricably linked inquiry and equity for me. Out of that weeklong experience, our professional development team developed a whole-school data-based inquiry about writing instruction. We planned whole-school strategies—common use of rubrics and frequent opportunities to write and revise—to help students meet standards. As a faculty, we spent two full days a year (one in the fall and one in the spring) calibrating our writing standards from kindergarten through eighth grade and scoring writing by every student. We analyzed data from these whole-school scores to adjust our instruction.

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>
> Create structures and support for teachers to reflect on how issues of race, class, and culture play out in their own lives, in the school, and in the classroom.
>
> Offer a variety of structures and entry points for equity-driven inquiry.
>
> Dedicate time, space, and support for both formal and informal inquiry.

To make this whole-school inquiry feel present and alive in our classrooms, we also devised "minicycles," which framed the whole-school inquiry at the classroom level. We asked teachers to choose students from our underserved groups whose writing had not met the standards and to design strategies aimed at strengthening their skills. To help us think strategically and systematically about why students weren't achieving, we each picked one focus student and conducted an inquiry about that student. We devised a research question, planned out strategies and data-collection procedures, and recorded our hunches and challenges. By sharing strategies, seeking information from the students' previous teachers, and asking each other questions, we began to take collective responsibility for the students who were not meeting the standards. Our classroom inquiries, along with our whole-school work, improved students' writing performance and allowed us to trace which strategies worked most effectively with which students. For five years in a row we closed the equity gap in writing achievement on school and district assessments.

This first schoolwide inquiry impacted our school culture in at least two important ways. First, it established that our purpose for inquiry is to create equity. Second, it initiated our practice of collecting and disaggregating data, no matter how small the numbers. For me, equitable achievement began to seem possible, even just around the corner.

Despite the benefits of this inquiry, our ongoing work has revealed the complexity and difficulty of creating equity in achievement and school experience. While we still have more questions than answers, we've found three elements to be especially important in developing and sustaining a culture that supports inquiry for equity:

- Create structures and support for teachers to reflect on how issues of race, class, and culture play out in their own lives, in the school, and in the classroom.

- Offer a variety of structures and entry points for equity-driven inquiry.
- Dedicate time, space, and support for both formal and informal inquiry.

Structures and Support for Explicit Work on Equity

I have come to believe that the most significant factor in determining whether classroom inquiry will bring about changes that lead to equity is structured time for teachers to reflect on how their experiences and beliefs impact their practice and their interactions with students. Through our work with BayCES, we learned about the tools and structures of constructivist listening[3]—a form of listening designed to support individuals to gain a deeper understanding of their own biases, assumptions, and reactions while supporting a community to build alliances across race, class, and cultural differences. In a constructivist listening session, each speaker has a designated amount of time to speak on a topic of concern, while the other participants listen without offering judgments, interpretations, advice, or personal responses. (See appendix B for details.) When our school counselor and I first practiced constructivist listening at a BayCES retreat in 2001, we saw how we were able to connect our prior experiences to what we believed and how we acted, while simultaneously being exposed to a wide range of other people's stories and experiences. It seemed like the missing piece to our model of inquiry.

Since then, an overwhelming majority of our staff has embraced the opportunity to reflect on how our beliefs and prior experiences affect our interactions with students and with each other. Instead of blaming students or giving up, teachers try to understand the role their own beliefs and behaviors play in students' lack of success. Once a teacher acknowledges her part, she can start a meaningful inquiry. For example, through participating in constructivist listening, one teacher recognized that she had a pattern of consistently engaging in power struggles with African American girls. To understand the roots of these power struggles, she examined her expectations of African American girls, her own childhood, and her experiences with anger. She also looked at aspects of her teaching style and practice that sometimes sparked power struggles. After this investigation, she changed her practice in important ways—from creating more concrete classroom leadership opportunities to modeling ways for students to rephrase questions or complaints that sounded disrespectful to her.

As our research group came to share community and trust, we started turning to each other for help in changing practices. When a colleague recognized a pattern of Latino boys being unmotivated in his class, he asked another colleague to observe his classroom. He knew that his own school experiences shaped his view of his students and his reactions to their apparent lack of motivation. His colleague's observations helped him identify how he unintentionally communicated low expectations. In order for teachers to ask each other for help—and give each other honest feedback—we need to have a high level of trust among ourselves.

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3 Constructivist listening was developed by Julian Weissglass, professor of education at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and director of the National Coalition for Equity in Education (NCEE). For more information about constructivist listening, see *http://ncee.education.ucsb.edu/articles/constructivistlistening.pdf*

My own experience also illustrates the importance of confronting hidden beliefs and assumptions. After engaging in inquiry for several years, in 2002 I began to ask myself, What am I willing to learn from my inquiry? I learned to ask myself this question from hearing myself ask it of my colleagues. I recognized that the individual inquiries that leveraged the greatest change were those in which the teacher was willing to learn that she was making mistakes, missing important pieces of data, or looking through biased lenses. As I looked at data about Iris, a second grade English language learner who had repeated kindergarten and was still about a year below level in literacy, something shifted in me. (See appendix C for details about my cycle of inquiry with Iris.) I asked myself: What am I willing to see in the data? Am I just seeing what I expect to see? Am I really willing to hear Iris's answers? Which practices am I willing to change or to give up altogether? And I asked colleagues to look with me.

Because of this new stance, I tried to open myself up, to see the unexpected in Iris's data. I noticed two important things about Iris and her learning that I might previously have over-looked. First, I observed that Iris's comprehension improved dramatically when she read with a partner. To my surprise, it didn't matter whom she read with—whether she read with another second-grader at her own level, a second-grader at a higher level, or a first-grader at a lower level, she engaged the text more meaningfully and comprehended more. This challenged my assumptions about how best to partner students for collaborative work. What I learned from Iris also prompted me to set aside more time for partner reading, during which students took turns reading and spent a lot of time talking about their books. In order to do this, I had to reduce the time dedicated to independent reading, a practice I'd considered successful in my classroom for seven years.

"What am I willing to see in the data? Am I just seeing what I expect to see?"

Second, I was struck by Iris's description of herself as a weak student. I realized that my carefully constructed reading groups weren't serving her well and might even be contributing to her negative image of herself. I approached Iris with a new plan: she and Carlos, another second-grader who read below level, would join a new group with second-graders who read several levels ahead of them, but they would need to preview the book before the group met and occasionally meet with me in addition to their regular reading-group time. These changes felt like a big risk to me. What if I wasted weeks of reading instruction and Iris's reading didn't improve? Worse, what if I was setting her up to feel even less confident? But these doubts weren't realized. Instead, I noticed an immediate positive change in her affect and performance. Months later, she referred to the time when she moved reading groups as when she "started to get smart." And she scored in the 80th percentile on the second grade CAT-6.[4]

Because of Iris, aspects of my reading instruction will forever be more complex; but more significantly, she transformed how I look at data and how I listen to my own questions. Opportunities to examine my own assumptions and to challenge practices I considered effective and grounded in sound theory were key to promoting this learning.

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4   California Achievement Test, Sixth Edition. See *http://www.startest.org/pdfs/posttestguide.pdf* for more information.

These stories illustrate how SFC teachers' examination of our assumptions—about students, ourselves, and effective teaching practices—affected classroom inquiries that ultimately changed our practices and contributed to student learning. Our use of constructivist listening practices has fostered a culture in which teachers regularly have protected time and space to talk about the emotional content of our work and about how our experiences shape our beliefs and actions. I believe that such structured time for teachers, whether or not constructivist listening is used, is essential for building trust, which in turn allows teachers to ask hard questions, to take risks, and to make necessary mistakes. Without protected time and safe space, it is too easy to gloss over this step amidst all the things that need changing in our classrooms and schools. This kind of self-reflection is the heart of a culture of inquiry for equity.

A Variety of Structures and Entry Points for Equity-Driven Inquiry

For a long time, I felt that it was important for every SFC teacher to participate in the same inquiry process. I believed that if we kept revising our approach we would find a model that would meet each individual's needs. I no longer believe that a single best model exists. Different approaches work well for different people at different times, depending on what they are investigating, whom they are working with, their comfort level with inquiry, their teaching experience, and their individual styles. Each year our professional development team modifies the inquiry structures that the whole staff uses. In particular, we adjust and modify

- the focus of the inquiry
- the locus of the inquiry—who decides the focus, and where it happens
- the length of time an individual or team stays with a specific topic.

Choosing a Focus for Inquiry

Our first inquiries each focused on one student and one learning outcome. This worked well when teachers had a very clear standard they wanted a student to reach. The goal was for the teacher to learn one thing that worked—even one thing that didn't work. Our assumption was that strategies that are successful with one focus student—using songs to memorize multiplication facts, adjusting a peer-editing process to learn language mechanics, creating a home-school journal to build a relationship around reading—would likely be successful with other focus students. These inquiries helped develop teachers' sense of confidence with inquiry because success or lack of it was measurable and concrete.

We also used content-focused inquiries, where teachers began with a question about how to teach a particular standard or subject so that every student would master it. These inquiries have often generated important ideas that we could apply across disciplines and across grade levels. For example, during a middle school teacher's inquiry into what practices supported her struggling students to master complex learning standards, she developed a theory about prerequisite skills. During a series of scientific investigations in which students were to discover for themselves an understanding of buoyancy, she noticed that none of her focus students were discovering the theory. After a few days, she realized that

her focus students weren't using their scales accurately. Without this prerequisite skill, they didn't have a way to figure out the higher-level concept. We began wondering what other prerequisite skills were hindering our focus students from mastering complex standards and began to incorporate prerequisite skill assessment into our project planning.

The Locus of Inquiry: Who Decides the Inquiry Focus and Where It Happens

Each year the professional development team decides whether classroom inquiries will stem from the whole-school focus or whether we will structure support for teachers to select their own inquiry topics.[5] Both approaches have strengths and limitations. When there are clear links among everyone's inquiries, it is easier to learn together, to push each other, and to support each other. Informal conversations about our inquiries are richer and more frequent when we share a focus than when we pursue individual questions. A common focus facilitates communication with our students' families. We've experienced success in two schoolwide inquiries: one about writing strategies to close the achievement and experience gap, and another about reading comprehension strategies. However, sometimes the schoolwide focus isn't what is most pressing to a particular teacher or a particular team. In these cases, teachers sometimes walk through the motions of the inquiry without delving into it deeply.

We've noticed advantages and disadvantages to a more individualized approach to classroom inquiry, as well. We have found that teachers often invest more in self-determined questions. For example, a kindergarten teacher's interest in how classroom power dynamics affected his students' learning inspired an inquiry that brought about significant changes in his instruction. These changes contributed to more equitable reading readiness levels than his classes had achieved in previous years. In my experience, inquiries rooted in a teacher's passion or immediate concerns are more likely to result in major changes to practice. When teachers devise their own questions, however, it can be difficult to support each individual inquiry. In our experience, without structured support, many teachers struggle and feel ineffective, while some don't conduct inquiry at all. Inquiry leaders at SFC also struggle with the question of whether a particular inquiry is likely to lead to equity, and who makes this determination.

To balance the pros and cons of whole-school and individual inquiry approaches, we sometimes engage in collaborative inquiry by grade-level teams. It's easier for three or four people to agree on a common question and to keep a focus on equity, especially when their students are similar ages. Grade-level teams often have particular achievement gaps or instructional weaknesses that team inquiry can address more effectively than whole-school inquiry or individual inquiry.

Inquiry Length

Over the years, we have planned very short minicycles, and we have pursued multiyear inquiries. (For one example of the many recording tools we developed to document our minicycles, see appendix A.) Minicycles, which typically last two to four weeks, can sup-

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5   The professional development team uses data from multiple sources to choose a focus for the school. We try to stay with the same focus until data show significant changes and promising practices seem sustainable, often from three to five years.

port a teacher's sense of efficacy about using inquiry. For example, a teacher who did a mini-cycle on teaching multiplication facts to a struggling math student tried a different technique each week for three weeks. This inquiry provided clear data about this student's learning style, and reinforced the power of systematically examining a practice. These short cycles offer teachers the flexibility to address immediate teaching challenges, provide immediate data-based feedback on how a particular strategy works, and help teachers identify larger questions to pursue over a longer time period. Sometimes, however, the short cycles feel too abbreviated and disjointed, and don't allow teachers to investigate deeper questions, so we have also experimented with yearlong inquiries.

Our first yearlong cycles of inquiry started with our participation in BayCES' Teacher Inquiry Project (TIP) in 2000–2001.[6] Almost half of SFC's teachers voluntarily participated and conducted full-year inquiries for the first time. At the end of the year, when we presented at school, our colleagues were impressed by the depth of our learning and wanted to try this approach. The next year, each teacher followed one student's progress over the year. We carefully chose students who were underachieving and who also represented the groups of students we were consistently underserving. These inquiries helped all of us learn about our focus students' unique learning styles.

Some teachers found that their investigations changed how they taught all students. For example, one teacher tracked her interactions with her focus student. Over time, her analysis of each incident allowed her to notice how she and her student reacted to each other. She learned which approaches were effective, when he was most likely to act out, and how his behavior was connected with his academic learning. For instance, on days when his homework was incomplete, he was particularly volatile until he finished it. And the further behind he was on an assignment or in his progress toward meeting a standard, the more anxious she became about failing him. The anxieties of both the teacher and the student often snowballed into conflicts. The long-term nature of her inquiry allowed the teacher to see larger patterns that she might have missed in a shorter cycle and gave her insights that allowed her to overhaul many classroom systems. One important change she made was creating time for students to complete homework before school began. While many teachers valued the depth of learning resulting from full-year inquiries, others found them hard to track and too slow to make a difference for students. These differences among teachers' perspectives highlight the importance of flexibility and multiple approaches.

Time and Space for Formal and Informal Equity-Focused Inquiry

While we have established a variety of formal inquiry structures, opportunities for less formal conversations have been essential in the development of our culture of inquiry for

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6   The TIP network provided instruction on classroom research, which we were excited about since our minicycles were improvised based on what we had learned about whole-school inquiry. It also provided opportunities for SFC teachers to network with teachers from three other Bay Area schools. On TIP network days, our school team met with teams from the other schools in the BayCES TIP network. Seeing how other schools supported inquiry gave us some insight into the benefits and challenges of different models and of our own. On the best TIP days, we had a taste of the kind of culture of inquiry we wanted to develop at SFC.

equity. I believe, in fact, that our culture of inquiry for equity really grew up in the intersections of formal and informal inquiry. The SFC teachers who first started meeting for monthly dinners through the BayCES TIP network have continued these get-togethers for many years. Our dinner conversations, which typically involve six to eight teachers, have contributed to my understanding of the need for both formal and informal structures of inquiry. When I look over agendas and notes from these meetings, I am struck by the combination of structure and spontaneity. For the most part, we structure our predinner work according to an agenda, with designated time periods allotted for different activities (though we follow our agenda loosely, bowing more to hunger or the timing of dinner). We engage in a combination of individual reflection, partner work, and whole-group time to give each other feedback on data, classroom videos, interviews, or assessment questions. At dinner, we usually discuss an open-ended question, tying it back to equity and inquiry, though not necessarily to anyone's specific inquiry. We often linger over the dinner table long past the agenda's ending time. The conversations frequently turn philosophical and abstract, but we always find ourselves coming back to what we are learning from our students, what we are learning about teaching, and what we are learning about ourselves. The format for the dinners continues to evolve; what remains constant is the beneficial support they provide for examining the intersection of equity and inquiry.

Several of our dinner conversations remain touchstones for how we talk about equity-driven inquiry and how I think about teaching. Recently, during a feedback session on a teacher's current inquiry about how to engage reluctant readers, someone asked her about her own reading preferences. This question referenced a dinner conversation from four years ago, when we talked about why we read and what was personally meaningful to us about reading. We shocked ourselves with the diversity of our responses. Some of us preferred to read for pleasure, others only read nonfiction and news for information, while still others primarily saw reading as a tool to learn how to do something. I realized in that discussion that I had to change my reading program to support all the ways reading might be important to my students.

Many dinner conversations turn into discussions about race, class, and culture. As we build stronger and stronger relationships, we ask each other questions about our assumptions and push each other to see our data differently. What does it mean that white teachers struggle so much with the behavior of some African American students? How does the fact that most credentialed teachers grew up in middle-class homes while most classified staff grew up in working-class homes affect school culture? How were our expectations for how families should stay in contact with school informed by our cultural backgrounds? Perhaps even more important than the content of our questions is that these informal dinners allow us to ask ourselves hard questions—and to ask them out loud. We expose more and more of how our feelings, reactions, and assumptions influence our practice. We share how it feels to discover that our instruction is not always equitable. We talk about what it feels like to fail with a child or a group of children, and to watch the equity gap widen. We also talk about our visions for ourselves as teachers—how we imagine that leaders for equity teach.

These less-formal conversations about equity and inquiry have been as important to developing our culture as any of the more-formal structures or approaches we use. It became more and more important to the TIP team, many of whom served on SFC's professional

development team, that we create opportunities for the whole staff to talk about the personal dimension of teaching for equity. We experienced the benefits of a culture of inquiry for equity and wanted to share it and sustain it.

Bringing Together the Elements of an Inquiry-for-Equity Culture: Our Current Approach

Our current approach to inquiry locates structures of support and types of inquiry in different places. The *professional development team* carries out whole-school inquiry. At our meetings, we set the agenda for staff meetings, reflect on teacher self-assessments, and analyze student outcomes. We determine which aspect of project-based learning the staff needs to focus on based on our data and revise the adult learning plan for the year as needed. We expect that all teachers will learn and incorporate new strategies, reflect on what happens, and analyze student data, but we know not all teachers will make these understandings the focus of their classroom inquiry.

Grade-level teams work together to choose a focus area for their inquiry, because so many teachers find independent inquiry isolating and frustrating. Each team chooses whether to conceive of their grade-level team inquiry as a yearlong cycle, a series of separate minicycles, or something in between. And we continue to have *TIP team* dinners for individual teachers who seek additional support or have questions that don't fit into the whole-school or team inquiries. *Study groups* meet monthly to investigate an aspect of equitable schooling. These groups decide what structures best serve their learning—constructivist listening, dialogue, or a cycle of inquiry. All members of our staff—from classroom teachers to the custodian to yard supervisors—participate in these groups.

We will continue adapting our approach to inquiry for equity to support our community of educators to

- look at multiple sources of data to identify the ways we are not serving our students, particularly those who traditionally are underserved and who underperform

- ask ourselves what we need to learn (as a community and as individuals) in order to better understand what is and what isn't working for our students, and what we need to learn and do to achieve better results

- talk with each other about what's not working in our own classrooms and how we see our beliefs, backgrounds, personalities, and values interfering with the kind of interactions and instruction we want to deliver.

Conclusion

We continue to build our adult culture of inquiry for equity at SFC in order to achieve our goal of equity for students. We know that in order to transform student achievement and school experience, we need to transform our classrooms, our school, and ourselves. We need to continue to engage in inquiries, formal and informal, that help us see our students, our practice, and ourselves with more clarity and with more complexity. In order to do that,

we need to immerse ourselves in a culture that honors and supports our questions, that provides different ways for us to engage our questions, and that creates space for experiencing and reflecting on the emotions, expectations, and assumptions that accompany this work. My assessment of the health of our culture of equity-driven inquiry is based on my own experience with my classroom and students. When I begin a new inquiry, if I feel resistant to change or reluctant to unpack my assumptions and actions, it is a sign for me that the interplay of equity and inquiry, of support and urgency, is in disequilibrium. When I feel willing to transform my instruction—to give up familiar structures and practices, to look at something or someone in a completely new way, to take risks, to learn something uncomfortable about myself—then I believe our culture is healthy.

When I see and hear my colleagues engage in formal and informal inquiry, investigate foundational pieces of practice, take risks with instruction, work to build alliances, or ask how their assumptions affect their instruction and possibilities for equitable and excellent achievement, then I believe that our culture of inquiry for equity is working—it is supporting and compelling teachers to change their practices in ways that will lead to more equitable results.

Reference

Weissglass, J. 1990. "Constructivist Listening for Empowerment and Change." *The Educational Forum* 54 (4): 351–370.

Tanya Friedman has been learning about equity and inquiry for the past nine years at San Francisco Community School, where she teaches second and third grade. As a teacher-leader, Friedman focuses her research on how teacher inquiry can support teachers to change their practice to create better and more equitable results for all students, particularly those who have been historically underserved. As a classroom teacher, she focuses her research on accelerating students' academic achievement through positive, culturally congruent relationships with school and learning. She is currently investigating the relationship between how students conceive of powerful thinking and what they achieve academically.
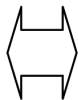
Appendix A: San Francisco Community School Inquiry Minicycle

Name:

DLT question for minicycle #3:

My question:

What I am going to do:
(strategies)

What I am going to collect:
(data)

My hypothesis and hunches:

Challenges I anticipate and SUPPORT that I would like:

Appendix B: Introduction to Constructivist Listening

There are many forms of dialogue between individuals. Among these are conversational, informative, and give-and-take discussions. Based on our assumptions about people, there is another form of communication that needs to occur—one in which people can construct understandings and deal with their feelings. This form, called constructivist listening, can take place in a dyad, support group, or personal experience panel.

It is necessary to create relationships safe enough that colleagues can express their deepest feelings and be listened to, knowing that they will not be criticized or ridiculed. To develop our own thinking it is important to have a place where colleagues listen to us without judgment while we explore our ideas.

Structures in Support of Constructivist Listening

Dyads: The simplest structure is a dyad, which is the exchange of constructivist listening between two people:

> I agree to listen and think about you for a fixed period of time in exchange for you doing the same for me. I keep in my mind that my listening is for your benefit so I do not ask questions for my information.

Support Groups: A facilitator is responsible for seeing that the guidelines are followed and for asking questions when necessary. The leader often suggests a topic for the support group, but the choice of what to talk about is up to each talker. Support groups are useful in building a sense of community, helping people learn how to listen, and providing safety to begin to look at an issue that will be worked on more in a dyad.

Personal Experience Panels: A small number (three to five) of people have a limited amount of time (four to six minutes) to share their experiences related to a topic (for example, gender bias, leadership, teaching in diverse classrooms) with a larger group of people.
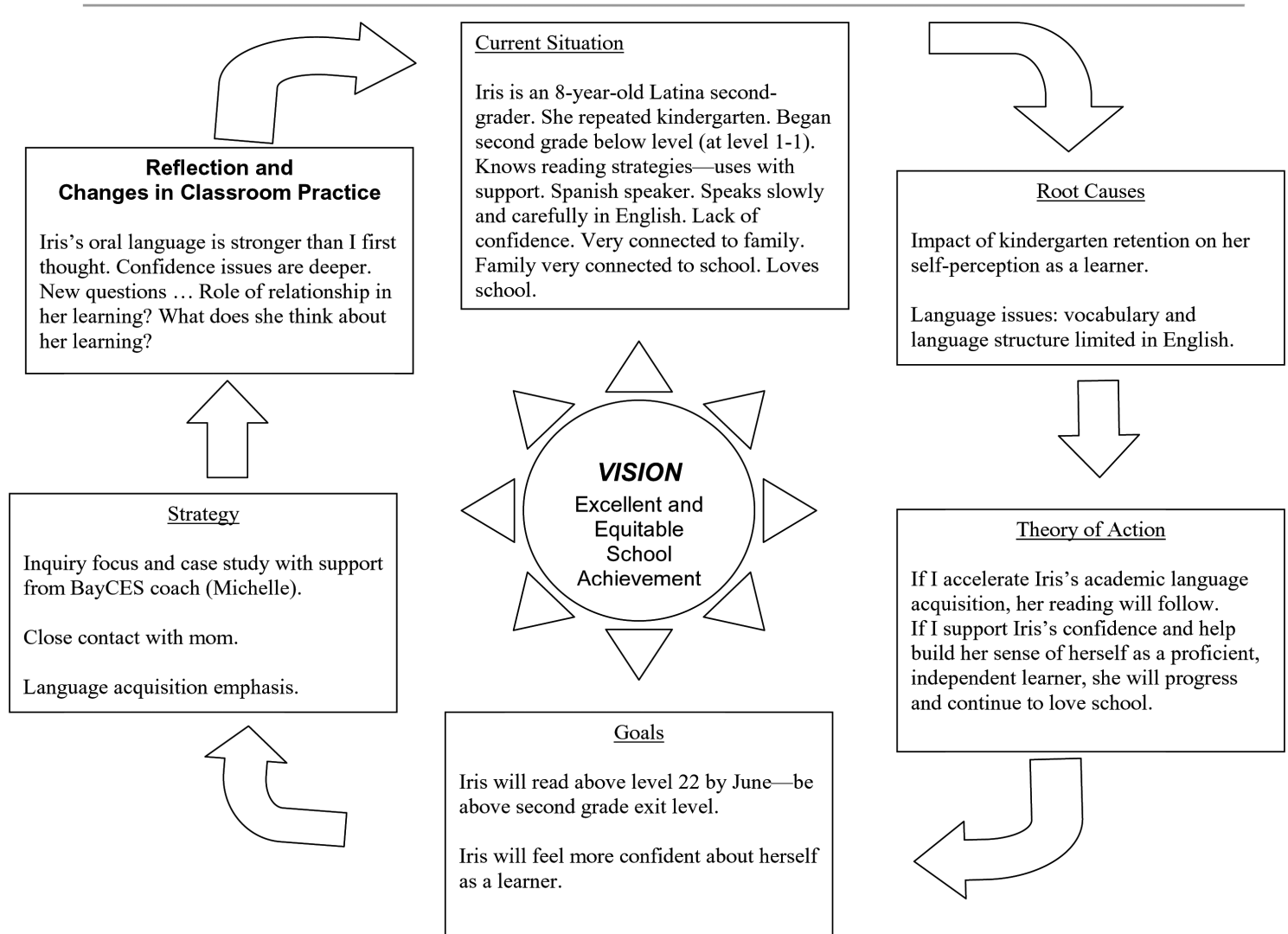
Guidelines for All Support Structures

- Each person is given equal time to talk. *Everyone deserves attention.*
- The listener(s) do not interpret, paraphrase, analyze, give advice, or break in with a personal story. *People are capable of solving their own problems.*
- Confidentiality is maintained. (The listener doesn't talk about what the talker has said to anyone else or bring it up to the talker afterward.) *A person needs to be assured of confidentiality in order to be authentic. Also one's feelings at any moment are not representative of one's rational thinking (or perhaps even of one's feelings five minutes later).*
- The talker(s) do not criticize or complain about the listener(s) or about mutual colleagues during their time to talk. *A person cannot listen well when he or she is feeling attacked or defensive. Problems are to be addressed in a different structure, based in dialogue.*

Appendix C: Target Student Cycle of Inquiry

Target Student Cycle of Inquiry

Current Situation

Iris is an 8-year-old Latina second-grader. She repeated kindergarten. Began second grade below level (at level 1-1). Knows reading strategies—uses with support. Spanish speaker. Speaks slowly and carefully in English. Lack of confidence. Very connected to family. Family very connected to school. Loves school.

Reflection and Changes in Classroom Practice

Iris's oral language is stronger than I first thought. Confidence issues are deeper. New questions … Role of relationship in her learning? What does she think about her learning?

Root Causes

Impact of kindergarten retention on her self-perception as a learner.

Language issues: vocabulary and language structure limited in English.

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Excellent and Equitable School Achievement

Strategy

Inquiry focus and case study with support from BayCES coach (Michelle).

Close contact with mom.

Language acquisition emphasis.

Theory of Action

If I accelerate Iris's academic language acquisition, her reading will follow. If I support Iris's confidence and help build her sense of herself as a proficient, independent learner, she will progress and continue to love school.

Goals

Iris will read above level 22 by June—be above second grade exit level.

Iris will feel more confident about herself as a learner.

A Practical Practice: Shaping and Owning Teacher Research

Effective teacher research, according to Deborah Juarez, is action-oriented, focused on improving student learning, and sustained by an on-site staff community. Here Juarez, a teacher and researcher in Oakland, California, lays out her vision for teacher research and describes an example of its practice. Juarez believes that teacher research must be teacher owned, and she outlines some of the problems she has encountered when working with outside support organizations, in particular university–school partnerships. She shares her experiences as a leader of teacher research in her new small school—a high school she and her colleagues designed using action research as the primary form of teacher professional development. She provides insight into the process, challenges, and rewards of leading inquiry groups and supporting teacher ownership of the work.

By Deborah Juarez

"I want to consider the shape teacher research takes when it is truly owned by classroom teachers."

Background

At Mandela High School, a small school in its first year in Oakland, California, my colleagues and I engage in teacher research on a regular basis. It serves as our support for professional growth and is an essential part of our collaborative culture. Three years ago when Carol Tateishi, the director of the Bay Area Writing Project (a site of the National Writing Project), asked me to introduce teacher research to interested colleagues at my site, I didn't foresee such a result. Though it had long been my view that teacher research could be an effective support for professional growth, I didn't expect it to catch on and shape the collaborative culture of our school, nor did I expect the practice to sustain itself once writing project funding ended. At that time I said little to promote the practice of research as a way to improve teaching. Instead, I let the practice speak for itself.

In my view, teacher inquiry needs to be owned by teachers, as opposed to being facilitated and controlled by university–school collaborations. In many university–school partnership models, what counts as inquiry is often based on the written research product produced by the research process, not the research process itself. The focus on the research product can sometimes obscure what I believe should be most central to teacher research—student learning and student outcomes.

Overall I am interested in uncovering how teacher research can be sustained, and what it looks like, without external support. I want to consider the shape that teacher research takes

when it is truly owned by classroom teachers. In this essay, my goal is to describe our school's model for school-based teacher research, a model that is focused on improving teaching and student learning, and is not dependent on external support. I begin with my background and experience with teacher research, move to the background and experience of my school, and end with our current involvement in teacher research.

My History with Teacher Research

To describe teacher research more fully at Mandela I must first describe my own experience with it, which informed my thinking and objectives as I modeled the practice for my colleagues. In 1993 I was invited into a university-teacher collaborative named the Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools (M-CLASS), funded through the Center for the Study of Writing at the University of California, Berkeley. University staff intended to study the research practice of twenty-four novice teacher-researchers at four urban sites across the country, while the teachers researched a question around the themes of multiculturalism and literacy. Mind you, I had never heard of "teacher research" before, nor did I like the sound of it, but as a fourth-year teacher honored to be invited and hungry for professional growth opportunities of all sorts, I found the initial description of the practice more intriguing than repelling.

"Teacher research," I was told, "complements teaching—it is formalized reflective practice." Growth in practice is thus the outcome of conscious and deliberate reflection. I was introduced to the British-based model of "action research," the practice of "trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge" (Kemmis and McTaggart 1982). With its focus on action and improvement, this type of research contrasted with my perception of research as "controlled." By its definition, teacher action research allowed for trial and error, intervention, and movement toward a desired outcome. These practices, which traditional research lacked, were closely aligned with teaching. The action research practice was further described as the result of a grassroots movement generated by teachers. From this description of teacher involvement, I formalized an ideal of teacher research as inclusive, practical, and teacher owned.

Some Thoughts on External Support for Teacher Research

In the years since that initial description, I've examined teacher research in this country and concluded that it does not have the characteristics of a "movement," and it certainly is not "grassroots." A common support for teacher research in this country is through a school–university partnership. I credit university scholars for introducing teachers like myself to the practice of teacher research and for building my leadership capacity as a facilitator of the practice. However, I have also felt conflicted about their involvement, no matter how democratic their intent. As a teacher with an ongoing involvement in a university scholar–teacher collaborative, I have experienced dependency in all stages of our relationship, despite the deliberate efforts by university colleagues to empower teachers as facilitators and grant writers. Even when I participated as a teacher-leader with an on-site group, I depended on funding to entice involvement.

In addition, with external support came external requirements: publication, presentations, or reports of progress, all of which told me that dissemination of teacher knowledge was the main objective of inquiry practice. Although I understood the importance of elevating teacher perspective through publishing research, I noticed that this objective did little to entice involvement in the research practice, or for that matter, to reshape our professional growth culture as a teacher-owned movement like that in Britain. I wondered how the practice could sustain itself without outside support.

I began to ask, out loud, Are we missing some big point? Over and over I heard teacher-researchers saying the same things: they saw value in formalized reflection and collaboration, they felt transformed by the practice of research, and they experienced improvements in their teaching. The collaborative process of sharing and supportive feedback enabled reciprocal teaching among colleagues, allowing novice and veteran teachers to learn from one another. These were the "side benefits." However, in my experience, becoming a better teacher was never named as the primary objective of our research. I was rarely asked to name my own objective, and when I was, my objective of improved teaching was often met with resistance, as though I was opposed to writing, publication, the elevation of teacher knowledge, or "rigor" in the work.

I was developing a position about external support: that the best support prepares teachers for a future of no support. Though I had no experience without external support, I continued to wonder: What might compel teacher ownership of action research? How could teacher research establish and sustain itself as part of a school's teacher culture without external support? How would teachers shape this practice if they had ownership of it?

A Pivotal Experience as a Short-Term Outside Facilitator

Through my experiences and the reflective skills that I developed doing teacher research, I began to answer the above questions. About eight years after my initial introduction to teacher research with M-CLASS, because of my experience as a teacher-researcher and my role as a writing project teacher-consultant, I was asked to facilitate a group of novice teacher-researchers at Roosevelt Middle School in Oakland. Our time together was to start in the middle of the school year and be limited to approximately fifteen hours. I had never before experienced the process in such a limited way—some of my fellow researchers used as much time just to fully flesh out a question.

Despite limited time, I wanted teachers to experience the research process fully—beginning, middle, and end. To prepare, I collected tools for approaching the process: handouts and articles covering the action research description, types of data and methods of analysis, protocols for discussion and feedback, and a variety of published examples.[1] The three-hour monthly meeting times that I had experienced for my own research did not fit the needs of some teachers in the group, so we decided on shorter meetings every two weeks.

"Over and over I heard teacher-researchers saying the same things: they saw value in formalized reflection and collaboration, they felt transformed by the practice of research, and they experienced improvements in their teaching."

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1 Please see the "BayCES Teacher Inquiry Protocol" in the "Tools" section of this guide as an example of a resource that we found useful and adaptable to our specific needs.

After the initial introductory meeting, in which five interested teachers committed to the group, I helped participants focus on an issue of concern. We framed questions that force an action, using the stem "What happens when . . . ?" and I pushed them into data collection.

What I witnessed was nothing less than amazing. One teacher began with a belief that his African American male students didn't care about their grades. He took action-providing assessment on a weekly basis—and found these students and others regularly clamoring to the posting site to look for their grades under their assigned code numbers. After noting that ongoing assessment seemed to motivate some students to improve while other students showed no change, he arranged a weekly tutorial (which took place during P.E.) and provided tutoring to failing students. During this time he came to our meetings with anecdotal data about the improved performance of his African American male students: one student had completed his first essay ever through tutorial support, and others had completed their first essays without tutorial support.

"Ongoing reflection gave them a sense of greater control of their teaching."

I was impressed. From the first-year teacher who developed checklists to train her ELD students in peer assessment to the science teacher who discovered that clearly outlined steps in lab helped to engage students in the activity, I was witness to great shifts in practice by all five participants. I knew then what inspired the grassroots involvement I had heard about but had never seen. Like the British teachers who practice action research, the Roosevelt teachers took action to address an area of concern. In each inquiry meeting, we engaged in a minicycle of inquiry, sharing questions, data, and suggestions. The teachers left with ideas on how to improve their practice and move closer to the objective of better student performance. Of course, it was the *action* part of research that inspired grassroots involvement-improved practice is every teacher's ongoing professional goal. To validate the expense of their inservice, Roosevelt teachers shared their data with the staff. However, I couldn't help but think that the value of their experience was better measured in the classroom, among their students. This experience confirmed to me that professional growth objectives of improved teacher practice / improved student performance are achievable through the practice of teacher research. It makes sense—both for those British teachers and for me—that these objectives would be the primary impetus for teachers to become involved in teacher research.

Despite our successes, as an outside facilitator, I worried that the momentum of research at Roosevelt would be lost when I left the school. I was ready for a new challenge: taking leadership from the inside at my own school to create a teacher-owned model of research aimed at improving student learning.

Bringing Teacher Research to a Large High School Going Small

In 2001, when Bay Area Writing Project directors asked me to form a group of teacher-researchers at my own school, Fremont High School, I knew what I wanted my colleagues to experience. When the group started, Fremont was beginning to be restructured from a large high school into five small, interconnected schools that operate autonomously but share common resources and space. I wanted to align our professional growth objectives with the action research model, and I wanted to support the ongoing needs of teacher prac-

titioners by meeting more frequently to create momentum in the work. And, though "rigor" had never been defined for me, I knew how I would define it to my group: movement toward improved practice / improved student outcomes. I planned facilitation with all of this in mind. Though writing project financial support required us to focus on writing in our research and to produce a written report on our work, I found three colleagues to join the research group: a veteran math teacher, Ellen Salazar; a fairly new social studies teacher, Patricia Arabia; and our high school curriculum coach, Emily Filloy.

In our first year of teacher research, we met once a week during a forty-five-minute lunch period. Limited by time, only one or two teachers shared at each session, and I focused on facilitating the group rather than sharing my own research. I elected to write about the process myself to fulfill the writing project's written report requirement.

This first year, Ellen utilized writing in her math classes to get her students to describe what they knew (or didn't know). Patricia, frustrated by her history students' inability to structure their thinking in a linear manner, provided writing instruction, using teacher-made checklists and rubrics to guide their thinking. Emily focused on the use of particular reading strategies across disciplines and their impact on student learning. I did not pressure the three to write about their experiences, even though they had a lot to say. I interviewed my colleagues to determine the impact of the teacher research practice. They articulated what I too had experienced: ongoing reflection gave them a sense of greater control of their teaching; collaborative exchange provided ongoing support; and the safety of our community allowed them to take risks they might not otherwise have taken. On their own, without any prompting from me, they collectively announced, "We need to keep doing this."

That year I was engaged in another common endeavor with these same colleagues and others: small-school design. Ellen, our math teacher, put two and two together and determined the important role teacher research could play in the design of our school. After all, one of our reform objectives was a professional collaborative culture; inclusion of the teacher research practice would support this objective. With this in mind, the teacher research group collectively introduced teacher research to other design team members. Our design team enthusiastically accepted the idea. I was charged with facilitating a second year of teacher research and incorporating teacher research into the professional-growth planning of our small school, Mandela High School.

"The safety of our community allowed them to take risks they might not otherwise have taken."

Mandela High School—a New, Small, Interconnected School

Mandela High School, one of five interconnected small schools at the former Fremont High School campus, has approximately 250 students in ninth and tenth grades, with room to grow to a student body of 400 as we add eleventh and twelfth grades over the next two years. Our school's demographics closely resemble Fremont High School demographics of previous years: 54 percent Latino, 30 percent African American, 15 percent Asian/Pacific-Islander, and 1 percent white. Students throughout Fremont's campus score far below the 50th percentile on standardized tests, an issue of great concern to us.

Mandela High School, unlike other schools located at the same site, is not a career themed school. Our electives and activities are intended to promote lifelong learning. Paulo Freire's calling to "read the word" and "read the world" describes our literacy-building objective and also the critical pedagogy we want to practice to empower our students and expand their worldview. Such is our mission, and we are currently shaping the outcome. Fremont High School, like many under-performing schools, has seen its share of unsuccessful reform attempts, and the small-school concept is yet another attempt at reform. Successful reform requires conscious and deliberate shifts in practice; to sustain such shifts requires the conscious reflection that teacher research is all about.

Teacher Research Tool Kit: The toolkit is the curriculum support for the teacher research process. Included in the toolkit are articles/handouts focused on

teacher research and its purpose

what data are and how to manage them

developing a question

collaboration and vulnerability

data analysis, triangulation of data

protocols for discussion and feedback

writing and other forms of "publication"

data-driven decision making

teacher research process papers, published articles

Traditional Professional Development Versus Teacher Research

I have come to view teacher research as a support for professional growth, even though it doesn't look like typical professional development for teachers. Generally, discipline-specific workshops, often facilitated by outsiders, were the norm of my experience in Oakland. Yet I often found these experiences wasted, as participants didn't apply workshop learning to their teaching. I began to wonder, How might teacher research support the reform objectives at our new school? The teacher research process had built-in accountability owing to ongoing expectation in the exchange process, and I considered this fact as I planned the role of teacher research at Mandela. More than anything, I wanted this research practice to sustain itself in the internal structure of our school; I wanted it to make practical sense on a number of levels, and I wanted it to immediately reveal itself as a practical use of our time.

I noted that our curricular focus on literacy could be supported through the teacher research practice, as could structural changes like our new homework policy (weekly sheets stamped upon homework completion) and our parent communication efforts. It made sense to me that teacher research could drive our reforms. With this in mind, I wrote up an implementation plan for teacher research at Mandela High School (see appendix A: Overview of Teacher Research Process at Mandela). I connected the research process to decision making to further establish the centrality of teacher research in our work. Teacher research was not meant to be just one more reform; it was meant to be the practice that supported all our improvement efforts.

In our teacher research implementation plan, I purposely focused on building the leadership capacity of my colleagues (see appendix B: Teacher Research Leadership Model). As a teacher with a full schedule in a school with limited resources, I could foresee a need to share the facilitation of this work. With the help of a "teacher research tool kit" I wanted to explicitly outline the research process so that anyone could assume facilitation. If facilitation each year involved training a cofacilitator, then leadership responsibility could be shared and rotated among Mandela teachers. So many times I have seen a program leave when the teacher in charge leaves. For teacher research to become a permanent feature at Mandela, its facilitation had to belong to all.

Teachers' Research Questions

I began the school year, the first year of our small school, with the research question, "What happens when teacher research is the professional growth practice at a small school?" I chose this question because I wanted to monitor our research practice, study its impact, and assess its support for our work. I wanted to take note of what was needed to yield a practical alignment between teacher research and our reform objectives and of how we could best use our time.

At midyear there was much to report. Most teachers had developed questions that centered on their individual interests, were aligned with our reform objectives, and suggested changes in teaching. Isabel, for example, was studying how her teacher-made participation rubric affected participation in her Spanish class. Craig's question focused on the impact of providing immediate homework assessment in his social studies class. Paul was exploring ways his science curriculum could be more directly tied to his students' lives. Tony was studying the effect of increased peer-support on student learning in his geometry class. Kevin's work included group collaboration as he and other tenth grade teachers practiced common literacy strategies across disciplines and researched their effectiveness. We also had whole-school studies, including Patricia's focus on the effectiveness of a whole-school homework policy and Robin's assessment of reform progress based on students' perspectives.

Using Whole-School Data

Mandela's initial teacher research calendar supported teachers' individual classroom research and designated time for collaborative decision making based on the research in our last weeks of school. Ellen's whole-school focus helped me to see the benefits of examining schoolwide data and research questions throughout the school year, and the importance of ongoing collaborative decision-making opportunities. As a math teacher who loves to play with numbers, Ellen knew from the onset that she would deal with whole-school data. She began before our professional development days, collecting data about our detention policy to answer questions about our use and enforcement of it. Ellen requested staff time to address this whole-school concern, so I realized early on that our teacher research calendar needed to include time for discussion and decision making based on schoolwide data.

I quickly saw the benefits of including a whole-school data focus. With one person in charge of schoolwide data collection, whole-school research required our collective input in shaping an action. I felt our collaboration to be strongest during these discussions. For example, at the end of our first grading period Ellen shared schoolwide grading data that she disaggregated in a number of ways. By examining grades by teacher and discipline, we discovered that math teachers gave the highest percentage of failing grades. Through discussion we determined that although objective assessment is every teacher's goal, in some disciplines teachers are more prone to subjective grading. "He's improving," or "He really shows effort" is generally not factored into a math grade. However, owing to the low literacy levels of our students, effort and improvement often influence the grades teachers give in other disciplines. Our discussion about grades, in combination with the students' low test scores, led us to recognize that while our students got the lowest grades in math, they were

doing poorly in all disciplines. They needed extra support. As a result, we opened an additional after-school tutoring opportunity, employed peer tutors, and publicized this resource to parents of failing students. Ellen further disaggregated the data to show concentrations of failing students (students with four to five D or F grades) in particular classes. These concentrations helped us to understand why teachers experienced particular difficulty with some classes. Ellen, for example, had a class with seventeen failing students, making the teaching and learning more difficult for the collective twenty-five. As experienced teachers, we recognized that a critical mass of successful students in each class supports peer learning and enables teachers to deliver a common curriculum with similar momentum across classes. Unless additional support is provided in a low-performing class, a more conscious effort to create heterogeneous classes is needed. This issue could not be immediately addressed, but we agreed to respond to this concern in the following year's programming.

Ellen's data also raised our awareness of our students with only one D or F grade. Because we view such students as generally proactive learners, we had to consider how we could better support them toward improvement. We also discussed ways to shape our school culture and community to address learner apathy. We agreed to an ongoing system of rewards and recognition, more school events, and more parent involvement.

We continue to examine grade data and discuss ways to improve student achievement schoolwide. In addition to the schoolwide decisions (for example about heterogeneous classrooms and learner apathy), I imagine that some teachers made individual decisions as they compared their grading patterns and policies and considered questions like: Is our grading aligned with our learning objectives? How explicit is our grading criteria? Are we holding high enough standards? In any case, Ellen's thoughtful manipulation of the data gave us food for thought and an opportunity to make informed decisions collectively. The experience with these data played an important role in shaping our collaborative culture.

What I've Learned Leading Inquiry at My School

At this point I could very well brag, "Well, look at my school; we've got it together," and leave it at that. I would, if I didn't understand the recursive nature of teaching and teacher research. My question, What happens when teacher research becomes the professional growth practice at a small school? begs for an ongoing look at a practice that requires modifications to maximize its effectiveness. My analysis of our current research practice takes into account our implementation objectives, the reality of our very busy schedules, and the ideal of teacher research as a practical, sustainable, collaborative professional-growth practice. In the midst of my research, I've already noted some possible shifts that might better support our teacher research practice next year. Here is a preliminary list of lessons that I plan to share with my colleagues at the end of this school year:

1. *Start early*. Teacher research should begin with the school year. Because our professional growth days did not begin until the second marking period, our curricular reform objectives were not driven through a sustained research focus. A research focus on our newly adopted strategies could have made us more accountable to them and helped us to effectively integrate them into our teaching.

2. *Take ownership of the calendar.* Teacher research practice requires fixed meeting times. Our calendar of established meetings seemed to exist in theory only. Not everyone had access to the calendar, and there was no one with clear responsibility for maintaining it. Early teacher research meetings were cancelled or rescheduled, slowing momentum. I blame myself in part for not taking charge and for not establishing ongoing meetings with my principal to address the plan I had drawn up. But I had anticipated commitment to the initial schedule in the form of a reminder: "You're on this Wednesday. What's the plan?" New in the role of leader, I was waiting for permission to show authority. Not so next year.

3. *Redesign the plan as needed.* For example, early in the school year I discovered the importance of time for examination of schoolwide data. Ellen and Patricia's research in particular required ongoing collective analysis and whole-staff decision making, something I had not anticipated in the original design. We gave time to this, but it happened more as an afterthought than a plan. Ideally it should be incorporated into ongoing meetings. Without this time, we miss the opportunity for ongoing collaborative input that could help us respond to our challenges. For example, shortcomings in our homework policy have not yet been addressed because we have not yet established sufficient time for this type of collaborative discussion.

4. *Keep the focus on improved teaching.* I learned that form can obstruct content. The objective of teacher research is improved practice / improved student outcomes. And in our desire to formalize the structure of the meetings (through inclusion of meeting objectives, check-ins, self-assessments, and the like) we may have obscured the natural alignment of teacher research with improving teaching. Limiting discussion of articles, tools, and other structural supports and highlighting the work itself—reflection on teaching and collaborative exchange—will allow the practice to speak for itself and support teaching. "Just do it" is next year's plan.

5. *Keep the planning simple.* At times I had a sense of "the more explanation, the more complication." On top of this, excessive planning diminished time I had for grading papers and developing lessons. My experience with teacher research is that planning can be as simple or as complicated as one desires, but for a lead facilitator with a teacher's schedule, a "less is more" approach is practical. Hence my design plan for next year's meetings proposes following a simple protocol, incorporating tools and information, and relying on the process of group questioning and feedback to support a participant's research presentation. The need for a lead facilitator may continue, so rotation into this role is a fair expectation. If this is the case, not only should the job look easy, it should be easy. I've been told on more than one occasion that real facilitation allows the group to run itself; I think that an established structure goes a long way toward achieving this goal.

Concluding Thoughts

In our small-school design team, my Mandela colleagues and I committed to dual roles, as teacher and leader, and also to the development of a collaborative culture. Our principal, Robin Glover, in her first year as an administrator, engaged us in leadership because she believed in shared decision making and teacher ownership of small schools. It makes sense

that our opportunity for professional growth would be teacher-determined and teacher-facilitated. Because of our focus on reform, we were expecting to make shifts in practice. The tool we needed revealed itself to us! Practical, empowering, and free, teacher research at Mandela is an expression of our confidence; its practice suggests that everything we need we have already.

No matter what model of teacher research I practiced, who controlled it, or how long my commitment, it has always made practical sense to me. I began with an action research model—for me, teacher research has always been about trying out new practice and moving practice toward mastery through a sustained reflective process. As an added benefit, teacher research enables a collegial exchange—reciprocal teaching and learning—that teaches us far more than we could ever learn on our own. I would practice teacher research even if my findings affected only those within the four walls of my school.

My experience of teacher research at Mandela High School represents to me the juncture of idealism and reality I have long sought—producing the teacher ownership to which I aspired. When teacher research practice met teaching practice at Mandela, a practical partnership evolved. And because the Mandela High School vision held a place for teacher leadership and teacher control, teacher research evolved to become teacher-owned and focused on student learning.

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Deborah Juarez *was introduced to teacher research twelve years ago as a fourth-year English teacher in Oakland. Since that original inquiry experience, in which she asked, What happens when race, culture, and class become explicit topics in the classroom? equity has been an ongoing theme in her research. Three years ago she introduced teacher research to the staff of her small school, and this practice is currently in place as their professional development.*

Appendix A: Overview of Teacher Research Process at Mandela

Integral to the structure of Mandela High School is the inquiry process, a process which supports ongoing assessment of structural practice and standards-based teacher practice. Incorporating the inquiry process into the functioning of Mandela High School will

1) Drive designated curricular reforms through theme-based inquiry (example: writing across the curriculum)
2) Promote a culture of professional growth and collaboration through individual reflective practice and ongoing reflective exchange
3) Inform discussion and decision-making involving designs of whole-school systems and practices
4) Build the leadership capacity of practitioners who master the process, engage in decision-making, and take on leadership roles with the process.

The objective of the inquiry process is twofold: improved teacher practice and improved school structural features to improve student achievement. Thus inquiry practitioners will formulate questions focused on this result. In development of an inquiry focus, practitioners will identify specific achievement goals and the strategies being assessed. Inquiry questions will focus on individual practice rooted in school vision and student outcomes (possibly theme-based) or selected whole-school systems or practices (which require assessment to determine effectiveness).

Teachers, counselors, and administrators will engage in the inquiry process through individual practice and whole-group exchange. Whole-group exchange is the driving force behind individual inquiry; it promotes accountability, provides supportive feedback for practitioners, and supports an ongoing focus on inquiry work. Group meetings will take place twice a month. Accommodations will be made at the beginning of the school year to provide time for teacher research meetings. Once inservice Wednesdays begin in mid-October, the group will meet during that time for the remainder of the school year.

A write-up of findings or other form of reporting is another expected outcome of this process. Making our research public will definitely include year-end reporting to parents and the larger community but could also include networking with other schools engaged in research practice; article publication; small-school conference sessions; or teacher research conference workshops. The research group will discuss and select the reporting method(s).

The remaining two-plus Wednesdays will be devoted to decision making related to examined practices. Four questions for decision-making will be addressed:

1) Have curricular reform practices been satisfactorily implemented (or is continued focus required)? Have curricular reform practices achieved desired results or do findings indicate otherwise?
2) Have individual practices achieved desired results? (If so, should certain individual practices be implemented schoolwide?)
3) Have certain structural practices proven effective (or do these practices require replacement or modification)?
4) As a structure, the teacher inquiry process will require examination: How can the inquiry process be improved to better inform decision making and/or promote professional growth (keeping in mind the objective of high student achievement)?

Teacher Research Timeline and Agenda, 2003–2004

September	Introduction to teacher research: what, why and how, writing activity and whole group share
	Question development: the goal and action (strategy), data collection, writing activity and whole group share
October	Protocol usage and feedback modeled; whole group exchange
November	Teacher research writings: an examination of the process; small-group exchange
December	Data analysis; small-group exchange
January	Data analysis; small-group exchange
February	Teacher research articles: some common elements; writing activity
	Assignment: process paper due April___; small group exchange
March	Process paper samples; small group exchange
	A focus on findings; small group exchange
April	Process papers shared
	"Publication" design
May	Decision-making focus
June	Examination of inquiry process

Appendix B: Teacher Research Leadership Model, 2003–2004

At Mandela High, teacher research leadership includes two levels of leadership: lead facilitator and co-facilitator roles. A description of these roles and particular responsibilities of each are described below.

Lead facilitator oversees the yearlong teacher research process and assumes responsibility in the following areas:
   a)   timeline design (meeting dates/objectives and deadlines within the school year)
   b)   inservice design and facilitation (focusing on specific aspects of the teacher research process)
   c)   facilitation in large or small group protocol exchange (which includes modeling of feedback)
   d)   coaching of individual teachers (determined by need or request)
   e)   documentation of process (agenda items, handouts, audio-tapes of meetings)
   f)   selection of cofacilitators and assignment of responsibilities
   g)   ongoing training/support of cofacilitators in all areas of responsibility

Cofacilitators support the lead facilitator in different areas of responsibility, (a) to (e). Selection of cofacilitators happens at the beginning of the year. Initial responsibilities include one or two tasks [(e) or (d) for example] with increasing responsibility as the year progresses (determined by support needs of lead facilitator and/or cofacilitator "readiness").

Leadership development: Research practitioners will be moved into leadership positions as they gain experience from the practice of teacher research and participation in the model. The lead facilitator designs cofacilitation for the year, connecting particular individuals with particular duties, rotating and/or increasing duties, while providing support. The goal is the rotation of the lead facilitator each year.

Cofacilitation Plan for 2003–2004: Cofacilitators Ellen, Patricia, and Leslie rotate through these duties: coaching, small- and large-group facilitation, and inservice design (with lead facilitator). Cofacilitators design the rotation of duties using the timeline, and provide a copy to the lead. Remaining practitioners are encouraged to volunteer themselves in any of these areas based on readiness or interest.

Partners in Inquiry: Embedding Teacher Inquiry into School Reform

Marty Williams, a writing project co-director, cofacilitated a three-year partnership between a local writing project site and a high school in San Francisco. The partnership, funded by a federal grant, provided a range of support to teachers and administrators focused on improving literacy. One major focus of the work included a teacher inquiry group. This essay illustrates how the partnership's teacher inquiry work and a belief in teachers as change agents contributed to literacy reform in a struggling urban high school. Williams explores the dynamics of the school partnership over a three-year period and reflects on how such partnerships can shape both the school and the professional development organization.

By Marty Williams

"How come almost everyone who writes about school reform works someplace other than a school?"

—Teacher-writer JoAnne Dowd quoted in an article on school reform by
Boston Writing Project Director Joe Check (2002)

Often the last person to be heard from in discussions of school reform is the teacher. While many school reform efforts include the notions that teachers must work together collegially and that change in schools and outcomes for students are related to what happens in classrooms, there are few examples of teachers and classroom practice leading school reform efforts. Indeed, classroom practice is often overlooked in favor of changes in school structure and the school day. If classroom practice has been identified as a focus, the reforms often take the form of a set of imported mandates for change or prescribed "teacher-proof" curricula. In the past decade or so, however, there has been a growing movement within school reform that supports teachers as reflective practitioners.

The three-year partnership between the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP), a site of the National Writing Project, and Balboa High School in San Francisco is the story of how a belief in teachers as knowledge makers and change agents, coupled with the practice of teacher inquiry, can support reform in a struggling urban high school. I will take a look at how BAWP and Balboa came together, the program we designed and carried out over a three-year period, and some of the lessons learned from this partnership.

In the fall of 1999, Carol Tateishi and I, director and co-director of the Bay Area Writing Project, prepared to meet Balboa High School teachers. In the spring of 1998, administra-

tive staff at Balboa had applied for and received a three-year Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) grant focused on literacy improvement from the state of California. They had selected the Bay Area Writing Project as their primary support provider. For the next three years, BAWP would be intimately involved with Balboa teachers in a small Teacher Inquiry Group (TIG). The history of the Teacher Inquiry Group at Balboa is one slice of the school's entire CSRD reform effort, but one that shines a light on ways in which teacher inquiry can engage and propel changes in the day-to-day workings of a school.

Context for the Work: Bay Area Writing Project

Education reform organizations come and go. The Bay Area Writing Project, however, has been around for more than thirty years and has, since its inception in 1974, placed teachers at the center of its work. Over these three decades BAWP's primary contribution to school reform has been twofold: 1) improving teaching and learning in individual classrooms, and 2) sharing effective teaching practices through networks of teachers and professional development programs. In recent years, whole-school reform initiatives have shaped BAWP's professional development offerings. BAWP strives to use its collective knowledge and expertise in effective teaching of writing to support large-scale change efforts aimed at addressing and reducing long-standing inequities in academic achievement. BAWP has increased its professional development programs in the large urban districts in the San Francisco Bay Area and focused on issues affecting second language learners and all students struggling with academic discourse and writing.

Balboa High School

Balboa High School, founded in 1928, occupies a full city block in a working-class residential neighborhood in the southeast sector of San Francisco. A staff of more than seventy-five serve a diverse student population of about one thousand students, a lively mix of San Francisco's long-rooted ethnic populations and newer immigrants: African American, Asian, Filipino, and Latino students. Each group comprises 20 to 30 percent of the school's population. In 2003, more than half of the students qualified for free and reduced-fee lunch, about a quarter lived on their own without parents or guardians, and many were brand new to this country.

Once highly regarded as one of San Francisco Unified School District's (SFUSD) college preparatory high schools, in more recent years Balboa has struggled with low test scores, declining graduation rates, and difficulties meeting the educational needs of its students. In 1996 SFUSD designated Balboa as severely underperforming, and amid much local controversy, slated it for "reconstitution."[1] A new administrative and teaching staff was hired, including some former staff who applied for positions and were rehired. A clear majority of the staff was new to the school, and many were new to teaching, choosing the challenge of Balboa with energy and idealism. Three years after reconstitution, many of these teachers

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1 *http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/may97/reconst_5-27.html*

and administrators had come and gone. With an entirely new administrative team (new both to the school and to administration), a large group of new teachers, and lingering feelings of blame for the challenges and struggles facing the school, Balboa headed into a second major wave of reform.

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Grant

The CSRD grant gave Balboa teachers the opportunity and resources to address literacy schoolwide. It aimed to improve parent involvement and communication structures within the school community in order to increase the reading and writing capabilities of Balboa students. Another important goal for both BAWP and Balboa was to keep current teachers at the school and to support their teaching. Balboa had already lost a number of good teachers in the previous couple of years, and the school wanted to hold on to the ones it now had. With these overarching goals in mind, site administrators and BAWP met to work out the key activities of the grant, which included 1) hiring a site literacy specialist (an exemplary teacher on staff who would leave her classroom responsibilities to oversee the schoolwide effort), 2) creating the Literacy Leadership Team (a voluntary group of teachers who would be trained by BAWP), and 3) receiving technical assistance from BAWP.

Balboa chose BAWP as its primary support provider because of the writing project's model of professional development—teachers teaching teachers. BAWP wanted teachers at Balboa to be the primary shapers of the effort to improve student literacy. The literacy specialist would play a key role in guiding the school toward achieving the literacy goals at the heart of Balboa's site plan and its CSRD grant efforts. BAWP teacher-consultant Helen Duffy and I would serve as coordinators and coaches for BAWP's work at the school. The first year Balboa used its grant money to buy books for students and pay teachers to design curriculum for these books. They hired a consultant to support teachers in classroom management and a parent literacy specialist to increase parent involvement in student learning and literacy. They also sent teachers to professional development in advanced placement courses, purchased a comprehensive reading assessment program, and published a student datebook that included student writing. In addition, teachers were paid for time spent in designing curriculum to accompany the new books they had purchased. Also that year, Balboa began organizing teachers and students into small learning communities. All ninth and tenth grade students were enrolled in small learning communities with a focus on academics, service learning, and career/college exploration. In eleventh and twelfth grade, students chose one of several thematic academic pathways: Law; Communication Arts; Health and Science; Wilderness Arts and Literacy Collaborative (Environmental Studies); and International Studies.

"BAWP wanted teachers at Balboa to be the primary shapers of the effort to improve student literacy."

Beginnings of the Partnership: Where the Rubber Meets the Road

I remember well BAWP's first meeting with Balboa teachers in September 1999. Carol and I got off at the wrong subway station and had to charge on foot the mile and a half to the school. A couple of minutes late, but quite warmed up and ready to talk about our work together, we spoke with the teachers assembled in the library. We learned that many teachers felt burned by groups coming from outside and telling them what they needed to do to

make their school better, and they were tired of having professional development crammed down their throats. Few teachers knew about the CSRD grant, and fewer had been closely involved in the drawing up of their school site plan for the year. We tried to communicate to teachers that BAWP was not coming in to tell them what to do, but to help them do what *they* wanted and could do for their students.

Over the next couple of months, Carol, Helen, and I met several times with the administration, a few teacher-leaders from the school, and members of SFUSD's professional development team to agree to a purpose and parameters for our work together. Both the principal and assistant principal were new in their positions, and none of us had been part of writing the grant the previous spring. By early December 1999, we had hammered out a plan for BAWP's work during the first year of the CSRD grant. Our work would focus on writing in all content areas.

One of BAWP's first contributions was to plan for a schoolwide professional development day in December. We organized a menu of BAWP workshops focused on writing across the disciplines. As Carol, Helen, and I participated in the professional development day, we realized that this form of inservice—workshops by exemplary classroom teachers on specific strategies to improve the teaching of writing or to use writing to learn—was too close to what teachers had complained about in our first meeting: outside experts dropping into their school with advice. We wanted the work to grow out of and support the leadership of Balboa's resilient and talented teachers.

The CSRD planning team put together the Literacy Leadership Team (LLT), a small voluntary team from across the disciplines charged with helping to lead the first year's work. (The CSRD planning team included Carol, Helen, and me, as well as teacher-leaders from Balboa, the assistant principal, and the newly identified literacy specialist.) For once it seemed the school had the money to help support teacher leadership, and we were counting on the LLT to get the literacy work off to a strong start.

Year One: 1999–2000

Teacher-Leaders: Testing the Waters, Getting Their Feet Wet

In January of 2000 the LLT held a one-day miniretreat away from the school site at the Marin Headlands Institute just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco. That day the group identified several areas of work to take on. The teachers looked at structures and processes to support literacy that could be put into place at the school, including a bookroom inventory and guidelines for purchasing and using new trade books. Each teacher decided on an area of his or her classroom practice to take a closer look at, creating the starting point for the BAWP-supported teacher inquiry at Balboa. The LLT had two core responsibilities: first, selecting instructional resources and second, designing curriculum to meet the goals for the grant, and participating in the teacher inquiry group led by BAWP.

We left the retreat with a plan and immediate steps to take. LLT members led and participated in lively debates, and they ordered books to support literacy in classrooms across the disciplines. The LLT met once a month to look at curricular materials and make decisions

about book purchases, and BAWP guided them in their review and selection. The team met a second time each month to focus on classroom inquiry. During the inquiry sessions the group gathered over snacks for about an hour and a half at the end of the day to write and to talk about their teaching and learning and to get ideas from their colleagues about how to proceed. Because the group was large and members had different days available to meet, Helen and I split them up and each facilitated a smaller group. We communicated regularly by email and telephone about what was happening in both groups and tried, as much as possible, to use the same reading materials and timelines for the teacher inquiries.

At each session teachers arrived with *Teacher-Researchers at Work* by Marion MacLean and Marian Mohr (1999). Helen and I proposed a semester-long timeline, adapted from the book, as well as a selection of short readings. These were lively meetings as teachers reflected in writing and talk about their classroom teaching.

The topics for inquiry all focused on literacy but were distinctly embedded in each teacher's classroom preoccupations. The question, what is an appropriate balance between visual and written texts as part of a process to understand a concept? came from an art teacher, and What is an effective model for peer response and revision for my students? from an English teacher. Two special education teachers collaborated on a question, Is a social studies/literature collaboration going to improve reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and conceptual understanding for the students we share? Another English teacher focused on his current vocabulary development program, wondering if it was effective, for whom it was successful or unsuccessful, and why. An ESL teacher wanted to know what she could do to develop fluency for reluctant writers and decided to focus on two or three students who were conducting a letter exchange with students from a nearby middle school.

"The topics for inquiry all focused on literacy but were distinctly embedded in each teacher's classroom pre-occupations."

One of the critical activities of the LLT—an activity that shaped much of the future work of the partnership—was the year-end poster share-fair held in the library on a professional development day in May. The share-fair provided LLT teachers with an opportunity to share their questions and the initial findings of their inquiries with the entire staff of Balboa. For teachers, the share-fair was a welcome relief compared to other whole-staff professional development sessions. For an hour and a half, teachers wandered from one LLT teacher's station to another, examining displays of student writing and assignments, and talking about the student artifacts and the LLT teachers' questions and learnings. Some stayed at one station the full time, talking in depth with that teacher and the assembled teachers from across grades and disciplines. It was the first professional development the teachers at Balboa had experienced for quite some time that centered on teachers' day-to-day preoccupations with students. In the words of one teacher,

> It inspired other people to focus upon the aspects of their teaching that they might feel weak and want to improve on . . . a forum for acknowledgement of teachers just day in and day out doing their thing and the tiny successes that really make their whole year . . . [2]

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2 From a taped interview with a teacher at Balboa High School.

The period for the inquiry was brief, January to May, and it was sandwiched in between a thousand and one other activities, but this experience of sharing their research—and their teaching—with one another was fresh and inspiring for the teachers. It set the tone as we picked up again in the fall of 2000.

Year Two: 2000–2001

Teacher Inquiry Group: A Learning Community, an Oasis

Reflecting on the first year of the partnership, Helen wrote that the LLT was "confounded by the multiple tasks that the group was being asked to perform: teacher inquiry, decision making about the distribution of resources, and decisions about professional development activities at the school."[3] We began year two by prioritizing the teacher inquiry work for the LLT. We moved the responsibility for some of the CSRD grant's demands to other teacher groups at Balboa. For example, departments and small learning communities assumed responsibility for administering and scoring reading and writing assessments. In addition, BAWP met individually with the Social Studies Department and the Science Department faculties to discuss the inclusion of writing in these curricular areas.

The LLT reshaped and renamed itself as the Teacher Inquiry Group (TIG), a voluntary group with a single focus on teacher inquiry. New teachers joined, drawn by the energy of the previous spring's share-fair. Some teachers from year one decided not to pursue teacher inquiry, and some began with the group in the fall but fell away after the first or second meeting. The final group of twelve, representing teachers of English / language arts, special ed, mathematics, science, reading, and electives, made up the TIG, which met once a month after school for about an hour and a half to two hours. Helen and I began the group by proposing a year-long timeline, again borrowed from *Teacher-Researchers at Work*. CSRD funds paid TIG participants the SFUSD hourly stipend for their time.

About a month into the school year, a two-day retreat with other California Writing Project (CWP) sites helped shape the second year's partnership.[4] Three TIG members accompanied me to the retreat, which focused on CWP sites' partnerships with schools and districts. This gathering provided teachers the opportunity to present to other CWP directors and teachers what we were up to in our BAWP/Balboa Partnership: what they hoped for from the partnership and the steps we were taking together to get there. In a sense, they were for the first time going public outside their school sharing Balboa's teacher inquiries and explaining their place in the school's reform efforts.

The meeting afforded the teachers a much-needed and rarely experienced opportunity to meet and write and talk with each other, in an extended fashion, about their work. One of the Balboa teachers, still new to the school and relatively new to teaching, admitted she had

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3 Excerpted from an unpublished article by Helen Duffy, BAWP teacher-consultant.

4 The thirty-year-old California Writing Project (CWP) is a network of seventeen regional sites, nine housed on University of California campuses and eight on California State University campuses.

been uncomfortable with her part in the share-fair the previous spring. She felt that with many more-experienced teachers at Balboa, she was uneasy placing herself in what she perceived as the "expert's" role. Rethinking how the TIG might present its work to the rest of the faculty, she proposed a midyear sharing of questions rather than a summative year-end session. She hoped to invite other teachers to give advice, opinions, and suggestions about where the inquiry should go. Her idea expressed the desire to share the power of inquiry and collegial reflection with all of the teachers at her school, regardless of whether or not they participated in the TIG. We decided that rather than remaining isolated from other teachers at the school, during this second year of the partnership the TIG would open up its process of inquiry to all teachers, and we proposed this midyear invitational dialogue as both the form and content for the upcoming professional development day.

Back at Balboa, the idea of a midyear sharing was well received. While involved teachers were beginning to count on the TIG as an oasis where they could share ideas and questions about their teaching practice, some were concerned that nonparticipating teachers might perceive the small group as elitist. They wanted to build collegial connections with teachers across the school. They thought recasting their sharing as an invitation for others to join the conversation at a staff development day in March rather than presenting findings in June might help.

As facilitators, both Helen and I assumed that an entire school year devoted to inquiry would be much more productive than the rushed investigations of the spring semester the year before. In the early months of the school year, TIG members continued their classroom inquiries and met to share and fine-tune their most pressing questions. Yet they struggled with systematic collecting of data or evidence related to their research, and questions changed from meeting to meeting. Teachers arrived wanting to talk about what had most recently occurred in their classrooms, but without much to report on their inquiries. By December, inertia set in as TIG members got stuck trying to perfect their questions, and lost the momentum to move from questions to collecting and looking at data from their classrooms.

Our growing familiarity with the day-to-day challenges facing TIG members kept Helen and me from insisting that they adhere to our agreed-upon timeline. We wanted to be flexible and find ways to adapt the process. Another BAWP teacher-consultant passed along to me a protocol for structured conversations that she had used with teachers at her school site. Like so many important tools shared by teachers, it came to me as a crumpled photocopy—an article by Simon Hole and Grace McEntee, "Reflection Is at the Heart of Practice" (1999). (See appendix A and B for the protocol for shared reflection and the protocol for individual reflection that we adapted from this article.)

Anxious to get the TIG back on track, Helen and I introduced the protocol for shared reflection at our December meeting. As in our other meetings, group members first wrote for about ten minutes. This time they wrote about an incident from their teaching day—perhaps an encounter with a student, a conversation with a colleague, or simply something surprising or lamentable or worth celebrating that remained in their minds from the day or the past week. After a brief sharing of these anecdotes, we chose one, by consensus, for closer investigation. The author of the anecdote had a few minutes to read what she had written and to talk a bit more about what had happened. Other members of the group asked clarifying

questions until they felt they had a full sense of the incident. Then the author listened while the other group members discussed the anecdote's significance and implications for teaching practice. The group made connections to their own teaching and made suggestions for next steps. At the end, the anecdote's author shared insights she had gained from listening to her colleagues discuss her situation. Finally, the group discussed how the protocol had worked for them. All of this happened in the space of an hour, helping teachers move efficiently from the hubbub of the day to deep shared reflection about significant issues.

The first time I facilitated the protocol, I felt that the group had chosen the wrong story. It didn't seem rich or representative of the issues I was hearing about from teachers and I worried that it wouldn't yield much of import. However, after the group discussion, I realized it didn't matter which story was chosen because each one was rooted in realities from the daily life at the school and, under close scrutiny, revealed essential issues that required teacher intervention. The TIG teachers brought their own burning issues to the discussion and their probing questions brought out hidden and important threads in the story. Often the story shared by a colleague and the ensuing discussion of its implications for teaching helped another teacher think about his or her teaching and inquiry in a new way. One teacher's use of student interviews to probe her students' understanding of their academic growth led another teacher to give her students a survey about the effectiveness of some of her classroom practices and the use of class time. Another teacher, hearing from others about how they assessed students along the way, changed the way he conducted weekly quizzes in his classroom.

"They decided to share process rather than product."

The TIG had awakened! Reinvigorated by hearing one another talk freshly and honestly about their teaching challenges, the group members sharpened their focus on inquiry and rededicated themselves to collecting data from their classrooms. They also began to plan how they might best share their works in progress with their colleagues in March.

It became evident that the TIG was making a significant contribution to how administrators and teachers across the school thought about staff development. The enthusiastic evaluations from the previous spring's share-fair, as well as the positive reports about the value of the TIG from its participants, led the assistant principal to invite the TIG teachers to coordinate the two whole-school professional development days remaining in the year. During an afternoon professional development day in March 2001, the TIG shared their midyear inquiries with the rest of the staff. Following their plan to discuss work in progress, TIG teachers asked colleagues about their own promising classroom practices and insights, and requested suggestions about where to go next with their inquiries. Folks clustered around the small display stations and talked with individual teachers about their inquiry and their classrooms. TIG teachers created a short evaluation to get feedback from other teachers about the structure and content of the day. Typical responses were like these:

> I think this was an excellent idea. It opens the doors for dialogue, free sharing of ideas, and inspiration, most of all—camaraderie.

> We could do this all next year for our P.D. Thanks for your time—I want to be part of this group!

As spring went on, the TIG continued to meet, regularly using the protocol for shared reflection. They were also moving toward analyzing the data they had collected so that they could write about their findings for the year. The second professional development day they were to coordinate fell in May, near the end of the school year. Initially TIG teachers intended to share their final reflections on their inquiries for the year, but several balked, feeling they hadn't yet added substantially to what they had shared in March. They decided to share process rather than product, and led the entire staff in the use of the protocol for shared reflection. A member of the TIG group facilitated each small group. The time passed quickly as small groups of teachers engaged in earnest collegial discussions of classroom dilemmas. In their evaluations, teachers overwhelmingly requested this kind of rich exchange focused on immediate classroom teaching as their primary form of professional development at Balboa High School.

In May we reflected on the year. The twelve teachers in the TIG had taken responsibility for two days of highly praised professional development. The administration asked them to be a professional development planning team for the next school year. TIG teachers were ambivalent about accepting this offer. They identified the TIG as an oasis, a sanctuary, a place they could come to and really be themselves, and they didn't want to lose that by becoming a staff development task force. They decided the TIG should continue to focus on inquiry, and interested individual teachers could take up the challenge of helping to plan the professional development. They clung with intensity to their right to meet as an inquiry group, unfettered by the demands to structure support for the whole school. The TIG depended on money from the CSRD grant and facilitation support from BAWP, but the work belonged to the teachers. The competing needs and, in this case, a genuine desire on the part of the administration to involve teachers in their professional development, were threatening the one island of sanity the TIG teachers had been able to create for themselves.

"Time passed quickly as small groups of teachers engaged in earnest collegial discussions of classroom dilemmas."

Year Three: 2001–2002

BAWP's Teacher Research in Urban Schools: Collaboration for Knowing

For the third year, the last year of the CSRD grant, the TIG was able to remain an inquiry group. The administration also worked with individual teacher-leaders from the TIG to plan professional development for the school. The practice of inquiry and collegial sharing was becoming an important part of how the school community envisioned and conducted professional development.

During this third year of our partnership with Balboa, BAWP received a grant from the Spencer Foundation to continue to develop our teacher research program in urban schools. The money from the grant supported a group of thirteen teacher research group facilitators and thirty-seven participating teachers who met in site-based teacher research groups.[5] Balboa's TIG became part of that network, and a TIG member from the previous year

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5   See the essays by Tateishi, McKamey, Juarez, and Roth in this book for examples of work that was supported by the Spencer
    Foundation grant.

became a cofacilitator with Helen and me of Balboa's TIG. Now Balboa teachers had their own sanctuary at home, plus a larger network of like-minded teacher-researchers from around the Bay Area with whom they could share their work.

One Saturday in January 2002, Balboa teachers gathered with other Bay Area teacher-researchers in BAWP's network. They participated in workshops on data collection and data analysis and discussed their works in progress in small groups. In May, each TIG member contributed a piece of writing to the BAWP publication *Working Papers of Teacher Researchers*, and the group gathered with teachers in the Spencer Foundation grant network to share and comment upon each other's inquiry and writing.

At our final meeting with Balboa teachers in May 2002, we acknowledged the end of the three-year CSRD grant that had provided financial support for BAWP to facilitate teacher inquiry at Balboa. While BAWP would look for ways to continue our partnership with Balboa, we were at an ending point. When Balboa wrote up its findings for the three years of the CSRD grant, teachers and administrators articulated the impact of BAWP and the Teacher Inquiry Group on the school as a whole. The report chronicled the ups and downs of student achievement, grades, test scores, and the like, noting that while we always hope for miraculous improvements, it almost never happens quickly. Despite some notable gains in achievement, many Balboa students continued to struggle with basic academic literacy. However, the exodus of teachers had slowed, and although a few teachers left the school right after the end of the grant, most teachers involved in the TIG remain at Balboa today.

Learnings

So how do we understand the impact of the BAWP-supported teacher inquiry for three years at Balboa? In a meeting in fall of 2003 with Balboa's principal, two TIG teachers described the teacher inquiry with BAWP as the most powerful professional development they had ever experienced. They identified teacher inquiry with BAWP as changing their notions of what professional development could be. They claimed inquiry as essential to the work of the small learning communities and recommended it as the way to support teachers new to the school. They also itemized what they had learned about examining their own teaching practice and sharing it with others. The TIG teachers mentioned how important it was to have other eyes to help analyze problems of student achievement and faltering teaching practices, as well as to help identify particular strengths of students, curriculum, and teaching approaches. They highlighted the way in which regular opportunities, small and large, to discuss teaching with colleagues supported their effectiveness in the classroom. They stressed the importance of creating collegial connections around the school, both as a way of building and sustaining morale through the teaching year and as a way of mentoring individuals who are new to teaching or new to the school. Overall, they emphasized the power of the TIG in helping them to better understand and change what was happening for students in their classrooms. Carol and I also pointed to the importance of TIG teachers writing about their inquiry and practice, creating permanent documents to be shared with other teachers.

The impact of teacher inquiry can be seen on the overall school culture at Balboa: BAWP and the processes and tools we helped develop with teachers have allowed the collabora-

tion across the school and within small learning communities to deepen and continue. As outsiders with a philosophy of drawing on the expertise of the Balboa teachers, we helped identify teacher-leaders who informed the large decisions that affect their school, their students, and their teaching and learning as professionals.

The collaboration between BAWP and the TIG has also changed how professional development is carried out at Balboa, in both content and form. The school developed ways to encourage and provide opportunities for collegial conversations about teaching and learning that could feed back into classrooms. The Teacher Inquiry Group created new ways teachers could talk to each other about teaching. Teachers who participated in the TIG discovered the power of writing up their reflections, observations, and discoveries about teaching and learning. Finally, teachers, with the time and opportunity to reflect on what was and was not happening in their classrooms, were able to make incremental changes in their teaching practices that had an impact on student learning.

We have seen many improvements at Balboa since the start of our partnership. By 2004, more than 90 percent of Balboa teachers were fully credentialed, compared to about 75 percent in 1999. The four-year estimated dropout rate for students decreased, with nearly 22 percent of students dropping out in 1998–1999 to fewer than 10 percent dropping out in 2002–2003. From having only 67 percent of its student body participate in the school's state-mandated tests in 1999, Balboa now has 99 percent of students participating.

We have been heartened by Balboa students' incremental but steady growth in achievement on reading and language arts tests. In 1999–2000, 9.3 percent of all students scored at or above the 50th percentile in reading; in 2004 that jumped to 26.6 percent. Additionally, fewer students scored below and far below basic on the English language arts test. The school's Academic Performance Index (API) rose, and while Balboa still received the lowest ranking on a scale of 1–10, in 2004 the California Department of Education removed Balboa from its list of underperforming schools.[6] Balboa had made adequate yearly progress for the first time in many years. Also in 2004, 67 percent of Balboa seniors graduated having completed the course requirements for admission to either the California State University or University of California school systems. Thirty-three percent of that year's graduating class went on to college.

BAWP's Teacher Research Program

BAWP's partnership with Balboa and the story it tells has informed BAWP's teacher research programs, giving us three years of intense involvement in an urban school to examine closely as we continue to develop our program. The three years at Balboa confirmed our belief that a teacher inquiry approach is one of the strongest forms of professional development. Our partnership with Balboa teachers has also raised and answered some questions for us at BAWP about how our programs fit within the context of whole-school reform. The chal-

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6   As part of its assessment system, the state gives each school in California a score and rank on its Academic Performance Index
    (API). The numbers are based on a compilation of results from a range of mandated standardized tests.

lenges and opportunities at Balboa have helped us think about the kind of structures and resources that are needed by teachers in highly impacted urban schools.

Teacher inquiry is now woven into most of BAWP's professional development work that takes place at school sites. Rather than simply bringing workshops highlighting effective classroom approaches, BAWP teacher-consultants are able to guide teachers through analyses of their own student work in order to plan more effective instruction. In the year since the partnership with Balboa, I have developed a series of questions that I and others at BAWP bring to schools early on in our collaborative work (see sidebar). These questions are designed to help us understand what structures and processes to support teacher inquiry already exist in the schools. While these questions are not a direct result of the collaboration with Balboa, they build on the understandings of school-based inquiry that were gained there.

We know that, while the role of the insider/outsider occupies a delicate position, it allows the consultant to offer valuable assistance to teachers. Inside enough to know the day-to-day challenges and richness of a school site, BAWP also offered outside perceptions and perspectives, and opportunities to place the school site efforts in a larger context. We brought experience in teacher research and help in facilitating the work of the TIG. We brought snacks and journals, articles and books, agendas and writing prompts. We brought timelines and designated meeting times and the reminder to begin with reflection.

> **Questions to consider when starting school-based teacher inquiry**
>
> How do you currently draw from your existing knowledge pool, from teachers?
>
> What systems are in place to learn from teachers' work?
>
> How is teacher reflection encouraged at your school?
>
> How do you define your professional learning goals?
>
> When are you able to spend time on matters that relate to student achievement?
>
> What are you doing already?

From BAWP's perspective, it was important for Balboa to select its own support provider and to have the accompanying CSRD financial resources to support the collaborative development of a program. Money paid for BAWP's time, which allowed the site to work closely with Balboa for three years, and it paid teachers for theirs. Money purchased new sets of books and time to create curriculum. There was money for substitute teachers so that TIG members could be released for a day to share their inquiries with other teachers. New opportunities for collaboration opened up, within and throughout the school community. TIG members had the means to get away from school, to meet with teachers from other schools and districts to discover they were not alone in their thinking and working. Throughout this process, the thoughtful support from Balboa's administrators and the schoolwide focus on improving literacy gave TIG members a larger purpose for their individual classroom efforts.

We also learned from the tension between BAWP's plan to develop school-site leaders to lead teacher inquiry and the teachers' need to pursue their own research with their students. The Balboa teacher cofacilitating the TIG struggled to balance the competing demands on her time: her teaching, her research, her leadership role in her small learning community and the TIG, and increasing requests for her leadership throughout the school. While it was challenging for her, it cemented the importance of the TIG as a homegrown leadership group for Balboa.

While certainly not a quick fix for a whole school's problems, teacher inquiry can help to grow a school culture that challenges inequities for students. It is slow, and we need to carry out the careful nurturing of the teachers who will create an equitable school, always paying attention to what is happening for students here and now. We believe teacher inquiry, with a focus on making a difference for students, makes this growth possible. The opportunity to engage in a multiyear effort with teachers at Balboa moved our thinking at BAWP forward to inform our continuing efforts to construct a viable structure and support for teacher inquiry for equity in urban schools.

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Marty Williams is currently co-director of the Bay Area Writing Project where for the past seven years she has coordinated the project's contracted professional development programs to improve the teaching of writing in schools throughout the San Francisco Bay Area counties. She has been a reading and writing teacher for more than twenty-six years, and has been actively involved in urban school reform for most of that time. Teacher research has been an inseparable part of her educational practice, and she continues to work with teachers on the use of inquiry as professional development. Williams has worked in community-based, out-of-school literacy projects, in popular education projects, at New College of California, and, for sixteen years, as a teacher in the San Francisco Unified School District. She is a poet and, with the Bay Area Writing Project, has developed many opportunities for teachers who are also writers to write and publicly share their writing.

Appendix A: Protocol for Shared Reflection

This protocol adapted from S. Hole and G. McEntee's "Reflection is at the Heart of Practice" [ASCD's *Educational Leadership* 56 (8) 34-7] appeared on these pages. The full article can be found on the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) website at *www.ascd.org.*

Appendix B: Protocol for Individual Reflection

This protocol adapted from S. Hole and G. McEntee's "Reflection is at the Heart of Practice" [ASCD's *Educational Leadership* 56 (8) 34-7] appeared on these pages. The full article can be found on the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) website at *www.ascd.org*.

Working Together: Designing a Districtwide Action Research Plan for Professional Development

In Tucson, Arizona, a group of teachers, working with a supportive district adminis-trator, established teacher research as a districtwide option for teachers' ongoing pro-fessional development. The teacher research plan was intended to help teachers better understand and meet the needs of the district's mostly low-income and Hispanic stu-dents. Here Deborah Green tells the story of how the new teacher research program was established, emphasizing the importance of careful planning, background research, hands-on experience, and plenty of time to introduce and explain the process.

By Deborah Green

Introduction

My belief in the power of teacher inquiry to improve classroom practice was put to the test four years ago, when I began working with a small group of teachers in my district to inves-tigate the possibility of using action research as a districtwide professional development program. These four years have been rich ones for me, as I've learned that teacher inquiry affects students and teachers alike. I've learned that when teacher inquiry is offered as a form of professional development, it can build a community of learners by creating time and space for teachers to be reflective, to look closely at student work, and to collaborate with other educators. Through thoughtful inquiry, teachers can improve their knowledge of their students and their understanding of the curriculum; they can consider different ways of assessing what students have learned; they can question whether or not students know something; and they can examine their own role in developing *all* students' understanding. As a professional development model, teacher inquiry also builds strong bonds among teachers, which can have a positive impact on their classrooms.

My school district is located in Tucson, Arizona, sixty miles north of the U.S.-Mexico bor-der. As one of seven districts in the city, it serves a community that is primarily low-income and Hispanic (see appendix A for student population demographics).

A large percentage of our students speak Spanish as their first language and come from homes where Spanish is the only language spoken. Meeting the needs of students who don't speak English has become a challenge, particularly since Arizona recently passed a law pro-hibiting bilingual education. The district also has high dropout and transient rates. Not only do many students move from one school to another, but children often come to school hav-ing missed anywhere from weeks to years of formal schooling. All of these conditions cre-

Planning Districtwide Action Research: Our Yearly Goals

Year One

Find out everything we could about action research.

Find out if action research would benefit students, and if it is something teachers could do or would want to do.

Evaluate action research in relation to Career Ladder criteria for professional development programs.

Year Two

Create a cadre of trainers/leaders.

Identify elements that would be used to create our action research program.

ate pressing equity issues in our classrooms, which teachers must deal with on a daily basis. These issues are woven throughout this essay.

In this essay, I describe a design for a districtwide plan for teacher inquiry—a plan that offers teachers a choice in their learning. Teacher choice begins at the district level in Tucson, where we have the option of being involved in Career Ladder, a performance-based compensation program that provides teachers with opportunities for continued professional development. Teachers can also take advantage of more traditional professional development offerings, in which the district administration addresses issues such as poverty, bilingual education, and the readiness skills of students through skills-based professional development.

My involvement with what came to be called the Action Research Plan began when I responded to an email from the Career Ladder office inviting teachers to serve on a committee to investigate action research as another option in Career Ladder's professional development program. Initially, nineteen teachers responded to this email, including teachers from kindergarten through middle school as well as three librarians. Several of us came from science or medical backgrounds, and we felt that we had a good understanding of the research process. All of us were looking for a new challenge or a more meaningful way of looking at what was going on in our classrooms.

To be honest, none of us really understood the magnitude of the job we had taken on. Over the next years we would immerse ourselves in the theory and practice of teacher research, design a multifaceted program with an embedded leadership strand, and begin to see the fruits of our collective labor. At every turn, we were faced with a steep learning curve that helped deepen our reflections and contributed to our own development as leaders.

The First Year—Investigating the Process

In our first year we were charged with the task of finding out everything we could about action research. Our goal was to find out if this approach would benefit students, and if it was something that teachers could do or would want to do. We also had to keep in mind Career Ladder's criteria for professional development, which included thirty hours of instruction and an accountability component, requiring written documentation.

We began our work by reading *Guiding School Improvement With Action Research* by Richard Sagor (2000), and other articles about professional development and the role of action research in school improvement. We met once a month to discuss these readings, which helped us define action research—and specifically teacher research. The texts also gave us a common vocabulary for discussing our work, and a way of comparing action research programs outside our Career Ladder program. Along the way, many of us realized we had been doing research in our classrooms for years, but had never had a name for the

journaling and data-collecting we had done, nor a clear purpose for what we were doing. We just knew it helped us understand our students better.

Beyond reading and talking about action research, we felt that it was important to have first-hand knowledge of the process. We thought that conducting our own research would give us a much clearer understanding of action research and what it involved. For this we turned to the Southern Arizona Writing Project, a site of the National Writing Project, at the University of Arizona. Four teachers (including me) volunteered to participate in its yearlong Teacher Research and Inquiry Institute (TRI). Participating in the TRI would give us the vital experience of doing action research, and we could see if the course might meet Career Ladder's professional development requirements.

At the monthly district meetings, those of us who had volunteered to join the TRI—we eventually became known by the committee as the "seniors"—reported back, discussed what we had learned, and talked about the research we were doing in our classrooms. Our work covered a wide range of topics. I spent that year investigating what would happen if I increased dialogue and storytelling before writing assignments. Would my second-graders' writing—especially that of my second language learners—improve? A middle school teacher investigated ways of increasing the involvement of parents whose children had missed one or more years of school. Another middle school teacher looked at how students assessed their own work.

However, our inquiries went beyond what we learned about our students, about doing teacher research, and about our own classroom practice. Of particular importance, we learned the value of collaborating with other teacher researchers. This realization was a critical point in our work together as a committee. We ended the year understanding the power of collaboration and action research in the lives and work of teachers—and saw their potential role in the professional development offerings of our district. Action research was a vehicle through which the district could improve equity in instruction by giving teachers support and time to look at their own instructional practices, explore curriculum issues, conduct case studies, and work on schoolwide improvement plans. We also concluded that the existing TRI would be a beneficial component of our final program, because as an established course, it had a level of expertise we didn't yet have within the district. The TRI directors had already put together a comprehensive curriculum to guide teachers through the entire process: finding a question to research, collecting and analyzing data, locating references and resources, and writing a final report.

Examine other models of districtwide action research programs.

Year Three

Explore staff development possibilities that include teacher research and collaborative support groups.

Provide leadership roles for district teachers.

Educate district leaders about teacher research to help refocus their thinking about staff development and garner their support.

Create a model for Career Ladder through which all district teachers would have the option to participate in teacher research.

Year Four

Work in progress: continue to revise program and respond to emerging challenges.

The Second Year—Learning the Skills of Teacher Research

Building on what we had learned in the first year from our reading, research, and discussions, as well as from our experience in the TRI, we began our second year believing that in order to create and facilitate an action research program for the district, it was important for all of us on the committee to have a clear understanding of what was involved: not only what models were already out there, but also what doing action research was really like. That year, all ten members of the pilot committee (including the four seniors) attended the TRI with the idea that if we were going to be inquiry leaders, we needed to understand first-hand the process of doing action research. In addition, we continued to meet monthly with the Career Ladder director to share what we were learning and talk about what the final district program might look like.

We set three goals for our second year:

- to create a cadre of trainers/leaders
- to identify elements that would be used to create our action research program
- to examine other models of districtwide action research programs.

"If we were going to be inquiry leaders, we needed to understand firsthand the process of doing action research."

It was a year of hard work and reflection. In addition to our regular teaching duties, each of us attended the TRI, conducted our own research, reflected on our professional practice, and gathered information about other action research programs. We met regularly as a committee, kept notes, and discussed the role of the facilitator. We had many conversations, formal and informal, about what the final program would look like.

By the end of the year we had agreed on two critical things: the program must be voluntary, and the training process for inquiry leaders would take at least two years. We had all taken part in programs that had been mandated by the district. We knew the resistance and lack of buy-in these mandated programs elicited, and their failure, in many cases, to bring about real change. We also now knew, from our experience as researchers, how much time and dedication would be needed for the program to be successful. By making action research voluntary, we believed we would avoid resistance and gain the cooperation the program would need in order to succeed. The requirement for at least two years of leadership training also came out of our own experience. At the end of the first year, each of us felt we were just getting a handle on the inquiry process; in no way did we believe we were ready to guide someone else through it.

The Third Year—Putting the Program Together

The third year of the pilot project was key in the development of our district's teacher research model. The four senior TRI participants from our ten-member pilot group had spent a week prior to the new school year at a workshop for coaches sponsored by the Southern Arizona Writing Project. This training showed us ways to support one another in the teacher research process. We took turns conducting the group meetings, which provided an opportunity to hone our facilitation skills. These skills were crucial, as we knew that we would all be playing strong leadership roles in the districtwide teacher research process.

Our goal in the third year was to create a new paradigm in district/teacher partnerships. Specifically, we wanted

- to explore staff development possibilities that included teacher research and collaborative support groups
- to provide leadership roles for district teachers
- to educate district leaders about teacher research in order to help refocus their thinking about staff development and garner their support
- to create a model for Career Ladder through which all district teachers would have the option to participate in teacher research.

These were lofty goals, but we were ready to take on the challenge.

That year, the four of us who had initially participated in the TRI attended the National Writing Project Annual Meeting in Atlanta, where we presented our work. That presentation helped to solidify our vision. We received helpful feedback from conference participants and learned about other teacher research programs throughout the country. With this knowledge, we further brainstormed what the districtwide Career Ladder alternative program might look like. For several hours, we huddled under the steps of an escalator at the convention center with large sheets of butcher paper. Together we created a working copy of the new program. We struggled with how to meet all Career Ladder requirements, especially documentation. What kind of written documentation could we reasonably ask people to do? How could we get teachers to share their work with other teachers in the district, and should this be a requirement? We knew that trying something new can be scary and that committing oneself to something new for a whole school year can be even scarier. So we looked at different models of teacher research to see how to make the process manageable and understandable within the school year. Then, with the help of the rest of the committee, we arrived at our final draft, which included five inquiry options ranging from a single eight-week mini-inquiry to a full two-year leadership training cycle. We hoped that, having a range of options to choose from, teachers would be more willing to take a risk and try action research (appendix B includes the application and list of options for 2003–2004).

The end of the year brought us together frequently to discuss how we might share this new teacher research program with our teachers and administrators. We were concerned about how to share our knowledge of teacher research with teachers, knowing that it is often difficult for teachers to view change positively. We also knew that our teachers often have far too many professional development initiatives and options to consider. Would they want one more? How might new teachers look at teacher research, when they are often paralyzed by the overwhelming teaching task ahead of them? Early experiences sharing what we had learned with teacher colleagues had taught us that we needed to balance our enthusiasm with ample information, and provide the time for teachers to process that information before asking them to commit to a new program.

At the beginning of the 2003 school year, the Career Ladder office presented district teachers with an opportunity to sample the variety of alternatives available to them through a dis-

trictwide Career Ladder Fair. Our pilot group attended this fair to explain the teacher research options to attendees. At the same time, the Career Ladder director, Cheryl Siqueiros, presented the model and rationale to district administrators. We were finally ready to implement the program that had been in the making for three years.

The Fourth Year—Our Work in Progress

Our implementation year got off to a good start. Fifteen teachers ranging from kindergarten to middle school signed up. Fourteen of these chose to do three eight-week mini-inquiries, and one chose to participate in the Teacher Research Institute. The fourteen teachers in the mini-inquiry cycles were divided into three teacher research support groups, by school location. Each teacher had his or her own research question. Most questions focused on English language learners (ELL)[1]; however, one teacher focused on developing math skills in his self-contained special-education class.

Each teacher was expected to attend at least three meetings per eight-week period. All three groups got together once every eight weeks to share their work with one another. At the end of the year, participants shared their work with administrators and other interested teachers in a program that included roundtable presentations and panel discussions.

"The work that each of these teachers did was remarkable."

The work that each of these teachers did was remarkable. Their confidence in themselves as researchers and their understanding of their students grew dramatically over the year. For example, a teacher whose students had all been identified as having severe learning disabilities (SLD) began the year asking if an electronic device would help his SLD students master math facts. By the end of the year, he was exploring what types of problem solving in higher-level math his SLD students could do if they were given calculators to perform basic math functions. For the first time in his teaching career, his students were successfully exploring perimeter, area, and volume.

As inspiring as this year was, however, we encountered several challenges along the way as we worked to get this new program up and running. Among these were:

- *Maintaining communication among facilitators.* Although we were all attending monthly planning meetings, we discovered that we often left meetings with differing understandings. To resolve this, one member volunteered to take detailed notes and share them with the rest of us.
- *Establishing clearly defined roles for facilitators.* The role of the facilitator is evolving into one that could be called "participant instructor": we have to do our own research at the same time that we are providing workshops and small-group guidance. We are working to come up with a system that meets the needs not only of the participants but also of the facilitators.

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1 Our population is 98 percent Hispanic, and a large majority of this group speak English as their second language. Of those who speak English as their first language, many speak nonacademic English and cannot pass the language proficiency test. Since Arizona now has a law against bilingual education, this issue is at the forefront of many teachers' concerns.

- *Ensuring effective planning and focus for each meeting.* Some facilitators and participants enjoyed having the freedom to make last-minute changes in the agenda or schedule of meetings. Others were very uncomfortable with this practice and wanted meeting dates and agenda topics to be set in advance.

- *Considering the implications of group composition.* We had divided the groups up by site, thinking it would be easier for people at the same site to meet regularly together. However, one group was already meeting two hours a week at their school and asked to be split up in order to get a different perspective on their work.

- *Managing time constraints.* The challenge of teaching research techniques and expecting teachers to conduct research all within an eight-week time period is one we are continuing to address. We have experimented with running three consecutive minicycles so that teachers become increasingly comfortable with the research techniques, allowing a stronger focus on the research question itself.

- *Coordinating options.* We hope to find a way to do this more systematically in the future.

Our pilot group planned to meet during the summer to consider these challenges, and to assemble a more solid curriculum for next year.

Suggestions for Others Thinking About Leading Teacher Research

In addition to allowing sufficient time for the processes of program and leadership development (our journey illustrates the need for this) and thinking through the challenges listed in the section above, I would like to offer these suggestions to others who may be thinking about leading teacher research at the district level:

- Have someone on the inside, such as a principal or an administrator, act as an advocate; this is key to the success of the program.

- Consider outside networks for support; we found it very helpful to have the Southern Arizona Writing Project as an outside resource in planning curriculum and as an option for teachers in the program.

- Be open to suggestions from the participants to modify the program to meet their needs.

- Provide a mechanism, like a binder or handbook, to help participants make sense of the curriculum/program, and for reference later on.

- Provide a book such as *Living the Questions* by Ruth Hubbard and Brenda Power (1999) for participants to use as a reference.

Our journey over the past four years has confirmed our belief that inquiry can provide teachers with meaningful and productive methods for solving problems and working with students. As I sat with participating teachers at the end of this year, I heard them talk about the gratification of being in control of their own professional development and using systematic methods to find answers to the questions that face them each day in their classrooms. They also talked about how much they appreciated being able to take a project through a full year, allowing them to reflect on their own practices and make changes along the way to better meet the needs of their students. Throughout this journey my colleagues and I worked together, supported each other to overcome the inevitable doubts and frustra-

tions that arose, and had the help of a program director who believed in us. This collaboration and mutual support has given us confidence in our knowledge that the work we are doing is important to students and fellow teachers, and we look forward to being part of the action research program for years to come.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the other seniors in our pilot group—Deborah Dimmett, Suzanne Kaplan, and Deborah Vath—for their support and contributions to this project.

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Deborah Green has been teaching for twelve years at Liberty Elementary School in Tucson, Arizona, where 95 percent of the students qualify for free/reduced-price lunch and 92 percent are Hispanic/Latino. She participated in the Teacher Research Institute sponsored by the Southern Arizona Writing Project and has been involved with teacher research for the past eight years. She helped design, and continues to lead, a districtwide program that offers teacher research as an alternative option for professional development. Her teacher inquiry questions arise from her desire to maintain students' cultural identity within a traditional school setting and have included looking at how oral language affects writing for students whose first language is not English.

Appendix A: Student Population Demographics, Sunnyside District

Ethnicity

School	Year	Total	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native Am	White
District Total	1998–99	14502	0.7	2.7	80.6	4.5	11.5
District Total	1999–00	14700	0.5	2.7	81.6	4.5	10.7
District Total	2000–01	14747	0.6	2.7	82.2	4.4	10
District Total	2001–02	14948	0.6	2.4	84	4.3	8.7
District Total	2002–03	15491	0.6	2.1	85.4	4.3	7.5

Gender

School	Year	Total	Male %	Female %
District Total	1998–99	14502	51.7	48.3
District Total	1999–00	14700	51.6	48.4
District Total	2000–01	14747	51.4	48.6
District Total	2001–02	14948	51.3	48.7
District Total	2002–03	15491	51.7	48.3

Free and Reduced-Fee Lunch

School	Year	% Free Lunch	% Reduced-Fee Lunch	% Pay Lunch
District Total	1998–99	60.3	6.8	32.9
District Total	1999–00	61.2	7	31.8
District Total	2000–01	60.2	9.4	30.4
District Total	2001–02	65.7	9.8	24.4
District Total	2002–03	67.3	9.7	23

Graduation Rates

School	Ethnicity	1998–99 %	1999–00 %	2000–01 %	2001–02 %	2002–03 %
District Total	ALL Graduates	53	58	55	61	58
District Total	Asian	67	60	67	67	86
District Total	Black	65	66	65	52	37
District Total	Hispanic	51	58	57	61	58
District Total	Native American	42	44	36	42	43
District Total	White	61	61	52	68	65

English Language Learners

School	Grade	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
District Total	All Grades	29.8	29.7	34.6	35.7	35.6

For additional information go to:
http://www.susd12.org/departments/research_eval/default.asp

Appendix B: Sunnyside Career Ladder Application for Action Research Option

**SUNNYSIDE CAREER LADDER
APPLICATION FOR ACTION RESEARCH OPTION**

Date _____

Name _____

School _____

Grade Level and/or Subjects Taught _____

Career Ladder Level _____

<u>REQUIREMENTS</u>
Applicants must:
- Be a Career Ladder Level II OR III teacher in good standing
- Attend regularly scheduled after-school meetings
- Maintain required documentation
- Meet all the prerequisites

Applying for: _____Option 1 _____Option 2 _____Option 3 _____Option 4
_____Option 5 _____Career Ladder Responsibility Option

Please respond by completing the following statements:

1. Teacher Research interests me because . . .

2. What coursework, district staff development or training have you attended that would assist you in participating in an Action Research Alternative?

3. If you have participated in Action Research, describe the experience.

I acknowledge the teacher's interest and support participation in Action Research.

_____
Principal's signature   Date

This completed application must be received in the Career Ladder Office no later than:
_____

2003–2004 Teacher Research Options

Teachers wishing to use teacher research as a career ladder alternative may choose one of the following options. *First year Level II must participate in one eight-week mini-inquiry (as a Career Ladder Responsibility) prior to participating in any of the options.*

Option 1: Teacher Research Institute (full year)
- *Prerequisite:* CL requirements are maintained in good standing.
- *Focus:* The focus will be on learning the process of teacher research in one's own class or school. Teachers may select this option only once at the district's expense. Any teachers who are interested in developing a leadership component for this career ladder alternative will need to select this option.
- *Documentation:* A final in-depth report that includes data and findings from the teacher's research.
- *Responsible Party:* Southern Arizona Writing Project, Teacher Research & Inquiry Institute. (Optional 3 Graduate credits from U of A at participant expense).
- Meetings: Monthly Saturday meetings (usually 8:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.).
- *Career Ladder Responsibility:* Individual Presentation – district focus.

Option 2: Three eight-week mini-inquiries
- *Prerequisite:* CL requirements are maintained in good standing.
- *Focus:* The focus will be a scaled-down version of the yearlong teacher research model. Participants apply an inquiry model that begins with identifying a problem or concern by using a reflective protocol. The problem or concern is normally smaller in scope than the problem or concern identified in the yearlong teacher research model.
- *Documentation:* Three working papers that describe the problem, the approach, data collected, impact on student progress, impact on teaching practices, findings, and a bibliography citing at least two sources. One final reflection paper (at end of year) that summarizes the research experience with citations from the participant's journal.
- *Responsible Party:* Lead Teacher Researchers/Career Ladder.
- *Meetings:* A minimum of three meetings per eight-week session, approximately two hours each, after contract time.
- *Career Ladder Responsibility:* Individual Presentation – district focus.

Option 3: Teacher Research (yearlong)
- *This option is for teachers who have previous experience with teacher research.*
- *Prerequisite:* CL requirements maintained in good standing. One full-year Teacher Research & Inquiry Institute or three eight-week mini-inquiries or comparable coursework.
- *Documentation:* A final in-depth report that includes data collected and concludes findings from the teacher's research.
- *Responsible Party:* Lead Teacher Researchers/Career Ladder.
- *Meetings:* Monthly meetings.
- *Career Ladder Responsibility:* Individual Presentation – district focus.

Option 4: Teacher Researcher Practicum

- *Prerequisite:* CL requirements maintained in good standing. One full-year Teacher Research and Inquiry Institute and desire to become a Lead Teacher Researcher.
- *Focus:* The focus of this option is to receive leadership training for teachers who are interested in leading teacher research groups. The teacher researcher practicum would require the participant to co-direct three eight-week mini-inquiry groups.
- *Documentation:* Practicum participants will submit meeting dates, detailed plans for each meeting (specific agenda), and a roster of attendants for each meeting. Participants will write a reflective log for each meeting. A mini-inquiry working paper will be submitted to document student achievement.
- *Responsible Party:* Lead Teacher Researchers/Career Ladder.
- *Meetings:* Three meetings per eight-week session. Additional meetings may need to be scheduled with the teacher-consultant.
- *Career Ladder Responsibility:* Individual Presentation – district focus.

Option 5: Lead Teacher Researchers

- *Prerequisite:* CL requirements maintained in good standing. Two full-year Teacher Research Institute OR one full-year Teacher Research Institute and one year Teacher Researcher Practicum OR one full-year Teacher Research Institute and Critical Friends Training.
- *Focus:* The focus of this option is to provide leadership training for teachers who are leading teacher research groups. Trainers will coach and model the inquiry process, reflect on practices, monitor and provide feedback to participants in the practicums.
- *Documentation:* Trainers will submit syllabus, training/meeting dates, detailed agendas for each meeting, a roster of attendants for each meeting, a reflective log for each coaching session, and a mini-inquiry working paper.
- *Responsible Party:* Career Ladder Office/Individual Sites.
- *Meetings:* Minimum of once a month.
- *Career Ladder Responsibility:* Individual/Group Presentation – district focus.

Leadership Strand

- *The following leadership strand is particularly applicable for Level III teachers:*
  - Year 1: Teacher Research & Inquiry Institute
  - Year 2: Teacher Researcher Practicum
  - Year 3: Lead Teacher Researcher: Lead mini-inquiry sessions or full-year inquiries. Lead practicum participants.

Focusing on Equity in an Established Teacher Research Program

Carol Tateishi, director of a local writing project, describes how her site's commitment to an increased diversity of teacher participants and a greater focus on equity changed their teacher research program. The site used a two-year grant from the Spencer Foundation to establish a multicultural leadership team of teachers, who then met regularly while leading equity-focused inquiry groups at urban schools. Tateishi shares eight lessons she has drawn from the site's effort to improve the teacher research program and concludes with a brief description of continued challenges for this work in the current educational environment.

By Carol Tateishi

What happens when an established writing project site undertakes an overhaul of its teacher research program by broadening its purpose to include equity and by setting as its goal a greater understanding of what contributes to successful inquiry groups in urban schools? As director of the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP), a site of the National Writing Project, this has been my research question for the past many years as I've worked with a strong and wonderful group of BAWP teacher-consultants, who are experienced in conducting classroom research.[1] Together we have reinvented much of BAWP's teacher research program. This essay is the story of these efforts.

Historical Context

Even though classroom research has been part of BAWP's history from its inception, the pointed focus on equity in its teacher research program is a recent development. The seeds of this focus had been sown in the late 1980s, when BAWP leaders had begun to increase the project's focus on teacher diversity and develop programs that addressed the needs of urban teachers and schools. I came on as BAWP director in 1991, primarily because I believed that the time was right to make diversity the central thrust of the work of the Bay Area Writing Project. I believed BAWP's programs would not be effective in reaching a diverse student population until the teacher-consultant corps was more inclusive and diverse. Since its inception in 1974, BAWP had created a professional home for classroom teachers and had nurtured the

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1   BAWP teacher-consultants are teachers who have participated in BAWP's Invitational Summer Institute, an intensive five-week program that is the key component of the writing project model. Teachers are selected for their excellence in teaching writing.

leadership and spirit of hundreds of Bay Area educators. Yet, within this vibrant and caring community, many teachers of color and teachers working in high-poverty communities continued to feel uncertain about whether the tent was big enough to include them as full members. My desire to address this challenge was the deciding factor in my decision to take the position.

This was at a time in the early 1990s when the achievement gap between African American and white students was increasingly discussed publicly and when the numbers of Latino and Southeast Asian students were increasing in urban schools unprepared to meet their language needs. Urban schools in general were losing ground. How could the Bay Area Writing Project address these challenges? We needed the input and leadership of teachers committed to urban schools, particularly teachers of color and teachers who shared common cultural values with the students in these schools.

In my first months as director, I was lucky to hear a speech by University of California Vice President Joyce Justus. At that time, Justus was both a UC vice president and the executive director of the California Subject Matter Projects of which BAWP was one. She was also among the few people of color I had encountered at this level of administration in the university. Justus offered a spirited defense of the role of diversity in California schools, stating that "diversity and quality are inextricably linked; no greatness without diversity." Justus also described the task ahead: to define the relationship between quality and diversity. Justus's words gave me the rich and broad rationale I needed as I gathered teacher-leaders from BAWP and the larger community to realize this vision of diversity at BAWP.

To support our commitment to increase diversity at BAWP, we engaged in a myriad of activities. Here are some examples:

- attending district principals' meetings to explain BAWP's intentions regarding teacher diversity and to encourage teacher nominations for our site's invitational summer institute

- revising our "request for nominations" letter to BAWP teacher-consultants, making the teacher diversity goal and its reasons explicit

- contacting classroom teachers of color whose good work I had learned about, to encourage them to become involved in BAWP through the summer institute

- participating in various programs such as the National Writing Project's Urban Sites Network

- applying for and receiving a federal grant for a three-year program to work with teachers of English language learners in San Francisco.

Perhaps most importantly, in addition to each of these particular activities, we made the issues and concerns of urban teachers the focus of many of our programs.

New leadership emerged from urban teachers of color, and their perspectives began to shape much of BAWP's work. By 2004, our data provided evidence that this push to increase diversity at BAWP had made a significant difference: in the seventeen years

between 1974 and 1991, thirty-seven teachers of color had become BAWP teacher-consultants; in twelve years, between 1992 and 2004, one hundred teachers of color had become teacher-consultants. Many of these teachers were bilingual with roots in local communities. This same push has attracted many other teachers dedicated to issues of equity, including more white teachers teaching in urban schools.

But numbers don't mean much in and of themselves. The meaning lies in the difference made through this broader and more inclusive representation of classroom teachers. Most markedly for BAWP, this difference showed itself in the complexity of the issues and questions about writing that participants raised. In our institutes, teachers were asking why most of the writing research focused on white, middle-class classrooms. Or, when research did focus on African American students, why were so few studies conducted by African American researchers? BAWP teachers also questioned some of the writing project's standard teaching practices, asking for whom and in what context a practice works best or how to adapt a practice for students for whom academic language was a secondary discourse. Clearly, we as a writing project had a lot to learn.

BAWP's Teacher Research Program

This brings us to BAWP's teacher research program, which has a long and productive history. Teacher research started at BAWP in the mid-1970s with individual BAWP teacher-consultants conducting studies in their classrooms. Many of these studies were published as BAWP monographs, a popular series for teachers about the pedagogy of writing. By 1983, BAWP leaders recognized the need for a teacher research community and initiated a program for teacher-consultants that brought individual teacher-researchers together for regular meetings on campus. Over time, as these teacher-consultants gained experience as teacher-researchers, they understood the transformative nature of classroom research and felt a compelling need to move opportunities for research to a broader arena. We wanted to bring teacher research to the Bay Area schools we work with through our extensive professional development programs. We were particularly interested in reaching schools identified by the state as "underperforming" and located in low-income communities of color.

The greater diversity of participating teachers in our programs also began to call into question how we worked on research. For example, our new teacher research leaders wanted to involve their colleagues in leadership rather than individually lead a research group. We began asking ourselves questions: Whose perspective and leadership should guide the research work? Are current leaders able to move the program in new directions? How does the program need to change so that teachers of any experience level can benefit? And, most important: Research for what? How would teachers' time and effort in classroom research make a difference for their students? We knew our current model could not respond adequately to these questions; thus a new vision of a teacher research program began emerging.

A Teacher Research Program Focused on Equity

By the late 1990s, BAWP's teacher research program was in transition. A small band of long-

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time BAWP teacher-researchers and I agreed that we needed the time and support to step back from the program, understand its strengths and weaknesses, and forge a new model—one that fostered leadership anchored in urban schools and built BAWP's capacity to use teacher research as an important component of professional development in these schools. We applied for and received a Spencer Foundation Practitioner Research Communication and Mentoring Grant that gave us two years to build our program.

The program model we created the second year of the Spencer grant, and that we continue to refine, included the following meetings and activities:

BAWP leadership team meetings including an August mini-institute and five school-year meetings of the leadership team, held on campus

Monthly or biweekly meetings of research groups at school sites

A midyear retreat held in January on campus that involved all school participants and leadership team members

A culminating spring symposium in April held on campus for all participants, leaders, and invited guests

Publication of *Working Papers of Teacher Researchers* by the end of the second semester.

A vision crystallized as we worked through our first year with the grant. This vision introduced equity as an explicit focus of research and placed importance on teachers of color as leaders. As a result of the increased diversity of BAWP teacher-consultants, by the late 1990s, I was able to recruit a racially diverse team of experienced BAWP teacher-researchers—elementary through university teachers, 50 percent of whom were teachers of color—to explore ways that practitioner research could foster improved teaching and learning and promote school change. Marty Williams, BAWP co-director, and I were also active participants. Most of the team taught in "underperforming" schools and were highly committed to issues of social justice.

In the second year of the grant, we reconfigured the BAWP leadership team to include a diverse group of twelve teacher-researchers.[2]

By early fall of that year, the twelve leadership team members established teacher research groups (two of which were co-led) at ten schools, elementary through community college, involving a total of thirty-seven participants.[3] The Spencer grant made it possible to give stipends to the team leaders and to the participating teachers at their sites, and also to hold full network events and to publish a "works-in-progress" volume at the end of the year.

As our Spencer grant came to an end, BAWP became a member of the Teacher Research Collaborative (TRC) and benefited from a push to articulate more fully the place of equity in our teacher research program. The TRC also supported the leadership development of members of our leadership team. Six leaders, five of whom were teachers of color, continued as leaders in BAWP's TRC program.

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2 The twelve members of the new BAWP leadership team were Adela Arriaga, Sim Chiang, Helen Duffy, Deborah Juarez, Susan Katz, Pirette McKamey, Lisa Morehouse, Peggy Riley, Robert Roth, Lynn Scott, Carol Tateishi, and Marty Williams.

3 Participants included groups in San Francisco at Thurgood Marshall High School, Mission High School, Balboa High School, the University of San Francisco, and a cross-school group that included McAteer High School, MLK Middle School, and Southeast County Community School; groups in Oakland at Fremont High School, Maxwell Park Elementary School, and Laney Community College; and groups at UC Berkeley and Las Positas Community College in Livermore.

Description of Equity-Focused Teacher Research Program

The program model we created the second year of the Spencer Foundation grant, and that we continue to refine, included the following meetings and activities:

1. BAWP leadership team meetings, including an August mini-institute and five school-year meetings of the leadership team, held on the UC Berkeley campus.

2. Monthly or biweekly meetings of research groups at school sites.

3. A midyear retreat held on campus in January that involved all school participants and leadership-team members.

4. A culminating spring symposium in April held on campus for all participants, leaders, and invited guests.

5. Publication of *Working Papers of Teacher Researchers* by the end of the second semester.

A more complete description of these components follows, based on the 2002–2003 program.

1. *Leadership Team Meetings*

   Each member of the BAWP leadership team, including Marty and me, facilitated (or cofacilitated) a teacher research group at a local site. Facilitators operated on two levels: the organizational/institutional level of the Bay Area Writing Project and the local school site level. In the organizational capacity, members worked collaboratively to develop a model and materials for training and mentoring new BAWP members to lead teacher research in urban schools. Leadership team members also collaborated by trying out materials from a facilitator's binder that included methodology, suggested activities, readings, protocols, and more; we engaged in problem solving as a team, shared successful approaches, and designed the midyear retreat and the spring symposium.

   The second level of responsibility for leadership team members was at the school site. Here each leader served as the facilitator of a school group—building communities of teacher-researchers, providing instruction about classroom research, and mentoring potential new leaders. The leaders engaged in research about their teacher research group and some leaders also conducted their own classroom research.

   At BAWP leadership team meetings, the diversity of the group played an important role throughout the year. For starters, no single way of running a meeting dominated. While this might not sound like much, social and cultural assumptions abound in these settings, with the dominant group usually taking for granted that its way of interacting and relating to others is the norm. This practice of diverse approaches to running a meeting paralleled our need to learn from each other about culturally influenced experiences that students brought to school that could affect whether and how they learned.

2. *Research Group Meetings at Local School Sites*

   Because we were using the year to garner more knowledge of what contributes to successful inquiry groups in urban schools, members of the leadership team gave themselves great leeway in structuring each school-group's timeline, meeting times, and local means of dissemination. This provided the opportunity for us to see many models at work. On

average, groups met at least once a month at their local schools. All groups tried out a number of common writing activities, inquiry protocols, and research methods. Almost every group also came up with useful adaptations and innovations to these processes. We believe it is significant (based on years of past experience) that no leadership-team member dropped out during the year, especially given the stressful working conditions at many of the schools.

3. *Midyear Retreat*

In January, the leadership team held a Saturday retreat on the UC Berkeley campus that brought together the full network of thirty-seven participants. The retreat included time for everyone to a) share their inquiries and the workings of their local groups, b) participate in a choice of small-group sessions (Charting Your Data, Writing as a Way into Data Analysis, Planning for Data Collection, and Using Protocols in Data Analysis), c) participate in guided writing, and d) work in their site groups. This retreat, held on a gloomy, rainy day in Berkeley, created a spot of sunshine. In our first activity, a quick go-around, each teacher briefly described his or her question and each school group said a few words about its collaboration. As we went around the room, the enthusiasm of the teachers' presentations gained momentum, filling the room with the power of urban teachers asking serious questions about their students' learning and their teaching. With the final question, everyone broke out in spontaneous applause, moved by the experience of being in a room with close to forty other teachers who cared as deeply as they did about the students they taught. As the day progressed, participants made good, practical use of the small-group time, the topics of which had been generated by the leadership team. No one had anticipated the importance of this midyear event. A community formed that day, one that reenergized people and helped sustain them over the coming semester.

4. *Spring Symposium*

Held in April at the UC Berkeley Alumni House, this event served as a culminating celebration of work completed during the year with a chance to evaluate and learn from it. This time it was a beautiful, sunny day and participants eagerly came to see one another again and to share their work. The leadership team had planned the day with different team members responsible for different parts of the program. The symposium opened with a focus on data collection and analysis, highlighting the work of three of the participating teacher-researchers. While it might seem strange to spend time on these nuts-and-bolts topics at the end of the year, leadership team members knew their group members were at the point where they could appreciate the work done by their fellow teacher-researchers, having just completed data analysis themselves. Each presenter's short session illuminated the use of different kinds of data and data analysis—videotape, audio-taped interviews, and student writing. The presenters spoke honestly about the ups and downs of their work and, in doing so, shared their passion for their students and their sense of accomplishment in their research. People took notes and thought about how they might use what they learned in their studies next year. We passed out their published writing in a professional-looking, spiral-bound publication, titled *Working Papers of Teacher Researchers*. In small groups, teachers read full papers and discussed them using guidelines developed by the leadership team. The day also included reflective analyses by two members of the leadership team, a discussion of possibilities for the next year,

"As we went around the room, the enthusiasm of the teachers' presentations gained momentum, filling the room with the power of urban teachers asking serious questions about their students' learning and their teaching. With the final question, everyone broke out in spontaneous applause."

evaluations, and plenty of time for written reflections.

5. *Works-in-Progress Publication*

All participants had drafts started, and twenty-nine completed them in time for the publication deadline. The collection of writings provided a realistic snapshot of what is possible amid fairly difficult teaching contexts when teachers are given opportunities and support to look closely at some aspect of their classroom practice. Participants included new teachers still completing their credentials as well as veteran teachers conducting classroom inquiries for the first time. Some of the pieces were clearly research reports—their research methodology and research stance were apparent—while others were reflective essays.

6. *Other Work Generated During the Year*

In addition to the components described above, the leadership team also offered presentations about research to the faculties of several schools, developed and taught a new course on teacher research with academic credit provided by UC Berkeley Extended Education, and revised the BAWP teacher research program's facilitator's notebook.

What Have We Learned?

Our effort to refocus our research program on equity and to better understand how to support change in urban schools has taught us a number of lessons that help guide our continued work. I hope these understandings will help others to design equity-focused teacher research programs.

A shared commitment to equitable teaching provides a powerful focus for research.

Perhaps our most important learning has to do with importance of a shared commitment to equitable teaching as the purpose for engaging in research. During the many years of BAWP's teacher research program prior to this work, teachers came to the program mainly to learn how to do classroom research, to expand their sense of professionalism, to contribute to the research knowledge in the field, and to become better teachers. While these purposes were certainly shared by participants in our new program, we found that, in many cases, they were not the starting point. Rather, a compelling mission brought educators to this work: participants were committed to teaching that led to equitable outcomes for their students, and they perceived teacher research as supporting this mission. However, the explicit focuses of this mission varied widely across groups. At one end of the continuum, equity was a clear focus. For example, in the cross-school group in San Francisco led by Robert Roth, members began by establishing principles for their work related to common beliefs around social justice; at Thurgood Marshall High School, Pirette McKamey and her group came together to look closely at the school's teaching of African American students; and at Mandela High School, Deborah Juarez and her colleagues put equity of student outcomes at the center of every aspect of their research. At the other end of the continuum, teacher research methodology tended to take the foreground, and BAWP facilitators wrestled with creating entry points for issues of equity. In the middle of the continuum, for instance at Balboa High School, leaders found the focus on equity was more implicit than explicit. (For details about experiences in several of these schools, see the essays by Roth,

"Participants were committed to teaching that led to equitable outcomes for their students, and they perceived teacher research as supporting this mission."

McKamey, Juarez, and M. Williams in this collection.)

No matter where a school fell on this continuum, a shared research purpose, focused on equity, made a positive difference. This added dimension provided reasons for teachers at each school to spend time together, to learn research methodology, to write about what they learned, and to share their inquiries with colleagues at their schools. We also learned that this shared purpose was instrumental in attracting other faculty members to teacher research. Framing the work in terms of important school issues larger than those of individual teachers' classrooms was key to the high interest participants' colleagues showed for the work.

Preparing to lead equity-focused teacher research requires new approaches.

Here I want to elaborate a bit on what has changed at the Bay Area Writing Project as a result of this project. As I stated earlier, through our changes to the program, we shifted our focus specifically to urban schools and looked to deepen our understanding of ways to make teacher research a fully realized component of BAWP's professional development programs. We moved from the development of autonomous, individual teacher-researchers to the development of communities of teacher-researchers within the specific social contexts of their schools. Likewise, our question "inquiry for what?" now focused not on teacher-researchers' individual products and their potential contribution to the field but on the potential of the research to contribute to equitable outcomes for students and to the larger goals and concerns of school communities. This reframing of our approach to teacher research has had great implications for the design and implementation of BAWP's programs in schools, and it dovetails with our efforts over the past three years to build ongoing partnerships with schools and promote homegrown leadership at school sites.

These years have given us time to build a flexible model of shared inquiry at schools with a range of research-based tools, strategies, and activities as resources to draw on. Most importantly, we have also developed an approach and model for training new facilitators and developing their leadership.

BAWP's "teachers-teaching-teachers" approach is useful for promoting equity in leadership.

At the outset, members of the leadership team made a decision to use BAWP's model of "teachers teaching teachers" as a central governing principle of our work together as leaders. While we used many common processes and procedures at our leadership meetings, each meeting drew on the particular skills and expertise of different members, and, most importantly, their differing social and cultural ways of leading and interacting. In addition, this nonhierarchical, flattened model of leadership reflected a belief that teacher-leaders for equity (at BAWP and at each school) needed to experience equity themselves in their new roles. Thus facilitators also used a nonhierarchical model of leadership with their school groups. They provided direct and explicit instruction as needed, and the network as a whole had common deadlines and expectations for work. But they also invited members of their groups into the thinking and planning, for example by cocreating tools, processes, and procedures. We found that this approach developed clear ownership of the program by team leaders and encouraged school groups to take increased ownership not only of their group's

work but also of their school's professional development.

Diverse leaders bring a variety of approaches to leadership.

One way to go about developing leaders of teacher research is to teach them to do this, this, and this. Another way, the way we chose, was through shared inquiry. We invited a diverse group of people into the leadership of BAWP's teacher research program and cocreated the process. We provided the building materials—the readings, the methods, the resources— and the overall purpose and goals there. With this as a foundation, we then encouraged adaptation and innovation. While our network of teacher research groups shared common activities, research methodology, deadlines, and expectations, each of us as facilitators was encouraged to find our own best ways of working at our sites and to regularly share these evolving approaches at our leadership team meetings. This pushed us to different ways of leading. For example, after Deborah Juarez's group was established, the members began rotating leadership roles. In Robert Roth's multischool group, members created norms and principles to guide the group's work. New research group activities and processes emerged as well, useful to the network at large. In Pirette McKamey's group, the members created a turn-taking process for taking notes and documenting their meetings that others could try out; Marty Williams and Helen Duffy refined a reflective protocol that became a standard tool for all of us; and I adapted Jerry Harste's "mini-inquiry" activity in a way that was immediately useful for others.[4]

We leadership team members learned a lot about teacher research through the experience of facilitating it. We allowed ourselves to wrestle with tough issues and topics we didn't necessarily agree on, and opened ourselves to other people's ideas and an understanding that not all the edges needed to be smoothed over. The differences among our perspectives and knowledge about students' home cultures, for example, signaled a need to talk through these perspectives and educate one another. There were also differences about how to proceed. During an early meeting, a facilitator introduced a particular protocol and a number of people resisted the process. From this we realized that we couldn't assume we all valued the same processes, and that discussion was needed. Experiencing this kind of discourse in the facilitators' meetings made it possible to allow similar conversations in our school groups and made us more conscious of the varying knowledge and experiences others might bring to our groups.

Membership in a larger community provides participants validation of their concerns and support for their research.

We learned a great deal from the success of the January midyear retreat and the April celebratory meeting. Just as it was important for participants to be part of research groups that shared ideas and issues larger than themselves and their individual classrooms, within the network as a whole, it was a powerful experience for groups of teachers to be part of a larger community with shared goals. Many came from schools that are regularly trashed in local

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4   For details about mini-inquiry, please see Harste 1999. Also, see my description under the heading "*Mini-inquiry helps groups gain momentum.*"

newspapers, and whose students are considered deficient in the public eye. Being a participant in this program elevated status of their work. They found a community that acknowledged their day-to-day efforts as significant and believed that their classroom practices, their concerns, and their students were worth researching.

Public sharing increases accountability and effectiveness.

Built into the leadership team was the expectation of publicly sharing one's ongoing work with a number of audiences: the leadership team; one's own local school group and local faculty; the full network of teacher-researchers; and readers of our written publication. This public accountability upped the ante in a number of respects as participants worked to make their work understandable to others and make wise choices in how they used their data and wrote about their students. The public sharing also helped participants use their meeting time effectively, meet deadlines, and, from the beginning, think about how to represent their work to different audiences.

Mini-inquiry helps groups gain momentum.

The mini-inquiry approach mentioned earlier deserves a bit more comment. We found that a mini-inquiry is a very effective format for encouraging participants to start the research process. This low-stakes, nonthreatening activity proved critical for many who initially saw research as something only done by university professors or an elite group of teachers. As described by Harste (1999), mini-inquiry projects are "quick investigations of issues that are raised through professional readings, conversations, or occurrences in classrooms . . . [T]heir inherent simplicity helps to ensure that inquiry is seen as a way of life rather than a big deal" (68–69). In the teacher research group I facilitated at Maxwell Park School in Oakland, participants were daunted by the idea of a research question worthy of a yearlong study, but eager to pay close attention for two to three weeks to some of their real questions. For example, one teacher wanted to learn more about who played with whom during recess. After two weeks of observation, her mini-inquiry blossomed into a full-fledged study of race and gender in playground activities. What began as a mini-inquiry revealed patterns that had implications for school climate concerns. Frequently, the mini-inquiry led to longer-term, meaningful research.

Writing is an essential support for learning.

At the Bay Area Writing Project, writing is so much the air that we breathe that we sometimes lose sight of the vital role it plays in our work. Writing was an essential tool for learning that we built into every leadership team meeting and that leaders built into their local inquiry sessions as a regular activity. To inform our uses of writing, we drew on texts by Langer and Applebee (1987) and George Hillocks (1995). The texts emphasize the importance of writing for learning and inquiry and provide frameworks for its use. The product of a final written document was also important. Through writing, participants pulled together their work, analyzed their data, put it into language useful to others, and were able to have their studies examined by others. In doing so, participants experienced the critical thinking processes and the writing skills needed by their own students, who often struggle with the demands of academic writing.

Concluding Comments

It would probably not surprise many to learn that BAWP's teacher research program is still evolving. We have, at this point, established a foothold in the world of teacher research for equity, and we've laid down a number of promising pathways to pursue. We also have a working model to share and some ideas about what is important to the work and why. As we look to the future, though, we continue to face a number of challenges:

- Funding is important, and in the coming year, we do not have special funds to support the program. We are currently considering ways to sustain the program without special funds.

- Teacher turnover can be high in urban schools, and it can be hard to maintain momentum when a group is unstable.

- Teachers in urban schools, particularly those involved in reform, are tremendously overextended and are pushed to find time to conduct classroom research.

Amid these challenges, I take heart knowing that the teacher research program BAWP now promotes is worthy of teachers' time, and that through teachers' work, we may all learn more about improving the academic achievement of struggling students. BAWP is about teacher leadership in improving the teaching of writing, and a teacher research program focused on equity serves this goal in powerful ways.

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Carol Tateishi began her work in education as a middle school English teacher, teaching for fifteen years in California and two years with immigrant students in London. For the past fifteen years, she has served as the director of the Bay Area Writing Project, working with teachers and schools throughout the eight Bay Area counties. During her tenure, she has guided BAWP's efforts to increase the diversity of its teacher-leaders and develop programs that address the needs and interests of urban teachers. While her interest in teacher research dates back to the mid-1980s, her involvement began in earnest when, as BAWP's director, she came to understand more fully the significance of classroom research for teachers and their students and the role writing projects can play in supporting this work. Tateishi is a member of the National Writing Project Task Force and coordinates the NWP's Professional Writing Retreats, a program that encourages and supports teacher-researchers and others in the publication of their work.