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GRADUATE COLLEGE

TEACHING WITH A QUESTIONING MIND: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TEACHER RESEARCH GROUP INTO A DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By
CINDY L. O'DONNELL-ALLEN
Norman, Oklahoma
1999

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TEACHING WITH A QUESTIONING MIND: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TEACHER RESEARCH GROUP INTO A DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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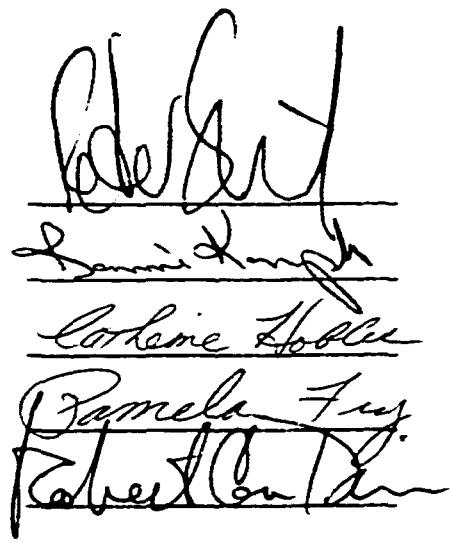

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that much research has been conducted on classroom discourse and the function of talk in the construction of knowledge within small cooperative groups of students, there has been little systematic examination of the discourse practices of teacher research groups. This study was an ethnographic analysis of the collaborative discourse practices influencing the establishment and maintenance of the Red River Writing Project Teacher Research Group (RRWPTRG) as well as the processes by which this diverse group of classroom teachers, most with only limited experience in conducting research, developed into a discourse community of teacher researchers. The full data set included transcribed audiotapes and videotapes of teacher research meetings; semi-structured group interviews of RRWPTRG members; proposals, analytic memos, and drafts of member's individual studies; fieldnotes taken during meetings; written reflections in my research journal; written reflections and visual representations on the group's research processes, composed by group members during meetings; meeting agendas; e-mail correspondence; other documents produced by the group (e.g., goals, membership agreements, budget proposals, annual reports, etc.); and presentation proposals and texts. All data were initially categorized by date, genre, purpose, and outcome, and were keyed to relevant research questions which suggested emergent themes in RRWPTRG's cultural development. Meeting transcripts were then analyzed using an analytic grid representing multiple components of the speech event.

Data analysis suggested that RRWPTRG's collective identity as a teacher research group was rooted in prior overlapping settings that constrained the group's development of an overriding motive and the purposeful activities, problem-solving methods, and discourse practices it established as appropriate. Members' degrees of congruence with this overriding motive largely predicted their success within RRWPTRG, and those whose personal goals conflicted with the motive eventually left the group. The linguistic choices favored by RRWPTRG reflected the relational framework of core group members, their attitudes toward group identity, and their cultural norms, values, and priorities. Central to the development of communicative competence in RRWPTRG was a value for equity in communication, with listening and making relevant contributions to others' work as important as sharing one's own. Because RRWPTRG activities were carried out largely through the medium of language, the members who succeeded within the group were those who learned to speak, write, and behave like teacher researchers by developing fluency in the research dialect, regularly participating in exploratory talk and writing, and sharing findings in and beyond the group's immediate setting. RRWPTRG's discourse practices were tools for: (1) establishing and maintaining membership, roles, and relationships as teacher researchers in the RRWPTRG culture; (2) providing intellectual, procedural, and emotional support for individual members; (3) posing and solving problems through exploratory talk; (4) sharing knowledge in larger settings; (4) and establishing membership within more global communities of practice. These linguistic means demonstrated the group's commitment to creating a context where language could be

used as a tool to collaboratively construct knowledge and mutually support members' inquiry and their teaching.

Much of human existence—both individual and corporate—is mediated through communication, linguistic as well as non-linguistic. It attends the individual's entry into a society and his or her departure from it. Through it, everything from dyadic interactions to the operation of complex nation-states is managed. Language and other aspects of communication serve many ends, from the gratification of individual desires to the organization of massive cooperative efforts. Beauty and destruction, altruism and venality, the profound and the trivial, are all accomplished within the frameworks of often unconscious bodies of social conventions which guide and constrain the possibilities of communicative action.

- Muriel Saville-Troike, The Ethnography of Communication

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The strange had become familiar. During last spring's professional development meeting at the high school where I was teaching, the faculty convened in the library to develop a mission statement for the coming year. The librarians had pushed long tables into clusters to facilitate small-group discussion, and administrators had distributed markers, large note pads, and other supplies to the eight teachers assigned to each work station. As the meeting began, assistant principals distributed surveys listing several statements regarding the school environment (e.g., "The school should be a safe environment for learning and teaching."). Beside each statement was the typical range of choices from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The principal explained that the staff would choose our mission statement from the items the administration had previously listed on the questionnaire and that the only appropriate responses would be "agree" or "strongly agree" since these would expedite calculation. Additional suggestions would not be considered.

Teachers talked and laughed as they completed the familiar process of determining a mission statement, and administrators circulated among the groups checking progress and collecting surveys as teachers completed them. While an assistant principal quickly scored the completed set, the principal explained the procedures for completing the mission statement process. After the top five statements had been selected, each group of eight teachers would be responsible for

combining the sentences into a single mission statement, recording it on the large notepad, and displaying it on the easel next to our work stations. To facilitate the process, administrators had included neatly printed "sentence starters" on strips of poster board with the rest of the supplies at each table. The principal continued to explain that after each group completed and displayed its statement, teachers would walk around the library to view them, choose the best sentence, and vote again on what would become the school's new mission statement.

By this time, the initial surveys had been tallied and the results displayed from the overhead projector at the front of the room. The principal gave us fifteen minutes to try out different sentence combinations on the members at our table, and groups quickly produced and displayed their statements. Assistant principals collected teachers' votes for their favorite sentence, and the principal explained that the votes would be tallied while teachers moved on to the next professional development activity of the morning--visiting "hobby rooms" (e.g., music, art, sports, cooking, family, computers) where we could become better acquainted with other faculty members who shared our interests. Then, we would return to the library so that she could announce the winning sentence and we could refine its wording as a faculty. She thanked us for our hard work and was clearly pleased that by lunchtime, we would have a new mission statement to guide our school for the coming year.

Statement of the Problem

In 1996 after an intense two-year investigation, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future concluded that the two most important elements in

achieving reform in elementary and secondary education were "(1) increasing teachers' access to knowledge to meet the demands they face and (2) redesigning schools so they can better support serious teaching and learning" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 5). The commission's review of the body of research on teaching, schooling, and reform efforts resulted in the following argument:

> 1. What teachers know and can do is one of the most important influences on what students learn.
>
> 2. Recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools.
>
> 3. School reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating conditions in which teachers can teach and teach well. (Darling-Hammond, p. 6)

One might argue that our professional development meeting to create a mission statement that morning was planned with the Commission's (1996) recommendations in mind, but I see it instead as an instance of the strange becoming familiar. Strangely, the entire process required minimal intellectual or emotional investment from teachers in the critical task of formulating a mission statement intended to shape their workplace and their students' learning environment. Teachers' choices were restricted to previously determined items on a survey, and the task of developing a new mission statement was reduced to a sentence-combining activity that required speed but little thinking. Yet the process was familiar enough to be completed efficiently and without protest. In the guise of site-based management, this meeting was simply another instance of professional development as it has been traditionally conceived, that is, as

the discontinuous "one-shot workshop" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 9) where information is transmitted to teachers, often irrespective of the particular needs arising from their actual classroom contexts.

Sarason (1996) criticizes teacher preparation programs for perpetuating the notion of the teacher as a "kind of engineer who has a variety of methods to apply to a spatially restricted set of tasks" rather than a "professional practitioner who has a broad conceptual and institutional framework within which his or her activities take on meaning and justify actions" (p. 47). He (see also, Bruner, 1997; Shulman, 1997) argues that the same sorts of reforms that have been suggested in the education of children (e.g., inquiry-based learning, activity, reflection, collaboration, community) ought to be extended to teachers. Although Sarason has pre-service programs in mind, his argument parallels recent calls for professional development reform (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1998; Rhine, 1998; Westheimer, 1998) in that both emphasize the necessity of supportive contexts of intellectual-professional collegiality where teachers can think and work productively. Like other researchers (Gelberg,1997; Shulman, 1997; Sirotnik, 1989; Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986), Sarason asserts that teachers can create and sustain comparable learning environments for their students only if such contexts exist for them. To be effective, then, schools must be "educative" for their teachers by providing them with opportunities for investigating their own teaching (Shulman, 1997, p. 90).

Based on transmission views of learning, however, standard professional development ignores the necessity of teacher inquiry in effecting educational reform

and stands in sharp contrast to alternative models that "replace the usual notions of training, inservicing, dissemination with possibilities for knowledge sharing anchored in problems of practice." If professional development is "[t]o serve teachers' needs, [it] must embrace a range of opportunities that allow teachers to share with one another what they know and what they want to learn, as well as to connect their learning to the contexts of their teaching" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996, p. 206). In short, professional development opportunities ought to be oriented toward inquiry.

To be sure, teaching is a profession that requires continuing education (Hollingsworth, 1994). As Shulman (1997) puts it, "One never learns to teach once and for all. It is a continuous, ongoing, constantly deepening process" (p. 103). Since teacher knowledge is so connected to student learning (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996), the questions then become, which forms of continuing education are ineffective and which forms foster teachers' professional development? What do the latter forms look like, and how do they work to deepen the process of teaching?

With these questions in mind, this study was a systematic analysis of the collaborative work that occurred during one teacher learning community's sustained use of various psychological tools (Vygotsky, 1978) to mediate their collective thinking and to help them better engage in *praxis*, defined by Noffke (1995) as "the practical implications of critical thought, the continuous interplay between doing something and revising our thought about what ought to be done" (p. 1). In

particular, the study explored the functions that discourse practices (Gee, 1990) served in the development and maintenance of the Red River Writing Project Teacher Research Group, the collaborative analyses of its members' individual teaching practices, and their professional development as educators in various settings.

In the following sections I will review critiques of traditional models of professional development as well as recommendations for alternatives, namely in the form of teacher learning communities. In order to situate the group which is the subject of the present study, I will then examine conceptions of teacher research and discourse communities. Finally, after looking at the obstacles that restrict the formation of such groups in schools, I will synthesize the questions that emerge from calls for more collaborative forms of professional development and for empirical work that might ground the underconceptualized notion of teacher learning communities (Westheimer, 1998).

Background of the Problem

Traditional Models of Professional Development: Inservice Education

By far, the most common form of professional development teachers experience is school-wide inservice education. Although published in 1975, the following model for inservice programs from The Handbook of Educational Administration (Stoops, Rafferty, & Johnson) is typical of those that persist in much of the current literature aimed at school administrators responsible for professional development (e.g., DeRoche, 1985; Wallace, 1996):

1. Through group action and discussion, arrive at a basic agreement upon the educational philosophy, goals, and objectives of the school system, with the emphasis upon greater accountability.

2. Compare collectively the current practices of the school district with the announced objectives.

3. List the conflicts uncovered in order of priority.

4. Set up a schedule for attacking problems, and assign staff members most interested in certain areas to attempt solutions.

5. Invite outside experts and consultants to contribute to the final solutions.

6. Facilitate outside study in related areas so that needed data may be gathered.

7. Experiment under controlled conditions after tentatively adopting a hypothesis indicated by the majority.

8. Evaluate results of the experiment; if a solution to the original problem is found, implement the solution as soon as possible.

Although each step in this model could conceivably involve teacher input, most of the models I reviewed suggested that decisions, such as those described in Steps 1-4, initially be made by a small group, consisting of site administrators, district coordinators for professional development, and teacher representatives. Some models also suggested that parents be included. Once decisions and goals for inservice had been established in this fashion, the entire faculty participated in Steps 5-7, which typically involve a cycle that Joyce (1990) refers to as the "theory-demonstration-

practice-self-feedback paradigm" (p. 31). The chief addendum made to this cycle by Joyce, Showers, and their colleagues (Baker & Showers, 1984; Joyce & Showers, 1988; Showers, 1984) is the use of peer coaches and teacher cadres, who they describe as "little communities of leaders...[who] rapidly and satisfyingly...can create a different and productive normative structure" within a school district (Joyce & Murphy, 1990, pp. 248-249).

Overwhelmingly, the central goal present in the professional development models I reviewed was to train teachers to implement model teaching skills and strategies for the purposes of connecting educational research and theory to practice. Common to the vernacular surrounding these models were some or most of the following phrases: visionary leadership, outside experts, educational theory and research, teacher accountability, consensus, hypothesis, experiment, evaluation, objectivity. Although these models were clearly oriented toward the achievement of particular objectives, these were typically imposed on the majority of teachers by the group in charge of planning inservice programs. Even the teacher cadres described by Joyce and Murphy (1990) were composed of small groups of teacher-leaders identified by administrators. While cadre members were described as expert teachers in their own rights, their purpose was not to inquire into their own practice. Rather, they were to be trained by outside consultants in models of teaching and were then charged with the task of training district faculty in turn.

Joyce and Weil's (1996) treatment of teacher research as a form of professional development takes a more peculiar turn. Although descriptions of teacher

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> One [model] is to call a teachers' meeting and have an expert (speaker) bring in "the word." Another is the "quickie" workshop which pours a lot of bright shining verbiage over the heads of the novitiates. In general practice is the use of the curriculum committee in which the professional more advanced teachers analyze needs and construct instructional materials which are passed on to teachers who did not participate in the process and for whom the material is again verbiage. (pp. 184-185)

Shumsky argued that such "learning without meaning" did little to improve the quality of teaching and much to reinforce the "implementation of gimmicks rather than ideas" (p. 185, emphasis in original). As an alternative, Shumsky (1959) proposed an action research approach to professional development that addressed concrete problems and issues arising from the teacher's classroom context, was marked by "a continuous emphasis on the personal meaning of learning" (p. 189), and was evaluated in terms of its "educative process" for the teacher researcher (p. 196).

Also criticizing current models of professional development as decontextualized, Eisner (1998) recently compared the external staff development consultant to a voice coach offering advice to a singer he or she has never heard before. His comments echo Shaftel's above and suggest that little has changed in forty years:

> We try to improve teaching by asking teachers to leave their classrooms so that they can travel to distant locations in order to get general advice from people who have never seen them teach. One does not need to be a specialist in

learning theory to know that for complex forms of human action, general advice is of limited utility. Feedback needs to be specific and focused on the actor in context. (pp. 161-162)

Models of professional development have historically avoided a focus on needs arising from particular teaching contexts. Instead, programs are often conducted in single sessions on general topics (e.g., site goals, cooperative learning, classroom management, etc.) and are usually the product of top-down planning (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Hogan, 1995; Sarason, 1996). Frequently, information is transmitted by outside consultants to teachers who are expected to apply it in their classroom contexts (Robertson, 1992). Even in more active roles in cadres or study groups, teachers are still conceived of as trainees or students of more expert consultants and educational researchers. A telling figure featured in a chapter from the 1990 ASCD Yearbook portrays a teacher as one of three "school improvement cogs," joining the smaller cog of classroom improvements and the larger cog of school improvement for the purposes of "fostering systematic links between the two" (Fullan, p. 17). These approaches imply that "knowledge resides outside of practice, outside of classroom teachers" (Hogan, 1995, p. 115) and that teachers, as cogs in the wheel of educational reform, "are not knowers who can teach one another; they are learners to be taught by experts." (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 126)

These models closely resemble Freire's (1970) concept of banking education, in which the teacher, the "depositor," perceives students as "the depositories" to be

filled with "the contents of his narration" (p. 57-58), which students are to receive, file, and store. Freire argued that with such approaches to education

> it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (p. 58)

According to Freire, students of all ages must be "critical co-investigators" of "problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world" (p. 68). Anything less "constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding" (p. 84).

Arguing that "criticisms...levelled at male-dominated professions...rarely focus on the lack of personal knowledge of practitioners," Robertson (1992) critiques traditional professional development models as androcentric because they are based on teachers' cognitive deficiencies, possibly "reflect[ing] a more generalized contempt for women's competence, since the profession is widely viewed as feminine" (p. 49). These models clearly assume teachers to be "received knowers" who "equate receiving, retaining, and returning the words of authorities with learning" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 39). Both researchers and teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; Hargreaves, 1992; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993; Little & McLaughlin, 1991; Rhine, 1998) report that standard professional development in the form of discontinuous, "generic one-shot

workshops" is often unrelated to the needs arising from teachers' classroom contexts and is less effective than other approaches such as out-of-school networks, action research projects, professional development schools, study groups, and teacher research groups (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 9).

Alternative Models of Professional Development: Teacher Learning Communities

Providing extensive and continued support for teacher learning and development requires that notions of teaching and schooling be redesigned to include revised systems for teacher education and professional development (Rhine, 1998; Sarason, 1996; Shulman, 1997). Based on the 1996 findings of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, Darling-Hammond (1998) recommends systemic and structural changes in teacher preparation and professional development programs so that they can support professional communities oriented toward collaboration, inquiry, and educational reform. These problem-solving communities would be closely connected to teachers' work with their students, linked to the concrete tasks of teaching, informed by research, and sustained over time by ongoing conversations and coaching.

Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon, and Campione (1993) identify several features of successful learning communities that distinguish them from conventional forms of professional development:

1. Expertise is distributed among the group; thus the group's labor is divided as individual members contribute diverse skills, talents, understandings, and dispositions for the good of the group.

2. Expertise is intentionally shared among the group; conversation, peer interaction, instruction, and collaborative work allow individual insights to benefit other group members.

3. The group's collaboration and collective expertise are nurtured by mutual trust and respect for members and their contributions.

4. The group moves from talk to action through the joint accomplishment of public tasks that affect the entire group. These tasks are inevitably more difficult and complex than individual members could have performed alone.

Researchers have noted the dearth of such collaborative communities for teachers. Sarason (1996) recently observed that in his decades of research in schools, he found no forums for teachers to engage in collaborative classroom-based inquiry or to discuss professional research relevant to their teaching concerns. Instead, he found a "culture of individuals, not a group concerned with pedagogical theory, research, and practice. Each was concerned with himself or herself, not with the profession's status, controversies, or pressures for change" (p. 367). He concludes that teachers must develop forums specifically designed for the purposes of professional growth and development.

Shulman (1997) contends that teachers need structures similar to the medical community's clinical pathological conference (CPC) where staff members meet regularly to discuss and learn from cases that did not go well. Rather than celebrating successful procedures, CPC members place value on the examination of mistakes, puzzles, and surprises so that cases become "occasions for learning, not opportunities

for shame" (p. 105). Instead of just examining best practices, teachers could also profit more from the collaborative examination of cases where the teaching did not go smoothly. Shulman envisions this teacher learning community as a "productive marriage of insufficiencies" (p. 92) in that the complex problems and questions teachers face would be more ably addressed in the supportive company of other teachers than when faced alone. Such collaboration would not only enhance teacher learning, but would also provide professional and affective support for the complex tasks of teaching and could hold benefits for these teachers' students as well. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) found, for instance, that secondary school teachers who regularly taught for deep understanding were also members of one or more learning communities, such as supportive departments, writing projects, teacher research groups, or other networks outside of school.

Although such learning communities are rare for teachers, general profiles depict them as groups designed to foster teacher development and to reform teaching and schooling practices. According to McLaughlin (1994), teachers who reported a high sense of efficacy in dealing with difficult teaching situations also claimed membership in supportive professional discourse communities. Linking individual and communal knowing, these communities value members' collective expertise and attempt to bridge theory and practice through projects grounded in teachers' everyday work (Craig, 1995; Hargreaves, 1992). Within a context of shared values, goals, and norms, they create structures that reinforce group identity and allow members to engage in collaborative problem-solving. Hargreaves (1992) notes the "interweaving

of the personal and professional" in these collaborative cultures as members recognize that "[d]eveloping the teacher...also involves developing the person, developing the life" (p. 233). The communities are thus "relational places" (Craig, 1995, p. 141) characterized by members' trust and support for one another.

These general profiles share much in common with those of teacher research groups (cf. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Hollingsworth, 1994; Stevenson, Noffke, Flores, & Granger, 1995). In order to better understand how teacher research groups can be distinguished from other teacher learning communities, I focus more specifically on the purpose of teacher research by reviewing the term itself in the following section.

Conceptions of teacher research.

The teacher learning community that is the focus of this study chose early on to call itself the Red River Writing Project Teacher Research Group (RRWPTRG). The term teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) is sometimes used interchangeably with other terms referring to the investigative inquiry conducted by classroom teachers, such as reflective practice (Schön, 1983, 1987), practice-as-inquiry (Newman, 1992), practitioner research (Radencich, Eckhardt, Rasch, Uhr, & Pisaneschi, 1998; Winter, 1988) and action research (Carr, 1989; Noffke, 1995; Winter, 1987). Regardless of the term one chooses, teacher research cannot be defined apart from a discussion of its purposes.

Insisting that it includes both empirical and conceptual research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) define teacher research as "systematic, intentional inquiry by

teachers about their own school and classroom work" (p. 24). Because its strength lies in the context-specific nature of the work, teacher research draws primarily from the interpretive tradition; Knoblauch and Brannon (1988) refer to its basis as phenomenological. Broadly speaking, interpretive research blurs the distinction between researcher and participant in attempts to understand and interpret how participants construct the world around them; phenemonology, a brand of interpretive research, is particularly concerned with understanding participants' perceptions of reality in regard to everyday, ordinary phenomena of interest. Because teacher-researchers attempt to understand and improve their work with students in the everyday life of the classroom, teacher-research is compatible with these traditions (for a fuller discussion of interpretive research, see Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Van Maanen, 1988; for more on phenomenology, see Hamrick, 1985; Spiegelberg, 1971; Stewart & Mickunas, 1974).

Researchers disagree about the theoretical grounding for teacher research. Drawing contrasts between North's (1987) conception of professional knowledge in composition instruction as "lore" and Schulman's (1986, 1987) description of a complex base of professional knowledge, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) argue that teacher researchers draw upon multiple categories of knowledge to frame their questions and analyze and interpret their findings. Additionally, like the action research of the 1950s and 1960s, teacher research is aimed toward change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle; Lewin, 1948). They conclude that teacher research may necessarily include a variety of theoretical perspectives and that teacher researchers are both

"users and generators of theory" (p. 17).

Noffke (1995) prefers the term educational action research, and in her efforts to define the genre, she reviews the various forms action research has taken since the 1930s when the term was initially used by the U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier in his work with agricultural planning, and by social psychologist Kurt Lewin, whose research focused on understanding and changing human action. Like Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), Noffke acknowledges that since that time, multiple definitions of action research emerging from various reform agendas continue to abound, making the synthesis of a single definition difficult; yet she offers the following position, one with a distinctly political turn, shared by some but not all teacher researchers:

> Action research is, at once, a technology—that is, a set of things one can do, a set of political commitments that acknowledges, however tacitly, that educational (and other) lives are filled with injustices—and a moral and ethical stance that recognizes that people in schools live in a world in which the question "What will I do?" lives alongside, "What is going on?" and "What shall I do?" (p. 4)

With these questions in mind, educational action researchers reflect upon their practice in order to understand and improve it and the contexts in which it occurs.

While Hollingsworth (1994) also sees teacher research as a derivative of action research, she further distinguishes among its three interrelated stances of "curriculum improvement, professional critique, and epistemological/societal reforms" (p. 85). The

first of these stances, curriculum improvement, is adopted by teachers for the purposes of experimenting with curricular ideas as a means of improving current teaching practice. Teacher research conducted from the standpoint of professional critique focuses on the examination and improvement of the structures and social conditions of educational practice while that conducted in the name of epistemological/societal reform is concerned with transforming societal views of schools and teaching so that change may occur.

Common to each of these definitions is the notion of a dialectical relationship between theory and practice as well as a progressive orientation toward educational reform. Teacher researchers both consult and generate knowledge in the course of their investigations, and their purposes are at once concerned with contributing to the general knowledge base of education and with developing "a deeper wisdom about the educational enterprise than is usually sought by researchers." In short, teacher researchers are concerned with "becoming wiser about education practice" within their own classroom contexts so that they can take action to improve it (Feldman & Atkin, 1995, p. 130).

Researchers (e.g., Chang-Wells & Wells, 1997; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Hollingsworth, 1994; Wells, 1994) concur that the efforts of individual teacher researchers are enhanced by their collaboration with peers and colleagues in a community of inquiry because of the intellectual and affective support these groups can provide. Over time, teacher research groups develop their own culture characterized by a shared sense of history, a common set of procedures with which to

organize their activities, and a discernible discourse that makes them identifiable as discourse communities (Gee, 1990; Beaufort, 1997). These discourse communities share common interests and goals that delimit the modes of discourse the group values (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; MacKinnon & Grunau, 1994; McLaughlin, 1994). In the following section, I review definitions of discourse, discourse communities, and discourse practices.

Conceptions of discourse communities.

Individuals learn to practice literate behaviors such as teacher research or, to use Gee's (1990) example, reading, by "being apprenticed to and accepted by groups of people who read in this way, while acting, interacting, feeling, thinking and valuing in certain ways" (p. xix). Gee claims that "all literacy activities are bound to particular Discourses" (pp. xviii), that are inevitably embedded in specific cultural contexts (see also, Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1982; Hymes, 1981; Scribner & Cole, 1981). He defines a discourse as "any stretch of language (spoken, written, signed) that 'hangs together' to make sense to some community of people who use that language" (p. 103). Discourse thus functions as a sort of "identity kit" (Gee, 1990) that includes practices that signal membership in a particular discourse community. Gee refers to the discourse community as a "club" (p. 142)

> with (tacit) rules about how members ought to behave (if they wish to continue being accepted as members). Being a member of a family, a peer group, a community group or church, a drinking group, a classroom, a profession, a research team, an ethnic group, a sub-culture or a culture requires "rites of

passage" to enter the group, the maintenance of certain behaviors (ways of talking, valuing, thinking) to continue to be accepted as an "insider," and continued "tests" of membership applied by others" (p. 143).

In a recent attempt to operationalize the concept of discourse community through empirical research on workplace writing, Beaufort (1997) defines it as:

> a dynamic social entity within which a set of distinctive, yet changeable, writing practices occur in relation to other modes of communication as a result of the community's shared values and goals, the material conditions for text production, and the influence of individual community members' idiosyncratic purposes and skills as writers (p. 522).

Synthesizing the work of anthropologists, rhetoricians, and sociolinguists, Beaufort argues that the discourse community requires modes for communication, textual norms, writing tasks, and roles for writers, all of which are influenced by the values, goals, and communicative situations unique to the community. Although her study privileges written discourse, these features could be broadened to include other modes of communication (e.g., oral, visual) in order to understand how "the discourse that one group of like-minded people use defines the community and its product as well" (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1991, pp. 191-192).

Like Beaufort (1997), Gee (1990) insists that the rules and practices of a discourse community are inherently bound to "socially situated language" that allows members to enact the appropriate "social identity (or social role), an identity that is a composite of words, actions and (implied) beliefs, values and attitudes" (p. 140,

emphasis in original). Though Gee offers no explicit definition of discourse practices, one can infer through his work that they are the specific skills acquired through, and required for, successful participation within a particular discourse community, and as such, reveal its values, world-view, and ways of knowing. Using the case of a student learning standard English dialect, Gee explains:

> Discourse practices are always embedded in the particular world view of particular social groups; they are tied to a set of values and norms. In apprenticing to new social practices, a student becomes complicit with this set of values and norms, this world view. The student is acquiring a new identity, one that at various points may conflict with her initial enculturation and socialization, and with the identities connected to her social practices in which she engages (p. 67).

In addition to revealing how teacher research groups use specialized language to serve their communicative purposes, the study of their discourse practices thus has much potential for revealing, via empirical evidence, the identity, values, perspectives, and tensions that constitute group membership as well as the processes by which that membership is acquired.

Obstacles to the establishment of teacher learning communities within schools.

If teacher learning communities, such as teacher research groups, are so beneficial to teacher and student learning, then why does the "culture of individuals" (Sarason, 1996, p. 367) persist in schools? Researchers concur that few schools are designed to support teacher learning in the ways described above. Constraints to

collegiality in school settings include structural fragmentation and strict limitations on how teachers spend their time (Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Heckman, 1996). Administrators may be reluctant to encourage inquiry-oriented groups whose work appears less expedient and predictable than they perceive traditional staff development to be (Hargreaves, 1992).

In their study of four schools attempting to meet the state mandates of a literature-based literacy curriculum, Johnston, Allington, Guice, and Brooks (in press) found that even in schools where the need for educational reform is openly discussed, little support is actually offered to assist teachers with the change process:

> We found that individual teachers largely carried the burden of change on their backs. They were expected to change with little in the way of guidance, little in the way of professional development opportunities, and few opportunities to explore change or to reflect upon it. . .in every case school districts expected teachers to change of their own initiative and on their own time.

Even when teachers from this study formed after-school discussion groups and found them to be invigorating, these groups were seldom self-sustaining because they were located on the margins of the institution. In the cases where change did take place, it occurred "classroom by classroom, teacher by teacher" within small, informal learning communities of like-minded peers rather than in public forums like those proposed by Sarason (1996). Johnston et al. noted that in the schools they studied, "[t]he principles of learning associated with thoughtful literacy--the building of responsible, reflective learning communities, were nowhere applied to the development of

teaching." Sarason echoes Johnston et al. and other researchers (Gelberg, 1997; Shulman, 1997; Sirotnik, 1989; Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986; Wells, 1994) in his assertion that "Teachers cannot create and sustain contexts for productive learning unless those conditions exist for them" (p. 367, emphasis in original). Wells (1993) specifies what might constitute these conditions: "giving teachers the opportunity to develop their own expertise in planning and enacting the curriculum through critical inquiry into their own practice, which is conducted in collaboration with their colleagues" (p. 2).

To be sustainable, Feldman and Atkin (1995) argue that teacher research must become a natural and integral part of schools. Considering the aforementioned obstacles to school-based teacher learning communities, however, that time may be long in coming. Additionally, because few schools with conventional notions of staff development as "teacher training" offer opportunities for forming site-based groups, external groups are necessary for many teacher researchers who wish to collaborate in their inquiries (Little & McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). Those who turn to out-of-school networks, however, sometimes discover that their membership with them results in resentment and further isolation from their individual departments and schools (Hogan, 1995). When faced with conflicts between reference groups, teachers tend to shift their loyalties to the outside networks and to weaken their ties with their workplace contexts (Little & McLaughlin). Until, and perhaps even after such time arrives that teacher research is a taken-for-granted part of the everyday life

of schools, then, a need to study the workings of external groups and the dilemmas their members face, remains.

Emergent questions on productive learning contexts for teachers.

In light of the above obstacles, researchers have identified the need for studies of the establishment, development, and transformations of existent teacher learning communities over time (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Little & McLaughlin, 1993). Grimmett and Neufeld (1994) call for the study of "exemplars of professional discourse communities with a view to understanding the extent to which their very existence and nature are determined by the macro- and micro-political contexts" (p. 226). Westheimer (1998) urges researchers to identify the complexities inherent in such communities rather than glossing over the struggles in favor of the triumphs. Because current social theories regarding teacher communities are seldom grounded in empirical work, the features and processes of teacher communities require additional study.

While the teacher learning community is heartily proposed by educational reformers as an alternative to traditional models of professional development, however, the term itself is underconceptualized and ambiguous (Westheimer, 1998), leaving numerous questions unanswered:

1) What do teacher learning communities look like? How, under what circumstances, and by whom are they established? What purposes do these groups serve for teachers, and how are these purposes achieved?

2) What characterizes their collaboration? In what activities do teacher communities engage, and what are the consequences of these activities on teachers' thinking, professional development, and classroom practice? What specific tools do they use to mediate their thinking?
3) How do teacher communities develop, and how are they sustained over time?
4) What obstacles and dilemmas do teacher communities face, and how do these dilemmas affect their development?

Answers to questions such as these should have important implications for those who wish to understand the effects of professional communities on teachers' practice, their connections to student learning and achievement, and the external support such networks require (Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Westheimer, 1998). As Westheimer explains:

> Further case studies would be beneficial to both researchers and policymakers to capture the real struggles of practitioners, committed to their profession and to each other, engaged in the work of building connections to one another and to their students. Researchers need stronger conceptualizations of the kinds of communities they are examining. Teachers and administrators need stronger visions of the type of community they are trying to build, whether it is community based on some kind of professional autonomy or community based on solidarity through a common mission. And policy analysts need the

wherewithal to point out the differences and pursue strategies that truly represent a clear vision for communities in schools. (p. 151)

Answering this catalogue of emergent questions will require research on multiple teacher learning communities. In the current study, however, I provide some contextualized answers as I investigate the discourse practices developed by one teacher research community over time and the influence of these practices on members' professional development, their notions of situated and strategic practice in their individual classrooms, and their interpretations of their perceived roles in the larger purposes of schooling.

Focus and Significance of the Study

This study explored the functions that discourse practices (Gee, 1990) served in the development and maintenance of the Red River Writing Project Teacher Research Group, the collaborative analyses of its members' individual teaching practices, and their professional development as educators in various settings. In order to make explicit both the contextualized and contextualizing (Schriffin, 1994) nature of the group's discourse practices, this study was an ethnographic analysis of the communication practices (Hymes, 1974) employed by the group and was guided by the following questions:

1. What were the group's underlying rules, norms, and strategies for action, and what purposes did these serve for its members? How was this cultural knowledge developed, and how was it revealed through the practices that

defined the RRWP Teacher Research Group as a discourse community? Conversely, how did this cultural knowledge shape the group's discourse?

2. What influences did participants and settings, both prior and immediate, have on the interactions in the discourse community and the purposes of these interactions?

3. How did the group collaboratively construct knowledge through social interaction? What were the structural and functional dimensions of this group's discourse? More specifically, what discourse genres were employed by the group, and what were the social functions of its discourse? What modes (verbal, written, visual, etc.) and what sequences of action were employed by the group in its interaction and for what purposes?

4. What dilemmas did the group face, and how was it sustained despite these obstacles?

Providing teachers with productive contexts for their own learning will require significant restructuring of time, resources, and professional development opportunities in schools. At the heart of this redesign is an altered notion of teachers as professionals, and such notions are particularly resistant to change (Lortie, 1975). Contexts for teacher learning will not exist, however, unless teachers are viewed and view themselves as significant players in their own professional development, as problem-solving agents rather than received knowers (Belenky et al., 1986; Cooper, 1988; Oakes, Hare, & Sirotnik, 1986). While critics have identified what does not work in teacher professional development, researchers have visions of what might. In

the meantime, the task of finding and describing communities that have managed to foster teacher learning and development despite the obstacles remains a vital one, even if we must look outside of schools to find them.

Limitations of the Study

As an ethnography of communication, this study is subject to the same criticisms that have been leveled at ethnographies more generally, that is, that they are subjective accounts of single cultures and are thus limited in their generalizability. Focused on a handful of teacher researchers, I in no way attempted to account for every variable involved in the complex development of this group into a discourse community, nor do I intend to portray this group's development as representative of other teacher research groups. This study can thus be best described as exploratory, rather than conclusive. I would concur with Duranti (1985), however, that beginning with deductive models and theories tends to "force data on a Procrustean bed. The open-endedness of the ethnographic approach defines its limit but also its force" (p. 223). As a member and researcher present at every meeting, I was in an excellent position to provide a fine-grained picture of this group's development and patterns of communication. I have also made every effort to seek interpretations from other RRWPTRG members' perspectives in order to provide an adequate account of our speech events and our underlying cultural norms (Duranti, 1985). In Chapter 3, I explicitly address concerns that my intense involvement in the group might compromise the validity of my findings. Until then, I argue along with DiPardo (1993) that the external validity and value of ethnographic findings ultimately depends upon

readers' abilities to "generalize personally to their own situations--to locate comparable patterns of reflection upon their own contexts, and to discover fresh directions of inquiry and discussion" (p. 29).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The familiar had definitely been made strange. But as I entered the high school where I taught the Monday morning after attending the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, nothing much had changed. The halls smelled just as musty, the students looked as sleepy. Coffee cups in hand, the same teachers greeted me on their way to stand in line for the copy machine. Over the intercom, the school secretary requested that a custodian mop up the puddle of water that fell from the leaky roof into the south gym hallway every time it rained. I collected my mail and headed for my classroom. One more Monday morning. So why did this feel like a foreign country?

Only a few days before, I had squeezed through the carpeted hallways of an enormous luxury hotel in downtown San Diego to hear educational researchers present their work about students, teachers, classrooms, and schools all over the world. Talk of transformation, reform, and collaboration dominated the sessions I attended, and like many of the thousands of other participants I saw, I strode from one meeting to the next, consulting my inch-thick directory regularly for the highlighted speakers I was determined to hear. I wanted to be informed of the newest findings, the latest problematizing, the best ways to make schools better. As a part-time high school teacher, however, I was one of the few practitioners around. When the studies are presented, the studied seldom attend.

So when I returned to the high school that rainy Monday morning, the culture shock was profound. As I walked down the mismatched tile hallway to my classroom, my feet remembered the plush carpeting, and I recalled the industriousness, the urgency, and the multiple recommendations for educational reform I'd witnessed only a few days before. In the midst of my disequilibrium, I couldn't help reflecting on how little those hallways had in common with one another and wondering what might happen if they were ever to intersect. What if one hall of the Hyatt led to another hall of the high school? What if "the suits" met "the studied"? If all of us--teachers, students, researchers--were better listeners to one another, would transformation actually occur?

Ironically, much human effort is consistently expended toward that very pursuit. Educational researchers, teachers, and students work hard to make schools better; yet for all that, the images of life in the ivory tower and life in the trenches persist. These images emphasize the distance between those who have traditionally had the power to call for reform and those who have been expected to see that it comes to pass. The divisions between researchers' and teachers' roles seem clearcut, yet some educators search for ways to bridge or dissolve the gap. Shulman (1997) goes so far as to insist that educational researchers must mine the wisdom of practice (Hawkins, 1966) in order to develop more powerful theories, and that teachers should view their classrooms as laboratories where they develop and report lessons for improving educational practice. Shulman's challenge blurs traditional roles regarding who has the power to generate educational knowledge and who has the responsibility

to make it useful. If educational reform is to occur, maybe the choices ought not be either/or.

In the following sections, I examine scholarship relevant to understanding how a diverse group of teachers developed into a discourse community of teacher researchers for the purposes of analyzing and improving their practice. After reviewing literature concerning teachers' roles in professional knowledge development and educational reform, I examine the unique perspective teacher researchers lend to educational research. Although teacher research offers potential for contributing to educational reform, its representation in the overall scheme of educational research is rare, and documentation of the collaboration within teacher research groups is rarer still (Wells, 1994; Westheimer, 1998). Perhaps because collaborative inquiry is rarely the primary objective of traditional professional development for teachers, there has been little systematic examination of the discourse practices of teaching communities despite the necessity of analyzing such groups as they evolve over time (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Grimmett & Neufeld, 1994; Little & McLaughlin, 1993). While some research (Carini, 1986; Edelsky, 1988; Green, Dixon, & Putney, 1998) has documented the discourse occurring in oral inquiry groups who use formal procedures to organize their talk, few studies have systematically examined the more spontaneous discourse practices that occur in less formal teacher research groups such as the one that was the focus of this study. Consequently, in the remainder of the review, I examine broader sociocultural perspectives on the potential for learning through social interaction that occurs in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in general

as well as teacher research groups in particular. In each case, I devote attention to the ways that discourse practices are used as tools for social and individual psychological development.

The Roles of Teachers in Professional Knowledge Development and Educational Reform

In their examination of Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher (Reynolds, 1989), Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) take issue with Reynolds' underlying assumption that teachers best inform their classroom practice by drawing upon expert knowledge generated outside the classroom itself (i.e., from the university research base). They argue that this 1989 publication by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education implies that while teachers are certainly competent to make judgments about the practical goings-on inside their classrooms, they are not seen as participants in "the generation of Knowledge (with a capital K) or official, 'principled,' 'discipline'-based knowledge" (p. 42). While Cochran-Smith and Lytle do not dismiss the value of university-based research, they challenge its position as privileged, arguing that teacher researchers also have the potential not only to contribute to, but to alter, the knowledge base in education because of the uniquely emic perspective their position affords.

Historically, however, teachers have been viewed as "learners to be taught by experts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 126), and traditional models of staff development (e.g., Joyce & Showers, 1988) continue to operate off an educational version of economic trickle-down theory in which the knowledge required for effective

teaching is constructed by those furthest away from the classroom and eventually makes its way through policy makers, administrators, and curriculum coordinators to teachers and the students they serve (Wells, 1994). Professional development in the form of "teacher training" (Joyce & Weil, 1996, p. 37), as it is often called, is still widely conceived of as a vehicle for the transmission of skills and knowledge rather than an opportunity for teachers to engage in professional inquiry (Apple, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; Hogan, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993; Little & McLaughlin, 1991; Rhine, 1998; Robertson, 1992; Sarason, 1996).

These notions call into question the roles teachers are to assume as professionals. Gitlin (1983) argues that in determining the form and content of their curricula, teachers may choose from a spectrum of roles ranging from implemental to transformative:

> Those who view their role primarily in terms of efficiency and implementation will act to facilitate the values and attitudes embodied in the curriculum form and content, because they do not consider confronting values to be part of their job. Those who investigate the curriculum in terms of what is and what should be have the potential to question and present alternatives to curriculum values and attitudes because this is part of their job. Since the questioning of curricular values and the determination of alternatives are prerequisites for one who wants to act in transformative ways, they must be included in the work of teachers for them to have a transformative influence. (p. 209)

Other theorists have also examined these implemental and transformative extremes. Some (Apple & Weiss, 1983; Sarason, 1996) criticize prescriptive, reductionist teacher training practices that transform curricular "questions of 'why'" into "questions of 'how to'" (Apple & Weiss, p. 6) and stem from a view of teachers as technicians, expected to learn and apply the skills of effective pedagogy in a "teacher-proof" curriculum (Beyer, 1983, p. 92). Others recognize the potential of teachers' work as a vehicle for social improvement (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995) and promote a view of teachers as transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988). Some research also suggests that teachers can be "entrepreneurial" knowers (Duffy, 1997, p. 351) who transform existing school structures by initiating their own inquiries and acting upon their findings (e.g., Allen, Cary, & Delgado, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Graham, P., Hudson-Ross, S., Adkins, C., McWhorter, P., & Stewart, J. M., 1999; Meyer et al., 1998; Rhine, 1998).

Almost 25 years ago, Lortie (1975) suggested that teachers might play a transformative role in educational reform. He proposed that cadres of teacher-researchers be developed in response to the disjunctures he observed between conventional educational inquiry and the daily concerns of the classroom teacher. He saw the role of the teacher researcher as "both practical and visionary" (p. 242) in that teacher researchers might simultaneously examine and seek solutions to problems in their own classrooms and assist other teachers with their respective inquiries. Others contend that the teacher research movement, that has occurred in the years following Lortie's proposal, is also based on a view of teachers as both "users and generators of

theory" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 17) and implementers and initiators of educational and social change (Feldman & Atkin, 1995; Hollingsworth, 1994).

Rhine (1998) argues that models of professional development should acknowledge the power of teacher inquiry in effecting educational reform. Because of the "bounded rationality" of humans to completely know and perfectly process limitless amounts of information (House, 1996, p. 6), Rhine challenges notions that reform can be accomplished through endless cycles of professional development workshops designed to help teachers amass knowledge from educational research. He issues a call for new professional development models that "[bridge] the gap between research and practice and effectively [transform] teachers into action researchers of student understanding" (p. 30). Wells (1993) likewise insists that the larger goals of educational reform can only be met through the critical inquiry of teachers into their own practices and that such inquiry is best practiced with other peers and colleagues in a collaborative community.

The Strength of the Subjective Perspective in Teacher Research

Although Wells (1993) notes that teacher research in its various forms has been criticized by scholars for falling short of the standards of traditional, generalizable educational research, he counteracts these criticisms by arguing that teacher research belongs to a different research paradigm altogether in terms of its objectives and its ideology. Because it is motivated primarily by the desires of teacher researchers to improve their educational practice and the conditions in which their students learn, teacher research is necessarily situated in the subjective perspectives taken by teachers

as they attempt to answer questions emerging from the particular contexts of their own classrooms. Commonly reported features of the teacher researcher perspective include an inquiry orientation toward teaching (e.g., Wilhelm, 1997), the ownership of research questions grounded in personal experience (e.g, Bernard & Konjevic, 1993), and the recognition that educational change also involves personal change (Hollingsworth, 1994). Gallas (1994; 1998) speaks compellingly of this perspective when she describes herself as an "aboriginal" among her students. In the midst of her teaching, she collects artifacts that will later allow her to reflect upon the "life of the classroom with imagination" (p. 9)--recordings of classroom discussions, stacks of student work, photographs of her children at work, and notes about their interactions in her teacher journal. As Gallas's example attests, because teachers determine objectives, design lessons, and negotiate daily classroom doings with students within the social context of the classroom, they are automatically "native inhabitant[s] of the research site" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). They thus have extraordinary potential to respond fully and reflect critically as "observant participants" (Geertz, 1973) in the classroom setting.

Hollingsworth (1994) found that the personal and relational perspectives the members of her teacher research group assumed in their teaching were also profound influences on their research. Leslie Turner Minarik, a member of Hollingsworth's study, contrasts the personal investment teacher researchers have in educational reform with the more general perspective assumed by conventional models of professional development:

I think it's important to mention the importance of "owning" the problem or the question. The observation of the students in my case [and other group members' cases]...arose from our defining a problem that was important to us (grounded in an observation). It is critical for the teacher to define the issue. That is exactly why many inservices fail. Here's a model of what I think is happening [in a teacher research study]:

> (a) teacher observation; (b) define question for yourself; (c) seek external solutions from those (usually teachers) whom trust; (d) do your own research in your classroom; (e) come to conclusions; (f) modify your methods; (g) and (maybe) wonderfully continue the process again when another issue arises.
>
> (a) Contrast this model to externally identified questions or problems. district or university decides issue or problem; (b) teachers attend inservice or class on externally determined problems which might not be a significant issue for them; (c) teachers take notes dutifully or doodle; (d) nothing happens; (e) district or university despairs at teachers; (f) teachers despair at district or university people, but sit quietly and silently; (g) unhappily, the cycle repeats. (p. 100)

This intentionally subjective perspective as well as the praxis-oriented agenda underlying teacher research make it compatible with the theoretical framework and methodologies underlying feminist research (Coates, 1996; Hollingsworth, 1994; Lather,1991; Sherwin, 1989). Because of their insider perspectives, teacher

researchers have the potential to make unique contributions to the general knowledge base of education, and many of their studies provide insight into their individual learning processes. Grounded in the sociocultural theories of learning that I discuss in the following sections, this study, however, examined how one teacher research group constructed knowledge together.

Sociocultural Perspectives on Learning through Social Interaction

Rooted in theories developed by L. S. Vygotsky and his colleagues in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and '30s, sociocultural perspectives on learning and development are based on the understanding that human activity is situated in sociocultural contexts, mediated by language and other symbol systems, and best understood through an investigation of its historical development (Cole, 1996; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1998; Wertsch, 1985, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Insisting that all learning is social, Vygotsky maintained that thinking occurs on two planes, operating first on an interpsychological plane before existing on an intrapsychological plane:

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition...Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. (p. 163)

Vygotsky referred to this "dynamic region of sensitivity" (Wertsch, 1987, p. 67) in which psychological development occurs as the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p. 86).

Recent sociocultural theorists have broadened Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development to include collaborative development. As Engeström (1996) contends, "Even Vygotsky, a champion of the social and cultural in developmental psychology, did not conceptualize development as the transformation of human collectives. For him development required social interaction and collaboration, but it was the individual child who actually developed in the collaboration" (p. 4). Engeström argues that forming new collectives with significant others can elicit the simultaneous development of individuals through a process he calls "collective transformation" (p. 5). Other researchers (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; John-Steiner & Meehan, in press) also describe the co-construction of transformative knowledge among creative individuals engaged in collaborative problem-solving:

> In our view, internalization is simultaneously a social and an individual process. In working with, through, and beyond what they have appropriated in social participation and then internalized, individuals co-construct new knowledge. In contrast to facile internalization which leads to a limited combination of ideas, internalization that involves sustained social and individual endeavors

> becomes a constituent part of the interaction with what is known and leads to the creation of new knowledge. (John-Steiner & Meehan)

Learning through social interaction thus does not result from the mere acquisition of knowledge transmitted from the expert to the novice but occurs through a process of transformation. Individuals make the cultural knowledge and practices experienced in the presence of others their own by transforming them; in turn, the individuals are themselves transformed as is the community in which they participate (Miller & Goodnow, 1995; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa, & Goldsmith, 1995; Wells, 1994). John-Steiner & Meehan refer to this process as "mutual internalization" among members of a community.

Recent theorists have also extended Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the interpsychological, or social plane. In addition to the transformation of understanding that occurs in the intrapsychological, or personal plane as a result of an individual's participation in activities, Rogoff et al. (1995) argue that development occurs simultaneously in two other planes as well. Development in the community plane occurs when people participate with one another in culturally valued practices (e.g, English class, religious services, Little League games) organized by formal institutions as well as more informal systems. Development in the interpersonal plane occurs through the "face-to-face and side-by-side interactions" (p. 46) that facilitate or restrict the activities in which people participate (e.g., a poetry discussion, praying, learning to steal a base, etc.). Because these planes are interdependent, an individual's

development is indeed social but in a more complex sense than Vygotsky's theories imply:

> ...individual's efforts and sociocultural institutions and practices are constituted by and constitute each other and thus cannot be defined independently of each other or studied in isolation. We may focus on the contribution of one or another individual or a cultural tradition, but always in relation to the whole activity rather than extracted from it...When we consider a single person's contributions or the functioning of a whole community in the foreground, we do not assume that they are separate elements or levels but rather planes of focus on the whole activity that facilitate analysis; all are essential to understand any of them. (Rogoff et al., pp. 45-46)

Sociocultural researchers who study collaboration have also argued that peers can offer one another mutual support within the zone of proximal development. Engeström (1996) argues that learning is not always a matter of "the more competent pulling up the less competent;" he insists that future research must move "beyond the vertical idea embedded in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and incorporate the horizontal dimension in such zones" (pp. 6-7). Likewise, Wells (1993, 1996) maintains that groups need not always have a more capable peer in their midst in order to accomplish tasks successfully. Because complex tasks typically involve various components, individual members may offer assistance to peers on certain parts while requiring assistance themselves on others in order to jointly complete the overall task through old-fashioned teamwork.

This still leaves the problem of how groups are able to solve complex tasks when no one member is clearly more expert than others. Wells (1996b) explains that in such circumstances, each member is

> "forced to rise above himself" and, by building on the contributions of individual members, the group collectively constructs an outcome that no single member envisaged at the outset of collaboration....It seems, therefore, for learning to occur in the zpd [zone of proximal development], it is not so much a more capable other that is required as a willingness on the part of all participants to learn with and from each other. (pp. 7-8)

Throughout his work, Wells contends that the zone of proximal development is a useful notion in describing the learning of adults as well as children. In regard to collaborative action research, he argues that sociocultural theories are especially helpful for understanding teacher learning and development through action research since these theories: (1) emphasize a dialectical relationship between theory and practice, (2) depict learning as a constructive activity occurring within a specific context, (3) stress the social nature of learning, especially through discourse, and (4) provide a theoretical framework for teacher educators (Wells, 1993). Taken together, these sociocultural perspectives extend Vygotsky's (1978) notion of psychological development within the zone of proximal development by demonstrating that the collaborative learning that occurs as a result of social interaction transforms both individuals and their communities. These theories thus provide a useful lens through which to view groups jointly engaged in inquiry, including teacher research groups.

Language As a Tool for Learning

One method of understanding how learning occurs within individuals and groups is to examine how they use psychological tools to mediate goal-directed actions within the frame of a larger activity, that is, a particular sociocultural context (Wertsch, 1985, 1991, 1998). The various psychological tools people choose as they construct, represent, and communicate meaning have the capacity to transform their thinking and are always social and cultural in nature (Bruner, 1986; Cole, 1996; Salomon, 1993; Wertsch, 1991, 1995, 1998). Vygotsky considered language to be the "tool of tools" with its primary function being that of "communication, social contact, influencing surrounding individuals" (Vygotsky, cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 81). As Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) argue, "[i]n a very important sense, education is dialogue" (p. 32, emphasis in original). The value communities of inquiry place on exploratory talk (Barnes, 1992) in problem-solving activities, for instance, allows for the collaborative construction of meaning as members learn from and with one another, whether zones of proximal development are vertical or more horizontal. As Wells (1994) puts it, "it is not simply that when faced with a problem, two heads are better than one, but that, by struggling to make explicit to the other group members one's perception of the problem and one's tentative ideas for its solution, one clarifies and extends one's understanding of the problem as a whole—for oneself as well as for the others" (p. 247).

Drawing on the work of Vygotsky, Piaget, and others, Cazden lists three potential cognitive benefits of discourse among peers in addition to exploratory talk.

1. Discourse serves a catalytic function when peers provide different viewpoints on the subject at hand. Because these perspectives have the potential to eventually alter members' thinking, they can enhance cognitive development and increase problem-solving productivity in groups as well as individuals.

2. Discourse allows peers to enact complementary roles within the zone of proximal development as they offer support, guidance, and encouragement to one another during instances of collaborative problem-solving. As Forman found, ". . .by assuming complementary problem-solving roles, peers could perform tasks together before they could perform them alone" (Forman & Cazden, 1985, p. 343).

3. Discourse, both written and verbal, orients learners toward an audience, requiring individuals to clarify meaning for themselves in the process of doing so for others.

As individuals jointly engaged in problem-solving activities verbally formulate and refine their ideas with others, they influence other group members and develop personal knowledge that becomes a tool for thinking. Because language itself is dialogic (Bakhtin, 1986; Chang-Wells & Wells, 1997) in that it both shapes and is shaped by the social environment in which it is used, researchers must thus study language use on both community and interpersonal planes in order to understand how it mediates thinking on the personal plane (Rogoff et al., 1995; Wertsch, 1985, 1991).

As researchers have noted (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Smagorinsky, 1995a, 1995b; 1997a, 1997b; Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1998; Vygotsky, 1981a; Wells, 1996a), psychological tools are not limited to speech, but include other socially developed and culturally valued semiotic means of communication as well (e.g., art, writing, graphic design, music, dance, etc.). An analysis of a community's various discourse practices is central to understanding how they collaboratively define, describe, and explore problems as they construct knowledge together. Wertsch (1998) argues that psychological processes "can be thought of as skills in using particular mediational means;" thus examining the use of mediational tools provides an entry point "for understanding how internal processes come into existence and operate" (p. 31). It is precisely such examinations that Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) argue ought to be the subject of classroom research:

> The aim of [the close analysis of particular episodes of classroom talk] is to gain a greater understanding of the way in which knowledge is co-constructed over the course of conversation through the sequential contributions of the various participants as they shape their utterances to fit the demands of the situation according to their interpretation of it. From the study of such episodes, selected in a systematic manner, it may be possible to arrive at principles of interaction that have quite general applicability and, in this way, to throw more light on the question of how we learn through talk. (p. 33)

Though Wells speaks in the context of classroom research, the central aim of this study was to "throw light" on the ways a teacher research group used discourse

practices to construct knowledge together. Because few studies have examined the joint inquiry processes of teacher research groups, however, I next review how learning occurs in other communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The Potential for Learning in Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning occurs through legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice. Through their examination of various groups, including Yucatec Mayan midwives, Vai and Gola tailors, navy quartermasters, supermarket butchers, and members of Alcoholics Anonymous, Lave and Wenger describe a community of practice as:

> a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning. The social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (i.e., for legitimate peripheral participation). (p. 98)

Like members of the discourse communities described by Gee (1990), newcomers to communities of practice learn culturally valued ways of behaving, thinking, and interacting through the process of apprenticeship. While Lave and Wenger do not "imply some primordial culture-sharing entity" by their use of the term community, they do mean to "imply participation in an activity system about which participants

share understanding concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and their communities" (p. 98).

Similar to the sociocultural theorists described earlier, Lave and Wenger (1991) reject notions of learning within the zone of proximal development as an individual internalization of cultural givens. Emphasizing processes of social transformation instead, their theory of legitimate peripheral participation stresses that learning occurs through transformative participation in communities of practice because of the rich relationships existing among its members, activities, and the artifacts they produce. Because learning is socially distributed among members, individuals and their community are transformed when learning occurs. This view thus has the benefit of examining learning through a simultaneous focus on the interdependent planes previously defined by Rogoff et al. (1995). As Lave and Wenger maintain:

> to insist on starting with social practice, on taking participation to be the crucial process, and on including the social world at the core of the analysis only seems to eclipse the person. In reality, however, participation in social practice—subjective as well as objective—suggests a very explicit focus on the person, but as a person-in-the-world, as member of a sociocultural community. This focus in turn promotes a view of knowing as activity by specific people in specific circumstances." (p. 52)

Legitimate peripheral participation not only permits newcomers to participate in community practices as provisional members, but it also allows their acceptance by

and interaction with more expert community members, who Lave and Wenger refer to as "old-timers." As they explain in the case of Vai and Gola tailors, much of the newcomer's time is spent "sitting beside the master on his two-person bench," making partial, but useful, contributions (pp. 110-111). While their responsibilities are limited, newcomers learn task knowledge and skill in the process. More importantly, they gain wide access to the community of practice and eventually develop their identities as full-fledged members.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), "learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: They are aspects of the same phenomenon" (p. 115). Members eventually assume identities of mastery through gradually increasing participation with masters in activities central to the community of practice; thus learning occurs through "improvised practice" (p. 93) as opportunities for participation naturally unfold within the community environment. Practices (and these are necessary if learning is to occur) rather than assymetrical master-apprentice roles structure learning, however, and apprentices appear to learn mostly from other apprentices. In the case of Yucatec midwives, for example, Lave and Wenger noted very little explicit teaching, yet ample evidence of learning, as newcomer midwives gained everyday experience in their family environments over a period of several years.

Language is an essential tool for learning in communities of practice and, in some cases, is the central medium for transformation and identity construction. Because learning how, when, and why to use language (or not) signals one's identity as a full member of the community of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize

the significance of language-in-use rather than language used for didactic purposes. Particularly important are a community's uses of stories because these serve as incidental instruction, culturally appropriate models, and proof of membership. In Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), for example, newcomers used narratives as tools for constructing identities as community members. Though AA oldtimers offered no explicit instruction, through modeling and interaction in discussions, newcomers learned the codes of the community's cultural narratives and thereby gained a member's perspective.

Because of their focus on long-standing communities, Lave and Wenger (1991) offer little insight into how communities of practice are initiated. Their theories remain useful to this study, however, because of its emphasis on teacher-researchers as active learners. Unlike traditional models of learning in which learners are viewed as "recipients of defined knowledge," Lave and Wenger's theories define learners as "from the beginning, active participants in authentic practices; learning and acquiring expertise are essentially viewed as processes of enculturation" (Mandl, Gruber, & Renkl, 1996, p. 402). While an emphasis on practice as the medium for learning and artifacts as evidence of cultural knowledge suggested a methodological focus for the study, their ideas regarding identity development, language use, and the social nature of learning were also helpful in understanding how a diverse group of teachers, most with little experience in conducting research, developed into a discourse community of teacher researchers.

The Potential for Learning in Teacher Research Groups

As a kind of community of practice, teacher research groups combine their knowledge and expertise in the joint analysis and interpretation of their classroom research. Although few researchers have analyzed the processes teacher research groups use to construct knowledge together, they have described the features of these groups and have identified some of the ways they support the inquiries of their individual members. Wells (1994) refers to action research groups as communities of inquiry and explain that the overriding principle in these groups is that "knowledge and expertise are a shared achievement, arising from joint engagement in challenging activities that are personally significant to the participants" (p. 9). These groups share an orientation toward inquiry and collaborate for the purposes of understanding and improving their own research and practice. In their classroom research, Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) identified these additional features of communities of inquiry that might also apply to teacher research groups:

1. All participants are considered to be learners and contributors to the subjects under inquiry.
2. The products of their learning are seen as tools in the processes of action and inquiry rather than as ends in themselves.
3. Exploration and cooperation are emphasized over correctness and competition.
4. Community members are engaged in learning and willing to share their knowledge with others.

In short, practices in communities of inquiry are guided by the understanding that learning and development are "intrinsically social and interactive" (p. 29).

Like classroom communities of inquiry, teacher research groups require an optimal mix of give and take as members contribute to and learn from the joint analysis of classroom practice. Since examining the intentions and interpretations of their individual studies requires both "conversations with self" and "conversations with others" (Prawat, 1995, p. 742), teacher research groups are comprised of professionally compatible "critical friends" who meet regularly to provide alternative frames for the interpretation of their classroom experiences (Stevenson, 1995, p. 201). Such critical dialogue provides a combination of internal and external reflection that potentially enriches the processes of both research and teaching (Allen, Cary, & Delgado, 1995). While they use conversation to sharpen one another's thinking, teacher research groups must also be genuinely collegial, however. Wells (1993) notes that action research groups are likely to avoid the "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves, 1991) that often results in mandatory, school-based instances of peer coaching because inquiry is self-initiated in the former groups, and discourse is oriented toward problem-solving rather than evaluation. Only in an environment of trust, respect, and support can members risk speaking in their own voices about their professional beliefs and practices (Stevenson, 1995).

Despite the credibility and intellectual and emotional support teacher research groups lend to their members (Elliott & Adelman, 1996; Hollingsworth, 1997; Wells, 1994), both groups and individuals face obstacles to their efforts. Other colleagues

and administrators may view teacher research studies as unimportant, irrelevant, or invalid and may regard teacher researchers with suspicion, contempt, or indifference (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Hollingsworth, 1996). Innovative teachers involved in out-of-school networks, such as teacher research groups, may find support and earn "good colleague" status within these networks, for example, and yet face disapproval and resentment by their individual departments and schools (Little & McLaughlin, 1993). This experience has also been noted by in-school groups of teacher-researchers (Hogan, 1995). Because teacher research groups and their goals, proceedings, and outcomes must evolve over time, they may also be unattractive professional development alternatives to administrators who seek more expedient, predictable change (Hargreaves, 1992).

The support provided by teacher research communities is critical in sustaining the efforts of individual teacher researchers as they face such obstacles (Feldman & Atkin, 1995). Researchers cannot fully understand how individual members of teacher research groups construct their knowledge without also examining the practical, intellectual, and affective support provided by the community of inquiry. In the next section, I examine the special role that discourse plays in teacher research groups.

Discourse Practices in Teacher Research Groups

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) distinguish between two interrelated types of talk that occur in teacher research communities: thick description and critique. After Geertz's (1973) notion, thick description refers to "the process of 'grasping' and 'rendering' the multiple and complicated 'webs of significance' [Geertz, 1973, p. 5]

that people themselves have created" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 94). This talk includes rich descriptions of teacher-researchers' understandings of their students and the events, norms, and practices that make up the taken-for-granted daily lives of ordinary classrooms. By contrast, critique includes conversations in which teachers question and examine the larger structures in which decisions and inquiries about learning and schooling occur. Both types of talk allow communities of teacher researchers to build "multi-layered portraits of school life" and to "conjointly uncover relationships between concrete cases and more general issues and concerns" (p. 95). Such conversation is not linear, nor aimed at consensus, but is recursive as it reflects teachers' evolving realizations regarding their own theories and practices.

Hollingsworth (1994) describes how teacher research groups use collaborative conversation as a relational tool for learning to teach, a medium for understanding experiences within the classroom, and a stimulus toward "transformative social action" (Lather, 1991, p. 72). Unlike authored dialogues dominated by one perspective, or more formal discussions of prearranged topics, teacher research group's discourse is more accurately characterized as conversation because it provides an intimate, supportive space for exchanging ideas and raising questions relevant to members' teaching contexts.

Chang-Wells and Wells (1997) similarly observe that discourse is a powerful mediator for the joint activity of teacher research groups, a tool for learning and problem-solving, and a means for achieving broader educational goals. In addition to oral discourse, they also describe how other modes of discourse (e-mail

communication, fieldnotes, written reports, publications, audiotapes, and videotapes) constitute the practice, research activity, and data for their action research group. Like Hollingsworth (1994), they report that both oral and written modes of discourse allow their group to maintain a relational framework characterized by friendship and support and to provide a means of establishing and defining group membership. Additionally, some practices, such as e-mail, serve as ethnographic documentation of the group's policies, activities, and thinking, and provide members with broader pictures of schooling beyond their individual classrooms.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) attest to the central role of professional discourse in the collaborative construction of knowledge in teacher research groups, as well as to the more informal purposes "small talk" serves in the establishment of interpersonal relationships and emotional levels of trust and care essential to an environment that encourages the taking of intellectual risks. These researchers concur that both the official and unofficial discourse in which group members engage serve important purposes.

Conclusion

Darling-Hammond (1998) argues that the documentation of inquiry-based, professional development collaboratives is clearly necessary for a better understanding of the kinds of teacher learning and development they foster, the external support such networks require, and the connections they have to student learning and achievement. While teacher research groups have the potential to make unique contributions to professional knowledge development and educational reform, little is known about

how they construct knowledge together. In addition to lending credence to views of teachers as agents capable of their own inquiry, this research should be useful in identifying the kinds of collaboration necessary for the establishment and maintenance of successful teacher research communities. More broadly speaking, this study also provides empirical evidence of a teacher learning community (Westheimer, 1998) and should further operationalize the concepts of discourse communities (Beaufort, 1997) and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

After Wells (1993), this study of the development of a teacher research group into a discourse community takes a view of teacher development as

> a form of professional apprenticeship in which teachers take over the solutions to past problems embodied in the artifacts, both physical and intellectual, which they encounter in the joint activities they undertake with other professionals. In the process, not only do they develop new ways of acting and understanding, but they may also radically transform the situations in which their actions are performed. (p. 5)

In determining how best to study development along these lines, I found it useful to think of my methodology in terms of a camera that would not only allow me to record particular data but would later constrain how I developed it through my analysis. Because I am a member of RRWPTRG, this metaphor also worked well since it acknowledges me as part of the action. For even as I interacted with other group members at RRWPTRG meetings, I frequently wondered, "Where are the best places for me to point and shoot? What angles and views will allow me to capture the most accurate picture of the group's work together?"

Compatible with sociocultural theories of learning described in the previous chapter, the means I chose for studying the group's interaction focused the camera on our use of tools, in this case, discourse practices, to mediate our joint inquiry within the context of the teacher research group. Often, I needed a lens wide enough to

frame the group's work as a whole, and in some instances, wider still to include the other settings in which our work was nested (Cazden, 1988; Sarason, 1997). At other times, I needed to zoom in and capture our moment-to-moment interactions and analyze the purposes and structures these interactions took. Above all, I was committed to choosing a methodological lens (Cole, 1996) that recognized discourse practices as "socially embedded" and "socially constructive" (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991, p. 3). In this chapter I explain how the methodology associated with the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972; Saville-Troike, 1989) allowed me to determine the functions that discourse practices served in establishing RRWPTRG's identity, mediating our thinking, and creating a context through which members could analyze and improve their teaching practices.

Before describing my research methods in more detail, I first provide an overview of the context of the investigation. In the following sections, I describe RRWPTRG's purposes, the participants and their individual teacher research studies, and the settings for the group's interactions.

Context of the Investigation

The Red River Writing Project Teacher Research Group

Founded in 1996, the Red River Writing Project Teacher Research Group (RRWPTRG) was established as a way of validating what its members believed good teachers do every day, that is, to search for answers that might hone or alter classroom practice. Such a goal was closely aligned with that described in Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993): We wished to establish an "intellectual community of teacher

researchers. . .who enter with other teachers into 'a common search for meaning' (Westerhoff, 1987) and who regard their research as part of larger efforts to transform teaching, learning, and schooling" (p. 52). RRWPTRG's official purpose, as stated on a flyer distributed to various conference and classroom audiences interested in our work, was to provide its members with "practical, intellectual, and affective support in the design and development of classroom studies" and to share its findings with larger communities through presentations and written accounts submitted to various venues. RRWPTRG members also served as a resource to the Red River Writing Project (RRWP) and to Red River University (RRU) undergraduates enrolled in the action research course required during their intern teaching.

Participants

Initially composed of seven teachers, membership was diverse and shifting through the group's first year and included classroom teachers interested in improving their own practice as well as those pursuing questions related to graduate study yet still emanating from their teaching. While our research projects were generally focused on questions and concerns arising in our individual classrooms, we were bound together by the inquiry orientation we brought to our teaching. Although I will examine the influences of various members and visitors on the group's discourse practices throughout the first year, the bulk of my investigation will be focused on the interaction of the following original members, all Anglo-American middle-class teachers and members of RRWP.

Crystal.

Formerly a secondary English teacher, Crystal was an artist-in-residence who combined art with the teaching of writing in elementary and secondary schools throughout the state. At the time RRWPTRG was established, she was also the Associate Director for RRWP and a Master's student in English Education. Crystal's study was centered around the consistently powerful connections between art and writing she had observed in student work. In her teaching, Crystal noted that

> the inclusion of visual prompts or visual art activities seemed to aid in the creative writing process. When given a visual art activity followed by writing to students, the images in the writing appeared stronger and more vivid as opposed to those students who were not given the art prompt. In regard to the creation of art, it seemed the employment of freewriting, journaling, or poetry writing clarified and defined the image on the canvas, paper, or collage. It was this very observation that attracted me to the problem of how images and words influence the creative processes in art and writing.

Crystal had conducted a pilot study exploring the questions emanating from these observations for an RRU qualitative research course. Rather than taking a classroom-based approach, however, she had chosen to interview artists and writers and had discovered that while "the visual (images)/verbal (words) stimulus seemed to be the conductor that transported the process, . . .the desire to express a deep, sometimes unknown, intrapersonal contradiction within the artist/writer was the impetus driving the creative process." Consequently, the central research question framing her RRWPTRG grant proposal had taken a more psychological turn as she sought to

understand, "What is it that is the underlying motivation to use art and writing as a conduit for expression?" As she explained, she saw the question itself to be explicitly informed by multiple intelligences theory (Gardner, 1983) since she was "interested in researching how the integration of. . .multiple intelligences, especially Spatial/(art) and Linguistic/(creative writing) interact to promote intrapersonal self-reflection." Although she planned from the start to use self-identified adult artists in her study (she eventually settled on an in-depth case study of one artist-writer), Crystal clearly saw classroom connections to her research, intending it to be the subject of her Master's thesis in English Education and a potential topic for conference workshops sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English, the state Council of Teachers of English, and, of course, RRWP. She also stated on multiple occasions that she believed her findings would help her to become a better, more informed teacher of both art and writing in her role as an artist-in-residence.

Hannah.

An RRWP member since 1992, Hannah was a student in RRU's Master's program in English Education. Additionally, she had held a leadership position in the RRWP summer institute just prior to RRWPTRG's formation. As an instructor in the English department of a small, regional junior college, her research questions were rooted in the pilot study she had conducted the year before for a qualitative research course at RRU. In that study, she had become intrigued by the role of reading in the burgeoning educational aspirations of her non-traditional female students. As she explained in her grant proposal, she was

interested in how their development as readers might have played a part in the decision to return to school. Although these women experienced many barriers to their pursuit of higher education over the years, I found that the dispositional barriers--those related to a person's attitudes and perceptions about his or her abilities as a learner--were the most powerful. Could their reading behaviors have made the dispositional barriers less imposing? In other words, does reading increase their confidence and motivation? Did it influence their decision to return? Has their reading outside of school had an impact on their performance once they returned to school?

Hannah came to RRWPTRG with these questions and the conviction that a clearer understanding of how non-traditional students used reading would allow her (and others) to better serve this growing classroom population. She, too, conceived of this project as her Master's thesis.

Roxanne.

Roxanne was an experienced teacher at a progressive elementary school who had taught fifth grade for several years before she began teaching in a multiage classroom in 1996. Like Hannah, she had been an RRWP member since 1992 and had made several presentations to area schools, demonstrating how she implemented writing workshop, taught revision strategies, and integrated multiple intelligences projects into her teaching. Also a member of the RRWP Governing Board and a Master's student in English Education at RRU, Roxanne's initial research questions

reflected her immediate concerns as she prepared to teach in a multiage classroom for the first time. In her proposal for the RRWPTRG Research Grant she wrote,

> How will the change to a multiage classroom affect meeting the needs of all students in a writing workshop setting? Will a twelve-year-old want to share his work with a nine-year-old? Will a nine-year-old feel comfortable sharing writing ideas with someone three years older? How will the climate of the writing workshop change with these varied ages of students?

Although Roxanne would continue her interest in the effects of the multiage setting on her students' learning, she would eventually focus on the social dynamics of a small group of boys as they adopted a project-based approach to research. From the start of RRWPTRG, Roxanne viewed her teacher research project as the study that would comprise her Master's thesis.

Joan.

Joan was a teacher of gifted students in grades 1-6 at a suburban school and had just become an RRWP member the summer prior to RRWPTRG's founding. After receiving her Master's degree from a regional university in 1989, she had returned to RRU to pick up fifteen additional hours in rhetoric and composition before attending the RRWP summer institute and applying to RRWPTRG in 1996. No stranger to classroom-based research, Joan had published an article in a regional university journal on the cognitive processes of a small group of her gifted elementary students at the behest of a highly respected composition theorist she had worked with at RRU. In her grant proposal, Joan explained that she saw her study as a way of

justifying her existence as a teacher of gifted students since state and district budgets for gifted programs were in serious jeopardy. Still, she noted, "While validating one's program is very important, especially if it is endangered, the REASON to validate one's program, true learning experiences for our children, is even more important." Although she described in detail the benefits of a multiple genre approach (Romano, 1995) for teaching research skills to gifted students, Joan included no research question in her grant proposal. Instead, she seemed more interested in trying out what she saw as an exciting new instructional approach and documenting student performance to demonstrate that it had worked, thus validating her gifted program in the process.

Kathy.

Also new to RRWP was Kathy, a fourth-grade teacher in an urban school. She had earned a Master's degree in reading from a regional university in the late 1970s and was eager to apply several of the teaching strategies she had picked up in the RRWP summer institute with her students in the coming school year. Realizing as a result of the institute that "writing is an important part of learning for every student," she came away with "the desire to adapt my students' curriculum in such a way [that] I believe that they will be more successful writers." Having recently read Atwell's (1991) account of a workshop approach to teaching writing, Kathy had become inspired to create a similar environment in her own classroom where circumstances were apparently not as happy. As she explained in her grant proposal:

> The announcement that it's time for a writing activity is met with groans and moans. What am I doing wrong? Why don't they look forward to writing? "Take out your Writing Workshop [a writing workbook]," I say. My students complain "it's hard," it makes my hand hurt," or "I don't know anything to write." How many times have I heard these worn-out excuses? What can I do?

Although these questions of motivation seemed to be a potential point of departure for a frustrated writing teacher's inquiry, Kathy instead conceived of her study as a project "to create a new environment, a writing environment in my classroom." After detailing her plans for developing a classroom writing center, which she planned to call "The Writing Connection," Kathy listed multiple teaching strategies she hoped to try. She concluded the narrative portion of her RRWPTRG grant proposal with this series of questions, which, unlike those that began her proposal, shift the focus of her inquiry to student attitudes and performance rather than her pedagogical approach:

> Will students approach writing with a more positive attitude if they have helped to create their working environment? Does the student prefer less teacher input in what they will write? Is their attitude more positive toward writing when they have chosen the topic? Will students have a higher rate of mastery in composition skills [as measured on Essential Skills Testing, her school district's standardized tests]? Will there be transference of composition skills they have learned when attempting such tasks as the "Fix It" rewrite? Will their portfolio, a collection of examples of multiple genre

writing, demonstrate growth? These are some of the questions that I hope to answer as we work through this school year.

At the time of writing her grant proposal, then, Kathy had not yet narrowed the focus of her research. Like Joan, she seemed to view her role as a teacher researcher as trying out a new approach and answering questions as they occurred to her along the way. As a trainer for the staff development program of the largest school district in the state, she hoped to eventually share her findings with other trainers and the teachers at her school.

Regina.

Also a new RRWP member from Joan and Kathy's class, Regina was a doctoral student in English Education at RRU. She taught courses in freshmen composition at a nearby regional university and supervised RRU intern teachers. From the very beginning, Regina was quite explicit in stating that she saw her RRWPTRG grant as a way to fund her dissertation study. Although in her grant proposal she explained that she planned to study how the influence of social and cultural factors on college composition instructors' tool use during planning, classroom activities, and assessment, she changed her topic early in RRWPTRG's first year together, choosing instead to investigate how the writing instruction of college composition teachers who view themselves as writers compared to the writing instruction of those who did not.

My Role as a Participant and a Researcher.

An RRWP member since 1991 and a high school English for several years, I had just begun my doctoral program when RRWPTRG was formed. I was a RRWP

Governing Board member, a frequent teacher-consultant for RRWP and the College Board's Advanced Placement English program, and a recent participant in a year-length study on multimedia composing, conducted in my classroom the prior year by Paul Stanchinsky. As facilitator of RRWPTRG, I did not submit a grant proposal since I saw the already-funded project with Paul as my research focus at the time. Although the RRWP Governing Board (to be described in detail in Chapter 3) had agreed that project facilitators would receive compensation for their work, I requested travel funds to literacy conferences in lieu of a stipend. As I became more involved in coordinating the group's efforts and our meetings began, I immediately began to see RRWPTRG as a promising site for exploring my interests in teacher research, small-group discourse, and professional development. Consequently, RRWPTRG soon became the focus of my study within the group and my dissertation research as well.

Having already agreed to facilitate and act as a full participant in RRWPTRG, I did not relinquish these roles upon also becoming the group's ethnographer. On a participant-observation continuum, my role as a researcher would best be described as a full participant since I was "simultaneously a functioning member of the community undergoing investigation and an investigator" (Glesne & Peshkin, p. 40). This position was compatible with the theoretical perspective I chose in the ethnography of communication since "[it] is likely that only a researcher who shares, or comes to share, the intuitions of the speech community under study will be able to accurately describe the socially shared base which accounts in large part for the dynamics of communicative interaction" (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 110).

This position yielded several benefits: As both RRWPTRG member and ethnographer, I was present at every RRWPTRG event, my access to the setting was a given, and I was able to consistently elicit feedback from other group members in response to my ongoing questions and descriptions. Additionally, I was able to convey reciprocity toward RRWPTRG members by becoming an advocate for a number of their requests. I convinced RRWP director and the Governing Board to fund conference travel for Roxanne and Crystal and wrote several conference and grant proposals for which members were joint beneficiaries, gaining presentation opportunities at national conferences, book purchases relevant to their individual studies, and school release time for Roxanne so that she could have uninterrupted thesis writing time. Although these efforts may have been small compensation for the time and generosity members extended in allowing me to engage in data collection practically every moment we were together, they were supportive of my study from the beginning. At one point when I was videotaping a meeting, for instance, a member became upset because of the writing deadline she was facing. When I rose to turn off the video camera, she stopped me before I did, saying, "No, don't! It's your data, and this is part of it, so leave it on."

Van Maanen (1988) argues that fieldwork is ultimately "an interpretive act, not an observational or descriptive one" (p. 93), and after Barthes, he describes ethnographies as documents that "necessarily decode one culture while recoding it for another" (p. 4). As such, my "pre-text" assumptions (p. 5) have undoubtedly influenced my data collection and analysis, and reporting my findings has inevitably

required some degree of political mediation in my attempts to represent the work of others. Because inquiry is "value-laden" in that "ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound and perspectival" (Lather, 1991, p. 2), I have turned to my research journal throughout this study to identify the perspectives that have shaped my research processes and to help me mindfully consider the question of who is speaking for whom in my research text (Duranti, 1985; Smagorinsky, 1995b). While the ethnographer's subjectivity is "the basis for the story that [he or she is] able to tell," to be considered valid, I have tried to keep in mind at all times that my story must ultimately be "imaginable" and "verifiable by others" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 104).

Settings

The setting for the majority of this group's interactions was our meetings, which were regularly held in members' homes and occasionally at local restaurants or the university library. Some group members also traveled to conferences to make presentations on the RRWPTRG's work and participated in the virtual settings of personal e-mail correspondence and XTAR, the Teacher-as-Researcher listserve. Each of these settings and our interaction within them is somehow represented in the transcripts, documents, and other artifacts I collected throughout RRWPTRG's first year together and will be described in detail in the chapters that follow.

Procedure

A Syncretic Framework for the Study of Discourse Practices

Gutierrez and Stone (in press) claim that researchers need transdisciplinary perspectives that will allow them to "link the particular to the larger social context.

Thus methodologically [they] attempt to look at both the social practice of literacy learning and the moment-to-moment construction of that practice." They refer to this approach as a syncretic framework and define it as "the principled and strategic use of a combination of theoretical and methodological tools to examine individual actions, as well as the goals and history of those actions." In this study, my use of the methodological tools associated with the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972; Saville-Troike, 1989) made possible both macro and micro analyses of RRWPTRG's discourse practices while allowing me to remain grounded in the overarching framework of sociocultural theory.

Similar to Gutierrez and Stone (in press), sociolinguists have argued that complementary conceptual frameworks and methods in sociology, anthropology, and sociolinguistics have the potential to "overlap, combine, and mutually inspire each other" for the purposes of "detailed, ethnographical, multilevel analysis of actual language use, especially spoken dialogues, in the sociocultural context" (Van Dijk, 1985, p. 11). Described as "the most integrative approach" (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 143) in discourse analysis in terms of theory and methods, the ethnography of communication views utterances as embedded in a larger context of cultural or social meaning. Ethnographers of communication attempt to explicate this contextual knowledge and the corresponding rules of discourse through a global analysis of speech events as they occur within a particular setting or culture.

In order to provide a fine-grained picture of RRWPTRG's development into a discourse community of teacher researchers, I thus chose to combine the research

methods associated with this approach and the conceptual framework provided by sociocultural theory. In the following sections, I briefly review the methodological implications of each piece of the study's syncretic framework before describing my specific procedures for data collection and analysis.

Sociocultural theory: The "ensemble" as a unit of analysis.

While sociocultural research has not been confined to any single research paradigm, the sociocultural perspectives of learning outlined in the previous chapter were central to my attempts to understand how RRWPTRG members constructed knowledge through their social interaction. The theory that human development is goal-directed, situated in particular sociocultural contexts, and mediated by language and other symbol systems meant that I would need to examine RRWPTRG's cultural practices and mediational tools as well as the goals and contexts influencing our actions. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that "participation in the lived-in-world" must be the key unit of analysis in the development of a theory of social practice (p. 121). Building upon other notions of the unit of analysis (e.g., the word, individual, dyads, different levels of activity, etc.) previously suggested by sociocultural theorists, Granott (1998) similarly proposes analysis of the ensemble, a unit that was especially relevant to this study since it is "a collective variable, indicating the smallest group of people who directly interact with one another while co-constructing developmental processes within a specific activity context." This context includes "the symbol systems that the ensemble uses; the objects (e.g., tool, artifacts, or materials) that are

directly involved in the activity; and socioculturally based layers of interpretations, norms, and conventions that are reflected in the activity" (p. 50).

An ensemble distinguishes itself from a mere collection of individuals by the way its members relate to and depend upon one another to define and achieve a common task, which may be externally imposed or situationally derived. Also proponents of the ensemble as a unit of analysis, Bracewell and Witte (1999) insist that task definition emerges as an ensemble's unifying theme, organizing both the roles participants assume and the mediational means they choose to employ. Within the ensemble, the individual's actions can be fully understood only in relation to other group members' actions and the activity in which they are engaged, and the group's co-constructed knowledge is the product of the interdependence and interactions of its individual members.

Granott (1998) grounds the notion of the ensemble in her study of adults engaged in a collaborative problem-solving activity. There she found that ensembles continually defined and redefined their goals, questions, and strategies, and thus the conditions of their talk. The group's development related to the immediate context of the activity in that their interactions were based in their culturally shared understanding of acceptable practices within that context. Through her analysis of microdevelopmental sequences, Granott demonstrates that while the group's interaction paved the way for an individual's development, the individual's contributions made the group's interaction possible. She concludes that because ensembles use one another's talk, action, and gestures as a basis for co-constructing

knowledge, researchers can determine how knowledge develops through interaction only by analyzing the group's interaction within their common activity context, which may also reflect "layers of settings" from larger sociocultural and institutional contexts (p. 44).

I found the ensemble to be an attractive unit of analysis for my purposes because it has the benefit of including many of the elements researchers have insisted ought to be included in a the study of socially constructed knowledge within the zone of proximal development, including social relations (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998), sociocultural context (e.g., Saxe, Gearhart, & Guberman, 1984), leading activities (e.g., Griffin & Cole, 1984), and mediational means (especially language) within goal-directed actions (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985, 1991, 1998). In addition, it allowed me to consider RRWPTRG's collective psychological development as a whole process rather than a collection of isolated variables (Smagorinsky, 1995b). In the next section I turn to the methodogical implications of the second piece of my syncretic framework, the ethnography of communication.

Methodological implications: The ethnography of communication.

Simply put, the ethnography of communication is a study of "discourse-in-situation" (van Dijk, 1985, p. 10). Originating in the work of Hymes (1972, 1974), the approach is rooted in structural linguistics and anthropology and is concerned with the relationship between language use and sociocultural context. Hymes's primary methodological goal was aligned with what he saw to be the larger purpose of sociolinguistics: "to explain the meaning of language in human life, and not in the

abstract, not in the superficial phrases one may encounter in essays and textbooks, but in the concrete, in actual human lives" (1972, p. 41). Central to the approach is his notion that participants orient their language use toward their sociocultural surroundings in their attempts to demonstrate communicative competence (Hymes, 1972, 1981), that is, to use language in socially and culturally appropriate ways. Like Gee (1990), researchers in this tradition regard discourse as culturally bound: as "part of the speakers' cultural construction of reality," discourse must then be understood as "relating to and defining such reality" (Duranti, 1985, p. 220). Such a sociocultural approach to discourse thus has two requirements: "to relate a given text to its context" and to characterize "speech not simply as a tool for describing the world but also as a tool for changing the world" (Duranti, pp. 195-196).

An ethnographic approach to understanding RRWPTRG's communicative processes is highly compatible with the conceptions of the discourse community as described in Chapter One because both approaches emphasize language use as integral to culture. Since the ethonography of communication provided a means for making these connections empirically explicit through an analysis of the structural and functional dimensions of discourse, its method offered much potential for uncovering how the group's discourse practices revealed our values, world-view, and ways of knowing (Beaufort, 1997; Gee, 1990).

Data Collection

Sociocultural theorists have traditionally viewed language as discourse, that is, as a means for achieving some larger purpose. This emphasis on pragmatics rather

than pure content (i.e., understanding how people are using language in a particular situation, rather than just focusing on what they are saying) was an important methodological consideration in this study. In order to understand how RRWPTRG used language as a mediational tool, this meant I must collect and examine what Engeström (1994) terms "on-line data":

> When thinking is defined as a private, individual phenomenon only indirect data is accessible. Thinking embedded in collaborative practical activity must to a significant degree take the form of talk, gesture, use of artifacts, or some other publicly accessible mediational instrumentality; otherwise mutual formation of ideas would be rendered impossible. Collaborative thinking opens up access to direct data on thought processes. (p. 45)

Viewing RRWPTRG as Wells (1996b) views the classroom, I attended not so much to our "talk per se, as the contribution it makes to the activities in which students engage in the 'lived-in world' of the classroom, the actual structures of participation, and the functions that talk performs—along with other semiotic systems—in mediating the goals of these activities." Collecting a full range of data representative of RRWPTRG's discourse practices was central to determining how we collaboratively identified, described, and explored the problems that allowed us to construct knowledge together. (Wells, in press)

With a view toward culture as practice, I studied the group's "lived experiences dynamically" by using research methods that placed me "in situ, engaged with, instead of detached from, human beings and sociocultural dynamics" (Moll, in

press, emphasis in original). Like most ethnographers, I purposely employed multiple methods of data collection in an effort to triangulate my data and increase its trustworthiness (Denzin, 1988; Glesne & Peshkin, 1991; Lauer & Asher, 1988; Moss, 1992). As Moss notes, triangulation provides "an emic perspective (insider's view) of the culture," a task I saw to be central in tracing RRWPTRG's development into a discourse community. To corroborate and convey my insider perspective as an RRWPTRG member, I used basic ethnographic techniques of participant observation, document analysis, interviewing, and in situ recording and transcription of the group's representative verbal activities (Saville-Troike, 1989).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) have designed an analytic framework for the description of the following four dimensions of teacher researcher communities: methods for organizing time, using talk, constructing texts, and interpreting the tasks of teaching and schooling. While this framework is intended as a heuristic for the planning of collaborative work by teacher research communities, a consideration of the interrelationships among its dimensions guided my data collection. Because I became interested in the development of the group early on, I decided to conduct a longitudinal qualitative study of the group for my dissertation research. Having previously conducted qualitative research, I was familiar with the types of data that might be useful, considering the kinds of research questions I find to be compelling. Thus I began collecting data from the first meeting of the teacher research group, trusting that, ultimately, my research design would emerge.

Grouped and filed by genre, the full data set includes transcribed audiotapes and videotapes of teacher research meetings; semi-structured group interviews of OWTPRG members; proposals, analytic memos, and drafts of member's individual studies; fieldnotes taken during meetings; written reflections in my research journal; written reflections and visual representations on the group's research processes, composed by group members during meetings; meeting agendas; e-mail correspondence; other documents produced by the group (e.g., goals, membership agreements, budget proposals, annual reports, etc.); and presentation proposals and texts. I recorded most of our meetings using a portable tape recorder or a video camera and otherwise documented our interactions, usually by taking fieldnotes, when technical difficulties prevented either of these means.

Because a full understanding of RRWPTRG's discourse practices demanded a deep familiarity with the members and the rules, norms, and values we shared, my principal task for this study was to "reconstruct and interpret this knowledge in terms of the categories or rules used by the people themselves" (van Dijk, 1985, p. 8). By assuming a participant-observer stance (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), I hoped to be able to infer communicative patterns through the systematic collection and analysis of our spontaneous verbal interactions so that I could "learn what members of a culture know about how to 'make sense' out of experience and how they communicate those interpretations" (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 141). In order to construct a "culture-specific definition" (Duranti, 1985, p. 199) of the group's interactions and participants'

perspectives on them, my goal was to collect a rich base of data that might illuminate the structure, content, and dynamics of our communication practices.

Data Analysis

My data analysis occurred in three stages. As the first step in describing and analyzing RRWPTRG's patterns of communication and making explicit the cultural knowledge that informed them, I examined each document, transcript, and artifact in the data set and categorized it by date, genre, and purpose. I also keyed it to relevant research questions and noted emergent themes, questions, and outcomes related to the document, transcript, or artifact. These themes, questions, and outcomes provided my initial coding scheme that in turn suggested the broader themes of RRWPTRG's cultural development as represented in the following chapters.

Recognizing that language use is "constrained by culture," even as it "reveals and sustains culture" (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 139), I also sought a better understanding of RRWPTRG culture through an ethnographic analysis of the relationships among various components of the speech events (Hymes, 1972) represented by RRWPTRG's regular meetings. Tapes of the group's meetings were transcribed by group members, then checked by me to verify accuracy. In this second stage of analysis, I identified the salient components within meeting transcripts, recognized recurrent speech acts, and attempted to discover the relationship among components and between our meetings and other aspects of RRWPTRG culture (Saville-Troike, 1989). In the final stage of data analysis, I more closely analyzed transcripts and videotapes of our meetings by using Saville-Troike's (1989) adaptation of Hymes's (1972) analytic grid representing

multiple components of the speech event. I describe this grid in detail in the following section.

The analytic grid.

Using the analytic grid below, I coded transcripts to determine how RRWPTRG members oriented their language use toward their sociocultural surroundings in their attempts to demonstrate communicative competence (Hymes, 1972, 1981). This grid consists of the following components that are likely to be salient in a communicative event:

The genre, or type of event (e.g., joke, story, lecture, greeting, conversation).

The topic, or referential focus.

The purpose or function, both of the event in general and in terms of the interaction goals of individual participants.

The setting, including location, time of day, season of year, and physical aspects of the situation (e.g., size of room, arrangement of furniture).

The key, or emotional tone of the event (e.g., serious, sarcastic, jocular).

The participants, including their age, sex, ethnicity, social status, or other relevant categories, and their relationship to one another.

The message form, including both vocal and nonvocal channels, and the nature of the code which is used (e.g., which language, and which variety).

The message content, or surface level denotive references; what is communicated about.

The act sequence, or ordering of communicative/speech acts, including turn taking and overlap phenomena.

The rules for interaction, or what proprieties should be observed.

The norms of interpretation, including the common knowledge, the relevant cultural presuppositions, or shared understandings, which allow particular inferences to be drawn about what is to be taken literally, what discounted, etc. (Saville-Troike, 1989, pp. 138-139)

Providing descriptions of speech events and acts at these eleven levels, Saville-Troike's (1989) system allowed me to determine how the group's speech acts were normatively situated within the speech events of our RRWPTRG meetings. Essentially, the grid is concerned with the questions, "What are the communicative events and their components in a community? What are the relationships among them? What capabilities and states do they have in general and in particular cases? How do they work?" (Hymes, 1974, p. 25). I used the grid to describe our meetings in general and to more closely examine the speech acts occurring within them in order to identify: (a) the variety of speech acts, (b) their relationships to the larger event, and (c) the communicative norms and understandings revealed through members' behavior (Schiffrin, 1994).

While the speech act level was most important for analysis of turn by turn interaction, I analyzed the speech event as a whole before analyzing its component

utterances in order to determine the features necessary for communicative competence within our group (Gumperz, 1972; Hymes, 1972; Schiffrin, 1994). In analytic memos written after charting each speech event, I noted emergent patterns and themes that I then grouped into the broader categories suggested by my third research question concerning the structural and functional dimensions of the group's discourse. RRWPTRG members examined my subsequent interpretations for validity. My purposes at this stage of analysis were thus to: (1) describe the relationship between language use and sociocultural context and (2) determine how the group had developed culturally informed discourse practices to mediate their inquiry within the context of the teacher research group.

By explicating the structures and functions of the group's discourse and relating these to our cultural knowledge and practices, I attempted to systematically explore the dialectical relationship between RRWPTRG's discourse and the sociocultural context in which it occurred (van Dijk, 1985). To achieve this goal, I selected a syncretic framework (Gutierrez & Stone, in press) that suggested the use of the ensemble (Granott, 1998; Bracewell & Witte, 1999) as a unit of analysis, data in the form of discourse practices (i.e., language use within a culturally defined activity context), and ethnography as a general research approach. The specific research methods associated with the ethnography of communication allowed me to examine RRWPTRG's activity in the settings in which it was nested (Sarason, 1997; Cazden, 1988) and provided the means for analyzing the purposes and structures of our moment-to-moment interactions. Although the units of analysis for each approach

were different, they could easily be viewed as encapsulating one another (i.e., the ensemble engages in the speech event, which is constituted by various speech acts). Together, sociocultural theory and the ethnography of communication provided a valuable combination of lenses (Cole, 1996) through which to view the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEXT MATTERS: THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR SETTINGS

Early on, someone asking an RRWPTRG member to describe the group's purpose would probably have encountered a combination of shoulder-shrugging, stammering, and, at best, a vague reply. Assuming a teacher researcher persona in itself was a new idea to all of us, so designating ourselves as an official, funded arm of a professional organization initially made us feel a little nervous, if not downright fraudulent at times. Although our group had been argued into existence, named, and legitimated by RRWP funding, the task that lay before us that first August of 1996 was nothing short of inventing who we were as teacher researchers and as a collective. Within a year, the process of defining ourselves would not only determine our group's trajectory but would also carve out a community of practice that some members would find safe and challenging but others would find exclusionary.

Central to the task of self-definition and the development of the group into a discourse community were matters of context. Members' involvement in prior settings shaped RRWPTRG's development into a discourse community and, as I will later show, influenced the patterns of communication that facilitated our work together as members looked to linguistic norms from these prior settings to establish new norms for our group. The development of new linguistic norms would pose a serious though largely implicit challenge for RRWPTRG since "the most difficult [situation] for speakers" occurs when "old rules no longer hold but new ones have not yet codified"

(Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 250). Just as Appalachian children's ways of speaking in the prior contexts of home and community influenced their varying degrees of school success in Heath's (1983) study, group members' linguistic experience and expertise in multiple prior settings would largely determine their success in RRWPTRG.

The Relationship between Context and Discourse

In the previous chapter, I argued that the ensemble (Granott, 1998; Bracewell & Witte, 1999) was an appropriate unit of analysis for this study. Because ensembles do not form in vacuo, however, a number of theorists contend that it is seriously misleading to consider any group's activity without examining the interrelationships among the group and other contexts, or settings, in which their work is situated (Cazden, 1988; DiPardo, 1993; Floriani, 1993; Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1972, 1974, 1981; Malinowski, 1923; Sarason, 1997; Saville-Troike, 1989). Cazden defines context as "the situation as the speaker finds it, antecedent to the moment of speaking" and insists that "it is the rules for speaking in that context to which the speaker's utterances must be appropriate." In her examination of the relationship between contexts and discourse as it is produced in a particular setting, she argues that contexts are "never wholly of the participants' making" because they are "nested, from the most immediate to the act of speaking to the more distant" (p. 198). In pre-established contexts, newcomers learn to speak appropriately by observing and participating alongside more experienced community members (Lave & Wenger, 1991) who are familiar with the community's overriding motive (Wertsch, 1985) and the purposeful actions it implies as appropriate. But what of newly forming communities for which

linguistic norms are yet to be established? What if no clear antecedents to the moment of speaking exist?

In such a case, speakers are not only influenced by prior contexts but are also "context-creating" through their intentional use of discourse to change or subvert existing contexts, or to fashion new ones altogether (Cazden, 1988, p. 198). Intentionality is an important dimension of context because it acknowledges the agency of individuals rather than portraying them as environmental pawns. While certainly an influence on an individual's engagement in an activity, then, context does not necessarily predetermine it, particularly when an individual's goals are incongruous with the overriding motive of the setting (Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1999). An understanding of contexts as nested, yet dynamic, is thus essential to the premise that individuals can be affected by their environments at the same time that they are effecting changes within them (O'Donnell-Allen, 1998). Likewise, participants can use language within a setting as a tool for "reproducing as much as changing reality" since "language, like all tools, is both enabling and constraining" (Duranti, 1997, p. 42).

In the following sections, I describe prior contexts in which RRWPTRG's development was nested. When possible, I also highlight the overriding motive and the role of discourse either explicitly or implicitly embedded in each setting.

Shared Contexts: The Red River Writing Project and the Summer Institute

Established in 1978 and affiliated with RRU and the National Writing Project (NWP), RRWP was a thriving center of professional development for state literacy

teachers for over a decade before falling on hard times in the early '90s. Loyal to the longtime director who took a position at another university in 1990, RRWP veterans balked at the new director's leadership style and revision of long-standing policies and traditions, especially those regarding the summer institute. Although tuition for summer institute participants had been funded by RRWP since the year it was established, in the first year he organized the institute, the new director experimented with requiring teachers or their school districts to pay tuition themselves. Seeing this alternative as a way to stretch funds provided by the annual NWP grant and increase new members' and school systems' investment in the summer institute experience, the director discontinued these scholarships without consulting veteran members. These members, however, viewed the scholarships as a time-honored NWP practice as well as an essential incentive and financial nod to the professional and intellectual worth of pocket-poor teachers. While this expense often depleted the RRWP budget by each year's end, in veteran members' minds NWP funds had become almost a given for a Project as healthy as theirs, and these scholarships further established the norm that the most important investment the organization could make was in its teachers. Once summer tuition scholarships were eliminated, participation at RRWP events dropped sharply, and applications to the once highly competitive summer institute dwindled. Although the director re-instituted scholarships the following year, irreparable damage had been done to both RRWP's statewide reputation and the relationship between the director and the bulk of the membership, a contingent of whom rallied to form a new Writing Project site at the state's other flagship university.

Despite this slump and its increasing strain on the organization, all six original members of RRWPTRG became RRWP members between 1991 and 1996 during the new director's tenure. To gain their membership, teachers interested in writing instruction from the elementary to university level were first required to complete the "linchpin of all Writing Project programs" (Gray & Sterling, 1999), the five-week summer institute, where they participated in writing groups, researched topics associated with writing pedagogy, and prepared presentations featuring their own classroom writing instruction. Since RRWP was a funded affiliate of NWP, institute facilitators were bound to further its basic assumptions, among them that "teachers are the best teachers of teachers" and that teachers of writing should be writers themselves (NWP Basic Assumptions--Basic Beliefs, 1999).

Following NWP's lead, institute facilitators emphasized writing process theory as the predominant conceptual framework underlying the content and activities of these summer sessions. Not surprisingly, then, writing, discussions regarding the teaching of writing, and the sharing of writing itself were the dominant discourse practices during the institute. In the development of their individual presentations, teachers were required to consult and draw upon writing process theory and research as they articulated the rationale behind their teaching, to explicate a particular strategy from their classroom writing instruction, and to use student writing samples as evidence of its efficacy. Additionally, teachers produced and shared several pieces of personal writing in the course of the institute in the form of daily logs, written exercises completed as consultants practiced their presentations, and original works

that would eventually be published in the summer anthology mailed to the entire body of RRWP members.

If not already indoctrinated in writing process theory prior to their induction into RRWP, new members had been required to demonstrate their allegiance to it by the institute's end in the form of their personal writing and the presentations they were now certified to make to area schools. In the process of sharing their personal writing and supporting one another through the sometimes intense workload, teachers often formed bonds of friendship with their classmates that lasted well beyond the summer. By the institute's end, they had earned six hours graduate credit and were listed as RRWP teacher-consultants in a state directory distributed to school districts. Officially, they had gained access to the most extensive network of literacy teachers in the state. Although I believe it is accurate to say that most teacher-consultants authentically bought into writing process theory as well as the NWP philosophy and viewed the institute requirements as worthy personal goals, the latter, more pragmatic incentives of free college credit and professional contacts were the main draws to others who had little to do with the organization after completing the summer institute.

The six original RRWPTRG members had participated in RRWP to varying degrees when the group formed in 1996. While some members were experienced teacher consultants who had made numerous presentations statewide, others were brand-new members of RRWP. Although all members had completed the summer institute, some members actually hailed from the same class. I had been an RRWP member the longest and was the only one from the class of 1991, but Roxanne and

Hannah became RRWP members and fast friends in the summer of 1992. Roxanne encouraged Crystal, her middle-school colleague at the time, to apply the following year, and Crystal would later become RRWP's Associate Director in 1995. As members of the class of 1996, Regina, Joan, and Kathy were newest to RRWP, but they interacted extensively with Crystal, Roxanne, and Hannah, who helped facilitate the summer institute and encouraged them to apply for RRWPTRG.

Despite their differing levels of participation, all RRWPTRG members shared a common rite of passage in the summer institute and at least ostensibly espoused the philosophies, goals, and discourse practices that accompanied it. In addition to RRWP membership and the summer institute, all RRWPTRG members shared bonds forged in prior settings with some members that they did not share with others. In the following section I describe these settings as they are relevant to the group's development throughout the first year of its existence.

Overlapping Contexts: University Ties

Five of the seven RRWPTRG members held strong ties with the university. The six hours earned through the summer institute were key to the graduate work of Roxanne, Hannah, Crystal, Regina, and I, who were students in RRU's English Education program. In the summer of 1994, Roxanne, Crystal, and other RRWP members (not members of RRWPTRG) earned college credit when they formed a study group to review research on writing. All five of us also were advised by, and/or studied with, Paul Stanchinsky at some point in our programs and were conversant in the theories discussed in his classes and informing his work (e.g., multiple

intelligences, reader response, writing process, and sociocultural learning theories). Roxanne and Hannah had taken classes together with Peter, and the four of us also had other professors in common. Regina and I originally became acquainted three years earlier when we were enrolled in a class on research methods, and all four of us had taken a qualitative research course with another professor we mutually adored. Our graduate work in English Education, the common conceptual background provided by Peter's influence, and our predilection for qualitative research provided us with a degree of intersubjectivity foreign to Joan and Kathy, the other two RRWPTRG members. As I will later demonstrate, this background also influenced the identity and development of our group and its discourse.

Overlapping Contexts: Leadership Positions

Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I also held leadership positions in RRWP. Roxanne and Hannah had been chosen as facilitators for the research strand of the 1996 summer institute, and Crystal had been RRWP's Associate Director since 1995. In this position, Crystal carried most of the responsibility for keeping the organization afloat, but little of the executive power, which rested with the project director who was also her advisor. Her responsibilities included scheduling and planning most of the summer institute, all executive meetings, workshops, and other RRWP events; publicizing these activities; corresponding with school districts and Project members; filing budget requests through the university's departmental secretaries; bulk mailing and other clerical duties. A former secondary English teacher and a frequently requested artist-in-residence, Crystal's easygoing, personable manner made her the

contact of choice when Project members had questions, requests, or crises. She knew more about the internal workings and history of RRWP than anyone else, and members considered her to be a trusted and respected colleague.

In 1996, the time of RRWPTRG's formation, Roxanne, Crystal, and I served on the Governing Board, an elected group that met once a month to plan and carry out RRWP business. The Board consisted of two representatives from the most recent summer institute as well as members of prior classes. Boardmembers served a term of three years during which they had input in steering policies and planning activities for the Project. Discourse patterns at board meetings were mostly informal, so informal that discussion was easily swayed off course, and meetings frequently ended with boardmembers' realizations that we had accomplished little business that would move the organization forward.

But in late 1995, interest in the summer institute and participation in the Project was at an all-time low, and boardmembers resolved to move from a body of talk to one of action. Several RRWP representatives, including Crystal, Hannah, and Roxanne , had attended the fall conference of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in November of that year, and after hearing about other successful Writing Projects at the concurrent NWP meetings, they had returned with a new vision of what RRWP could become. At a board meeting shortly after the conference, Crystal presented the Governing Board with a new metaphor that promised to revitalize the Project.

Reporting on an NWP session she had attended, Crystal explained to us that healthy Projects operated like healthy households where members might occupy different rooms yet still function as a family. She expressed her concern that, in its current state, RRWP consisted of a loose collection of individuals who often began isolated, well-meaning projects that fizzled because they could not be sustained without the support of other members. She challenged boardmembers to exercise their leadership by taking charge of a room in the RRWP house and recruiting a blend of new and veteran RRWP members for participation in that room's activity. Crystal believed that as a result, members would again feel necessary to the once thriving RRWP family and would in turn maintain or renew their connections to the Project.

Hannah was a special guest at the same meeting, requesting a spot on the agenda so that she might suggest a possible new room for RRWP that had been described in a conference session she had attended on teacher research. Although she had completed a qualitative research course the previous semester, Hannah admitted that she knew little about teacher research and didn't have time to organize a group herself. Still, she expressed an interest in studying her own teaching and thought other RRWP members might like the idea as well. Her argument was convincing enough that I volunteered to organize a teacher research group, the director agreed to fund individual teachers' projects, and the Board decided to issue a call for proposals to the entire membership. The Board also agreed that teacher research should become a stronger emphasis in the upcoming summer institute, and the director later appointed Hannah and Roxanne as co-facilitators of this strand.

As a result of this meeting and Crystal's guiding metaphor, the central task of the Governing Board became the revitalization of the ailing project. In addition to teacher research, board members agreed to be in charge of building new rooms, such as summer camps for young writers, as well as remodeling existing rooms, namely inservice programs and the summer institute. At a subsequent board meeting, Crystal even went so far as to distribute handouts featuring a figure of a house with rooms labeled for existing programs, and asked us, "Where do you belong?" Additionally, the Board decided to meet more frequently and to make the management of meetings more efficient by printing and sticking to an official meeting agenda that would now consist of four parts: old business, committee reports from those members managing RRWP rooms, new business, and business from the floor. Crystal agreed to mail these agendas to boardmembers prior to the meeting so that they would come prepared to get down to business. The agendas indeed made subsequent meetings more productive as any boardmember who began wandering off on a personal tangent was soon reminded to stick to the program.

The following November, several boardmembers received RRWP scholarships to the NCTE conference and concurrent NWP national meetings for the purposes of attending sessions pertinent to the management of their respective rooms. Intent on establishing their new programs and revising existing ones, boardmembers took copious notes, debriefed each other throughout the conference, and shared ideas over meals together. The chair of the Summer Institute Committee even brought along a laptop from his school, and after a particularly helpful session, he, Crystal, and I found

a couch in a nearby hallway and began drafting plans and timelines for revision of the Summer Institute so that we could implement them immediately upon our return.

As a result of the Board's revitalization efforts, tensions inevitably surfaced. As we began to transform old rooms and establish new ones to make RRWP an inviting household where members would once again find a place to serve and grow, the Board and the general membership sought more power that the director was reluctant to part with. Because these concerns and power struggles understandably consumed much of our professional and emotional energies, Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I often informally discussed the general state of RRWP at RRWPTRG meetings as we attempted to gain insight in what was to be done. As new members, Regina, Joan, and Kathy remained on the periphery of these conversations and waited for RRWPTRG business to resume on these occasions.

Overlapping Contexts: Friendship

Attending classes, conferences, and board meetings together provided multiple common points of reference for every RRWPTRG member but Joan and Kathy. Occupying the inside track during RRWP's troubled times made Hannah, Roxanne, Crystal, and me especially close, and we could better be characterized as friends than colleagues, especially since Roxanne and Crystal socialized together frequently through their dinner group, Roxanne and I teamed her elementary students and my high school students up as writing buddies, and Crystal frequently served as artist-in-residence in my and Roxanne's classes. For the four of us, RRWPTRG meetings quickly met as many social needs as they did professional ones. While we participated

in multiple overlapping settings, Joan, Kathy, and Regina were new acquaintances, having met only the summer before the formation of RRWPTRG. Inadvertently, over half of our group had achieved the intimacy and ease that accompanies friendship and had learned to communicate and work together in prior settings to achieve common goals. On the other hand, three of our members had little shared history to draw on. The settings RRWPTRG members shared are illustrated by Figure 1 (see Appendix).

Context Matters: The Intercontext as a Source of Cultural Capital

In the process of developing what we saw as a new setting, we would discover that context matters do matter and that our identity and practices as individual teacher researchers and as a group were ultimately inextricable from those contexts which had preceded the formation of RRWPTRG. Members' participation in RRWP and the summer institute resulted in: (1) an assumed value for writing as a tool for constructing and sharing knowledge, (2) an understood commitment to teaching it as such via practices informed by writing process theory, and (3) the implicit responsibility to share useful findings about teaching with audiences in larger settings. Rooted in shared contexts, these assumptions would significantly shape the values and practices central to the new setting of RRWPTRG. Through our participation in overlapping settings and the relationships and communication patterns that accompanied them, Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I had also inadvertently begun to establish an intercontext (Floriani, 1993), a set of rituals and social practices that would guide the group's activity. Reflecting many of the cultural values, processes, and practices we had previously developed in shared settings, this intercontext would

significantly constrain the overriding motive, problem-solving methods, and discourse practices we would establish as appropriate for our group (Tulviste, 1991). As veteran RRWP members, the four of us saw ourselves as engaged in reform on several levels--within our classrooms, schools, and RRWPTRG, yes, but also within our Writing Project. For better and for worse, RRWPTRG was married to a Writing Project with a troubled past, and our very existence and activities were originally conceived and thus inevitably implicated as part of a larger effort to revitalize RRWP.

Although this intercontext and the values and concerns accompanying it were not immediately evident in the group's overriding motive, they were there all the same. And as shared histories often are, ours was all the more powerful and indelible for its invisibility. As I will show in the following chapters, in spite of democratic appearances, core members who shared this intercontext automatically held greater cultural capital within the group, holding as they did a common vision and overriding motive that entailed particular conceptual understandings. Other members who lacked such common ground struggled mightily from the outset to act accordingly but inevitably had difficulty saying the "right things," thinking the "right thoughts," and producing the "right texts" in accordance with the pre-established intercontext. The ensuing success of some members and the struggles of others in RRWPTRG must be framed in light of this understanding of the shared and overlapping settings and the different conceptions of genres (for speech and texts) and goals, both of which suggested particular social practices, these settings deemed appropriate.

CHAPTER FIVE

CREATING A NEW CONTEXT: DEVELOPING AN IDENTITY AS A TEACHER RESEARCH GROUP

Even prior to RRWPTRG's formation, RRWP records show that two teacher consultants had received funding for individual "active research" projects in 1995. As the misnomer on the call for proposal suggests, however, neither project was conceived with teacher research (or action research, for that matter) in mind. One of the consultants, a high school teacher, used her grant to fund a Folger Library Shakespeare Festival and a teacher-training workshop at her school. The other consultant used her grant to fund her dissertation research, a study of the writing instruction of five beginning middle school teachers. Neither of these consultants was engaged in answering research questions connected to their own classroom contexts, nor did they collaborate to support one another's work, so RRWPTRG members began the group with no immediate precedent of teacher research studies nor blueprints of teacher research groups to guide us. Essentially, we were newcomers all with nary an oldtimer in sight to help us build this new community of practice. And like many leaders, our initial vision was relatively unclouded by the obstacles inevitable to the creation of any new setting, so we launched into the establishment of RRWPTRG with a collective belief that our good intentions would serve as "a universal solvent for the problems of contemporary social living" (Sarason, 1997). We publicized the group and issued calls for proposals in the late spring of 1996, and, as I

phrased it in the subsequent acceptance letter to new RRWPTRG members, relied heavily on "the goodwill of humankind" through the initial stages of the process.

Because Crystal, Roxanne, and I were the only members present when Hannah hatched the original plan for founding the group, we should not have been surprised that ours would be a slow and steady process and that problems would be the rule rather than the exception in creating a community that met the group's purposes as they were originally defined in that RRWP winter board meeting. It would take no longer than the arrival of the grant proposals and the first RRWPTRG meeting, however, for many of the "predictable problems" entailed by such a task to surface. Chief among these were the challenges arising from the fact that "[t]he creation of a setting inevitably, always, impacts on and is impacted upon by existing settings" (Sarason, 1997, p. 181) such as those previously described in this chapter. In the following sections, I examine the establishment of the group's overriding motive and its relationship to our budding identities as individual teacher researchers and a teacher research group. To do so, I trace the development of this motive and these identities through several documents and RRWPTRG meeting transcripts representative of our early discourse practices.

Developing an Overriding Motive

I met the job of facilitating RRWPTRG with excitement and anxiety in almost equal parts. For a classroom teacher and new doctoral student, I felt relatively comfortable with the idea of conducting research, having successfully completed a qualitative study for my Master's thesis and having collaborated with Paul Stanchinsky

(hereafter referred to as Paul) to conduct studies in my high school classroom. In a freewrite composed at the first RRWPTRG meeting, I expressed my enthusiasm about the group's development and my reasons for agreeing to participate:

> I am here for lots of reasons—first of all because I'm so excited about developing a T-R group. I remember when I went through my Master's program, took my required research courses, completed coursework on schedule, and then, boom, time to write a thesis. My coursework had focused on my studies, yes, but had only briefly touched on writing a thesis or a dissertation, and no one seemed to point the way. I received lots of advice--"Go to the library reading room and browse through those hard-bound copies; buy this book—it's a published dissertation, but it might help"—but no one was there each step of the way to commiserate, offer "been-there-done-that" tips, or simply to serve as a sounding board. The School of Hard Knocks is an always available teacher, but not always the best. So I went back to the books, yes, but oh, to have had access to a real live human being.
>
> I am eager, then, to share what I've learned, to be that "real live human being" for others, to learn from the wealth of knowledge in this room, and also to observe the formation of a T-R group and see what it can teach me.

These early thoughts featured well my excitement but obscured the anxiety I felt about my role as the group's facilitator. I can read it there between the lines, but only in its omission, as I highlighted my role as participant and minimized that of leader. While I admitted being eager "to share" my experiences, that role was one in the more

equitable list of being, learning, and observing. Although I had dubbed myself the "chair" of the group as I outlined my duties in the budget request submitted to the RRWP director, I felt more than a little uncomfortable with the title. It smacked of authority, and the truth was I wasn't sure what to call myself. I was certain the new RRWPTRG members didn't need another authority figure in their professional lives, and I did have an image, albeit a blurry one, of what the group could become, based on Hannah's description of the groups she had heard described at the NWP conference session. So I spent the spring and summer reading teacher research texts (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Gallas, 1994; Wells, 1994), sharpening up the image, and discussing the group's purpose at length with Crystal before publicizing it to the RRWP body.

After much deliberation with Crystal, I wrote the initial advertisement (see Appendix) for the group, describing the activities in which we would be engaged (I could easily picture us in a room doing something) but leaving implicit our overall purpose. I explained that we would meet regularly "to explore individual research questions, pursue the answers, discuss research methods, and provide support at each stage of the process" and that by the end of the year, we would share our findings in an anthology. The group was to be open to any RRWP member, degree-pursuing or otherwise, who was interested in solving classroom problems, answering questions, or trying new teaching approaches. I advertised RRWPTRG as "an exciting RRWP first!" and "an ideal way to proceed with direction and much support from fellow consultants!" Yet nowhere in the document did I define teacher research or detail the

shape a group member's project might take. I was intent on founding an RRWP teacher research community, yet I was a newcomer to the genre myself and was simply unable to articulate its purpose at this point, much less the purpose of a group that would be jointly pursuing it.

The next document prospective members would receive would do little more in the way of clarification. Because the call for proposals would ultimately entail financial decisions, the director insisted we use the one he had written the previous year that had funded the Shakespeare festival and the dissertation study on the writing pedagogy of beginning teachers. Through the following list of questions applicants were to address in their proposals, this document (see Appendix) only implicitly defined the action research for which they might receive funding:

> What is the problem? Why this project? What literature informs your inquiry? How would you conduct the research? What materials and resources will be needed? How will the information gathered by analyzed? How the research project be evaluated? How will the findings be disseminated?

These questions loosely structured an APA-style proposal but used the words "research" and "project" interchangeably. At the end of the call for proposals, almost as an afterthought, the teacher research group was mentioned yet re-named, "the Teacher Researcher Study Group," and membership was listed as a requirement for RRWP funding although no description of the group's purpose was included.

On the basis of these documents alone, Joan, Kathy, and Regina committed themselves as teacher researchers and RRWPTRG group members despite receiving

no definition of teacher research and only loose descriptions of the group's overall purpose. On the other hand, Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I had been involved in the decision to found and fund the group and had direct access to Hannah's initial vision. As graduate students who had at least piloted qualitative studies, we fully intended to conduct research relevant to our graduate work and were well aware of the support we would be seeking from one another in the process.

As it turned out, these latter goals and purposes are among those I highlighted in a roundtable proposal I wrote in July for the upcoming fall NCTE conference and the letter I composed to notify applicants of their acceptance into RRWPTRG. In the proposal, I defined teacher research and our group's purposes by borrowing and adapting lines from Cochran-Smith's and Lytle's (1993), Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge, a text that had become canonical for me by that time. Citing their classic definition of teacher research as "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (p. 24), I described RRWPTRG as an "intellectual community" (p. 52) committed to providing support for members' engaged in classroom studies, sharing our findings with larger communities, and serving as a resource group to RRWP and university undergraduates enrolled in action research courses. Although I still did not offer a precise definition of teacher research in RRWPTRG members' acceptance letter, I specifically designated the group's overriding motive in the second line of the letter: "The official purpose of this group is to provide practical, intellectual, and affective support in the design and development of classroom studies." As conditions for their participation, I asked group members

(1) to submit to the RRWP director a brief description of their study that contained a "clearly focused question you hope to have answered through your research," (2) to commit to sharing their findings with audiences beyond RRWPTRG, and (3) to agree to regular attendance at RRWPTRG meetings.

If these conditions did not clearly suggest the inquiry orientation the group would take, the allocations of RRWPTRG funds should have. When the director allotted $5,000 to the group, I immediately asked Crystal to help me make funding decisions. We met twice the summer preceding RRWPTRG's first meeting to review proposals, define my duties as facilitator, and determine how to equitably divide monies to fund members' individual budgets. We finalized the budget at the second of these meetings, which Roxanne also attended since she and Crystal wanted to ask my advice on beginning their thesis research. We eventually decided to reserve some funds for group resources (e.g., common texts, presentation materials, xeroxing, and supplies) and divided the remainder among group members for the purposes of funding their studies.

With two exceptions, group members received some funding for all the items they had requested in their individual budgets. In the first case, Crystal and I re-worked Kathy's budget so that it reflected a research stance we felt to be more appropriate than the project stance she had assumed. This meant denying every request in Kathy's original budget but one. Although we wound up awarding her more money than she had originally requested, we took the money she had earmarked for "quantitative interpretation," classroom furnishings, and supplies to set up the

writing environment she had described in her proposal, and re-allocated these funds toward transcription, cassette tapes, and photocopying. While our funding decisions arguably steered Kathy toward the qualitative paradigm with which Crystal and I felt more comfortable, our decision to deny her funding for "quantitative interpretation" was based less on our methodological biases than her failure to designate how these funds would be spent. In fact, the only quantitative measure she planned to use to assess her students' "progress" ("progress" in what, we weren't sure) were the standardized tests that were already funded by her district. In the second case, we decided to deny Joan's request for honorariums she planned to pay teachers who would serve as resources (again, as what kind of resources we weren't sure since she had not defined their roles) during her unit on the multi-genre research paper. Because we were determined to divide funds equally, no member received every single budget request, but everyone received funding for each item in her budget that could be clearly tied to a research expense.

I did not request research funding because the project I was focused on at the time had already been funded through Peter's grant from the NCTE Research Foundation. I did, however, request funds for conference travel in the same amount that had been funded for other members' individual research proposals. In my letter to the director requesting approval of the RRWPTRG budget, I also outlined my responsibilities for "chairing" the group as I saw them. These responsibilities reinforced the overriding motive and related goals I had stated in the NCTE conference proposal and the letter of acceptance I had begun to draft for RRWPTRG

members. The director approved both the budget and my job description with minor stipulations. These included asking the members to re-submit a one-page description of their projects with refined research questions and clearer connections to research on writing. He also insisted that members make explicit plans for sharing their findings with RRWP and implied that he would be involved in evaluating their findings at a later date. Finally, he offered to give me RRWP funding for the NCTE fall conference on the condition that I would attend NWP workshops in addition to making the roundtable presentation which Crystal had agreed to co-present.

Even before our first meeting, the group's purpose as defined by various RRWP leaders began to come into focus, and cultural norms began to emerge through the various documents I have described in this section. While hinted at in early publicity and the call for proposals, the group's overriding motive of providing mutual support for one another's inquiry was more officially defined in the letter of acceptance. By funding only those items related to the costs of data collection and analysis, the budget clearly reflected my and Crystal's preference for qualitative research and demonstrated that question-driven studies, rather than new classroom projects, were to be the group's focus. Finally, expectations for members' participation, including my own as facilitator, were established through the contracts attached to members' letters of acceptance. This contract not only began the delineation of roles within the group and established commitment to the group as a norm, but it also eventually served as a gate-keeping device when one member did not fulfill her role as promised.

Defining Moments and Critical Texts:

Developing an Identity as a Teacher Research Group

Although I and others in leadership positions had designated an overriding motive for the group, and members had signed contracts committing themselves to RRWPTRG membership as so defined, this motive was taken up and resisted in ways that no one could have anticipated. How the group would define itself remained to be seen through the texts we would create and consult as well as the events that would prove crucial to our development.

Meeting #1: "Why are you here?"

Besides the fact that this was the first time all of us had met together as a group, our initial meeting was crucial to the group's development because it revealed individual members' personal discourse styles, the roles they would assume, and the purposes they saw for RRWPTRG, many of which were rooted in prior settings. Because some of these components were complementary to the overriding motive that had been set for the group, and others were conflicting, this meeting significantly influenced the group's trajectory by foreshadowing the discourse practices we would favor and the dilemmas we would face in our first year as we established our identity as a group of teacher researchers. Although I will discuss many of these discourse practices in more detail in the following chapter, I have selected portions from the transcript of the first meeting to provide an overview of the rituals and routines that began to define the group's cultural context.

Agendas, common texts, and data collection.

I conferred with Crystal extensively before our first meeting and wrote the agenda in pencil on a sheet of notebook paper. Since the letter of acceptance had explained that I would bring copies of members' one-page descriptions to the first meeting, I expected that they would understand that our initial goal was to become acquainted with our respective research interests as well as with each other. Though I had included some housekeeping items and Crystal had requested time to share some materials from her current research course textbook that she thought might be helpful, the bulk of the meeting was to be devoted to describing members' personal and professional goals for RRWPTRG participation and to determining how the group would like to progress. When the day of the meeting came, everyone had signed her contract, and everyone but Regina was present. I expected to be able to assume a facilitative, rather than directive, leadership role.

As the meeting began, members sat around Crystal's living room eating dessert, drinking herbal tea, and discussing how the beginning of the school year was going. Crystal handed out recent copies of the NWP Quarterly, a practitioner journal focused primarily on the teaching of writing, and referred us to a section devoted to teacher research.

> **Crystal:** Starting on page 21 and then following, those are all teacher researchers. Basically, they kept a journal or a log, the two teachers did. One talked about, you know, I'm going to keep a log every day, and what happened was she ended up keeping it periodically, but-- And then [she described] what she would do differently. She was going to keep a log and

talk about her whole class, and this time she decided, now she was just going to study one person or one facet of research instead of the whole class. It was just too much for her. She needed to focus on one particular aspect of it or one student. Anyway it was pretty interesting.

Kathy: Well, that is something to talk about, because I've been wondering about that. I think I have to narrow my research topic. So I though I would do vocabulary and comprehension and how writing affects reading and comprehension.

Cindy: OK...

Kathy: Because I want to know how writing affects reading because we are doing a reading-writing type of thing [in her school]. And my emphasis will be writing. I mean, you can't [inaudible] in this writing program.

Cindy: Really?

Kathy: Yeah, and I have all the writing subjects—social studies, science—the whole bit.

Crystal: Cindy, I want to give out these handouts—why don't I wait until we get to that part of it. And that way I can explain.

Cindy: Okay...Okay. Um, before we even get started talking about all that stuff--because Kathy sounds like she's got a lot of questions that we need to talk about--Um, Crystal and I are going to make a presentation at NCTE in Chicago in November on the perspective of teacher research at the Assembly

for Research. Paul twisted my arm and said, "Cindy, will you do this? You will do this. You will write a proposal." Okay, Peter, I will.

In this excerpt, Crystal introduced a practice that would become a staple in the group's participation, that is, the reading and discussion of common texts relevant to teacher research. Her interpretation also suggested a particular habit of reading that other members would adopt. Crystal had mindfully read the text for the purpose of discovering what it was that teacher researchers did: What questions did they ask? What research tools did they use? And how did they arrive at their answers? Other members would follow Crystal's lead as texts were introduced into the group, reading them as models that held clues for the teacher researcher identity they hoped to eventually assume.

This excerpt also provides the first indication that an informal agenda, written in pencil and privy only to Crystal and me, would be insufficient for carrying out each meeting's purposes. Kathy's first comment indicated that she apparently saw the agenda as emergent, thus she latched onto a topic Crystal had described in the article as "something to talk about" in regard to the immediate needs of her project. Although I politely but briefly followed her lead, Crystal, sensing the derailment of our informal agenda, interrupted with an offer to wait to distribute handouts "until we get to that part of it." Her comment subtly implied that an agenda was indeed in place, and I took the opportunity to table Kathy's questions and follow my and Crystal's agenda as planned.

As the meeting continued, I explained more about my and Crystal's roundtable presentation and asked for group members' permission to record and transcribe our meetings. In the next section, Crystal and I describe the purpose of our data collection, and in the process, suggest methods and raise issues that would strongly influence cultural practices and norms for the group:

Roxanne: So be sure to talk intelligently.

Cindy: Hey, we're going to transcribe them! We have control as to what goes in it or not. Um, and so, some other things that I might be asking you to do between now and then is like write some stuff for us, and we thought that today we'd start with that and just ask you to write just for a little while. Write for about five minutes about why you're here at this meeting and what you hope to gain from this group. And then we can talk about that for a minute. And I can, if you don't mind, I can keep your sheets.

Crystal: So all this stuff will kind of be data and help us as we present in November. It's kind of also to define what does a teacher researcher group do, exactly? I mean, we gave grants one other time...and last time they just gave the grants, and the people did their thing, and that was it.

Cindy: They never met or anything?

Crystal: Uh-uh. And so we, this is the first time this group has, you know, happened, and so we're trying to figure out—what do we do? You know, what are we about? How do we help each other? That's how I see our presentation.

Cindy: That's right. And what's exciting about it is really, for all practical purposes, this is the first group that is actually going to meet on a regular basis, so we get to decide. I mean, I don't think Crystal or I have any preconceived notions about how it's all going to run. We have kind of an agenda so that we'll stay on task, but--

Crystal: But think about it, too, like when you go back to your schools, it's just another tool that you have because it's not [just] right here. People, teachers, do research at their schools all the time. So if you wanted to have a teacher-researcher group at your school, then you'd kind of have an idea how it works here and how we've done—what worked, what didn't, things to do differently. And so you could start it up there because that's kind of-- I was amazed when people found out we were doing it and they wanted to know how we were doing it. Oh, sure! We'll tell you how we're doing it! Let us figure it out first!

Roxanne: In May we'll be happy to tell you how we're doing it.

Cindy: And we're going to present in November, but we don't know--

Crystal: That's right.

Cindy: Anyway, so if we could just write for about five minutes, just talking about what we hope to gain from this group and why you wanted to be a part of it...

In this excerpt, Crystal and I established data collection, reflection on group processes, and the sharing of findings with larger audiences as routine practices in the group.

Aside from explaining the value the two of us would gain from these practices, Crystal attempted to extol their virtues for other group members as well, suggesting that understanding our processes and learning from our group experience would allow members to use teacher research as a tool beyond our immediate setting. Most importantly, however, she introduced the questions that would serve as central themes in our NCTE presentation but also in the group's development throughout the first year: "What does a teacher research group do exactly?...You know, what are we about? How do we help each other?" Despite my admission that Crystal and I had "kind of an agenda" to keep the group on task, both of us saw considerable flexibility for realizing that agenda and emphasized to the group that "we get to decide...how it's all going to run."

In my and Crystal's minds, the group's destination was set, but our means of transportation were yet to be determined. As group members' freewrites would demonstrate, however, a shared sense of destination was not a given as we had assumed. Members' differing degrees of goal congruence not only projected the conflicts the group would encounter but also would ultimately determine who among us would still be journeying together by the first year's end.

First meeting freewrites.

Our freewrites reveal that Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I shared a high degree of goal congruence that was quite compatible with the overriding motive of the setting as it had been defined up to this point. We viewed RRWPTRG as a combination research training ground and support group where we would help one

another find answers related to our research in the process of conducting it. Roxanne was particularly concerned with questions in the latter category and overwhelmingly identified her graduate work as the motivating factor for her membership:

> As a Master's student working on my thesis, I need the support of a group like this to get me through. I have so many questions about what to do. How do I do a lit. review? How can I be organized? What do I do with all the data I collect? How do I write a research proposal? All of these questions are things that I must know in order to complete my research. It will be great to have people to work with who have similar needs and concerns.

Crystal raised research-oriented questions in her freewrite as well, but she also expressed her preference for learning through collaboration and spoke of her desire for camaraderie through what she perceived to be an intellectually overwhelming task:

> I am here because I need direction. I have questions: Am I doing this right? What's my research question? How do I evaluate my research? For me, meeting in a group, inter- and intrapersonal dialogue, works best. To be able to hear myself voice questions seems to make it clearer. It's like going into the forest at night. You're apt to come to the other side if you're with a helper. Everyone's input is valuable. It's a learning experience from each other. I think what I value is that it's also helpful if I see that I'm not in this dark forest alone. Others have the same concerns and questions.

Like Crystal, Hannah expressed her hope that RRWPTRG would be a place of

inquiry where exploratory talk (Barnes, 1992) would serve as the communicative norm. In her freewrite she defined talk as central to her composing processes, and she expressed her hope that the group's structure would provide the incentive she needed to complete her Master's thesis.

> I've always found it helpful when working on projects to have people who could be sounding boards for my ideas. Part of my writing involves a lot of talking about what I am doing. That talk helps me organize, prioritize, and just make more meaning out of what I am doing. So first and foremost, I hope that this group will be a place where I can talk about my research as I progress through it—not necessarily to get all the answers but to generate more ideas.
>
> I also hope that the group will give me some needed structure for my research. I've spent a semester kind of floating around, not wanting to get started. Maybe meeting a couple times a month will motivate me to get moving with this research project.

In my freewrite, listed earlier in this chapter, I also expressed a desire to have access to "a real live human being" throughout the research process and to learn from and alongside other RRWPTRG members. While Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I mentioned our graduate studies in our freewrites and voiced our hopes that RRWPTRG would provide the supportive structure we needed to complete them, we also shared the expectations that the group would be research-oriented and that we were willing to help other members by listening, talking, and learning together.

Joan's freewrite, however, made no mention of the group and demonstrated her interest in pursuing a new instructional approach rather than a question-driven study:

> I teach gifted students, grades 1-6. My project, for which I received the grant, is aimed for thirty 5th and 6th grade students. My Question: Can the multiple-genre research approach present challenging historical and literary research opportunities for thirty 5th and 6th grade gifted (intellectually able) students. My program is driven by large thematic units. This year, Election '96, the Civil War, and Ancient Romans are three such units. I would like to apply the multiple-genre research approach to these three units. By doing this, I also hope to reach and serve the multiple intelligences of these gifted students.
>
> Students will keep a process folder, a portfolio of their multiple-genre research project. They will produce a finished product, the results of their research, and they will present their topics to a variety of audiences. They will evaluate the multiple-genre approach as compared to the more traditional MLA documented type research paper. My main question is: For what can I use the grant money?

Although Joan posed two "questions" here, neither of them is a research question as revealed by her comments in the transcript (underlined below for emphasis) surrounding the reading of her freewrite. Joan had first learned about the multi-genre research approach through an RRWP consultant's presentation at the

summer institute, and both her grant proposal and her comments at our first meeting demonstrated that she had already decided that multi-genre research would be more challenging and engaging for her students than a traditional approach. At the meeting she explained:

> **Joan:** Um, I hope to immerse my students in a whole lot of information using multiple intelligences approach, and the end idea is for them to produce a research, multi-genre paper instead of the traditional...That's my goal, and I really don't know how to go about it, but I've got some ideas of things I want to do.
>
> **Crystal:** So your question is more affective?
>
> **Joan:** Well, let's see. [reading from her freewrite] "Can the multiple-genre research approach present challenging historical and literary research opportunities?" I'll have my fifth and sixth graders also evaluate the project at the end. Of course, they always evaluate the program as a whole at the end anyway...Um, the sixth graders did MLA documented research papers last year as fifth graders, so they actually could compare and contrast the two approaches. Those twenty can...

As the underlined comments suggest, Joan's goal, her vision of an end product, was not an answer to a question emergent from her teaching but was a collection of successfully written multi-genre research papers. Her participation in the group thus appeared to be oriented more toward receiving moral support as she tried out a new instructional approach instead of gaining assistance in conducting a study.

Further evidence of this orientation is seen by Joan's avoidance of Crystal's question, which seemed designed to steer her toward seeing the project from a research perspective. Instead of answering her, Joan simply re-read the question she had originally written on her freewrite. She also appeared to substitute the homophone "effective" for Crystal's original "affective" (a word suggesting more of a focus on student motivation and engagement) and only then began to consider the possibility of investigating which research approach students might find to be more "effective."

Later in the meeting, when Joan again raised her "main question" about the grant money, Crystal and I explained that she had not received funding for the honorariums she had requested because we had only allocated money for expenses directly related to research:

> **Joan:** About the money. Okay now. Transcriptions. Just what does that mean?
>
> **Cindy:** That is if you decide to interview your kids-- Okay, like I will take this tape [referring to the tape of the meeting] and have it transcribed. I will give it--
>
> **Crystal:** So you can read it.
>
> **Cindy:** Yeah, and so you can have it for all those wonderful things which are way on down the line, which is data analysis. Um, almost every qualitative study requires some kind of transcriptions, and it's-- How much, Crystal, did you say you...[intervening conversation among Roxanne, Crystal, and me about the cost of transcription]

Joan: So I interview my students on what, how they feel the, what they like about the uh, multi-genre approach as compared to a traditional paper. Or just typically things they, you know, did on their uh, project, and have that transcribed? Okay.

Crystal: Or even think-alouds. They could go ahead and talk about their project with you and talk about, "Now how is this [inaudible] from traditional?"

Roxanne: You could tape record that.

Joan: Yeah, yeah. Okay.

Crystal: That would be real good.

Joan: And I've never had any—So there's people you hire?

Cindy: We're working on that. We're trying to get a central person who's going to be really good that we [hire for transcription].

Crystal: Hannah could do that.

Hannah: Yeah.

Joan's tentative verbal exploration of how she might use her transcription funding suggested that she was recasting the idea of her project as a study for the first time at our RRWPTRG meeting. My, Crystal, and Roxanne's comments revealed once again our preference for qualitative research methods and our insistence that conducting inquiry-driven studies, rather than trying out promising instructional approaches, would be RRWPTRG's dominant focus.

Unlike Joan's freewrite, Kathy's was ostensibly focused on research. She had attempted to draft a research question at the top of the page, but after several false starts, she apparently gave up and began her freewrite, leaving a jumble of phrases and scratched-out words behind. Although Kathy had filled her page with writing, she chose to talk about what she had written instead of reading her freewrite to the rest of the group:

> **Kathy:** Okay. Mine is quite a bit like everyone else's, too. I think initially the reason why I was interested in the research is that I am a teacher trainer for [her school district], and so I felt like that, um, the research lends a [credibility] to the things that I present to the other teachers. If I could say I tried this for a year and these were the results, and this is why I'm interested in teaching this particular skill. And uh, um, I'm also interested in writing professionally. I'd like to write for magazines and that type of thing.

After clarifying that she was interested in eventually submitting a piece about her research to a teaching magazine, Kathy went on to describe Write Tracks, "a real sequential writing program" she was trying in her classroom and was simultaneously being trained to teach. Designed to teach writing across the curriculum, the program's first step required teachers to develop an alphabetic list of words connected to a specific area of study. As Kathy explained,

> You develop the words, and the next step is to choose words that you want to find out about that generate questions, or you can use the words to construct

the sentences, and from sentences you go to paragraphs and from paragraphs you go to stories. It's a very structured type of thing.

When Crystal expressed her confusion about how this program connected to the writing workshop approach Kathy had described in her grant proposal, Kathy explained that she had implemented Atwell's (1987) ideas by setting up a classroom writing environment and had also experimented with a freewriting technique from the summer institute to help her students with their sensory writing:

Kathy: And so a lot of my Red River Writing Project ideas are a lot like this woman's Write Track ideas, so there's a lot of mingling. And Atwell, she's got a lot of, I want to commit to so much time, and I have 45 minutes with a reading-writing group.

In an effort to understand Kathy's focus, Crystal again attempted to steer her back toward an articulation of a research question:

Crystal: So it sounds like you're integrating all three approaches—Atwell, what you learned at RRWP, and this Write Track.

Kathy: Yes, right.

Crystal: And you're going to compare it to the traditional story prompt, writing prompt [referring to the "story starter" approach Kathy had described in her grant proposal].

Kathy: Right.

Crystal: I mean traditionally how you teach writing.

Kathy: And I'm going to measure their success in their vocabulary development and their comprehension because these are two scores that are very weak on their ITBS [achievement tests]. We are letting them down some way, and I personally believe that people that are good writers have better comprehension skills as well as better vocabulary.

Crystal: Meaning they use it better?

Kathy: Yes, and it becomes a part of them because they are using these things.

When Crystal eventually claimed that she understood the gist of Kathy's approach, Kathy responded:

Kathy: I'm having really a hard time getting it down on paper to tell somebody, and um, that's not unusual. Sometimes I have a hard time getting my ideas over to someone else, and that's why I'm excited about the research and the support of the group. But like you said, Hannah, I want to come and bounce these ideas off of you, tell you what's happening, and if you don't understand me, I want you to ask me questions.

Crystal: It's hard when you integrate three things. I mean, I'm doing enough trying to integrate two.

Cindy: Um, are you kind of trying then just to develop your own writing program?

Kathy: Yes. Right, right.

Cindy: Drawing from the experiences you've had with reading Atwell and the experiences you've had this summer and then your experiences with the Write Track program? And seeing if kids who go through this process have an increase in test scores in their vocab. and composition?

Kathy: Right, right.

Cindy: If it connects with their reading performance?

Kathy: With their reading and writing.

Cindy: With reading and writing.

Kathy: Yes.

As she reveals in this excerpt, Kathy had only recently begun to see herself as a writer. Although she admitted she sometimes had "a really hard time" articulating her thoughts in writing, she hoped that the group would be a source of support, and she eventually envisioned herself publishing articles for educational magazines. Having become personally convinced of writing's importance during the summer institute, she consequently patched promising techniques for teaching writing together in an attempt to replace the story starter curriculum she had found ineffective in previous years. Kathy was entertaining multiple paradigm shifts at once as she began to see herself as a writer, a teacher of writing, and a teacher researcher. Little wonder then that she tried to collapse all these roles into a single manageable package represented by her proposed project.

Where Kathy saw her new writing program to be a neat and tidy solution to the shifts in her identity as well as her students' low achievement scores, the rest of us

foresaw problems with her research question, the writing program itself, and the methods she planned to use for its evaluation. The next several pages of the transcript are devoted to Kathy's further explanations and the group's gentle troubleshooting through the use of indirect questions, alternative solutions, and examples from our own prior research experiences. Despite our extended attempts to help her clarify her focus, however, Kathy eventually admitted, "...that's why I need you all. I have no idea what I am doing."

This series of freewrites and the discussions they provoked marked common ground in some areas and surfacing dilemmas in others. Through our freewrites and the remainder of the first meeting's transcript, Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I subconsciously but consistently confirmed our conceptual allegiances to the learning theories, writing pedagogy, and qualitative research methodology we had acquired in the prior settings we held in common. We also displayed a rudimentary understanding of teacher research as the inquiry-oriented, data-driven investigation of questions arising from the classroom context, while Joan and Kathy appeared to be almost completely unfamiliar with the genre. All of us, including Joan and Kathy, expressed a common desire for RRWPTRG to become a place of support, but Joan wanted help in implementing a new instructional approach, Kathy sought answers in multiple areas, and the rest of us, to paraphrase Hannah, envisioned a group similar to the one she had originally described at the Governing Board meeting, one where we could talk about our research as we progressed through it—"not necessarily to get all the answers but to generate more ideas." Since Regina did not attend our first meeting, she played no

part in our initial orientation to one another, making her position impossible to ascertain. Thus the questions Crystal posed at the beginning of the meeting would preoccupy our group in the coming months as we attempted to determine, "[W]hat do we do? You know, what are we about? How do we help each other?"

Rituals, Routines, and Other Common Texts

In addition to these critical questions, the first meeting gave rise to the early routines that would persist in the group throughout the year. Despite the surfacing dilemmas, these collective habits helped to establish a comfortable, informal atmosphere, an overall expectation for collaboration, and a growing sense of group identity. Central to this atmosphere were our decisions to continue meeting in members' homes rather than in more impersonal, institutional settings, such as the university or the local library, and to begin each meeting with a snack or dessert. As everyone (but Regina) volunteered for a slot on the food schedule, we often wondered aloud about what we might bring. Food was an area where everyone could contribute and be applauded for her culinary efforts, and "breaking bread" together at the start of each meeting provided a time of casual talk and informal fellowship, thus lessening the distance between us. After several items remained unfinished on the informal agenda Crystal and I had set for our first meeting, I also took a more directive role and developed the habit of printing agendas to distribute at the start of each meeting. By writing conference proposals and arranging for members to serve as guest speakers in RRU education classes and at RRWP events, I also continued to emphasize the

importance of sharing our work with others. Finally, we continued the practices of consulting common texts and creating texts together.

Consulting common texts.

Kathy: How many questions should we include in an interview?

Cindy: I don't think we're going to be able to get to that yet probably, just because we still have to talk about forming the group and refining research questions, and it's going to depend on what you want to find out, too.

Kathy: Okay, so let that ride for a little bit?

Cindy: I would.

Kathy: Okay. Should I even ask them a question about how they feel about writing before I really get into--'cause right now it might be different from three or four weeks from now?

Cindy: That's true. I mean, if you're looking--well it depends on what you're looking for.

Roxanne: She needs to read that Peshkin book.

Kathy: Which book?

Roxanne: On Becoming Qualitative Researchers.

Cindy: This one right here [holding up book]. We're ordering some of these. Um, it depends on what you're looking for. We're ordering some, so don't buy it.

Kathy: Okay.

As illustrated by this excerpt from our first meeting, with no immediate teacher research community of practice in place to guide us, our group persistently relied on accounts of teacher research and qualitative research more generally written by members of larger, more established research communities. Because Crystal and I had included a book fund in the RRWPTRG budget, the expectation that we would share common texts was in place even before the group's first meeting. In our budget request, I had listed as possible text titles two anthologies of teacher research studies with editorial frames provided by university researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Wells, 1994) and an introduction to qualitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1993) that had been a required text in a university course every member but Joan and Kathy had taken. First on the list of duties in the job description I composed for myself was "selecting and facilitating the use of texts and resources helpful in the organization of T-R groups." But rather than formally assigning and discussing chapters, I did no more than make the texts available. Members used them as their personal needs dictated, and consequently, the ideas within them soon became part of the readers' overall discourse in meetings, written texts, and eventually, in conference presentations. Every transcript provides evidence that RRWPTRG members regularly exchanged books and suggested helpful resources for one another's studies and that Crystal was continuing her practice of forwarding teacher research articles and bibliographies to all of us.

By our fourth meeting, we had visited the RRU library together, the routine of sharing texts was firmly in place, and our methods for reading them were becoming

more evident. Our discussion of a teacher research article (Whitin, 1996a) Crystal had previously sent us demonstrates several of these methods:

Cindy: The other thing is, you know, you [referring to Crystal] sent us that article to read, and I had already looked at that other book that you had. And I was amazed it was by the same person. Because Crystal and I were browsing through Paul's books one day, and--

Crystal: You're talking about that drawing thing?

Cindy: Yeah. And, and I found this book that seemed like it was related to Crystal's question, and this lady--you've probably looked at it more than I have, but she basically was using art--

Crystal: Drawing--

Cindy: --or having the students respond, respond to literature with drawing. Is that right?

Crystal: Right. Uh-huh.

Cindy: Okay, so it seemed like it was really tied together. But the book [Sketching Stories, Stretching Minds, Whitin, 1996b] is aimed, published by Heinemann I believe, it's really aimed at teachers. Well, she's the same lady who wrote this thing that's in Research in the Teaching of English. And it's her, just her voice and her writing, and the way she--it's the same basic--'cause this is called "Exploring Visual Response to Literature," so I'm sure it's--

Crystal: That's the article I sent you.

Roxanne: Who is it?

Crystal: Phyllis Whitin.

Cindy: I'm sure this is the same data--

Crystal: It is.

Cindy: --and the question and all that--

Crystal: Yeah, it's the exact same thing.

Cindy: And so it depends I think, too, on your audience, how you are going to say it. And that was one thing whenever Paul came and talked to our class [a graduate seminar I was enrolled in], he said that he always tries to write, you know, to get more than one article out of whatever study he's doing--

Roxanne: Yeah, he's said that for years.

Cindy: --by framing it in a different way. I mean, this is APA--

Crystal: Your audience--

Cindy: Yeah, this is APA, you know, you've got your lit. review at the beginning, got an abstract at the very front, and then she's got--her methodology was in her data collection. That's not how that other book is organized.

Crystal: Oh no, but it's the same person.

Cindy: Right. Same person, same stuff.

Crystal: That book, that book--and I'll go get it--is for teachers [gets book from table nearby].

Cindy: Uh-huh.

Crystal: [holding up book] Here's a "look-what-I've-done"--

Cindy: And it's very practice-oriented.

Crystal: And that [pointing to the research article], it's more research-based.

Cindy: But then on the back of that book that Crystal has--

Crystal: It says it's one of the best teacher research books, yeah. That's why I sent that article, 'cause I knew it was from that book. It's the same study.

Cindy: Yeah, I think that's just, it's amazing. . .

In this excerpt, Crystal and I used common texts--the Whitin article (1996a) she had sent everyone in the group and the Whitin book (1996b) that she and I had found on my advisor's shelves--to better understand teacher research as a genre with the potential to reach varied audiences, classroom teachers looking for strategies to improve their practice as well as subscribers to a well-respected educational research journal with a primarily university audience. Occurring as it did in the midst of the larger theme of the entire meeting (What is teacher research?), this conversation also illustrates how we read teacher research texts to determine where teacher research fit into the overall scheme of educational reform. Crystal and I would raise both of these issues less than two weeks later in our NCTE Roundtable discussion. Additional methods for reading common texts emerged in our continued discussion of the article:

Cindy: . . .the other thing is that I think maybe that teacher research, at least the stuff that I've been looking at, involves students a lot more as collaborators in helping find answers to the question.

Hannah: That was a good point that she brought out there, that they were kind of co-researchers doing it all together.

Cindy: Yeah.

Kathy: And they really help you understand, don't you think? Like you [referring to Hannah] were talking about students that you've got in your class now that you're--When you were talking about how they come back to learn, don't you think they really help you have an understanding for the process that they've gone through?

Hannah: Well, I'm not really sure what you're saying. I just think that, you know, as I go through with that question in my mind, I see, um, or I hear their comments in a different way, you know?

Crystal: Well, she actually said in that article, I don't know if you remember, I think the article said it, but in the book as well, that for her, teacher research was--She was, she thought she--and I said this in your class [the action research course for intern teachers] yesterday, too, Regina--she thought she was going to answer this questions and solve something, whatever it was. But what ended up was that they all learned together. And so, and in a classroom setting, they taught her things even about her own thinking, and so they changed the way she viewed uh, even her question. And it was based on the whole, everybody doing it together, so it was learning togeth--She wasn't separate, like a researcher, you know, sometimes like we do. We're out here, and you know, that's something that's--I wonder if that's it? You know, in my

study [I'm] separate, and that's a big thing in research. You don't want to get invol--You know, you don't want to get--In some of it, not all of it.

Cindy: What do you mean in your--?

Crystal: Well, she was actually part of it.

OA: Right, but what do you mean you're separate?

Hannah: Having that objective stance.

Cindy: But see, what I've learned about qualitative—really, what you're trying to do is become as much a part of that environment as you can.

Crystal: Well, yeah, I know, but even in [her qualitative research] class, [the professor] said, when we were trying to [refine interview] questions, and I would say, "Well, can I do this and this?" And he said, "You don't want, you know, don't lead that person into what you want to"--But in this case she wasn't, you know, she was actually in there. They were drawing together, and she said, "This is what I think this means," and they [the students] go, "Well, I think it means this. Look at how you, how you did this." And they became the teachers all of a sudden.

In this excerpt, we moved smoothly from research text to our individual studies to classroom experience to university courses and back again, in the process using the text to consider methodological issues regarding the teacher researcher's tripartite role as teacher, researcher, and student, and to determine how a teacher researcher's role as full participant in the classroom setting is different from a more traditional qualitative researcher's role as a participant-observer still outside the

setting. As we considered these questions in light of the Whitin texts (1996a, 1996b), we struggled toward an articulation of how teacher research lends a unique perspective to the broader field of educational research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Gallas, 1994, 1998; Hollingsworth, 1994; Wells, 1994). Crystal's, Hannah's, and Kathy's comments also suggest that they had begun to see themselves as teacher researchers similar to Whitin. Hannah reported that for her, inquiry had become a filter for her teaching as her ever-present research question caused her to hear her students' comments "in a different way, you know." Later in the year when the group was discussing how becoming teacher researchers had forever changed our teaching, she would describe this stance as "teaching with a questioning mind." Kathy, too, had begun to see students as resources that "really help you understand." And Crystal, through her role as a guest speaker in the action research course for RRU interns, had begun to publicly share these common texts with extended audiences, describing teacher research as inseparable from teaching, as a way of transforming the teacher-student relationship so that "they all learned together." By drawing on common texts, all of us were beginning to understand that to be a teacher researcher is to be, as Gallas (1998) puts it, "a full member of a unique culture. . .an aboriginal" (p. 146).

Although we found these common texts useful for research purposes, this final excerpt also reveals how we read them as teachers:

Roxanne: [referring to a figure in the Whitin book (1996b)] This is really cool.

Crystal: The pie thing, yeah.

Roxanne: I'm starting my new reading, my new literature groups this week. I'm going to use this.

Cindy: She's got a whole section in this little article on it...

Hannah: What I thought was so interesting was how they just happened to be doing it [graphing] in their math class, and then those things transferred over. Because I had a student this week that was doing some drawing about a story he read, and he did a flow chart. He said, "Oh, we're just doing flow charts in math right now, and I just, you know, that's just the way I want to do it."

Roxanne: That's cool, too.

Hannah: I said, "Can I have that, please?"

Cindy: I know. That's the other thing. Everything's data. When your students--

Hannah: --and your students are like, "Why do you want this?" Just let me have it, you know, put it on my refrigerator.

Roxanne: Well, the group I have this time is uh, really low readers, and some are non-writers, so doing stuff like this will be great for them. . .

Reading as a teacher, Roxanne planned to implement the strategy from the article with the special needs children in her multi-age classroom. Hannah also saw classroom connections to the strategy used by her student in her community college English class, and she and I briefly discuss how teacher research had shifted our perspective on student work from assignment to artifact. "Everything's data," I

quipped, and Hannah admitted that she, too, had developed the habit of data collection as a matter of course in her teaching.

Another common text for Roxanne, Crystal, and me was XTAR, the Teacher as Researcher online discussion group I advertised at the first RRWPTRG meeting. Our participation on this friendly, informal list was particularly thrilling because each of us received enthusiastic responses to our introductory postings and helpful feedback to our postings thereafter. Messages were also frequently posted by published teacher researchers whose work we admired (sometimes in response to one of our postings!), and all of us developed off-list correspondences with other teacher researchers as well. In the process of our participation, the three of us became familiar with the issues and questions that currently puzzled other teacher researchers, and we received offers of help from the likes of Gordon Wells and JoBeth Allen, both established researchers who facilitated teacher research groups at their respective universities. When I attended the International Conference for Teacher Research (ICTR) several months after we had subscribed, I was a bit startled when an unfamiliar woman approached me with a smile and extended her hand as if we were already acquainted. As I racked my brain trying to place her, she said, "Hi, Cindy! We've never met, but I feel like I know you because I read your messages all the time on XTAR. I'm so glad to meet you in person." This scenario was repeated several times throughout the conference, transforming the virtual community into a physical reality. Like small-town girls gone to the big city, Roxanne, Crystal, and I gained a sense of being a part of something larger than ourselves, and our participation in this on-line community was a means for

us to participate at a "macrointeractional level," providing us with a degree of professional and linguistic affiliation unavailable within the immediate confines of RRWPTRG (Duranti, 1997, p. 290). Because Roxanne, Hannah, Crystal, Regina, and I were automatically assigned e-mail accounts as university students, we also used this channel of communication for logistical purposes (e.g., scheduling meetings) and friendly exchanges. Joan nor Kathy was online, however, so neither had access to this additional form of community contact.

As we struggled to organize our own teacher research community at a "micro-interactional level," texts from extended communities of practice at the "macro-interactional level" frequently provided us with the necessary "typically larger, real or imaginary. . .reference group, whose constituency exceeds the boundaries of the here-and-now of any given situation and is established on the basis of one or more of a number of criteria, including geo-political, kin, ethnic, professional, and linguistic affiliation" (Duranti, 1997, p. 290). While these communities were removed, we still apprenticed ourselves to these "distant teachers" (John-Steiner, 1985) in search of a heritage of linguistic and methodological practices that would reflect culturally valued modes of behavior, thinking, and interaction. Language was a primary tool throughout this process, serving as both the medium through which we learned how to conduct ourselves as a teacher research community and as the vehicle through which we constructed identities for ourselves as teacher researchers.

Creating common texts.

As described earlier in this chapter, RRWPTRG members frequently composed freewrites in response to common prompts as a way of focusing our attention on pertinent questions and issues we were encountering at various stages in our development. I will discuss this practice in the next chapter, however, and will focus here on the common "text" Crystal and I created for our NCTE roundtable presentation since it distills many of the identity issues our group faced in our first year together.

The proposal deadline arrived six weeks before the first RRWPTRG meeting, and I entitled our presentation "Becoming Agents of Change: Establishing a Teacher-Researcher Group." Working only from the grant proposals I had received and relying heavily on the teacher research texts I was reading at the time, I described members' projects as best I could and explained that our session would be devoted to an examination of the processes of establishing and maintaining our group. Apparently foreseeing, even in the grant proposals, seeds of the dilemmas RRWPTRG would encounter, I also promised that we would "describe the challenges associated with creating a tradition of professional development and continuing research with a diverse constituency of classroom teachers, the majority of whom have limited training or history in conducting research."

Neither Crystal nor I had attended a roundtable presentation before, and I had never been a participant, much less a presenter at a national conference, but Paul assured us that the roundtable format was relatively low-risk as conference presentations went since our ultimate purpose was to elicit discussion from those who

attended. Our determination to make a good appearance, however, had us collecting data from the first RRWPTRG meeting on, and in early November we met at Crystal's house to make sense of our findings.

The brainstorming sheet I brought to our meeting reflects many of the questions and common texts preoccupying our group's attention at the time. At the top of the page, for instance, I had written "What is teacher research?," the same question that had served as the prompt for our group's most recent freewrite. Underneath I had also copied the cover description from the Phyllis Whitin book (1996b) we had discussed at our preceding RRWPTRG meeting and a description of the genre taken from an advertisement for the ICTR conference to which I had recently sent a proposal. I also asked the question, "What sorts of things are defining the concept for us?" and listed several items, including various group documents, talk, "people's individual agendas," and our common texts.

While my planning had been focused on the ways RRWPTRG members had been defining teacher research within the context of our group, as we planned together Crystal and I decided that a prerequisite question we had to address was much bigger than the one that had directed my planning. After a lengthy discussion of Wells (1994) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), we decided to begin our roundtable presentation by asking participants to consider, "How does educational change occur?" We were particularly drawn to three quotations from these texts that we felt spoke directly to this question. Crystal thought a visual representation of each of these would more clearly communicate our intent to discuss how teacher research challenged traditional

notions of the educational change process (I will discuss these figures in detail in the following the chapter), so we sketched out some possible figures which Crystal polished before the presentation.

We agreed to open our presentation with one quotation by Wells (1994) and another by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993). After consulting my original proposal, we turned next to a description of our processes for establishing and maintaining the group. Crystal agreed to describe the group's origin, our purpose, and our projects, and to explain the ways RRWPTRG members were already effecting change in our classrooms (through our teaching and our revised view of students as partners in inquiry), extended communities (through RRWPTRG, our schools, and RRWP), and the general knowledge base of education (through conference presentations like this one, and eventually through articles, an RRWP anthology, and our theses and dissertations). My role was to explain how maintaining our group had been dependent to a large extent on our efforts to define teacher research since that definition ultimately determined our group's identity and purpose, the substance of our conversations, and the direction our group would take. I would then introduce excerpts from the Whitin article (1996a), book cover (1996b), and the ICTR call for proposals, and pose the following three questions for group discussion: (1) What is teacher research? (2) What is the status and value of teacher research in the educational community? (3) How can teacher research effect change? We planned to conclude the presentation with the third quotation by Wells and a corresponding figure.

Our planning for this conference was crucial for what it revealed to us about RRWPTRG's development up to this point and for its subsequent influences on that development. My original invitation to Crystal to serve as a co-presenter reinforced our roles as leaders and representatives of the group and the norm we had established for sharing our group's findings with a larger audience. Our decision to work jointly to plan, prepare materials, and evenly divide our speaking roles also demonstrated our "comfort with interdependency," which John-Steiner (1996) describes as "the ability to articulate ideas a-borning, to participate in an intensely experienced co-construction of thoughts, and the willingness to speak of them to others" (p. 549). Rather than a collaboration of complementarity where partners simply agree to divide labor according to their areas of expertise in completing a joint task, our working style reflected an inclusive pattern of collaboration. Crystal and I had deliberately chosen to "think together" since we had developed the habit of being "jointly engaged in generating new ideas, new approaches, new theories" through our work in RRWPTRG and other overlapping settings. In such collaborative dyads between women, John-Steiner argues that "relationships are inclusive and mutual. While complementarity of skills exists, the bonds are deeper" (p. 551). Our intellectual respect for one another and our value for equity and exploratory talk (Barnes, 1992) allowed us to challenge one another's thinking without threatening our deepening friendship.

The presentation itself required us to reflect on RRWPTRG's development and to identify our progress as well as the challenges that lay before us. As we generated

and supported these claims about our group and the nature of teacher research in general, it was as if RRWPTRG's identity, purpose, and definition of teacher research crystallized before us. Together, we developed a cover story that would become a cultural narrative for our group, as well as a one-page description of RRWPTRG's purposes that would appear on our conference handouts and be reproduced in later presentations as group members served as guest speakers to other classroom and conference audiences (see Appendix). Most importantly, however, the conference presentation required us to conjure up a rhetorical context beyond the immediate setting of RRWPTRG and speculate about its central issues, to envision a larger teacher research community of practice and project ourselves into it. This task thus represented a defining moment for us, demanding that we determine what we did know about teacher research and our group's purpose and identity so that we could compose a "text" we hoped would be useful and compelling to others.

Other Defining Moments

Like the cover story we prepared, our roundtable presentation would become a cultural narrative for our group, recounted immediately for group and family members when we returned home and several times even to this day. As Crystal and I sat in the conference ballroom the morning of the roundtable and listened to the opening addresses, we scanned the audience and realized that we were newcomers to a larger community of practice whose members were serious in their pursuit of educational reform. Telling our group's story provided us with a prime opportunity for "improvised practice" and increased participation with masters of that community

(Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 93), particularly since George Hillocks attended our session. Having heard Paul describe his former advisor as famous for posing incisive (and sometimes relentless) intellectual challenges, we prayed that Hillocks would drift to another table as the time came for our presentation. When he instead followed us, listened intently, and sure enough, questioned our preference for the title "teacher-researcher," we resisted the urge to crawl under the table and instead calmly asked him to elaborate. He explained that he took issue with the term because he saw the word "teacher" as an adjective qualifying the type of research being described and thus potentially diminishing its value in the eyes of the broader educational community; he preferred the title "teacher as researcher" instead. Others at the roundtable, including myself, disagreed, arguing that the hyphen in "teacher-researcher" operated as a fulcrum that balanced the two roles, lending equal importance to both and identifying the unique intersection of practice and theory that teacher research provides.

When we returned from the conference, Paul e-mailed his congratulations on our performance. Although Paul had not attended our session, Hillocks had passed along his compliments, which Paul assured us meant we had done well since these were rare indeed. More than complimenting our performance, however, we took these comments as validation from a "master" that we were legitimate participants in a larger community of practice.

Late in RRWPTRG's first year, a similar defining moment for our group also came in the form of a "master's" validation. We had invited the RRU qualitative research professor who had been a mutual favorite of ours to an RRWPTRG meeting

to advise us on research design and interview questions. Late in the meeting, talk drifted toward the profession of teaching as it has been historically conceived, and referring to RRWPTRG, he commented, "This kind of group is something I've dreamed about for a lot of years." He went on to describe how he had presented local administrators with a plan for establishing a site-based teacher research group, but they had rejected his idea in favor of the top-down models of professional development they already had in place. He contrasted their approach to our group and said, "Now this is a center of intellectual inquiry." Although he argued that nothing prevented any teacher from being a teacher researcher but historical tradition and a disciplinary socialization (John-Steiner, 1996) that prepared them to "react, not to inquire," he agreed with us that such inquiry must be legitimated and supported through "safe spaces" like the one we had established in RRWPTRG. We savored our mentor's comments as high praise and additional proof that our individual and group efforts at inquiry were worthwhile.

Obstacles, Dilemmas, Greener Pastures

Despite these hard-earned moments of affirmation, we faced numerous individual and collective difficulties in our first year together. These, too, were self-defining influences in our emergent culture. Feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy plagued us as we attempted to gain focus in our individual studies and our group activities, and we struggled to organize our time productively and to negotiate a satisfactory overriding motive for the group. While Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I would reap enough personal and professional remunerations to make these labor pains

seem worthwhile, Joan, Kathy, and Regina apparently would not and would ultimately leave the group altogether.

Our anxieties were not surprising considering the fact that all of us were to some extent wandering around in that dark forest Crystal described in her first meeting freewrite. Most worrisome was the persistent feeling that we had no firm sense of direction to guide our individual studies or our group's development. Joan admitted outright at the first meeting that she didn't "have a clue as to how I'm going to go about this," and Kathy also admitted, "I have no idea what I am doing." Crystal worried aloud about her research design through several meetings, and Roxanne struggled to settle on a topic that she would find stimulating enough to motivate her through her thesis, an academic writing task that seemed almost insurmountable to her at times. Deep in data collection in November and worried that she would find nothing to report by her upcoming proposal deadline, Roxanne confessed, "Well, you know, Paul wants this fifteen page proposal by the end of December. . .for my class, for my independent study. And I'm going—how am I going--? I can't. I don't know how I can do that." Regina, too, heard the tick of the graduate college clock. Having filed for multiple extensions in completing her degree, she still needed to organize her literature review, defend her general exam, and begin her dissertation.

Because Hannah had completed a pilot study the spring before, she began her study with a focused question, but she also faced dilemmas concerning participant selection and research methods. Part of her design would require participants to respond to a short story, and because her own students were used to her teaching

style, she knew that they would find the task familiar. But would the fact that she was their teacher bias their responses? Would they tell her what they thought she wanted to hear? On the other hand, she worried that choosing student participants from a more traditional instructor's class would also prove problematic since they would be unaccustomed to providing personal responses to literature and might ultimately produce data that would do little to answer her research questions. She was also concerned about choosing research methods that would allow her to answer her questions but would keep the study manageable for her thesis.

As the following excerpt from my analytic memo reveals, my personal worries revolved around the group's development and my leadership role. Reflecting on my description of RRWPTRG's purposes and goals in a recent conference proposal, I wrote:

> The above were my goals at the establishment of the T-R group based on my summer reading about T-R groups, but as early as the first meeting, I discovered what I've known all along as a teacher--I can't just assume that the participants will share the goals I have established. My position as chair is already a tenuous one. Having written a Master's thesis, supposedly I have more experience with formal research than the other members of the research group with the exception of Regina. . .My goals were explicitly stated in that first letter, but the goals of the other participants are more diverse depending upon their purposes for joining the group in the first place. Some wanted help in their stage of the research game. Others, I think, simply wanted a grant to

help fund the use of new techniques in their classroom and to more informally observe how those techniques played out in the experiences of their students. I'm probably the person most interested in the question of what teacher research is anyway. My agenda is to push our work beyond that of "lore," yet I know that a couple of others in the group have no great wishes to move to a more formalized means of exploration. How will we negotiate among the divergent purposes of the group and yet still meet the needs of [individuals]? What is my role? Mediator? Facilitator? Teacher of research processes? Setter of agendas?

Like other evolving teacher research communities, members' struggles and dilemmas indicated that we were discovering that we were not, "one day, nonresearchers and, the next day, researchers, any more than we are nonmusicians one day and musicians the next. We learn, practice, mentor, and are mentored, and we are in the process of becoming" (Allen, Cary, & Hensley, 1995, p. 47). For Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I these obstacles were surmountable because of the support we gleaned from RRWPTRG; for Joan and Regina, who viewed the obstacles as void of personal meaning, the group served little purpose at all; for Kathy, however, successful participation in the group proved to be as obstacle in itself and was one of several she would ultimately find to be overwhelming.

Resistance and Rejection: Members Lost

My conference proposal intuitions regarding a lack of goal congruence with the overriding motive on the parts of Joan, Kathy, and Regina proved to be accurate.

Joan did not return to the group after the first meeting, and in late October she wrote to Crystal explaining that she would be withdrawing from RRWPTRG if she landed the job she had applied for at the State Department of Education. Joan did receive the job, and since she was no longer in the classroom, forfeited her funding and gracefully bowed out of the group.

Regina's attendance and commitment to the group were also erratic. Attendance records show that despite her signature on the group participation agreement, she was absent from five of nine meetings and left early from two she did attend. Although her grant proposal revealed that she planned to use RRWPTRG funds for her dissertation study, other members had similar plans, so Crystal and I did not foresee her lack of commitment to the group itself. Because she was absent from the first meeting where members wrote freewrites explaining their intentions for participating in the group, no one else was aware of her limited intentions either. In grant proposals and transcripts, while other members prefaced a discussion of their projects with stories that demonstrated their personal investment in their studies, Regina did not. In fact each time one of her numerous flippant comments pointed to a lack of personal investment in her research, other members' shocked responses marked Regina's breach of what had become for the rest of us a cultural norm. Unfortunately, I am unable to include transcripts from these discussions because despite my repeated requests, she never provided the signed consent form that would have granted me permission to quote her directly. When Regina's consistent absences could no longer be ignored, the group decided that she had lost her right to RRWPTRG funding,

drafted a letter notifying her of our decision, and enclosed a copy of her membership agreement.

Kathy's case was more complex since she, like Joan chose to leave on her accord, but did not do so until late in the first year. Meeting transcripts repeatedly show that Kathy was undergoing multiple paradigm shifts as she strove to fashion a more progressive literacy curriculum, to see herself as a teacher researcher, and to "catch up" to qualitative research and its methodology. In another analytic memo I wrote after the group's fourth meeting, I noted:

> Our advice to Kathy seems geared toward helping her develop an inquiry-driven study (rather than a project) and toward helping her become more systematic in her investigation by narrowing her focus. Our comments are aimed at helping her determine what she wants to know, suggesting data collection techniques, and getting her to verbalize her goals. In short, we are trying to educate her about qualitative research! We try to help her with QR lingo (e.g., probing, leading vs. open-ended questions, interview protocols, consent, and confidentiality) by using multiple examples from our prior research and coursework experiences. She is reading Glesne and Peshkin [1992] now and says she loves it, but she still has a long old row to hoe. Our questions to Hannah [in this meeting] differ markedly from those we ask Kathy, suggesting that we see Hannah more as an equal.

Kathy's drastic change in communication patterns after the first meeting when she dominated the floor suggested that she, too, recognized that her relative

unfamiliarity with qualitative research would be a challenge to her full participation in the group. In the second meeting as Roxanne, Hannah, Regina, and I described our studies, we clearly relied on prior research we had conducted as reference points for our current processes. In the midst of these descriptions, the four of us debated the virtues of various methods of data collection in relation to our research questions, but Kathy disappeared from the transcript for pages at a time until midway through the meeting when the topic shifted to thesis guidelines. Then she announced, "I need to come down and to talk to somebody about what I'm going to do for a doctorate because I can't decide which college to do it in, and I need some advice, and I don't know where to go." When we asked her what she was interested in studying, she mentioned English or curriculum, and all of us advised her to choose the latter since she planned to continue working fulltime:

> **Roxanne:** Instructional leadership is probably what you want to get it under. . .That's what ours is, all of ours, we are all--
>
> **Kathy:** So what college is that?
>
> **All:** Education.

Since she did not apply to the doctoral program after all, Kathy's announcement was an apparent indication of her desire for an affiliation with the academic club to which the rest of us so obviously belonged. For the remainder of this meeting and the next, Kathy's interaction was limited and when it did occur, was confined almost entirely to questions.

Her verbal withdrawal became physical when our group decided to hold a meeting at the RRU library to look for current research related to our questions. Although the library visit had come about as a result of Kathy's contrast of RRU's library with that at the regional university where she had received her Master's in the late '70s, when we arrived at the library, Kathy took up a spot at a study carrel while the rest of us browsed the nearby shelves containing current research journals. In an analytic memo written shortly after this meeting, I mused on the significance of her behavior:

> Certain authors, theories, research terms are beginning to brand some RRWPTRG members as "in the know". . .I have to wonder what it might feel like to have been "out of the know" for several years, or maybe always, if one's Master's program did not demand a research emphasis. Does Kathy know what a "lit. review" is, a term most of us were tossing around at the first meeting? At the library she said she was considering calling up Heinemann "to see if they might recommend some good books on teaching writing." She wondered if we had heard of Calkins, Graves, Atwell, Murray, and busily recorded titles and authors [Roxanne brought to] her study carrel at the library while the rest of us roamed the journal shelves. . .. "Be nice to Kathy; include Kathy," I whispered to other members I saw among the shelves because I don't want her to feel isolated.

Devoted to trying out an instructional approach rather than conducting a teacher research study from the beginning, Kathy continued to resist the setting's

overriding motive well into the first year. Shortly before our NCTE roundtable presentation, Crystal and I asked the group to complete a freewrite to the prompt "What is teacher research?" Kathy's freewrite follows (bold print, her emphasis; underlined portions, mine):

> Teacher Research to me is sharing what works and doesn't work. Most of the professional magazines and journal have published authors who submit a great many of the articles that appear in their pages.
>
> Donald Graves
>
> Many references to **Atwell** (woman)
>
> These articles weed out ideas that I have and have given me practical suggestions. IRA - **Reading Teacher** articles have bibliographies for other references--more formal research.
>
> **Instructor**
>
> **Creative Teaching**
>
> **Reading Teacher**
>
> excerpts from published textbooks
>
> Many times I find the more technical things may not have as much practical application. They don't work with programs that are on the shelf that are published type of things that we use in the classroom. "Research" oftentimes is product of requirements that we have to meet.
>
> I know my concern about students' attitudes isn't original--I'm not interested in doing my research to make a name for myself but to meet a need

my students have for different instruction. I'm interested in curriculum rather than statistics.

In her distinctions between teacher research and "more formal research," Kathy showed a strong preference for classroom application at the expense of inquiry. She relegated "formal research" to "technical things" associated with bibliographies, course requirements, and statistics and emphasized that her focus (as well as that of teacher research, she believed) lay entirely in the realm of the practical. In the discussion that followed our freewrites at this meeting, the transcript reveals that Kathy again dropped out of the conversation as the rest of us described teacher research in ways that were clearly aligned with the "systematic, intentional inquiry" described by Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993). In the following excerpt from an analytic memo, I noted Kathy's altered discourse patterns as I considered the issue of "voice" in our group:

> After the first meeting, Kathy has asked lots more questions. Does she feel silenced by the research orientation of the group and by the fact that most of us seem familiar with a certain body of theory and research? Does she feel alienated by such talk? Does she feel a desire to join the club, or does she feel excluded from it? DO I value her perspective? Will her voice be excluded? Will she begin contributing again or will she just ask questions? Is it possible for our group to share a common vision? Who decides where we are going? If we have no cohesive conception of t-r, what sort of building will evolve at the end of our pursuit?

Kathy's shift in communication clearly concerned me because it reflected a lack of goal congruence with the overriding motive of the group as it had been, and was being, defined in OWTPRG documents and our emergent discourse. The questioning, challenging, and unresolved nature of the exploratory talk (Barnes, 1992) that dominated our discourse must have been unsettling for Kathy, who was already overwhelmed by the multiple paradigm shifts she was experiencing and was more interested in finding practical answers she could apply rather than pursuing more questions. As a result, she chose between two mechanisms: She sought formulas for teaching and research, or she sought retreat in silence and physical isolation. Although her desire for affiliation became strong enough at one point that she actually enrolled in the qualitative research course the rest of us had taken and discussed on a regular basis, Kathy eventually withdrew from the course. At about the same time, she quit attending RRWPTRG meetings. When I called to tell her we missed her and to see if everything was okay, she explained that she was leaving the group because of added family responsibilities, an explanation that other RRWPTRG members and I felt obscured her insecurities regarding her place in the group.

Although Joan, Kathy, and Regina were officially the only members we lost during our first year together, because I insisted that we continue the practice of outreach, we had several visitors who dropped in from time to time out of curiosity or for brief periods when they needed intellectual support. Each time we had visitors, we began the meeting by reviewing our research interests and our progress so that those attending would have some degree of common ground. After several meetings,

however, this practice became counterproductive as it grew increasingly difficult to explain all that had gone on before. Hannah was most outspoken in noting that this process was "dragging on," and we finally discontinued the practice of outreach altogether, realizing the inefficiency that would result if we remained constantly concerned with meeting the general needs of whoever decided to show up at the next meeting.

Establishing an Idioculture

At some point our membership had to become fixed if we were to make satisfactory progress toward our individual studies, and when that point arrived at the end of RRWPTRG's first year, Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I were the members who remained. Loyal to the conceptual allegiances we had formed in prior settings, our first-year activities centered around the consultation and creation of critical texts and the establishment of the rituals and routines that defined our teacher-researcher identities and would continue to channel our work together. Together despite the dilemmas, we had negotiated an emergent idioculture, a

> system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction. Members recognize that they share experiences, and these experiences can be referred to with the expectation they will be understood by other members, thus being used to construct a reality for the participants (Fine as cited in Cole, 1996, p. 302).

This idioculture reflected values and practices rooted in the common and overlapping settings described in the previous chapter and was oriented toward the overriding motive of supporting one another's inquiry, the same goal that had dominated Hannah's original vision. As this chapter has documented, by the end of RRWPTRG's first year, the following cultural norms emerged as congruent with this overriding motive:

To be a teacher researcher, one must:

* see oneself as a knower, capable of and responsible for effecting educational reform in immediate and more distant contexts.

* teach with a questioning mind. Inquiry is a filter for teaching, and members' studies should be inquiry-driven. The relationship between teaching and research is thus dialectic.

* realize that teacher research requires more than informal reflection. Instead, it is the systematic, intentional process of answering questions that arise in the context of teaching.

* be personally invested in answering one's research questions, which have been chosen for the purpose of improving one's practice through a better understanding of the processes of learning and the contexts in which it occurs.

To be an RRWPTRG member, one must:

* demonstrate a mutual trust in other RRWPTRG members that makes possible the continuous process of emotional and intellectual risk-

taking. Members are personally invested in one another's projects and lives. To be a full-fledged member requires commitment to this relational framework.

* value questions, exploratory talk, and other members' perspectives for their potential to guide individual inquiry and promote collaborative thinking.

* be responsive to other members' practical, intellectual, and affective needs by listening to what they say and being sensitive to what they do not quite say.

* view group activities as negotiable provided that they do not violate the overriding motive of the setting to support one another's inquiry.

* value common research-based texts for the common conceptual ground they provide to inform our research and our teaching.

* recognize the value of qualitative research since its methods can be incorporated in the course of teaching and it is conceptually compatible with the notion that participants (often students) can be co-investigators in one's inquiry.

* view reading and writing as tools for learning in the context of whole-language, constructivist, progressive literacy teaching.

Influenced by prior contexts at the same time that we were "context-creating" (Cazden, 1988, p. 198), members of the RRWPTRG idioculture enacted these cultural

norms through our discourse practices, which served as tools for supporting our inquiry at the same time that they posed barriers for marginal members' participation. By explicating the structures and functions of the group's discourse in the following chapter, I more closely examine its dialectical relationship to sociocultural context (van Dijk, 1985).

CHAPTER SIX

COMMUNICATION MATTERS:

ACQUIRING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN RRWPTRG

Having provided an overview of the RRWPTRG context and its emergent cultural norms, I devote this chapter to the contextualizing nature of language as evident in the discourse practices present in our dominant speech event, the RRWPTRG meeting. Rather than simply serving as a research construct, the speech event can be identified as a unit by determining its goals and spatiotemporal organization as cultural members would define them (Albert, 1972; Duranti, 1985; Hymes, 1972). The notions of the speech event and the speech act are based on Hymes's (1972) distinction among three levels of activities in which discourse features prominently: the speech situation, the speech event, and the speech act. While the speech situation refers to those activities in which language figures but does not play a central role (e.g, eating dinner, attending a concert or sporting event), the speech event includes those activities (e.g., interviews, phone conversations, meetings) in which discourse features so prominently as to "define or constitute the interaction itself" (Duranti, 1985, p. 201). Although Hymes offers no explicit definition of speech acts, Schiffrin (1994) infers that they are those "acts that can be defined through their illocutionary force (e.g., commands or greetings), as well as those that cannot be so defined (e.g., jokes)" (p. 142). The larger units in this set can be thought of as

embedding the smaller: thus a party is a speech situation; a conversation during the party is a speech event; a joke within the conversation is a speech act (Hymes, 1972).

While an exhaustive examination of each speech act within these meetings is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I have selected representative data from various meetings that will allow me to identify several recurrent speech acts and their relevance to the speech event (i.e., the functions it served in the RRWPTRG meeting) and to explain how the act reveals communicative norms. I close the chapter by synthesizing from this analysis the communicative norms that determined one's communicative competence as an RRWPTRG member.

Regulating the Speech Event: The Role of Agendas

After the first meeting when my hand-written agenda proved insufficient for maintaining a focus that would allow us to accomplish our goals, Crystal and I agreed that I should use a public agenda to guide subsequent meetings. This practice formalized meeting content, sometimes dictated "rules" for interaction (e.g., when speaking privileges were designated), and increased our chances of keeping the meeting on track. Agendas also provided information of potential interest to the entire group (e.g., members' phone numbers, the food schedule, and dates of upcoming meetings) and served as a record of our activities. Consequently, this genre is useful in determining the idealized act sequence of RRWPTRG's dominant speech event, the teacher research meeting.

The first public agenda provided a template for the meetings to follow and structured this speech event into four parts:

1. Housekeeping - books available, meeting schedule through Dec., "contracts," FOOD!, etc.)
2. Description of Projects (con.) - Roxanne, Regina, Hannah, Cindy
3. Research Focus - Loving Your Question/Getting Organized
4. Discussion - Questions, Comments, and Concerns with Current Research

As mentioned previously, RRWPTRG meetings were typically held in members' homes with members gathered around kitchen tables or seated in a circle on living room couches and floors. This intimate atmosphere set an inviting, informal tone, especially since meetings always began with the sharing of food and drink. After a few minutes of eating and friendly conversation, the distribution of agendas signaled the formal beginning of the meeting. Crystal or I generally led the group through RRWPTRG business in the "Housekeeping" phase of the meeting before moving to the next item. As indicated by the above agenda, at the first few meetings this second item was taken up with descriptions of individual members' projects with speaking privileges indicated accordingly, but at subsequent meetings, this segment was often devoted to group tasks, such as freewriting to a common prompt. Next in the sequence of events was always the "Research Focus," which referred to a brief presentation or activity designed to help group members at the current stage of their research process. Agendas show that we attempted to work through the research process in a linear fashion the first year although transcripts reveal that the designs of our individual studies were inevitably emergent. Crystal or I (mostly I) typically led the "Research Focus," but later in the first year, we also invited guest speakers—our

qualitative research professor and Peter—to provide advice in the areas of data collection and analysis. The bulk of each meeting was devoted to the final agenda item where members discussed the immediate needs of their research, although we often injected comments and questions about our studies during earlier relevant segments rather than waiting until the end. Speaking was self-selected during this portion of the meeting. Initially, movement from one segment of the meeting to the next was regimented by verbal markers, but as the year progressed, meetings became more fluid with each item flowing to the next. While I set agendas for the first few meetings, usually with Crystal's input, the content of later meetings was negotiated by the group during a general discussion at the end of each meeting when we discussed what we needed to accomplish next.

The Research Dialect: Language as Evidence of Group Identification

Although not a speech act in itself, RRWPTRG members' use of a research dialect was an important component of communicative competence within the group. Members with more research experience regularly engaged in situational code-switching, the linguistic alteration that "accompanies a change of topics or participants, or any time the communicative situation is redefined" (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 59). From the first meeting, these members frequently shifted into a research dialect, a use of the specialized language and terms members had to master voluntarily in order to communicate about qualitative research and its methods. This dialect became even more pronounced in subsequent meetings. Evidence of its existence and its necessity to members' communicative competence is especially evident in the

following excerpts from our fourth meeting when group members attempted to help Kathy design an interview protocol that would give her insight into her students' attitudes toward writing (Note: I have underlined the introduction of specialized research terms for emphasis; also, throughout the remainder of the chapter, I have used a marginal arrow to identify points of analysis):

Cindy: So, Kathy, you're going to try and get one set of interviews done?

Kathy: Yes, yes.

Cindy: So what else are you going to ask? Were you just going to ask them those questions [referring to a list she had been compiling earlier in the

→ meeting]? Do we need to talk to her about interviews? Do you need us to talk about interviews?

Kathy: Well, some of...Yeah, I've written down interview questions, and I've talked to Roxanne about them before, and I don't know if I brought them with me...Okay, uh, I was going to do, "When you study what help you to know--...okay, do you write in a journal or a diary?"

Roxanne: Watch your [inaudible] there.

→ **Crystal:** One thing he [referring to the professor other members' had taken for a qualitative research methods course] says is don't use anything that can be answer as a "yes" or "no."

Roxanne: No "yes" or "no."

Kathy: [writing] "Why" or "why not."

→ **Crystal:** No, say, "Tell me about when you write. Tell me about all

the things you write about."

Roxanne: Yeah. Open-ended.

Cindy: The more open-ended, or broader, your questions, the more involved your responses usually are.

Kathy: [writing] Okay, "What do you like to write."

Already, in this brief segment, Roxanne, Crystal, and I have identified ourselves as users of the research dialect we had learned in a prior setting, in this case a qualitative research course. My first question, directed toward other members of the group ("Do we need to talk to her about interviews?") and then toward Kathy almost as an afterthought ("Do we need to talk to you about interviews?"), may have indicated my desire to help Kathy develop some general guidelines that would allow her to conduct successful interviews, but these questions also deny researcher status to Kathy at the same time that they proffer it on Crystal, Hannah, and Roxanne (having left early, Regina was not present by this point in the meeting). Crystal's pronoun reference to "he," was ambiguous to no one but Kathy since the other four of us had shared the common experience of the research course and knew that Crystal was referring to our professor. Finally, Crystal's verbal revision of Kathy's first question, Roxanne's subsequent label in the term "open-ended," and my parenthetical definition of the term with the word "broader," clearly position us as "teachers," possessing knowledge and a research dialect our "student" Kathy does not share. The lesson in dialect continues in the following segment:

→ **Hannah:** And also, don't think. If a question comes to mind while

they're talking, ask that questions, too. You don't have to stick to that list.

Cindy: Right. That's called probing.

Kathy: Make it conversational.

→ **Cindy:** Yeah, because that helps give you more information.

Kathy: All right.

→ **Hannah:** One thing I noticed looking back at my transcripts, I just missed so many, so many seemingly obvious questions, you know, to get more. So that's why it's important to have a second interview to go back through.

Kathy: Okay, and I've got that [list] at home, and I love this book [referring to On Becoming Qualitative Researchers (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992)].

→ **Cindy:** Read the stuff about interviewing in there. It's really good.

Kathy: I've got, "Why is it important to be able to write. Explain."

Cindy: But what if they don't think it is important?

Kathy: Then they don't have to explain and [they can] tell me why they don't think it is.

Cindy: If you—but that's a leading question.

Kathy: Oh, it is?

→ **Cindy:** Because you're--in your question, you're saying to them, "It is--," I mean it's not written there, but you're saying, "It's important to now how to write."

Kathy: So can I put, "Is it important?"

→ **Hannah:** Look here. I've got, this guy in a book, I wish I could find it, but of course somebody stole this book from the library. But anyway, there are three types of questions: descriptive questions, which informants answer by describing their environment, activities, and experiences; structural questions, which informants answer by explaining how their knowledge is organized; and contrast questions, which informants answer by distinguishing among objects and events in their world. So, typical questions asked during a first interview might be, "What kinds of things do you read? Name one thing you've recently read and tell me about it. How do you differ as a reader from other readers in your family? From other English teachers you know? What made you choose to read the most recent book you've read?"

Roxanne: "Why is writing important to you?"

Cindy: That's a leading question if you're saying that writing is important to them.

Roxanne: Oh.

→ **Hannah:** I think that question, "What do you think writing is?" is a good—

Roxanne: Yeah.

→ **Crystal:** You want them to talk about everything. You don't want them, you don't want to say, "I think writing's important. Now you tell me why you think writing's important."

Kathy: Yeah, that's a good point. I guess I won't ask that question.

Our advice in this segment was both content-oriented and procedural, as

Hannah and I again identified research tools and their labels (e.g, "probing," "leading questions"), and Hannah went one step further by cataloguing a list of question types that Kathy might find useful, depending upon her immediate purposes in the interview. Other notable features of this "lesson" were Hannah's use of her prior research experience as an illustrative counter-example, and the catalogue of hypothetical questions she posed that, while obviously connected to her own study on reading, served as models for the kinds of open-ended prompts Kathy might use herself. Our instruction was jointly completed when Hannah made a direct link to Kathy's study with her final suggestions of what constituted a good research question, Crystal provided a final interviewing guideline, and Kathy received it by eliminating her original leading question.

Saville-Troike (1989) explains that among the many functions of code-switching are "group identification, solidarity, distancing, and redefinition of a situation" (p. 68). Although we intended to help Kathy develop tools for effective data collection, the didactic tone Crystal, Hannah, Roxanne, and I subconsciously assumed had the incidental effect of delineating the social roles (as well as the status that accompanied them) of researcher and non-researcher, and of consigning her to the latter category. That linguistic prowess in the research dialect was a communicative norm we expected RRWPTRG members to acquire was evident in our labeling and parenthetical definition of specialized research terms. Fluency in the research dialect became a symbol of group identification and solidarity by serving as an important evidence of communicative competence within RRWPTRG.

Presenting: Language as a Tool for Sharing Knowledge

A recurrent speech act at RRWPTRG meetings was the presentation of information for the purposes of sharing content and procedural knowledge. As the previous excerpt illustrated, this act occurred spontaneously in the discussion of members' individual projects; but more formal instruction in various components of the research process was also an intentional feature of RRWPTRG meetings and usually constituted the third phase of each meeting, marked as "The Research Process" on the agenda. During these more formal presentations, usually delivered by me, Crystal, or a guest speaker brought in especially for this purpose, discourse patterns changed markedly from the more conversational pattern that dominated other phases of the meeting. Prior to the following excerpt where I present information about developing focused research questions, speaker change was frequent and turns were relatively similar in length as the group provided Hannah with feedback regarding her choice of research participants. I marked this phase of the speech event by distributing handouts from a qualitative research text and referring to the title I had chosen for this segment of the meeting, "Loving Your Question:"

> **Cindy:** I stole this title from this lady who, um, I'm corresponding with on the Teacher As Researcher thing [referring to XTAR listserve]. And she suggested this book that I'm going to have to get probably called Loving the Question, and it's about how the key to really good research is starting at the beginning with very focused questions. Yeah, they can evolve and all of that, but that really seems to be a key thing before, you know, jumping into your

interviews or whatever. You really need to know what you're looking at. And so I stole that little title from that. Um, but I thought some of this [referring to the handouts] might be useful to you guys.

After addressing a brief spate of questions about the round of guest speakers in the graduate proseminar I was enrolled in that semester, I continued:

> It's really nice. 'Cause we're kind of getting to meet them. But all of them have said that the kind of questions you ask, uh, the kind of research study you wind up doing, whether it's qualitative or quantitative, all depends on what you're trying to find out. And, um, I thought that was interesting 'cause this [referring to the handout] says basically the same thing in here, um, on number two where it asks you to force yourself to make decisions concerning the type of study you want to accomplish. And if you'll look down at three, there are a couple of things I marked in here where it says "Develop analytic questions." And I thought, that made me feel a lot better because my questions are so, like I said, real nebulous. I mean, I kind of know what I want to find out, and I know, um, what sorts of areas I'm going in, but it's pretty broad now. And this gives lots of sugges--not suggestions, but examples, um, of what they wind up coming up with. If you'll look on the back...

This excerpt demonstrates several typical components of "The Research Process" as a recurrent speech act in RRWPTRG meetings. First of all, this act was marked by an extended turn in which the presenter held the privilege to the conversational floor. When they occurred, intervening turns were brief, and speaker

privileges automatically reverted to the presenter, who engaged in another extended turn at their conclusion. Secondly, even though the discourse patterns changed markedly during this act of the speech event, the tone remained decidedly informal and extemporaneous. For example, in the above excerpt, although I had obviously planned the course of my presentation to the extent that I had chosen a title and had prepared handouts relevant to the topic, I sandwiched information from the research text between references to my own personal experiences as a graduate student and a researcher. This pattern continued throughout the rest of my presentation and was a common template followed by presenters in other meetings. Such an integration softened the impression that the presenter saw herself as an "expert" and allowed her to project herself as a peer instead. Finally, the overall practice of the "Research Focus" further emphasized the expectations that RRWPTRG members' projects would be oriented toward inquiry and pursued via qualitative research, and that education in these methods was a group priority.

Exploring: Language as a Tool for Constructing Knowledge Together

Transcripts of RRWPTRG meetings are wonderfully rife with instances of collaborative intellectual exploration. In the following sections, I describe how members used exploratory talk (Barnes, 1992), reflective questions, teaching narratives, and role-playing to construct, represent, and communicate meaning, as well as to provide mutual support in the zone of proximal development (Engeström, 1996; Wells, 1994, 1996b).

Exploratory Talk

In his examination of classroom discussions, Barnes (1992) argues that discourse can be categorized as exploratory or final draft. Exploratory speech demonstrates the ways in which the processes of speaking or composing function as tools for discovering new meaning, while "final draft" versions of speech (p. 108) are those statements issuing from previously explored versions that are then offered in final form as resolutions to thought. The collaborative texture of RRWPTRG's talk is evident in the following exploratory sequence taken from the first meeting where Crystal described her study. As the following excerpts illustrate, these sequences were characterized by a preponderance of exploratory talk and frequently began when a member admitted to a problem she was encountering in the process of her research and then posed a question that touched off a cycle of collaborative problem-solving:

Cindy: What group were you dealing with?

Crystal: I'm just going to use...artists and writers. So I'm using three, and that was a question that I had, because I wanted to know if you thought I had too much? Sometimes I have a hard time gauging if I have too much, you know, data...Because I was going to do two case studies for an artist, two case studies for a writer, and then interview like maybe three artists, three writers. And then I was going to do a case study for somebody that neither considers themself an artist or a writer. Like just a teacher, and have them—

Cindy: How many interviews are you doing?

Crystal: So that would have been-- You mean total?

Cindy: Uh-huh.

Crystal: Probably... Different people?

Cindy: Yeah. Like how many different people? How many interviews total? How many with each person?

Crystal: About nine.

Cindy: That's a lot.

Roxanne: That's a lot.

Kathy: Nine people or nine interviews?

In this case, Crystal's first question initiated the exploratory sequence. Once she had posed a problem concerning the optimal amount of data, my series of questions was designed to elicit additional information before Roxanne and I offered our perspectives and Kathy asked another question for clarification. Roxanne emphasized her agreement by repeating my phrase, "That's a lot" and proceeded to offer a series of alternative proposals, all still in response to Crystal's original question and her own concern that Crystal's research design was unwieldy in its current form:

Roxanne: I think you've got more than--You know, when you were talking about your project, your--You know, with this program that you're doing, your art thing? You could almost do your whole study--

→ **Crystal:** --just using those people?

Roxanne: Just using those people.

Crystal: [addressing the rest of the group] Well, here's the other thing. I'm doing these discovery workshops. Once a Saturday, I'm doing an art project in connection with a writing project, and it's open to anybody who wants to do

it, you know, here at my house. And so, what I thought I would do is get people to be in that study, and then they wouldn't have to pay for the workshop, and then I could interview them after they do the art and the writing together.

Roxanne: If you did what you said, and you did one person doing just the art--you know, somebody outside of the group, maybe, to do just the art, the person who's doing the, I mean, who's in your discovery group—

→ **Crystal:** --who's doing both—

Roxanne: --who's doing both, and then a person that's doing just the writing prompt. I think you've got a study right there. I don't think you need all that other stuff. I really think that's a study in itself.

Although she did so indirectly, Roxanne began answering Crystal's question by introducing a hypothetical option that would significantly reduce her total number of interviews. Crystal participated in the construction of this option by jointly constructing Roxanne's utterances on two occasions as marked. Roxanne's proposal continued to be modified over the next several turns as Crystal and other members explored multiple options for her selection of participants and data collection methods. After several suggestions, Crystal stopped to take stock in what had been said:

Crystal: So you're saying--Okay. Now I've got to get this straight 'cause this is, like pops everything.

Roxanne: [referring to Crystal's pilot study] I know, all those interviews she did.

Crystal: No, that's all right. I can still use those. Those are fine. But I had it down that I was going to take two artists, two writers. I was going to inter-- Now, as far as I know, [in] a case study you just interview them. Extensively, right?

Cindy: That's one thing you can do.

Crystal: Okay. And then I was going to take somebody that was neither in art or writing and then expose them to that and interview them and compare all three interviews. I guess I was going to do two, four, six. I was going to do six interviews. But the way you're saying is you just take--Who would I do besides Carrie [a participant who had already volunteered]? I mean, I would have Carrie—

Roxanne: Carrie, your whole person, doing everything. Okay, then you pick one—you need to get somebody who is a writer who would be willing to come and do the art stuff.

Crystal: To come [to the] workshop?

Roxanne: Just the art without the writing.

→ **Crystal:** So how can I--? Oh! Then I would interview them and see if they have this intra--, if they have this self-reflection through it.

Roxanne: And then, if you could get somebody who's an artist—

Crystal: --to do the writing—

Roxanne: --the writing without the art...Or it's not even necessar--Or get three non-artist, writer people. And have just one do the art—

Hannah: Or just get three people off the street.

Roxanne: Hey, you come in here! We need you!

Hannah: There goes a lady right there.

Roxanne: Okay, now here's another idea. Don't just use—get more than one, get two people. I don't know if you need the art without the writing because that's not what you're looking at.

Crystal: Why can't I just get an artist, a writer, and a non-person, a non-whatever--

Roxanne: Poor Carrie.

Crystal: --and they go through the whole process together?

Roxanne: Yeah, but I think, if you want to look at how—

Cindy: It depends on what you want to find out.

Roxanne: Right.

Despite the fact that other members' suggestions apparently caused her some disequilibrium (i.e., "this...like, pops everything"), Crystal reflected on the past several minutes of conversation to compare her original vision with Roxanne's alternative and to pose qualifying questions so that Roxanne would clarify her suggestions. At the first line marked above, Crystal then appeared to catch the gist of Roxanne's suggestion and its connection to her original research question, and she and Roxanne again jointly constructed sentences and built the hypothetical option together. Hannah's suggestion to pull three people off the street provided a moment of comic relief to this potentially stressful alteration of Crystal's original vision, and the group

arrived at the conclusion that her choices ultimately depended upon what she wanted to learn through her investigation. This conclusion in turn led Crystal to reflect aloud extensively about the purpose of her study and the hypothesis that brought her to it:

> **Crystal:** I want, I think, what I think—and this is probably biased—I think that once, if you use those two symbol systems and you integrate the activities—art and writing, okay? What happens is it goes deeper than just what you wri—what product you create in both instances. You can, when you have art and you have a visual, and you write in response to that, something happens associatively, and you start to think. You go deeper like a dream, like, you know, a subconscious, you start coming up that way [inaudible]...And then I think the artist—the same thing happens when they start doing art and they start using the language with it to come up with that. They do the same thing. Because in that preliminary study, what I found—I thought that what I was going to find was that the art and the writing really helped their product. Well, yeah, that was one thing, but really, what came out of it was, they had a tension inside that they didn't know what it was. It's different: It could be cultural, it could be emotional, whatever. And that's what was tapped. It [the art or writing] tapped into that, and they would express it in their writing, they would express it on the canvas. They didn't even know they were expressing it. They only knew it once I started interviewing them and I made them start talking about it. And I think that's what happens, but we [teachers] don't know that. I mean, they [the artists]

don't. They're not aware of it. And I think for kids, if you did this [integrated art with the teaching of writing], I just think it would relate learning more to them individually.

The meanings produced through RRWPTRG members' interaction were rarely fixed and bear an almost uncanny resemblance to the exploratory processes described by Barnes and Todd (1977) in their study of students working in small groups:

> [T]he meanings which the participants made were not stable. They were fluid and changing, built up out of the existing knowledge and expectations which they brought to the situation, along with their own implicit summary of what went on in the conversation, and their reaction to that summary. Meanings change in response to on-going events in the conversation, which lead to a reinterpretation of what has gone on so far (p. 17):

Although this exploratory sequence did not help Crystal to settle on her ultimate research design in the course of the meeting (she would eventually limit her focus to an intensive case study of one artist-writer), it did help her to begin to more firmly articulate the motivations behind her inquiry in the first place. This excerpt was characteristic of RRWPTRG's exploratory talk in these ways:

(1) exploratory sequences were often touched off when individual members posed a problem or question for the group's consideration;

(2) when this happened, other members' responses were most often indirect and couched in hypothetical language (note the preponderance of conditional tense verbs in Roxanne's suggestions), emphasizing that, while

other members could provide intellectual support, individuals ultimately maintained ownership of their respective studies;

(3) meaning was often jointly constructed and carried toward unpredictable conclusions as members took up one another's ideas and extended or transmuted them (Barnes & Todd, 1977);

(4) discourse was fluid and dynamic and produced in a mutually supportive environment that allowed members to challenge one another's ideas without losing face or friendship.

Reflective questions and teaching narratives.

While the previous sequence demonstrated how the joint construction of suggestions and hypothetical alternatives deepened individual members' thinking, the following sequence will illustrate how members' strategic use of reflective questions and teaching narratives provided support for both research and teaching practices. The excerpt begins with Kathy's reading of a freewrite she had composed at home and brought to read to the group so that we could help her to clarify her research questions:

Kathy: All right. Barriers to writing attitudes. Why do students have a negative attitude toward writing? In classrooms, the announcement that class will begin [with] our writing assignment meets with moans and groans. Students complain, "It's hard," "It makes my hand hurt," "I don't know anything else to write," and finally, "It takes too long." All these are complaints that many of us have experienced in our classroom, but I still don't

understand why they are so opposed to writing. Are they turned off in the fourth grade because I want to use writing as a learning tool? Or is it a lack of experience and skill? They express concerns about poor spelling and not wanting to look the word up in the dictionary. Some seem to have real fears they won't be able to think of a topic. Should I then choose their topic or give them the story starter they have often used to get them going? Would their attitude toward the assignment improve if they were allowed the freedom to choose for themselves? Does the pressure of a time period add to the negativeness toward writing? Or is it simply because it doesn't have a purpose in their learning schema? Perhaps it is a sense of failure because past experiences have not been successful in terms of evaluation. Questions, questions, questions. The main thrust of my research will be trying to describe experiences which cause young people to feel negatively toward writing. I will also introduce changes in methods and classroom environment, and [will] offer varied writing tools and genres while monitoring the effect they have on student attitude.

After reading the freewrite, Kathy looked up and asked, "Too broad?," but before answering, Crystal clarified the kind of feedback Kathy wished to receive:

Crystal: Well, you want us to tell you what we, what we just, what I got out of that?

Kathy: Yes.

Crystal: What I got out of it—your real question, you want to know why students don't like to write.

Roxanne: Yeah, that's what I say.

Crystal: But the thing you said at the end is what you plan to do to show the negative part. The last sentence you read, which I thought, um, "feel negatively toward"—

Kathy: [reading] "The main thrust of my research will be to try and identify experiences which cause young people to feel negatively toward writing."

→ **Crystal:** Why not identify the positive things?

Kathy: Okay.

Crystal: I mean, the negative ones you almost know, you know? You've already said in here [referring to the freewrite]. They don't like to look things up in the dictionary, you know. They don't think they can do it. I mean you can do that as well, but I think that what you want to do is find out—

Kathy: --identify the [inaudible] that cause people to feel positive—

→ **Cindy:** Or are you trying to figure out if you can--I mean, you perceive from them that they have a negative attitude now, and you want to see—

→ **Crystal:** --how to change it?

→ **Cindy:** --what, what changes it? Are you trying--? See, because you said earlier—

Kathy: That's what I want to do, yes.

Cindy: --was that you wanted to do some of the things you learned with Write Tracks [the writing across the curriculum program Kathy was implementing in her classroom] and In the Middle stuff [Atwell, 1987] to see if their attitudes change. So that's a different question altogether.

Crystal: Yeah, she has three things here. She has why kids don't like to write, identifying the negative parts of writing, and then now you're saying, how writing changes—

Cindy: --based on what she's using with them—

Crystal: Mm-hmm.

Kathy: Okay, I'm having a real hard time of getting it down.

Crystal: Well, you're not alone.

Kathy: And in my journal in the classroom, I'm keeping track of all these things I'm trying to do with them and the one's that work and don't work.

→ **Crystal:** But "work and don't work" as far as what? Their attitudes?

Kathy: Right.

Hannah: And that has to be—you have to decide, you know, how it works as far as attitudes because there are so many other things that you can say, "It's working in this area or that area." I think that would focus it in one way, you know, just improve their attitudes. What I wrote down is that you were looking at how writing instruction affects their attitudes, different types of instruction. Like first you said having them do story starterr, um, doing that or letting them choose their own topic--

Cindy: But that could be a whole study in itself.

Hannah: Right, right.

Kathy: Just that?

Cindy: Just that could be.

Crystal's first reflective question was designed to help Kathy cast her study in a different light and to discover the question driving her inquiry. By pointing out that Kathy had already identified many of the negative influences on students' writing attitudes, Crystal suggested the possibility that Kathy had yet to discover the true focus of her research. Crystal and I jointly constructed the next reflective question ("Or are you trying to figure out what changes it?") to probe further into Kathy's motivations, and I went on to remind her of the cause-effect question her original grant proposal had suggested. When Kathy admitted that she was having difficulty focusing, Crystal offered a commiserating remark, and Kathy reflected on the lists she had been making in her data collection to determine what teaching methods did and did not work, a discovery that also suggested a broader focus than the question stated in her freewrite implied. Crystal's next reflective question attempted to get Kathy to reveal the focus behind her data collection (Was she attempting to record pedagogical successes and failures or to trace their connections to student attitudes?), and Hannah joined Kathy's freewrite question on attitudes with her data collection methods to suggest a new focus that encompassed them both: "What I wrote down is that you were looking at how writing instruction affects their attitudes." Although Kathy

would leave the group before finishing her study, reflective questions such as these held the potential of providing her with a focus for her research.

Later in the same excerpt, members also used reflective questions in combination with teaching narratives to support both Kathy's teaching and her research. Kathy began by describing some of her tentative findings:

Kathy: Okay, so what I've found out this year is that I give them a really structured situation...where they're going to be writing within a framework, they feel much more secure. They don't feel as threatened—

Cindy: As opposed to what? What did they have before?

Kathy: Okay, just say, "Here's a topic and you write."

Crystal: They don't like what about--?

Kathy: They don't like that freedom. They don't, they're not—

→ **Crystal:** But why don't they like that?

Kathy: I don't think they have enough language arts experiences to do it successfully. They can't spell—

→ **Cindy:** Or is it that they've always been given structure, and if you take that away from them, they don't--?

Roxanne: Maybe you gave up to easily.

→ **Hannah:** I've had students who say, "Okay, what do we put in the first paragraph?" [To which she replied,] "That's your decision." You know, I mean, they wanted me to structure their whole paper for them, and I won't do it.

→ **Cindy:** And I've had kids who have responded negatively to having to do reading journals before because they'd much rather do study questions. Because if they're study questions, then I'm coming up with the questions. They just have to find the answers. It's not that, I mean, the way—at least the way I've looked at that is that the negative thing is not that reading journals were bad, or that, um, they couldn't learn how to operate with less structure. It's just they didn't want to think for themselves, to come up with the questions in the first place.

Crystal: See? What seems like a simple answer actually goes much deeper. It's not just about writing. It's that, you know, the kids—We, we've spoon-fed them for so long, they don't know how to think on their own.

Crystal's first question in this excerpt required Kathy to problematize her findings by asking the question "why." My question and my and Hannah's brief narratives describing similar dilemmas in our own teaching likewise implied that Kathy resist jumping to a facile pedagogical solution when, as Crystal put it, "a simple answer actually goes much deeper."

Because careful listening was required for their formulation, reflective questions revealed evidence of members' commitment to support one another's inquiry. Because drawing parallels between members' classroom situations and reassured the listener that "I have been there, too," teaching narratives suggested empathy for one's circumstances at the same time that they worked as counterexamples, requiring members to step back from their teaching and view it from

another angle. In this and other instances, RRWPTRG members used these strategies to help one another reflect more deeply on the approaches we took to our research and the conclusions we drew about our teaching.

Role playing.

During the group's second meeting, we stumbled upon an additional exploratory strategy that allowed us to refine the focus of our research. The idea for role playing came about when the excerpt I had brought from a research text suggested that a researcher ought to be able to explain the intent of her or his research to an intelligent layperson without appearing boring or confusing. Coincidentally, Roxanne had been in precisely this situation at a recent dinner party she had attended when another guest asked her to explain the topic of her thesis. Roxanne begins the following excerpt by describing her response:

Roxanne: I said something like, "Oh, I'm really just looking at writing in my classroom, and how I teach and how my students react to each other and their interactions." She didn't fall asleep. I kept it short and to the point, so--. But that was interesting 'cause she's an educated layperson.

Cindy: Yeah.

Roxanne: And I thought, she's going to go, "What a waste of money."

Crystal: Well, that's true 'cause you make this big question that has all these, you know, things that are supposed to be in it, and then—but then it has a real practical—somebody just wants to know, "What are you doing?"

Roxanne: Yeah, and this woman is not in education. She's a vocational rehab person or something, so you know, it wasn't something that she personally would be interested in anyway, so—

Crystal: I just think that's a—that was a good way to check and see if your question is really what you're doing.

Roxanne: You should stop people on the street. "Excuse me, I'd like to tell you what my thesis is. Tell me if you get bored."

Crystal: "Tell me if you understand this"...Or if they could explain it back.

Hannah: ...What Crystal said is really important, if they can tell you back what you're doing and it sounds like what you're doing.

Roxanne: Yeah, that's pretty good. Oh, that's what I should have said. "Would you repeat that back to me now? I'd like to see if it made sense."

Crystal: I think I did do that to somebody. I told him my question, you know, the real formal one, and they, and I said, "Now tell me what that means." And they go, "Well, I don't really know," and so I go, "Okay, well I'll go back and work on it."

Hannah: Well, I mean, could we do that for each other?

Cindy: Yeah.

Crystal: That's what I was thinking. That might be a good thing. Just go around and say, "Well, I think you're studying," or—

Hannah: Yeah, yeah. But let's not do it now.

Kathy: I feel the same way.

Cindy: Want to do that next time?

Crystal: Yeah, yeah. That'll give us some think time...

Besides describing the process by which the idea for role playing came to be, this excerpt also demonstrates how group members collaboratively negotiated the direction of our group's activities. In the next few meetings, we would take turns being researchers and educated laypeople. While some members performed extemporaneously, others, like Kathy in the excerpt from the previous section, rehearsed their ideas in writing before sharing them with the group. The act of role playing not only met its original purpose for individual members but also reflected and reinforced the group's value for the practice of reflective questioning. Additionally, role playing sequences frequently initiated episodes of exploratory talk that led individual members to verbally reflect on the motivations underlying their inquiries, and at the same time, allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the details of one another's projects.

As we employed the often overlapping practices of exploratory talk, reflective questions, teaching narratives, and role-playing, it was frequently impossible to determine where one member's thinking ended and another's began. We collaborated even to complete one another sentences at times, and in the process discovered the value and challenge of thinking together. Our exploitation of these linguistic tools provides additional evidence that, in ensembles, "there may be jointly achieved, interpsychological functions which are sufficiently complicated that they never become

independently realizable individual psychological functions but can only be achieved as joint, mediated, activity in context" (Cole, 1996, p. 342).

Freewriting: Language as a Tool for Action

Although talk was our most common discourse practice, it was the writing that initially brought RRWPTRG together and extended our work into other settings. From the grant proposals that gained members access into the group to the presentation texts that formalized our identity as a teacher research group, writing was, from the beginning, a tool for action. Within RRWPTRG meetings themselves, however, writing served other purposes as well, allowing members to formalize the goals for their research and their group participation, to theorize about educational reform, and to suggest future directions the group might take. Our frequent practice of freewriting at the start of RRWPTRG meetings required members to give visible form to interior thought, first for themselves and then for others through the readarounds that followed. In this way, freewrites became prompts for collective thinking that often led to action.

The freewrites produced at our fourth meeting provide a case in point. As a result of reading the common texts described earlier and viewing other literature on the genre, Crystal and I had discovered wide-ranging definitions of teacher research. Because we wanted to deliver a faithful version of RRWPTRG's own perspective on the matter at our upcoming NCTE roundtable, we asked group members to "write for a few minutes about what you think it is, and then we can talk about it a little bit." Members' freewrites revealed the continuum of perspectives existing within the group

itself, from Kathy's version resembling "teacher lore" (North, 1987; i.e., "sharing what works and doesn't work") to Crystal's middle-of-the road response (i.e., "it can be as much or as little as you want it to be") to Hannah's account of a formalized process whereby teachers were able to "answer for themselves the questions that arise in their classroom." Common to all of our freewrites, however, was an examination of the uniqueness of the genre of teacher research itself. Although somewhat lengthy, the following excerpt demonstrates how our freewriting inevitably led to exploratory talk that jointly extended our thinking:

> **Crystal:** ...[teacher research] seems almost more than educational research since it takes awhile for that to get--
>
> **Cindy:** Right.
>
> **Crystal:** --to get into anybody's mind, you know.
>
> **Cindy:** And this one book that we have [Changing Schools from Within (Wells, 1994)] that everybody can look at, this one that we ordered. Uh, Gordon Wells, the guy that wrote to you [referring to the reply Roxanne had recently received from Wells on XTAR] said exactly that, that it's the most powerful way to cause change. He thinks it's the only way that there's going to be any sweeping changes in education because there's such mistrust on either side, you know, of people saying, "Oh, the researchers are out of touch, so theoretical that I can't use it," kind of like what you were saying. Um, and then the researchers looking down their noses at teachers, saying, "Oh, they're just so practice-oriented." There's a way to bridge that. Um, I don't know.

That book is really interesting. His chapter, his introductory chapter at the beginning—because he was a university researcher who did just kind of like what Paul does, you know? Or lots of people in the education department, going into a classroom and collecting data and fieldnotes, and interviewing people and all that, but really as an outsider coming in. And he [Wells] was teaching a course in Toronto and working with this teacher cooperative and discovered that, you know, they were more than capable of answering their own questions. And so he began working with them, and that's how he's gotten so involved in teacher research.

Crystal: It is so important. I mean like, when I went to [another teachers' school where she was a guest artist-in-residence]...and she's got like first graders, just little bitty and all. I mean, it's just, it was a whole different environment for me to sit there and watch her do things and talk. It made me just realize, I don't know, you're in...the gym with all these little kids around you and they have to—those teachers have—that's their, that's their world, and they have to solve it in their world. So you know, I think that I couldn't say, "You know, well, why don't you try this, Roxanne?" You know? Because I'm not in that world. It's kind of the same thing as the education people. They're kind of removed.

Cindy: And even if like, I teach, obviously, at the high school, but I've been doing some observations at [a mid-high school where I was collecting data as a research assistant] for this grant, and you know, things that just seem so

familiar and everything, when you're sitting in someone else's classroom and watching it, it just seems so odd. Like I was watching this [student teacher]...figure out which group was going to get to go first on the presentation, and he handed out these little bitty slips of paper, you know, and didn't really explain it. Well, they [the students] obviously knew what was going on 'cause it was familiar. But when you're just sitting there, seeing it for the first time, it seems like this strange ritual.

Hannah: Well, they've built up a relationship all year.

Cindy: Yeah.

Hannah: It's just like you have a relationship with anybody else, after awhile [inaudible].

Cindy: ...but you don't realize how much of that goes on unless you come in from the outside. The other thing is working with Paul on [the research he conducted in my classroom]. I mean, he came to my class every day for a whole year last year, but he still didn't know some of the things that the students and I knew. And as we're analyzing those transcripts, he'll go, "Well, what is this?" And I'll say, "No, no, no. This means this because I know this kid, and I know how she responds with this kid, and this is what she's saying to her." And the reason I know it is because I was the teacher.

Crystal: Well, you're kind of doing both. He's doing the educational part of it, and you're doing the teacher research part of it...

This excerpt is notable for the combination of "critique" of larger educational structures and "thick description" from classroom and research settings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) as described in Chapter Two. In this case, RRWPTRG members drew on their teaching and research experiences as both classroom outsiders and insiders to contrast the positions of teacher researchers and university researchers. By drawing on these experiences and a common text, members emphasized the inherent strength of the teacher's perspective and the corresponding potential "those teachers have...to solve it in that world."

As the conversation continued, Roxanne shared the disorienting experience she had as an outsider when she covered the class of a first grade teacher at her school:

> **Roxanne:** ...and we were supposed to do calendar, and I'm, I don't know how to do calendar. I don't do calendars. I'm going, and they're well, we have to sing the song. Okay, who's going to teach me the song? I don't know the song...And they were kind of being loud, and one little girl goes, "Just put a star on the board." I said, "Okay." So I went over and put a star on the board. They were quiet.
>
> **Cindy:** Isn't it weird? I mean, when you're coming from that side—
>
> **Roxanne:** I know, I'm going to try that in my class.
>
> **Cindy:** It's like a tribal thing almost.
>
> **Roxanne:** Yeah, it is! Because there are things in my class that I know somebody would come in and go [making a puzzled face expression].
>
> **Crystal:** But you've worked stuff out.

Roxanne: But I know things, and my kids know them just like [the first grade teacher] knows to put a star on the board and they all get quiet. And I told her that and she said, "Oh, you used the star trick," and I said, "Yeah, that was really amazing!" I can't believe how they got quiet. And they were doing writing and reading workshop, and they were quiet for twenty-five minutes because I had that star on the board. Little first graders.

Crystal: ...But she's researched that out. Just like in your class.

Roxanne: Somehow she's figured out that works. Right.

Crystal: You know, and what kind of need is it? Now, you went in her environment, and now you can take some of that back to your environment. That's why I think teacher research is so powerful because we share it among ourselves and then think, "You know, hey, I might try that."

Roxanne: But I really think you're right about you can't understand it unless you've been in there and been in their shoes.

In this segment, members again emphasized the distinctive classroom culture created by teachers and their students. Crystal's comments also identified an additional appeal of teacher research, implying that teachers might find it to be more authentic than university-based educational research because it is authored by someone who, as Roxanne put it, has "been in their shoes."

In the conversation that followed, Hannah and I continued our attempts to identify distinctive features of teacher research:

Cindy: See, I think it's diff--, to me it's different than just, you now, sitting there every day and figuring out whether it worked or not and talking to the people in the lounge about it. I mean, that is, that's a form of inquiry, you know...It just seems like you have a specific problem and you come up with ways that you're going to figure out the answers to it. It's just a little more, well, a lot more formalized, I guess. But not as formalized as what I think of, where somebody goes, "I have a question and we're going to use these surveys to test it out."

Hannah: It's also where the question comes from, too. I think that question arises out of something that is going on in the classroom, whereas somebody who is at a university somewhere just decides....

After we spent several minutes discussing how our own questions had emerged from particular classroom needs, a long pause indicated that the conversation was winding down, and I asked:

Cindy: So we didn't end up coming to a conclusion?

Hannah: Somebody get that star off the wall.

Roxanne: Erase that star.

Crystal: Well, I don't think there's a canned answer for it.

Cindy: I don't think there is either...

Crystal: I think it is real powerful, and I think he's [Wells] is right, that that's where the change is going to be 'cause...I don't like people telling me, "Well,

why don't you try this?" And I go, "Well, why don't you try something? Why don't you try teaching in this classroom?"

Hannah: ...When you look at all these movements for educational reform, it's all, "Okay, let's establish some national standards," you know, looking at things, at such big, broad things like that's really going to bring about educational reform. It's going to be one teacher at a time, you know, and those teachers—it's got to kind of develop as a grass roots movement rather than some big government program.

Cindy: Yeah, grass roots is a big word in all of this stuff.

Touched off by the issues presented in individual freewrites, members wove together interpretations of common texts, teaching narratives, and research experiences in joint pursuit of the original question, "What is teacher research?" Without concocting "canned answers," we certainly noted several themes that were consistent with the approaches we were taking in our individual projects and in our work together:

(1) More than just reflection, teacher research is the process of seeking answers to questions that matter in the everyday lives of teachers and students.

(2) Teacher research should be considered a powerful force in efforts toward educational reform because of its ability to effect change in both immediate and extended contexts.

(3) Because of the insider perspective it provides to the general base of educational knowledge, teacher research findings may have greater potential for speaking directly to teachers than those drawn from traditional educational research.

Each of these ideas would find their way into my and Crystal's NCTE roundtable presentation and are especially evident in the figures the two of us designed to represent our group's emergent understanding of teacher research and its place in educational reform. The first of these figures (see Appendix, Figure 2), paired with a quotation from the Wells (1994) text we had discussed in the above excerpt, portrayed our understanding of the traditional hierarchical model of educational reform. The second (see Appendix, Figure 3), paired with a quotation from another common text for the group, demonstrated how a teacher research model might realign teachers' "relationships to knowledge and to the brokers of knowledge" and might lead toward a "redefinition of the notion of a knowledge base for teaching" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). This model collapsed the traditional hierarchy, reassigning stakeholders to what we saw as more equitable positions along the theory-practice cycle. Reminiscent of Hannah's "grass-roots" theory in the excerpt above, our final figure (see Appendix, Figure 4), again paired with a Wells quotation, illustrated our claim that wide-sweeping educational reform requires the radical restructuring of the current hierarchical model through the establishment of multiple centers of inquiry within teachers and their students, schools (including universities), and networks, such as

as teacher research communities. Beginning "one teacher at a time," then, such change would eventually impact the general knowledge base of education.

Enacting Cultural Norms through Communicative Events

As is true for any culture, the linguistic choices favored by RRWPTRG members reflected the relational framework of the group, our attitudes toward group identity, and our cultural norms, values, and priorities (Saville-Troike, 1989). Central to the development of communicative competence in RRWPTRG was a value for equity in communication, with listening and making relevant contributions to others' work as important as sharing one's own. Exceptions to this norm were regulated by the agenda with the implicit understanding that every member would eventually get her fair share of the group's focused attention. Because RRWPTRG activities were carried out largely through the medium of language, the members who succeeded within the group were those who learned to speak, write, and behave like teacher researchers by developing fluency in the research dialect, regularly participating in exploratory talk and writing, and sharing findings in and beyond our immediate setting.

As illustrated by the final excerpt above when freewriting led to exploratory talk that led in turn to attempts to represent this talk through visual means to be used in other settings, RRWPTRG's discourse practices were impossible to isolate, even for purposes of analysis. Tightly bound together, each tool informed the other, inevitably forging together to create a stronger, more flexible whole capable of supporting our inquiry and our teaching. Together, these practices were tools for: (1) establishing and maintaining membership, roles, and relationships as teacher researchers in the

RRWPTRG culture; (2) providing intellectual, procedural, and emotional support for individual members; (3) posing and solving problems through exploratory talk; (4) sharing knowledge in larger settings; (4) and establishing membership within more global communities of practice. These linguistic means demonstrated the group's commitment to creating a context where language could be used as a tool to collaboratively construct knowledge and mutually support our inquiry and our teaching.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPLICATIONS

This study has been an attempt to ground social theories regarding the features and processes of teacher learning communities in empirical work, to add flesh to the bones of this underconceptualized and ambiguous term (Westheimer, 1998), and to identify the complexities of one teacher research group's development into a discourse community. Although generalizations based on a single teacher research group would be unwise, this study should still be useful to researchers' attempting to conceptualize teacher learning communities, to practitioners curious about how such groups develop and are sustained, and to policymakers interested in alternative models of professional development based on teacher inquiry (Westheimer, 1998). In Chapter One, I synthesized a catalogue of questions from calls for additional research on teacher learning communities. To conclude this study, I return to each of those questions, this time providing contextualized answers, based on my investigation of RRWPTRG, and suggesting additional implications for future studies of teacher research groups.

Some Answers, More Questions on Productive Learning Contexts for Teachers

Question 1: Origins and Purposes of Teacher Learning Communities

What do teacher learning communities look like? How, under what circumstances, and by whom are they established? What purposes do these groups serve for teachers, and how are these purposes achieved?

As both group member and ethnographer, I can say without reservation that RRWPTRG looks unlike any professional development opportunity I have encountered in my thirteen years as an educator. Unlike traditional models of inservice education with their compulsory involvement, externally imposed goals, and focus on subjects that may or may not connect to individual teachers' classroom contexts, RRWPTRG established an inquiry model for members' development that was characterized by voluntary involvement and negotiated goals, and was oriented toward jointly solving problems and answering questions that arose in individual members' teaching. Rooted in prior settings and common texts, the group's overriding motive was to provide mutual support for members' inquiry and was established almost by default when Hannah described her initial vision for the group at the 1996 RRWP Governing Board meeting. This motive suggested a framework for the group's development while still providing considerable flexibility in pursuing the goals individual members deemed meaningful. For those members with access to this original vision, choosing personal goals congruent with this motive was relatively comfortable, but for Joan, Kathy, and Regina, this was no easy task. With the exception of Regina, who gave the impression that she had chosen her topic based on matters of convenience rather than personal investment, other RRWPTRG members chose to investigate problems centered on the needs, concerns, and questions that issued from their particular classroom contexts. Although the group did consult experts by reading research texts, participating in XTAR, and inviting experienced

university researchers to visit from time to time, we did so on a need-to-know basis and filtered their advice through the immediate demands of our own situations.

Our experiences suggest that those interested in teacher development and educational reform would profit from a closer look at teacher learning communities that have been formed and sustained largely of their own accord, in order to determine how the overriding motives governing their activities differ from those in more traditional professional development settings. What problems do teachers deem important, what questions do they ask, and how have they designed settings in which to solve them? How can experts provide help on a need-to-know basis, and how might administrators or other organizational leaders facilitate the structural support (e.g., time, material resources, etc.) necessary for sustaining the work of inquiry-oriented groups?

Question 2: Contexts, Activities, and Tools for Collaborative Thinking

What characterizes their collaboration? In what activities do teacher communities engage, and what are the consequences of these activities on teachers' thinking, professional development, and classroom practice? What specific tools do they use to mediate their thinking?

RRWPTRG members' established an intellectual community and relational framework that made possible a continuous process of emotional and cognitive risk-taking. In the course of our first year together, members became personally invested in one another's projects and lives. On one occasion after Roxanne had worked through a particularly thorny research problem during a period of exploratory talk,

Hannah exclaimed, "Roxanne, I am so excited about your research!" Such comments made all of us feel as if we were pursuing important work by reassuring us that, if our questions mattered to someone besides us, then somehow, all this effort was worth it. Central to the practical, intellectual, and affective support we provided one another were the discourse practices we used as tools to guide our individual inquiry and promote our collaborative thinking. In addition to serving as problem-solving tools in our immediate setting, these practices reflected our cultural value for inquiry and allowed us to participate and communicate our findings in extended contexts, thus establishing our membership in larger communities of practice also concerned with bringing about educational reform.

The centrality of language in conducting RRWPTRG's activities suggests that an examination of the discourse practices of other teacher learning communities is a promising means for understanding how inquiry is jointly accomplished through their moment-to-moment interactions. Systematically examining the contextualized and contextualizing nature of the community's discourse should also lend insight into the relationship between communicative competence and successful participation within the immediate group and the larger communities of practice in which their work is nested.

Question 3: Developing and Sustaining Teacher Learning Communities

How do teacher communities develop, and how are they sustained over time?

Joining already established communities of practice requires less risk and uncertainty than creating one from scratch because overriding motives, cultural values, and communicative norms are to a large extent already defined. In the presence of oldtimers, newcomers have a sense of what they're getting themselves into by joining the community, whereas initiates to new communities of practice are agreeing to membership terms that are, at best, ill-defined and subject to negotiation among influences from prior settings, individual goals and personalities, and motives that, though they emerge as overriding, are seldom evident from the start. Since no one knows what she is getting herself into by joining a new community of practice, how can she be sure that the sacrifices of shaping a new identity will be worth the struggles and the costs? In the annual report I wrote at the end of RRWPTRG's first year, I noted that the group had developed into more than any of us had ever imagined. This phrase was true for all of us then, though I now understand it to be so only in an ironic sense. When I read the idealized profiles of teacher learning communities described in Chapter One, I think, "Yes, that is us," but "us" consists of Roxanne, Hannah, Crystal, and me, who were able to become full-fledged RRWPTRG members with the sense that our participation would build on who we already were. Although the four of us helped to develop some of the new cultural and communicative norms that guided RRWPTRG's activity, many of these we already shared because of our participation in multiple and overlapping prior settings that were uncommon to Joan, Kathy, and Regina.

Even new communities of practice are rooted in prior settings and take cues for their development from larger communities of practice, which for RRWPTRG members were those described or enacted in common texts, virtual settings, and conference environments. Unsurprisingly, those of us with a maximum degree of conceptual overlap and goal congruence because of our participation in prior settings, our value for common texts, and our continued participation in larger teacher communities of practice, formed and sustained the RRWPTRG idioculture. These findings suggest that those wishing to understand how new communities of practice are developed and sustained must look to relevant prior settings in which individual members have been involved, particularly when these are overlapping. Researchers who want to understand, and practitioners who want to form, collaborative learning communities must understand that though new groups eventually develop their own idiocultures, many of their cultural values and discourse practices are rooted in prior settings. Understanding the new setting will inevitably involve an examination of those that came before.

Question 4: Obstacles and Dilemmas

What obstacles and dilemmas do teacher communities face, and how do these dilemmas affect their development?

In telling this story, I have been so mindful in my attempts to portray the complexity of RRWPTRG's development that I worry that I have understated the immeasurable positive impact the group has made on my, Crystal, Hannah, and Roxanne's lives as teacher researchers, women, and friends. Because the process of

change, of learning and becoming, inevitably involves a redefinition of who one was before, all of us experienced uncertainty, anxiety, and inadequacies as we took on identities as teacher researchers and a teacher research group. Although, as I said above, I am able to recognize the four of us in descriptions of teacher learning communities, our development into such a community came at the expense of those members who were not privy to Hannah's original vision of the group. When acceptance of a new job transported Joan to a new setting where teacher research was no longer relevant, she forfeited her membership. When cultural norms required commitment to needs other than her own, Regina did not comply and was ousted from RRWPTRG altogether. When the development of a teacher researcher identity threatened her current sense of self, Kathy retreated overwhelmed, and eventually and quietly disappeared.

More than anything else, the obstacles and dilemmas experienced by our group raise questions I have yet to answer and thus suggest ripe areas for future research: Can teacher learning communities be self-sustaining, or do they inevitably disband once their overriding motive and corresponding individual goals have been met? Is it possible for a community to move forward and simultaneously make space for newcomers? Will there ever be room for members with needs and goals as diverse as Kathy's? What are the benefits and costs of homogeneity? If some degree of goal congruence is necessary for a group to function and cohere, what degree is optimal, and what is limiting?

Final Thoughts

In the course of conducting this study, I have had conversations with several educators and educated laypeople who have eyed with skepticism RRWPTRG's work and the underlying premise that teachers are capable of their own inquiry. In these instances, I have wondered at the source of their doubts. Were they rooted in reality as the faces of teachers they knew rose before their minds' eyes? In fear, as faces of students suggested the cost of educational irresponsibility? These individuals must have wondered if the years of status quo efforts toward reform could really have been ineffective when they had consumed tremendous amounts of money, energy, and time. While their skeptical reactions have likely been a combination of these factors and others I have not considered, I have become convinced that they are intimately related to the disciplinary socialization (John-Steiner, 1996) that promotes a view of teachers as received knowers (Belenky et al., 1986), as cogs (Fullan, 1990) in the machine of school improvement rather than engineers themselves.

As RRWPTRG member and ethnographer, I have become equally convinced that any efforts toward teacher professional development must start with a radical redefinition of what it means to be a teacher. I prefer RRWPTRG's tripartite view of teacher-researcher-student all in one, intimately acquainted with the classroom, capable of posing questions and pursuing answers, invested with confidence in effecting reform in immediate and extended contexts. Teachers must first so view themselves, however, and professional development must be reconceived as a means of support for the teacher's capacity to know and take reasonable action as a result. All stakeholders in teachers' professional development (especially teachers themselves)

must collaborate to replace models of hierarchy with those of inquiry in which the questions and needs of teachers are taken seriously. Everything depends on it. For ultimately, "Teachers cannot create and sustain contexts for productive learning unless those conditions exist for them" (Sarason, 1996, p. 367, emphasis in original).

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Appendix

Flyer publicizing RRWPTRG.

WP TEACHER RESEARCHER GROUP

The WP is offering the first group of its kind in WP history—a **TEACHER RESEARCHER GROUP.**

Beginning in July, the group will meet at least once a week through the summer to explore individual research questions, pursue the answers, discuss research methods, and provide support at each stage of the process. The group will continue to meet on a regular basis throughout the 1996-97 school year as they complete their projects and will produce an anthology of individual findings at the year's end.

Although such a group should be particularly helpful for consultants who are currently pursuing graduate degrees, university enrollment IS NOT a requirement.

So think back over the school year to a problem you never solved or a question you never answered to your satisfaction OR look ahead to next year and consider an approach you would like to try with your new students. The **Teacher-Researcher Group** would be an ideal way to proceed with direction and much support from fellow consultants!

Please express your interest by June 15 to either Cindy O'Donnel -Allen at 321-1059 or (360-1950 hm./ 321-2341 wk.).

We hope you'll join us for an exciting WP first!

Appendix

Call for proposals.

The WP is offering support to teacher-consultants for action research projects in classrooms and schools to a limited number of applicants. The support will come in two forms: consultation and funding of up to $1000 (no computer hardware).

Submit grant proposal by **JUNE 22, 1996** to:
Teacher Researcher Grant Committee
Writing Project
Room 100

Since the action research projects are new to the WP, we would like to, on the one hand, keep the process as open to your creative flare as possible, and on the other hand, insure that we are funding quality projects. This effort is an experiment in itself. In the interest of supporting meaningful research, we have formulated some questions to which you will need to respond in your grant proposal. Feel free to include other relevant information and comment on the proposal announcement itself, so that we can better serve the needs of teacher-researchers in the future.

In a conversational, succinct, jargon-free, three to five page proposal, please consider the following questions:

- What is the problem? (e.g., low motivation of 9th grade basic writers to complete writing assignments)
- Why this project? (e.g., all 9th graders need to practice writing in order to improve)
- What literature informs your inquiry? (e.g., the work of Anderson and Beane, who conclude:...)
- How would you conduct the research? (e.g., I would read the following books, interview students, survey students and other faculty, gather writing samples, decide on teaching strategies, etc.)
- What materials and resources will be needed? (e.g., these books:...($125), rental of transcribing equipment ($50), hiring a transcriber ($100), photocopying ($60), etc.)
- How will the information gathered be analyzed? (e.g., through descriptive statistics like means and standard deviations, or a qualitative approach using case studies, interviews, field notes, etc.)
- How will the research project be evaluated? (e.g., the review of literature during the first quarter, data gathering during the second quarter, analysis of data during the third quarter, etc.)
- How will the findings be disseminated? (e.g., a report in the OWP newsletter is required. Some other options include conference presentation, journal article, local news, reports to school faculty/district, etc.)

Also, as part of the WP Teacher Researcher Grant, awardees will participate in the Teacher Researcher Study Group. This group will be coordinated by Cindy

Appendix

Description of RRWPTRG for NCTE roundtable presentation.



WRITING PROJECT
TEACHER RESEARCHER GROUP

Our Purposes

*** to formalize what good teachers do every day; that is, to search for answers that might hone or alter classroom practice**

*** to establish an "intellectual community of teacher researchers...who enter with other teachers into 'a common search for meaning' (Westerhoff, 1987) and who regard their research as part of larger efforts to transform teaching, learning, and schooling" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 52).**

*** to provide practical, intellectual, and affective support in the design, development, and implementation of classroom studies**

*** to share findings with extended communities through the OWP newsletter, an OWP anthology, conference presentations, journal articles, theses, and dissertations**

*** to serve as a resource group for undergraduate and graduate students at the University**

Appendix

Figure 1

RRWPTRG members' participation in shared and overlapping settings.

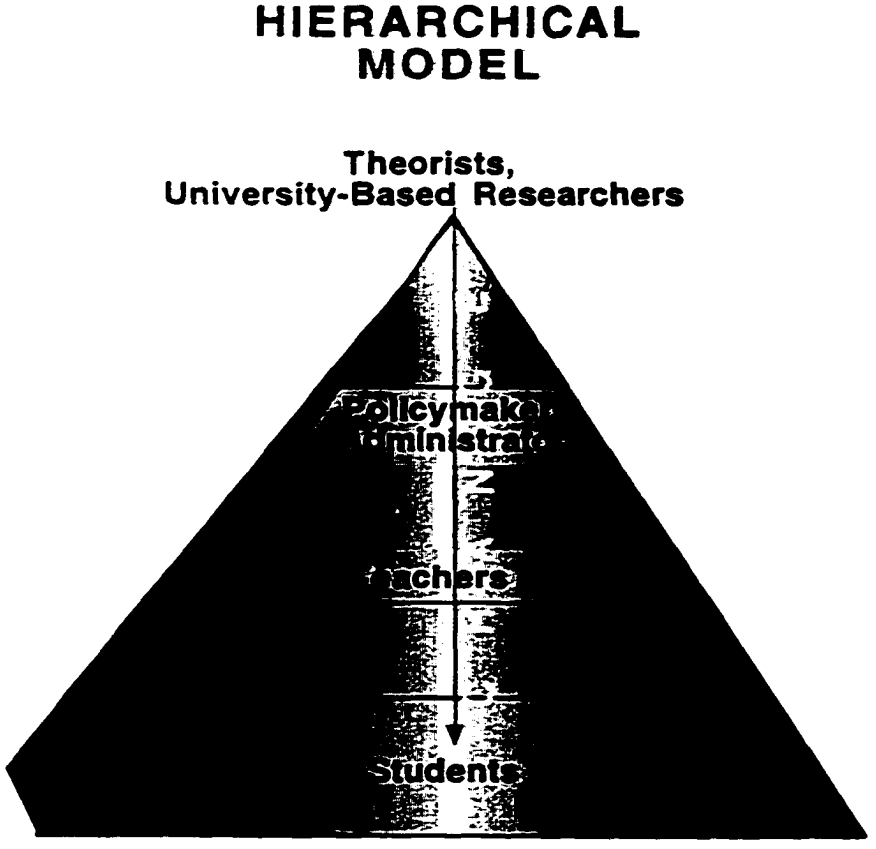
RRWPTRG Members	RRWP	Summer Institute	University Ties	RRWP Leadership	Friendship
Cindy	•	•	•	•	•
Crystal	•	•	•	•	•
Hannah	•	•	•	•	•
Roxanne	•	•	•	•	•
Regina	•	•	•		
Joan	•	•			
Kathy	•	•			

Appendix

Figure 2

Hierarchical model of educational change,

prepared by Cindy and Crystal for NCTE Roundtable Presentation.



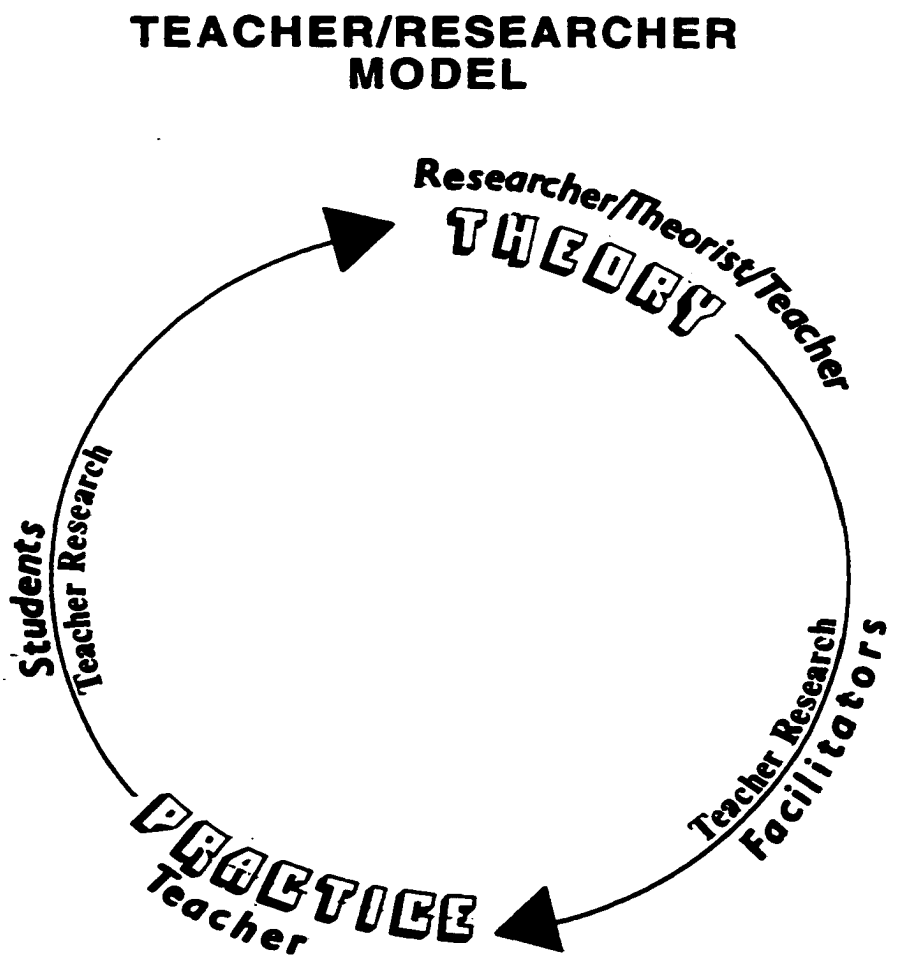
"In this hierarchical structure, expertise is equated with power and status, that is to say with those who, at the apex of the pyramid, are furthest removed from the actual sites of learning and teaching." (Wells, 1994)

Appendix

Figure 3

Teacher-researcher model for educational change,

prepared by Cindy and Crystal for NCTE Roundtable Presentation.



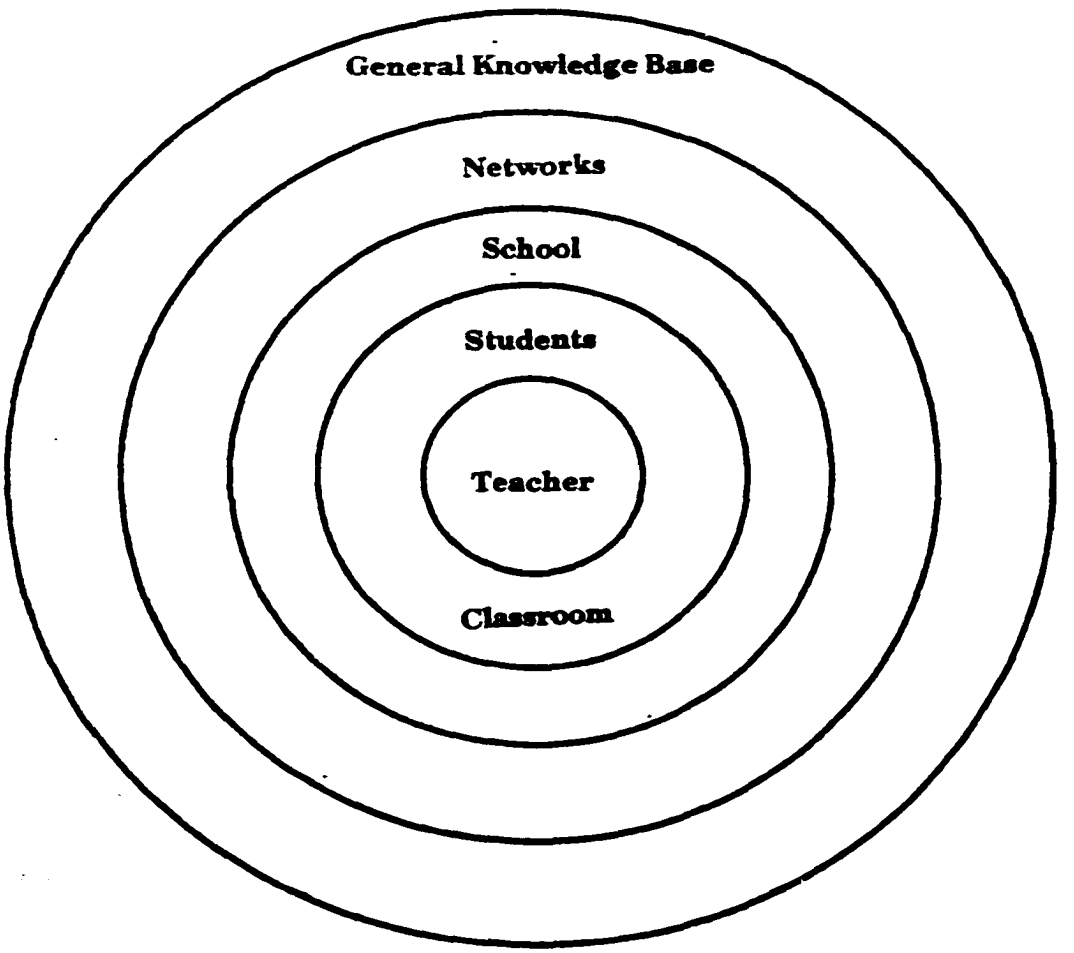
"Inquiry by individual teachers and communities of teacher researchers realigns their relationships to knowledge and to the brokers of knowledge and also necessitates a redefinition of the notion of a knowledge base for teaching."

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993)

Appendix

Figure 4

Establishment of multiple centers of inquiry to effect educational change, prepared by Cindy and Crystal for NCTE Roundtable Presentation.



"Change in teachers is now recognized to be the prerequisite for bringing about educational change" (Wells, 1998, p. 22).