
Preface

When working in schools and districts, I often hear that teachers are resistant to change. This is odd to me, as teachers are constantly changing and adapting within the classroom. Richardson (1990) points out that change in practice is often construed as teachers doing things *others want them to do*. In this definition, teachers who question certain changes, sometimes top-down changes, are considered resistant to change. This book is about examining and changing literacy teaching practices through reflection and systematic inquiry. It is about teachers being the catalyst for their own change, rather than the recipient of others' ideas for change.

Reflection is the key to change and to effective professional development (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000). Teachers continually think back about their teaching and how their actions shaped student learning. This *reflecting-on-action* (Schon, 1987) shapes future teaching; it is a powerful tool for change. Teachers also *reflect-in-action* (Schon, 1987). As they teach, they continually question themselves and adjust what they are doing "on the spot." The intertwining of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, *reciprocal reflection-in-action* (Schon, 1983)—the ability to stop and think, adjust and evaluate, and look back to reframe, rethink, and react—is necessary for change in the uncertain and complex reality of teaching. It is also the frame for this book.

As a literacy teacher educator, I puzzle through how to examine my own teaching practices to learn about myself, make changes, and determine how what I do impacts the knowledge and practice of teachers. I develop tasks and activities, gather information about how teachers use them and what they think of them, and make decisions about where to go from there. After several years of systematically putting into place and examining tools to help teachers reflect on, examine, and change their classroom literacy practices, and evaluate their effect on students' learning, I am convinced that classroom research is one of the most valuable tools for accomplishing this.

Although there are many names for teachers doing research on their own practice within their own classrooms (*action research, teacher inquiry, classroom research, classroom study, teacher research*), I like Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) definition of *teacher research*:

We use the term *teacher research* here in the broadest possible sense to encompass all forms of practitioner inquiry that involve systematic, intentional, and self-critical inquiry about one's work in K–12, higher education, or continuing education classrooms, schools, programs, and other formal educational settings. This definition includes inquiries that others may refer to as action research, practitioner inquiry, teacher or teacher educator self-study, and so on, but does not necessarily include reflection or other terms that refer to being thoughtful about one's educational work in ways that are not necessarily systematic or intentional. (p. 22)

What competent teachers need to know is embedded in their practice, in their reflections on their practice, and in their inquiries about their everyday work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 19). Teacher research is meant to answer teachers' problems and questions that arise in practice. At the heart of teacher research is reflection on practice, challenging assumptions, and change.

This is a book about classroom research, but it is equally about literacy teaching and learning. One of my goals in writing this book is to provide information about how to conduct classroom research that leads to teacher, student, and school growth. You will learn how to use classroom research to examine, change, and evaluate your classroom and school practices. You can apply the basic tenets of classroom research to any problem in teaching and learning. My goal is to help you accomplish two things with respect to literacy teaching and learning—first, to see how the reciprocal cycle of classroom research plays itself out in classroom literacy instruction, and second, to learn about research-based literacy practices that other teachers have found successful. You will learn from teachers who have engaged in the process of classroom research in literacy. Teachers, literacy specialists, coaches, and school administrators can use this book to learn the steps of classroom research and learn through colleagues how to design classroom research that is accessible, pragmatic, and important to literacy teaching and learning.

You can use this book in several ways. First, you can use it as a classroom research primer. This book contains guidelines, charts, tables, and information to help you get started with classroom research. Second, you can use this book to learn about specific issues in the core areas of literacy teaching and learning (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) and find out what has worked for other teachers. Third, you can use the teachers' research presented in this book as lesson plans or outlines to embark on these projects on your own.

This text is a dual approach to teaching classroom research. In Part I, you will read an overview of the classroom research process. In Part II, you will experience actual research from teachers in the field. These case studies link the theory and process chapters of Part I to classroom application. This text is based on sound theoretical and research-based perspectives. The classroom research framework originally outlined by Lewin (1948) has been adapted and refined. The idea of using classroom research as a tool for reflection and changing practice is well established (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Dinkelman, 1997; Gray-Schlegel & Matanzo, 1993; Hensen, 1996), as is the practice of using case studies for teaching and learning the process and product of classroom research (Yin, 2003).

Part I of this book, *Understanding Classroom Research*, presents the step-by-step process of classroom research and contextualizes it through literacy teaching and learning. Chapter 1 describes the background of classroom research and presents the steps necessary to accomplish it. Chapter 2 highlights the recursive nature of classroom research through vignettes of teachers' research process. Chapter 3 focuses on choosing the most appropriate way to analyze data collected throughout the research.

In the current climate of federal mandates, reports, and funding streams such as No Child Left Behind, the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000), and Reading First, researchers, teachers, and school professionals are focusing much attention on five core areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. You will read about classroom research in each of these areas in this book. Within these, there is virtually an endless supply of issues to watch for and notice in a classroom.

Part II, *Teachers' Classroom Research in Literacy*, presents research conducted by teachers. The first section, *Looking at Teaching Within Mandated Programs*, includes three chapters that describe how teachers explored their own teaching practices within the reality of district or school mandates. Oftentimes teachers are required to implement literacy programs or administer assessments that they do not find effective. Systematically gathering data can help teachers adjust instruction and inform supervisors or administrators of what is or is not working. In Chapter 4, Maureen, a K-1 teacher, analyzed how her teaching practice through the basal reader was or was not facilitating students' understanding of text and participation in text discussions. Maureen uses transcript analysis to view her read-aloud practice and analyze her role as a discussion facilitator. Chapter 5 focuses on assessment. We know that the purpose of assessment is to inform instruction. Yet, with accountability pressures, teachers are finding it difficult to keep up with the sheer volume of data. In this chapter, Jessica describes how she incorporated district-mandated assessments, filled in the holes in her assessment data, and developed a system to pull the data together to inform instruction. Chapter 6 focuses on differentiating instruction. Teachers, particularly

teachers of beginning readers, are often told to differentiate instruction, yet at the same time are handed a specific program to use for all students. How does a teacher reconcile these mixed messages and provide students with differentiated instruction appropriate to their developmental levels? In this chapter, Jenn, a first-grade teacher, describes how she planned a differentiated program of word study instruction by first assessing her students, then integrating the district-required program with thoughtfully-chosen supplemental programs to help all learners.

The second section of Part II, *Tying Research to Practice*, presents four chapters illustrating how teachers have turned research-based ideas into practice. In Chapter 7, Jayne, a second-grade teacher, describes planning and implementing structured vocabulary instruction in her classroom. Chapter 8 highlights fluency. Ruth Lynn discusses her research into helping her students achieve greater reading fluency, and teaching them about themselves as both readers and listeners. Chapter 9 presents phonemic awareness. In this chapter, Joell, a middle school special education teacher, talks about how she found out that her struggling readers lacked these skills and how she developed and assessed a program to teach them. Chapter 10 features vocabulary. We know from research that vocabulary is crucial to success in reading. We also know that middle school-age students can be tough to involve in learning. This chapter focuses on how two teachers, Sandy and Angela, developed similar projects to enhance middle schoolers' vocabulary learning through teaching Greek and Latin roots.

Each teacher research chapter features spotlights to highlight a part of the classroom research cycle that is particularly well represented in the research and a specific literacy area (vocabulary, phonemic awareness, fluency) or practice (differentiating instruction, keeping track of data). Annotations guide the reader through the cases by connecting ideas from the overview chapters to the process as it unfolds within the teachers' research. Each chapter in Part II ends with a wrap-up of concepts and suggested tasks that focus on both the classroom research process and ideas in literacy teaching and learning to help you apply both to your own classroom teaching.

This book would not be complete without a discussion of ethics in research, found in Chapter 11. Most of you will be conducting research to improve your own teaching rather than to present or publish your findings. Regardless, understanding your responsibility as a researcher to your research participants and their families is always a top priority.