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Inquiry as Stance

**Practitioner Research
for the Next Generation**

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as stance much more than a counterhegemonic or oppositional notion that engenders trenchant critiques of the current educational regime and fosters new insights that counteract narrow notions of test-based accountability and practitioners as implementers. Even more importantly, in Chapter 5 we theorize inquiry as stance as a powerful affirmative and constructive idea that repositions the collective intellectual capacity of practitioners and suggests a framework for aligning it with other larger social and political movements that aim for radical transformation of teaching, learning, and schooling.

Taken together, the five essays that comprise Part I of this book provide a generative conceptual framework for considering practitioner inquiry for the next generation. They also serve as a call for new alliances among the many communities of educators who reject current dominant notions about knowledge, practice, and the role of practitioners in educational change.

Chapter One

Practitioner Inquiry in Trying Times

Some 20 years ago, we began writing about the reemergence of practitioner research as a promising way to conceptualize the critical role of teachers' knowledge and actions in student learning, school change, and educational reform. Arguing that neither process-product nor interpretive research on teaching recognized teachers' roles in the generation of knowledge, we pointed to some of the consequences of this omission, including teachers' ambivalence about academic research and the field's lack of information about classroom life from an emic perspective. We also recognized that it was difficult for the university-based community to acknowledge the potential of teacher research. To make this happen, we argued that there would need to be incentives, supportive networks, reform of school organizations and the cultures of teaching, and ways of dealing with the hierarchical power relationships that characterized much of schooling and (as we would argue later) the cultures of university life as well (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

Nearly a decade later (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a), we tried to take stock of what had happened to these ideas, arguing that part of what had made teacher research into a movement (and not just an educational fad) was that it stemmed from several different but compatible intellectual traditions and educational projects. We described five significant trends in the U.S. teacher research movement: its prominence in teacher education, professional development, and school reform; the development of a number of conceptual frameworks and theories of teacher research; the dissemination of this work beyond local settings; the emergence of critiques related to knowledge, methods, and purposes; and the transformative potential of teacher research for some aspects of university culture (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a).

Despite these positive trends, we ended our 1999 essay on a decidedly sober note. The educational climate of the late 1990s seemed vastly different from the prevailing sentiments of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when

calls for the professionalization of teaching, enlarged roles for teachers, and enhanced teacher leadership were surfacing across the nation. Instead, the educational discourse of the time was dominated by the standards movement, the intensification of pressures for accountability, the emerging rhetoric of best practices, and the increasing prominence of outsiders designing plans for whole-school improvement. All of these developments, which de-emphasized local contexts, local knowledge, and the role of teachers as decision makers and change agents, seemed to us to be antithetical to the heart of the teacher research movement.

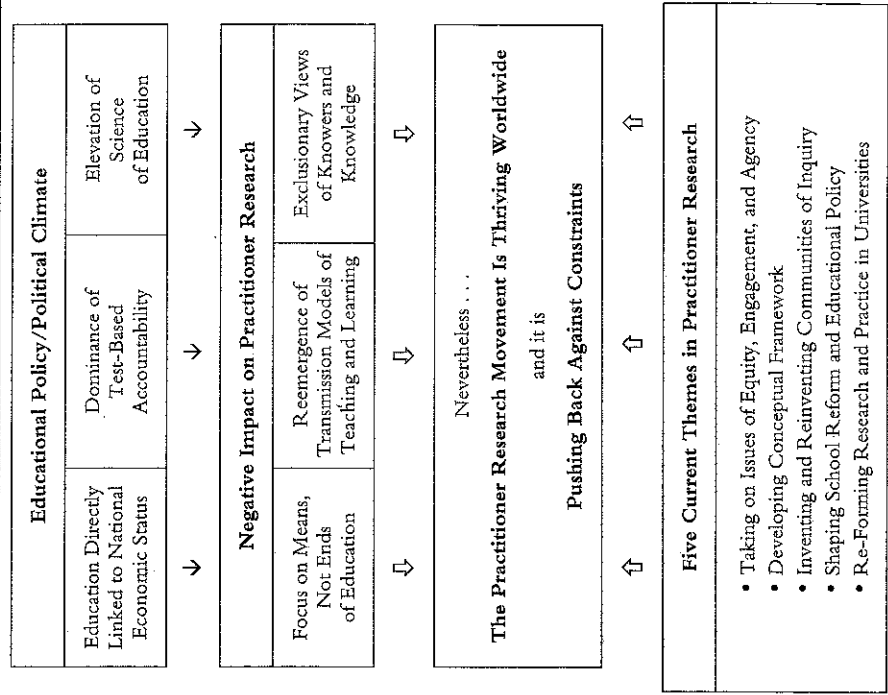
At that time we suggested that the future of the movement was uncertain, and we foretold serious challenges in the form of narrowed outcomes, prespecified curriculum, high-stakes tests, and cooptation of teacher communities for the implementation of federal, state, and district policies. At the same time, however, we also predicted that the central ideas of the movement would remain deeply compelling to many teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and other practitioners and thus that practitioner research would be sustained as a viable framework for improving the school lives and life chances of students.

To begin this book, we highlight what has happened to practitioner research over the last 10 years, since we wrote our 1999 essay. We identify five major themes that build on but also differ from what was happening a decade ago. These developments represent very promising directions for maintaining and adding to the strength of the movement, and taken cumulatively, the message is a decidedly hopeful one: Despite all of the forces working against it, teacher research and the larger practitioner inquiry movement continue to flourish in the United States and many parts of the world. Many educators still believe that deep and significant changes in practice can only be brought about by those closest to the day-to-day work of teaching and learning. And across myriad contexts, practitioner research initiatives are proliferating, often “pushing back” against constricting policies and mandated practices and opening up spaces for practitioners to articulate and enact deep beliefs about the fundamental purposes of education (see Figure 1.1).

It is important to point out that our account of the current state of practitioner research is necessarily partial. This chapter is not intended as a comprehensive literature review. Instead, we have identified what we regard as significant themes and have provided selected references to illustrate those themes. We know that much of the work of practitioner research remains radically local, generated and sustained by those who do not privilege publication and dissemination over trying to practice better, thus doing work

that is consequential but invisible, except to its immediate participants. In addition to a considerable number of recent publications based on or related to practitioner research, then, there is an enormous amount of activity that exists under the radar of even the most energetic synthesizers. Some unpublished work is widely circulated among teachers and teacher educators, and many of the “outcomes” of participation in inquiry communities are palpable and relevant only to those who are in them: people who teach differently, who advocate for students, who take leadership roles in their schools or districts or universities, and who question current assumptions and taken-for-granted practices.

Figure 1.1. Practitioner Research in Trying Times.



There are also demographic issues involved in taking stock of the movement. Some of the prominent leaders in inquiry communities have changed positions and are carrying their inquiry stances into their day-to-day work as school leaders, mentors, or college or university faculty members. Some are at or approaching retirement. And some versions of practitioner research have been brought into line with technical views of teaching and educating in sync with the prevailing business and neoliberal climate of the day.

Furthermore, what is going on now in the practitioner research movement is far from monolithic. Because there are so many different initiatives informed by a range of purposes, contexts, epistemologies, methods, resources, and consequences, various actors in and around the movement necessarily represent it using different information and different frameworks. These differences are in fact one of the reasons the movement is dynamic, not dormant, “alive and well” in spite of—or perhaps in resistance to—the dominant discourses of the day.

THE CURRENT POLICY/POLITICAL CLIMATE IN U.S. EDUCATION

We begin by setting our “telling” of the practitioner research movement over the last 10 years within the context of the current policy/political climate. We point to dimensions that seem especially toxic to its core elements.

Education and the Economy

In much of the discourse about public education, it is now considered self-evident that the nation's place in the global economy depends on the quality of its educational system. Policymakers, pundits, and others demand that the schools produce students who have the array of knowledge and skills needed to thrive in the new “knowledge society” wherein low-level work is done by machines or outsourced to the lowest bidder, and “developed” nations compete for high-paying jobs that require sophisticated intellectual skills and strategies. Consistent with this view is the assumption that the primary purpose of education is to produce a workforce that can meet the demands of the competitive global market and preserve—or, better yet, boost—the nation's place in that market.

The shift to a knowledge economy has also shifted the locus of education policymaking in the United States from low-profile state agencies and local decisions to the highest levels of government and business (Oakes, Lipton, Rogers, & Renee, 2006), including presidents, governors, federal legislators,

corporate CEOs, and major philanthropists. Overwhelmingly, they have concluded that the current educational system in the United States is failing to produce the workforce needed and that the nation urgently needs major reforms—or a complete overhaul—of the education system.

What do these ideas about education's inextricable link to the economy mean as a backdrop for practitioner research? First, it is important to note that from this perspective, what we (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998) once called the “ends question” in education (i.e., debates about the purposes of teaching, learning and schooling) is closed. In other words, the complicated string of assumptions and values that support the idea that preparation for economic roles is the central purpose of schooling is taken for granted and regarded as straightforward.

In contrast, at the heart of practitioner inquiry is problematizing the ends question. Practitioner researchers question the fundamental goals of teaching, learning, and schooling: What purposes—besides academic achievement as indicated by test scores—are important in the schools? What about teaching toward the democratic ideal, deliberation and debate, and challenging inequities? Practitioner researchers also raise questions about power and authority: Who makes decisions about purposes and consequences? How do school structures, assessment regimes, and classroom practices challenge or sustain the status quo? What are the consequences for students' learning and their life chances? What part do practitioners play in broader social and intellectual movements?

Emphasis on Accountability

It is eminently clear that the accountability movement now dominates the discourse about reforming education in the United States and elsewhere. The testing requirements put into place by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), along with its annual requirements concerning pupils' and schools' progress, now drive most district, state, and school-level initiatives regarding curriculum, graduation and promotion policies, and practices related to test preparation. There is also a major focus on accountability systems in teacher preparation, professional development, selection of teaching materials, and whole-school initiatives.

The accountability emphasis is reflected in the recurring language of outcomes, results, effectiveness, evidence, monitoring systems, test scores, adequate yearly progress, and bottom lines. Words like these have been used so consistently in everyday discourse and at every level of schooling that they are now fully normalized and neutralized. This is exacerbated, we suspect,

by the fact that many young educators either do not know about or do not remember a time without high-stakes accountability.

From this perspective, it is assumed that teaching is the transmission of agreed-upon knowledge, learning is the demonstration of that knowledge in high-stakes contexts, and differences in local settings and capacities are unimportant. In contrast, when practitioners engage in inquiry, they typically work from expanded rather than narrow views of teaching and learning. This includes conveying knowledge to students, to be sure, but it also includes representing complex knowledge in accessible ways, asking good questions, co-constructing curriculum, forming relationships with students and parents who have widely varying abilities and backgrounds, collaborating with other professionals, interpreting multiple data sources, and posing and solving problems of practice.

The accountability movement assumes there is consensus across society about what it means to be educated, whose knowledge and values are of most worth, and what counts as effectiveness. Yet even as teaching becomes more and more public, it remains, at its heart, radically local—embedded in the immediate relationships of students and teachers, shaped by the cultures of schools and communities, and connected to the experiences and biographies of individuals and groups.

Evidence, Science, and Scientism

The third influential aspect of the policy climate is the current emphasis on evidence and the elevation of science. The notion of “scientifically based research” and its complement, “evidence-based education,” reflect renewed confidence in the power of science to solve social and educational problems. The presumption here is that today’s rich data sources, powerful analytical techniques, and increasingly sophisticated researchers permit the verification of scientifically based practices and policies that increase achievement, improve teaching and the schools, and solve the problems involved in providing universal education to a large and diverse population.

What do these ideas mean as part of the backdrop for practitioner research? First, many of the most important issues that have been contested throughout the history of educational research are assumed to be beyond debate: the purpose of research, the questions that should be asked, the relationship between the researcher and the “objects” of research, the methods employed, standards for reporting research results, and relationships between research and practice. Clearly, this has devastating implications for the funding and dissemination of practitioner inquiry, not to mention the many other forms of research this devalues and essentially discounts.

At the base of this devaluation is a narrow and exclusionary view of knowledge and knowers. In our analysis of images of teachers, knowledge, and teaching in NCLB documents (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Chapter 3 in this volume), we found that “good teachers” were consistently characterized as wise consumers of products and selectors of research-based strategies to boost students’ achievement. Throughout NCLB rhetoric, we found that teachers’ implementing practices based on scientifically based research and doing “what works” were valorized and contrasted with learning through trial and error, relying on theory, following educational fads, or employing “unproven” practices based on ideological rather than empirical grounds. There is no question that the current regime of scientifically based research and evidence-based education positions practitioners as the recipients of other people’s knowledge.

TAKING STOCK: MAJOR THEMES IN TEACHER INQUIRY/PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

Despite all of the forces seemingly working against it, teacher inquiry and the larger practitioner research movement appear to be flourishing in the United States and in many other parts of the world. There are multiple indicators that many teachers, teacher educators, school leaders, university-based teachers and researchers, and other stakeholders are engaged in the admittedly uphill struggle to democratize the locus of knowledge and power that determines the quality and quantity of educational opportunities afforded to children. These indicators include single and collaboratively authored accounts, documentation of the work of networks, the reports of myriad conferences and professional organizations, and Internet-based communities and resources that support practitioner inquiry. In the remainder of this chapter, we highlight five themes in the corpus of practitioner research over the last 10 years: (1) the emphasis on issues of equity, engagement, and agency; (2) the development of new conceptual frameworks; (3) the continued growth and reinvention of inquiry communities; (4) the use of practitioner research to shape school and district reform and educational policy; and (5) the persistence of efforts to alter the relationships of research and practice in universities. For each theme, we provide examples to emphasize the continuity of this work with previous efforts (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a) and to highlight what we regard as some of the most promising new directions in the movement. Given the limitations of space, we draw mainly from teacher research/practitioner research in the United States but with some reference to cross-national and international work as well.

Theme 1: Taking on Issues of Equity, Engagement, and Agency

Over the last decade, the body of published practitioner research reflects a distinctive commitment to investigating issues of equity, engagement, and agency in classrooms and schools across the country. In stark contrast to remedies prescribed by *No Child Left Behind*, many teachers and students have embraced the challenge of providing access to quality education by defining equity more broadly and complexly than through performance on high-stakes tests. In addition to compelling practitioner studies in their local sites, many educators in schools and universities have documented inquiry-based curricula that put students at the center of investigating topics of concern to them in their own lives and communities.

Classroom-, School-, and Program-Based Investigations. A considerable number of published accounts of practitioner research explicitly address concerns related to equity. Taking up a range of overlapping issues in specific local contexts, this work provides valuable cases with potential significance to wider audiences. What is notable here is the publication of so many books about equity in just a few years. Unlike the other sections of this chapter where we briefly elaborate a few texts, here we list the topics or foci in bullet form, each with selected examples.

- Issues of language and cultures (Ballenger, 2004; Fecho, 2004)
- Language and literacy in multilingual and multicultural early-childhood classrooms (Meier & Henderson, 2007)
- Critical literacies, critical pedagogies (Aaron et al., 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Morrell, 2007; Vasquez, 2004)
- Immigrant students' cultural resources and narratives for literacy education (Campano, 2007)
- Turn-around pedagogies as literacy interventions (Comber & Kamler, 2005)
- Imagination in elementary literacy learning (Gallas, 2003)
- Narrative inquiry and the special needs of children (Hankins, 2003)
- Adult literacy education in community colleges (Wilson, 2007)
- Discourses of queer youth (Blackburn, 2005; Blackburn, Clark, Kenney, & Smith, in press)
- Curriculum genres and classroom inquiry (Pappas & Zecker, 2001a, 2002b)
- Action research for equitable classrooms across one district (Caro-Bruce, Flessner, Klehr, & Zeichner, 2007)

- Families, literacy, and culture (Compton-Lilly, 2003, 2007; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005)
- Gender in urban education (Ginsberg, Shapiro, & Brown, 2004)

Conducted and published concurrently with the era of *No Child Left Behind*, together the inquiry-based texts, focusing on issues of equity, suggest more complex and nuanced interpretations of this concept among practitioner researchers.

Other practitioner-based classroom and school-based studies focus on student engagement through improving content-area pedagogy and curricula in subjects such as science and mathematics (e.g., Feldman, Konold, & Coulter, 2000; Langrall, 2006; Masingila, 2006; Smith & Smith, 2006; van Zee, 2005; Van Zoest, 2006) and TESOL (Allwright, 2005; Borg, 2006; Cunningham Florez, 2001). Many of the volumes cited here represent efforts by teacher researchers to grapple with issues of social justice in their particular schools, classrooms, and communities over time. Some of this work takes place within communities and/or networks that have organized purposely to foreground social justice issues.

Networks and Cross-Network Initiatives. Many of the prominent teacher networks, including the National Writing Project and The Bread Loaf Teacher Network, have put issues related to equity front and center. Because networks often connect geographically dispersed and distinctive local sites, equity issues vary considerably from site to site even within the network. The Philadelphia Writing Project, for example, convened a group of parents, teachers, and students to form a participatory inquiry group to study school reform from their diverse perspectives. Known as TAPAS (Teachers and Parents and Students), the group was funded by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education and supported by Research for Action to conduct systematic inquiry into the then-current systemic reform initiative in urban Philadelphia, with a particular focus on parent leadership in school reform and parent-educator relationships (Gold, Rhodes, Brown, Lytle, & Waff, 2001). Other networks have focused on gender equity in education, such as the Gender Awareness Through Education program in Philadelphia (Ginsberg et al., 2004) in which teams of teachers, parents, and administrators engaged in practitioner inquiry to consider gender in relation to other social issues, including race, class, religion, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability.

The Teacher Research Collaborative (TRC), a 3-year alliance among teachers, teacher educators, and staff from the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, the Bay Area Writing Project, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and

the National Writing Project, also took up issues of equity through inquiry. The TRC project was based on the pursuit of local answers to fundamental questions about the nature of equity, how it relates to teaching and working in schools, and the role of equity in teacher research/action research. In *Working Toward Equity: Writings and Resources from the Teacher Research Collaborative* (Friedrich, Tateishi, Malarkey, Simons, & Williams, 2005), the authors explain that their project aimed “to establish an ongoing presence for equity-focused teacher inquiry, to develop and articulate strategies for using inquiry to improve student learning and achievement, and to share resources that its members had found useful to educators leading teacher inquiry with an equity focus” (p. 1). Project participants were educators from urban and suburban communities across the United States who together explored the complex and sometimes contested intersections among equity, inquiry, and leadership. One of the most challenging aspects of their work was figuring out why and how to make equity an explicit focus in teacher inquiry despite the risks, complexities, and resistance to change that this would likely churn up.

Students as Researchers and Social Actors. The third section in this first theme on issues of equity emphasizes a key facet of teacher research/practitioner inquiry from its inception: the close connection between teacher inquiry and student inquiry (Branscombe, Goswami, & Schwartz, 1992). Many of the published volumes mentioned above engage students directly in the inquiry process. Practitioner research as social inquiry or critical action research has long entailed collaborations among teachers, students, and other key stakeholders. In the past several years, however, new initiatives have focused directly on inventing curricula with students as a means toward more equitable and democratic educational opportunities. Here, co-construction of curriculum provides a context for students to change their relationships to their schools and communities and to affect the broader social, cultural, and political milieu. Some of this work essentially creates a new genre, as in Linda Christensen’s *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word* (2000). Rather than illustrating how teachers empower students, this recent work reveals how inquiry conducted with and by students allows learners to empower themselves to take different stances toward their education, acting as agents for change in their schools and communities.

Some of this work links writing, community, public engagement, and social action. In New Orleans, for example, a Students at the Center Writing Project (linked to Bread Loaf and teamed with The Algebra Project) supported students and teachers using radio, filmmaking, and writing to de-

velop, in Dixie Goswami’s words, students’ “powerful literacies” (personal communication). Bread Loaf projects foreground students’ writing, as in the recently released *HIP DEEP: Opinion, Vision, and Essays by American Teenagers* (Young, 2006), which contains essays, speeches, and poems by 50 young rural and urban writers. *Writing to Make a Difference: Classroom Projects for Community Change* (Benson & Christian, 2002), another edited volume associated with Bread Loaf, provides striking examples of students’ action research on such subjects as fighting racism, investigating environmental hazards, and teenage health risks.

The National Writing Project has also sponsored a number of equity-focused initiatives that support students as social activists. In *Writing for Change: Boosting Literacy and Learning Through Social Action* (Berdan et al., 2006), for example, teachers and students merged literacy education and community problem solving in their schools, communities, and lives. Written in collaboration with the Centre for Social Action in England and involving students K–12, the book tells the stories of a robust kind of service learning that encourages students to work together on their chosen problems, carry out projects, and reflect on their solutions.

In *Writing America: Classroom Literacy and Public Engagement* (Robbins & Dyer, 2005), the authors also link classroom-based social literacy with avenues for contributing to the larger community. The book describes a multiyear student-teacher curriculum development project, funded by the National Writing Project (NWP) and the National Endowment for the Humanities, that merged community research, school literacy, and writing. A companion volume, *Writing Our Communities: Local Learning and Public Culture* (Winter & Robbins, 2005), translated this inquiry-based curriculum into resources for teachers. Both projects emanated from the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project in rural Georgia, which provided the infrastructure and intellectual community for teachers to pursue curriculum development as inquiry. Similarly, *Literacies in Place: Teaching Environmental Communications*, edited by Comber, Nixon, and Reid (2007), represents the work of a group of primary educators in Australia who participated in “rethinking the potential relationship between literacy and environmental studies in the light of changes that informational and communications technologies (ICT) are bringing to our understandings of literacy” (pp. 11–12). The teachers focused on redesigning curricula so that primary school students might become environmental activists within and beyond their local communities.

Inquiry-oriented work in which students position themselves as researchers provides an edgy and palpable means for disrupting the current policy/political climate, in which teachers are consistently positioned as

the transmitters of others' knowledge and students as the recipients. A recent volume, *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion* (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), argues that adults cannot predict the issues young people face or will face in the future and how they will be encouraged to interrogate them. Based in the tradition of participatory action research, the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project involved many young people who would be classified in the traditional sense as "marginalized" and "at risk." The project gives new meaning to the concept of education as "something students do—instead of something done to them" (p. 10). Under this first theme of post-2000 practitioner research that emphasizes equity, engagement, and agency, we have shown a noteworthy array of efforts by individuals, inquiry communities, and various collectives to make equity mean something real and palpable in specific contexts. This recent work also makes visible the strong linkages between practitioner inquiry and student inquiry and the significant symmetries in learning that accrue when they are intentionally co-constructed. This array also reveals the power of practitioner networks to deepen local work and link various locals to spread innovative ideas across settings.

Theme II: Developing Conceptual Frameworks

From the beginning, participants in, supporters of, and commentators on the practitioner inquiry movement have described, theorized, and critiqued this approach to inquiry. Until relatively recently, however, most of the literature *about* practitioner research was written by university-based researchers, and only some of it drew explicitly on the published texts of teacher practitioner inquiry (Lytle, 2000). Since 2000, a wider range of participants in the movement has been involved in the development of conceptual frameworks that draw on their emic understandings of the practice of teaching and emanate from practitioners' constructions of their diverse experiences in classrooms and within and across communities.

Theorizing the Practice of Teaching. Various insiders to the movement have offered new and extremely rich accounts of teaching that talk back to the reductive views of children, schools, and standards that dominate today's educational landscape. A key example is Patricia Carini's collection of essays, *Starting Strong: A Different Look at Children, Schools and Standards* (2001), which is a companion volume to *From Another Angle: Children's Strengths and School Standards* (Himley & Carini, 2000). The latter explored the documentary processes developed at The Prospect School in North Bennington, Ver-

mont, now widely used in teacher inquiry communities across the country. As Joseph Featherstone writes in the Foreword to *Starting Strong*:

[F]rom the 1960s on, Carini and many others opened up a host of new and critical perspectives on education: promoting qualitative and alternative modes of scholarship, attacking the cult of omniscient educational research, reminding an educational world too often managed by male big shots that teachers and children are the real voices and characters in the educational drama. The heart of this movement has been its insistence over a very long haul on the root of educational reality: that children and teachers are shapers of meaning and interpreters of experience. (p. xii)

Exploring what makes us "human," Carini articulated what it means to be exquisitely attentive to children's thoughts and meanings and to the thoughts and meanings of adults who have responsibility for the education of children. Carini's philosophical writing both derived from and informed Prospect's unique approaches to oral inquiry as a form of practitioner research. These recent volumes illuminate the power and complexity of descriptive processes for understanding and acting on students' strengths in the era of standards and standardization.

There are many others whose theorizing of *teaching* has added new momentum to the teacher research movement. Notable among them are two recent volumes by Sonia Nieto, *What Keeps Teachers Going* (2003) and *Why We Teach* (2005). By learning from teachers about what inspires them, how they relate to their students, how they create learning environments that make time and space for thoughtful, engaged work, and what they value about being educators in these times, Nieto's respectful accounts offered an emic perspective on frameworks that teachers who stay in the classroom use to guide their teaching. Along different but related lines, Weinbaum and colleagues' (2004) volume on *Teaching as Inquiry* built a conceptual framework linking teacher and student learning through case studies of inquiry conducted under the auspices of three leading educational organizations.

Theorizing Practitioner Research. Over the past decade, some new conceptualizations and some refinements of previous frameworks for practitioner inquiry have emerged. For example, Gerald Campano's *Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing and Remembering* (2007), which is based on the immigrant, refugee, and migrant narratives of his 5th-grade students in Stockton, California, posed the question: "What would it mean to develop curricula that acknowledges our students' unique social identities, not as problems, but as profound sources of knowledge that could help

us illuminate aspects of our shared world and inform the ways we conceptualize our pedagogies?" (p. 16; also see Chapter 13 in this volume). Now a professor at Indiana University, Campano suggested that a major challenge for urban teachers is to "create an environment in which all children and young adults feel empowered to reflect critically and draw upon the realities of their lives. What it takes to create such an environment is not simply a matter of setting the conditions for knowledge to occur, but is a type of knowledge *in and of itself*" (p. 16, emphasis in original). Campano theorized the identity of teacher researcher as:

an emergent professional and activist identity . . . [that] involves stretching the ideas of *social location and inquiry stance*. . . . As urban teacher researchers *collaboratively* inquire into their own practices in a wide variety of settings *over time*, they may begin to notice salient patterns, recurrent themes, similar concerns, and observations that resemble one another and that, when conceptualized together, begin to have explanatory power and general relevance. Despite the differences in teaching contexts and between researchers, these features point to aspects of a shared phenomenology. (p. 115, emphasis in original)

Another example of practitioner-generated theorizing occurs in *Teacher Research for Better Schools* (Mohr et al., 2003), where Marion Mohr and her colleagues spoke explicitly to the generation of theories about how students and teachers learn, how teaching and learning are related, and how schools change. These conceptual frameworks derived primarily from their research as teachers over time.

In their recent book *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Houses, Communities, and Classrooms*, Norma Gonzalez, Luis Moll, and Cathy Amanti (2005) showed vividly how teachers can document the competence and knowledge from life experiences held by families and use this knowledge embedded in communities within their teaching. Gordon Wells (2001, 2003) analyzed the affinities of teaching and research, the centrality of communities of inquiry, and the ways "dialogic inquiry" builds sociocultural theory. Patti Stock (2001, 2004) explored alternative genres of teacher research, encouraging the critical analysis and conceptualization of the practitioner inquiry movement by teacher researchers themselves.

In addition, debates regarding the foundational theories underlying practitioner inquiry have been widely disseminated. For example, a recent issue of *Educational Action Research* published in the United Kingdom (Brennan et al., 2005) provided a retrospective analysis of Carr and Kemmis's seminal *Becoming Critical* (1986), focusing on questions about the use of critical social science

theory and its current relevance to action research. Other university-based researchers have explored relationships between practitioner research/action research, participatory action research and feminist theory (McGuire, 2001; Brydon-Miller, McGuire, & McIntyre, 2004), as well as specific approaches such as participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Epistemologies, Methodologies, and Methods. An indication of the robustness and inherent optimism of the practitioner inquiry movement is the proliferation of guides and handbooks intended to support new practitioner researchers (see, for example, Burnaford, Fischer, & Hobson, 2001; Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 2006; Falk & Blumenreich, 2005; Fox, Martin, & Green, 2007; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Rymes, in press). These reflect an interesting and provocative array of epistemologies, methodologies, and methods drawn from disciplines such as composition studies, technoliteracy and critical theory, technology, linguistic anthropology, health and human sciences, as well as education.

Lankshear and Knobel's *A Handbook for Teacher Research: From Design to Implementation* (2004), for example, grew from the authors' initial engagement with the Primary English Teaching Association (PETA) in Australia and was transported to and expanded in Mexico. The authors disputed the notion that teacher research is inherently nonquantitative and that it exclusively involves direct research in classrooms. Instead, they argued that teachers learn by researching a variety of topics, including "policy, communities, social class, the work world, [and] nonstandard language-varieties" and by engaging in "historical, anthropological, sociological or psychological studies and theoretical work conducted in other places and/or at other times" (p. 7). We single out Lankshear and Knobel's book to indicate that each of the so-called how-to books on practitioner research contains an argument about the nature, purposes, participants, forms, outcomes, and consequences of various approaches to teacher research, in much the same way that the field of qualitative research has expanded to include multiple varieties. The steady production of such books suggests that, within the movement, there is a deep and useful conversation taking place that includes many teachers—school- and university-based—who have a stake in shaping its directions and practices.

Ethical Considerations. A substantial part of the current conceptual work regarding practitioner research focuses on the complex and somewhat unique ethical issues involved. In Jane Zeni's *Ethical Issues in Practitioner Research* (2001), for example, practitioner research was defined broadly and spun out in distinctive ways by differently positioned educators. The individual

of the teacher research movement: teaching as a deliberative (not technical) profession, knowledge generation for practice from practice, and the value of local questions and uncertainties in grappling successfully with issues of teaching and learning at all levels. As we noted earlier, however, when the accountability movement accelerated, the focus shifted to an almost singular emphasis on student outcomes as demonstrated on high-stakes tests. The notion that practitioners could identify questions for systematic inquiry and that teachers and students could co-construct curricula contrasted dramatically with compliance with mandated, “research-based” curricula that promised to deliver particular outcomes. This in turn affected the availability of federal, foundation, state, and local resources to support teacher inquiry communities as opposed to narrow teacher training centered on preset curricula and assessment.

Despite this shifting policy emphasis, many practitioner networks continued to support inquiry communities. However, they also acknowledged the need to address standards-based and policy-driven pedagogy, curricula and assessment. Although teacher networks like Bread Loaf and The National Writing Project, for example, intentionally maintained and even deepened their support for inquiry communities, shifts in the makeup, design, activities, and purposes of inquiry communities are now perceptible, and some groups are struggling to retain their identities while managing top-down regimes of accountability.

Affordances of New Technologies. During the last decade, even well-established inquiry networks have needed to become inventive in supporting established lines of work. The Bread Loaf Teacher Network, for example, has used the web-based “Breadnet” to link rural and urban teachers for intensive study of language and literacy connected to joint classroom-based curriculum development based on research by teachers and students in classrooms. From its inception, Bread Loaf made teaching with technology a central focus. But the explosion of Internet possibilities during the past decade or so has now created affordances for reinventing community at a whole new level. As Dixie Goswami wrote about the uses of Breadnet:

Computer networking provides teacher researchers (and their student collaborators) with an important source of data not previously available. . . . Studying the discourse informs and changes the online communication and at the same time generates new questions about language and learning and new approaches to research design for systematic, intentional studies. (Goswami, personal communication)

chapters offered local and vivid accounts of different aspects of these projects, but they also functioned as “telling cases” (Mitchell, 1984) for those engaged in related work in other contexts. Drawing from her own long and deep experience with school- and university-based practitioners, Zeni explored the critical ethical issues and dilemmas that come with the territory of insider research in the increasingly politicized arena of educational change projects. As classroom teachers, administrators, parents, community members, school staff, district leaders, and university faculty work together to construct relationships that make traditional boundaries more porous and negotiable, it is no surprise that the relationships among the many participants are more complicated and that the ethical issues are intensified.

Campbell and Groundwater-Smith’s *An Ethical Approach to Practitioner Research* (2007) represents a cross-national foray into this territory. While primarily focused on a comprehensive range of ethical issues in the United States, Australia, and Europe, this volume acknowledged similar challenges faced by others in professional practice, such as legal, nursing, and social care contexts. In taking up ethical dilemmas related to practice-based inquiry, the book focused on roles for academic researchers, consultants, teachers, students, and children. It also paid particular attention to the relationships of “field-based” researchers and academic researchers and to the concerns of various “consequential stakeholders,” as well as to difficult epistemological issues and competing knowledge interests. These texts and other recent articles considered the vulnerable and consequential relationships among various constituencies in the practitioner inquiry movement (e.g., Fecho, 2003), underlying ethical principles and practices (Nolen & Putten, 2007), and the relationship of practitioner inquiry to the practices of institutional review boards (Pritchard, 2002).

A decade ago we suggested that efforts to theorize teacher research focused on social inquiry, on ways of knowing in communities, and on practical inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a). These approaches have been augmented over the last decade by practitioners’ own theorizing and by theories of teaching that respond to the challenges of the current policy and political climates. In addition, a proliferation of publications have explored practitioner research epistemologies and methods as well as ethical issues that come with this territory.

Theme III: Inventing and Reinventing Communities of Inquiry

From the late 1980s until the late 1990s, there was rather broad institutional support for forming communities that embodied the core concepts

Over the last decade, the Bread Loaf Teacher Network magazine has reported myriad variations on cross-school and school-university virtual networking that in turn create new relationships across boundaries of place, ethnicity, race, culture, and language. This has spawned investigations into topics such as “what it means to be bilingual,” for example, an inquiry conducted virtually among two U.S. high school teachers in Arizona and Massachusetts in collaboration with a university faculty member from South Africa, a primary school head from England, and their students (Lewis, Guerrero, Makikana, & Armstrong, 2002). Funded by a grant from the Spencer Foundation, this collaborative inquiry surfaces narratives of language acquisition from bilingual adults and adolescents to reveal the specific ways that acquiring a language is at once personal, social, and academic.

The resources of technology have not only enabled new inquiry communities to form and communicate online but also spawned innovative uses of technology for sharing inquiries and classroom practices with audiences that extend beyond those involved in creating the online representations. A prominent example is the Carnegie Foundation’s CASTL Program for K–12 teachers and teacher educators, which was continued in Carnegie’s CASTL Program, Goldman-Carnegie Quest Project, and The Teaching and Learning Commons, under the conceptual umbrella of the “scholarship of teaching and learning” (<http://carnegiefoundation.org/programs>). Each of these initiatives was designed to create a space for an interactive intellectual community where distal educators can participate in enriching and inventing the documentation of teaching and learning practice. Beginning with face-to-face communities that brought participants from across the country for intensive institutes, the Carnegie projects now make widely accessible the practices of teachers and teacher educators through multimedia technology. (See <http://carnegiefoundation.org/programs>; Hatch, 2006; Hatch et al., 2005; Hatch & Shulman, 2005).

Another example of the affordances for practitioner inquiry of new technologies is an online teacher community that enables access to national discourse on key educational issues and thus provides a kind of infrastructure for inquiry of various kinds. The Teacher Leaders Network (TLN; www.teacherleaders.org) is a virtual community launched by the Center for Teaching Quality in 2003 based on the assumption that society currently underestimates the potential and the complexity of teachers’ work and that “good teaching” is currently being defined by people and institutions other than teachers. While not specifically aligned with the practitioner research movement, this opportunity for dialogue and information gathering through virtual connectivity enables learning across a diverse group of local, committed

educators and makes “learning as a teacher” a more collegial, agentive, and public process.

Online teacher networks such as TLN are essentially without boundaries and uncontrollable by the hierarchies of schools or districts or the intrusions of federal education policy. The Internet permits user-generated forms of sharing, collaboration, and support that are fast and fluid. While many uses of the Internet for lesson planning and information sharing are not based on teacher research or practitioner inquiry, there are now quite a number of inquiry groups that use digital technologies to share classroom and school data sources and analyses to an extent inconceivable only a short number of years ago. Furthermore, putting teachers and other educators’ work on the web contributes to what we see as the growing “publicness” and visibility of teaching, giving teachers and teacher educators more access to and images of the daily work of others, up close and personal. Along with this access, however, come consequential questions about who is framing these images and what messages these representations are sending about the profession of teaching. The web not only connects local work with wider conversations but also makes possible the commercialization, control, and the “selling” of teaching rather than interrogating it in order to improve it.

Local Groups with National Reach. The practitioner research movement continues to thrive in part because local communities are making public and accessible the distinctive processes and findings of their work. The Philadelphia Teachers Learning Collaborative (PTLC) exemplifies the powerful possibilities of local groups with national connections and national reach to support local knowledge generation in other locations. Closely linked to the Prospect School’s Patricia Carini and to the North Dakota Study Group, the PTLC has met every week in urban Philadelphia for more than 30 years to use structured oral inquiry processes to improve students’ learning, teachers’ lives, and the institutions in which they work. Much of this research has been against the grain of the traditional labels, practices, and accountability systems of schools and schooling (Abu El-Haj, 2003).

A number of PTLC and/or Prospect members have contributed to a series of books that explore the power of descriptive processes for understanding and acting on students’ strengths. These practitioner researchers subscribe to a highly theorized norm of accountability that holds teachers accountable for observing, knowing, and teaching children in ways that are diametrically different from the notions of accountability explicit in NCLB and other policy tools. PTLC and Prospect members have several books either in press or in preparation, including Margaret Himley and Pat Carini’s *Jenny’s Story*

(in press) and Lynne Strieb's *Inviting Families* (in press), based on her 30-year history of working with parents. Both of these texts draw on the phenomenological perspectives developed at The Prospect School and its spin-offs in Philadelphia, New York, and other cities. Along somewhat similar lines, the Brookline Teacher Researcher Seminar has been very influential beyond its local impact. In the edited volume *Regarding Children's Words: Teacher Research on Language and Literacy* (2004), Cynthia Ballenger and colleagues provided thoughtfully documented case studies that highlighted the distinctive ways these practitioners had developed to collect and analyze classroom data as the group evolved over time.

Some local practitioner groups are smaller than those described above. They may be limited to two or three teachers and yet, by virtue of their connections to national organizations, have venues to disseminate their work. For example, Mary Klehr and two other experienced practitioner researchers in Madison, Wisconsin, have created an inquiry community to study their own practices of arts integration and arts-based research. Supported by a "Communities of Inquiry" grant from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), they formed a small collective to foreground their use of aesthetic texts such as visual imagery, performance, poetry, and storytelling. Klehr explained the effort this way:

Our collaborative process involves developing and refining aesthetic techniques. . . . Each of us is responsible for introducing a number of arts-based methods such as poetry, theater, visual and sonic collage, and film to the group, around which we develop short informational and exploratory sessions. We combine various of these methods with more familiar data such as field notes, interviews, and analysis of student work, in order to shed new light on specific questions and classroom practices. (personal communication)

This community, along with others funded by NCTE grants, illustrates the kinds of grassroots initiatives that reveal the heart of the practitioner research movement, offering compelling evidence for its value to practitioners and hence its perpetuation.

Cross-National Communities. Another promising trend for the future of the practitioner inquiry movement are the cross-national communities that are flourishing in many places throughout the world. In the United States, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) has special interest groups devoted to Teacher as Researcher, S-STEP (Self Study of Teacher Education Practices), and Action Research. Several annual conferences fea-

ture practitioner research, such as the Ethnography in Education Research Forum at University of Pennsylvania, the CRESS Center conferences at the University of California at Davis, and the bi-yearly International Teacher Research Conference (ITRC) held after AERA. A recent edited volume by Clarke and Erickson (2003), for example, based on presentations at ITRC, contains 45 pieces from practitioner researchers all over North America and the United Kingdom, and represents its contents as a key resource for teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers.

A growing network of Bread Loaf teachers in Nairobi, Mumbai, Tanzania, and Bulgaria study what students know about culture. Inquiry related to the teaching of English as a second language is going on at Lancaster University and the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. Brian Street and colleagues at Kings College in London and elsewhere are researching—in collaboration with Indian educators—how teacher researchers in India infuse ethnographic approaches to numeracy and literacy as social practices in South Asia (Street, Rogers, & Baker, 2006; Nirantar, 2007). There are also major international practitioner research conferences sponsored by the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) in the United Kingdom and other organizations that represent collaborations across countries and continents. Many of these projects are reinventing the concept of inquiry communities and increasingly depending on the Internet and web-based technologies for connecting and collaborating.

Grassroots, National Professional Organizations, and Foundations. Sustaining and deepening the work of practitioner research communities require sources of support, including visible and accessible sites for collaboration, publication, and dissemination. A number of new grassroots efforts to support and spread action research are in development. The North American Action Research Alliance (NAARA), for example, encourages exchanges between people doing action research and others in fields, including health and human services around such foci as alternative epistemologies, collaborative subversion, and the politics of social justice (<http://naara.ed.uiuc.edu>). A critical dimension of this initiative relates to the expansion of inquiry communities within and beyond education.

Among national professional organizations and foundations, there is evidence that some previous sources of support for practitioner research are being sustained while new ones continue to emerge. NCTE, for example, awards work related to teacher research, provides grants for teacher-initiated studies, and supports a large school-based network of inquiring teachers called CoLEARN (see www.ncte.org/profdev/online/colearnwi; Donnelly

et al., 2005; Fleischer & Fox, 2003; Stock, 2004). The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has a series of four practitioner inquiry-based volumes with 90-some authors, each devoted to teaching and learning at different grade levels (Langrall, 2006; Masingila, 2006; Smith & Smith, 2006; Van Zoest, 2006). The International Reading Association (IRA) supports teacher research groups and publishes both practitioner research and books about practitioner research. Over the last decade, the Teachers College Press Practitioner Inquiry Series has published new and established authors' work, with more than three dozen books now in print or preparation. The Chicago Foundation for Education gives grants to promote action research as a way to improve instruction and inform district policy, with the explicit aim of giving teachers a voice in making policy (Temkin, 2005). The Spencer Foundation's website indicates it will support practitioner-generated research. As professional organizations, TESOL, NCTE, NCTM, and the Center for Applied Linguistics all favor practitioner research as professional development and publish articles in their professional journals. Somewhat further afield, the website of the National Health Museum introduces science and health teachers to teacher research.

In describing efforts during the last decade to invent and reinvent social structures to support practitioner research, we emphasize the importance of the collaborative nature of this work and the desirability of having configurations at many levels. This includes small, practitioner-initiated projects at the local level; school-based, out-of-school, and cross-school groups; and virtual networks or major commitments by professional organizations and foundations. It is important to note, however, that there are sometimes radical differences between the various iterations of practitioner research and the now-widespread phenomena of professional learning communities; we explore some of these in Chapter 2.

Theme IV: Shaping School Reform and Educational Policy

A decade ago, we described the ways practitioner research had been aligned with inquiry-based alternatives to traditional transmission models of professional development; curriculum innovations in writing, literacy, science, math, and social studies; alternative forms of assessment; and the creation of a professional discourse around race, gender, and schooling. We also expressed concern, however, that as practitioner research was being linked to an ever-widening range of educational agendas, it could become both trivialized and marginalized, or co-opted into educational change initiatives antithetical to its purposes. The current era, as we have argued above, repre-

sents such a challenge. The fourth theme we identify in the current practitioner research movement involves efforts to disrupt the new master narratives of evidence-based decision making and accountability by reframing reform initiatives and making schools and districts more permeable to alternate epistemologies and ways of constructing teacher and student learning.

Schools as Sites of Change. Recent work in practitioner research at the school level continues the theme of teachers "studying their own schools" (see the new 2007 edition of Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen's classic volume) and making teacher research in school and district-based networks the primary mode of professional development (Mohr et al., 2003). While these enterprises can be envisioned as bumping up against the current educational climate, as we have noted, school-based "inquiry" can also be co-opted and turned into top-down, step-by-step processes. As Anderson and colleagues (2007) put it, action research in schools can be "a popular name for merely poring over test scores" (p. xvii).

Collaborative inquiry looking at student work currently figures prominently in many school reform agendas, but much of it depends almost exclusively on the data from high-stakes tests and outsiders' agendas, protocols, and goals (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert 2006; Wood, 2007), as we discuss in Chapter 2. An exception clearly grounded in teacher agency was the work of the National Study Group, established to compare efforts across schools to support systematic inquiry into student work (Weinbaum et al., 2004). The participants in the Study Group—the Academy of Educational Development in New York City, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and Project Zero—were highly visible organizations investigating school-based efforts to take an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001) on improving teaching and learning. Their investigations built on Stokes's (2001) analysis of what three different types of inquiry engaged in by teachers at a California elementary school enabled them to learn and do. Weinbaum and her colleagues (2004) constructed detailed case studies of inquiry projects at four different schools, revealing the variability of entry and the inextricable connections between teacher learning and student learning and between inquiry and equity.

Project SOULL (A Study of Urban Learning and Leading) was designed to investigate how teacher leaders in urban secondary schools define, enact, and assess leadership in relation to school change (Lytle, 2006; Lytle, Portnoy, Waff, & Buckley, 2009). The evolution of the project reflected teachers' urgency about finding a context to struggle openly with day-to-day issues and support each others' efforts in a time of fundamentally destabilizing conditions.

As the project evolved, it expanded to include not only inquiry into how teachers lead, primarily from the classroom, but also how they intervene at various levels of the system in the service of social justice and equity for urban students and communities. Projects and study groups that construct professional development as inquiry (see, for example, Calliari, Rentsch, & Weaver, 2005; Tachibana, 2007) allow teachers to co-labor around dealing with the challenges and fundamental uncertainties of their daily practice.

Organizing to Inform Policy. As we show above, many educators from different locations and for different audiences are constructing research as concerted action to bring about change and, more specifically, to influence educational policy. In *Teachers Organizing for Change: Making Literacy Learning Everybody's Business* (2000), Cathy Fleischer, who has been a leader in practitioner inquiry over many years, re-imagined teachers as community activists who are part of the public discourse in education. Fleischer argued for a focus on one's own community, drawing strategies from the work of community organizers in public health, environmental advocacy, and social justice.

It is important to note that in a certain sense, all of the work described above is intended to inform policy by affirming and acting on beliefs that run counter to the current images of teachers and teaching in the present climate (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). But some teacher networks make bringing teachers' voices into the policy arena via teacher action research an explicit goal. A prominent example is the Teachers Network Policy Institute and the Teachers Network Leadership Institute, described by Frances Rust and Ellen Meyers in several recent monographs and articles (MetLife Fellows, 2008; Meyers & Rust, 2003; Rust & Meyers, 2006). These depicted the work of a national network of teacher researchers designed to position teachers' classroom- and school-based research in relation to educational policy, with the aim of bridging the chasm "between classrooms and statehouses" and "enabl[ing] teachers as individuals to enter policy discussions in their schools and their local communities and as a network to affect decision-making at local state and national levels" (Rust & Meyers, 2006, p. 70). Drawing on Cobb, McClain, deSilva Lamber, and Dean (2003), Rust and Meyers described the movement of teacher research into the policy arena as a "boundary encounter," a time when members of one community "engage in activities with members of another community" (p. 80). The network strategy aimed to show policymakers what happens when their policies are translated into practice.

Along somewhat similar lines are students' efforts to talk back to practices or policies that constrain their learning, which is a predictable consequence of

encouraging students to inquire into their own schools and school systems, as we discussed in Theme I above. One example involved the inquiries carried out by students, parents, and teachers in an effort called "writing to be heard." This work was sponsored by Research for Action (RFA), a not-for-profit group working with Youth United-for-Change, an organization dedicated to providing young leaders in Philadelphia with training and tools to improve the quality of their education and communities. In a project about building respectful communities, high school students (Crosby, George, Hatch, Robinson, & Thomas, 2006) examined adult-student relationships in their three new small schools. Conducting interviews, informal conversations, and observations, the students authored their own report, which made recommendations for district and school leaders, teachers, and community groups.

In our discussion of the fourth theme in the practitioner research movement, we have pointed to ways practitioner research is positioned to take a critical stance on current change initiatives that diminish the role of teachers as decision makers. Many of the initiatives we described in the first three themes are also aimed to impact school reform and, in some cases, educational policy. Affecting policy is admittedly very difficult, however, as policymakers have been increasingly enamored of research and evidence that "proves" what practice should look like rather than illuminates its complexities. How to accumulate meaningful findings from case studies, the primary genre of practitioner research, represents an ongoing challenge to the movement.

Theme V: Re-Forming Research and Practice in Universities

In this final theme, we consider the practitioner inquiry movement's explicit efforts to alter relationships of knowledge, practice, and power in universities and to rethink hierarchical connections between teaching and research. As we suggested in our article a decade ago (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a), practitioner research has the potential to collide with the longstanding tradition of universities to privilege research while holding teaching and service in relatively low regard and with the tendency of universities to call for changes in schools without altering the cultures of their own institutions. We argued then that there was increasing evidence that involvement with practitioner research can have a transformative effect on aspects of university culture.

Here we point to some of the ways practitioner research has surfaced in the academic literature of education, informed teacher education, and influenced education dissertations and advising during the last decade. We discuss briefly how practitioner research has continued to be a subject of academic

research and teaching and has been embedded in school–university partnerships. (We take up some of these issues in more detail in Chapter 4.)

Visibility of Practitioner Research in the Academic Literature. In the last decade, a number of handbooks and monographs entirely focused on exploring practitioner research have been published, including *Participatory Action Research* (McIntyre, 2008), *The SAGE Handbook of Educational Action Research* (Noffke & Somekh, in press), the *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, 2008), *On Teacher Inquiry: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research* (Goswami, Lewis, Rutherford, & Waff, in press), and the *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education* (Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004). In addition, in many handbooks and research syntheses on teaching and other education-related subjects, there are now one or more chapters devoted to practitioner research, including Zeichner and Noffke's (2001) chapter on practitioner research in *The Handbook of Research on Teaching*; Fecho and Allen's (2002) chapter on teacher inquiry into literacy, social justice, and power in *The Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*; Fecho, Allen, Mazaros, and Inyega's (2006) chapter on teacher research in writing classrooms in *Research on Composition: Multiple Perspectives on Two Decades of Change*; Kemmis and McTaggart's (2005) chapter on participatory action research in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*; Lytle's (2000) chapter on teacher research and reading research in the *Handbook of Reading Research*; and Fries and Cochran-Smith's (2005) chapter on teacher research on classroom management in the *Handbook of Research on Classroom Management*. Furthermore, a recent edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy Through the Communicative and Visual Arts* (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2008) includes in each of its major sections a number of pieces under the heading "Voices from the Field," designed to balance the perspectives of differently positioned participants in the conversations representing major topics. Another indicator of the vibrancy of practitioner research is the lively debate in academic journals, such as *Educational Researcher*, about what it means for practitioners in graduate school to "become researchers" and the role of practitioner research in the university's canon (e.g., Anderson, 2002; Labaree, 2003; Metz & Page, 2002).

Preservice teacher education is another area in which practitioner research continues to play a prominent role at the university level. There is a growing literature on the promises and problems of inquiry in teacher education, including Celia O'Leary's (2006) volume, *Learning to Teach Inclusively: Student Teachers' Classroom Inquiries*, written with her preservice inclusion study group;

Marilyn Cochran-Smith and colleagues' efforts to construct inquiry as both process and legitimate outcome of teacher education (Barnatt, Cochran-Smith, Friedman, Pine, & Baroz, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2003a, 2003b) and Linda Valli and Jeremy Price's analyses of the intended and unintended consequences of encouraging preservice teachers to engage in action research (Price, 2001; Price & Valli, 2005; Valli, 1999; Valli & Price, 2000). In addition, there are a number of studies of the role of inquiry in the development of preservice teachers' ideas and beliefs about teaching, learning, and diversity (e.g., Hyland & Noffke, 2005; Levin & Rock, 2003; Rock & Levin, 2002) and about the relationships of inquiry and reflection, identity, and learning in various teacher education settings, including professional development schools (e.g., Crocco, Bayard, & Schwartz, 2003; Freese, 2006; Mule, 2006; Schultz & Mandzuk, 2005). Some alternative teacher education programs located at universities, such as Teach for America, have also become sites that encourage new teachers' inquiries (Lytle et al., 2009).

Academic Research and Teaching. The current educational policy/political climate has profoundly impacted the agendas of many research universities, resulting in both acceptance and resistance to stipulations about the purposes of schooling, accountability, and "scientifically based research." At the same time, many faculty have become involved in practitioner research, seeking to work out research agendas that involve practitioners in equitable roles and relationships and that aim to influence practice. Programs in language and literacy, teaching and curriculum, higher education, and leadership have begun offering formal preparation in using practitioner methodologies and practitioner questions to drive the design of doctoral dissertations. Herr and Anderson's *The Action Research Dissertation* (2005), for example, provided guidance on developing doctoral dissertations based on the realities of everyday practice. Many graduate students who pursue praxis-oriented degrees are electing to conduct practitioner research for their EdD and PhD dissertations as well. Courses in teacher research, action research, participatory action research, and other related genres are proliferating in graduate schools. In addition, local sites of the National Writing Project at nearly 200 colleges and universities across the country have professional development efforts that reflect a commitment to practitioner inquiry.

Many academics, including ourselves, have engaged in long-term field-based projects working with local teachers and school and community leaders aimed at addressing social justice issues through various kinds of inquiry in classrooms, schools, and districts (e.g., Aaron et al., 2006; Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007; Caro-Bruce et al., 2007; Ginsberg et al., 2004; Meier

& Henderson, 2007; Nieto, 2003, 2005). A number of uniquely constructed inquiry communities also flourish at universities. Steve Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, for example, have conducted research in Fishman's college philosophy class for 20 years (Fishman & McCarthy, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2007), contributing not only to Dewey scholarship but also imagining new ways compositionists and philosophers can conduct interdisciplinary inquiry aimed at deepening our understanding of learning and teaching.

School-University Partnerships. A wide range of school-university partnerships (as well as many strong practitioner inquiry groups and networks not affiliated with universities) are discussed in the sections above. As we have noted, in the United States collaborations such as the National Writing Project and Bread Loaf Teacher Network have used the synergies of schools and universities to support inquiries by teachers and other practitioners, sometimes in collaboration with university-based faculty. We want to focus here on one additional example, however, because it highlights both the positive and problematic aspects of the role of the university in practitioner research: a United Kingdom project described in *Researching Schools: Stories from a School-University Partnership for Educational Research* (McLaughlin, Black-Hawkins, Brindley, McIntyre, & Taber, 2006). McLaughlin and his colleagues provided a forthright account of what happened when the two worlds of school practitioner and university-based research attempted a merger. This is a largely untold tale, partially because of the complexities and controversies in the academic and educational policy arena around what counts as knowledge useful for educational improvement.

Researching Schools is based on a 6-year partnership between the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and eight secondary schools in the United Kingdom. The story is unusual because it was based both in the (British) tradition of teacher research and the concept of schools as researching organizations. Across the participating schools, there were key roles for teacher research coordinators, student voice coordinators, head teachers, members of the project steering group, project directors, a faculty research officer, partnership coordinators, and critical friends. The project saw its challenge as understanding:

how [university] staff and school staff within the partnership find ways and means of working together on research issues and questions of mutual interest in order to create a systemic research culture within and across the partnership schools. One problem (of perhaps many) posed by this challenge will be to find ways in which the research process and outcomes can have utility for teachers in terms of their front-line accountabilities, at the

same time as meeting the different accountability pressures upon [university] personnel. (McLaughlin et al., 2006, p. 14)

Not only was the focus of the project on researching the partnership itself, but the intention was also to move beyond individual teachers as researchers to authentic collaboration on and orchestration of the broader research endeavor. This complex agenda yielded considerable debate about the role of the teacher as researcher.

Across the schools in the partnership, however, classroom action research was the most common form of knowledge generation, while knowledge generation as a school and as a network were more difficult to achieve. Many, if not most, of the teachers saw the value of their research as chiefly for their own practice and themselves as the audience, although there was evidence of teachers engaging *with* research (echoes of Stenhouse, 1975). The authors commented that the policy climate in England had not been supportive of researching schools or partnerships but at the same time had been enamored of practice being informed by evidence. They urged recognition of the complexity of teaching and suggested rethinking teachers' workloads to allow them to devote time to doing research that would translate evidence to more effective practice. We include this example because it contains so many of the significant design features, challenges, and contradictions that can be endemic to serious efforts to re-form relationships of knowledge and practice, within and beyond the university.

In highlighting some of what has occurred since 2000 in colleges and universities that supports and extends the practitioner inquiry movement, we are suggesting that the institutionalization of practices and debates around the relationships of inquiry, knowledge, and practice are alive and well at the postsecondary level. In Chapter 4 of this volume, we describe in some detail how our own experiences with practitioner inquiry have led to the "constructive disruption" of university culture in our own institutions and provoked many questions, some not answered, about what it means to live lives that foreground practitioner knowledge in a university context.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD, AND MOVING FORWARD

We have been suggesting throughout this chapter that the practitioner research movement appears stronger and more persistent than would be expected in the current climate. Among the vast array of practitioner inquiry-related projects and programs, many are intentionally pushing back against top-down

mandates and expanding narrow definitions of what constitutes a “good” education. Considerable evidence shows that, during the last decade, despite all the forces working against it, the practitioner research movement has continued to thrive in parallel with other initiatives that aim to democratize the locus of knowledge and power and thereby directly influence the educational opportunities afforded to children in urban, rural, and suburban districts and other educational institutions across the country.

That said, we hope this book will support ongoing efforts to imagine what can sustain and expand practitioner research in the next generation. Clearly there are many challenging and coexisting realities. The powerful accountability regime that currently dominates the policy and the political contexts of education creates exceedingly trying times for practitioners and others who are addressing the concerns of policymakers differently and who persist in asking a different set of questions.

For example, at the same time that schools exist where teachers are allowed to teach something only if it will improve test scores, there are schools where groups of teachers meet regularly to look closely and descriptively at students’ work. At the same time that teachers are writing books about their efforts to teach in ways that truly embrace equity and access to meaningful learning activities, there are children and schools labeled “failing” because of high-stakes test results. At the same time that school systems are promoting teacher collaboration toward predetermined ends, there are vast virtual networks where teachers and learners from radically different cultural contexts read common texts and investigate questions about the environment and its impact on families and communities.

One of the purposes of compiling the literature of and about practitioner inquiry—and indeed, of reading it—is to come to understand the crucial questions it raises for the practitioner inquiry movement and for the field of education more broadly. In the final section of this chapter, we name just a few of these issues, anticipating that readers will have generated many of their own.

Looking ahead to the next generation, we ask many questions: How should those of us invested in practitioner research take this fragmented reality (and the powerful messages it sends to teachers and students, parents and academics) into account? How do we respond to work that calls itself teacher research or action research or participatory inquiry and yet is very much in line with narrowed policies that co-opt the language of practitioner research to marshal participants’ energies in opposite directions? Certainly, we are not suggesting here that all practitioner research should look the same across contexts or that there is a singular “we” in this diverse, multifaceted move-

ment. Such a stance would undermine its radically local character and diverse lineage. But how is it possible to sort out what is genuinely and productively disruptive of the neoliberal language and mind-set that maintains the status quo from what even unintentionally works to maintain it?

The considerable range and variation of practitioner research have contributed to its richness and vitality but, at the same time, perhaps undermined its coherence as an intellectual and social movement with a palpable impact on emerging policies. Related to this is the lack of “lateral citations” (Franke, 1995) in documentation of the work of practitioner research and the relative lack of effort to connect the work of different individuals, communities, networks, and institutions through webs of citations. Another concern is what it means to affirm efforts to integrate practitioner inquiry with professional development but also to remain committed to the role of practitioner research in generating local and public knowledge to inform wider social change and educational equity. What would it mean for prominent networks to align deliberately with one another and other related social movements? The prospects for practitioner research as a movement going forward into the next decade likely depends in part on orchestrated efforts to preach beyond the choir and to make the value of this work more obvious to the gatekeepers, policymakers, and politicians who control the discourse about what counts, who knows, and what we should do about it.

That the practitioner research movement continues to survive and even flourish does not mean that there are not deep issues *within* that merit attention. How do we understand the needs of teachers and other practitioners to be cosmopolitan, globally informed intellectuals while maintaining the critical focus on the local? Does the movement need to be more discriminating and vigilant about the quality of the work, and if so, how does that happen? What are the most pressing issues of quality and value, and how does a broad, dispersed movement develop criteria and methods for assessing them in differently positioned initiatives? What do we (and who, indeed, is the “we”?) think about the possibility that some practitioner research exists “under the radar” and thus has little or no accountability to a wider public or community? Is it possible that projects without any public scrutiny may circulate less-than-thoughtful practices or have troubling blind spots about what is “best” for children and their families?

Many members of the larger practitioner research community believe that questioning central assumptions is of quintessential importance. Who within and beyond the practitioner research movement can be the “others” who maintain a critical focus on that responsibility? The freedom to imagine, the existentialist Maxine Greene (2008) tells us, comes from encountering

and resisting obstacles. How can these trying times push the work of practitioner inquiry to new depths and perhaps more self-critique—and at the same time cultivate what Greene has called restlessness and unease as sources of optimism, power, and possibility? In the chapters that follow, we take up some of these issues. Our hope is to provide grist for others within and beyond the practitioner research movement to debate, invent, and act on these and other salient questions in the next generation.

Chapter Two

Practitioner Inquiry: Versions and Variance

In Chapter 1, we portrayed the current landscape of practitioner inquiry as complex, dynamic, and healthy. In short, our message was this: Despite (and perhaps in part because of) the acutely conservative educational climate in the United States and many other places, the practitioner inquiry movement is alive and thriving in programs, projects, networks, communities, and partnerships all over the world. Many of these are connected to one another and to other social groups through print, face-to-face, and electronic channels. We pointed out that practitioner inquiry is now part of, and sometimes center stage in, many local, regional, national, and international meetings, conferences, and publications that are intended to transform teaching and schooling by strengthening its democratic vision and challenging inequities.

But practitioner inquiry has multiple historical and epistemological roots and serves many agendas, which have evolved over time and in different places. For the most part, the multiple roots of practitioner inquiry have been a source of power and strength, and, as we argued in *Inside/Outside*, have helped to make it a movement, not just another trend or a discrete method. It is impossible—and, of course, undesirable—to regard practitioner inquiry as a monolith in the face of its widespread and far-flung development. Despite its variety, however, most versions of practitioner inquiry share a sense of the practitioner as knower and agent for educational and social change. This is a perspective that resonates with many agendas and affirms a commitment deeply felt by many of the people involved with practitioner inquiry around the world. Many of the variants of practitioner inquiry also foster new kinds of social relationships that assuage the isolation of teaching and other sites of practice. This is especially true in inquiry communities structured to foster deep intellectual discourse about critical issues and thus to become spaces where the uncertainties and questions intrinsic to practice can be seen (not hidden) and can function as grist for new insights and new ways to theorize practice.

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