A Review of Colin Lankshear's and Michele Knobel's Handbook for Teacher Research: From Design to Implementation

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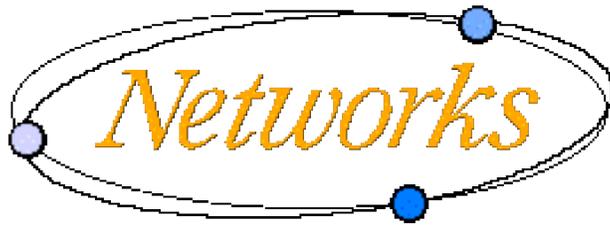# A Review of Colin Lankshear's and Michele Knobel's *Handbook for Teacher Research: From design to Implementation*

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I have found a book that I have been seeking. Don't be put off by its size and weight; this is a book that all teacher researchers will want to own. While written for teacher researchers, this book challenges us by refusing to stop at simple truisms about the importance of teacher's voices and the benefits of reflective practice. This book challenges us not only to do teacher research, but to do it well.

One of the things I appreciate about this book is that it pushes us to think about what it is that we call teacher research and how we want to define our presence and our contribution. The authors challenge the prevailing views of teacher research. They argue that teacher research does not need to be confined to "direct or immediate research of classrooms." Empirical research alone is not enough; the work of teacher researchers will be informed by consulting historical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological work of others. Furthermore, teacher research should not be limited to teachers researching what occurs within their classrooms. Issues related to our professional practices extend beyond our classroom walls; these issues involve social and political structures, school policies, and community issues. As teachers we interact with children and parents who bring very different experiences to our classrooms. As Lankshear and Knobel explain, "confining teacher research to the study of our own classrooms in the company of our peers might actually be a powerful conservative force within

what it widely identified as being a very conservative professional domain." Finally, Lankshear and Knobel challenge the notion that teacher research should be conducted without the involvement of higher education faculty; teachers should have the option of accessing academic forums for the purposes of pursuing authentic and practiced based questions.

Lankshear and Knobel make the case that teacher research needs to entail a systematic approach to the question/issue being explored; they identify six features of systematic investigation that can apply to teacher research studies. These features include having a carefully framed research question, an appropriate research design, data that addresses the selected question, a process for collecting data, a means for analyzing data, and a means for sharing the results of the research with others. Chapters two and three explore these six features in detail; they are followed by chapters exploring general approaches to teacher research, literature reviews, and ethical issues. The book continues with introductory chapters that explore document-based teacher research and quantitative teacher research. These chapters address topics rarely examined in teacher research texts.

The bulk of the book predictably explores qualitative approaches to teacher research. The unique quality of this book is that it systematically explores three types of

data, spoken data, observed data, and written data. Issues related to collecting and analyzing data are explored as well as the relationship between the data collected and the purpose of the research study.

The chapters on spoken data address a range of concerns for both novice and experienced researchers. Issues related to conducting interviews, documenting think-alouds, and utilizing existent transcripts are addressed. In addition, the authors explore the crafting of interview questions, organizing and conducting interviews, and analyzing spoken data. In the analysis chapter a range of analytic procedures and techniques are presented including categorical analysis, sociolinguistic analysis, and discourse analysis as well as tips for transcription and organizing the data,

The chapters on observed data and written data explore a similar range of issues related to collection and analysis. These chapters are filled with references to helpful resources, often classic texts in the research field, that can assist teacher researchers who seek more information.

The book is truly comprehensive. It presents an interesting historical review of teacher research tracing our roots back to Lawrence Stenhouse and Anne Berthoff. It also explores deficiencies of some current teacher research efforts and challenges the notion that teachers experiences do not count as valid data. The text pushes us to differentiate between teacher research and classroom projects. While some professionals may be uncomfortable with the high expectations that this books places on the field of teacher research, I celebrate its faith in teachers and the premise that teachers are capable of critical reflection and high quality research. I suspect that this book that will grow with its reader. It will be helpful to novice researchers but will continue to be a resource that experienced teacher researchers will return to over and over again as they pursue new questions and issues

Lankshear, C. and Knobel, M. (2004) *A Handbook for Teacher Research: From design to Implementation*. Berkshire, England: Open University Press