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"Anything Worthwhile Takes Time": Eight Schools Discuss Impacts and Impressions of Doing Action Research

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During the 1997-1998 school year, eight elementary, middle, and high schools connected with each other and a local university to conduct classroom-based action research, and our goal in these reflections is to examine what the teachers involved in the studies thought about the research process and the possible effects of action research on their students' classroom performances.

We, the authors of this piece, were ourselves two of the researchers, one of us from a high school and the other from a college of education. We began our partnership in fall 1997 when Janet was assigned to an area high school as the university faculty liaison for a school-university partnership project called GATE. Jean had worked as the GATE on-site coordinator for two years. Our collaboration began with concerns Jean had regarding writing instruction preparation for the statewide Florida Writes assessment of students in grade ten. Janet has a background in language arts education, having taught for eighteen years at high school through university levels; throughout her professional career she has been especially interested in writing instruction. Jean had been an English teacher for eighteen years when she accepted the assignment at Boca High to serve as the on-site coordinator for the university/public school partnership along with her responsibilities as English Department chair.

At the end of that school year, after reporting findings from our research, we also analyzed post-research survey data from our colleagues, 87 teachers who had done their own action research. It is an overwhelmingly, although not unanimously, positive story of all of our experiences, and it is a story that begins with what first brought us all together--a school-university partnership called GATE.

Here in South Florida, area schools and a local university are involved in a partnership called the Genesis Academy for Teaching Excellence (GATE). (For the 1999-2000 school year, the partnership has expanded to include twelve schools.) Our school-university partnership was formed as a result of a grant awarded by the Florida Department of Education asking universities to facilitate professional development by bringing local schools on-board as professional development sites. The schools would work with faculty from the university to explore topics of the schools' concern and to extend professional development, and the university would gain student placement sites that were congruent with what was being taught in the college classrooms while developing a deeper rapport with area schools. The design of the school-university partnership provided for a university faculty member, known as the university liaison, to be matched with the school's on-site coordinator, a school faculty member whose role was to

facilitate the school-university partnership, organize the school's professional development, and provide the university's teacher-interns with field placements.

In the fourth year of this partnership, the focus of the collaboration shifted to action research on teaching strategies, specifically strategies related to literacy enhancement. In the fall of 1997, we took part in a two-day retreat for the school principals, on-site coordinators, university faculty liaisons, and the director of the Florida Academies for Excellence in Teaching (of which GATE is one). The purpose of this retreat was to enhance the collaborative efforts among the eight GATE professional development schools and the GATE university faculty and to incorporate a new direction for Florida Academies for Excellence in Teaching identified by the Florida Department of Education involving high student achievement through increased literacy. Tied to the goal of improving students' achievement through increased literacy was the utilization of action research to develop, expand, and examine classroom practices.

It was the schools' GATE on-site coordinators who introduced the idea of action research related to literacy to interested colleagues at their schools; then, whoever wanted to at each of the schools became part of the action research team. Once teachers formulated initial research questions, the GATE university liaisons joined the projects, some as co-researchers and some as research consultants for the teachers.

Origins of the Action Research Studies

There were two primary goals for the action research studies. First, teachers at the schools selected areas of interest related to literacy that they felt could impact student learning. A second goal involved the study and implementation of "the action research process to teach the staff in our professional development schools how to use this process to collaboratively improve curriculum and instruction in reading and/or writing" (Kaplan, 1998, p. 7). Each school looked at how reading and/or writing strategies were implemented at their schools and developed a specific research question and an action research plan.

The research questions from the eight schools were similar in their focus on literacy because, that year, the school district and the state Department of Education had asked schools to focus on improving literacy. Literacy is always a concern for teachers, but it was made even more immediate for Florida teachers by the state and district level emphasis on improving literacy, evidenced in statewide tests of writing and reading administered to grades four, eight, and ten. The on-site coordinators therefore discussed this emphasis on literacy enhancement with teachers at their schools and suggested that action research might be a means for examining literacy instruction and student achievement. At the same time, the coordinators saw this as an opportunity to engage in action research themselves, to help coordinate research projects, and to provide assistance to their colleagues since, although "action research" was a term many had heard of, it was a process that few had engaged in.

However, these were not "implementation projects"; rather, they were invitations to conduct action research regarding concerns the individual schools had about literacy development. Thus, the university liaisons did not determine this literacy focus or the primary research questions but worked to provide collaborative assistance to the teacher-researchers for their action research

studies. Consequently, novice teacher-researchers in the schools were guaranteed of the support of both the on-site coordinators and the university liaisons throughout the research projects.

Doing Action Research-Getting Started

"Doing action research" meant something different to all of us working in the eight schools. Our schools have different cultures, and our faculties have different personalities and instructional approaches. Each research project resulted in a written report, and these were compiled into a larger report, The Paradigm Shift: Successful Action Research in Professional Development Schools (1998), which was submitted to the Florida Department of Education. These reports provide an extended answer to the question, "What did doing action research mean to the teachers?" as they include detailed descriptions of setting, instruction, data collection and analysis methods, and effects on student achievement. What we offer here are more like snapshots from a family photo album - a series of "stills" from the complex activities in which participants were involved. However, as the portions of the reports below will illustrate, doing action research had a meaning specific to each school. We begin with each school's primary research question, followed by a description of the first stages of research:

1) Will providing staff development schoolwide, K-8, in Florida Writes [a statewide writing assessment for grades four, eight, and ten] rubrics (to include Focus, Organization, Support, and Conventions) improve student achievement in writing if these rubrics are implemented in classroom instruction and evaluation? (K-8 university laboratory school)

In the fall of 1997 it was decided that the focus of the research would be to improve writing skills in all grades, kindergarten through eighth-grade. Although Florida Writes statewide assessment scores had been number one in the state for 1996 in fourth- and eighth-grade, the scores for 1997, still ranking as one of the highest in the state, had decreased in the fourth-grade from 3.4 to 3.3, and in eighth-grade from 4.0 to 3.6 [on the 0-6 rating scale used by the state]. As a result, teachers felt an action research project focusing on improving students' achievement in writing would benefit students at all grade levels, thereby improving Florida Writes scores in fourth- and eighth-grade. (Read & Cross, 1998, p. 201)

2) Does ELIC [Early Literacy In-service Component]Training for participating teachers influence their beliefs and understanding of the reading and writing process? Does implementation of ELIC strategies increase student achievement in reading and writing? (elementary school)

In the summer of 1997, the federal monies became available to train public school teachers in ELIC (Early Literacy Inservice Component), a program developed and used by educators in Australia and New Zealand, and it seemed to be a natural next step for the teachers here. Its emphasis is on helping teachers learn to gather and interpret important data on children's language use. Hopeful that the ELIC training could lead to increased student achievement in literacy, fourteen teachers from the school volunteered to participate in the ELIC program in the Fall, 1997 semester. A second group of teachers volunteered to attend the training during the following semester. The teacher research project grew from the questions that emerged during this training period. (Fleming & Harris, 1998, pp. 11-12)

3) If the Florida Writes rubric is infused into writing instruction using research-based writing strategies, will the instruction impact student achievement? (high school)

From discussion, we recognized we wanted students to know not only the steps of the writing process but also how they would be evaluated on their product for the Florida Writes assessment. Two English teachers with four classes of tenth-graders preparing for Florida Writes agreed to work with us on this co-teaching and co-research project. In the four ethnically diverse classes, there were 129 students; these four classes were designated as regular level ability. (This means that the students in these classes would have stanines of 1 to 6 on standardized tests.) (Benton & Wasko, 1998, pp. 33, 35)

4) When vocabulary and comprehension strategies are infused in classroom instruction in math and science, is there an increase in student achievement in math, science, and overall reading comprehension? (middle school)

Faculty at our school had prior training in reading strategies instruction, yet we were not noticing significant gains in comprehension test scores. Teachers were continuing to note a lack of grade level reading ability in entry level students and a need to diversify their approaches to meet the needs of these students. As a common fact, it was stated that students' reading ability was falling farther below grade level than ever noted before. Language arts teachers were not the only teachers aware of this, but all content area teachers were discerning that students could not read their textbooks. If they could read their texts, they still had difficulty comprehending or generalizing about what was just read. We wanted to understand the reasons why this might be happening; hence, we began our inquiry. The inquiry was announced to the faculty and staff members could volunteer to participate in the project. The inquiry group for this particular project consisted of the building principal, the university liaison, the on-site coordinator (teacher on assignment), and six content area teachers with a total of approximately 390 students. (Darr, 1998, pp. 68-69)

5) Does student achievement in reading comprehension improve when retelling strategies are infused with reading instruction? (elementary school)

We had carefully examined the 1996-97 Stanford Achievement Test results. Upon this examination, we found that at the third-grade level, 80% of our students scored below the median in reading, and in fifth grade, 69 % of our students scored below the median in reading. This data indicated that reading comprehension and vocabulary were critical target areas for instruction. After sharing our findings with third- and fifth-grade teams, the area of reading comprehension was selected. Working collaboratively, we formulated the research question. (Jackson, 1998, p. 100)

6) Does school-wide implementation of Reading Renaissance and CCC [Computer Curriculum Corporation] Reading Programs improve student achievement in reading comprehension and improve student attitudes towards reading? (elementary school)

The State of Florida uses three criteria as indicators that determine whether the schools meet or exceed competency in basic subject areas. The criteria used are norm-referenced tests, Florida

Writes and FCAT, the fourth-grade being the catalyst for determination in reading and writing and the fifth-grade in math. Due to the expectations by the Department of Education, the district, and schools themselves to avoid designation as "critically low," it became very evident that improvement was necessary for preparing literate readers. Our faculty and staff concluded that a need for reading instruction was the key to enabling students to become functional, literate readers. This need became evident by the students' performance on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) showing that students were working below grade level in both reading comprehension and vocabulary. Although reading has improved, test results indicate a need for additional instructional intervention. The information gathered formulated the basic question for this study. (Eaker & Rahming, 1998, p. 168)

7) Does the schoolwide implementation of the "Just Read" program increase student achievement in reading comprehension and improve student attitudes towards reading? (elementary school)

The Just Read Program was chosen as a pilot program at our school for the spring of the 1998 school year. The Just Read Program is a program developed by a committee from the Florida Department of Education to assist schools in developing and promoting lifelong readers. The program is a partnership between the school and home to increase students' reading of books. Just Read is intended to be a simple way to connect reading to the home, the library, and other sources of literature. From this study, we are trying to answer the question of does the implementation of the Just Read Program increase student achievement in reading comprehension and improve student attitudes toward reading? (Cornett, 1998, p. 191)

8) What writing strategies are applicable and successful at specific grade levels to improve students' writing performance, grades K-5? (elementary school)

Florida's use of the Florida Writes and FCAT examinations as indicators of "critically low" schools has put a tremendous emphasis on writing in the elementary schools. Historically, the training of elementary teachers in writing instruction and in preparing children for writing assessments has been virtually nonexistent. Given the high stakes nature of these tests for districts, schools, individual teachers, and students, it was felt that a study regarding the methods of teaching writing and writing test preparation was needed. The information gained from the results of such a study could be utilized in determining effective strategies to be used to improve the skills of children and to disseminate best practices to other schools and teachers struggling with how best to prepare children for writing assessments. Additionally, it was felt by administration and teachers that the Florida Writes scores of fourth-graders in our school in 1997 were lower than the ability level of the students. From these educational concerns the basic question of this study evolved. (Huie & LeMaster, 1998, p. 130)

We used two primary resources as we discussed and implemented the action research: How to Conduct Collaborative Action Research by Richard Sagor (1992) and How to Use Action Research in the Self-Renewing School by Emily F. Calhoun (1994). Calhoun identifies three types of action research: an individual teacher as researcher, collaborative action research, and schoolwide action research. Teachers within each of the professional development schools chose

the type of action research best suited to their setting, inquiry, and needs. Five of the schools conducted collaborative action research, and three schools chose to conduct school-wide action research.

Additionally, study groups, consisting of the teachers conducting the action research and the university liaison were formed "to share knowledge and expertise, decide on which sources of data to collect, discuss the actions they have taken to support their project, identify important themes in the data, and summarize implications of the action research project to share with the school community" (Kaplan, 1998, p. 8).
At the end of that school year, the teachers who participated in the action research studies were asked to complete a survey of open-ended questions to provide feedback on their experiences. Because we wanted to capture the teacher-researchers' attitudes and perceptions about the experience of action research, we chose the survey as an instrument to collect the data because "self-reports are useful for assessing how individuals make judgments about people and events" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 162). The survey asked these questions:

1. Has the research project you have been involved in changed your teaching practices? If so, how?
2. Do you feel the research and related practices in any way impacted student achievement? If so, how?
3. How do you feel after this project about yourself as a researcher and research in general?
4. Describe working with a university partner on this research.
5. Would you engage in another research project? If so, describe what you would examine.
6. What are any other comments you would like to make?

A total of 87 teachers from the eight professional development schools completed the survey. Topics the teachers wrote about ranged from their involvement in action research, possible effects of the action research on instructional methods and student achievement, and partnerships with the university liaisons and GATE on-site coordinators. The following summary of teachers' responses to taking part in action research was also included in The Paradigm Shift: Successful Action Research in Professional Development Schools (1998), the larger report.

Action Research and Teaching Practices

The teachers were asked if their involvement with the action research projects had affected their teaching practices and what the effects were if they occurred. Of the 87 teachers who completed the survey, 70 responded that their teaching practices had been changed through involvement. Of the teachers who responded affirmatively to this question, many said that the research project helped them develop new strengths in teaching and add to their existing repertoire of instructional methods. As one teacher wrote, "Yes, my teaching has changed as a result of the project. I was able to focus on specific areas of writing that I might not have stressed. Frequent discussions with colleagues helped develop ideas."

Other teachers echoed this response:

"Since teaching writing isn't one of my strengths, I was able to pick up many pointers and techniques."
"The action research project has made me more aware of reading mechanics....An array of useful tools have been provided that enables the teacher to explore this domain more concretely with those in need."
"It's made me more aware of some things I'd not done in a while....It was good reinforcement and also brought forth some new ideas."

Teachers described the introduction of new teaching strategies, collaboration with colleagues, and validation of instructional methods they had used in the past as benefits derived from their participation in the research projects.

Of those surveyed, 11 teachers indicated that their practices had not changed because of the research project. These 11 teachers responded "no" or "not at all" when asked if their teaching had been affected. Six other teachers responded that their teaching practices had not changed, but qualified this "no" response. They explained that their teaching had not been changed because the practices they used were already in line with those of the school's research project:

"No, because I was one of the first (a couple of years ago) to use these reports to adjust my teaching strategies."
"My teaching practices have not changed. I have given the Florida Writes test so many times that I use prompts frequently in teaching writing."
"No. It is the same belief that most of us started with--guided reading, small groups, etc."

While these 6 teachers did not see the research projects as having altered their teaching by providing new instructional strategies, they did describe how their current and past practices were congruent with the research-based strategies used in the projects.

Impact on Student Achievement

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and reported (including some graphic representations of data) in all eight action research projects regarding student achievement (see The Paradigm Shift: Successful Action Research in Professional Development Schools, 1998, for detailed reporting of findings). In brief, though, the findings from all eight studies indicated varying degrees of gains in specified areas of student achievement.

The survey asked teachers to explain if, and how, the action research and related practices had impacted student achievement. 71 teachers wrote that the action research projects and related practices had impacted student achievement, 8 responded that there had been some impact, 6 responded that there had been no impact, and 2 teachers gave no response to this item.

The 71 teachers who responded that the research and related practices impacted students' achievement gave examples and explanations to illustrate their belief. The teachers cited their students' academic achievement in the classroom, students' increased confidence with various aspects of literacy, and students' improved test scores as evidence of the effects of the practices from the research projects:

"My earliest emergent readers (for the most part) quickly became early readers. My early-fluent quickly became mature/developing-fluent."
"Absolutely. Look at our test scores, up in all areas, and individual improvement as well."
"Yes. It has made them feel more confident about themselves as readers, and reading scores on the CCC [Computer Curriculum Corporation] reports are higher."
"Since I was able to use better strategies for facilitating learning, my students were better learners."

Eight other teachers stated that there had been some impact or that perhaps the impact on students would be determined more conclusively later. One teacher explained, "Somewhat--they were more interested in reading which appears to have helped vocabulary development comprehension and oral/silent reading skills." Another teacher wrote, "At the upper level, it's difficult to judge the impact. I feel it takes more time for results."

Six teachers answered "no" or "not really" when asked if the research and related practices had impacted student achievement. Because these six teachers gave no elaboration to "no" and "not really," we are unable to further interpret their responses. Two other teachers did not respond to this question. We acknowledge this weakness inherent in the survey as a method of data collection, when no elaboration or no response becomes the option for the respondent.

School/University Partnerships

Another question on the survey asked teachers to describe working with a university partner on the research. The teachers' responses were analyzed, and three themes emerged: empowerment as a professional, collegiality and collaboration, and professional development. The question did not specify working with either the university liaison or the on-site coordinator; hence, the comments sometimes referred to the university liaison, the on-site coordinator, or they were general, not specifying one individual.

Some teachers wrote of empowerment as a professional when they responded to this item. These responses reflected the affective domain in that teachers discussed an increased sense of self-worth as professionals. One teacher captured the essence of this in responding, "I felt more like a professional." Another teacher wrote, "We had a large part of it [the action research] rather than just a say." In one teacher's words, the research experience was, "Very rewarding for me."

Too often, classroom teachers' voices and professional input have not been valued in the area of academic research; research has traditionally been the domain of the university. Teachers in general are not often asked for their opinions when major decisions are being made, and they do not feel like stakeholders in new programs that are implemented. For this reason, the teachers in these research studies appreciated being empowered to have a voice and an active involvement in the research.

The partnerships with the on-site coordinators and university liaisons facilitated the school-based research, and some teachers directly addressed the collegial quality of their collaborations with these individuals. Because the question did not specify work with either the on-site coordinator or the university liaison, the teachers were free to make comments about collaborations with

either or both. Frequently, teachers have had little or no opportunity to collaborate with one another, much less with university faculty. In these research studies, teachers had the opportunity to work with colleagues in their schools and the university. That collaboration was appreciated can be noted in some of the teachers' comments:
"There was another person to bounce ideas off and more input and suggestions."
"Wonderful collaboration of shared ideas and experiences."
"The university partner made my job very easy and much more enjoyable."
"Our GATE coordinator has been very helpful in analyzing data for us so that we could keep track of our students' progress. She was a great asset!"

Enhanced collaboration with colleagues in the school and in the university connects us in the joint effort of providing quality education for students in Florida's schools. One teacher offered this idea: "It gives [a] sense of cooperation and sharing, therefore establishing a continuum."

Teachers also addressed professional development when responding to this question about working with a university partner on the research. Teachers wrote that the experiences broadened their expertise in various areas of literacy instruction. Teachers discussed acquiring new strategies for teaching:

"I feel the university partner enhances my teaching practices by keeping me abreast of current techniques."
"It was an opportunity to explore other ways and ideas of retelling stories read by the children."
"[The university liaison] was our link, connecting us with new knowledge, strategies, and techniques. The staff development was very helpful."

What was unique about these experiences was that they were staff development put into action. Ideas promoted at in-service workshops may or may not make it into classroom practices; furthermore, "one-shot" staff development workshops do not provide ongoing support and dialogue for teachers. There is something about the school/university partnership that motivates the implementation of research-based strategies. Bringing together the school and university faculties creates a synergy, and more is achieved than when the same teachers remain isolated and work alone.

Teachers as Researchers

The survey also asked teachers to describe how they felt about themselves as researchers, and research in general, after working on the projects. Four themes emerged from the teachers' responses to this item: research supporting practice, personal and professional growth, time, and uncertainty.

Some teachers mentioned the theme of research supporting practice as they reflected on themselves as researchers. So often teachers do something because they are told it is a good practice, but they don't usually collect and analyze the data to support or refute its effectiveness in their own classroom. The role of teacher-researcher allowed some teachers the opportunity to make this connection between practice and research:

"I have always wanted to be more involved in research and use that research to improve student achievement. I would like for [our school] to continue to be involved in action research."
"Research is vital in order to develop programs to meet performance criteria set for us. I was happy to participate as I was able to use the results directly in my classroom."
"...research is what I believe, from firsthand experience, to be the best way to teach. If I know from experience that something works, I will continue to do it."

Research provided validation of new practices and affirmation of familiar practices. This validation and affirmation tends to perpetuate both research and instruction based on research.

Some teachers discussed personal and professional growth that resulted from their involvement as researchers in the projects. When describing themselves as researchers, opportunities for growth and learning were mentioned:

"What a tremendous learning and growth experience."
"I learned and grew myself."
"I had personal and professional growth with this project."
"If research evolves from the flow of my own personal interests/concerns, it has a value and will become integrated into my professional growth."

The possibility for growth is two-fold in these research projects: not only the students but also the teachers can benefit. One teacher expressed this belief: "I want to continue researching as I realize this is a process and that I am a lifelong learner."

Other teachers' responses addressed time. As mentioned earlier, time is precious to teachers, so it is not surprising that this issue came up in relation to conducting research. These comments were not negative, but the teachers stressed the necessity of having time to take part in research. One teacher responded, "I wish I had more time to work cooperatively with other teachers on the students' writing." Similarly, another noted that research is "fine if you have the time. I enjoy it; teaching is researching anyway." Time is a factor in conducting research, but as one teacher stated, "It's worth the extra effort and hard work."

Overall, the teachers' comments were positive in nature; however, five teachers expressed differing degrees of uncertainty about themselves as researchers and the nature of their research project in general. Three of these teachers wrote that they did not see themselves as researchers, one would have liked "to have [had] more information before the project started as to what was being targeted," and one was "not very comfortable as a researcher."

Future Involvement in Action Research

The survey asked teachers if they would engage in another research project and to describe what they would examine in that research. Sixty-one teachers said "yes" they would engage in another research study, 10 said that they possibly would participate in research at a later date, 10 said "no," and 6 teachers did not respond.

The 61 teachers who indicated that they would engage in another research project listed numerous topics for future research. Teachers mentioned research topics related to teaching styles, improvement of students' reading and writing performance, cooperative learning, math instruction, student grouping, discipline, motivation of reluctant writers, mechanics in writing, state testing such as FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) and Florida Writes (statewide writing assessment at grades four, eight, and ten), learning styles, learning centers, conflict resolution, looping in the middle school, and professional development. Other teachers wrote they would like to continue the research begun in the studies from this past school year.

10 teachers said that they might possibly participate in future research. Their responses were often one-word: "possibly," "uncertain." Of the 10 teachers who responded that they would not engage in another research project, some provided elaboration. One teacher wrote, "No, I would rather not. I feel that as a veteran and experienced teacher my time could be spent working with my children." Another teacher expressed reluctance as follows: "I would prefer not to adopt new projects. We are always starting something new without finishing old projects." Anyone who has ever taught in a classroom could understand these two positions: time is a precious commodity for teachers, and too many of us have participated in new movements only to find that they fall out of "educational fashion."

Conclusions

According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), "the concept of teacher as researcher can interrupt traditional views about the relationships of knowledge and practice and the roles of teachers in educational change, blurring the boundaries between teachers and researchers, knowers and doers, and experts and novices" (p. 22). The 87 elementary, middle, and secondary teachers who responded to this post-research survey experienced this interruption of "traditional views" when their roles as teachers extended to include the role of classroom investigator. For some of these teachers, the classroom research did not prove entirely satisfactory, as their comments above express; however, for many others, the opportunity to take part in action research rejuvenated and validated their professional practices.

On the survey, the teachers were given the opportunity to write any final comments that they would like to make. These comments tended to reiterate what had been stated earlier. For example, one teacher said, "Anything worthwhile takes time. Often the time to research and reflect is limited." That comment highlights the need for an ongoing collaborative partnership between the university and schools to support such projects, since the teachers' time remains primarily devoted to classroom teaching activities. For such partnerships to continue, however, all those involved - from the schools and the university - must continue to seek ways to "stress commonalities and possibilities for collaboration between the two cultures" (Anderson & Kerr, 1999).

A second theme that resurfaced in the final comments was professional development through the research projects. This teacher's response is representative of the theme: "Our action research reading group was extremely beneficial to my own professional development and has led me to become a better teacher. Thank you." Throughout the last decade, it has become evident that "the idea of teachers actively initiating and carrying out research in their own schools and classrooms

is connected to programs of professional development and other strategies to professionalize teaching" (1999, Cochran-Smith and Lytle, p. 17). A dominant theme in the final survey remarks of these teachers was the positive connection between action research and their own professional development. For most of the teachers involved in these research studies, the experience was viewed as beneficial.

And, what happened with regard to continuing action research in the schools after this survey was conducted in the spring of 1998? In the 1998-1999 school year, teachers in all eight of the professional development schools in the partnership again conducted action research studies, with the continued support of university faculty members. Currently in the 1999-2000 school year, schools are determining their goals for the coming year, with action research still considered an important means for examining and reforming instructional methods, student achievement, and professional development.

Through the partnership of interested school and college of education faculty members, we all re-examined-and continue to re-examine-our views about research and instruction. We, the authors of this article, "examined and re-examined" our own beliefs during the process of working together as co-researchers and co-teachers for our study, and this is what it meant to us:

For Jean: It was an opportunity to engage in research for the first time in my teaching career, and a chance to examine not only student achievement but also my own teaching practices. My "ah-ha" moment came with the realization that students were not aware of specific, mechanical writing errors; although the high school students we worked with came from a long academic history of doing text-based grammar and mechanics exercises, they often had difficulty identifying and correcting errors in their own writing. The idea that grammar and mechanics lessons are meaningless unless tied to something real life, such as their own writing, really hit home during the action research. We have, of course, all read that writing should have such relevance to students, but the importance of situating grammar and mechanics within the context of the students' own writing became suddenly more vivid and clear to me.

For Janet: This was an opportunity for me to re-examine the significance of connecting theory and research from my university language arts courses to actual application in a real-world setting. Co-teaching four classes of tenth-graders one day a week for eight visits-beginning at 7:30 am and ending at 2:50 pm-was more rewarding, and more demanding, than I initially anticipated. From this experience, I could then share with my university classes what it was like to teach high school students, swapping stories of my "field experience" with my pre-service teachers, who themselves are engaged each semester in intensive field placements. This experience enhanced my credibility, I believe, as a faculty member in a college of education. I was no longer referring only to others' research studies or to my own long-past years as a high school teacher. I was in a high school each week, just like my pre-service teachers, and I was learning from my high school colleagues and my "adopted" high school students.

For us both, stronger bonds were formed between ourselves and other colleagues at the high school. As a permanent member of the high school faculty, Jean became an on-site resource person who is aware of action research, its processes and benefits, and she is now someone who can coach and assist others interested in action research. Janet has remained a university-based

resource person for teachers in the high school; last year and this year, she has worked with two more English teachers whose action research focused on the possible effects of team-teaching and cooperative learning strategies on students' performances in creative writing and public speaking classes.

A belief we both hold is that if we, as educators, truly care about the achievement of our students, we must be available to help each other and be willing to leave our respective, familiar university and secondary worlds to learn more about other school settings and practices that make up the whole continuum of education. Teachers from both the school and university arenas should strive, as Anderson and Herr (1999) maintain, "to continue to find ways to work together to see their critical reflection on these efforts as part of the new scholarship. After all, our common goal is to seek more effective and equitable ways to educate children" (p. 20).

Ultimately, the point of the whole project was to impact student achievement through research-based teaching strategies and to show teachers how research set in their own classrooms informs what they do in the way of instructional methods. That goal is captured quite well in this teacher's observation: "Action research gives teachers the opportunity to examine the achievement of their students through specific data, and also to examine teaching practices and strategies that affect that achievement." The enthusiasm for the process of action research was also evident in the final comments of one teacher, who summed it up by saying, "Let's do it again!"

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