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Learning and Thriving With Questions: a Helpful Resource for Teacher Researchers

by *Catherine Compton-Lilly*

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Hubbard, Ruth Shagoury and Power, Brenda Miller. (1999). *Living the Questions: A Guide for Teacher-Researchers*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers. Pp. 328. ISBN 1-57110-081-4. \$27.50.

"My school just received a \$3,000 grant to support a teacher research group. I have been asked to facilitate the group. I know a bit about teacher research and published the results of a teacher research study I completed during my graduate work, but I'm nervous about helping other teachers to become researchers."

"I was introduced to teacher research when I was working on my masters. Now that I have my own classroom, I'd like to begin a teacher research project but don't quite know where to start."

"I've considered myself a teacher researcher for the the last ten years and I've worked on several projects but there is no established teacher research group in my area. I feel quite isolated and alone. Is there a resource that turn to when I just need guidance, support, or encouragement?"

Contemporary educators live in an era of advertised "quick fixes and simple solutions that too often leave us feeling cheated and alone. The acclaimed phonics program, the scripted behavior reinforcement scheme, and the carefully sequenced, research-based scope and sequence all leave us much as they found us - continuing to seek ways to improve instruction for our students. As teacher researchers recognize, no one resource will serve all of our needs and challenges. Collaboration from supportive peers is integral to developing and maintaining exciting, compelling, and productive research projects. However, there are resources that can support us as we embark on and continue this journey. *Living the Questions: A Guide for Teacher Researchers* is one of these resources.

In this book, Ruth Shagoury Hubbard and Brenda Miller Power write "We can't anticipate your passions as a teacher or the constraints that you face in your research. But we can share the passions and constraints of teacher-researchers from throughout the world who have tackled all sorts of research projects and in the process developed creative methods for making research a vital part of their lives. This is the richness of the book *Living the Questions: A Guide for Teacher Researchers*. While providing general guidelines for approaching and exploring various aspects of teacher research, this book offers ranges of possibilities rather than prescriptions.

Filled with essays written by teacher researchers, data samples, field notes, and self-reflections, *Living the Questions* explores teacher research from the perspective of those who best understand its joys, challenges, and complexities - practicing teacher researchers. The book explores every aspect of the research process from crafting a research question to writing for publication. Perhaps the most daunting challenge of teacher research is defining a research question that is meaningful, productive, and manageable. Hubbard and Power explain that powerful research questions evolve from a variety of experiences and insights and that all teachers carry with them potentially rich and fruitful research possibilities. An entire chapter is devoted to identifying a research question.

Once a research question is defined, redefined, and refined, planning the project is the next challenge. Chapter two of *Living the Questions* is packed with actual research plans that will inspire teacher researchers by presenting a range of possibilities. Teachers are invited to reflect upon the options posed by their research question and consider their project in terms of the data that will be collected and how that data will be analyzed to create a tentative timeline for the project. The book continues by exploring data collection and analysis, reading related research, and the challenges of "writing up research. Throughout the book, examples of teacher research that explore not only possibilities for teacher research but also its challenges are presented. Particular attention is paid to the importance of building teacher research communities, the construction of our own identities as teacher researchers, and engaging our students as research partners.

While providing teacher researcher with useful and relevant information about teacher research, *Living the Questions* also explores the status of research conducted by teachers. In particular, an essay written ironically by a university professor, Suzanne Jacobs, reminds us of the existence of a historical "discourse tradition [about research] that is "not always friendly to teaching. Jacobs reminds us of the dangers of allowing others to define who we are, what we do, and how we do it. She reminds us of our professional responsibility to defend our right to define ourselves and our work in ways that are meaningful and productive for teachers and children.

Throughout this book, the authors emphasize teacher research as a human and humane practice. Hubbard and Power conclude their final chapter with the following comments:

What we see in our work with teacher-researchers is a fundamental kindness - teachers care about listening to students, their colleagues, and their gut instincts about how their research agendas need to change. And it is this kindness and concern that will continue to be an antidote to the hostility and tension sometimes present as researchers with widely different values tackle many tough issues of learning, diversity, and change in classrooms.

While *Living the Questions* could never address all our questions and interests around teacher research, it does provide a starting point and a touch stone that we can return to as we continue to examine our teaching practices through conducting researcher in our classrooms, schools, and communities.