

From Practitioners to Researchers: Facilitating Classroom Research

Rosalind Raymond Gann

Jane E. Melendez

East Tennessee State University

Melissa Bray

Churchill Elementary School

Stephanie Mann

Mount Carmel Elementary School

Teresa Young

Fairmont Elementary School

Introduction

We are living an era when a physicist is heading the National Panel on Literacy, and only four of its members have had hands-on experience with the teaching of reading, or the administration of reading programs (National Panel on Reading). We cry “foul!” arguing the expertise of the literacy profession has been swept to the side. Yet we ourselves can be guilty of the same disregard for the contributions of those who labor long and hard in our field. I speak of the failure to include the voices of K-12 practitioners in many of our reading conferences and journals, or even at times to recognize that those who teach reading daily would have important things to say. In part, the problem is one of professional discourse and dialect. Professors and researchers can be embarrassed by the way their elementary and secondary school colleagues talk. K-12 teachers are socialized to speak in a discourse that is anecdotal, situationally specific, and embedded in concrete detail. Here is an example:

To help her students develop schemata for understanding a reading on the early life of Abraham Lincoln, a fourth grade teacher has her students build “log cabins” out of popsicle sticks and school glue. While they are building, she has students imagine what it would be like to live within one of these structures. The activity generates much productive discussion. The students understand the reading. When she discusses the project with colleagues, her talk is replete with admonitions on how to unstick the tops of glue bottles and how important it is that structures be left to dry on paper towels, not on the tops of desks.

The teacher in this case, employs a discourse that North has described as “lore” (1987), which he characterizes as an oral tradition for conveying guidance to fellow educators. Lore is easy to caricature. It is not a discourse of power (Fairclough, 1995). Such discourses do not “play” well in many of our academic reading conferences and journals.

This paper relates an experience in which I (Gann) required a group of seasoned teachers—all masters’ degree candidates in reading—to design action research projects in their

classrooms. In the course of the project, the teachers not only developed teaching strategies that might interest the rest of us; they became fluent in the language of research, a discourse of power. The control of such discourses is vital in an era that fails to respect the contribution of classroom practitioners to the educational enterprise, minimizes it through a process some have called “deskilling” (Shannon, 1989), and often treats teachers as mere technicians of the testing process.

Arguably, today’s K-12 teachers are measured and tested at least as much as their students. Despite creativity and motivation, teachers exist in a professional culture of accountability, where it is assumed they must be told what to do with specific structural mechanisms in place to assure they do it (Stephens, 1998). Politicians and the public are obsessed with romanticized visions of an educational past where rules were enforced and students learned basics. Teachers are assumed to be the “passive recipients of the dictates of experts,” and incapable of self direction (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 2). Uninformed by the knowledge base of teachers, research is often removed from the reality of practice in today’s society, and reforms are imposed on the schools from the outside, limiting the effectiveness of the reforms.

Elementary and secondary teachers seldom learn to perform research, and when they study research the techniques are rarely the sort that can be applied in a classroom. For example, positivistic modes of research require investigators to control artificially devised experimental groups and conditions, in a way unachievable in a practitioner’s own classroom. Broadly speaking, however, research is asking questions, making predictions, and showing evidence for what one does. It is about actively seeking knowledge and using it (Boomer, 1987). This is why action research paradigms are so useful to classroom teachers. The notion that teachers as well as academics and professional researchers can engage in research is grounded in democratic social theory which assumes that educational research is not the exclusive preserve of an elite minority (Kincheloe, 2003). In classroom action research, the investigator identifies a problem, reads what others have done in similar circumstances, and formulates a strategy for addressing the problem in a particular setting. The investigator keeps records of how well the intervention works and shares the results with other educators (Stringer, 2004). He or she behaves as teacher and researcher at the same time (Mills, 2000). The research is integrated into pedagogic practice. The method, which was first developed by Kurt Lewin in the 1930’s, is plastic and can merge with a variety of educational ideologies. Some writers (e.g., Stringer, Mills), seem to value action research most as professional development for teachers. Others, like Kincheloe, stress its knowledge generating capacity and its potential for stimulating organizational change within schools.

Getting Started: Rosalind Gann

In the Fall of 2002, when I undertook teaching Content Area Reading to ten experienced classroom teachers in the Reading Masters Program at East Tennessee State University, I had no intention of requiring them to do action research. I was new to the faculty, and content area reading was not my specialization. I followed the established syllabus and textbook. Having been a K-12 educator, I was accustomed to writing materials to supplement content area textbooks. I planned to cover the textbook, to show the teachers how to write supplementary materials, and to assign them term papers. But grading the first assignments was humbling. The teachers, most of

whom worked in low-resource and otherwise challenging schools, were already developing highly appropriate learning materials for their students. They already knew the material in our textbook. While a few of the students were slightly newer to the field, the class was mostly composed of creative reading practitioners, who had much to teach me and others in the profession. They were ready to learn new modes of discourse so they could make their own contributions to professional knowledge. Action research would be a worthwhile way of addressing the issue. I therefore upgraded the term paper to the designing of an action research project.

Taking Action: Jane Melendez

About mid semester of fall 2002, Dr. Gann told me that she had included an assignment, which required the students in our Reading MA cohort to develop action research proposals as a component in the course, Reading Instruction in Middle and Secondary Schools. This assignment meant the students would be in possession of action research proposals at the end of the fall semester. I suggested Dr. Gann inform the students that I would have them conduct and report their action research as a part of the practicum course I was scheduled to teach in spring, 2003. While the students had been reluctant to develop the action research proposals in the beginning, the opportunity to carry out their research boosted their willingness to produce the proposals. Action research was then included as a major component of our practicum course. The students conducted several well-designed, creative projects in their classrooms, and it was a pleasure for me to observe their research processes. Toward the end of the semester, we worked on their written reports, and they learned to be cautious about the sorts of claims that can be made related to informal classroom research. They produced well-written action research reports.

The students were to graduate in May 2003, and they were facing the culminating experience for their program – evaluative interviews with their committee members. I suggested to them that we convert the process to a Reading MA symposium for which we would gather on a Saturday and they would present their research to each other, the members of their committees, and other interested faculty. They were very enthusiastic about the idea, and we conducted the 2003 Reading MA Symposium during late March. Our students' presentations were very well received by all present. Faculty commented on the creativity of the action research projects and professionalism with which the students presented their reports. We will continue with this format for our Reading MA program.

Student Action Research Projects

Of the ten students in the Reading MA program, all completed the project satisfactorily. Three of the graduate students further refined and edited their work, presenting it at the 2003 American Reading Forum Conference. Excerpts from their papers appear below. These particular papers were selected because they reflect the quality and range of the projects, and also because their authors were willing to spend the additional time required to edit them for publication. The projects reflect long-standing interests and professional competencies of their authors. The value of the assignment was to challenge these accomplished educators to discuss their activities in the discourse of research.

Excerpts From “Involving Parents in their Children’s Reading Development”

by Melissa Bray, M. A.

Introduction

A parent’s active role in a child’s education has proven to be a key factor in a child’s successful schooling. Parental involvement has positive effects on students’ academic achievement, work ethic, self-esteem, attendance, motivation, and social behavior. “Parent involvement is a necessary part of the education process...”, says Sherlie Anderson (2000). Parental involvement can take many forms – volunteering at school, attending meetings, encouraging the child to try new and harder tasks, maintaining contact with teachers, practicing new skills with the child, or assisting the child with homework. “Passive forms of involvement are better than no involvement at all”, say Kathleen Cotton and Karen Reed Wikelund (1989).

This is especially true of developing a child’s reading ability. Research has shown that parental involvement can positively impact the reading achievement of students (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Students who receive extra help from their parents make significant gains in reading achievement when compared to students who do not receive extra help from their parents (Faires, Nichols, & Rickelman, 2000). “Getting parents involved in their children’s reading, regardless of the type or the intensity..., leads to improvements in students’ ability to read and... in students’ interest and enjoyment of reading” (Rasinski & Fredricks, 1989, p 84-85).

Setting

The school, which was the setting for this study, is in a rural community in Northeast Tennessee. The student population was 352 students in Kindergarten through fifth grade. There were three general education classrooms per grade level. There were two special education resource classes and one Comprehensive Development Class (CDC). The school is a Title One school, which indicates over 50% of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch based on household income. The population involved in this study was 17 first, second, and third grade students who were served in a special education resource classroom. All 17 of the students received special education services for reading and 12 of the 17 students received special education services for math as well. Fourteen of the students had been identified as having a learning disability in the area of reading or reading and math. Two of the students were health impaired and one was language impaired. The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect that parental involvement at home could have on the reading achievement of special education students.

Methods

Letters were sent to the parents asking permission for their children to be included in the study. The letter went on to ask if parents would be willing to commit to assisting their children with reading at least four nights a week. They were then given the opportunity to attend a training session. The response to the letters determined which group the children and their parents were assigned to. The first group was comprised of students whose parents were actively

involved and who were trained in reading strategies to use with their children. This group was designated Group A. The second group consisted of students whose parents agreed to be actively involved with their children's reading assignments, but they were not trained in any special techniques or methods. This group was designated Group B. The third group included students whose parents gave permission for their children to be included in the study, but did not want to participate themselves. This became Group C. The children's reading levels were assessed by administering the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery – Revised (WJ-R). The WJ-R was given as a pre- and posttest.

The parent training sessions included a simplified format for using reading cueing systems. Strategies included how to effectively use context clues, phonics and syntax when encountering an unknown word, and how to model reading, cueing systems and questioning techniques. Parents were also given the option of attending an individual training session where they observed the researcher reading with their children using the strategies presented in the training session. In an effort to maintain the integrity of the research, there were no changes made in the classroom setting or teaching methods used during this study. The only variable changed was the level of parental involvement. The frequency and duration of the parental involvement was checked by having parents sign a reading log each night and by verbal verification from the students.

Results and Discussion

All 14 parents agreed to read with their children four nights a week for 20 to 30 minutes. Five of the 14 parents agreed to attend a reading training session, but only two parents actually attended. Reading logs documented that 9 of the 14 parents read with their children at least four nights each week. The response to the training sessions resulted in Group A having two students whose parents were actively involved and trained in using cueing systems. Group B had seven students whose parents were actively involved but not trained in using the reading cueing systems. Group C consisted of five students whose parents were not actively involved.

The results of this study strongly suggest that parental involvement may improve the reading achievement of special education students. The students whose parents were trained to use the reading cueing systems made more improvements than those whose parents were not trained or were not involved. Substantial improvements in students' reading were shown by most of the students whose parents were actively involved but not trained. These results imply that parental involvement impacts students' reading performance positively and suggests that parental training may make parental involvement more effective.

Excerpts from “Teaching Fifth Graders to Understand Graphs and Charts”

by Stephanie Mann, M.A.

Introduction

It has been my experience over the past five years that students have a difficult time reading and interpreting the information given in charts, graphs, and maps in content area

subjects. I have observed students paying little or no attention to the visual aids provided in their textbooks. When visual aids are linked to the chapter reading, I have found that students consider them to have little connection to what they are learning. Why do students have trouble reading and interpreting visual aids in content area subjects? Students need to be taught the value and importance visual aids provide to learning. The purpose for my study was to better equip students with visual and reading strategies that would allow them to correctly interpret visual aids in content area subjects. The research addressed the following questions: Will hands-on instruction prove effective in developing skills in reading and interpreting visual aids in content area subjects? Will the hands-on instructional method make a difference in student ability to interpret visual aids? Do skills used when students create their own visuals increase their ability to interpret them in textbooks?

Setting

The location for the study was a rural school serving kindergarten through fifth grade. There were 18 teachers and 331 students. Approximately 40% lived in nuclear families while the other 60% lived in a single or “zero” parent homes. Of the student body, 46.3% received free or reduced-price meals. All students spoke English as their primary language.

Review of the Literature

A number of the studies have explored how students utilized the visuals in their textbooks. According to Mesmer and Hutchins (2002), students were able to explain detailed science processes, but when asked a multiple-choice question they often produced the wrong answer. The students thought that the visuals were irrelevant and did not take the time to use them. Arnold & Dwyer; Booher; Decker & Wheatly; Holiday, Brunner, and Donais; Rigney & Lutz (as cited in DuPlass, 1995), compared the performance of students who were presented material with and without graphic displays. The results of the studies provided evidence that students’ comprehension improved when they were taught with graphics as opposed to when they were taught with little to no graphics. DuPlass (1996) used a three-step strategy provided by Mannhood, Biemer, and Lowe (cited by DuPlass, 1996) for teaching the interpretation of graphical images. As a result of using this strategy, DuPlass’ students who were not able to read or interpret charts and graphs beforehand were able to read and interpret graphic information after the instruction.

Methods

The students created three graphs each during their social studies class during a six weeks period. Verbal permission was given to me by my principal to conduct this study. Letters were sent home to parents requesting permission for their children to participate. Of the 55 fifth grade students, 47 participated in the study. The study sample was reduced to 40 students due to transfers or absenteeism that affected testing. Students were identified by their textbook numbers during the study.

The class discussed different types of visuals provided in their textbooks before beginning their assignments. This allowed the teacher to determine the students’ prior knowledge

of visual aids. Once the teacher had collected the students' background information, a foundation was laid for in-depth instruction about visual aids. The students determined topics they wanted to use for school surveys. One week was spent determining survey questions, gathering the information needed in order to complete a bar, line, and circle graph, and generating a survey form for all students to use. Some of the choices were favorite sports, favorite cars, and favorite pets. After all survey data had been collected, each student created a bar graph showing the results of the first survey, a line graph showing the results of a second survey, and a circle graph showing the results of a third survey. Students were required to provide titles, keys, and all labeling for each graph. Once graphs were completed, each student explained his/her graph to the class. Graphs were displayed for the entire school to see and read. Students were assigned two graphs to review before beginning the study. They answered sixteen questions that were associated with the graphs. The students were assigned the same two graphs and questions at the conclusion of the study. The scores from these tests were compared to determine differences in skill levels used to read and interpret visual aids at the beginning of the study and its conclusion. I also collected data over the six-week period through observations and documented it through note taking. I wrote about the students' reactions, work, and progress at the completion of each day in a reflective journal. This allowed me to monitor student progress in skill development, to identify needs for additional instruction following the study, and to reflect on the study.

The students' answers to the pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed to see if the students had paid attention to the material that was presented only in the visual aids. Some questions were formatted so students would only know the correct answers if they had paid attention to supplemental text and information given with visual aids. The answers allowed me to determine if the students read the supplemental text or merely looked at the graphics.

Results and Discussion

The "hands-on" approach proved to be a beneficial means of increasing students' understanding of content area graphs. Skills developed by students while creating visual aids also improved their skills for correctly interpreting visual aids in content area material. Comparisons were made to see if students' interpretations of charts and graphs increased by using student created visuals as a method of teaching. It appeared that many of the students' skills in correctly reading and interpreting visual aids improved. Of the 40 students who participated in this study, 19 students improved in their ability to interpret charts and graphs, while 21 students' ability to interpret these visual aids remained approximately the same.

Students often look at graphics and bypass the supporting text and information. Their attention is often caught by the image, but they tend to disregard the meaning of the information presented. The purpose of my research was to determine if student awareness of the graphics in content area textbooks could be increased and if their interpretation skills could be improved. The research indicated that many of the students did benefit from this method of instruction. The students who showed the most improvement were the students who performed at a level that was below average in the areas of social studies and science. This study suggests that this method of instruction, which uses a hands-on approach, benefits low-functioning students the most. Follow-up research might use resource or low average students as a population to see if the results are consistent.

Excerpts from: Increasing Spelling Proficiency Through Writing

Teresa Young, M.A.

Introduction

The intent of this project was to promote increased proficiency in students' spelling through meaningful writing instruction and practice. Efforts to teach students to read often focus on the reading process while neglecting to balance instruction with writing and spelling. This research took place at an elementary School located in an older neighborhood that many years ago was deemed prestigious and where only the affluent lived. Today, it is a Title I school serving approximately 230 students, predominately white, with 45 students being served in special education. This study focused on the spelling difficulties of a group of special education third grade students' and examines both weekly spelling tests and written work. The special education group consisted of eight boys and one girl ranging in ages between eight and ten years old from two third grade classrooms. This group receives "pull out" instruction in the special education classroom in reading and language arts for two hours daily on third grade level with the current textbook. The basal includes spelling words; grammar lessons were taken from the weekly story.

It has been the responsibility of the special education teacher to develop and implement strategies to teach learning disabled and sometimes unmotivated students to improve their spelling skills during the reading and language arts class. How could these special education students' spelling be improved in written language daily practice and on their weekly spelling assessments? Was the current curriculum the right curriculum for teaching reading, written language and spelling skills to this population? What is the most effective strategy for long-term retention of spelling that would enable these students to communicate in writing?

Review of the Literature

Degeneffe and Ward (1998) developed a program to increase the application of spelling skills in students' writing. In a study by Boyd and Talbert (1971) on characteristics of good and poor spellers, visual and auditory discrimination were found to have a high correlation with spelling ability, revealing that visual discrimination is more closely related to spelling ability than auditory discrimination. To meet learners' different learning styles and needs, Boyd and Talbert (1971) suggested that frequently used spelling lists and a variety of activities should be used. Many words in spelling need to be over-learned so that they may be written without conscious thought by students. Drill and practice of writing and re-writing spelling words is not an effective strategy because a student may see a word that he is learning to spell, yet reproduce it incorrectly without any metacognitive process. Active intellectual involvement is necessary in learning to spell. Ediger (2000) discussed the acid test of student achievement in spelling, the actual application of correct spelling of words in functional written products without weekly spelling tests. Students should be given spelling words that have relevancy to them. Cued spelling strategies developed and researched in Scotland is a simple procedure that promotes spelling mastery through motivated practice and memory cues developed by the students

(Topping, 2001). Students are paired with partners, either peers or parents, in the learning process. Both students and their partners check the correct spelling of the words, read the words, and write the spelling words. The cued spelling technique distinguishes itself from traditional spelling methods by having the students develop their own cues for remembering the correct spelling of words. In an action research program to increase application of students' spelling skills in their writing that targeted first graders in a city school, three interventions consisting of establishing a print-rich environment, implementing direct teaching of spelling strategies, and creating student centered activities were implemented (Bleck, Crawford, Feldman, & Rayl, 2000). The first grade teachers had used the traditional drill and test teaching method while using commonly basic written words for weekly tests. Teachers had chosen spelling words randomly for each thematic reading unit, and they were inhibited in teaching spelling skills to their students by the lack of time allocated in the daily language arts schedule. The print-rich environment began developing when the teacher modeled writing a paragraph about a child in the classroom, and posted that paragraph on the wall for children to refer to when reading and writing (Gentry & Gillet cited in Bleck, Crawford, Feldman, & Rayl, 2000).

An action research by Angelisi (2000) was conducted in a third grade classroom for three weeks. It focused on the pros, cons, and effects of three different spelling strategies and activities. The study used the traditional rote, drill, and memorization spelling strategy that is typically used in classrooms and introduced two different strategies of phonemic awareness and word identification. Results showed that the traditional method caused all students in the study to show frustration with this strategy incorporated to learn spelling. Laminack (1996) offered observations of the success of any spelling strategies lies in children using them. Teachers can get a sense of how children use various strategies to spell as they write through observation, questioning, and analysis of writing samples. However, curricular and instructional decisions are not left to the classroom teacher to decide upon; the one person who knows the students' needs most. When spelling instruction is a matter of moving students through the spelling textbook, teachers do not have to make any decisions about what to teach and when to teach it. Yet, when writing is the focus with spelling instruction as a part of it, then teachers must rely on their own knowledge of spelling in use. This comes from their professional training, and experience as writers and observers. A balanced literacy program requires a supportive classroom environment that is rich in print and resources for supporting the work of students as readers and writers.

Methods

The study population was a group of nine third grade special education students in pull out language arts instruction. Parents received a letter explaining the project that asked for permission for their children's participation. New strategies and procedures for spelling instruction in this study involved small-group rotation in fifteen-minute intervals of activities. Emphasis was placed on students learning functional words from a frequently used word list in everyday writing. Special education students have limited experience with writing, especially on-going creative writing that involves editing.

Spelling words were chosen from the *Guide to the Rank List* (Becker, Dixon, & Anderson-Inman, 1980), in addition to the ten to twelve spelling words for each weekly story in the basal textbook. Students had twenty spelling words on weekly tests. A pretest was given for

each set of one hundred words in order to determine words the majority of the special education group did not spell appropriately. This was done to eliminate redundant work on skills already mastered by the students.

The study population of nine special education students was divided into groups of three. At the beginning of each week, the students were given their weekly spelling list. During the language arts class, each group rotated through three different skill centers. The skills were a grammar lesson from the basal with direct instruction, a writer's workshop, and an individual spelling activity. Each center activity was 15 minutes long. The language arts class consisted of an hour with three 15-minute rotations.

The grammar skills consisted of direct instruction from the basal's workbook, skills book, and assessment. Grammar lessons included nouns, pronouns, adjectives, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations. One skill was studied each week with assessment each Friday. The vocabulary words were included in the lessons from the basal. The writer's workshop was comprised of a written activity where students wrote sentences, paragraphs and letters. The students worked individually on a modeled and pre-directed writing assignment for 15 minutes daily. The students were required to use all their spelling words in their writing assignment each day. Neat handwriting, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, content, and spelling were emphasized in the students' writing. Daily work was graded on spelling accuracy. Written work was assessed daily, and feedback was given to the students in written and verbal form. The final written assignment was due at the end of each week.

The individual spelling activities were worksheets. Students were familiar with the format. A different custom-designed spelling activity was presented daily. These activities used the weekly spelling words and incorporated visual-perceptual skills, spelling and phonemic patterns, and fine motor skills to meet the students' individual needs. Activities included alphabetic order, crossword puzzles, coding, matching, missing letters, jumbled words, word search puzzles, and copying. These activities were rotated weekly to motivate student participation and interest.

A weekly spelling test was given on Friday from the spelling list tape-recorded by the teacher. This test was presented in the traditional method in which a word was pronounced in isolation, and pronounced again in a sentence. Students checked and corrected their own tests with the use of an answer key. This helped the students take ownership of their work.

Results and Discussion

The researcher gathered baseline data that consisted of special education students' spelling errors on pretests of frequently used words from the *Guide to the Rank List*. All students' daily grades and written products for spelling proficiency and writing accuracy showed an increase in accuracy and proficiency. In comparing students' work samples from the beginning of the six weeks to the end of the six weeks, students were able to develop sentences and paragraphs that were much more meaningful and fluent. Their attention to details in all three activity centers improved. Overall, the special education students' handwriting was also more legible. Data collection of the fourth six weeks spelling tests and averaged grades, in comparison

to the second and third six weeks spelling tests and averaged grades, showed a 9.8% decrease in the majority of special education students' grades instead of the desired increase.

When interviewed, students stated that they preferred the learning environment of the daily skill centers to the traditional spelling instruction. They agreed that they would like to continue the group rotation activities after the action research was completed. The researcher observed improved spelling on daily work. Students' handwriting improved in sentences, paragraphs and letters. Written work improved through meaningful and fluent content. The researcher noted that this strategy required more preparation time for daily activities, generated more papers to grade for student feedback, and necessitated more worksheet copies to be printed for students' use. However, the researcher was able to teach more curriculum skills successfully to the students than in the traditional setting.

Based on the analysis of the data on weekly spelling tests and six weeks' grades, the students did not show improvement in the use of correctly spelled words. The project did not prove to have a positive impact on special education students' spelling performance on tests reflected by grades during the fourth six weeks grading period.

There were obvious limitations to this study when one reviews the factors that may have interfered with the research that caused the undesired results. The short time span of six weeks for students to learn the new routine and for the researcher to collect data may have had a negative effect on the outcome of the project. Also, the inclement weather and holidays shortened five of the six weeks by as little as one day and as much as three days during the research. The students' increased absenteeism due to influenza during this study may have been another factor causing lower grades. Or, it may be the case that careful selection of appropriate words for study should be considered. Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnson (2000) and others argue that words selected for spelling should be organized around sound, visual, or meaning patterns, selected to match students' levels of orthographic development (Henderson, 1990; Schlagal & Trathen, 1998; Templeton & Morris, 2000) Given these limitations, one may conclude that further action research should be considered in order to compare results to this study.

Reflecting on Student Action Research Projects

The papers excerpted above represent the thoughtfulness and creativity of the K-12 reading practitioners we regularly encounter in our Reading Masters program. Long before they arrived in our classes, these accomplished teachers were developing strategies for addressing the often daunting circumstances under which they work. We can claim no credit for having taught Ms. Bray how to help parents of special education students to use the multiple cueing systems for which she gained understanding in her reading diagnosis courses. We did not teach Ms. Mann how to show fifth graders to read and create graphs. Ms. Young's strategy for teaching standard spelling to special education students is her own intellectual property. What this joint project supplied to the teachers was another discourse, that of action research. It is an important discourse for teachers to know and control, for it is a discourse of power. In these times when persons far removed from the classroom seek to control methods teachers use in equipping

children with literacy, it is vital that teachers assert their claim to direct the educational enterprise.

Conclusion

This paper has related how three exemplary teachers—representatives of a class—learned to use the language of action research for their classroom projects. We continue to hope that they and teachers like them will continue to present, write and publish so that their work will influence the future of education in general and reading education in particular. In the popular press, teachers like Ms. Bray, Ms. Mann and Ms. Young are sometimes called “Veterans.” There is a reason they are called this. These women are the heroes of the educational system. The conditions under which they work are often daunting. They are blamed for societal problems not of their making, and their expertise is not always respected.

We hope they will continue writing and sharing what they know, and we hope the reading profession will listen. In this paper, they have agreed to speak in the discourse of academic research. However, in the future, we hope the academic community will have the professional humility to listen respectfully when K-12 teachers speak in their accustomed professional discourse of teacher lore.

References

- Anderson, S.A. (2000). How parental involvement makes a difference in reading achievement. *Reading Improvement, 37*, 61-86.
- Angelisi, M.A. (2000). *Teaching spelling: Which strategies work best*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED346082)
- Becker, W.C., Dixon, R., & Anderson-Inman, L. (1980). *Morphographic and root word analysis of 26,000 high frequency words*. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon, College of Education.
- Bleck, J., Crawford, B., Feldman, I., & Rayl, T. (2000). *Improving student spelling in daily written work*. Chicago, IL: Saint Xavier University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED443130)
- Boomer, G. (1987). Addressing the problem of elsewhere-ness: A case for action research in the schools. In D. Goswami, & P.R. Stillman (Eds.), *Reclaiming the classroom: Teacher research as an agency for change*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.
- Boyd, G.A., & Talbert, E.G. (1971). *Spelling in the elementary school*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Cotton, K. & Wikelund, K.R. (1989). *Parent involvement in education*. Retrieved October 10, 2001, from <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/cu6.html>

- Degeneffe, L., & Ward, L. (1998). *A constructivist approach to spelling strategies*. Chicago, IL: Saint Xavier University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED420848)
- DuPlass, J. A. (1996). Charts, tables, graphs, and diagrams: An approach for social studies teachers. *The Social Studies*, 87, 32 – 37.
- Ediger, M. (2000). *Assessing student achievement in spelling*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED447487)
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Longman.
- Faires, J., Nichols, W.D., & Rickelman, R.J. (2000). Effects of parental involvement in developing competent readers in first grade. *Reading Psychology*, 21, 195-215.
- Henderson, E. H. (1990). *Teaching spelling*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kincheloe, J.L. (2003). *Teachers as researchers: Qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment*. New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Laminack, L. (1996). *Spelling in use*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Mesmer, H. A., & Hutchins, E. J. (2002). Using QARs with charts and graphs. *The Reading Teacher*, 56, 21 – 27.
- Mills, G.E. (2000). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- National Panel on Reading. *Bibliographies of members*. Retrieved on March 3, 2004, from <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/NRPAAbout/Biographies.htm>
- North, S. M. (1987). *The making of knowledge in composition: Portrait of an emerging field*. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton-Cook Publishers.
- Rasinski, T. & Fredricks, A.D. (1989). Working with parents: Can parents make a difference? *The Reading Teacher*, 43, 84-85.
- Schlagal, B. & Trathen, W. (1998). American spelling instruction: What history tells us. In R. J. Telfer (Ed.) *Finding our literacy roots: Yearbook of the American Reading Forum*, 18, Retrieved on November 8, 2004, from http://www.americanreadingforum.org/98_yearbook/volume98toc.htm
- Shannon, P. (1989). *Broken promises: Reading instruction in twentieth century America*. Granby, MA.: Bergin & Garvey.

Stephens, D. (1998). Literacy education as a political act. In C. Weaver (Ed.), *Practicing what we know: Informed reading instruction* (pp.viii-xiv). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Stringer, E. (2004). *Action research in education*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson, Merrill, Prentice Hall.

Templeton, S. & Morris, D. (2000). Spelling. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.) *Handbook of reading research, Vol 3* (pp. 525-543). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Topping, K. (2001). *Peer-and parent-assisted learning in reading, writing, spelling and thinking skills*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED452496)