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Editorial Introduction

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An On-line Journal
for Teacher Research

Editorial Introduction

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A few weeks ago, I had an opportunity to meet with teacher researchers from across the country at a day-long preconference sponsored by the International Reading Association's *Teaching as a Researching Profession Special Interest Group* and *Teacher as Researcher Subcommittee*. This is not the first time I have had the opportunity to connect with teacher researchers. In fact, I have been active with teacher research for over twenty years. Back in 1987 the idea of teacher research was radical. Imagine teachers researching their own practices and using their insights to talk back to policies and mandates that limit learning for children and their teachers. We believed that we were involved in important work and that our effects would be far reaching.

In some ways I suspect that our dreams have materialized. There are teacher research communities across the country. Teacher research projects are routinely assigned in schools of education. There are teacher research journals, conferences, and books. But like many communities, we may be more effective in conversing with each other than in affecting policy and educational practices beyond our own schools.

At the teacher research preconference, we celebrated our successes and the personal and professional stimulation we receive from being part of the teacher research community. We listened to accounts of projects undertaken by novice and experienced teacher researchers. We learned about new resources and shared techniques and insights. However, by the end of the day we were not

only energized, but also frustrated. After twenty years of hard work, we recognized that we are still situated at the margin of the educational research community. We found ourselves lamenting how politicians, publishers, and policy makers seem to have louder voices in the educational community than teachers, even when teachers systematically attend to their practices and claim their voices. Certainly, recent years in education have been difficult. High stakes testing, federal policies including No Child Left Behind, an emphasis on scientifically proven instructional programs, and deteriorating school budgets have taken their toll. These narrowly defined and scientifically "proven" instructional programs have stifled teachers' voices and limited their instructional options.

While all of this is certainly true, there are other issues within the educational community that are equally problematic. While it is fashionable for teacher educators to avow support for teacher research, do we really value the voices of teachers? Do we integrate their voices into our teacher education courses as we select readings and choose guest speakers? Do we have our students read examples of teacher research? Do we cite teacher researchers when we craft articles for publication? Do we invite teachers to keynote our conferences, serve on review boards, or chair our committees? While I suspect that many of us can answer yes to some of these questions, I suspect that many more of us will need to admit that we could be doing more.

Some might say that teacher researchers have their own voices and that they do not need teacher educators to speak for them or to provide credence for their work. In a perfect world, this would be true. However, all of us who currently reside in academia had mentors. I argue that this is what we can do for teacher researchers. Provide them with methodological tools. Support them in asking their questions. Protect them when administrators balk. Help them acquire the

techniques and strategies that provide access to forums and communities outside of teacher research. Demonstrate respect for their work by citing it, publically praising it, and acknowledging the knowledge that they alone can contribute to the field. Over the past twenty years, progress has certainly been made, but we are far from finished. There is much that remains to be done and the possibilities are limitless.