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This study focused on composition teachers in elementary and secondary schools who researched their own teaching practices. Specifically, it examined political implications of their work within the larger context of the education hierarchy. Central to this examination were teacher-researcher (t-r) perceptions of and interactions with other members of the education hierarchy (i.e. university researchers, other t-rs, and students). Evidence for this study was gleaned from journal articles, descriptive essays, and conference sessions in which composition studies t-rs and their consultants discussed their work.

A rhetorical analysis of what t-rs have said and written, along with an examination of the politically charged origins of the t-r movement support the hypothesis of this study: t-rs research (at least in part) for political empowerment. In the process of researching, t-rs alter their traditionally defined relationships with university researchers, other t-rs, and students. Composition studies offers a natural setting (philosophically and practically) for the t-r movement.

**Teacher-Researchers in Composition Studies:
Subverting Education's Political Hierarchy**

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PREFACE

Many “creative” breakthroughs in science and the arts are not the result of finding a better technical solution to an old problem (e.g. the disease-producing influence of evil spirits), but of seeing a new problem (e.g. the existence of germs).

Linda Flower and John Hayes
1991 Conference on College Composition and Communication

Originally, I was attracted to reading about teacher-researchers because I wanted to do my own research. When I was asked why I wanted to research, my first response was that I wanted to be able to prove theories I held, theories that teachers I met at in-services and in classes discussed, but that workshop leaders and university researchers did not adequately address. The more I read, and the more I questioned myself, the more I realized that what many t-rs wanted, and what I wanted, was not just to “prove” theories and become more effective teachers; we wanted respect from university research communities who claimed to know what elementary and secondary teachers ought to be doing. I suspect our students feel the same way when we teachers impose structures on them that leave them without an option for input.

This thesis investigates teacher-researchers, one “technical solution” for communications problems in composition studies. Each section of this paper describes a different aspect of the solution. In exploring this proposed solution, though, I think it becomes quite clear that poor communications are merely a symptom of a larger, unacknowledged problem, a problem embedded in the hierarchical power structure of American education systems. Flower and Hayes suggest that the key to solving some problems is to re-see the problem. This paper hints at a profound problem that seems to have been overlooked for a long time.

Teacher-Researchers in Composition Studies: Subverting Education's Political Hierarchy

Section One: Introduction

In the teaching of writing, many public school classrooms mirror the American public education system they help form: they are organized as hierarchies of power. Students report to teachers, who hold the power of grades; teachers report to administrators and school boards, who create school policies; administrators and school boards report to state commissions, who oversee education standards and practices; state commissions consult university-level researchers and “education experts” to determine state education policies; researchers in education create the theory that’s supposed to make the system work. John S. Mayher describes this education model as one based on “common sense” (which he defines as taken-for-granted knowledge) in his recent, award-winning book, *Uncommon Sense: Theoretical Practice in Language Education* (17). For many years, this “common sense” education hierarchy—with its separate tiers and specializations—has been accepted as an effective model (Mayher 17).

Now, many composition teachers at all levels are beginning to question the “common sense” logic of the traditional education hierarchy (Mayher 17). One problem with this structure, its critics claim, is that for the hierarchy to function well, all the specialized groups (teachers, researchers, school boards, etc.) must communicate effectively with other groups in the

hierarchy. But communication networks are typically inadequate. Typically, one group (K-12 teachers) specializes in teaching composition, while other groups (university and private researchers) specialize in researching to improve composition education at all levels of the system. Researchers communicate their theories to teachers in workshops or in-services. But many educators (in universities *and* public schools) agree that these communications are generally ineffective at bridging the gap between education theory and practice (Allen 385; Perry-Sheldon and Allain 8-9; McCutcheon 187-188; Atwell "Class-Based..." 87; Berthoff, "Teacher as REsearcher" 29). The result is that many teachers are at best skeptical, at worst alienated, by education researchers and their findings. At least one current study of attitudes among elementary and secondary teachers reports that they frequently perceive academic research as a mystical, esoteric activity, unrelated to real classrooms (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 8-9).

This thesis examines why communication gaps exist in the traditional hierarchy and considers an alternative that many concerned educators suggest is one way to narrow the gap. The alternative I will examine redefines responsibilities in the education hierarchy by encouraging teachers to research in their own classrooms. This concept masquerades under a variety of names: "naturalistic research," "action research," "practitioner inquiry" and "classroom inquiry" (Goswami and Stillman Preface). All "teacher-researchers" (teachers who research their own teaching) claim that by studying their own teaching they can improve it, make better instructional choices, and take more effective action in their classrooms.

Effective action (helping students to reach their potential) is a teacher-

researcher's main concern. This orientation to research may fit general definitions of traditional education research, which, according to one text, is "...concerned with the development and testing of theories of how students behave in an educational setting" (Best and Kahn 21). Beyond this general definition, teacher-researchers define their goals differently. Unlike traditional, empirical research, where educators scrutinize theoretical constructs, teacher-researchers evaluate their research in terms of their own teaching (as it is reflected in their students' success).

Whether teacher-researchers in elementary and secondary schools ultimately will improve their teaching remains to be seen. Some university-level researchers debate whether teacher-researchers *are* more effective in their teaching. Most of this debate focuses on whether teacher-researcher findings meet empirical standards of validity (Applebee) or how teacher-researchers' work changes student performance (Heath). In both of these cases, evidence of teacher-researcher effectiveness is defined as a testable product which must meet empirical standards of teacher effectiveness, such as improved student test-scores. This product-oriented view of research is common in the traditional education hierarchy, but it seems to me that education research communities may be overlooking a different kind of value inherent in teacher-researchers' work.

I suggest that the real value of composition teacher-researchers' work in elementary and secondary schools is essentially political—existing not in research products (findings) but rather in the research *process* and its effect on the hierarchy. As they research, many composition teachers feel liberated to redefine their professional relationships, to interact in new ways—more egalitarian ways—with other groups in the education hierarchy. I find

evidence of teacher-researchers' political empowerment by reading explicit and implicit evidence in teacher-researcher reports—in the rhetoric and rhetorical strategies of articles, books and speeches by composition teacher-researchers and their university-level consultants.

Over the past 15 years teacher-researchers and university researchers in composition studies have attempted to define the aims and procedures of teacher-researchers. As a rhetorical analysis, this paper analyzes texts and contexts of the movement. Following the introduction, section two traces the politically charged origins of the movement. These origins portray teacher-researchers as politically oppressed groups who act (at least partly) for political reasons. Section three analyzes a growing body of literature and two recent workshops led by teacher-researchers and their collaborators at a national writing teachers convention. This analysis suggests that teacher-researchers in English are challenging traditional assumptions about their role in the hierarchy. In their writing they are redefining the education lexicon, revising the tone of their communications with other groups in education, and speaking with a new, politically empowered voice. Section four discusses political motives that drive writing teachers to research. It also presents how the education hierarchy might be affected by teacher-researchers, and suggests topics for further research.

Section Two: Origins and assumptions of the teacher-researcher movement

Education researcher Stephen Corey first began experimenting with teacher-researchers (hereafter called t-rs) in the early 1950s when he imported a research model from the social sciences into education. Corey placed several New York teachers in charge of “solution-oriented research” for their classes. He defined his work as a “...process by which practitioners attempt to study their problems...in order to guide, correct, and evaluate their decisions and actions” (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 14). Corey’s project did not immediately launch a nation-wide education movement, but it did prepare the way for later projects. According to one history of the movement, during the 1960s, the separation between teachers and university researcher-theorists grew. “Top-down” reforms (ideas generated by upper echelons of the education hierarchy and imposed on lower levels—classroom teachers) became common. Rather than encouraging teachers to generate curriculum, many school districts bought curriculum packages from researchers, aimed at large-scale reform and standardization (with little or no teacher input). In these programs teachers were used more as technicians than as creative individuals. Many of these attempts at top-down reform were dismal failures (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 14).

The concept of teacher-as-researcher next appeared in England, where Lawrence Stenhouse revived the idea of teacher-led investigation in the late 1960s, as coordinator for the Schools Councils Humanities Curriculum Project (Elliott, Preface, 2). Another Englishman, John Elliott, continued Stenhouse’s t-r work in a program called the Ford Teaching Project (1972-1975). This project involved 40 primary, intermediate, and high school

teachers in the U.K. who wanted to use “action research” to investigate their own classroom practices (Hopkins 275). In the 1980s-90s, educators from England, Australia, South Africa, and other nations have continued to show an interest in t-r work as conferences, t-r organizations, and publications from those nations reveal (Nixon *A Teacher’s Guide...*, Boomer, Grundy & Kemmis, and Ebbutt & Elliott).

Finally, in 1976, more than 20 years after Corey’s original work, Michigan State University established the Institute for Research on Teaching, which included teachers as collaborators, conductors, and analyzers of research (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 15). Since that time, U.S. interest in t-r work has revived. Unlike Corey’s limited experiments in the 1950s, today’s t-rs are scattered nationwide and form a loosely organized education movement. In composition studies this movement includes t-r training centers, such as the Institute for Research on Teaching, at Michigan State University (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 14), and the Bread Loaf School of English. It also features regional and national conferences where t-rs meet to form communication and support networks.

Most teacher-researchers would probably not list “changing the structure of education” as one of the reasons they research. Nevertheless, t-rs challenge traditional roles and relationships in the traditional education hierarchy. Political agendas are inherent in the t-r movement. Even the fact that t-rs are considered to be a “movement”—or “an alternative research tradition,” as Goswami and Stillman call it—implies political motives. I believe the origins and assumptions of the current t-r movement indicate that political motives have been an integral part of t-r work from its beginning.

Unconventional political roots

The origins of the t-r movement support the idea that t-rs challenge traditional hierarchies of power. The model t-rs use for their research—the “action research” model Corey and Stenhouse borrowed—was imported from social sciences. A closer look at this model reveals the overtly political agenda behind it. Historically and conceptually the t-r movement grows out of “change-experiments” done by social scientist Kurt Lewin in the 1940’s (Lewin 39). As the label implies, these experiments were conducted not merely for the sake of study, but in order to change group relations. Lewin used what he called “action research” (35) to improve relations between oppressed minority groups (gangs, Jews, Catholics, blacks) and those they perceived as their oppressors (usually the WASP majority in the neighborhood). Lewin’s aim was to enact long-term solutions to intergroup prejudices. In order to effect the kind of profound change he wanted, Lewin decided the change would need to come from within—be owned by—the groups who faced the problem. In a series of workshops, members of all groups involved (minority group members, majority group members, social scientists) worked their way through Lewin’s action research process: defining the problem, planning how to address the problem, carrying out the plan, reflecting on what happened, and repeating this process, adjusting the problem-solving plan as necessary. This research process and the “action-research” label were later adopted by Corey and Stenhouse. Although it may not be called action research by modern American t-rs, the research process and its insistence upon political change remain the same.

Lewin’s approach promoted political change in established

hierarchies by using unconventional means. What made Lewin's work unusual was that he placed the people most directly affected by the problem—untrained practitioners—in charge of defining and solving it. Contrary to traditional models of social reform, where “experts” introduce theories from outside a situation to improve it, Lewin's approach implies that long-term solutions must be generated from within a situation by the people most directly affected by the problem. Social scientists (the group that might traditionally direct social reform efforts) in Lewin's research participated mainly as consultants, not directors. The power, in other words, rested in the hands of the people, instead of in professional outsiders' hands.

This grassroots approach to research contradicts the traditional, hierarchical organization of education, where top-down models of research are the norm. For this reason, its current use by those who call themselves t-rs is implicitly connected to social change. The political agenda of t-rs is, at some level, to change current roles and responsibilities in education. This idea is perhaps best stated by the title of one of the foremost books produced by the movement: *Reclaiming the Classroom: an Agency for Change*. As this title suggests, t-rs want to do more than conduct independent classroom research projects; they are aiming to significantly change their professional world, to *reclaim* something they feel they have lost. This rhetoric of “reclaiming” matches Lewin's original philosophy in his change-experiments. Both Lewin and t-rs use the process of researching as a new way to liberate groups who feel that they lack power within traditional social, political, or educational systems.

To suggest that composition teachers in American schools view themselves as oppressed by political power structures may seem

melodramatic. Fundamentally, though, the t-r movement attacks the education hierarchy in the same way that Lewin's practitioners assaulted hierarchies of social power: by inviting untrained, alienated groups to question traditional assumptions and to have a voice in changing their role in an established system.

Like much racial discrimination, the current hierarchical structure in education relies on principles of separation and exclusion (Florio-Ruane; Gere 114). In this model the most efficient organization of education is one in which each group (universities, school boards, administrators, teachers, students) focuses on a particular specialization (e.g. research, policy-making, coordination, instruction, learning). Although each group recognizes the roles of the other groups, members of a group devote attention primarily to their group's designated role in the network.

Action research challenges the separation and exclusion on which the current American public education system is founded. Instead of embracing the idea that each community of specialization in the education hierarchy should limit its role, Lewin's theory imported into education requires teachers to overstep the traditional boundaries of their specialization (instruction) to assume responsibilities from another group's specialization (research).

Challenging traditional, positivist research principles

One way the education hierarchy in composition studies has enforced separation and exclusion in its ranks is by embracing positivist research methodologies that are grounded in empirical assumptions. Until the

revival of rhetoric in composition studies, the dominant model for composition studies research projects were positivist, experimental study designs (Hillocks 93). Two comprehensive overviews of composition research studies—one done in 1963, the other in 1986—show positivist, experimental treatment designs dominated composition research in 1963 and were still strongly represented in 1986 (Hillocks 93). Although the percentage of positivist studies decreased significantly between the two overviews, in the 1986 overview, composition theorist Donald Graves echoes sentiments of the early editors when he criticizes many of the studies for being “faceless data,” “devoid of context” and “meaningless” (Hillocks 94). As these comments suggest, even trained professionals in composition research find positivist research designs to be complicated to construct, difficult to interpret, and controversial.

Positivist research designs—the dominant education research paradigm for many years—have helped exclude elementary and secondary language arts teachers from researching. Positivist researchers are extensively trained to follow strict guidelines meant to ensure their own objectivity and the validity and reliability of their results. Control groups, variables analysis, and well established experimental research procedures guide positivist research. Since most teachers are not trained to design or carry out this kind of research they have been effectively excluded from doing their own research.

Teachers are also excluded from positivist research community conversations (or, indeed, any research community) because they don't speak the same language. Teachers in the traditional hierarchy who are not trained, empirical researchers do not easily understand research jargon. In

addition to vernacular, however, social differences cause communication barriers. Education theorist Susan Florio-Ruane observes that researchers and teachers form separate “discourse communities” (244) that reflect differences in each group’s power and perspective. When she tried to facilitate dialogue between researchers and secondary school teachers of writing she discovered open, equal dialogue was nearly impossible to achieve: “Put simply, I have come to the realization that in a social world that is unequal, you don’t get a democratic or open conversation simply by saying that everybody’s free to talk” (239-240). Researchers still held the power.

Aside from power issues, basic contextual differences between researchers and teachers shape their communications (244). Teachers’ ways of knowing and their immediate aims differ from those of researchers, so they interpret information differently. Florio-Ruane notes that teachers have fewer opportunities than researchers to talk with their peers about teaching. When they do communicate, they speak to different audiences and for different purposes. They read different kinds of texts about teaching and they read with a different agenda than their researching university colleagues. These differences in audience and purpose cloud communications between researchers and teachers (Florio-Ruane 244). They bar teachers from easily entering research community discussions and they prevent university researchers from communicating to teachers in a way that teachers find readily transferrable to their classroom contexts.

Teacher-researchers using Lewin’s action research model are able to subvert barriers traditional positivist research models have posed in the past. Lewin’s research model doesn’t require extensive research training.

Nor does it impose professional jargon on t-rs. By depending on this methodology from the humanities, not the sciences, t-rs challenge many basic assumptions of positivist research models. From a humanities-centered perspective, research is viewed more like a text. It is subject to questions one might pose when examining any text—questions about authors, audiences, the social position of each, their purposes, and the functions of their communication (Florio-Ruane 235). All these elements, not merely the results, become important to t-rs.

Social constructionism is one theory t-rs embrace in an attempt to examine motives and perspectives as they research. Social constructionism borrows from the ideas of Richard Rorty in philosophy and Kenneth Bruffee and Karen Burke Lefevre in rhetoric (Gere 117). Essentially, social constructionists differ from positivists on the relationship between reality and language. The positivist, empirical research tradition assumes that, “...language is a copy of some other, extralinguistic reality” (LeFevre 97). As a copy, LeFevre claims empiricists view language as imperfect,

...a partial representation, a reproduction or copy, a second class citizen in somebody else’s country. The work of language according to this [empirical] view is to reflect, often inadequately or downright misleadingly, something that is outside itself. (98)

Empirical thinkers would say individuals can best discern reality, itself, not through language, but by objective observation and empirical methods of experimentation. In this model, objective observers are valued for their detachment. In the context of classroom research, observers are rarely a permanent or integrated part of the classes they observe. This concern about “objectivity” in empirical models means discourse communities remain separate.

By contrast, social constructionism challenges traditional notions of scientific objectivity, claiming instead that language plays an important, active role in shaping our perceptions of reality (LeFevre 113-114). Reality, for a social constructionist, is created in and through language and dialogue (including voices from outside the dominant discourse community). Social constructionists assert that no single, objective reality exists; reality is discoverable only by considering multiple perspectives (each one a separate reality) created in and through language. Social constructionists ground the “truth value” (credibility) of a constructed reality in its completeness, its ability to communicate a shared experience (Lincoln and Guba 295-6). In social constructionism, an observer’s detachment is not as valuable as her ability to gather and assimilate many perspectives of an event and to discover ways of integrating knowledge in a social context.

Although the term “social constructionism” was not used in Lewin’s era, both Corey (41) and Lewin (42) embrace the idea that action researchers should gather as many representative, participant perspectives as possible. This is one example of how action-researchers (and t-rs) are more closely allied to humanities-based models of research than to positivist models. Unlike positivists, t-rs assume all observers are subjective creators of meaning, and that only in dialogue with others can individuals create a shared conception of reality.

In short, the assumptions guiding action research do what positivist assumptions cannot; they give elementary and secondary teachers authority as practitioners *and* researchers. The social constructionist assumption that all observations are based on subjective impressions, that there is no such thing as pure objectivity, frees t-rs to pursue their research with more

confidence. It suggests that research authorities, too, are subjective observers. Teachers without extensive training in observation may not be as insightful as trained researchers, but social constructionism validates t-rs' untrained observations, particularly if they gather other perspectives to help them reconstruct and interpret a scene. They can arrive at a "truth" as well as trained researchers (according to social constructionist assumptions) because reality is created in and through social interaction (Lincoln and Guba 295-6).

A Closer Look at Teacher-Researcher Research

The concept of truth as a constructed reality shifts researchers from examining objective truths to considering contingent truths, or what one t-r calls "working theories" (Burton 719). What constitutes a well designed study, from an action researcher's perspective, is less formulaic than much positivist research. Action-research designs are relatively informal, open-ended, and subject to change. "The contention that educational research should not be undertaken unless it can be good research is a vague one," writes Corey. "Advocating that a group engage in the best research it is capable of and strive for improvement in the future has much greater meaning" (83).

Methods of research reflect Corey's "do the best you can with what you have" attitude. Practicality guides t-r research methods. T-rs choose methods of observing and collecting data primarily based on which methods are least likely to interfere with their teaching. Within those bounds, they select the method they think is most appropriate for their research project's aims (Nixon, *A Teacher's Guide...* 7; Allen 385).

Specifically describing what t-rs do when they investigate is difficult because no two t-rs use exactly the same procedures or have exactly the same aims. Generally, all t-rs use narrative and dialogue from a variety of sources and perspectives as their primary research tools. Methods of data-gathering are eclectic and may include any of the following: quickly jotted field notes, anecdotal records (written from memory after class), interviews with students, surveys, student work, tape or video recordings, and observations by other t-rs or collaborating consultants (see Elliott "Triangulation as a Method of Initiating Self-Monitoring" for an in-depth description of triangulation).

Although they use various methods, t-rs claim to share one common goal: to systematically examine their own teaching in hopes of making more informed judgments that will improve their professional practices (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 13). Whether or not t-rs actually achieve their goal might be debated, but by questioning their assumptions, redefining "objectivity" and "research," and by following self-selected research processes to change what they believe could be improved in their teaching, t-rs challenge the established education hierarchy and assumptions upon which it is based.

Section Three: From separation and exclusion to professional community: transforming roles and relationships in the education hierarchy

Actual changes t-rs cause in the traditional education hierarchy are difficult to verify. Perceived changes are easier to document, and may be just as important. One thing t-rs are doing that reflects their changed perceptions is to redefine professional terms. "Research," as the last section suggests, comes to mean more than traditional, positivist definitions of the word connote. "Teacher" also is redefined by t-rs. Authors of one of the most influential reports on the American t-r movement notably redefine "teacher" to mean, "...a person who observes, questions, assists, analyzes, writes, and repeats these actions in a recursive process that includes sharing...results with...students and with other teachers" (Mohr and MacLean 4). This definition expands the teacher's role to include much more than simply presenting information, or lecturing, as teachers in the traditional hierarchy are expected to do.

Redefining words is just a hint of the new world t-rs envision; however, I see evidence of a more profound change. Many t-rs suggest that in the process of their research they significantly change their relationships with others: university research communities, other teachers, and students. In their interactions with these groups, t-rs say they act more as equals than they did before researching. Traditionally defined roles of all groups in the hierarchy seem to shift as elementary and secondary teachers actively define their research roles in context.

Reaching up the hierarchy: narrowing the gap between secondary teachers and the university research community

T-rs, by doing their own research, seem to more closely identify with university research communities than their non-researching colleagues. Teacher-researcher advocates claim teachers who research feel more ownership of research issues; in other words, they read and decode more research from universities than their non-researching colleagues (Goswami and Stillman Preface ii; McCutcheon 187-188), and they feel empowered to communicate with university researchers from a more informed perspective through newly opened channels of communication (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 8-9).

In the traditional hierarchy, chronic communication problems have been recognized by secondary teachers and university researchers, alike. One reason for these problems, according to secondary school teacher Jon Nixon, is because each group's goals differ:

On the one hand, teachers have blamed the research community for failing to appreciate the practical nature of their concerns; while, on the other, researchers have blamed the teaching profession for not discerning that the purpose of research is to pose and clarify questions rather than offer solutions. (*A Teacher's Guide...* 195)

So long as university researchers and secondary school teachers are at cross-purposes, as Nixon describes, each group alienates the other, widening the communication gap. A leading university composition researcher, Ann Berthoff, echoes Nixon's views and suggests t-r work might help university researchers and secondary school teachers rediscover common goals. T-r work that encourages university researchers (who are often also teachers) and secondary school teachers to talk to each other on equal terms, as

teachers, instead of as researcher-to-teacher, may help narrow current communication gaps. She writes in a voice that includes both university and secondary teachers in one community,

I want to claim that what we need is not what is called 'research,' but the kind of theory that is generated in dialogue among teachers. When we real teachers get together, we ask one another real questions.... ("Teacher as REsearcher" 29)

Like Nixon and Berthoff, several composition theorists write that teachers perceive research as an alien, external construct because they have had difficulty importing ideas from composition research into their own, unique classroom contexts (Mohr and MacLean 64; Perry-Sheldon and Allain 7-8; Schuster 73; Atwell "Class-Based..." 87). These importation and assimilation problems reflect many teachers' current views of their role in relation to the university research community: they are technicians, handed theory in workshops and told to apply it (Nixon, *A Teacher's Guide...* 5; Berthoff, "Teacher as REsearcher" 29; Rumble 134). Nancy Martin, a facilitator for t-rs, claims, "Generally, teachers have been trained as doers of other people's directions" ("On the Move" 22-23).

When teachers view themselves as technicians, they act as passive consumers rather than active producers of knowledge (Goswami and Stillman, Preface ii). As consumers, teachers decide whether to accept or reject theories from researchers based less on theoretical grounds, more on their own past experiences (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 7). At least one study suggests that the "failure to involve practitioners in any but a consuming role" is one of the major reasons for the failure of most attempted educational reforms (Oakes, Hare, and Sirotnik, n.pag.).

In contrast to non-researching teachers, t-rs recast their role from

being information consumers to being creative collaborators asking their own questions. As creative collaborators, I believe t-rs view research communities as less alien, less domineering than they did before they began reading and attempting research; t-rs discover they share common interests with university researchers. In this context, university research communities become t-r resources for background information and alternative perspectives. T-rs who reach up the hierarchy use university research to clarify their questions, as Nixon suggests university researchers want them to, not to get a prescribed list of answers, as Nixon says teachers currently want research to do (5).

By giving teachers a rationale and a method of asking their own questions, not just handing them theories from other contexts, t-r techniques seem to help secondary school teachers feel less like alienated outsiders and more like pro-active insiders in the composition research community. Questioning liberates teachers to feel like creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients. As researchers, teachers feel empowered to read, claim, and recreate research and theories inside their classrooms instead of trying to conquer and assimilate constructs that originated in other contexts.

One sign that t-rs feel less alienated by formal research is that they read more articles about composition research than their non-researching colleagues (McCutcheon 187-188; Perry-Sheldon and Allain 8; Goswami and Stillman preface). T-rs feel compelled to read research as background information for their own work. In contrast, non-researching teachers report that they read research infrequently because they are not confident they will be able to understand what they read (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 8).

As t-rs read university research findings (essays and articles) together, they seem to become skilled at decoding meaning systems of research communities. Teacher-researcher advocates claim that t-rs understand more and analyze research better than their colleagues (McCutcheon 187-188; Perry-Sheldon and Allain 8; Goswami and Stillman preface). T-rs jump the vernacular boundaries Susan Florio-Ruane says separate teacher and researcher speech communities, and they begin to bridge the communication gap (243).

Proof that t-rs feel empowered is that they enter research community discussions by taking part in professional conferences and writing in professional journals, unlike most non-researching teachers. My experience at one major composition conference (the 1991 Conference on College Composition and Communication) was that the only speakers present from outside university and research institutions were t-rs. Two sessions involved t-rs. One session focused on four examples of teacher-researcher projects (Lytle, Zamel, Kutz, Ruth Ray) and the other session offered an alternative method for reporting collaborative research so that the teacher has an equal voice in the reporting, as well as in the researching and interpreting stages of collaborative research (McCarthy). T-rs and their advocates are also publishing in composition journals and books that circulate in university research communities, as well as in pre-university composition studies audiences. Nancie Atwell, Marian Mohr, Lee Odell, Dixie Goswami, and others are presenting t-rs' work where university researchers will see it. These publications and conference presentations give t-rs a higher profile in traditional composition research communities.

Despite their new visibility on professional fronts, however, t-r

publications still sometimes get a mixed reception from university theorists. Teacher-researcher advocates and adversaries seem to agree that opportunities for increased communication between research communities and teaching communities need to be created; they disagree as to the form this communication should take. Teacher-researcher advocates claim that t-rs could be the communication link between communities that is currently weak or missing (Mohr 104). Adversaries of t-rs disagree because the validity of what t-rs say is still questioned in research communities (Applebee 7). In any case, these examples of t-rs speaking in forums previously dominated by university researchers signal an important break in the communication impasse that has existed between research communities and teaching communities.

There is a definite tone of empowerment to what many t-rs write. Teacher-researcher reports of their participation in the larger professional community glow with a new confidence, a new ownership, and a new engagement of research issues by teachers. Teachers who research and read composition research talk about sharing many of the same interests and concerns as university researchers. Like their university colleagues, t-rs in composition try to understand underlying theories behind their practices as they investigate issues like spelling development, student-centered versus text-centered writing instruction, student rules and beliefs about writing, the effect of word processors on student writing, and factors that might contribute to good student writing (Allen 380; Nancy Martin 23, 25-26).

While these shared interests may also attract non-researching composition teachers, t-rs report that they feel better equipped to critically read research-based curriculum materials and make more informed

curriculum choices than they did before they began researching, and that they are less vulnerable to fads (Mohr and MacLean 62). Dixie Goswami, Peter Stillman, and other university advocates of teacher research agree that t-rs are critical readers who make more informed curriculum choices than their peers (Goswami and Stillman preface; Gower 62; Perry-Sheldon and Allain 11).

Generally, then, I have been suggesting ways t-rs seem to view themselves differently than their non-researching peers in relation to university research communities. They see their role more as active, productive participants in research and less as technicians who implement theories handed to them in curriculum guides, workshops, and classes. These signs of changed professional relationships between teachers and research communities seem directly linked to the changes t-rs experience when they re-envision their role as teachers to include the role of researcher.

Reaching across the hierarchy: from colleague to colleague

Teacher-researcher work also seems to alter relationships between t-rs and their colleagues—members of the hierarchy on the same tier. T-rs emphasize that they become a community of colleagues instead of remaining isolated in their individual classrooms, as school teachers often are (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 26). In my experience, teachers rarely see each other except for meetings, lunch time, and occasional encounters before or after school. When they do meet, conversation is usually set by a meeting's agenda or is unrelated to professional concerns. T-rs, on the other hand, report they depend on each other for professional input on a regular basis.

Nixon, a veteran t-r, writes that the moral and practical support of other teachers is an important part of the t-r experience (Nixon, *A Teacher's Guide...* 8). Networking with other teachers who are researching empowers t-rs, allowing them more of an opportunity to collaborate and deliberate (Goodlad n. pag.).

In one of the most frequently used t-r models, groups composed of four or five teachers from across disciplines and/or across grades meet frequently to discuss ideas and insights, to critique methods and approaches, and to resolve problems. Each group is led by another teacher—preferably one who is also researching—and group meetings and publications are coordinated by a university consultant or experienced researcher (Mohr and MacLean 11-12). Research groups discuss research designs and proposed research projects, share research they have read, and support and critique each other's teaching and research efforts on a regular basis (Shostak 151; Nixon, *A Teacher's Guide...* 139). Some teacher-researcher advocates claim this professional exchange pushes teachers to set and meet professional goals and supports them as they try to reach those goals (Mohr and MacLean 63). Whether or not goals set by t-rs *are* met, teacher-researcher groups provide elementary and secondary school teachers professional input (sometimes critical, sometimes supportive) to which many teachers would not otherwise have access (Goodlad, n.pag.).

Teachers seem to value this opportunity for professional exchange, even though it means giving up time from personal life and professional responsibilities in already stretched schedules. Mohr and MacLean, consultants to two Virginia teacher-researcher projects, comment on how “starved” teachers were for this professional group contact when they

scheduled biweekly evening meetings, three hours apiece, for teacher research groups to meet. A time commitment of six evening hours per week, on top of family obligations, grading, lesson planning, and research commitments sounds overwhelming. Nevertheless, these groups would often continue talking about their work long beyond the time group meetings were scheduled to end, although Mohr and MacLean claim there was usually plenty of time scheduled for completing the agenda (5). This unpaid overtime suggests that teachers value giving and receiving professional input from their peers in the forum that t-r groups provide.

Another way t-rs depart from tradition and function as a professional community is by observing each other. In my experience, non-researching teachers are rarely observed by colleagues or by administrators. When administrators do observe teachers, they are usually there to assess them in the annual or semi-annual evaluation. Due to their infrequency and their importance, observations by administrators do not encourage teachers to take risks. On the contrary, they may promote rut-running behavior because teachers being observed frequently stick to familiar routines in which they feel safe. This means that the only feedback teachers get when they try novel approaches or take some other kind of risk is their own and their students', probably the most biased assessments available.

Teacher-researcher advocates recommend that t-rs observe and critique each other's classes and compare perceptions with the observed teacher. Ideally, three or four t-rs triangulate their observations; the teacher being observed and the observers confirm or disagree with each other's interpretations of these observations, and offer alternative perspectives for the observed teacher to consider (Mohr & MacLean 63; Elliott

“Triangulation...” 133). Whether or not they promote research validity (as Mohr and MacLean claim) may be debated, but certainly teachers observing teachers does at least three things: 1) peer observation offers teachers more frequent, less threatening feedback than they normally receive about their teaching, encouraging them to feel safer taking risks, 2) it helps them to see things from other perspectives, which may reduce stagnation and teacher burn-out, and 3) it is one more way that t-rs level the education hierarchy; by emphasizing the power of peer review they may modify the power of observations by administrative authorities.

Reports from t-r communities suggest that teachers who observe one another receive more frequent, less threatening feedback than they normally would from administrators. As equals, they are in a position to push each other to take risks in a relatively safe environment. Teachers who observe are less threatening than administrators and more aware of teachers’ concerns than students—well suited to observe and give feedback to their colleagues. One t-r advocate emphasizes the suitability of teacher observers by writing,

It is now fairly well established that teachers learn best and take criticism most easily from other teachers. It is ideal if teachers can act as participant-observers for each other, for this mutual exchange of roles quickly breaks down barriers that would be insurmountable to outsiders. (Hopkins 275)

Other t-rs second this opinion and add that teachers who observe each other can triangulate their observations to arrive at a more accurate version of what happened in class than any single perspective could (Jackson 53; Elliott “Triangulation...” 142).

Regardless of teachers’ suitability as observers, t-rs significantly change relationships with their peers when they invite other teachers to

observe and discuss their teaching. They break one of the traditions of teaching—namely that when the classroom door closes, a teacher is allowed to fly or flop without any adult witnesses. Changing from isolated professionals to professional communities means t-rs give up some of their professional privacy, a difficult thing for some teachers to do. As t-r consultant Nancy Martin observes, it's hard to move towards uncertainty when colleagues and administrators—those people who shape a teacher's professional sense of self-worth—are watching (24). Taking risks in teaching and being observed while risking, requires teachers to publicly share and acknowledge failures as well as successes (Mohr and MacLean 61). Some professional communities find this more difficult than others; Mary James and Dave Ebbutt discovered in their research that some administrators, as well as teachers, were unwilling to risk their professional privacy for the benefit of community discussion and growth (88).

In t-r communities where teachers do feel comfortable openly discussing their teaching, the rhetoric of t-rs sometimes sounds like that of a religious conversion experience. Teachers who move from being isolated professionals to participating in a community of t-rs frequently write about their experiences with what sounds like a testimonial tone—the converted preaching to the unconverted. They insist their research experiences make them more dynamic as teachers and more empowered to make changes in their own approach and in students' lives. Nancie Atwell, Ken Jones and others even report that t-r projects reduce burn-out (Atwell, "Class-Based Writing Research" 90; Jones 61). Jones puts it this way:

...there are a lot of us [veteran teachers] who care about teaching.... But when you do anything that's pretty much the same every year, then no matter how good your intentions are, there's a certain amount of stagnation that creeps in. I think

that doing research, regardless of the project, having a new focus to what I'm doing, did a tremendous lot to ward off burnout. (61)

Another t-r, Gail McCutcheon, echoes Atwell's and Jones' claims and adds that teacher research may offer an incentive for master teachers who are otherwise lured into administrative and college positions to stay in the classroom (McCutcheon 188). Jones, Atwell, and McCutcheon's claims and their proselytizing zeal as t-rs may make t-r projects appeal to working teachers. The community-building and reduced burn-out these t-rs report addresses the problem many teachers cite as their reason for leaving the profession: they left because they felt isolated, out of contact with colleagues and unable to make a significant positive impact by themselves (Perry-Sheldon and Allain 10).

Redefining "teacher" to include inquiry in professional communities clearly changes relationships among teachers. According to t-rs, t-r groups discover and share more information as teaching communities. They play an important part in empowering teachers to continue examining and critiquing themselves, and hold teachers professionally accountable to each other in ways that traditional teaching hierarchies do not require. "Without such networks," one t-r writes, "we tend to lose heart and revert to older and easier ways" (Nancy Martin 24). Through such means, teacher-research groups provide significant sources of support and constructive criticism not usually fostered between teachers in traditional schools.

Reaching down the hierarchy: giving students a voice

Redefining "teacher," as t-rs advocate, also changes teachers'

relationships to their students, the next tier down in the hierarchy. T-rs become more like social constructionists, less like sole proprietors and transmitters of knowledge. This pedagogical shift affects the value teachers place on student perspectives, the ways teachers plan lessons, and the ways they assess their strategies for assessing students.

In social constructionism (Lefevre), knowledge is a shared construct, so all perspectives—students', included—are legitimate, important for teachers to understand. What this means to t-rs varies. Some t-rs try to understand student perspectives by becoming students, themselves, for periods of time in other teachers' classrooms (as Lee Enright does in "The Diary of a Classroom"). More often, t-rs ask students to become active participants in their research by reporting what they see and experience in the teacher's class—a natural sort of assignment for a writing class. Sometimes students respond by writing reports (Holmstein), but student responses also take the form of student journals (Lumley), student interviews and conferences (Root 103-107; L. Ray 222), notes between students (Branscombe), letters between students and teachers (G. Martin; Atwell "Everyone Sits..."), and student responses to everyday assignments (Jackson; Grundy and Kemmis 19; Perry-Sheldon and Allain 20). At the same time that it informs teachers, this increased sensitivity to student opinions affects students, as well.

Students respond to increased teacher interest positively, according to many t-rs' reports. Lucinda Ray and Nancy Martin write that teachers who show they take a serious interest in student perspectives (tape recording student conferences or writing down and seriously considering what students say) make students take their own ideas more seriously and craft

their ideas more reflectively (L. Ray 222). Teacher-researcher Amanda Branscombe adds that students in her classroom changed during her research, eventually viewing themselves as important co-producers of knowledge. As a result, she claims, they attended class more regularly, monitored each other's behavior, and improved their writing skills (218). Branscombe, Ray, and Martin's descriptions of how their changed pedagogies affected students suggest that students feel more motivated when learning becomes a shared endeavor. Their claims are echoed by other t-rs. David Jackson suggests students feel more motivated in a social constructionist's class because, "Only if a child enters into the re-shaping of what is knowledge in that classroom will she/he be able to make unfamiliar, school knowledge personally meaningful to herself in that position" (59). [Jackson may have borrowed this idea from Jean Piaget's statement "to understand is to invent" (Berthoff, "Teacher as REsearcher" 30).]

How does a social constructionist pedagogy affect t-rs? Listening to student perspectives prompts t-rs to think and plan differently. They reenvision their teaching as, "...a process through which [teachers] learn *from* students what students need to learn, a process through which they reflect on their teaching and develop theories about learning" (Queenan 41). T-rs, increasingly attentive to their students' perceptions, report that they shift their lesson planning to better reflect student needs and abilities. Both Nancie Atwell, in her ongoing Boothbay, Maine, project, and Marian Mohr, in her year-long project with Virginia teachers, report that t-rs in their groups showed a similar shift in planning. Atwell notes that once her colleagues started researching, they found themselves less preoccupied with how to get through a certain amount of required material in their lessons,

and more concerned about planning lessons that met individual student needs (*In the Middle...* 53). Mohr reports that Virginia project teachers also tended to shift their lesson planning to respond more to what they learned about their students' abilities and development as their research progressed (Queenan 42).

In a social constructionist view of knowledge (LeFevre), teacher assumptions, like student assumptions, need a collective verification. Realistically, teachers do not give up all their assumptions, nor do they hand over all power to their students, but they do say that teacher research pushes them to test some of their own assumptions. Nancie Atwell, for instance, says she had always assumed that teachers had to assign writing topics because students wouldn't write without them ("Everyone Sits..." 178). Her assumption was tested and proven wrong when she allowed students to be in charge of selecting their own topics—more of a social constructionist's approach that removes some of the teacher's power and redistributes it to students. Similarly, when teacher-researcher Ken Jones read student journals uncritically (as he might read letters, he said), he reports that he became more aware of his students as complex, thinking individuals (Jones 61). Assumptions Jones had made about his students were sometimes corroborated, sometimes dispelled when he listened uncritically. By reconsidering their assumptions and by giving students a role as legitimate informants in the research process, these t-rs suggest that they value their students as individuals.

Perhaps as part of their interest in students as individuals, t-rs report their approach to student assessment changes. When they read student papers, t-rs claim they move from being exclusively evaluators (teachers) to

becoming documentors (researchers), as well. Student papers that are error-laden are disappointing to teacher-as-evaluator, but the same set of papers may intrigue the teacher-as-documentor (Mohr and MacLean 56), because to t-rs, errors become clues to a student's learning process, or signs of growth (Mohr and MacLean 56; Mohr 102). T-rs say they depend on students for insights to student thinking and learning (Jackson 59).

One prominent composition theorist suggests all composition teachers should be both documentors and evaluators, anyway. Mina Shaughnessy recommends, in *Errors and Expectations*, that all composition teachers should document student errors to discover patterns of error. From these patterns, she says, teachers can often discover misapplied writing rules individual students follow. Discovering these rules, aided by students and their work, enables teachers to more effectively help individual students to learn. I would add that this approach also lends students dignity. Error, when viewed as Shaughnessy proposes, does not signal stupidity; it signals misapplied rules—something students can overcome. It also allows composition teachers to coach their students in the way Peter Elbow and Nancie Atwell ("Class-Based...") recommend, on a more equal level, as a colleague might. This is one more example of how t-rs' pedagogical shift honors students and moves classes to a more collaborative atmosphere, where teachers and students learn from each other on a more equal basis.

It would be a mistake to suppose that t-rs' changed perceptions of their relationships to professional research communities, their colleagues, and their students is a utopic answer to putting composition theory into practice, or to teacher burn-out, or to declining rates of student achievement. None of these ongoing dilemmas is likely to be fixed by any single change.

Nor is teacher research appropriate for all teachers to pursue (Nixon *A Teacher's Guide...* 5). But those teachers who do undertake their own classroom inquiry, seem to benefit by changes they perceive in their professional relationships up and down the education hierarchy. They feel more equipped to understand and recreate theory in their classrooms; they feel empowered to continue changing and growing as professionals in a community; they become less like proprietors of knowledge and more like professionals whose job is to help students to learn.

Section Four: Implications for composition studies and the education hierarchy

A clear pattern emerges from Lewin's "change-experiments," Corey's early action-research projects, and more recent t-rs' observations about their work and how it affects their attitudes. The pattern is that individuals (particularly in oppressed groups) want full creative control to explore and resolve problems in their world. For Lewin's oppressed groups, change-experiments offered a chance for them to fully participate in the entire process of designing and implementing programs for social change in their own neighborhoods. For Corey's pioneers and more recent t-rs, action-research allows them to design, implement, and interpret research that is more immediate, more meaningful to them in their own classroom contexts than most of what the established research community provides. The key in both cases is that the individuals who are most directly affected by the research are full participants in the entire process, not merely recipients of somebody else's plan.

Changing from being teacher to being teacher-researcher is a radical step, yet many English teachers seem especially attracted to the t-r movement. (I know of no other discipline, for instance, that has an equivalent to the Bread Loaf School of English—a summer training program that includes t-r training exclusively within one discipline.) Why do composition teachers so readily embrace the t-r movement, even though it is a radical reform? I suspect it is because the movement is not entirely foreign; it uses a paradigm familiar to all composition teachers. The action-research process strongly parallels the writing process. By comparing these

processes, we see reflections of why t-rs in composition studies choose to research and of how action research on a large scale might affect the overall education hierarchy.

Composing processes—from brainstorming to revising stages—almost perfectly parallel the action research process. Both are open-ended processes in which inductive approaches to reasoning interact with deductive approaches. The writer and t-r both work from a revisionary perspective, starting with one idea, testing that idea, renegotiating and revising the idea to reflect supporting evidence, and representing the idea in its revised form(s).

As revisionists, writers and t-rs frequently make important discoveries in the midst of their creative process as they discuss their ideas with others and more closely examine their own thinking. In writing this thesis, for example, I depended on many readers and friends for feedback as I was revising. Breakthroughs in my thinking were rarely due to independent meditation; conversations with other people were an important part of my writing process. To some t-rs, similar mid-process insights and modifications become as important as their study's final results. A facilitator for a Language Arts t-r project in Kansas reported,

One of the most exciting aspects of a research community such as the one these...teachers formed was that research was not result oriented, any more than writing and reading were product oriented.... Weekly sharing of insights, problems, and interesting responses was as valuable as sharing conclusions in May. (Allen 384-5)

Like writers, t-rs think and learn throughout their creative process. For this reason, working through the entire process and periodically getting feedback from others is an important key to both writing and researching.

Another parallel between writing and action researching processes is that both t-rs and writers work to make sense of what they see and experience. As they try to identify and interpret patterns they see, though, they acknowledge that their readings of the world are tied to their own social context, offering only one of many possible explanations for the phenomena they observe. In that respect, their work is never definitive, merely representative. Generalizations might be drawn based on their work, but the truth of those generalizations is strongly tied to the original context, and is of limited value elsewhere.

Each group also needs to be extremely aware of audience. Writers and t-rs need to know their audience's interests and needs so that they can catch the interest of the target audience and speak in a vernacular that is appropriate. As social constructionists, t-rs ask students (their daily audience) for their opinions. Sometimes the results are unexpected (as Atwell and Jones describe), and t-rs, like writers, modify their assumptions about their audience as they go.

All these parallels may not be too surprising since composition studies, action research, and social constructionism share roots in rhetorical tradition. They all spring from humanist epistemologies. All three areas value individuals and the contexts from which they come. They affirm the individual's right to observe and interpret the world from his or her unique perspective.

Echoes of the same humanist philosophy resonate in some education circles. Encouraging individuals to re-see, re-create, and re-interpret their worlds is what several education theorists say is also fundamental to good education. In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, education theorist Jerome

Bruner defines the language of education as, "...the language of culture creating, not of knowledge consuming or knowledge acquisition alone" (133). From Bruner's perspective, learning must involve "culture creating." The process of learning is not simply a matter of memorizing bits of consumable knowledge; it requires that individuals experience life and "create" their own knowledge. This humanistic perspective of learning is also echoed by Paulo Freire in *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, and by Piaget, when he writes, "to understand is to invent" (Berthoff, "Teacher as REsearcher"). T-r David Jackson's earlier statement (in section three) about children needing to reshape unfamiliar knowledge to make it personally meaningful applies to educators, as well as to kids. When teachers engage their own creativity, as t-rs do, and are allowed to ask and pursue research questions of their own, they are more likely to assimilate new ideas and approaches into their teaching because they make knowledge personally meaningful in their own social context.

Common roots in rhetorical tradition shared by writers, social constructionists, and educators may make t-r methods familiar to and appropriate for composition teachers; however, t-rs remain rebels in the education hierarchy. The education hierarchy's traditional separation between formal research and teaching obstructs t-rs. Instead of inviting teachers to experience the entire research process—from brainstorming questions, to testing hypotheses, and revising ideas—the separation of research and instruction means that teachers are excluded from most of the process. They only hear the product (final step) of somebody else's research process in workshops, seminars and summer school classes.

This system, which separates teachers from research processes, makes

it difficult for teachers to integrate new ideas in a socially meaningful context. The narrative of one person's experiences may be illuminating for others, but to make knowledge meaningful, teachers must recreate it in their own context. Culture creation—socially creating contextualized views of the world—is at the heart of the new composition studies and t-r work.

Present Political Implications of the T-r Movement

As creative forces, t-rs threaten to change traditions—including traditional political structures. They cause friction by reasserting humanistic epistemologies in a structure dominated by positivist assumptions. How effective are t-rs at implementing change? This segment examines what t-rs have changed and what they have not changed. Generally, change appears in ways that reflect what t-rs in composition studies already know from their studies of rhetoric.

Radical changes to the education hierarchy are not yet overtly evident, but subtle changes—changes in language, for example—reflect changed attitudes that could cause radical reforms. Ann Berthoff, a respected voice in composition studies, points out the relationship between language and politics in her Foreword to *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. She writes, "Liberation comes only when people reclaim their language and, with it, the power of envisagement, the imagination of a different world to be brought into being" (n. pag.). Liberation is at the heart of the t-r movement. As t-rs redefine common terms (such as "teacher" and "research"), and gather in discussion groups, they socially construct what they believe to be true...and envision what they believe ought to be true.

When t-rs re-envision their role, they affect roles throughout the entire education hierarchy. Section three describes one way they change—they help level the hierarchy by promoting a more egalitarian exchange of ideas. Along with this freer dialogue comes a rhetorical liberation, a new freedom for t-rs to speak and think as creators. That may sound like a minor change, but as t-rs feel more confident, they begin to demand a more equal voice in research publications and conferences. One of the conference sessions at CCCC 1991 focused on the controversy of how to present collaborative research findings (in this case, joint research by a high school teacher and a university professor) (Berkenkotter, n. pag.). The essence of the presentation was that, although the teacher felt equally involved in the research effort, he felt misrepresented or underrepresented when the university researcher wrote up the project. He wanted more of a voice in interpreting and presenting their work. The teacher's demand for equal voice in a conference where elementary and secondary school teachers have not even been included in the past as participants may be a sign of the future. It seems likely that t-rs will increasingly enter forums like this one where they can share their work with other researchers. Their voices will be heard in conferences and publications, demanding recognition from the traditional hierarchy's research community. As they interact with traditional researchers, t-rs may begin to erode the walls of separation and exclusion.

Teacher-researchers who speak in research conferences and publications change the kinds of opportunities available for dialogue between discourse communities. Unlike most teachers, t-rs are not limited to communicating during just one workshop or one class. They may draw on their work to write articles for journals and reach a wider audience.

Publications allow for extended, thoughtful dialogue. Published conversations are more progressive than workshop discussions, since written dialogues develop over time, allowing conversants to pause mid-conversation, try out new ideas and reflect on their findings.

Teacher-researchers also alter the education hierarchy by changing the social context for dialogues between t-rs and other groups in the hierarchy. Instead of perpetuating one-way (top-down) communications, teachers who research and who read more research will be better equipped to join extended professional dialogues with education researchers on open, equal terms. Not only will they have read more research, they also should have a better understanding of professional research rhetoric because they have worked with the rhetoric in the same way researchers do. Like any language or dialect, professional rhetoric involves shared experiences. T-rs, having read for their own research more literature from researchers, should be more aware of nuances in the rhetoric, should better understand how to frame their ideas so that researchers will pay attention, and should be able to discuss research topics more clearly than their non-researching peers because they are more familiar with issues in the context of research.

Another change t-rs bring to education is that they emphasize the importance of social processes in learning. Traditional communications in education—especially top-down communications from researchers to teachers or teachers to students—have not emphasized social processes (except, perhaps, recent cooperative learning efforts). Instead, traditional communications have reflected the positivist assumption that all information can be packaged, like a product, and transferred from one group of the hierarchy to another. This product-oriented view of knowledge

suggests that all concepts are easily packaged and that the experiences of one individual can substitute for the experiences of others. T-rs dispute these assumptions. By their actions, they suggest that some knowledge is accessible only through personally meaningful social experiences in a familiar context. This process-oriented view of knowledge could affect communication systems at many levels in the education hierarchy. For example, workshops, in-services and classrooms in which lectures are the primary means of teaching may need to be revised to include experiences: social processes that link ideas meaningfully to what the audience values.

Teacher-researchers also emphasize how important context is to education theory. Whereas the traditional, empirical assumption in education is that a theory that works well in one teaching context will probably work well in others, t-rs claim that what works well in one context—a sophomore composition class, let's say—may not work well in other contexts—even in other sections of the same class, or in the same class on a different day. This idea of “contextualized truth” is a concept that many classroom teachers discover when they try to import new theories into their teaching practices. They find that the theory, or “truth” (which sounded so convincing in the workshop) does not translate to instant success in the classroom, because they did not carefully consider the effect of their own particular classroom context.

To summarize: t-rs alter the education hierarchy by demanding a greater voice in research community discussions, by building dialogue between education communities, by diversifying their means of communicating, and by emphasizing the importance of social processes and contexts on understanding. These changes are important, but they are not

entirely original. Like the action research process, which has a parallel in the writing process, these changes are reflections of rhetorical concepts teachers in composition studies know about from their own curricular studies. Self-expression, voice, and the importance of an appropriate audience for one's writing are central to composition instruction. Dialogue about one's ideas and writing are also understood by most composition teachers to be important; writers generally do not write well without some feedback—whether it is from friends, colleagues, or teachers. Speech and writing skills are frequently taught in English classes, so using diverse means of communication and varying those media to fit one's audience and context are also familiar concepts to most composition teachers in secondary and elementary schools. Studying and valuing processes is also an idea that has been pioneered in composition studies. Studies defining “the writing process,” workshops trying to communicate what that meant, and then publications revising process-oriented instruction so that it was used as a flexible instructional tool instead of a lock-step procedure for training writers, have occupied a large part of the composition studies community for at least twenty years.

While it is true that many of the “new” ideas contradict the top-down, empirical model that has traditionally shaped education's organization, the changes themselves are not altogether new to those who are familiar with the social constructionist revolution in composition studies. It seems natural that t-rs, who as English teachers receive disciplinary training in rhetoric and the humanities, should depend on insiders' rhetorical tools, and that changes should first appear in areas that are congenial with what composition teachers already know.

Future Directions

So far, the changes t-r work brings to the education hierarchy are relatively subtle, but how t-rs affect education in the future remains an open question.

In a best-case scenario, communications between groups in the hierarchy could strengthen, helping to unify the system. Ideally, boundaries between groups might shift as composition teachers align themselves with common causes in composition instead of primarily with those who teach at the same educational level. T-rs could help reunite educators at all levels who have been alienated by hierarchical separation and exclusion principles for years.

In a worst-case scenario, t-rs may not affect the education hierarchy in such a positive way. Teacher-researchers might attack the concepts of separation and exclusion too successfully. Professional egos may be bruised as specializations—especially in research—become shared by instructors at all levels. Bruised professional egos would block communication, instead of unifying the hierarchy. Even if research communities do embrace t-rs and their ideas, t-rs might not be as receptive to research community ideas. (After all, the philosophy of t-rs is that their work is so context-specific that they view input from other contexts as being limited in its usefulness.)

Perhaps the most obvious danger that t-r work presents is that as t-rs change their job description to include research, they may neglect their primary role: teaching. Many traditional university researchers would agree with Arthur Applebee, a prominent education researcher, who wryly notes in a recent editorial that, “Though the movement to actively involve the

teacher in research is a healthy one, it has been marked more by its enthusiasm than by careful reflection upon the nature of the collaboration that might result" (5). A second possibility is that the entire system (all who are involved in education) might suffer an identity crisis as roles shift and evolve. Such a widespread identity crisis might result in chaos and destroy, rather than revise, the current education system.

Exactly how t-rs will affect composition studies and the education hierarchy remains to be seen. Determining the effects of this movement on the education hierarchy and composition studies will require future studies that investigate the strength and dynamics of the t-r movement. A closer consideration of how t-rs affect others in the education hierarchy (their students, their peers, administrators, and research communities) would also inform future work of t-rs and university researchers. Further research should focus on how to facilitate forums for extended dialogue between groups in the hierarchy. Forums like the one Florio-Ruane created, where university researchers and secondary school teachers talked, read, and wrote together over a period of time, are unique experiments that are worth developing. The advantage of such experiments is that they create shared discourse communities—a way to bridge the communication gap between groups in the hierarchy.

The t-r movement is a reaction to dysfunctional communications in the education hierarchy. For those teachers whose voices are included in this study, the t-r approach to teaching is empowering. It offers them a new way to converse with individuals from other groups in education, and it allows them to engage their own creative processes. Politically, t-rs are unique because they feel liberated to re-view and recreate their role in the classroom

daily. Whether they are a revolutionary force or an evolutionary phase will depend on how other groups in the education hierarchy react to their work and its political underpinnings.

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