What does each of us really want from a teacher? I think we want to be seen for who we are, with all of our potential and all of our challenges. I think we all want a teacher who will “get” us and help us work toward that potential and work with our challenges. Sounds pretty straightforward to me. What I know as a teacher (and as a student), though, is that it’s pretty hard to achieve. But I believe every student who walks into my classroom quietly, and sometimes not so quietly, hoped for that outcome. Look! Here I am! Can you see me? Sometimes I could, but teaching is so complex. There is so much to know about subject matter and grade-level competence, about human growth and development, school culture and home cultures, etc., etc., etc.; and the pressures for measurable achievement subordinate the dynamic relational aspects of teaching.

When I had the good fortune to join the Brookline Teacher Research Seminar, the process of conducting classroom research on language and literacy was liberating. I experienced myself once again as a novice—new to a unique perspective on learning and newly reinvigorated as a learner. In the context of my research questions, my students truly emerged as unique individuals, constantly declaring themselves in our classroom interactions. I also began to see myself—my teaching self and my thinking, feeling human self—more clearly. Most of the time the research process was exciting and energizing, but sometimes it was painful: I didn’t like what I saw in myself and my students. Awkward moments and missed opportunities simply don’t disappear when you’re stopping time through data collection.

So this is the power of teacher research. We do come to know our students deeply and more thoroughly. We do see them more completely, but what is most powerful is that we have the possibility of sustaining a deep and passionate involvement with our profession.

Rogers and Wetzel’s book provides a thoughtful and intellectually rich description of a year-long teacher-research study of the authors’ own teaching in two practicum-based elementary literacy classes. Two dominant threads run throughout the book: how the authors constructed learning experiences for their students that highlighted critical literacy in the context of teaching reading, and how they supported their students in using various discourse analysis strategies to make sense of their practicum experiences with students. Each chapter is rich with narratives and transcripts from the research, followed by specific tools and strategies for different approaches to and uses of discourse analysis. Methods instructors will find much to inform and challenge their approaches to literacy.
Teacher-Research Online Resources

http://journals.library.wisc.edu/index.php/networks. Housed at the University of Wisconsin, NETWORKS: An Online Journal for Teacher Research is a formal, electronic network for sharing and publishing teacher research. The website includes articles about teacher research PreK–university, published twice each year (downloadable as PDF files), as well as reviews of professional books. The journal is free, although registration is required. The site also provides a space for communication with others about teacher research. It has an international advisory and editing board and calls itself the first of such websites.

http://education.ucdavis.edu/cress-center. The Cress Teacher Resource Program at the University of California, Davis offers year-long seminars for teachers interested in conducting systematic research in their own classrooms or schools. Now in its twelfth year, the program supports a regional network of teacher research groups, each facilitated by an experienced teacher researcher; the groups support teachers of all grade levels and from all disciplines.

http://www.uea.ac.uk/edu/ddncl/ar.html. ‘Do Different’ Norfolk: A Networked Learning Community, sponsored in part by the University of East Anglia. This link includes a definition and brief history of action research along with links to various articles about action research.

http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/carnnew/index.php. CARN (Collaborative Action Research Network), based in the UK, sponsors a refereed journal, a blog, and a series of conferences/study days on action research.

http://oldweb.madison.k12.wi.us/sod/car/carhomepage.html. The Madison, Wisconsin, school district created this resource page for teachers engaged in action research. In addition, the site includes archives of sample action research projects.


http://actionresearch.altec.org/. This free website, sponsored by the University of Kansas, provides an online tool for teachers wishing to conduct action research projects and makes it possible for teacher-researchers to share their work with others.

http://gse.gmu.edu/research/tr/. This user-friendly site sponsored by George Mason University provides an overview and definition of teacher research, links to research about teacher research, and suggestions for getting a teacher research group started.

http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/programs/tic?x-t=about.view. The National Writing Project has an extensive array of supports for action research, including periodicals and professional texts as well as Web resources for teacher inquiry groups.

http://www.essentialschools.org/resources/72. The Coalition of Essential Schools offers a clear explanation of the concepts involved in teacher inquiry. The foundational information is very useful as a starting point.

http://www.fcps.edu/pla/opp/tr/. Fairfax County Schools, just outside the Washington, DC, area, provides a clear definition of teacher inquiry and how it contributes to student learning.

http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/actionresearch/arhome.htm. This website from Plymouth University in England includes detailed support for teachers interested in conducting teacher research, including narrative approaches, quantitative, qualitative, and evaluation studies.
classes. Language researchers will appreciate the detailed and sophisticated treatment of discourse analysis, narrative analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, and collaborative/longitudinal teacher research. Teachers at all levels will appreciate the insights into three approaches to critical literacy: a genre approach (linguistic structures of the dominant discourses), a multiliteracies approach (expanding forms of literacy to include digital technology and global communication networks), and a social justice approach (focused on critical analysis that leads to social action).


This book, updated from the 2003 edition, offers teacher-tested paths in classroom inquiry. Using the metaphor of a journey, the authors lay out specific details about developing a question or wondering, creating a plan, gathering data, analyzing the findings, and then extending the learning through the write-up and sharing of the inquiry. The authors' steps of data analysis—describing the data, making sense of the data (by using some data analysis strategies), interpreting the data, and finally finding implications—offer a concrete procedure that both new and experienced teacher-researchers can use. The first-year teachers in the book appreciated the authors' perspective that strong questions emerge out of the complexities of the teacher's work and real-world dilemmas. The authors offer eight passions (a child, curriculum, content knowledge, strategies, beliefs about practice, personal identity, social justice, and context) that can lead to a question. Identifying with these passions helped our novice teachers choose a question that was important to their practices. The accompanying Facilitator's Guide (2009) offers activities and protocols that can be used for each chapter in the book.


As John Donne wrote, “No man is an island.” Swanson's guide charts a course for educators who wish to break away from the isolation of their own classrooms. Teacher-researchers who follow her advice will learn to curate, reflect upon, and contribute to the wealth of best teaching practices available on the Web. For each step in the process, Swanson offers advice on specific Web tools and strategies for making teacher research more of a social and collaborative experience. Each chapter in her book begins and ends with real-life examples of educators who improved their practices by taking their professional learning into the digital age. (Since publication, Google has announced that Reader—a key tool in the book—will soon be obsolete; try Feedly instead.)

Apps and Web Tools for Teacher-Researchers

Notability: This affordable ($1.99) iPad app from Ginger Labs has many powerful features, but the one that may be most useful for gathering research data is the ability to simultaneously record audio while taking notes. Type notes or jot them with a stylus. When reviewing the notes, simply tap a word to hear the linked audio recording.

ClassCharts.com: This classroom management tool works on any Internet-enabled device and allows teachers to quickly record data on a virtual seating chart, which can be personalized with student photos and other information. Although originally intended for collecting data about behaviors, the customizable features make this free Web tool very flexible.

Google Forms: Teachers can create their own template for classroom observation or modify one that they find in the Google Docs Template Gallery for an organized data collection tool. The forms allow teachers to input blocks of text or select from predetermined options, such as check boxes.

Classic Books for Teacher-Researchers


A landmark text, Gymn at Wrk provides rich examples of the power of close study of young children engaged in learning
and using language. Connected to Charles Reed's interests in phonology, Bissex's work illuminates the developmental process of learning phonology and orthography and the connections between surface structures and deep structures in language. Her work helps us move away from a correct/incorrect view of spelling to an appreciation for what we can learn from students' spelling “mistakes.”


The first of several teacher-research books about her classroom, *The Languages of Learning* documents the way Gallas's students used many forms of communication to learn about their world. Using ethnographic data collection strategies along with the support of a thriving teacher-research group, Gallas helps to affirm the significance of teacher voices in the research literature about learning and curriculum.


Donald Graves's foundational text offers rich insights into the connections between reading and writing, the significance of writing viewed as a process, and the importance of studying educational issues in classroom contexts. Graves shares detailed descriptions of teachers and children engaged in the process of writing and in learning about writing as a process. The rich classroom details in this book have informed teachers and teacher researchers for two decades.


This text provides specific information on the structure of research craft. Teachers talk about taking better notes, asking themselves harder questions, and reflecting on possible outcomes, and find that they have much to gain from their students when they commit themselves to an inquiry stance and are willing to share what they have learned.


Vivian Paley's work, building on the work of Piaget, Duckworth, and Dewey, shows us how children try on the world by engaging with it. Studying her kindergarteners closely, over extended periods of time, Paley illuminates the way teachers grow as a result of careful reflection on thoughtful observations of classroom experiences.


The authors have expanded their work from *The Art of Classroom Inquiry* and offer new insights into the strategies and benefits of teacher research. The teacher narratives included in the book showcase various ways that teachers have used research into their...
own practices to inform curriculum and better understand the learning process.


This classic text includes Stenhouse’s statement that teachers should be at the center of curriculum development and educational research. Stenhouse defines action research as systematic and intentional study of one’s practice, with the intent to critically examine and ultimately change what happens in classrooms, as well as the forces outside classrooms that impact teaching and learning.

See also:

**Spotlight on a Teacher Study Group**
**Marie LeJeune and Tracy L. Smiles**

The Willamette Valley Global Literacy Community (focused on engagement with content and teacher research through international children’s and adolescent literature) began two years ago with a small cadre of four teachers and two university professors interested in implementing global literature into content-area teaching. We began with a small grant from Worlds of Words (www.wowlit.org) at the University of Arizona. We meet periodically, share book talks and resources, brainstorm teaching ideas, and reflect on our process and what it means to embrace a “curriculum that is international” (Short, 2003). Perhaps the most powerful piece of professional development for this group has been writing about our teacher-research studies for professional publication. Considering our focus on global and international literature and teacher research into best practice, the online resources through the Worlds of Words Collection—their blog, book reviews, and online journals—have been a steady source of professional inspiration and ideas for our small group.

**Reference**

See also:

**St. Louis Book Review Group:** Kathryn Mitchell Pierce (Editor), Cathy Beck, Phyllis Cook, Shonna Crawford, Laurie Finkenkeller, Carol Gilles, Dana Humphrey, Dick Koblitz, Susie Morice, Shannon Parker, Joanne Smith, Yang Wang.
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