



Unplayed Tapes: A Personal History of Collaborative Teacher Research. Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2000. 300 pp.

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This is a researcher's research book, full of all the detail about the issues, problems, and heartaches of doing good work honestly. The epigraph is from John Dewey, who reminds us that "our task is to reshape our traditions so we pass them on to future generations in more usable form." Thus begins the conversation between these two authors. The subject is teacher research, and how to tell the story of the process as well as the product in a constructive and useful manner. Throughout the book the authors weave their voices in and out of their own and each other's stories and project, and we all become learners. The goal is to offer their version of knowledge generated by fully empowered teacher inquirers.

The organization of the book is based on a series of private conversations, the unplayed tapes, of how the authors sought to do research together. Fishman is the university professor (of undergraduates) who will be observed, and McCarthy is the university professor and researcher. The class under observation was Fishman's initial intellectual home, an Introduction to Philosophy class. He was also very involved in the Writing Across the Curriculum movement. McCarthy's training is in the Teaching of English and Composition. She is a social scientist by training. Each begins with a clear understanding of what the research will be about. As their understandings unravel and they begin to confront and contest each other's foundational learning, they also begin to build a different reading of the work.

McCarthy is from the social-science tradition of research--she follows Stenhouse's view of practitioner inquiry as analytic, academic, and data-oriented. Fishman follows Berthoff's view of practitioner-inquiry as narrative, personal, and teacher-centered. The core of the book centers on their attempts to understand each other's positions, and to find a way to incorporate both. But that is only the beginning of the tale: Throughout the book you see their growth and change, the honesty of their struggle, and how they push and pull each other into new areas.

Chapters, about coconstructing each article that they write together, provide detailed explorations of their roles as researcher and researched, and of their slow movement into collaboration. Reprints of four articles, based on their collaborative work, follow the chapters. In the context of their work they address important issues within the teacher research movement. On the one side are teachers who feel that some research presented in an academic voice is too far removed from the everyday concerns of teachers, and does



not involve the researcher and their personal motives. On the other hand, some academics feel that some teacher research is more story than data, and insufficiently connected to broader intellectual social issues. The authors try to address both positions, and create some middle ground which works with the strength of this emerging paradigm for research.

One of the reasons for their personal history of teacher research involves the insider-outsider collaboration, which they feel leaves many ambivalent within the movement. Issues of power and voice within the data are contested from the beginning of their collaboration and reflect the struggle to protect the (usually) K-12 teacher, to generate research questions along with the university researcher, and to learn research skills to carry on work after the researcher leaves. In this case, both persons are high-status university professors, though the struggle, set in chapter 2, clearly reflects the same issues of power over voice. Who decides what is important to observe, and who decides what to say about it? Their slow and deliberate working out of these issues reflects a great deal of knowledge about research and teacher research in particular. The writing up of the data is another contested field within the research, and Fishman and McCarthy have independent and very different initial views of how research should be written up. Should it be personal and narrative, or dispassionate and academic? Their compromise and subsequent publications illustrate the best of collaboration.

As a teacher-researcher collaborator myself it was refreshing and illuminating to read their work. Their struggles are sometimes fierce and other times contemplative, but full of integrity and honesty to each other. They think about and work over each other's work, and then meet and work it over again. McCarthy's shock at discovering just how Fishman teaches, and his basic questions about the nature of his subject matter called Philosophy, begins their serious dialogue on the nature of teaching and what you need to know to do it. How can you observe what you do not understand? Thus the reflexivity of teacher research done collaboratively stands out--when you have a question about the data, you ask the researched.

This is a study of research on teaching, but only on one level. More significantly, it is a study about how people come together to coconstruct the nature of reality in a classroom. It will be useful to experienced researchers as well as graduate classes on research, particularly teacher research, to help students and teachers better tease out the full meaning of collaboration in research. All in all, a wonderful book, beautifully and evocatively written and full of the authors' dialogue and, ultimately, their products.

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