



Inside City Schools: Investigating Literacy in Multicultural Classrooms. Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Elizabeth Radin Simons, Julie Shalhope Kalnin, Alex Casareno, and the M-Class Teams. New York: Teachers College Press, 1999. 267 pp.

BRENDA J. KENNEDY

National-Louis University

bken@chicago1.nl.edu

Inside City Schools: Investigating Literacy in Multicultural Classrooms is a must read for teachers and researchers struggling to make a positive difference for the students in the ethnically and academically diverse classrooms of urban America. At a time when many teachers grapple with defining multiculturalism and diversity, the teacher researchers and university faculty who authored this book address, head-on, the real issues that permeate inner-city classrooms across the United States. Some of these issues include curriculum, student motivation, self-esteem, and social justice. The purpose of the study conducted by the Multicultural Collaborative for Literacy and Secondary Schools (the M-Class Project) was to allow the 24 classroom teachers from Chicago, Boston, New Orleans, and the San Francisco Bay Area to model ways of exploring their practice and to provide findings for other teachers, in urban settings like themselves, who work against all odds to prepare their diverse students to succeed in America's pluralistic society.

This truly collaborative book is written by four university researchers through the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at the University of California in Berkeley and the 24 teacher researchers. It is divided into five parts, which makes it easily readable by a teacher or researcher. Part 1 describes the M-Class Project and its approach to teacher research. It tells how the 24 English and social studies teachers from the 21 schools were selected. This section includes dialogue from the discussions held at the individual site meetings in the four cities during the 1992–93 school year when the teachers shaped their questions and conducted their research. This part discusses problems specific to the teacher researchers regarding the availability of materials and time to record data. It also describes the modifications the teachers had to make to the university research models presented to them in literature they were assigned to read. In addition, this section describes how the teacher researchers themselves were simultaneously studied by the university researchers as they conducted their own studies.

In parts 2 through 4, the heart of the book, the teacher researchers tell poignant stories of what happened when they made societal issues such as racism, slavery, and social justice explicit components of their curricula as they investigated issues of learning and literacy particular to the diverse groups of students in the multicultural settings of their eighth through tenth grade classrooms. The chapters in this section are divided according to the



themes that emerged from the teachers' own research questions and concerns. Through glimpses of personal introspection and reflection, classroom discussions, student and teacher journals, student work, and interviews, the teachers' candid descriptions of their own learning allows us to feel their pain, anguish, confusion, and triumph as they transformed their own teaching and the thinking of their students. Their honesty is quite revealing, especially when they encountered difficult and uncomfortable situations.

Part 5 discusses the implications the research presented by these teachers has for the educational community in general. To quote from the book, "The M-Class teachers show in clear and specific terms what can be done—not in the 'best' of schools, but in those often troubled by social ills and institutional weaknesses" (p. 221). A major plus gained from this research is that it shows ways in which teachers of all ethnic groups can teach all students in culturally relevant ways. Another plus is that the teachers' names and schools are given in the text, allowing interested individuals opportunities to seek out those teachers to begin conversations about making a positive difference for other students in inner-city classrooms.

Ultimately, I would like to know more about how the teachers were able to work through the difficult and uncomfortable situations that emerged during the research. Did the research network provide on-the-spot support for the teachers, or did they have to hold their concerns until the next site meeting?

© 2000 American Anthropological Association. This review is cited in the December 2000 issue of *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (31:4).