

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION



### *Telos* and Educational Research

Embedded in virtually any perspective on education is an assumption about the ideal society and citizen. Wertsch (2000) has used the term *telos* to describe the notion of an optimal developmental outcome that provides the motive for the ways in which people are socialized within a culture. In schools, the process of moving toward that ideal is a function of many factors: what traditions provide the overall goals for the institution of the school; how individual schools work within those traditions; what broader societal goals contribute to the purposes and processes of education; what disciplinary traditions suggest appropriate ways of teaching and learning in particular subjects; how community values and priorities affect conceptions of schooling; how more local social groups—departments, teams, grade-level teachers, factions, and so on—construct their own ideals within these larger contexts; and how individual teachers work so as to respect the views of other stakeholders while striving to develop more effective approaches to teaching and more satisfying ways of being a teacher. And the list could go on.

Each of these factors suggests the need to consider the role of culture in teaching and learning, a topic we have explored in previous editorials (Smagorinsky & Smith, 2000; Smith & Smagorinsky, 1999a, 1999b). By culture we refer to the recurring social conventions, tools, and practices that provide groups of people with cohesion and common purpose. The notion of a *telos* for schooling is important because it provides the ideal toward which all are expected to gravitate. Critics over the years have provided different conceptions of the ideal student, for example, Ravitch and Finn's (1987) assumption of the need for factual knowledge and Noddings's (1993) argument that ultimately, students should develop a disposition to care. Conceptions of how students should develop suggest ways of being a teacher, including both classroom practice (lecturing for facts, constructing activities to promote caring) and paths for improving practice (reading literary criticism to fortify lectures, keeping a teaching log to reflect on relationships). These in turn suggest ways of being a teacher educator (focusing on subject matter knowledge,

focusing on ways to develop and maintain classroom relationships).

The notion of *telos* provides a provocative lens for viewing the articles in this issue. In the first article, Joanne Larson and Maryrita Maier analyze how Maier engaged in modeling her writing. That modeling helped establish the *telos* for writing time. That is, Maier exemplified what it means to be a writer in her classroom. But Maier did far more than model. The careful analysis of participant roles documents how Maier and her students took up the roles of teacher, author, co-author, and overhearer. Through these roles students engaged in what Lave and Wenger (1991) call *legitimate peripheral participation*, ultimately taking up Maier's practices as they moved to their own writing and their work with their classmates.

Francine Falk-Ross investigates a different kind of problem in her study. As the speech pathologist in an elementary school, she was concerned with helping students with speech disorders learn and perform within the conventions of normal classroom interaction. Her study is an examination of her efforts to help one fourth-grade boy join the trajectory of his classmates. Instead of documenting how a *telos* is constructed, Falk-Ross's inquiry began with her recognition that the optimal development suggested in the context of a resource room is at odds with what obtains in a classroom. She describes her efforts to help Henry, the fourth-grade boy, become a participant in the class (and all that that implies). To do so, she intervened in an experimental way, establishing a collaborative relationship

with the teacher and using pull-in, pull-aside, and pull-out support strategies in her work with Henry.

In their study, Diane Stephens, Gail Boldt, Candace Clark, Jan Gaffney, Judith Shelton, Jennifer Story, and Janelle Weinzierl focus on four teachers and the way they ground their beliefs about teaching reading following their involvement in a Reading Recovery institute. Stephens and her colleagues draw on Peirce to argue that only beliefs grounded in inquiry can be generative. This emphasis on inquiry suggests a path of development for teachers. But even more compelling for Stephens and her colleagues is what the importance of inquiry implies about being a teacher educator. Their work establishes that research can provide a new vision of the future and in so doing suggest new paths of development.

One feature of traditional research reports is a section on implications. This section is often understood as being designed to offer specific suggestions about how teachers can enact research findings. But as studies become more highly contextualized, such suggestions become more difficult to offer unproblematically. On the other hand, we think that the notions of what it means to be a writer, a student, a teacher, and a teacher educator that inform the articles in this issue, grounded as they are by data that have been carefully collected and analyzed, will make important contributions to the continuing professional dialogues about the direction that education should be taking.

P. S. M.W.S.

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