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Becoming Research Collaborators in Urban Classrooms: Ethical Considerations, Contradictions and New Understandings

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Abstract: In this paper, we outline several ethical considerations that arose in our collaborative research in urban classrooms. Specifically, Beth discusses the concerns she had as a beginning researcher with regard to the demands she placed on Ian, the subject of her research, during his first year of teaching. Together, we then discuss a sensitive issue that emerged in the data analysis and the implications of the decision to write about the issue. Finally, Beth outlines an argument for the misalignment between the theoretical framework used in her study and Ian's roles and participation in the research process. Rather than offering suggestions, we envision that this paper will spark questions for other qualitative researchers who plan to collaborate with practitioners.

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1. Introduction

In this paper, we outline several ethical considerations that arose in our collaborative research in urban classrooms. Specifically, Beth discusses the concerns she had as a beginning researcher with regard to the demands she placed on Ian, the subject of her research, during his first year of teaching. Together, we then discuss a sensitive issue that emerged in the data analysis and the implications of the decision to write about the issue. Finally, Beth outlines an argument for the misalignment between the theoretical framework used in her study and Ian's roles and participation in the research process. Rather than offering suggestions, we envision that this paper will raise questions for other qualitative researchers who plan to collaborate with practitioners. [1]

Both the genre and organization of this paper differ from a traditional research article, which would only foreground the researcher's voice. Rather than only presenting Beth's voice and perspective, we determined that a more appropriate genre for one section of the paper was through the use of metalogue, a dialogue that accomplishes two goals. First, metalogue allows all authors to preserve their unique voices and elucidate their own constructions of phenomena (ROTH & TOBIN, 2002). Second, metalogue aptly reflects the dialogic nature of the subject

matter (ROTH, McROBBIE, & LUCAS, 1998); as we consider the reflexivity of our theoretical framework (the dialectic relation of structure and agency) and the importance of voice in our research, it behooves us to present our work in a similar vane. It is our intent that the metalogue will show readers the dialogic nature of our viewpoints, highlight contradictions, illustrate how we forged shared understandings about the issues, and raise further questions for those engaged in collaborative research. [2]

In the following section, Beth describes the philosophical viewpoints that inform her methodology as a qualitative researcher, the emergence of her research questions, and entry into the study site. It is against this backdrop that she then describes the ethical issues that arose; Ian's perspectives on these issues, most of which were not addressed during their collaborative research, will be considered through the metalogue that ensues. [3]

2. Becoming a Critical Ethnographer

After extensive thought, negotiation and reflection with my adviser, other professors and fellow doctoral students, I decided to study the transition between the student teaching experience and the first year teaching in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP). My interest was spawned by the teacher turnover statistics in the city, which indicated that only 52 percent of new teachers to the SDP for the 1999-2000 school year were still teaching there three years later (NEILD & SPIRIDAKIS, 2003). In addition, I was interested in exploring the experiences of White teachers that work in predominantly African American schools and how socioeconomic, racial and cultural differences affect interactions, teacher-student relationships, and student learning. [4]

My advisor introduced me to Ian STITH, a student in the university's science teacher preparation program who was finishing his yearlong student teaching experience and would soon begin his first year as a physics and math teacher. Another aspect was unique to Ian's situation was interesting from a research standpoint; Ian had spent a large portion of his student teaching experience coteaching (see ROTH & TOBIN, 2002; ROTH & TOBIN, 2005) classes with another student teacher—thus, I was interested to find out how he would fare in a traditional setting, teaching autonomously. My research questions focus on his agency as a beginning teacher; the questions were (a) What are the structural changes that Ian encounters as he transitions through various fields (i.e. student teaching at City High, first year of teaching at Leach Learning Academy)? (b) How does Ian use agency to find success as a new teacher? [5]

Although I hardly knew Ian, I developed my research questions and explained my interests and ideas to him. In line with what other individuals who knew Ian had claimed, I found him to be extremely laid-back and almost indifferent about the research. As I began to write my proposal, which included the problem and methodology, Ian and I saw each other regularly because of another research project we were jointly involved in. We spoke rarely, though, of my impending project. [6]

As I began to consider the methodology that would be used in the study, it became very important to me to solidify the intricacies of my identity as a qualitative researcher, which entailed some reflection on my own worldviews and how they fit into an established research paradigm. It was at this point that I became friendly with the Handbook of Qualitative Research (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2000) and began to question my ontological and epistemological leanings. Although the authors had constructed an organized table to delineate various issues in accordance to each paradigm, I found that my beliefs about research did not fit into one of their neatly compartmentalized categories. By and large I identified with the elements of constructivism, which assumes a relativist ontology and a transactional or subjectivist epistemology. However, the critical and transformative nature of my work in urban schools led me to consider the salience of several elements of critical theory. In essence, the issues, beliefs and understandings tied into these two paradigms became an important way for me to continually consider the "big picture" behind my study—what I believed about reality, knowledge, how one gains knowledge and how new knowledge is represented. [7]

Because a dialectical and dialogical methodology was appropriate for the study, and the theoretical framework focused on the dialectal relationship between structure (specifically, the schemas and practices in a given field) and agency, or one's power to access and appropriate resources (SEWELL, 1992), I planned to incorporate various voices into the research in an effort to create a sense of dialogue into the presentation. To do this, I intended that Ian would be involved in the collection of data and the analysis. Because of a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant[1], I was also able to hire two student researchers from Ian's class to help add to and analyze the data. [8]

Ian's school year began and I immediately embarked on my data collection. After we selected a class to study, I collected video footage of Ian teaching the class two times per week. I conducted several interviews with Ian, the student researchers, and other members of Ian's class at many stages. A few times throughout the study, Ian, his students and I participated in cogenerative dialogues (ROTH & TOBIN, 2002; LAVAN & BEERS, 2005), or forums in which individuals come together to discuss shared experiences and contradictions that occur and collectively generate future actions to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. Each of these cogenerative dialogues was videotaped and analyzed. Finally, I used artifacts such as the school's teacher handbook, school attendance and standardized assessment data, student work and Ian's journal, which he kept to document his experiences. [9]

It was at this point, however, that I began to worry about the implications of making specific demands on Ian's limited time, since I was convinced that his primary concern was merely surviving his first year of teaching. As ROTH (2004) notes, I was asking Ian for a gift—for his time, commitment and curiosity in thinking and talking about my research questions and my research interests. This

1 This research is supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. REC-0107022.

concern was compounded by Ian's professional situation—he was beginning his first year of teaching, a time in one's career that is filled with uncertainty, frequent feelings of being unprepared, and general chaos. Yet most first-year teachers get to experience this chaos in the confines of their own classrooms, without a researcher there to observe, record and analyze. [10]

The focal point of the research was also directly related to Ian's teaching practices, which implied that his personal actions would be the basis for many aspects of my dissertation. I cannot imagine the added anxiety that this would have caused me as a beginning teacher; however, I never stopped to ask Ian how he felt about his participation in the study. Because he never outwardly questioned anything throughout the research process, I chose to ignore any possibility for conflict that Ian's perspectives might incite. Thus, although I claimed to include Ian's voice in the study, I chose not to ask many of the salient questions that would clearly illuminate Ian's perspective as both a participant and a collaborator in the study. Although in hindsight, in the following section, I ask some of the salient questions that were neglected throughout the stages of my dissertation study. In the next section, we address issues that arose using metalogue. As we discuss our different perspectives, we seek mutual understanding of these issues and how they impacted our work together. [11]

3. Reconsidering the Issues: Seeking Understanding through Metalogue

Beth: At the beginning of the school year, actually, when I first came and met with you (I believe it was the first week of school), I started to accept my role as an intruder in your classroom. I think that my anxiety in this realm was mediated by our relationship—even though I considered us to be friendly, our conversations rarely went beyond work-related topics, such as when I was coming in to visit, specific pedagogical concerns, and talk about particular students in the class. Since we were in the very early stages of a friendship, I felt uncomfortable asking you extensively about how you felt about the project and the implications of my proposed methodology—especially the time commitment that would be involved. I often thought that you felt uncomfortable being direct with me about aspects of the project that you disliked, or found intrusive. Also, I felt like our interactions were more formal and rigid, which is typical of a working relationship, yet not necessarily conducive to asking someone about more personal things, like feelings. [12]

Ian: I can honestly say I did not feel like you were an intruder and a distraction to me. Rather I viewed you as someone who understood my situation and would offer me valid criticism regularly. Having worked with you through the summer I could tell that you and I had similar attitudes toward teaching and research and therefore I looked forward to having someone else to provide feedback. Similar to coteaching, on the days you were present I had another individual present who could analyze my work from a different perspective. [13]

Your presence in my class did raise concerns for me in regard to the students. Unlike me, the students did not have experience being video taped and interviewed during school. Although no significant problems arose there were a few instances of students who did not want to be videotaped. Being a new teacher, I was extremely concerned with the students' perception of my class and how every aspect of it would effect their enjoyment. [14]

As you said I probably did seem indifferent to the research project but I think an attitude of acceptance can seem like indifference sometimes. I did not feel threatened or intimidated because I had a basic understanding of the process you would be taking. Having been observed extensively as a student teacher, I was used to ignoring outsiders and concentrating on my own teaching. In addition as I have said I saw the research as a great opportunity for me to learn more about my own teaching. Finally I think our relationship did seem rigid at first mostly because of the time constraints and both our attitudes towards work. I feel like when it comes to work I would rather just do it and leave the relationship to be built later. This strategy is not always successful but under time restraints I slip easily into that mode. [15]

Beth: I suppose having researchers in your classroom as a student teacher is an important point, in essence the "observer" or the person holding a camera becomes part of the structure that you quickly learn to work around. It is interesting that you mention the students—as this paper focuses on my concerns about you and your agency as a new teacher, I have lost sight of the students' agency, and how their perspectives on being observed and researched is another topic of conversation that warrants more attention. [16]

What advice, if any, would you give to other new teachers embarking on classroom research with university personnel? Are there conversations that teachers need to have with students as well? Do you think others may not be so easy going? And finally, to what extent do you think teachers and researchers that collaborate need to have similar philosophies about teaching and learning, since you mention that as one of the aspects that made you feel comfortable with our research. [17]

Ian: In dealing with other teachers over the last few years, I have seen an overall aversion to observation and research in urban schools. This aversion is counterproductive in varying ways. First, if a teacher is not open to criticism from fellow teachers, one can assume any criticism produced by the students will be disregarded as well. Ignoring student voice retards the agency and capital building process. Second, I have learned that teaching is not a passive act; teachers need to move outside their comfort zones and analyze the job they are doing. Going into teaching with the attitude that you may "fail" at certain points, but that it is okay, is vitally important. The same goes for student teaching, there will be times that lessons are terrible; this is not a reflection on one's potential for success as a teacher, but rather a form of research into good teaching. Therefore, student teachers should not be observed sporadically and with a judging eye—instead, observation by others should be regular and done with a

research mentality. Teachers who begin their careers with a research mentality will continue to evaluate themselves in the future. Lastly, teachers who do not see the value in observation seem to distrust the university system. Many teachers I have encountered express distain towards teacher educators who "try to tell them how to do their job." Administrators, who often make curricular decisions without teacher input, also contribute to teachers' disparagement. It is vicious cycle in some cases of teachers losing control of their curriculum and teachers viewing their work as simply a job. [18]

I think the role of student researchers is vitally important and incorporating their goals into the research is necessary to achieve truly meaningful conclusions. In addition, I do not think that teachers and researcher necessarily need to agree on teaching philosophies, although it does make it feel more comfortable. Criticism from a professional in the field that you respect is valuable regardless of specifics. How would you approach working with someone whose ideas clash with your own? [19]

Beth: That is a good point, Ian, and is highly relevant to another set of research I am involved with in Delaware. There, they have instituted coteaching, yet there are some folks who do not "buy in" to the model, which makes it difficult for reflective discussions to take place. Although you and I agree on some aspects of teaching, such as the importance of being a researcher of your own teaching and utilizing student voice to inform practice, I am sure that there are some aspects that we are at odds with. For instance, although I understood your beliefs surrounding classroom management, which entailed ignoring students who are not participating in given activity, it was often difficult for me to be around. My schemas surrounding classroom management, which are dialectically related to my practices (SEWELL, 1992), are aligned with the traditional notion that students should be quiet and should not disrupt other individuals in the class. I think that these schemas are heavily dictated by my experience as a student in traditional, teacher-centered classrooms and any direct instruction I received in college about what is "right" as far as classroom management. Oddly enough, as a teacher educator, I constantly ask my preservice teachers to question these tacit rules about keeping students controlled and quiet and would rather see them focus on students that want to learn. This is a conundrum that I think about a lot as I am observing other teachers—part of me wants the teacher to address such students, and part of me does not. However, this is a relatively small issue, I suppose that if I was being asked to collaborate on a research project as an urban teacher, I may have many of the concerns that you addressed, especially if I hadn't been trained in a program with strong undercurrents of research like you had. [20]

Perhaps that is precisely the issue—my schemas about what the first year of teaching is, such as being very anxious and unwelcoming of visitors, is mediated by my own experience as a first-year teacher; I was not trained at a research university and did not have people in and out of my classroom during student teaching, like you did. Had we shared the same schemas I might not have felt so bad about taking up your time and for, in some ways, forcing you to take part in

my research. But what about the extra time involved in interviews, cogenerative dialogues, surveys, work with student researchers, journal writing, the research seminars that we attended weekly—were these acceptable endeavors because you were "on board" with research in urban classrooms? What about new teachers that do not have research in their blood like you did? [21]

Ian: I think your last question is precisely the point. What if I had not gone through teacher education at University of Pennsylvania and worked with Ken Tobin? Would I have been so comfortable with you coming into my class? Would I be working on this paper today? One can assume that I would not be as committed to research as I am today if not for my work at Penn. I believe that all teachers should be taught to welcome researchers into their classroom, even if they themselves do not want to do research. For example, my colleagues from my masters program are not currently conducting research but would entertain the possibility because of their student teaching experiences in which they worked with researchers. [22]

Of course, as with any research, once the data are gathered and the analysis begins questions can arise. Specifically, is it the responsibility of the researcher to include the teacher in the process and if so on what level? In our case we often discussed your findings and I even had the opportunity to read your work before submittal, but if you and I had not worked together previously this may not have happened. As the teacher I wanted to know what your analysis was—I valued your opinion as a professional. But this may not be the case with all teachers. I saw the research as exactly that and not what some teachers may see it—as passing judgment. Therefore I felt included and important to the research process, which is what I wanted. [23]

Beth: This is a big issue if we think about the questions that arise when doing collaborative research, especially within university researcher—school practitioner partnerships. For instance, when we get to the data analysis phase, and beyond, as the research is written up, whose voice is privileged? If it is like our case, in which I was responsible for the output (the dissertation), does the onus fall only on me, and if so, does that exclude your voice? This is important because, as I mentioned earlier, I designed the study to include multiple voices, and thus, varied constructions of the phenomena observed. However, conventionality presides in dissertation writing and as such, my voice became the important one. Do we just write this off and say, well, if it were a peer-reviewed article or a book, your voice would have been highlighted more? [24]

Another important issue emerged during the writing phase when I felt uncomfortable telling certain stories because they might portray you unfavorably or put you in an awkward position. For instance, I was conflicted about the situation that emerged from your post-observation conference with Dr. Smith[2], the principal at LLA, where you did your first year of teaching. [25]

2 Pseudonyms are used for the principal and the school where Ian worked.

Ian: That particular situation, as you said, could have turned out very badly for me and therefore it was a concern, but first I should explain what happened. The situation involved a directive from Mr. Smith that the math teachers who were working with the eleventh grade students should concentrate their efforts on preparation for the PSSA. The PSSA is the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, which all eleventh grade students must take; it is a standards-based test that is used not only to gauge students' individual performance in reading, writing and math, but also a means to evaluate whole school performance. Each year, schools are ranked according to their overall performance on the test by categorizing students as advanced, proficient, basic or below basic. Schools are required to meet basic performance levels and/or show progress each year. [26]

At LLA there was a crisis with regard to the students' performance on the PSSA. If 10 percent of students were not to move up one performance level (for example, from basic to proficient), the school would be reorganized by the district. The crisis was not limited to LLA; because of the district-wide struggles for schools to achieve "proficiency," all teachers were required to follow a test prep book starting two months before the test. In the case of LLA it was taken a step further. During a post-observation meeting with my principal, I was instructed to choose a group of students in each class who I would concentrate my efforts on until the test. These students were to be chosen by me based on who I felt had the potential to move up a performance level on the test. This instruction was difficult for me to follow, as naturally if I only concentrated on certain students I have to ignore others. I chose then to ignore the mandate. This was a personal choice for me based on the following logic. Sadly I knew that because of the time restraints the principal was under he would not check to see how I was proceeding. Also I honestly didn't think focusing on a particular group of students was ethical or reasonable considering the class size of 30 students. All of my students needed help to complete their work and I could not leave 20 students behind in each class and even dream of finishing the material I intended to complete. Finally, I honestly didn't think my extra effort would make any significant change with those students since they already were taken out of another class for extra help. I was not sure I made to correct decision, but looking back now I realize I should not have been surprised by a sudden directive coming down since I now know that this practice is commonplace in the district. [27]

Beth: This story was particularly salient because of some of the things you were trying to accomplish in your eleventh grade math class—many of which did not align with the extensive use of the test preparation booklets. You were getting kids excited about math by letting them experience it "in a science way"; many of these students never believed they could be successful in math at all, but were actually understanding the concepts because of the labs and demonstrations they were doing and the ways in which you made the lessons extremely hands-on. The mandate to focus on the test preparation booklets contradicted the culture of your class, which was the first issue. Even after his mandate, I was glad to see that you were able to continue to focus on the science-like activities, yet incorporate the test preparation work as a supplement. However, the bigger issue was the mandate altogether—even if selecting a small group of students to focus

on is the norm in failing schools, to what extent does the public at large know about this? If a teacher focuses her energy on a small group of students, then that implies that the others in the class lose out—on her time, interest and increased opportunities for success. What would I say if my son or daughter was not in the group that was being "coached?" How outraged would parents (and others in the community) be if they knew that certain students were being selected? [28]

As I was writing the dissertation, this was an extremely important story to tell, mostly because of the first reason I described above. You had created an innovative, engaging culture in your math classes by doing the science-like activities, but because of Dr. Smith's expectations, in some ways the culture had to be changed. Although I was mildly concerned about the repercussion of your telling the story, I realized how few people would read my dissertation, and was convinced that word would not get back to the principal, meaning that no one would consider you a "snitch." However, as you and I talk about writing a book based on your transition into teaching, how will we deal with this? Is it "safe" to write about this, or does that put your career as a teacher in this particular district in jeopardy? Because you no longer work at LLA, this is less of an issue. However, on a broader scale, where do our responsibilities lie as educators who believe that all students have a right to a rigorous education, even in the few months before a state-mandated standardized test? This is something we as researchers and practitioners must discuss, especially as tests become more important to the future of our students and the schools they attend. Furthermore, as researchers, we need to consider the ethics that drive our decisions to tell or not tell certain stories. [29]

4. Enhancing Understandings: Rethinking Voice and Agency in Collaborative Research

In this concluding section, I (Beth) summarize the ethical issues that are mentioned in the metalogue and offer a cogent argument for the misalignment between the theoretical framework in my dissertation and the actual research process and final presentation that resulted. From these claims, we offer several implications that other researcher-practitioner collaborations should consider when embarking on critical, potentially transformative studies in urban education. [30]

4.1 Beth's argument for contradicting Ian's agency and voice

Although the concepts of agency and voice were central aspects of the study, I contend that in retrospect, three contradictions arose in which Ian's agency and voice were theoretically truncated: through the monopolization of his time, by neglecting to ask important questions regarding his feelings about the research and by excluding his voice in the final presentation of the research. It is important to clarify that I use SEWELL'S (1992) definition of agency as one's power to act, or one's ability to access and appropriate resources. He argues that agency is dialectically related to structure, or the schemas and resources that unfold in

given fields to "empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by social action" (1992, p.13). [31]

First, throughout the study, Ian's time as a first year teacher was often compromised by his participation in aspects of the data collection and analysis. If one's practices can structure a given field and the structures within the field can enable and constrain individual agency, then it is feasible that my practices at times constrained Ian's agency—especially with regard to time. Additionally, time can be considered a structure (ROTH, TOBIN, & RITCHIE, submitted) with which agents must contend. For instance, I often asked Ian to spend an hour or so after school with me for interviews. During these interviews, he usually turned students away for tutoring or make-up tests because of my visit. Although Ian refutes that I put undue pressure on him to take part in the study, to welcome research into his classroom, and to spend additional time doing data collection and analysis activities, any opportunities in which I diminished Ian's ability to access and appropriate resources (such as time), his agency was theoretically truncated. Thus, any time Ian spent discussing or working on my research took time away from the extensive planning, grading, reading, extra tutoring and other responsibilities that are often overwhelming for beginning teachers. Clearly, Ian claims throughout the metalogue that chose to participate in the research, which implies that his agency was not truncated; yet, one might question whether Ian was being completely honest. Also, had I not met Ian, someone who did not see the importance of classroom research might have gotten involved in my study; this individual may have truly been bothered by the extended time involved. [32]

Second, as I mentioned in the metalogue, throughout the research process I often neglected to ask critical questions with regard to how Ian felt about the research. As I review my claims about my theoretical framework in which I sought to incorporate various voices, and thus, varied constructions of observed phenomena, the fact that Ian and I did not engage in extensive discussions about the research questions or the plans for data collection and wrestle with some of the intricate dimensions of our philosophies on research, teaching and education in general shows that at times, my dissertation study did not completely feature his voice. Through the metalogue in this paper, we established that our limited friendship was a constraining factor in this respect. Had I felt more comfortable talking to Ian on other levels, early meetings in our research relationship might have yielded more extensive discussion and debate about the study. For instance, Ian and I could have thought through the research questions together or discussed the coherence and contradictions between our beliefs about teaching and research. Had Ian and I built extensive social capital before the research began or even early in the project, the direction of the study may have changed based on our conversations and his added comfort in questioning or second-guessing my decisions. [33]

Third, although voice was an important consideration in my methodology, Ian's voice did not appear directly in the final presentation of the study. Ian member-checked elements of the data such as interviews and cogenerative dialogues and read chapters for accuracy as they were written, but his story was still filtered

through my perspective. I could argue that the tradition attached to dissertation writing precluded his participation as a co-author in sections of the text, but this would probably be untrue. Even though we did not discuss it, I think that the faculty members on my dissertation committee would have welcomed my use of metalogue or other alternative approaches of writing, especially because they would have better preserved the individuality of our respective voices and differentiated between our perspectives. [34]

Overall, these three examples illustrate ways in which Ian's agency and voice were implicitly truncated throughout the research process. Our metalogue shows that Ian was not offended by any of these issues, rather he felt validated in his role in the research. In addition, because Ian's perspectives, claims and concerns as a stakeholder were apparent in the text, GUBA and LINCOLN'S (1989) criterion of "fairness" was validated. It is the minor contradictions mentioned above that are retrospectively evident between the concepts of structure and agency in the theoretical framework (SEWELL, 1992) and both Ian's roles as a participant/collaborator and his participation in the representation of the work that is salient here. [35]

Also, the issue that arose with regard to the standardized test raises further questions. As a researcher, I felt that it was important to include this story because it symbolized some of the atrocious practices that take place, but are generally unheard of, in urban schools. In some respects, just "reporting" the incident is powerful, as readers will find out about it, understand its implications, and work to transform such policies. At the same time, it is important to consider the individuals involved. Not only was Ian's career at stake, but also one might assume that the principal himself was directed to give the mandate. Thus, we must consider, question and discuss the ethical implications for various individuals in the study within the context of their positions in more macro spheres. [36]

4.2 Implications from our story

Throughout our work together, we have come one conclusion: collaborative research in urban schools between university researchers and practitioners is a challenging endeavor, even in situations like ours in which we share similar philosophies about teaching and research. This is undoubtedly a simple conclusion, but with it carries several implications and a call for further inquiry that questions and negotiates the roles and obligations of collaborative researchers, especially when issues of power and voice come into play. In this final section we describe two considerations that stem from our work: opportunities for voice and the impact of interpersonal relationships on collaborative research. [37]

Although positivist conventions of writing and representation generally dominate the pages of scholarly journals, researchers concerned with issues of reflexivity, voice and appropriate representation must question such traditional paradigms and consider ways that participants' voices can be better articulated. Although many feminist qualitative researchers have raised these same questions, we

must continue to question and negotiate the roles of participants and researchers, being careful not to exclude the former in many of the critical "decisions" typically made by researchers, such as formulating questions, investigating literature, considering appropriate methodologies for inquiry, and collecting and analyzing data. In our study, Ian's voice was represented in the text through the inclusion of his journal entries, extensive interviews and written narratives; however, he had little say in the decision-making process and the direction in which the research unfolded. [38]

Second, the value of relationships between the individuals involved in collaborative research projects cannot be underestimated. In our work, we found that critical, sometimes uncomfortable conversations were vital to furthering our understandings of teaching and learning in urban schools, and served as a means to "ratchet up" our research. Through the metalogue in this paper, and other conversations like it, we have improved our relationship, which has directly impacted the quality of our work together. We implore that others who collaborate on projects similar to ours find opportunities to talk about beliefs, expectations and levels of commitment before beginning large projects. These conversations need to continue throughout the research process, especially when ethical issues arise, such as the emergence of findings that have personal repercussions for those involved, as was the case with the standardized testing situation we discussed in the metalogue. [39]

We have both found that one of the fascinating aspect of critical ethnographic research in urban schools is what we learn about ourselves throughout the process—how everything about our identities affect not only the "answers" to our research questions, but the way we do research and discuss the new understandings we gain about teaching and learning. Through conversations in which we wrestle with our roles, practices and perspectives as researchers and the ethical conventions that guide them, we seek to make one element central: the transformative potential of our work for urban education, and for us, as educators who have the power to impact the lives as many. [40]

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