

in an ethnographic study she conducted. Using this experience and ethnographic theory, Chandler suggests that writing students can be understood as occupying positions analogous to ethnographic subjects.

Missing from this collection is any exploration of the multiple kinds of professional discourses one can locate in the academy or a sense that “academic discourse” is ever-evolving, intangible, and always-already subject to hybridization. I expected to find work informed, for instance, by Gloria Anzaldúa and I was quite surprised by this absence. Nonetheless, I would recommend this collection to anyone interested in the narratives we construct about who we become as we make our way in the academy and who our students become in our classrooms.

San Bernardino, California

“What about Rose?”: Using Teacher Research to Reverse School Failure, by Smokey Wilson. New York: Teachers College Press, 2007. 208 pp.

Reviewed by Jenn Fishman, University of Tennessee-Knoxville

In the present era of assessment and increasingly large-scale writing studies, anyone who wonders what teacher-researchers can contribute should read *“What about Rose?”: Using Teacher Research to Reverse School Failure*. Part professional memoir, part research narrative, and part how-to guide, Smokey Wilson’s contribution to the Teachers College Press Practitioner Inquiry series (ed. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytle) makes a compelling case for teacher research as “an agency for change.” Twenty years ago, when teacher-researchers were “just beginning to find [their] voices,” Dixie Goswami and Peter Stillman made a similar argument (v), and they invited readers of *Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change* “to consider the potential of classroom inquiry to improve the quality of education” (vi). Recognizing the “unmistakably political and polemical quality” of such claims, James Berlin heralded teacher research as a powerful movement with “the potential to become a revolutionary force in schooling” (3, 10). *“What about Rose?”* captures the revolution at work, although Wilson reminds us that education is not a battleground, and school change is not a victory to be won through agnostic engagement. Instead, practicing an irenic rhetoric, Wilson shows how education practitioners can address systemic problems from the ground up, one student-teacher interaction at a time.

For Wilson, the problems with the greatest immediacy are problems she finds closest to home: namely, schools' persistent failure to serve the adult learners and minority students whose stories anchor our own. Writing with more than forty years' experience in urban northern California community college classrooms, Wilson took her first faculty job not long after NCTE published *Research in Written Composition* (1963). More than a decade later, and despite a rush of new activity, Wilson was not the only one to critique the busy scene of writing researching. As Lee Odell wrote, "Little wonder that both experienced and prospective teachers express some dissatisfaction . . . at the suggestion that they read or, worse, actually conduct some research" (106). With Odell, Wilson observed a great divide between instruction and inquiry, and she witnessed first-hand the lack of reciprocity between universities and community colleges. Against a backdrop of pedagogies and policies designed to support students' right to their own language(s), Wilson also saw significant flaws in extant theories of intelligence, language, and culture, none of which helped teachers like herself work effectively across cultural differences in the classroom. Wondering in particular "why the remedial classes were almost always filled with African American students" (3), Wilson posed several questions that remain relevant today: "Why did some learners succeed while others continued old patterns?" and "What was the route from basic skills to academic literacy?" (3-4).

Talk, specifically the kind of talk that makes literacy contagious, lies at the heart of Wilson's answers (79), and "*What about Rose?*" traces the development of her argument, following the chronological progression of teacher research through getting started, finding a focus, collecting and analyzing artifacts, and writing it up. In chapters 1 and 2, Wilson recalls her own start, and she remembers Rose and Mark: "Similar students, different outcomes" (9). While both black basic writers struggled with school before coming to college, Rose made progress in Wilson's class, while Mark dropped out. Transcripts from their tutorials show how, for some students, writing can be an activity that bleeds the life out of speech (13), and conversations with Mark illustrate how language difference can foil even the most well-intentioned teachers. Describing the inadequacies of explanatory rubrics available at the time, Wilson identifies two main sources of school failure: scholars' failure to understand the factors that influence differences in student learning (14-19), and teachers' failure to communicate effectively with students like Mark, whose speech and silences boggled Wilson's own attempts at instruction (26-27).

The ensuing search for solutions takes Wilson to education psychology, leading her over time from models of intelligence deficit and economic deprivation (14-19) to early theories of cultural and linguistic difference (28-32) to Lev Vygotsky's work on cognition and learning. Published in English between 1962 and 1978, Vygotsky's major statements about the sociability

of education helped many teachers and researchers find their focus, and Wilson's readers will recognize how and why she, too, situated her work at the zone of proximal development. In practice, Wilson used audio and video to record "learning in situ" (53), and she used pragmatic theories of language to interpret her interactions with students. Trying to understand why Rose and Anthony changed as writers, while Mark and Kelly did not, Wilson arrived a turning point in her work. Recasting school failure as a problem rooted in miscommunication, chapters 3 and 4 recall her growing awareness of cultural difference as rhetorical differences in style and expectation that teachers and students can negotiate.

Chapters 5 and 6 depict the teacher-researcher in action, collecting data for case studies and pilot research. These chapters also show writing research at the advent of New Literacy Studies, when reading and writing were reconceived as social practices organized by the same power structures that college English was learning to deconstruct (73). Buoyed by these emergent concepts and critical frameworks, Wilson shifted her attention to three students: Darleen, Gloria, and Ruth. Listening to Darleen's audio reading journal, Wilson tracked her semester-long journey toward engagement and a felt sense that "knowledge is power," at least for people with access and opportunities to use it (69). And conferences with Gloria and Ruth helped Wilson distinguish which type of knowledge mattered most to many struggling writers: reading, reasoning skills, or the ability to hold smooth and focused conversations with teachers (81). Countering the conventional wisdom that yoked the three Rs—reading, reasoning, and 'riting—Wilson concluded that "successful interaction seemed a variable that outweighed other influences" (87), and she planned further research, eager to move beyond "accounting for school failure" and to "show what school success looked like for students who statistically were expected to fail" (92).

Chapters 7 and 8 report on two different studies: Wilson's doctoral research and a subsequent survey-based project sponsored by an NCTE Classroom Inquiry Grant. In the former, Wilson analyzed transcripts from 50 writing conferences and 50 related essays, seeking correlations between students' writing and both their speech and their interactions with teachers (99-101). Her findings confirm the importance of pre-writing talk to successful academic composing (98), and they connect message-centered speech with high-scoring essays (104). Even more importantly, Wilson writes, "If I had to choose one feature that will do the most toward inviting the student into student-teacher conversation, I would choose in-the-moment conversational repairs" (109): the questions, words of encouragement, and acknowledgements of misunderstanding that can move awkward or stalled conversations back on track and toward good writing. Of course, generalizations about talk are complicated by the many languages students speak, and Wilson's later work examined the interrelationship of academic identity,

spoken language, and school success, starting from the premise that student-teacher communication was vital to both participants (121).

Wilson's volume concludes twice, first with a chapter on writing up research and second with an appendix entitled "Guide to Classroom Research for Teachers." The former models the kind of highly contextualized reporting that ensures both micro- and macro-structural issues are addressed, and it contains Wilson's signature combination of personal anecdotes, data analysis, and scholarly reference. Wilson also discusses the overarching value of classroom research, although some readers will leave her closing remarks about "what is now" and "what may be" disappointed that she did not take up the gauntlet against punitive state and federal education mandates, while other readers may wish Wilson had said more about how teacher-researchers can use their results to talk back directly to administrators and policy-makers. While such issues fall well within the purview of teacher research, they fall outside the scope of Wilson's book, which concludes instead with a practical turn. Prioritizing teaching and research practice, the "Guide to Classroom Research" reduces chapters one through nine, reframing them for teachers who "are doing research on top of their regular teaching assignments" and "who need an outline . . . so they can move quickly into their own classroom study" (153). Designed to be helpful and reassuring, the guide encapsulates the how and why of classroom inquiry, and it provides a series of practical exercises as well as references to support further study.

Both highly accessible and consistently rich with insight, "*What about Rose?*" is a book that has many audiences, including—but not limited to—the teacher who reads Wilson's guide first and who dips into other chapters only when need dictates or time allows. As it would for the community college or P-12 classroom, Wilson's case for teacher-researcher agency is also relevant to four-year college and university educators: faculty, staff, and administrators who still have much to learn about cultivating student success across cultural difference. "*What about Rose?*" is a book poised to draw these readerships together, providing an invitation as well as a guide to future work, from the ground up.

Knoxville, Tennessee