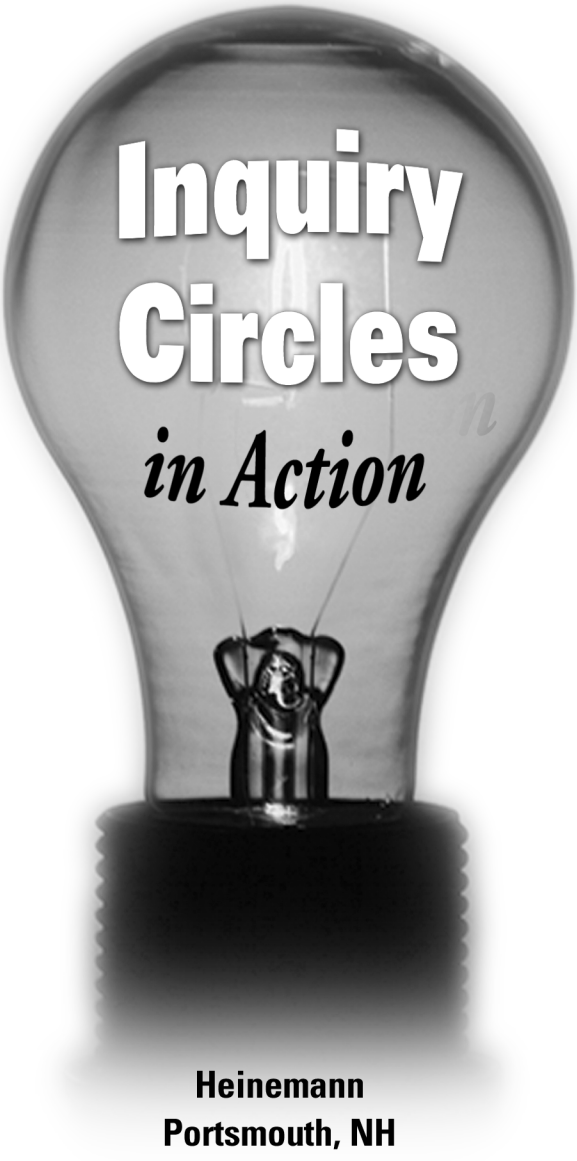
Stephanie Harvey

Harvey Daniels

Inquiry Circles in Action



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Preface

Greetings, colleagues and friends. Thanks for sitting down with us.

Like most books (and most good classroom lessons), this one started with talk. Lots of talk. First and foremost, it began in our conversations with teachers like you all across the country.

We make our living mostly by traveling from school to school and conference to conference, helping teachers with reading and writing, hanging around with great kids, and trying to figure out what will make learning and thinking even more powerful—and fun. Between us, we worked in twenty-six states last year. And although the travel can sometimes be trying—lost luggage, canceled flights, bizarre hotels—the great conversations we have with teachers make it worth every minute.

Lately, you have been telling us that you see connections between Smokey's and Steph's work. You say that you have been using the reading comprehension strategies with your kids and doing book clubs with them too, and that they fit together seamlessly. As Betsy Brand, a pal in Texas explains it: "Well, I've just been putting Harvey and Harvey together." And when you tell us about your amazing variations, adaptations, and improvisations on our basic ideas, we are knocked out.

So you got *us* talking, to each other. What becomes possible when kids can both comprehend and collaborate—when they can combine the thinking skills of strategic reading with the social skills of small, peer-led groups? Over the past two years, we have had dozens of short and long conversations about the possibilities by e-mail, phone, and face to face; in restaurants, at convention book booths, in our homes, on airplanes, in cars driving around Denver or Santa Fe; and most of all, in classrooms where we were working side by side with kids. We two have become the living embodiment of a classroom strategy that Steph always promotes: *turn and talk!*

In that spirit, it would seem unnatural for us to write any other way than conversationally, so in this book we are going to continue talking to each other, as well as to you, dear reader.

▲

SMOKEY: Hey, Steph, have you ever noticed how much we have in common?

STEPH: Yeah, I have. It's a little weird, actually.

SMOKEY: Weird? It's just cool. Let me see . . . We both grew up in the Midwest (in the virtually interchangeable states of Minnesota and Wisconsin). We had great family times on northern lakes.

STEPH: Water skiing, oh yeah.

SMOKEY: We went to sister colleges, Northwestern and the University of Denver (both founded by John Evans).

STEPH: Come on, you are really reaching on that one. John Evans?

SMOKEY: Ok. But I have lots more:

We both have two kids, an older boy and a younger girl.

All four of our children are talented and lovable.

We married exceedingly well—Elaine and Edward, respectively.

We both love the American West.

We have both had great previous coauthors to whom we are deeply indebted, including Anne Goudvis, Steve Zemelman, Marilyn Bizar, Arthur Hyde, and Nancy Steineke.

STEPH: And how about these? For the last several years we have been presenting together at state and national conferences around the country. We were on the same page professionally before we even knew each other.

SMOKEY: Absolutely.

STEPH: So, should we talk about how our work fits together and how this book came about?

SMOKEY: You bet. I'll start. Steph, I think it's fair to say that you are best known for your work with reading comprehension strategies, teaching kids the same kinds of thinking that skillful readers use to make sense of text. Your book with Anne Goudvis, Strategies That Work, was really a blockbuster—it changed the way that millions of teachers teach reading.

STEPH: Well, "blockbuster" is a little over the top. But if the book has had some impact, that's mainly because Anne and I were translating and classroom-izing the amazing work of David Pearson and others who pioneered the comprehension strategies research.

SMOKEY: But I also know that all along, you've had an abiding commitment to kids' working together in pairs, teams, and literature circles, and that is embedded in all your books and videos.

STEPH: That's right, for sure. And that's one place that our work connects so strongly. Now it's your turn. You are known as "the Literature Circle Guy," having led the development of literature circles, or small, student-led reading discussion groups—in Denver we call them book clubs. And you have been widely recognized for label-

ing and teaching the social skills used by proficient discussion group members. I think that your inventory of social skills is quite parallel to the repertoire of comprehension strategies that I have been working on all these years.

SMOKEY: Exactly. But sometimes people think I invented literature circles, which I most certainly did not. Since this structure basically involves bringing adult book clubs or reading groups into the school setting, no one can really claim credit for inventing them, just for adapting and popularizing the school-friendly version.

STEPH: In a way, that has been my role with the reading strategies too. So should we talk about how we actually met?

SMOKEY: OK, but let's tell this one together.

▼

The two of us have been casually acquainted for years and always admired each others' work. But it was not until 2001 that we became lifelong friends and close colleagues. Each of us had been separately invited to lead teacher workshops in New York City in mid-September. Then the attacks of 9/11 occurred. We were both stunned when our respective host schools called a few days later to reconfirm our workshops.

"The teachers want to hear you," the principals said. "We need some business as usual in our schools. Please come; we need you."

Feeling jangled and uncertain, we connected by phone and agreed to travel together to New York. As our near-empty plane descended toward LaGuardia, we were horrified by the smoking hole at the foot of a city we loved. It looked like the socket of a rough, brutally yanked tooth, spewing unspeakable pain and gruesome debris.

Later, as we sat in a deserted Thai restaurant in Midtown, there was no time—or need—for professional chitchat. Like people all across the country, we tried to make sense of this unspeakable event whose shadow was all around us—and whose scent drifted the ninety blocks north to where we sat. We connected as people, as citizens, and as educators. How could this kind of thing happen? How could we help the confused and terrified young people in their New York classrooms this week? And what can teachers do to gradually create a world where this kind of disaster never happens again, in the United States or any country? By the time we put down our chopsticks, we'd made a friendship that would last—and a commitment we continue to try to fulfill.

The morning after our New York dinner, we boarded different cabs—Steph off to Chinatown and Smokey to the Bronx. And in both schools, we encountered the most amazing teachers—men and women who were lovingly supporting their students while still in shock themselves. Those days made us especially proud to be educators.

Our work has always been about teaching kids to *think for themselves,* to reason, to understand deeply, to build knowledge, to leverage their thinking with others, and to put knowledge to work in their own lives. Now we hold those goals even more urgently. The only way the world can save itself from future 9/11s is if young people all around the world are educated to be critical, thoughtful, independent-minded readers, writers, speakers, and listeners.

Eleanor Roosevelt said: "Every effort must be made in childhood to teach the young to use their own minds. For one thing is sure: if they do not make up their own minds, someone will do it for them." We can hear you now saying "never more important than today." But if you'd read that quote twenty years ago, you would likely have also said "never more important than today." And if you read it twenty years from now, you'll almost certainly have the same response. Nothing is more important than teaching kids to use their own minds and think. Period.

This book is a small contribution to the worldwide effort to raise children into citizens who think clearly and deeply, who have gained knowledge and acquired judgment, and who take action with humanity in mind.

As you'll soon find out, for us this means:

- Teaching as though kids' own questions really matter
- Favoring topics of authenticity, relevance, and significance
- Focusing all our teaching around thinking, stressing knowledge over information
- Encouraging a curious, questioning, and critical stance
- Constantly offering students more choices—and more responsibility
- Helping young people to work collaboratively in pairs, teams, and inquiry groups
- Fostering the active use of knowledge
- Operating our classrooms as model democracies

This kind of teaching is far from new. Education has a long tradition of progressive practice that traces from educators of antiquity like Marcus Fabius Quintilian forward to great figures like John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Paolo Friere. Through the millennia, the same key features have defined this enduring view—a student-centered approach; a belief in the inherent goodness of human beings; a faith in experience as the best teacher; a zeal for connecting education to real life; an affinity for inductive, constructivist reasoning and teaching; and a commitment to individual fulfillment, autonomy, and freedom. In short, progressive educators have always seen themselves as preparing *citizens.*

It's time for another, stronger, more intentional era of progressive education. There's damage to repair, yes, but more importantly, there's an ongoing struggle to rejoin and extend. We are part of a movement that has been two thousand years in the making, and may take a little while longer to finish. But even if the final triumph of progressive, student-centered, education will be the work of generations, the way we teach tomorrow morning has supreme importance to each child in our care right now, and to the world we are living in this year.

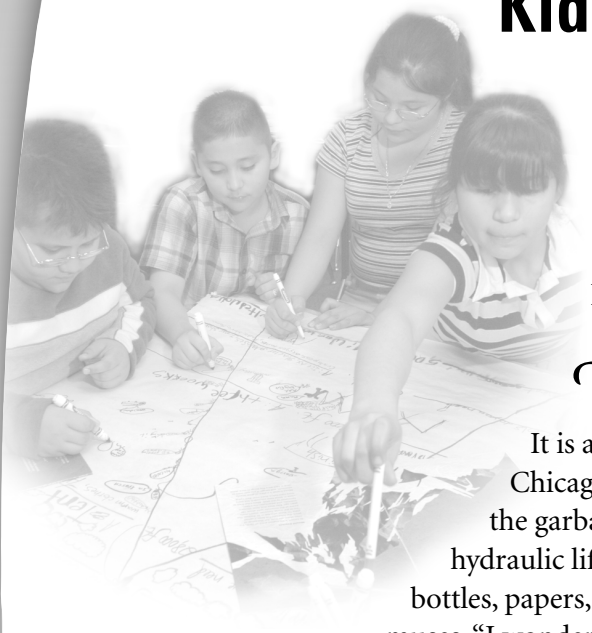
Our work with young people is not about standards—it is about a life of thinking, questioning, and caring; it is about survival.

Stephanie Harvey
Denver, Colorado

Harvey "Smokey" Daniels
Santa Fe, New Mexico

CHAPTER 1

Kids Want to Know



Welcome to *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action*. We invite you to begin by reading stories from four classrooms around the United States. Then we'll look at what these teaching and learning projects have in common.

Where Does the Garbage Go?

It is a bright spring morning in Sheila Booth's first-grade classroom in Chicago. As other kids read at their desks, Billy gazes out the window at the garbage workers on the school's loading dock below. Using a hydraulic lift, the men hoist up the school's big dumpster, and bags, cans, bottles, papers, and boxes tumble into the huge truck. As Sheila walks past, Billy muses, "I wonder where all that garbage goes." And Sheila, smart and vigilant teacher that she is, exclaims: "Whoa, what a great question!"

Within a week, the whole class is engaged in an investigation of garbage—what it contains, where it goes, and why its disposal matters. Searching the Internet, Sheila quickly discovers that there is a kid-driven nationwide trend of schools mindfully monitoring their trash output, and she shows some websites to the kids. They read about how some students have analyzed their schools' garbage by sorting through representative bags and determining exactly what is being thrown away: food, paper, office waste, and other materials.

"Yuk, I'm not going to get my hands into that stuff," says Juan.

"That's OK, I'll do your garbage," rejoins Matt cheerily.

"Don't worry, you guys. If we decide to try this, we will get plastic gloves for whoever wants to try it," Sheila says.

A few days later, the great garbage audit is carried out, and for that day anyway, the greatest culprit is an incalculable load of soggy green beans. As Matt says after scooping out handful after handful, "I guess this is what happens when we don't eat our vegetables at lunch."

The kids continue reading, drawing, and writing about garbage, waste, and recycling. With help from the librarian, Sheila finds some books to feed kids'

curiosity: *Recycle: A Handbook for Kids; Garbage and Recycling; The Three Rs: Reuse, Reduce, Recycle; Where Does the Garbage Go?* and *Why Should I Recycle?* As kids delve into these resources, Sheila helps them to jot or draw their responses and further questions, and to save them in a file. And, becoming hooked on trashy reading herself, Sheila discovers the adult nonfiction book *Garbageland* by Elizabeth Royle, a muckracking expose of the garbage industry with all of its smells, secrets, and occasional skullduggery. As the inquiry continues, Sheila reads passages aloud to the class and talks about her own reactions and wonderings.

The investigation culminates in a field trip. The first graders pack up their lists of questions, pile onto a school bus, and follow the garbage truck through its rounds and then off to a huge landfill in the community that none of the kids has ever seen. Trooping off the bus with clipboards in hand (and carefully watched by teachers and parents), the kids observe as the school's garbage cascades into the pit. They jot and draw their impressions of the vastness and ickiness of the landfill.

Next, small groups of kids scatter to interview the different workers who drive the trucks, operate machinery, and run the small office. Each team of kids has brought its own research questions: Why does garbage smell so bad? Do you ever find cool stuff that people throw away by accident? Do you really like working here? The workers are patient and encouraging. The kids interviewing the site manager are surprised to hear that the dump is almost full and that another landfill will have to be started soon.

Within weeks, the school's trash output is slashed, news of the first graders' initiative is spreading through the community, and many local families redouble their own recycling efforts.

The kids return to school and commence a buildingwide recycling program aimed at reducing the amount of trash that the school sends to the landfill. Within weeks, the school's trash output is slashed, news of the first graders' initiative is spreading through the community, and many local families redouble their own recycling efforts.

Native-Settler Contact in North America

Diane Titche's fifth-grade students in Lowell, Michigan, are just finishing up a round of literature circles. Patterned after adult reading groups, lit circles are simple and sociable. Each kid picks a book that he or she wants to read and three or four friends to work with. Then, over a couple of weeks, the different groups read their chosen book. The kids jot down responses and questions as they read, then bring these notes when they gather after every few chapters to talk about the story and the ideas in the book. In Diane's classroom, lit circles have proved to be one of the students' favorite activities all year long.

For this particular cycle of book clubs, students have chosen from a set of historical novels about encounters between European settlers and native American peoples. To make sure that all students could find a just-right read, Diane made sure to include both easier and harder books among the choices. At the groups'

first meetings, before they even started to read their books, each newly formed lit circle took two actions. First, each group made a calendar, dividing the book into chunks to be discussed at two- or three-day intervals. Then the group created some "ground rules," including how to handle a member who shows up unprepared, fails to do the reading, or doesn't join in the group's work. Both of these documents were submitted to Diane for her approval (the spanking of unprepared members is definitely not OK; find another consequence) and filed in the group's folder.

Now, following the usual procedures of lit circles, the six groups in Diane's room have been meeting every few days to discuss sections of the book and are finishing up their novels. Usually, when kids come to the end of a lit circle book, their teachers ask them to create a culminating project—a skit, a poster, a board game, a report about the author. But this time, Diane has another kind of project in mind.

She convenes the students and asks them to think about what new or lingering questions they have after reading these books about natives and settlers. This is not an easy task for kids. Throughout their school lives, they have more often been asked to report what they have learned, not to reflect back, examine their own thinking, and pose *further* questions. It takes time and talk, but over some cycles of writing and discussion, each group gradually develops (or simply recognizes) a question that members want to pursue. Then, groups launch into new inquiries, reading principally nonfiction texts to pursue answers to questions like these:

What causes people to develop prejudice and hate toward each other?

What were the actual cultural traditions of the Seneca Indians?

How did white people get the idea that Indians were savages?

Why did Indian parents allow their kids to attend the boarding schools?

What were the roles of women in Indian life?

How did women get the right to vote?

Some groups' questions are a short step from their books, while others range far away in time, content, and ambition.

For more than a week, the literature circles, now operating as inquiry groups, gather information related to their lingering questions, using a variety of nonfiction materials, books, periodicals, and websites. As a way of sharing their eventual findings, students create a series of tableaux, choreographed frozen scenes, depicting key ideas from their research and accompanied by carefully written oral captions. Each group's tableaux, in their own way, grapple with the eternal human issues of prejudice, misunderstanding, exploitation—and the possibility of peace.

The Many Forms of Prejudice: Investigating *"Isms"*

A student team investigating ageism took cameras into the city to document the way older people are sometimes treated, discarded, left alone, and shuffled past—then later hung their best photos in a school gallery for all to see.

It is May in Chicago, and the freshman class at Best Practice High School has entered a multiday process to negotiate the curriculum the kids will encounter next year as sophomores. Students work with teachers and other adult facilitators in small groups, repeating cycles of reading, writing, discussion, and reflection to identify concerns they have about themselves and their world. Though the student body at BPHS is a very heterogeneous mix of city kids, their "self" concerns are not much different from those of teenagers anywhere: facing issues of identity, trying to envision the future, getting into college, choosing careers, getting married and having families, dealing with peer pressure, coping with alcohol and drugs, staying healthy, getting along with others. When students look out at the world, they find themselves wondering about racism (will people of different races ever learn to get along?), immigration, violence, pollution and the environment, war, and the effects of technology on the future.

As this group of kids works through the negotiating process, one cluster of related issues keeps recurring: Why are there always wars? Why do so many people hate each other? Why do we have to fight? Coming from a variety of city neighborhoods, many of them gang-dominated, the kids are troubled by the disharmony they see every day. As LaShonda puts it: "Why is violence all around?" As the kids continue to frame this big question, they decide that there are different kinds of hate, which they begin to name: racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, gangsterism.

Fast-forward to the next fall, when two weeks are set aside to pursue this "isms" inquiry. Each faculty member has agreed to step out of his or her usual role (biology, math, physical education, art) and become the facilitator for research into one of the different *isms*. Kids choose the *ism* they are most concerned about and interested in, and head off with a team of like-minded classmates and their teacher-facilitator to dig deep into a single topic. Over the summer, teachers have gathered lots of good books and articles on the topic and bookmarked web pages with valuable information. Kids marinate in this material for a while, begin to pose more pointed questions, and then map out plans for learning more. They ask: what can we read, where can we go, who can we interview to help understand this kind of prejudice better and perhaps to combat it?

For two weeks, the kids and their teachers read, search, interview, and discuss. One group studying ableism toured the city, trying to understand the challenges that disabled people face, and grew angrier at the many obstacles and lack of accommodations they discovered. They wrote letters to inform a variety of businesses and public institutions of their need to provide better service. They also created posters about accessibility problems, entered them in an online design contest, and received two awards. Another student team investigating

ageism took cameras into the city to document the way older people are sometimes treated, discarded, left alone, and shuffled past—then later hung their best photos in a school gallery for all to see.

Another group became fascinated with the special individuals who, throughout history, have stood up against prejudice and discrimination. They decided to create a "Wall of Respect" to honor those who courageously opposed the *isms* of their times. After studying each hero's life and achievements, kids wrote short essays and graphic displays for the Wall of Respect. On culminating day, students dressed as the figure they had studied—Rosa Parks, Malcom X, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Gloria Steinem—and gave presentations in character, answering questions from other students and visitors about their choices and achievements.

Advocating for a New School

In their crumbling inner-city elementary school, Brian Schultz's fifth-grade students have become increasingly outraged by the deteriorating conditions of the building. Years ago, the community was promised a brand-new school, but that replacement was never built, and Byrd Academy was left to crumble with kids inside. Brian's students began to systematically document the issues that obstructed their learning:

- No heat and broken windows, so kids must study with coats and hats on
- No soap, hot water, paper towels, or toilet paper in the washrooms
- No lunchroom, so lunch is served in hallways
- No gym or auditorium, so all school events must use borrowed space

Students didn't hesitate to suggest that these city leaders would never let their own kids go to a school in such sorry shape.

As momentum grew around this project, Brian saw that it could become the focus of a whole year's worth of curriculum. "All the subjects in the prescribed curriculum were blended together in a natural way," he recalls. "Kids' research took them to books, magazines, and Internet postings that went well beyond their (supposed) reading level and aptitude. As Hennessy said, 'Before this project, I would never have thought I could read this stuff.'"

Working in small groups, the students created folders documenting each grievance, including photos, written explanations, and data displays, and posted all this content on a website (http://www.projectcitizen405.com). They composed respectful but pointed letters to school district, city, and state officials. They didn't hesitate to suggest that these city leaders would never let their own kids go to a school in such sorry shape. As a result, hundreds of letters, phone calls, and emails of support poured in. A wide range of media (local newspapers, TV stations, and National Public Radio) covered the story, Ralph Nader visited and wrote about the school, and the class was invited to the state capitol to testify before the legislature.

Still, in the end, students did not succeed in shaming the district into delivering the long-promised new building. Indeed, a few months later, the superintendent proposed the permanent closing of the building, due to low enrollment. But both the students and their teacher felt that powerful lifelong lessons had been learned. In the words of Malik: "Last year was my best year ever in school . . . instead of it being like school it was more like family . . . and I learned a lot too, like learning how to write and interview and ask good questions." In the end, Brian wrote a book about his kids' remarkable action research project, called *Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way* (Schultz 2008).

So what do all these classrooms have in common?

Here's what we see: Students are engaged, activated, and motivated. They dig deep into topics and questions they really care about, gathering and weighing information, building knowledge, and putting that knowledge to work in their lives. They design and conduct investigations much like adult researchers, and bring their findings to the community. They collaborate skillfully, shifting fluidly from individual pursuits into small inquiry groups and then back to whole-class communities.

In short, these kids are *thinking*. They are employing the very same cognitive strategies that proficient grown-up readers, writers, researchers, and collaborators use to get work done in the world every day. And these students are thinking *together*. For key parts of each project, teachers have organized students into small, peer-led investigation teams—a structure we call *inquiry circles*.

But there is even more here than meets the eye. Yes, students are exercising choice in topics, readings, and ways to show their learning, but this is not a temporary treat or a "day off" from the official curriculum. In fact, most of what the kids study in these small-group investigations either comes directly from the required curriculum in their schools or can be "backmapped" to it. For example, Diane Titche's literature circles were formed to address the district-required social studies curriculum at her grade level. The Best Practice High School kids identified their own topics, but look at all the standards-based skills they practiced along the way: reading a variety of challenging nonfiction texts, gathering information, categorizing data, forming hypotheses, graphing findings, making informational displays, giving public speeches and performances, defending their inferences and positions, and writing carefully edited informational, persuasive, and explanatory texts across a wide range of genres. Wherever small-group inquiry questions come from, teachers can match kids' investigations to subject matter guidelines, state mandates, and prevailing high-stakes tests.

And speaking of teachers, what strikes you about their roles in these classrooms? All four have relinquished the sage-on-stage stance to become guides on the side. Instead of telling, they are showing, modeling, coaching, mentoring, and facilitating. They are "leading from behind," working skillfully in the background to channel

Read More About These Teachers and Their Classrooms

Want to hear more about this chapter's opening stories? We first learned about Sheila Booth's garbage inquiry from our colleague James Beane, whose *A Reason to Teach: Creating Classrooms of Dignity and Hope* (2005) has an inspiring message about the importance of authentic inquiry in a democracy. The work of Brian Schultz's kids at Chicago's Byrd School is the subject of his 2008 book *Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way: Lessons from an Urban Classroom.* The high school *"isms"* unit and other negotiated-curriculum projects are described in Harvey Daniels, Marilyn Bizar, and Steve Zemelman's *Rethinking High School: Best Practice in Teaching, Learning, and Leadership* (2001). We dig deeper into Diane Titche's literature and inquiry circles right here in Chapter 10 of this book.

kids' curiosity, provide materials, structure interaction, and document ideas. They don't dominate, nor do they shy away from adding their own knowledge to advance the inquiry. These teachers have become facilitators of kids' learning.

When we hear about these energized kids and their collaborative investigations, many of us sigh and think, "Wow, that's the way I'd really like to teach." And we have all probably tried a few projects like these over the years. But even as we are charmed by and attracted to the active, cooperative learning portrayed in these accounts, it can also strike us as idealistic, time-consuming, or risky. Can we really trust kids to take and sustain this kind of initiative? Can we cover all the required subjects this way? Will students do OK on the state test? Does this kind of teaching really work?

The short answer is yes.

The long answer is this book.

Collaborative, relevant, deep, and thoughtful learning does work, at all grade levels. Kids *can* operate productively together in small peer-led teams, just like adults do every day in workplaces across the country. This kind of schooling pays off richly for learners. Decades of research confirm that such instruction leads not just to higher student achievement on the customary academic measures, but to better social attitudes, stronger work habits, and more persistence in school (Darling-Hammond et al. 2008; Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde 2005; Daniels and Bizar 2004; Smith et al. 2001; Newmann et al. 1996).

This engaged, interactive instruction is not a passing fad; it's not the latest faux-new bandwagon rolling through Teachertown. On the contrary, this model of learning and teaching has been steadily developing for decades. And today, fresh discoveries in cognition, inquiry, and collaboration show us even better ways to help learners engage with ideas and drive each others' thinking—not just to remember information, but to build knowledge, to care, and to act. When we combine the new research on thinking with the latest findings about how small groups can best be formed, guided, and managed, we can trust the active learning classroom to challenge kids and help them get smart.

*W*hy We Need a Change

In one of the largest studies of its kind ever undertaken in American schools, Pianta and Belsky (2007) found that American fifth graders were spending 91 percent of their school day either listening to a teacher talk or working alone. The findings were similar for first and third graders. Ninety-one percent! Can you believe that? After decades of research on the benefits of interactive teaching and learning, most of our kids are trapped in solitary, passive activities for almost the whole school day. How could this be happening?

Of course, there's long been a strand of "sit-down-be-quiet-and-listen" pedagogy in American schools—but it has always been balanced by a steadily advancing model of progressive student-centered education. As recently as the 1990s, this progressive tradition was widely in evidence: our schools were filled with cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, flexible small-group instruction, reading and writing workshops. Classrooms fairly burst with interaction—kids meeting in teams, book clubs, and research groups; students sitting at tables, facing other kids and working collaboratively; teachers offering instruction to small, flexible groups; teachers conferring with individuals and providing mini-lessons in literacy workshops.

But the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, along with the testing frenzy that followed its passage, sadly drove kids back to their individual seats for endless drill-and-kill test-prep worksheets. Deep thinking was replaced by shallow "coverage," and enforced by a battery of tests that discouraged schools from venturing beyond the approved minimums. Mandated, scripted instruction pushed discussion, interaction, and debate right out of the school day. In elementary schools, time spent on science and social studies shrank dramatically; art and music all but disappeared. More and more course requirements, with fewer and fewer choices, were piled on secondary programs. In effect, the tests literally became the curriculum.

STEPH: Whoa, Smoke, do you think we are being a little too tough? Is this sounding kinda negative?

SMOKEY: Hmmm, maybe. Probably. But what are we supposed to say? We've both worked in so many schools where all this accountability stuff has boomeranged and hurt the kids.

STEPH: Yeah, all those teachers who have had to let go of some of their best teaching to read off a script instead. And then to lose science and social studies time; I mean, no more sharks, no more rain forest. With teachers so concerned about the high stakes, test scores rule the day. It's sad . . .

SMOKEY: I've been in schools where the grown-ups now view the kids who struggle or those with special needs as problems, because their scores can "get the whole school on the state watch list."

STEPH: Yikes! It should be just the opposite. Schools should be about teaching <u>all</u> of our kids, particularly those who need the most support! It's really unfortunate. But still. There have been some positive outcomes from this whole NCLB thing too.

SMOKEY: You're right. Yes, let's look on the bright side for a while.

STEPH: Deal.

Here are three good things about the NCLB legislation. First, it put education at the top of the national agenda, which is always a good thing. Second, the NCLB era squeezed the slack out of the system. The law exposed any schools that might have been coasting on their laurels. But most important, the NCLB reporting requirements, which mandated disaggregated data, shined a harsh spotlight on the shameful disparity between students of privilege and those from poverty, those with special needs, and speakers of other languages. Schools with small populations of struggling kids used to be able to sweep their low scores under the rug. But under NCLB, even some much-admired suburban schools had to explain why they were just as ineffective with these kids as some underresourced urban schools.

As this book goes to press, new leadership has arrived in Washington, and the unfortunate side effects of the NCLB era are being scrutinized. There's a renewed commitment to progressive ideals and plans for a new federal education policy. President Obama has issued a stirring call for young people to enter a revitalized teaching profession:

> I'm calling on a new generation of Americans to step forward and serve our country in our classrooms. If you want to make a difference in the life of our nation, if you want to make the most of your talents and dedication, if you want to make your mark with a legacy that will endure—then join the teaching profession. America needs you. We need you in our suburbs. We need you in our small towns. We especially need you in our inner cities. We need you in classrooms all across our country.

These bright signs give us hope that we can now return to the mainstream of American education. We can reconnect with the work of the generations before us to make school what it should be for kids. How wonderful it feels to be part of a progressive restoration, to help usher in the next wave of student-centered teaching and learning.

Why Small Groups?

We have a long—wait, let's be honest—*ancient* tradition of students working alone in American schools. We recognize this planned aloneness in the standard classroom seating arrangement that keeps kids from facing each other, in the very idea of "seatwork," in the definition of most kid-to-kid talk as disruption, in winner-loser grading practices, in prizes, punishments, and in ubiquitous warnings like "Do your own work!" And as the recent Pianta and Belsky study pointed out, kids are still doing almost *all* their work in a solitary, individualistic framework.

But the world has changed. In offices and factories across the world, employees who once toiled alone are being reorganized into teams, work groups, or task forces. In the global economy, many forward-looking corporations are flattening

their organizations, soliciting more buy-in and input from workers. Many corporations are spinning off smaller "boutique" companies where, freed from the hierarchical structures of business as usual, teams of fired-up workers are empowered to find new ways, new products, new processes.

And guess what? Workers *make more money* if they know how to collaborate. A recent study from the University of Illinois showed that ten years after graduation, people who had honed their teamwork skills while still in high school had significantly higher earnings than classmates who had failed to do so (Science Daily 2008). In fact, the mastery of collaboration skills correlated more closely to annual income than standardized test scores. Even after controlling for students' achievement scores, family socioeconomic status, and educational attainment, the researchers found that "social skills such as conscientiousness, cooperativeness, and motivation were as important as test scores for success in the workplace." Shall we all say it together? Well, *duh!*

If you listen to people in the human resources world, you'll hear them talking about this new cooperative workplace and why it is so important. Human resources expert Susan Heathfield writes: "Fostering teamwork is creating a work culture that values collaboration. In a teamwork environment, people understand and believe that thinking, planning, decisions, and actions are better when done cooperatively. People recognize, and even assimilate, the belief that 'none of us is as good as all of us'" (2006, p. 1). Companies are finding that productivity, quality, and service improve when employees feel ownership, when they are part of a defined, small family within the organization—where they feel they have a voice, and even a home. Now, we understand that these cooperative innovations in the business world are aimed primarily at enhanced profit. But look what the trend says: small groups work. We will talk much more about this in Chapter 3, but for now let us simply list some reasons why small-group work is a must in today's schools.

Benefits of Small-Group Work

- Small groups are lifelike.
- Small groups generate energy for challenging work.
- In small groups, we are smarter.
- In small groups, diversity is an asset.
- Small groups make engaged, interactive learning possible.
- Small groups allow us to differentiate instruction.
- Employers increasingly require small-group skills.
- Well-structured small-group work enhances student achievement.

Hey, we all have our own crash-and-burn stories about cooperative activities that flopped.

Back in the School World, the adoption of small-group structures has been sporadic. Although we have gradually infused more group work into schools, it is still too rare—more like an occasional side trip, but not the main thoroughfare. The use of small-group work seems to be inversely related to grade levels. In primary and intermediate grades, teamwork is more common; partner reading and literature circles are not hard to find. Less so in middle school, even though the original middle-level model calls for lots of collaborative work. And then there is high school, where the massive curriculum, tracking systems, and instructional traditions often conspire against widespread small-group work.

But to be honest, it's not just the structures of school that make kid-to-kid collaboration seem like a stretch. As teachers ourselves, we may not feel so confident about adding lots of small-group work to our classroom menus. Hey, we all have our own crash-and-burn stories about cooperative activities that flopped. And maybe we never experienced any well-structured small-group work when we were students in school. Maybe the how-to's of student collaboration were omitted from our teacher training.

Students *can* consistently and effectively work with every other kid in the room. But equipping them to do so requires a repertoire of management tools that most of us were never given. If we can't teach our students the social strategies needed for this kind of learning, disappointment awaits. If the kids don't understand how to think together, to read, write, listen, and view as a team, they will drift off task and off topic. Moreover, if we teachers don't feel clear and comfortable with our own roles in the collaborative classroom, we may struggle, and resort to more conventional teacher-driven projects.

These specific skills, strategies, tools, and roles are exactly what this book aims to provide so teachers don't give up on authentic, kid-driven inquiry projects that engage their hearts and minds.

Comprehension, Collaboration, and Inquiry

As we mentioned in the preface, the two of us go back a number of years. As we spent more time together and became friends as well as colleagues, we discovered a natural convergence in our work: the connection between thinking and conversation.

While Steph's work had focused most prominently on *comprehension* strategy instruction and Smokey's on small-group *collaboration,* both of us had crossed over into the other's territory. Steph has always championed active literacy and getting kids to process information by talking to each other. And Smokey always encourages reading discussion groups to think strategically, to visualize, infer, question, and connect. Steph knew that you don't think in isolation and that in order to really begin to understand and act, you have to engage with other

people. And Smokey understood that you don't get kids into small collaborative groups for the sake of it; rather, the purpose of talking and working together is to ponder big ideas, issues, and concepts.

So it became obvious to us that comprehension and collaboration were a perfect fit. In fact, one without the other was pretty useless. The best way to understand the world we live in is to be alert to it—to read about it, to listen, to view, and then *talk* about it. Teaching kids to think coupled with rich talk about text makes all the difference. Two heads are better than one, three better than four, and so on.

When talking about teaching and learning, we often found ourselves asking, *What's next?* What becomes possible when we merge comprehension and collaboration? Time and again, we noticed that when kids have authentic opportunities to read, think, and talk together, their curiosity explodes and their questions come fast and furiously. The more kids learn, the more they wonder. And it is those questions that propel learners on, that get them excited and engaged in the world around them. This works both when kids pursue their own questions and when they investigate topics from the required curriculum. As long as we keep kids' interests, questions, and curiosity in the forefront, we can build inquiries that engage, enlighten, and educate.

Time and again, we noticed that when kids have authentic opportunities to read, think, and talk together, their curiosity explodes and their questions come fast and furiously.

The Next Step: Inquiry Circles

For us, the answer to "What's next?" is: well-structured small-group inquiry across the curriculum. This book occurs at the intersection of comprehension, collaboration, and inquiry. When we teach kids to think and work together, learning is more seamless. When kids learn and practice strategies to comprehend what they read, hear, and see and when they learn the social skills necessary to work in small groups, their inquiries soar.

In *Comprehension and Collaboration,* we teach the reader, not merely the reading; the communicator, not merely the communication; the researcher, not merely the research. When we focus on teaching strategies for reading, listening, viewing, communicating, collaborating, and researching, learners come away with lots of strategy knowledge for sure, but also a ton of content. Learning, understanding, and remembering subject matter is a direct product of knowing how to think, work together, and wonder.

Keep in mind, however, that we don't teach all of the thinking strategies, collaborative processes, and inquiry steps before kids ever get a chance to answer their questions. They wouldn't last long if we taught countless lessons before setting them free to satisfy their curiosity and search for answers. So we model a few important ideas of how to think and work together and then send them off to investigate. We then continue to teach more about comprehension and collaboration throughout the inquiry process.

What do these small-group inquiries look like? Think of literature circles—but instead of choosing a single book to read, kids select a topic or a question to explore. Picture teachers teaching comprehension strategies and kids making connections, asking questions, and synthesizing the information. Envision teachers modeling social skills and kids planning interviews, asking follow-up questions, and making decisions about what to investigate. Imagine teachers demonstrating research techniques and kids meeting together to pursue answers to their questions and take action. When comprehension, collaboration, and research intersect, inquiry circles take root and grow our kids' learning and understanding. The basic principles of inquiry circles are highlighted here:

PRINCIPLES OF INQUIRY CIRCLES

- Choice of topics based on genuine student curiosity, questions, interests
- Digging deeply into complex, authentic topics that matter to kids
- Flexible grouping, featuring small research teams, groups, task forces
- Heterogeneous, nonleveled groups with careful differentiation
- Student responsibility and peer leadership
- Use of proficient-reader/thinker/researcher strategies
- Drawing upon multiple, multigenre, and multimedia sources
- Going beyond fact-finding to synthesizing ideas and building and acquiring knowledge
- Actively using knowledge in our schools and communities: sharing, publication, products, or taking action
- Matching or "backmapping" kids' learning to state or district standards

This Book Is Different

You don't see many professional books claiming to be for all grade levels, K–12. And even fewer address all subjects across the curriculum. Conventional publishing wisdom says that educational authors must disseminate their ideas to a smaller range of grade levels or a narrower span of the curriculum. Well, sorry; guess we're breaking the rules.

This book is for *everyone who teaches* because the big ideas and processes of education, the really big ones, truly do apply to all learners. From pre-K to college, we are all in the business of teaching thinking. And that's something we are never done with: we don't start children off thinking in primary grades and then assume we're finished. Nor do we hold off on thinking until middle school, give them a couple good years of instruction, and then shut down, figuring they're

now ready for anything. We teach thinking all year, every year: we teach students how to listen, view, read, gather, and engage with information; we make sure students acquire cognitive strategies, weigh ideas, develop judgment, and build knowledge; and just as important, we help them to remember, care, choose, and take action.

We have tried to pack the book with practical ideas and materials you'll want to grab, but it is also about big ideas.

The social structure within which we nurture kids' thinking matters in all subjects and grade levels, too. How long have we worked inside discredited factory-model schools, but can't ever seem to break out of them? How long have teachers played "the font of wisdom," "sage on the stage," or simply the lecturer—when the testimony of our own sense screams: "The kids are not getting it!" We know we have to change the social relationships in the classroom in order to ramp up the learning power of our time with students. No matter whether we teach kindergarten or Advanced Placement, if we cannot get our students to work in groups productively, actively, and responsibly, we are pedagogically sunk. Back to the paleo-classroom, with its straight rows of unwilling kids and us in the front, spoon-feeding, cajoling, and threatening. Enough!

How the Book Works

Living with the Inevitable Internet (much more on this in Chapter 6), we have all become accustomed to reading in quick, strategic bursts, looking for features, pictures, and sidebars, jumping around the page, and following links. (Come to think of it, how often do we see a thirty-six-word sentence like that last one on a website?) In short, with hypertext, we like to take the wheel and drive ourselves around. Because this book is full of practical materials, suggestions, lists, connections, pictures, and samples of kids' work, we've tried to provide as much of that "webby" feel as we can, within the constraints of a tree-based product.

But there's also merit to sitting down in a comfortable chair, under the glow of a nice bright lamp, for a long, leisurely read. Turning a sequence of pages, stopping to think and react, maybe jotting notes or questions in the margin. Yes, we have tried to pack the book with practical ideas and materials you'll want to grab, but it is also about big ideas: What is school really for? How can we develop kids' thinking? How can we teach for understanding? What is most important to learn? Can we really break free of the old lecture-test method? Where does motivation really come from? Are we sure that kids are ready to take much more responsibility for their education? What roles are most powerful for teachers to enact? Sitting in your comfy chair, with that nice bright light, you can do a whole different kind of reading, and give the ideas in this book a longer, deeper, test.

Need a road map to this book? Here's how *Comprehension and Collaboration* lays out.

PART 1. Here in **Chapter 1,** we have tried to show the powerful potential of this approach and set it in the context of American education today. Next, in **Chapter 2,** we review research and current insights into *comprehension,* the way learners think as they listen, read, and view. In the complementary **Chapter 3,** we look at *collaboration* and the specific social strategies of small-group learning. There is a robust base of research and information (rarely shared among teachers) that helps us confidently form and manage student-directed inquiries in our classrooms. In **Chapter 4,** we share what we know about *research and inquiry projects* in school. While most of us already do some work along these lines—thematic units, projects, term papers—such projects may lack key elements of true inquiry, and thus contain pitfalls we want to avoid when we launch inquiry circles.

PART 2. **Chapter 5** explains ten fundamental classroom conditions needed for active, small-group learning in all subjects and at all grade levels. This starts with setting up your learning space and extends all the way to the intellectual habit of "living with big ideas in mind." Because our students depend heavily (though not exclusively) on the Internet for research, it is vital that we help them use the web wisely. The remarkable Andrew Hess, technology specialist from the Mamaroneck Public Schools, helps us provide that kind of specific, careful online guidance in **Chapter 6.**

In **Chapter 7,** we help you get started with inquiry learning by sharing the Gradual Release of Responsibility framework for instruction and offering 27 practical, adaptable lessons in comprehension, collaboration, and inquiry.

Lesson Link icons direct you to the page(s) where other versions of a lesson can be found.

Versions of these 27 lessons appear in many of the classroom accounts scattered throughout the book. To help you navigate between the baseline versions in Chapter 7 and the fascinating teacher adaptations, we use the Lesson Link icon. When this icon appears in the margin, it will direct you to the page(s) where other versions of the lesson can be found.

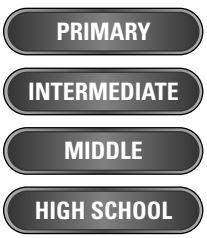
PART 3. Part 3 offers how-to instructions for four types of inquiry circles. **Chapter 8** introduces brief, often spontaneous *mini–inquiries,* in which groups of kids seek answers to a pressing question or quickly gather information about a topic of interest. In these brief investigations, kids may simply scratch a curiosity itch and answer a question, or they may spend several days expanding their knowledge about a topic. Either way, mini–inquiry projects offer an opportunity for teachers to teach some beginning steps of the inquiry process and for kids to practice the strategies of "finding out," the core activity of all deeper learning. In **Chapter 9,** we describe *curricular inquiries,* in which teachers offer students choice within subjects required by the official curriculum

and help them to investigate their chosen topics in a group inquiry mode, instead of relying solely on the textbook or seatwork. **Chapter 10** describes literature circle inquiries, small-group research projects that stem from book club discussions. In this variant, students systematically reflect upon books they are reading to notice big or lingering questions, and then reorganize to investigate these important topics. Finally, **Chapter 11** moves on to *open inquiry* or *negotiated project curriculum,* where teams of students identify and pursue their own topics, as teachers support, facilitate, and backmap the process to the official curriculum.

PART 4. The last section focuses on the distinctive management concerns that arise with small-group inquiries. Whenever kids are working in small groups, teachers wonder how to assess them. In **Chapter 12,** we address issues of assessment, evaluation, record keeping, and grading. Inquiry circles allow us to see kids working at a high and sustained intellectual level, and we want to be sure we capture evidence of all that good thinking. Finally, in **Chapter 13,** we tackle the most commonly asked questions about the setup, management, and predictable problems of inquiry circles.

Threaded through all these pages are 29 extended stories of small-group inquiry projects in action (as well as a variety of shorter ones) from pre-kindergarten through high school and across the curriculum. If you can't remember which story is in which chapter, refer to our Inquiry Project Locator chart on page 17.

To further help you locate classroom accounts from the grade level you teach, we've deployed grade-range icons in the margins of the book.



Grade level icons help you locate classroom accounts from your grade level.

Primary

Intermediate

Middle School

High School

While it's always valuable to see innovations at work with the kinds of kids you teach, don't forget that stories from other grade levels often provide structures that can be easily adapted to older or younger learners.

Each of these classroom accounts shows creative teachers putting the principles of inquiry to work with a unique group of students. By studying these distinctive stories, you can see the many different ways that artful teachers adapt the basic inquiry circle model to their own situation, style, and students.

Inquiry Project Locator

Companion Website

Anytime you see this icon in the margin, you'll know that there is additional material available on the web, at www.heinemann.com/comprehensionandcollaboration.

A vital part of this book is its companion website, www.heinemann.com/comprehensionandcollaboration. Any time you see this icon in the margin, you'll know that there is additional material available on the web. When you log on, you'll see that many of our chapters have extensions, extra sections, background details, or student work samples posted for your study and enjoyment. Especially valuable are several more full accounts of inquiry circles in action at a variety of grade levels. As we go to press, there are already 200 pages of extra content on the site, with lots more coming from us and, we hope, from you.

On the website you will also find:

- a step-by-step **Study Guide,** specifically designed for faculties or teacher study groups working to support student inquiry. You can start your own "Teacher Inquiry Circle" with this guide.
- a section of **Frequently Asked Questions,** where we address the most common concerns teachers have about implementing inquiry circles. We hope that this section will grow as readers visit this interactive part of the website, pose further questions, and share their stories and suggestions.
- three practical **Bibliographies** including a list of web pages of interest to teachers and kids, a list of magazines that cover science and history topics as well as current events, and a list of series books on a far-reaching range of topics and issues.
- **Resources Pages** that will offer updates on great new books, materials, processes, classroom stories, podcasts, staff development opportunities, and more.
- Detailed versions of some of the featured **Lessons**.
- A variety of **Graphic Organizers, Forms,** and **Think Sheets** that are used with the lessons and inquiries throughout the book.