Teacher Inquiry Communities Network Annual Report 2008-2009
Submitted by Cindy O’Donnell-Allen and Pam Brown

Summary and Reflections on the Year’s Work
The Teacher Inquiry Communities (TIC) Network was launched in November 2000 at the NWP Annual Meeting in Milwaukee. The TIC Network has at its heart five goals that guide network planning:

° promoting an inquiry stance
° facilitating inter-site and intra-site communication
° creating a clearinghouse for resources
° facilitating access to experts
° fostering equity and advocacy.

Reflecting these goals, the following activities represent TIC’s efforts in 2008-2009 to support inquiry and develop leadership within local Writing Project sites and the larger NWP network.

Annual Meeting Presence
The TIC Network was involved directly in three different sessions at the 2008 Annual Meeting in San Antonio:

° The Thursday site development workshop was held the afternoon of November 20. Facilitated by TIC Co-chair Pam Brown and titled “Inquiry as Advocacy: Using Teacher Inquiry Communities to Promote Social Justice,” the workshop provided an in-depth view of how three sites have used teacher inquiry as a tool for advocating social justice. More than 60 participants chose one of the roundtable groups to attend and were actively engaged in the three-hour workshop. Presenters included Rebecca Fox, Elizabeth Lewis, Cameron Shinn, and Cindy O’Donnell-Allen from the Colorado State University Writing Project; Roy Fox and Amy Lannin from the Missouri Writing Project; Pamela Brown from the Oklahoma State University Writing Project, and Sally Griffin and Tony Iannone from the UNC Charlotte Writing Project.

° Six participants from the 2007 Inside Inquiry cohort presented a Friday breakout session on November 21 entitled “Looking Inside Inquiry.” In addition to describing how their teacher research questions and skills had blossomed into full-scale inquiries since Inside Inquiry, presenters shared strategies for enhancing teacher inquiry within individual sites and developing inquiry connections with other Writing Project sites. Participants also received information on how to apply for the 2009 Inside Inquiry institute. Presenters included Renda Ware from the Boise State University Writing Project; Darla Liparelli and Wendy Wilson from the Great Basin WP; Annie Ortiz from Oklahoma State University WP; and Elizabeth Campbell and Holly Marich from Southern Nevada WP. TIC Co-chair Cindy O’Donnell-Allen facilitated the session.
Nellie Quinn and Daa’iyah Saleem facilitated a Reading the Research session focused on Sharon Miller’s *NWP Quarterly* article “Lessons from Tony.” Approximately ten participants shared in a frank discussion of ethical dilemmas in teacher inquiry, exploring such questions as whose needs should prevail—those of the teacher-researcher or the students—when students object to the dissemination of compelling data.

Annie Ortiz and Nellie Quinn also prepared the TIC table display highlighting TIC Network goals and events for the SFN Social held Friday evening, November 21.

**Spring Meeting Presence**
The TIC Network participated in a roundtable session at the Spring Meeting in Washington, DC, entitled “Ethical Issues in Teacher Inquiry.” Taking an exploratory rather than a directive approach, facilitators Pam Brown and Cindy O’Donnell-Allen led two groups in examining the ethical dilemmas that result as teacher-researchers consider the question, “What is the right thing to do in my inquiry?” By grappling with a set of scenarios and incidents drawn from actual teacher-researchers’ experiences, participants met the session goal of surfacing a set of questions teacher-researchers might use to maintain ethical integrity in their work.

**Leadership Team Meeting 1**
The TIC Network Leadership Team met on November 22, 2008, in San Antonio following the NWP Annual Meeting. During the meeting, leadership team members looked at recently published teacher research books and discussed writing reviews and annotations. The team shared summaries of the TIC Network presence at the Annual Meeting and tried out the activity Pam Brown and Cindy O’Donnell-Allen planned to share at the TIC roundtable session at the NWP Spring Meeting in Washington, DC. Team members also received an update on plans for the 2009 Inside Inquiry institute, read and discussed minigrant reports, and reviewed the most recent Program in Action piece on cross-site work on vocabulary instruction. Finally, the team members looked at upcoming items on the TIC calendar and bid a fond farewell to Daa’iyah Saleem as she rotated off the leadership team.

**Leadership Team Meeting 2**
In April 2009 the TIC Network Leadership Team met in Louisville in conjunction with the Urban Sites Network Conference. We were able to attend a day of Urban Sites sessions before our meeting on Saturday evening and all day Sunday, April 25-26.

On Saturday evening, the team participated in an extended visioning exercise designed to help us reflect on TIC’s purpose, goals, and activities. On Sunday morning, we identified key themes from that exercise to guide our work as a network and together sketched out session plans for TIC’s presence at the Annual Meeting.

**Minigrants**
In 2009, the minigrant online review team piloted the new user-friendly rubric for reviewing minigrants developed by leadership team member Joel Freedman. The review
team included Joel Freedman, Lona Jack-Vilmar, and Pam Brown. The TIC Network awarded seven minigrants supporting a diverse group of inquiry communities and projects. Prevailing themes in the work include an emphasis on equity and social justice and the development of inservice programs. For more information on the 2009-2010 TIC minigrants, please visit http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/projects/79. Finally, the minigrant review team met in Berkeley in September 2009 to write letters to minigrant recipients in response to minigrant progress and final reports. The three are also refining the minigrant rubric.

Program in Action Piece
TIC’s Program in Action (PIA) pieces continue to highlight how the TIC Network is enacting our program goals. Bob Fecho wrote another PIA focusing on the Mizzou Men for Excellence in Elementary Teaching, an inquiry community formed as a result of a TIC minigrant. This group from the Missouri Writing Project meets regularly to explore readings, films, and stories from their own classrooms that raise questions and issues related to their experiences as male elementary teachers.

Inside Inquiry
The second Inside Inquiry institute was held July 29–August 1 at the Babson Conference Center. Tanya Baker, Pam Brown and Cindy O’Donnell-Allen selected two-person teams from twelve sites to participate in the institute. Led by Pam Brown, Darla Lipparelli, Cindy O’Donnell-Allen and Annie Ortiz, the 2009 institute was again guided by a dual purpose: participants would experience a “crash course” in teacher inquiry and would also develop a plan for integrating teacher inquiry more deliberately into their site’s work. Consequently, we asked participants to wear two hats during the conference—one as learner and one as leader. Conference readings and activities were guided by three questions:

1) What is inquiry?
2) What is data and what do we do with it?
3) What do teacher inquiry communities look like, and how can we best support one?

Participants engaged in reflective conversations and exploratory writing, read the work of teacher-researchers, generated research questions, examined online resources, learned methods for data collection and analysis, and created plans for enacting teacher inquiry at their respective sites.

Members of the TIC Network Leadership Team during 2008-2009 were:

Pam Brown, Co-chair, Oklahoma State University Writing Project
Cindy O’Donnell-Allen, Co-chair, Colorado State University Writing Project
Bob Fecho, Red Clay Writing Project (GA)
Joel Freedman, UCLA Writing Project
Stephen Gordon, Boston Writing Project
Lona Jack-Vilmar, New York City Writing Project
Plans for the Year Ahead

Minigrants
Much of the 2009-2010 TIC budget is allocated toward minigrants since these are the heart of the TIC Network’s work. At the fall leadership team meeting, we will again reflect on the minigrants awarded in the past year for the purpose of understanding how TIC is supporting inquiry both within individual sites and across NWP as a whole. This reflection will continue to inform TIC’s future planning because it teaches us not only what sites need but also how sites interpret our intentions and goals.

In the coming year, the minigrant review team will refine procedures regarding minigrants by implementing a revised version of the proposal rubric, providing written feedback to sites who have received minigrants, and creating a guide for new members joining the minigrant review team.

Annual Meeting Presence
The TIC Network’s presence at the 2009 Annual Meeting will reflect the priorities identified at our spring leadership team meeting. On Thursday, November 19, the network will sponsor a site development workshop entitled “Developing Ourselves: Teacher Inquiry as Professional Development.” Presenters include Jim Fredricksen and Jeffrey Wilhelm of the Boise State University Writing Project; Stephen Gordon of the Boston Writing Project, presenting with Jessica Madden-Fuoco and Adina Schecter from Charlestown High School, Massachusetts; Nellie Quinn and Jason Thompson of the Gateway Writing Project; and Ted Domers, Marsha Pincus, Dina Portnoy, and Trey Smith of the Philadelphia Writing Project, presenting with Shevonne Jerido from Simon Gratz High School. Cindy O’Donnell-Allen will facilitate the workshop. Presenters will describe the varied ways that they have implemented teacher inquiry as an alternative to traditional professional development, and participants will reflect on how these models might be adapted for their Writing Project sites.

On Friday, Pam Brown, Darla Lipparelli, and Annie Ortiz will lead a breakout session entitled “Hey, Teacher, Inquiry Is Knocking at Your Door!” The session will provide participants with strategies, processes, and resources for finding a viable teacher research question. Also on Friday, Tanya Baker, Pam Brown, and Cindy O’Donnell-Allen will facilitate a Reading the Research session featuring Inquiry as Stance author Susan Lytle.

Nellie Quinn will once again take the lead in planning the TIC Network presence at the special-focus networks social on Friday evening.
Leadership Team Meetings
The TIC Network Leadership Team meeting will take place on Saturday of the NWP Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. We will welcome new leadership team members Mattie Davis from the Philadelphia Writing Project, Tony Iannone from the UNC-Charlotte Writing Project, and Lynette Herring-Harris as TIC’s new Thinking Partner. We will also announce Annie Ortiz as the new TIC Co-chair, replacing outgoing Co-chair Pam Brown, who will rotate off the team at this meeting.

We will report on TIC’s work since the Spring 2009 meeting by debriefing the most recently concluded Annual Meeting sessions, recapping Inside Inquiry, and reporting on minigrant work and PIAs. We will also share a condensed review of the visioning work we did at the Spring Meeting in Louisville as a way of framing our tasks for the remainder of the meeting. Specifically, these tasks will include developing the teacher research space on the NWP Site Leaders Ning, brainstorming topics for the 2010 Annual Meeting, and getting organized for the upcoming minigrant review in February. Leadership team members will self-select the working group of their choice based on their interests. We will also identify three team members who will travel to the 2010 Urban Sites Network conference in Portland to work out the details of the NWP Annual Meeting programming.

Inside Inquiry Mini–Writing Retreat
In January 2010, TIC will host a mini–writing retreat for up to five individuals from the 2007 and 2009 Inside Inquiry cohorts. Participants will work on a piece of writing related to their teacher inquiry.

In place of our traditional spring leadership team meeting, we will hold a visioning retreat July 30–August 1, 2010. One task at the retreat will be to revisit the TIC mission statement in light of the new NWP mission statement. This exercise will undoubtedly guide our construction of an action chart to reflect TIC’s immediate work and long-term goals.

Program in Action Pieces
Nellie Quinn has agreed to write a PIA reporting on the Gateway Writing Project’s school-based teacher inquiry group, which has been supported by a TIC minigrant. Annie Ortiz and Darla Lipparelli will write a PIA reflecting on their Annual Meeting session “Hey, Teacher, Inquiry Is Knocking at Your Door!”