

Sue Doubler, An Inquiry-Driven Career at a Glance — Hands On! Winter 2018

Since joining TERC in 1990, Sue Doubler has developed a rich and diverse body of work centered primarily on elementary school science teaching and learning, and on ways that technology can support teachers and students. As her most recent project, "Empowering Teachers Through VideoReView," is winding down, we took the opportunity to talk with Sue about her work and time at TERC.

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After years of experience in the Winchester school system, Sue had undertaken a Ph.D. program at Liverpool University, in England. As her dissertation was nearing completion, Sue received an email from an old colleague that said, "There's an ad in the 'Globe' for a position at TERC. You might be interested." She was, and thrived in TERC's climate:

"A leader at TERC once described TERC's aim as the idea that we should look just over the horizon at what's not yet doable, then not only make it doable, but make it practical," Sue said. "This has always been a guide for me in working at TERC."

This aim permeated her innovative projects, starting with the IBM PSL (Personal Science Laboratory) project. IBM PSL built software, curriculum, and teacher professional development using the PSL system of data-collection sensors. It also brought in a talented team of newcomers who became important to TERC's work thereafter.

"In that early work, when TERC got started with technology, technology was new," Sue reflected. "Few people knew how to use a computer. We were filling a void... Now, technology is part of everything; the technologies we use now are viewed as everyday tools."

Always a teacher at heart, Sue's work drew on her profound understanding of teachers and their context. Her work as part of the PALMS (Partnerships Advancing the Learning of Mathematics and Science & Technology/Engineering) Massachusetts Statewide Systemic Initiative led her to create innovative professional development that supported inquiry as a foundation for learning.

In the years after PALMS, a sequence of projects unfolded that drew on all of Sue's previous experience. In a partnership between TERC and Lesley College, Sue developed the first fully online master's program in K-8 science education. This was followed by TERC's collaboration with the Fulcrum Institute (an early Math-Science Partnership project), the Inquiry Project, and Talk Science. From these, Sue's strategic vision led to the VideoReView project.

"Through our work on other projects we learned that teachers didn't have any way to see their own teaching. That led us to VideoReview, in which we developed new video analysis software, so teachers can capture video of science discussions from their own classroom, study it, and discuss with colleagues," Sue said.

A central thread throughout Sue's work is inquiry in collaboration: honoring the questions, and the questioners, and focusing deeply on the phenomena, the bit of the real world that is the occasion for the investigation and the discourse. But she stays rooted in the classroom event, where the "magic" keeps happening, and the human relationships that are the basis of learning.