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*In memory of Richard Jones
1967–2015*

Editors

Special Issue: *Stopping for a moment: The influence of change on teachers' professional practice*

Jenny Ferrier-Kerr and Kerry Earl

With afterword by Susan Groundwater-Smith

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About the Journal

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Notes for Contributors

Teachers and Curriculum welcomes

- innovative practice papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords;
- research informed papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords;
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- book or resource reviews with a maximum of 1000 words.

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Teachers and Curriculum provides an avenue for the publication of papers that

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- reports on research in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment;

- provides examples of innovative curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practice; and
- review books and other resources that have a curriculum, pedagogy and assessment focus.

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Foot/End Notes

These should be **avoided where possible**; the journal preference is for footnotes rather than endnotes.

Referencing

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Acknowledgement of Reviewers

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AFTERWORD: LEARNING FROM CHANGE: RISKS AND REWARDS

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Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.

T. S. Elliotⁱ

Before discussing the many and varied contributions to this special edition of the *Teachers and Curriculum* I want first to focus on learning, in particular teacher professional learning, for if we are to reflect upon the consequences of change and the impacts upon practice we need to ask ourselves ‘what kind of learning is happening here?’

Allow me a brief digression. I spent an evening recently with two octogenarians one of whom, Nancy, was a retired midwife. After delivering her last baby at age sixty-five she decided that she now needed time to devote to painting—something that she had never done and had a great urge to undertake. For the past twenty years, she has transformed herself into an artist of considerable talent and capability. She finds her learning about her artistry and craft not only enriching but also enlivening.

Being a teacher and being a leader of teaching in circumstances that are constantly changing at both the micro and macro levels can be too often seen as enervating and draining. However, if change is seen as an opportunity to learn then the challenges can be immense and exciting. This is clear from the papers that follow, as Jenny Ferrier-Kerr and Kerry Earl in their introduction observe:

Change requires a readiness and openness to new learning, and importantly a desire for action. To notice and recognise that change has occurred or that there is a need for sustained change, teachers need to consistently and closely examine and reflect on their beliefs, assumptions and values, relationships, leadership and pedagogy. (p. 1)

Just as painting has become the medium for Nancy to put her thoughts into a tangible form, writing is the medium for those contributing to this special edition of the journal as a means to reflect upon learning that can be both transformational and discomfiting. As Fielding (2003) has noted: “Language matters; it matters because in naming it celebrates and excludes, not just in the words it uses, but in the conceptual networks that give meaning to our wider activities and aspirations” (p. 293). Thus, when Darylle Lawler writes of learning the lessons of leadership she also expresses her need to learn to exercise restraint, holding back from her own role as leader to support and sustain student and peer leadership, to become a ‘curator’. She is articulating what it is to learn to lead from the middle as a practicing member of both management and teaching communities of practice (Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves, & Ronnerman, 2014). She writes of the ‘hive’ to connote the interdependence of all in the learning community; in ecological terms we can also see this as an exemplification of the ways in which practice is arranged and embedded in other practices (Kemmis, et al., 2014). Thus learning about becoming and being a teacher is governed not only by what happens in the moment, but by the ways in which the context of teaching is located in ever-widening circles from the immediate to the remote.

Using a somewhat different frame of reference Jean Saunders articulates a career-long experiment in learning through experience. Her writing is based upon a succession of ‘stories’ that teach us that learning is through participation and appreciation of the policy circumstances of schooling that require a political as well as a professional awareness (Noffke, 2009). This piece is followed by that of Richard Jones who argues that for change as a complex process that is sustainable, it must build:

ⁱ T. S. Eliot. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved from BrainyQuote.com Web site
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/tseliot161678.html>

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... on individual self-awareness and organisational structures that promote self-reflection; dialogue; relational trust; personal responsibility; lateral thinking; courage; the growth of leadership; and the sharing of knowledge, at all levels. (p. 17)

He puzzles over the struggles that are to be faced in relation to knowledges that are deeply felt and intrinsic and the satisfying of extrinsic demands and expectations—an argument that has long been understood as dealing with the polarities of the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’ (Beck, 2002). His resolution to these challenges has been to lead from the front as one who is trustworthy and committed to investing time and care in bringing others along with him.

Miriam Price adopts the notion of the marathon as a metaphor for her thoughtful and delicate reflection on the ways that teachers come to understand their work. She is cognizant of the fact that it is not the years of teaching that count, but the willingness to engage critically in an examination of practice irrespective of where the teacher is on the career ladder. She draws upon notions of trust, evidence and learning communities. For my part I always consider the notion of ‘evidence’ to be a two-edged sword. Whose evidence counts and to what purpose is it gathered must always be problematic for us in education (Biesta, 2007). But it is in conditions of trust and within an authentic learning community that these ideas can be aired and debated.

Kelly-Anne Powers also applauds the sustenance that can be provided by a community of learning. A noteworthy feature of her writing is her recognition of the centrality of ethics to practice:

Ethics for example, is a topic that does not seem immediately relevant to the curriculum and therefore is not often addressed in professional development in schools (except perhaps in an ‘ambulance at the bottom of the cliff’ scenario when ethical problems arise) but it is very relevant to teachers’ practice though with consideration of ethical implications an essential component of teachers’ critical reflection. (p. 27)

Indeed, along with my colleague, Nicole Mockler, I have argued that when we consider quality in practice, whether in the classroom or in relation to teacher research, it is inescapable that we should also take account of ethical behaviour (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2008).

In her writing Kelly-Anne has also emphasised the ways in which engaging in ongoing academic study has allowed her to see her practice anew. She has been enabled to extol the benefits of teacher professional learning arising from not only engagement directly in practice, but also at arms-length from practice through study and reflection.

Throughout the many and varied writings of these practitioner-contributors to the journal the power of metaphor is significant. Carolyn Smith evokes the physical activity of cycling to capture her development, not only over a year’s full-time study undertaken to complete her Bachelor of Education degree, but also the many years of teaching that preceded this time. Cycling can be hard work, but at the same time, there are the joyous moments of free-wheeling and taking risks, trying out new routes and being willing to shift gears to accommodate to shifting policy texts created by government. Among the many influences on her practice Carolyn specifically considers Nell Noddings’ notion of an ‘ethic of care’. While not elaborating on this it is clear from her writing that she has learnt to care, both for the learning of her students, and for her own learning and the ways in which it may enrich her practice.

This series of reflections is completed by a poignant and compelling account by Donna Goodman of the day a tornado hit Briarwood Elementary School in Moore, Oklahoma. Her inspirational story is one of courage and compassion of a kind that few of us, as teachers, will be asked to exercise. The learning has been immense: “Many lessons were learned along the way, but more importantly, I found an inner strength I didn’t know I possessed” (p. 39). Even so, each and every story is one of learning from change, of seeing change as an opportunity to risk going a little farther each time, to find out in Elliot’s words quoted at the beginning of this piece “how far one can go”.

Lingard and Renshaw (2010) argue for teachers to be research informed and research informing in their professional dispositions. Writing of the kind captured in this journal edition makes its mark on both the writer and the reader. It will contribute immeasurably to our understanding of the journeys that teachers take as their careers evolve and change. Just as the irrepressible Nancy, our eighty-five

year old artist continues to grow and thrive in her practice, so too will thoughtful and enterprising teachers continue to grow and develop, take risks and, of greatest importance, learn.

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