



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Teachers and Curriculum

KAIAKO ME TE MARAUTANGA

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 1, 2015



*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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Teachers and Curriculum is an online peer-reviewed publication supported by Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. It is directed towards a professional audience and focuses on contemporary issues and research relating to curriculum pedagogy and assessment.

ISSN 2382-0349

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Acknowledgement of Reviewers

The Editors would like to acknowledge the contribution of the reviewers.

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PROEM: STOPPING FOR A MOMENT: THE INFLUENCE OF CHANGE ON TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

JENNY FERRIER-KERR AND KERRY EARL

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In this special issue of *Teachers and Curriculum*, teaching professionals have written about a change experience that has influenced their professional beliefs and/or professional practice, and reflected on the influences of change. These authors have articulated the thinking and reflective processes that led them to recognise the significant shifts in their professional beliefs and practice, and take action. Each author demonstrates an awareness of the need to reflect on and re-think what it means to be a teacher and leader, and examine the implications for their practice. They recognise that their perceptions and actions about change are influenced by what they believe, their knowledge and experiences. In sharing their open and authentic reflections these authors demonstrate their commitment to the profession.

Change is frequently overwhelming and challenging in nature, and while a critical dimension of what it means to be an effective teacher, it is not easily accomplished. To thrive in times of change therefore, it is vital for teachers to know about the change process in order to build their understanding of, and capacity for change (Fullan, 1993). Often activated and subsequently enhanced by certain factors or actions (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002), 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. Making decisions about change or as a result of change without reflecting on those elements that inform and influence their teaching practice can unintentionally prolong less desirable practices (Zehm & Kottler, 2000). This should not be interpreted negatively however. Teachers are not doing the 'wrong thing' when their practice differs to that of prevailing practices and could as Karaata (2011) claims, be part of a teacher's ongoing efforts to "bridge the gap between theory and practice" (p. 245).

Professional learning, which has long been considered a key determinant in how teachers respond to and approach change, is one important way of developing understanding, examining and reflecting on practice. However, teachers must see "themselves as fully involved and as genuine co-leaders in the whole professional learning community" for meaningful change to " 'scale up' to include all teachers and classrooms (Bain, 2007; Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002)" (Ferrier-Kerr, Hume, & Keown, 2008/2009, p. 127). Professional learning and the reflective process that it stimulates must therefore not only help teaching practitioners make sense of change, it must activate change.

Putting thoughts to paper as a way of talking to others or talking to ourselves can help gain perspective and understanding. Richardson (1994) has published regularly on writing as a "method of discovery and analysis" (p. 516), and Richards and Lockhart (1994) who specifically discuss teachers' use of journals to promote reflective practice have the view that writing in journals "serves as a discovery process" (p. 7). Writing can help us be better informed about our teaching:

Teachers who are better informed as to the nature of their teaching are able to evaluate their stage of professional growth and what aspects of their teaching they need to change. In addition, when critical reflection is seen as an ongoing process and a routine part of teaching, it enables teachers to feel more confident in trying different options and assessing their effects on teaching. (p. 4)

In whatever form, writing offers a place and space where individuals can explore their experiences, feelings and observations, and the ideas and words of others in the literature, their professional context, and links to be made between. Through this Special Issue we hope to encourage writing as a reflective exercise. Jenny had the idea for this Special Issue having noticed there were limited

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ISSN: 2382-0349

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opportunities for teachers to write reflectively about their practice and to have their writing published. We both remember reading publications in our school staffrooms where teachers had written of their professional practice for an audience of other teachers. In reading what these teachers have written, we also hope more teachers might be encouraged to write for publication. It is no small feat for these authors to share their writing publically, however in sharing their reflections and journeys not only the writers but other teachers can “attain different perspectives about their work” (Farrell, 2014, p. 76).

There is a saying that ‘experience is what you get when you don’t get what you want’. Certainly experiences, self chosen or imposed, can bring pleasure and hardship. With hindsight we usually see a combination of both enjoyment or at least satisfaction, and anguish, benefits and losses. Kerry can tell you stories of the life changing decision both personally and professionally to apply for the Junior teacher position in a small rural school, and some years later that school closure. Jenny might highlight her decision to take up a rural school principal position in the first year of the Tomorrow’s Schools reforms. Anticipating these experiences, the associated decision-making, the personal growth and professional development as teachers at the time, and the power of understanding gained through review and stories of these experiences has continued to influence our professional knowledge. These changes in work circumstances and context impact on us in different ways as individuals in a teaching role, as a member of a professional group, as a member of school staff, the leadership team in some cases, and as a member of the wider school community.

In this Special Issue each author examines change experiences that have influenced their professional practice. They consider the ways in which change was sustained and became transformative through critical reflective inquiry that surfaced and challenged their assumptions (Smardon & Charteris, 2012). For instance, Richard Jones insightfully pointed out that change is built 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” (p. 17). The other authors would concur with this view and they also indicate that for them in their various contexts, change has been challenging and at times, uncomfortable. This feeling of the discomfort of change resonates with the writing of authors with a broader audience such as Bridges (2009), Hargreaves (2005) and Richardson (1998). The authors acknowledge in different ways that change can be “volatile in nature” (Fullan, 1993, p. 12), hence aspects of these teachers’ ‘journeys’ have been high and low, including ‘into cul-de-sacs and one way streets’ and ‘wide open spaces’ as Jean Saunders puts it (p. 11). It is evident that these authors recognise that investing time and energy into reflection, during which experiences are synthesised and knowledge integrated (Zehm & Kottler, 2000), is critical for bringing about sustained change. That “reflective processes encourage multiple perspectives to be generated that challenge teachers and future leaders to excel in complex and uncertain environments” (Densten & Gray, 2006, p. 119) is borne out in the writing of each author.

We ask therefore, that readers keep in mind these submissions were originally written for a different audience and a less public purpose. They were written from a place of self-reflection and a growing awareness of the influence of change on professional practice. We acknowledge the courage of the authors and thank them for their willingness to share their stories. A key aim of this Special Edition is to provide educational professionals with insights into the professional reflective world of teachers in a variety of educational contexts, and to promote the participation of teachers in professional learning whether through research, study or by participating in collegial practices within school. These are each teacher-author’s words from their perspectives, memories of experience, reading of the literature and professional learning both in schools and in study. Summaries provide a focus for the reading of each piece. Overall experienced teacher readers are encouraged to seek points that resonate with their own stories. For beginning teachers these stories may provide insight into the experiences of changes in policy, developments in curriculum implementation of their colleagues and ways to reflect on and articulate experience of change. For all of us these are stories of lived reality, a timely reminder that teachers are human beings living and working, their lives daily gaining in knowledge, perspective and understanding as we, in the profession, all are.

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Kerry Earl is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. Kerry teaches face-to-face and fully online papers in professional practice, curriculum and assessment, eEducation and curriculum integration. She qualified as a primary teacher in Christchurch and taught for 15 years mostly in primary contexts. Her research has looked at innovative practices and changes to teachers' work including the use of digital technologies and in assessment. Her PhD study has a focus on self-assessment for personal and professional growth. To date Kerry has supervised directed studies and masters theses on personalised and online learning, teachers' beliefs about ICT, and student voice and inquiry learning.