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Editorial Introduction

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Editorial Introduction

by Gordon Wells

In this issue of *Networks*, there are articles by both classroom teachers and university-based practitioners. All are, in one way or another, concerned with the critical role of dialogue and discussion in effective learning and teaching. The issue concludes with the continuation of the exploration of the ethics of practitioner research that was introduced in the contribution to the previous issue by Jane Zeni.

In the first article, 'Understanding the Process of Teacher Research', Denise Dabisch, a high school teacher, of Spanish writes about her first investigation and what she learned from it. Starting from her attempt to improve the seating arrangement in her class and receiving the students' feedback on her efforts, she found herself enjoying and valuing the opportunity to listen to students' opinions in a way that she had not done before. As she concludes: "I found myself to be much more respectful of my students' needs and my own." Following this successful beginning, she intends to make more time for such collaborative dialogue.

Shelia Baldwin, the author of the second article, 'Infusing Computer Technology', is also a high school teacher. Her contribution describes her use of several computer software programs to enable her ESL students communicate through writing. No expert with the software at the beginning of her study, she found herself learning with and from her students and enjoying the experience. Baldwin describes three settings in which students composed and presented their inquiries, using either Hyperstudio or PowerPoint. Along with her evaluation of what they gained from being able to produce high quality written communications, she also points out the problems involved in securing sufficient time for the students to be able to complete their work.

In the third article, Lara Hansen recounts her attempt to wean her first grade students away from extrinsic motivation - grades, stickers and so on - in order to persuade them of the value of intrinsic motivation, that is to say, of learning and doing for the value of the activity for the actor. In her article, she reports the results of trying three strategies for increasing intrinsic motivation in different areas of the curriculum. All were to some degree successful, although it was acting as the teacher in the context of cooperative learning that was the most successful. However, Hansen's most important conclusion was that it was necessary for her to maintain the strategies in order to enhance her students' intrinsic motivation to learn.

The next article is by two university practitioners Laura Dreuth and Martha Dreuth-Fewell. 'Promoting Research Use Among Undergraduate Students Through Service Learning' describes the use of service learning to provide learning experiences for students enrolled in research methods in counselor education programs. Learning through participation in some form of service organization is now well recognized as providing a valuable complement to lecture-based learning in the preparation of many service providers. What is novel about the authors' approach is the requirement that students collect evidence during their placement and attempt to interpret it. Particularly valued by the students in these activities was the provision of opportunities for class discussion of the material they were working on.

The final article, 'Understanding Our Students' Literacy Practices and Events', by Linda Bausch, takes a broad and critical look at the literacies (i.e. uses of written language) that students engage in outside as well as inside the classroom. The questions she raises about the schools' valuations of different literacies, based on her case studies of a small group of students, are of very general importance in a multicultural society whose members use written texts for diverse purposes in specific situations that differ from one group to another. However, as Bausch concludes, welcoming these different literacies into the classroom brings many benefits for students' and teachers.

This issue concludes with a continuation of the discussion on the ethics of practitioner research. In 'Ethical Responsibilities To Children', Helen Hedges takes up the the issue of informed consent and from whom and in what manner it should be obtained. Where children are involved as 'subjects' of research, most institutions require only that informed consent be obtained from the child's parents on the grounds that children are not able to make such a judgment for themselves. Hedges challenges this justification and argues that if practitioners are to show respect for the participants in their investigations, they must ensure that they understand what is being asked of them and understand the implications of continuing or withdrawing. Drawing on her own work in early childhood education, she shows some ways in which this can be done.

To end this introduction on a more personal note: I have just finished teaching the introductory course for this year's intake of pre-service teachers. Entitled 'Learning, Teaching and Schooling for a Diverse Society', the course is based on principles derived from sociocultural theory - joint productive activity, collaboration, the zone of proximal development and dialogic interaction. In the materials for the course, the ideas of Vygotsky, Dewey and Bakhtin are well represented, as are extracts of videorecordings made in classrooms where these ideas are realized in practice. Also included are a number of papers written by teacher researchers, including some who have contributed to *Networks*. For many students, it was these writings by teachers that were most helpful and inspiring and, in their reflections on the course, they singled them out for special mention. But most encouraging is that many of them are intending to become teacher researchers themselves when they graduate from the program. For they have seen from these examples how being an active inquirer into one's own practice with the support of a community of like-minded colleagues is the best way both to keep on improving their effectiveness in enabling all their students to become successful, resourceful life-long learners and at the same time to transform the institution of schooling.

I share this personal experience with you to to thank those teacher researchers who are publishing their work and so providing powerful models to beginning teachers, and to encourage those who have not yet made their work public to take the plunge and submit an article to *Networks* or to one of the other journals that publish reports of educational practitioners' inquiries. By sharing your work, you not only make your discoveries available to others but, by your example, you encourage other teachers to become agents in improving the quality of education in their own classrooms and schools.

With the other members of the editorial team, I wish all our contributors and readers a fruitful and rewarding school year.