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Editorial Introduction

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Editorial Introduction

by Gordon Wells

This issue of *Networks* focuses on teacher research carried out by university teachers and teacher educators. In these articles, instead of carrying out research 'on' teachers - as university researchers have traditionally done - the authors turn the spotlight onto their own practice, investigating the manner in which they play out their roles and responsibilities as teachers of teachers. As each of these authors recognizes, if teacher educators are urging teachers to be reflective practitioners who carry out inquiries in order to improve and better understand their practice and the context in which it takes place, they themselves should 'walk the talk.' Here, then, are a number of investigations of becoming and being a teacher educator in reflective mode.

Nancy Dubetz and Steve Turley are recently appointed Assistant Professors who decided to make a self-study of their experience of crossing the divide between doctoral student and university professor. As they recount, the issue that stood out as most worth investigating, as they sifted through the hundreds of email messages and other communications they had exchanged over their first two years as members of the faculty, was that of mentoring - or rather, of being mentored. So, rather than simply accepting whatever help their mentoring colleagues gave them, they adopted a more reflexive stance as they charted their own progress and the changes in the kind of support they most appreciated. One outcome of this collaborative self-study is a heightened awareness of how they, in turn, can in the future help even newer members of the faculty than themselves.

In the second article, Thomas Ryan reflects on how he carried out his role as leader of a group of high school science teachers as together they investigated the forms and functions of assessment in their practice. As well as coming to have a better understanding of the options open to them in assessing their students and the different functions that different types of assessment best serve, the group of teachers were also apprenticed into the practice of researching their own teaching. The author also describes his changing feelings to leading the group.

The remaining articles introduce a topic not previously addressed in this journal: the preparation of teachers to work in schools and communities that are multicultural and often multilingual in makeup. Given the rapidly changing demographic statistics in many technologically advanced countries, the need to equip educators to teach in ways that are culturally sensitive and that ensure that no students are disadvantaged by virtue of their culture and language of origin becomes increasingly important.

Laureen Fregeau's article reports her attempts to discover what sorts of activities in classes for preservice or serving teachers are most likely to alert them to the issues involved in teaching in a multicultural society and to help them to modify their teaching style to match the learning styles of their students. Working within a constructivist framework, she found that, of the activities she offered, teachers - like school-age students - enjoyed 'hands-on' activities and those that really made them rethink their values and assumptions about race, class, and gender differences.

Although designed for teachers taking courses in a university setting, the activities described in this article might in many cases be adapted successfully for high school students.

The final article, by Marjorie Hall Haley, also concerns multiculturalism - in this case the preparation of teachers of English as a second language. Based on her own experience in this field, the author proposes two means of helping new teachers to make connections with, and understand the relevance of theory for, practice at the stage when they are still grappling with the planning of classroom activities and the complex demands of organizing their effective performance. The first describes the use of the case study of a particular intern in a teacher preparation program, arguing for the value of a case-based approach in situating and concretizing the abstractions of theoretical. The second initiative involves the use of teacher intern portfolios as a means of engaging student teachers in documenting and appreciating their growth and, at the same time, encouraging them to adopt a reflective stance toward their practice.

The second section of this issue of Networks addresses the important matter of the ethics of practitioner research. In an invited contribution, Jane Zeni explains the background against which the current concern with the ethics of research is best understood and then presents the concluding chapter of the book she recently edited (*Ethical Issues in Practitioner Research*, Teachers College Press, 2001), in which she proposes a framework of questions that practitioners need to consider at the various stages of their inquiries, from initial planning to public presentation and publication of their research. As she suggests, the ethical issues that arise in practitioner research differ in significant ways from those involved in, for example, medical or psychological investigations; rather than their resolution being a prerequisite for the research to go ahead, they need to be negotiated on an ongoing basis with the colleagues and co-participants whose ideas, actions and words contribute to the unfolding inquiry. It is our hope that, by including Zeni's chapter in this issue of Networks, we can contribute to the discussions and negotiations concerning the form in which the ethical review of practitioner research might most appropriately be carried out that are taking place in many universities around the world.

The issue concludes with two book reviews, both contributed by Cathy Compton-Lilly.

As always, the purpose of publishing the work of practitioner researchers is to stimulate reflection and discussion among other members of the community of educational action researchers. Although such research rarely allows conclusions to be drawn that can be generalized, as they stand, to all comparable situations, accounts of colleagues' work in their own specific settings, together with their reflections on what they learned through their inquiries, can prompt each of us to look at our own situations in the light of the insights that they gained and to consider ways in which we might be able to improve our practice in the interests of the students for whose learning and development we are responsible.