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Editorial Introduction

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Editorial Introduction

by Gordon Wells

This issue sees a continuation of a strand, begun in the first issue, of articles written by collaborative groups of educators who span the school-university divide. As the authors of all these articles note, when school-based practitioners or preservice teachers in their practicums work together with colleagues in universities they create a synergy that makes ripples - or even waves - beyond their individual classrooms. As they present their work at local or national conferences and publish in venues such as *Networks*, the value of their work is recognized by others, who are inspired to adopt and adapt their ideas to suit their own local situations. In this way, teacher research has an influence that is more powerful than top-down edicts that require educators to change, whether they agree with what is demanded or not. At the same time, the projects that such collaborative groups carry out have benefits for all participants - not simply for the teacher researchers, but also for the students they work with and their families and communities.

In the first article, Leslie Patterson, Shelia Baldwin, Rubén Gonzales, Irma Guadarrama, and Liz Keith tell about their "collaborative family inquiry" project in the Houston, Texas, area. Inspired by the "Funds of Knowledge" work of Luis Moll and his colleagues in Arizona, they have begun to visit the homes of their students to learn about recent immigrant families' lives and aspirations. Then they have used the knowledge gained to modify their teaching to make it more sensitive to their students' knowledge and experience. An important theme running through their article is that of the respect that comes with greater understanding and of the friendships that are formed in constructing knowledge together.

The second article, by Penny Beed, David Landis, Charline Barnes, Kari Benson, Kim Willms, and Amy Zidlicky, presents a number of linked research studies associated with the America Reads Program. Three undergraduate preservice teachers who tutored in this program collaborated with three university teachers to study the children's, the tutors' and the caretakers' views about the after-school tutoring program. The importance of relationships is one of the central themes here, too. For both university and preservice teachers, the chance to work together as co-researchers created a greater understanding of each others' roles and experiences and of the importance of interpersonal relationships in mediating both teaching and researching.

In the third article, by Barbara Davis, Virginia Resta, Karen Miller, and Keitha Fortman, it is novice teachers who are encouraged to embark on action research. The resources made available through the 'Teacher Fellows Program', a school-university partnership, enable new teachers to receive support from mentors in the school system as well as from university professors. There is also a linked writing workshop that helps them to write up their research. Although not strongly emphasized in the article, it is clear that it was the availability of assistance within the school that helped these beginning teachers to discover, in practice, the value of carrying out action research. Here, too, relationships are of real importance.

Karen Broaddus and David Landis are also concerned with establishing collaborative relationships with preservice and novice teachers and providing support as they explore literacy,

using inquiry-based methods. In their written dialogue the authors also raise some of the larger issues about the goals and methods of teacher research. Whatever critics in academic circles may say (cf Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) for a review), they are convinced that, as far as professional development is concerned, the situated nature of teacher research is not a weakness but a strength. For this reason, they conclude by suggesting that, in future, the preservice students should be involved with them in presenting and writing about teacher research.

In "The Power of Two", Carol Fitzpatrick expands on the theme of relationships in a report on the introduction of a "Buddy Reading" program in her school. Like Joan Ziolkowski (*Networks* 2(1)), she and her colleagues found that it was the developing friendships between the buddy pairs that was critical for the continuing popularity of the scheme. However, the gains in reading proficiency she reports suggest that the structure of the program itself was equally important. Viewed more generally, Fitzpatrick's article, together with those that precede it in this issue, bears out Vygotsky's (1978) claim for the value of collaboration in the "zone of proximal development": learning with the assistance of a more expert other - peer or teacher - is what leads development. As all these articles also show, assistance is most effective when it is contingently responsive to the interests and needs of the partner(s), as revealed in the course of the jointly undertaken activity.

The author of the last article, Angela Walmsley, teaches in neither school nor university. Her action research was undertaken from a student perspective, as she audited a university course in order to provide constructive feedback to the professor. As she argues - and as was shown in Karen Humes's article in the first issue of *Networks* - turning the spotlight on the classroom activities in which they are involved as learners gives students a greater sense of their own agency and encourages them to take a more conscious metacognitive stance to the processes in which they engage as learners.

This issue also contains a research note by Rena Cifarelli, a technology specialist, in which she reflects on the way she thought about establishing relationships as she set about assisting other teachers with integrating computer technology into their teaching in various disciplines. This issue also includes book reviews by Catherine Compton-Lilley and Gertude Tinker Sachs.

The present issue also provides an occasion for celebrating the first anniversary of *Networks*. As I hope readers will agree, the articles, notes and reviews in the first three issues have provided convincing evidence of the value of teacher research and of the importance of making it more widely known. In the coming year, we should like to see the range of articles expanded still further to include practitioner research across the disciplines, and from daycare to all forms of tertiary education; we should also welcome articles from practitioners in other continents. Watch the Home Page, too, for information about some theme-based issues that we hope to publish.

References

1. Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S.L. (1999) The teacher research movement: A decade later. *Educational Researcher*, 28(7): 15-25.
2. Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

