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Editorial Introduction

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Editorial Introduction

by Gordon Wells

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Welcome to the second issue of *Networks*. A new journal takes a while to become established, but we are gratified by the interest that the first issue aroused and pleased to be able to publish the second in this school year.

In this issue, you will find an award-winning article by Joan Zilkowski on the significance of the Reading Buddies program in her school. Working with her students, she discovered an important principle that applies to all learning-teaching relationships: They are founded in interpersonal relationships. Before we can provide assistance to another, whether as teacher or as buddy helper, we first have to establish a relationship of friendship and trust. This is all the more important when there is a difference in status or power between the participants in the relationship. The buddy reading partnership in Joan's school was successful, at least in part, because the older students quickly came to realize that friendship was as important a part of their relationship with the younger students as the help they gave with the skills of reading.

A similar concern with interpersonal relationships marks the partnerships described in the remaining articles in this issue. Whether between the two groups of preservice teachers, communicating via the internet, described by Marion Harris Fey and Mary Ann Tighe, the new teachers working with their former professor in the article by Clare Kosnik, or the practicing teachers brought together in a collaborative community of teacher researchers described by Myriam Torres, all recognize the importance of supportive relationships as the basis on which one person can learn with and from others. When the emphasis in the public sphere is so much on content coverage, outcomes, and accountability, it is crucial that we not lose sight of the fundamental reality: that teaching-learning transactions take place between whole persons within communities, and that they involve values, feelings, motivations, aspirations and insecurities, just as much as the competences specified in the official documents.

Globalization with its attendant emphases on competitiveness, cost-effectiveness and technical efficiency is putting great pressure on teachers, leading in many cases to a sense of loss of personal and professional responsibility with respect to what and how to teach. In these circumstances, continuing to be a researching teacher, although difficult, is particularly important - for one's personal sense of agency, for the students one teaches, and for the profession more generally. For this reason, the clear evidence in this issue of the important role of inquiry and action research in teachers' initial and continuing professional development is very encouraging.

Although change may be mandated by external agencies, the transformation of classrooms and of what takes place within them continues to be dependent on the relationships established among the participants and the objects of their activities. It is in individual classrooms and schools, therefore, that innovations actually take place, as teachers with their students construct and

develop ways of working together to meet and go beyond the requirements placed upon them. It is also on the basis of the evidence collected through classroom research and critically examined with colleagues that arguments can be put forward and actions attempted to bring about the conditions necessary to support and enrich students' learning and development in an equitable and democratic manner.

This journal exists in order that what is achieved and understood in these particular endeavors can be shared with others, both as a source of inspiration and encouragement and as a basis for ongoing dialogue. We urge you, therefore, to bring to your colleagues' attention the existence of *Networks* and its invitation to practitioner researchers to contribute articles about their work.

Gordon Wells