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Editorial Introduction

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Editorial Introduction

by Gordon Wells

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Welcome to Networks. This is a significant moment for teacher research: the first issue of an online journal in which teacher researchers can share their work with fellow educators and take part in the dialogue to improve and better understand ways of supporting and extending learning, from pre-school to university.

There is little doubt that the classroom inquiries carried out by teachers, either alone or in collaboration with colleagues, are making a significant difference to the quality of education. First and foremost, they are leading to changes in teaching practices that are of direct benefit to students - modifications, both large and small, that take account of students' particular interests, ways of learning, and needs for assistance, as well as of the value of inviting them to share in making decisions about the organization of their classroom communities and activities. These inquiries also benefit the teachers who conduct them by enhancing their understanding of how their actions affect their students' learning opportunities and by giving them a greater awareness of their ability to make principled decisions, based on reflection and analysis, about how to act in the specific situations that arise in their classrooms. Equally important, practitioner inquiries are challenging the traditional hierarchical relationship between curriculum developers and classroom practitioners by opening up a genuine dialogue between teaching and research, practice and theory, in which both parties can learn with and from each other.

For practitioners' inquiries to achieve their full potential, however, it is essential that they be widely disseminated. Not only are good ideas worth sharing, whether they be suggestions for practice arising from the research or insights gained through reflection on the significance of what was discovered in the light of wider reading; but equally the description of the decisions made and routes taken in carrying out these inquiries can be helpful to other teacher researchers who are still planning their own inquiries. It is for this reason that we intend to include short notes on work in progress in each issue as well as articles reporting more completed work. A further reason for starting this journal is to increase awareness of the widespread interest and involvement in classroom inquiry and to facilitate contact between individuals and groups who might not otherwise know of each other's existence. Our hope is that, through this opportunity to communicate with a wider audience, teacher researchers will more fully perceive their work as participating in, and contributing to, a larger knowledge building community.

This, then, is the principal purpose of Networks: to facilitate the dialogue among educational practitioners who are attempting to improve their practice through systematic inquiry carried out in collaboration with colleagues - both those with whom they are in immediate contact and those who are removed in space and time. As in any knowledge building community, those who

publish here do not imagine that they are uttering either the first or the last word; they are well aware that they are building on the work of others and they anticipate and hope that others will, in turn, respond with a view to extending or challenging their contributions. To provide a venue for this continuing dialogue, Networks also includes a Discussion Forum. We hope that readers will make full use of it.

In launching this new journal, I should like to thank those who have brought it into existence. The idea originated with DICEP (the 'Developing Inquiring Communities in Education Project' at OISE/University of Toronto), some of whose members have contributed to this first issue. However, many more people have been involved in making the idea a reality, in particular the members of the Editorial Board, who collectively established the journal's policy, and the Editorial Committee, who have created the website and put this first issue together. The names and affiliations of the members of the Board are listed at the foot of the homepage.

However, the continuation of the journal will depend on a much wider participation. Most important, of course, will be the willingness of practitioner researchers to submit material to be considered for publication. As is made clear in the Notes for Contributors, there is no fixed format to be followed; the principal criteria are that articles should be of interest to other practitioner researchers and be written in a manner that encourages further dialogue. All submissions are reviewed by a panel of fellow practitioners and, where appropriate, suggestions are made that are intended to help their authors to improve them. In order to carry out this reviewing function, the Editorial Committee needs to be able to call on a wide range of practitioner colleagues and would welcome many more volunteers. Finally, in order to ensure the smooth running of the journal, please note that all submissions, queries and suggestions should be sent to the Managing Editor at the address given in the Notes for Contributors.

We hope that this journal will further the cause of teacher research and we eagerly look forward to your participation.

Gordon Wells