

# Teachers and Curriculum



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*In memory of Richard Jones  
1967–2015*

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Special Issue: *Stopping for a moment: The influence of change on teachers' professional practice*

Jenny Ferrier-Kerr and Kerry Earl

With afterword by Susan Groundwater-Smith

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## **About the Journal**

Teachers and Curriculum is an online peer-reviewed publication supported by Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. It is directed towards a professional audience and focuses on contemporary issues and research relating to curriculum pedagogy and assessment.

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Teachers and Curriculum welcomes

- innovative practice papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords;
- research informed papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords;
- thinkpieces with a maximum of 1500 words; and
- book or resource reviews with a maximum of 1000 words.

## **Focus**

Teachers and Curriculum provides an avenue for the publication of papers that

- raise important issues to do with the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment;
- reports on research in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment;

- provides examples of innovative curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practice; and
- review books and other resources that have a curriculum, pedagogy and assessment focus.

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All submissions must be submitted online as word documents. Text should be one and a half spaced on one side of A4 paper with 20mm margins on all edges. Font = Times New Roman, 11 point for all text and all headings must be clearly defined. Only the first page of the article should bear the title, the name(s) of the author(s) and the address to which reviews should be sent. In order to enable 'blind' refereeing, please do not include author(s) names on running heads. All illustrations, figures, and tables are placed within the text at the appropriate points, rather than at the end.

### **Foot/End Notes**

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### **Acknowledgement of Reviewers**

The Editors would like to acknowledge the contribution of the reviewers.

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## THE VIEW LOOKING BACK FROM HERE: A PERSPECTIVE GAINED FROM DIFFERENT ROLES IN A 'HIVE'

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Darylle graduated from Auckland Training College at the end of 1971, after three years of pre-service teacher education, and set out on her teaching career armed with a Teaching Diploma. She has loved every moment of her teaching and has taught students from Year 0 to year 8, and even taught her own three children for three years while principal at a small school on the East Coast above Gisborne. Darylle has also worked in special needs-behaviour units and for the last 11 years she has been the DP at Makauri School, just outside Gisborne. She has recently graduated with a Bachelor of Teaching from the University of Waikato and is now on study leave working towards her Masters in Educational Leadership, also through Waikato, which she hopes to complete by the end of the year. - Darylle relishes the insights and fresh ideas that study offers.

### Professional Summary

*Looking back, this author explores her shifts in responsibilities and many prompts and actions for changing perspective. Readers are invited to consider how shifts in role impact on their own professional learning and development, and the place of feelings in experiencing change.*

The lavender flowers outside my study window are visited by honey bees. I watched them while planning this reflection and it struck me how bees, their hives and care were analogies to help me track the growth of my practice as a critically reflective practitioner. Hives are an inspirational reminder of the natural possibilities of organizational excellence. Each bee “has a role to play, including the leadership role of the queen of the hive” (Stead, 2009). Like education, they value research and development, and are constantly looking out for trends in learning while taking information from existing data sources. Likewise, the mirror of critical reflection allows us to observe our actions as teachers and deliberate on them as a tool for self-growth and change. Extending the mirror across the various roles and perspectives within a teaching community gives us the objectivity to consider and direct future action with mutual gains for everyone.

What are the changes and challenges that have enabled me to become a critically reflective practitioner? That enthusiastic young teacher who tried everything is now a more restrained individual who values the opportunity to align theory with practice and reflect on the outcome. I am now a series of parts held within my persona of a teaching professional and they are consciously employed to fulfil the critical reflective views that my complex work demands. The needs, concerns and successes of my teaching community require the compound perspective of reflection. A leader in Robertson’s (2005) study described this as “a pair of eyes coming in from out” (p. 67). For me, this use of perspective highlights how double loop learning, where actions inform and direct future work, and create knowledge for action (Argyris, 1999 as cited in Robertson, 2005). Without engaging in double-loop learning in my practice, I would not be able to examine and re-examine my values and assumptions (Argyris, 1976).

Double-loop learning has become an integral part of my teaching practice—the result of my participation in the Ministry of Education’s (MoE) Accelerating Learning in Mathematics Programme initiated in 2010. This programme’s theory of action perspective (Argyris, 1976) was shared with the participants and aimed to build reflectively on the intervention logic and the impact and success of the programme to inform future actions. As Hoyle’s (1974) models of professionalism suggest, I have moved from a restricted to an extended model of professionalism which has led to a greater awareness of what I term, ‘professional presence’.

For me, presence is more than the ability to be in the moment—it is to do with applying my beliefs in pragmatic ways—ways that align with my moral and educational purpose.

Teaching in all its facets has allowed and enabled me to build on personal and professional self-beliefs to become a reflective practitioner and deliberately probe, explore and make a decision about

what is happening in my classroom or school. Presence is also the *manaakitanga* that is recognised as a leadership quality in Māori contexts and is a quality that is indicated as being at the heart of effective leadership in New Zealand education contexts (Ministry of Education, 2015). Professional presence is also about the inner strength of the teacher as artist and researcher brought together and focussed on the moment. In the words of McCrary Sullivan (2000),

The artist is a researcher with his or her whole organism, inquiring, testing with the body as well as the mind, sensing and seeing, responding and retesting—a multitude of functions performed simultaneously—registering complexity, then sorting, finding patterns, making meaning (p. 226).

My reflective journey really began when I was a teaching principal. The first time I critically reflected in order to navigate change was during the 1989 change in New Zealand schools from Education Boards to school-based Boards of Trustees. I was responsible for managing the school along with parents who had little idea about the duty of governance. At times, I felt quite threatened (one day the Chairperson took over my office) as board members put forward their own views on school issues. Fortunately, my wise father, himself a School Commissioner, advised me to listen, value different points of view and encourage open discussions towards resolution, through board meetings. The personal challenge was reflecting on my role within this new structure. As the only educator, I had to steer the board towards the best possible outcomes for the students. This reflection is what Larrivee (2000) refers to as self-reflection. It caused me to examine my personal values, assumptions and beliefs. My ability to be a critical reflector has grown since then with the development of my understanding of action-based research developing through the work of Gwen Gawith (action learning, e.g. 1988) and of Trevor Bond's inquiry learning (see <http://ictnz.com/>). It was however, an opportunity to work with Eileen Piggott-Irvine (Professor of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University, Victoria in Canada) and to complete an action research project in School Leadership that made me much more aware of the value of critical reflection.

I have noticed that my ability to use critical reflection as a tool to extend my actions has developed more through my mistakes, let-downs and challenges over the years than through my successes. My presence has therefore strengthened through examining difficulties, accepting my part in them and then moving on to overcome the obstacle. Recognising the barriers to self-knowledge is painful but in order to have genuine self-awareness, I must have the courage and purpose to be an objective and reflective observer of what is around me. Being present in my role as an educator has, in the words of my bee analogy, added excellence to the crop yields.

Larrivee (1999 as cited in Larrivee, 2000) suggests three actions are essential for the development of critical reflective practice, namely: solitary reflection, being a problem solver, and questioning what is already there. In my role as a mathematics leader I was put into the seat of the teacher, researcher and learner when in my current position I became part of the Mathematics Specialist Teacher (MST) programme. As the lead teacher, I became the MST with the purpose of accelerating the “progress of underachieving students through teacher's increased pedagogical knowledge, best practices and responsive school wide leadership” (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Bees have individual abilities as team players. They are task and analysis driven and must share information for the mutual purpose of the community (Stead, 2009). Hence, I began as a worker bee. My initial role as the lead teacher involved trialling different approaches to accelerate groups of students. Reflecting on the effects of the approaches through journaling prompted me to visit other teachers and share their ideas. This helped me to build on my honeycomb of classroom practice, while my university study provided me with theoretical knowledge. I offered extra support and new ideas to staff members. My thinking was challenged, indicating that changes were needed. I had to put my own mindset and beliefs to one side in order to seek solutions.

In time I asked myself “So where to now?” In doing this, I moved my MST role into that of the Queen Bee-problem solver. My reflections signposted some big picture questions that needed addressing. I took my findings and concerns to our Lead Team meeting to set the direction for the next school year. We agreed that improving student outcomes especially for our priority learners in mathematics was urgent. I took responsibility for selecting an area to focus on as part of school-wide professional development and I invited any interested teachers to meet with me to plan a way forward. I had certainly underestimated the relationships that I had developed as every teacher came to me concerned

and eager to strengthen our collective practice. The hive was buzzing and just as Eisner (2002) had suggested, our mathematical learning was providing an orientation for us to make changes. Our data identified that our failing students could not subitize or recall early number bonds and patterns therefore we prioritised basic fact knowledge and number relationships. I led regular staff meetings to explore mathematical ideas and to provide a forum for reflection. Experts modelled effective teaching practices and we reviewed ourselves using a 'critical colleague' partnership. Teachers videoed themselves teaching and these vignettes were self-reviewed and then used to set individual goals. Our identified 'best practices' were then blended with evidenced based decisions (Robinson, 2003). Teachers used number knowledge ladders so students could monitor their own goals. Mathematical resources were purchased to support our identified needs. Our hive was developing into a professional learning community, using reflective practices, journaling and other tools to take a conscious look at aspects of our mathematical teaching (Robertson & Timperley, 2011).

As a leader, I scouted for evidence on the effectiveness of our intervention programme and the changes that we had made in our teaching. Common to us all was that basic fact/number knowledge relationships reverted to a recall and practice activity as other teaching demands arrived. Despite this, our end of year maths data improved across the school, especially in basic fact recall. Nevertheless, the data was unable to show us whether we were creating deeper understanding of how numbers worked. I realised that in order to keep expanding quality mathematical knowledge for both teachers and students, I would have to use a different type of leadership.

In thinking about leadership, I felt strongly that it must be centred on the students in our school. My own defining question to test ideas was "So what are the benefits to the students?" Subconsciously I was moving myself towards more of a student driven leadership style. Suddenly everything became clearer. My leadership needed to be a visible example of theoretical and practical knowledge in practice. I needed to move out of the beehive and become a keeper of the bees—the curator. In my leadership practice, I realised that I needed to engage with a wider view in order to sustain and enrich the environment essential for our school community to survive in and contribute to. I needed to wear the mantle of leader, teacher and learner. I recognised that I was secure enough in my own beliefs to encourage review and change. I had experienced change and knew that although there would be what Fullan (2001) has referred to as "early difficulties ... the implementation dip" (p. 38), the process would lead to a deeper understanding about effective mathematical learning underpinned by the vision of our school: "To build pathways for learning success, in partnership with our community." This vision equally shared, discussed and understood across the wider school community, forms our moral purpose.

In my curator role I was an expert. Postgraduate study had deepened my own understanding, creating new knowledge and implications for the bee community supporting both Larrivee's (2000) and Smith's (2002) views that theory is necessary to underpin quality teaching practice. Observations, shared readings, deep discussions and professional dialogue developed the capabilities of the hive; moderation and subsequent actions built efficient flight paths for teachers and learners; seminars and directed readings of sound theory were gardens used to gather new practice. Furthermore, I became aware that the care, protection and future focus of our hive and garden were being viewed through the lenses of Anthony and Walshaw's (2007) effective pedagogy in mathematics.

Change is not a comfortable process; hence, peer support is invaluable. At times I found it hard to see change as a challenge not a threat, so began deliberately focusing on my feelings, inviting both students and teachers to check in with theirs. Suddenly, my students were holding my hand and themselves searching to see if a change in practice such as orally justifying our mathematical solutions did in fact empower us as mathematicians. We saw the use of red pen as a way to track our thinking. In allowing others to experience and manage change in this way, I too learnt valuable lessons. Revived and humbled, my curatorship continued. Rather than avoiding change, we used these feelings to see ourselves through different eyes. The role of the teacher as researcher gave us objectivity and detachment to observe what was truly happening in our classrooms (Smith, 2002). Shared teacher inquiries reflected on together, added fundamental ideas to our honey pots.

As the curator, I respond to the effects of the weather (feelings), the variables of supply and demand (priorities), the pressure of work (reporting, student portfolios) and sudden changes (other demands). Maintaining the health of the colony is an enduring state of mind if I want students to benefit from our



work. I actively listen to the voiced and unvoiced messages and show that I value relationships and professional expertise by being in classrooms and engaging with students and teachers. Often I provide a link between the student voice and the teacher. I remain positive and philosophical knowing that I must be an astute curator, caring for the health of the hive and environment. In my role as curator, I need an open mindset, something that I had previously prided myself on. While I have found myself operating within the extended professionalism model (Hoyle, 1974) that is articulated in my conscious activities, my mathematic generalisations are deeply embedded and hard to change. It is in the mechanical actions of my teaching work that I catch glimpses of a restricted model. I need to be mindful therefore of Larrivee's (2000) systemic reflection process that allows teachers to take responsibility for considered personal action and become empowered practitioners who take deliberate actions to extend their honeycomb of learning. The use of Myportfolio (see <http://myportfolio.school.nz/>) and the discussion groups of my mathematic papers enable me to critically scout for evidence that my open-mindset is strengthening. Through university study I know that I have deepened my knowledge of the mathematics understandings embodied in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). Proportional reasoning and algebra, in particular, have challenged my previous beliefs. But if I feel this uncertainty, how then do I empower my colleagues to move away from symbol recognition and rule based beliefs towards the mindset of exploration, justification and generalisations? I am comforted by Larrivee (2000) who urges me to embrace this feeling of insecurity, and I have confidence that it will lead to greater understandings that will in turn create a genuine shift in the way that I reflect and take action.

As I look out of my window at the bees busy in the last sunshine of the day, I see part of the community that exists within my garden. Like the Curator, my work within the school is continually re-evaluated and updated. As with all change, the flight path to our shared vision as learners and teachers is fraught with obstacles. Critical reflection is a tough boss. Curator-like, I am sensitive to the atmosphere of the hive, tempering expectations into small steps with positive gains. The collapse of part of the hive has to be used to rebuild our honeycomb with even more explicit and deliberate acts of quality teaching. This reflective piece has been a timely review of my journey in critical reflection. Like the Curator of the hive, the cycle of review, reflection and deliberate action will continue through my professional work as I continue to strive to be the best that I can be.

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