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In memory of Richard Jones
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Editors

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

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Notes for Contributors

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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Foot/End Notes

These should be **avoided where possible**; the journal preference is for footnotes rather than endnotes.

Referencing

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Acknowledgement of Reviewers

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THE PERSONAL AND THE PUBLIC: A JOURNEY OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN TIMES OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE IN NEW ZEALAND

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Professional Summary

The change in this author's teaching philosophy and practice was gradual and in many ways happened without her being aware that it was taking place. Here she tells her stories about her teacher development using them to articulate how different periods and different roles have influenced her teacher journey.

My attitudes, beliefs and values about learning and teaching have been shaped largely by past experiences but also through professional dialogue and reading. In recalling my own learning from various times and contexts, I endeavour to create for my students the conditions I perceive will contribute to successful learning experiences for them.

A common feature of my own learning success has been to do with teacher expertise that is, a teacher's extensive knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy. My observations of these influential teachers showed they maintained a balance in their programmes in which content was challenging but not overwhelming; they were positive, organised, and prepared; they were also flexible and able to adapt in order to capitalise on the teachable moments. Clear expectations for learning and behaviour were also elements I now recognise as having contributed to the creation of effective and positive learning environments. These teachers were calm and rarely needed to raise their voices. Importantly, they were willing to share themselves with their students thus creating a sense of trust and caring. This establishing of authentic relationships was critical to the building of respect for others' ideas and beliefs; showing concern for students' welfare; celebrating students' victories; and sharing in the grief of losses and misfortunes. These teachers inspired me and have made real differences in my life. From the primary school teacher that influenced my decision to become a teacher, to the secondary school teachers that prepared me for higher academic learning, and the professional and vocational educators who have enriched both my working and personal life. As the bumper sticker says: 'If you can read this, thank a teacher' and for so much more as well. As a teacher I have had, and have the opportunity to change lives. Knowing that, I believe I have a responsibility to strive to be the best teacher I can be. Hence, my beliefs about professional learning are inevitably connected with my attitudes, beliefs and values, my practice, and ultimately student achievement.

In this paper, I have written about my teaching experiences over time. In my telling of, and reflection on these different stories I have come to realise that clichéd as it may sound, my development as a teacher has been a journey. I can see that it has taken me up and down highways and off onto byways, sometimes into cul-de-sacs and one way streets, and also to wide open spaces where I have been able to learn, grow, reflect, take advantage of opportunities, and improve my practice.

In my first story, I think back to when I was a beginning teacher. As a beginning teacher, I don't recall closely examining my own theories about learning and teaching, or assessing the effectiveness of my practice beyond a superficial level. I do know that I wanted to make learning fun and that I wanted to help children learn to read, write, and find out about the world in which they lived. These first few years of my teaching career were fragmented for a number of reasons hence I did not receive anything like the advice and guidance programmes that are available to the beginning teachers of today. Leadership and support from colleagues tended to be relative to their own level of expertise

and experience. I often felt isolated physically and intellectually, and left in my classroom to work things out by myself. Difficulties encountered in teaching situations were usually solved by practical means—the manufacture and adaptation of resources for instance. I would describe my practice as ‘knee-jerk’ because I would respond to situations intuitively and rarely reflect on the wider implications of my teaching practice (Hall, 2012; Hoyle, 1974). For longer than I would have expected, I was in the stage of teacher development often termed ‘survival mode’ (Katz, 1977; Moir, 1999 as cited in Ferrier-Kerr, 2012). My major concern was my ability to cope on a daily basis and I recall that I began to question my personal and professional competence to teach.

My second story is drawn from a time of major reform in New Zealand’s education landscape and is set in 1988 when I began teaching in the position that I retain today. This was the era of ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’, which saw the formation of the first boards of trustees. As the staff elected board member I helped with policy writing and implementation planning. Staff and parents all struggled with learning their new roles and responsibilities. Aspects of governance and management were not clearly defined and there was a lack of guidance from Ministry of Education advisors and other colleagues, who were likely struggling too. The work of the school board seemed disassociated from the work in the classroom. There was for instance, no structure in place for assessing the impact of policy decisions on student learning outcomes. Hence, while successive boards worked and learned together about how to govern the school in regards to the physical, legal and financial requirements, I became aware that insufficient attention was being paid to teaching itself, or to students’ learning.

The introduction and implementation of the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993) is the catalyst for my third story. This period of significant change led to a series of professional development courses for me and other school staff. This professional development was mostly concerned with understanding the content, aims and objectives of the subsequent curriculum documents with no exploration into why certain concepts were included and others omitted. Aspects of pedagogy addressed were usually around the pragmatics of introducing and teaching new programmes such as how to group students, how to structure lessons to meet learning objectives, and how to assess learning and evaluate teaching strategies. Most of the courses were conducted away from school and involved only one or two representatives from individual schools who were then expected to become lead teachers for whole staff development. As Guskey (1986) has observed, the assumption was that there would be a change in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs (changing how a subject had been taught in the past for example), and that changes in practice would lead to improved student outcomes. While change was critical to effective curriculum implementation, the long term changes in teachers’ practice and beliefs that eventuated were in effect the result of teachers’ tenacity and commitment to their students, rather than the offerings of off-site professional development. As most teachers did, I used what worked for my students and me, and discarded those strategies I did not find effective. With hindsight and greater insight, I see this was the beginning of the pedagogical reflection that Larrivee (2008) refers to as a practice indicator.

A further story stems from my Reading Recovery teacher training in 1995. For the first time in my teaching career, I felt I was really exploring how children learn and was participating as a purposeful member of a professional learning community. Dame Marie Clay’s theories underpinned all that we learned as educators (Clay, 1991, 1993). Critical inquiry and professional dialogue became regular and on-going features of my learning about the Reading Recovery Programme. Why certain aspects of the programme were included were discussed along with how, when and for whom instruction should be planned and implemented. This was reflection at a pedagogical level (Larrivee, 2008).

Nevertheless, there were challenges for me. While I could see the value of this learning and teaching for individual students, I began to question some of the decisions about the selection of students into the programme. Some children who I felt would have benefitted and made greater progress than those chosen, missed out because they were not the lowest achievers. Frequently, I thought the students receiving the instruction would have been better served by another learning programme more specifically tailored to their special learning needs, and often they were discontinued because they did not make sufficient progress. I observed that the opportunity for the more able child to receive intensive, one-on-one instruction was lost. To me this seemed unfair and unethical. I recognise now that I was reflecting critically, albeit in a seemingly unstructured and haphazard manner.

In a small school with two multi-level classes, we were well used to incorporating co-operative learning strategies into our learning programmes. While the enthusiasm and engagement of the majority of students indicated this approach was successful for most, it became clear that it was not a learning style that suited every student. This fifth story illustrates the empowering nature of professional learning when in 2001 I studied Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1999) at the Christchurch College of Education. The concept of thinking and by association of learning in different ways, and catering for these different preferences became a central principle in my teaching philosophy and embedded in my teaching practice. Paying attention to my students' strengths and then searching for learning activities that attended to the needs of their various learning styles, led to the development and fine-tuning of my skills for critical reflection. Furthermore, this recognition that the learner was better served by being able to identify their own strengths led to a greater awareness of my ethical responsibility to provide equitable learning opportunities for all. It therefore became crucial for me to reflect on my own beliefs and values, and deeply consider whether what the ethical responsibilities of teaching, aligned with my personal beliefs and values (Gibbs, 2006; New Zealand Teachers Council, 2004; Palmer, 1998). I recognised that as an ethical teacher I needed to demonstrate ethical responsibility not just through the culture of caring and respect present in my classroom, but through my pedagogy, curriculum decision-making and interactions with students, their parents, my colleagues, and the wider community.

My participation in the Early Numeracy Project in 2003 is the sixth story in this paper. This offered another opportunity to develop my own thinking about student learning, challenge my beliefs around what constituted knowledge, and examine why learning and teaching programmes were structured in particular ways. Again, putting strategies in place and observing improved student outcomes preceded changes in my beliefs and values, and in some instances confirmed my growing appreciation of children's capacity to learn in 'non-traditional' ways. One approach did not work for all students. It became clear to me that mathematical and other ideas needed to be presented and learned through a variety of methods for understanding to be transferred to other learning situations, and for learning to occur for all students.

In the first decade of the 21st century, I was an associate teacher for an increasing number of student teachers, and in 2009 became a tutor teacher responsible for the provision of an advice and guidance programme for a provisionally registered teacher. Critiquing this beginning teacher's practice, questioning them about their teaching decisions and modelling 'best practice' caused me to reflect on my own beliefs and attitudes, and to evaluate my ability, effectiveness and justifications for my own teaching decisions.

The implementation of the revised *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) is a further positive and affirming story about the ways in which change occurred as the result of our staff working closely with colleagues from other local schools in a cluster. Notably the cluster continues to function as a professional learning group. We supported, and continue to support each other through professional dialogue and the sharing of professional learning experiences. During this time, with the official recognition of dyslexia and dyspraxia I was also motivated to learn more about these perspectives and the implications for learners in my classroom by reading and attending workshops on the condition. The injustice of refusing to recognise that some people think and learn in ways alien to many 'language orientated' educators has major implications at the broader sociological and political levels.

This final story is drawn from my participation in the ICT/inquiry learning professional development contract from 2008 to 2010. This caused me to challenge my own beliefs and took me out of my 'comfort zone' in regard to my ability to use ICT tools personally and professionally. The ethical implications of enabling access by students to the Internet and social media are profound; so too are decisions to restrict or disallow access. These tools are part of 21st century life and I believe we have a moral responsibility to help students navigate the digital world safely, just as we are concerned for their wellbeing when accessing any learning contexts beyond the school gate. The contract also introduced me to further ideas about thinking and learning, as presented by course facilitators Trevor Bond and Pam Hook in particular. Within our school and cluster we have examined the vision, principles, key competencies and values outlined in the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and explored what they look like in our own schools. It is my view, however, that

the broader perspective and more searching questions as to why these concepts need to be included have been touched on only lightly during our professional conversations.

Change is perhaps the only constant in the 21st century. We change homes, schools, countries, jobs and spouses more often than we have previously changed our cars or even overcoats. Methods of communication are varied, faster and more accessible than ever before. The ways in which we are able to send and receive ideas and information seem limitless. Today we must be multi-literate - able to view, interpret and communicate ideas in multiple forms and contexts. New skills are required to keep pace with the vast amount of information available hence strategies to select and project information with precision; filter, analyse and synthesise; think critically in logical and creative ways are crucial. Adapting to and coping with rapid change, and adopting new technologies and even beliefs has become a way of life. It is the norm for our students therefore as teachers we must constantly reflect on, examine and adapt our practices, test our pedagogical beliefs, self-assess and be actively engaged in the learning process.

While it is inevitable that change will continue to occur on a school-wide, system-wide and national scale, it is critical that individual teacher practitioners take responsibility for transforming their practice in response to a changing world (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2009). As teachers, we must engage in authentic professional learning communities. It is necessary to contribute, interact, review, apply, assess and re-assess the learning that occurs not only for our students but also for us. This cannot happen in isolation in our classrooms or even within individual schools. As DuFour (2004) points out, a shift from a “focus on teaching to a focus on learning” will have “profound implications for schools” (p. 6). Furthermore, as teachers come to see “learning for all” (p. 6) as a commitment to each student, deep change will begin to take place.

I strongly believe that I have a moral and ethical obligation to proactively participate in professional learning to enhance and enrich my professional practice. Through ongoing reflection and a myriad of experiences over many years, I recognise that learning to teach is indeed a journey, albeit one without a final destination. If I cease to question my practice and strive to improve my knowledge and understanding of pedagogy, I will stagnate and restrict my professional growth. My focus must be on participation in a collaborative culture that is focused on learning and doing (DuFour et al., 2009). For me this is transformative rather than additive (Timperley, 2011), hence reflection, self-assessment and evaluation have become vital components of any change process I engage in. As Kierkegaard so aptly states, “While life must be lived forward, it can only be understood backward” (as cited in DuFour et al., 2009, p. 102). To move on, grow and improve therefore, I must look at where I have come from; what I believe; what has worked for my purposes; and what has been discarded. I must constantly search for evidence of growth and improvement in myself for my teaching to be effective and further learning to occur.

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