Teachers and Curriculum

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

KAIAKO ME TE MARAUTANGA

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 1, 2015

In memory of Richard Jones

1967–2015

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

Editorial Board

Correspondence and articles for review should be sent electronically to Teachers and Curriculum Administrator, Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, Faculty of Education. Email: wmier@waikato.ac.nz

Contact details

Teachers and Curriculum Administrator
Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research
Faculty of Education
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton 3240
New Zealand

Phone +64 7 858 5171
Fax +64 7 838 4712
Email: wmier@waikato.ac.nz
Website: http://tandc.ac.nz

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.

ISSN 2382-0349

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.

Submitting articles for publication

Please consult with colleagues prior to submission so that papers are well presented. Articles can be submitted online at http://tandc.ac.nz/

Layout and number of copies

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

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

Referencing

References must be useful, targeted and appropriate. The Editorial preference is APA style; see *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (Sixth Edition). Please check all citations in the article are included in your references list, if in reference list they are cited in document, and formatted in the correct APA style. All doi numbers **must** be added to all references where required. Refer: http://www.crossref.org/

Copyright

Acknowledgement of Reviewers

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Special Issue

Teachers and Curriculum, Volume 15, Issue 1, 2015

LEADING FROM THE FRONT: LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

RICHARD JONES

Richard completed his Diploma of Teaching in 1991 at the Auckland College of Teacher Education. He completed a one term sabbatical at the end of 2013 exploring the dispositions of inquiry learning teachers. He found this extremely rewarding and it motivated him to work towards completing his Bachelor of Teaching degree. At the time of writing, Richard was a deputy principal and focused on the future challenges and rewards of principalship.

Professional summary

Starting a new position in a new school with a mandate to develop inquiry learning meant this author had to be mindful of his first impressions of where teachers 'were at'. However, the more he got to know the teachers and his new context, the more he learned and was achieved. In this paper readers are encouraged to suspend their initial judgments of colleagues as they seek to develop supportive and collaborative ways of working together, and sensitive ways to lead change.

"Bloom's what?" This was the initial response I received in the first staff meeting at the start of the teacher only day at my new school. I had just been appointed as the deputy principal, having had previous experience working in a rural school that had a reputation for being innovative in its approach to curriculum delivery and inquiry learning. Now, standing before a staff of a large urban school I was suggesting that if we were to embark on a journey of beginning to understand inquiry learning, then maybe a place to start was to look at Bloom's Taxonomy. … "Bloom's what?" I admit my heart sank.

Naively, my early assumption as a new leader was that everyone shared similar levels of passion for education that I did—that this comprised a certain level of pedagogical knowledge and a desire to be creative and innovative. After all, was this not what developing the craft of being a teacher was all about? Weren't we all battling with innovative and meaningful ways to address the issues of a crowded curriculum at that time? What I didn't understand at that point in time was that while we were all teachers acculturated by academic study and ongoing professional development, we did not share commonly held beliefs about teaching and learning. In hindsight, I can see it was utopian to think that we could or that we would all share the same purpose, and have the same drive to develop our craft as teachers.

This moment in my career was pivotal to my realisation that leading change does not rest on hierarchy, reputation, personality of a leader, or even the dissemination of a body of knowledge. Sustainable change is a complex process built on individual self-awareness and organisational structures that promote self-reflection, dialogue, relational trust, personal responsibility, lateral thinking, courage, the growth of leadership, and the sharing of knowledge, at all levels. The result of this realisation was empowering for us all as we began the process of creating systems and support structures designed to provide opportunities for teachers to not only reflect on their impact on the learning in their classrooms but also to develop a process in which ownership of learning was valued and present through inquiry and collaboration. Even so, creating structures to promote sustainable change does not come without its challenges for as Opfer and Pedder (2011) caution, "Creating systems, supports, and norms that encourage both individual and organizational learning and getting the balance right between internal and external sources of learning are difficult for most schools" (p. 392).

Armed with the advice to be cautious, it eventuated that the most significant vehicle for sustainable change was the introduction and continuous improvement of our structures for teachers' professional development, initially through Teaching as Inquiry but also the establishment of vertically grouped communities of practice in the form of Quality Learning Circles. For sustainable change to happen, all of the teachers in our school needed to be able to inquire into the effectiveness of their practice, have the freedom and confidence to try new approaches, and witness the evidence of the changes they were making. Essentially this required teachers to participate in personal reflection about who they were as

ISSN: 2382-0349
Pages. 17–21

Teachers and Curriculum, Volume 15, Issue 1, 2015

professionals, accompanied by a high level of trust so they could explore and confront their personal and professional assumptions. As Clark and Crispo (2009, as cited in Smardon & Charteris, 2012) have asserted, "it is through reflection and resultant self-knowledge that one can leverage greater awareness of others and course content in the journey toward becoming a better teacher" (p. 31).

A formal framework for teacher inquiry based on the model outlined in the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) enabled teachers to scaffold their inquiries into targeted areas in their classrooms. While this also presented an opportunity to the address the mandatory requirements of the New Zealand Registered Teacher Criteria (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2009) through the school's appraisal system, I soon recognised that a top down approach would only serve to de-motivate teachers and affect their attitudes towards inquiry. Not only that, it could promote a feeling that this was something being done to them as opposed to the feeling that 'we are all in this together'. It was essential therefore that teachers understood that what was being implemented was a framework for them to work within, and that it was intended to ultimately be a catalyst for dialogue, reflection and action as a community of learners.

To promote the idea that we were a community of learners, teachers were attached to vertically grouped Quality Learning Circles (Stewart & Prebble, 1993). Each community held regular meetings in which teachers would share their inquiries, confirm the realities of the data they had collected, share research, and offer lateral ideas to assist with changes they were attempting in their classes. Teachers were able to explore and be challenged about the assumptions they were making regarding their teaching, and importantly about the learning that was taking place in their classrooms. A notable result was the de-privatising of classrooms.

Teachers had to be open to conversations about the teaching and learning that was taking place within the four walls of their classrooms. In doing so, the assumptions that they held were highlighted, explored and challenged. Breaking down the walls in this way may have been and seemed threatening to those most resistant to change but it was essential if we were to achieve the best possible outcomes for students. Teachers were also released to observe each other and provide further data through a more objective lens. This allowed them to not only be aware of the practices at other levels of the school but created situations where the learning and understanding was being shared rather than unduly critiqued. The notion of learning communities is not new. They have been a powerful driver of change and professional learning because they tend to instil a greater sense of purpose in the participants. In our school, teachers could see the changes that new approaches were having in their classrooms. Ultimately the leadership came from within each individual.

The Quality Learning Circles were instrumental in achieving the aim of engaging teachers in a multifaceted approach of exploring practice beyond the autonomy of the classroom and seeking to extend their "teacher professionality" (Hoyle, 1974, p. 318). Hoyle (1974) argued that the practice of individual teachers could be placed on a continuum between what he referred to as restricted and extended professionality. The two ends of the continuum reflect the extent to which a teacher's practice is based on intuition or rationality, is theoretically knowledge based, is viewed within in a wider context, and is distinguished with a high level of collaboration and collegiality. This shift towards extended professionality in our school involved teachers examining assumptions, addressing habits, challenging comfort zones, and creating new frames of reference or paradigms. Evident in the practices of teachers in our school is "continuous learning" that is actively endorsed because we believe that teachers "should constantly add to their knowledge base" (Fullan, 2002 p. 7). We know now that "there will be little to add if people are not sharing" as a "norm of contributing one's knowledge to others is the key to continuous growth for all" (Fullan, 2002 p. 7).

The quest for continuous improvement has not only assisted teachers to understand the need for change but to make certain that the structures employed ensure that any significant change is truly sustainable. This is born from the understanding of what Agyris (1991) termed "defensive reasoning" (p. 103), that is when teachers are under pressure they instinctively return to their default setting of 'the known' to avoid discomfort. Senge (2006) referred to these default settings as mental models and claimed "Our 'mental models' determine not only how we make sense of the world, but how we take action" (p. 164). They are the deep-seated values and beliefs we carry based on our perceptions hence influence the assumptions we make and the actions we take as a result. As Argyris (1982 as cited in Senge, 2006) explained, "although people do not [always] behave congruently with their espoused

theories [what they say] they do behave congruently with their theories-in-use [their mental modes]" (p. 164). Sustainable change therefore rests upon creating new defaults or new 'knowns'.

Guskey's (1986) view that "teachers became committed to new practices only after they had actively engaged in using them in their classrooms" (p. 8) has been our experience. We have found that teacher commitment has primarily developed after the implementation phase as suggested by Timperley (2008),

> Engaging teachers' existing ideas means discussion how those ideas differ from the ideas being promoted and assessing the impact that the new approaches might have on their students. If they cannot be persuaded that a new approach is valuable and be certain of support if they implement it, teachers are unlikely to adopt it. (p. 18)

Sustainable change in the classroom appears therefore to result from cycles of teacher inquiry and the ability to explore new ideas and witness the impact that these have. It has become clear that without deliberate actions to create and support levels of high trust, any attempts at sustainable change would have been futile. The approaches employed such as Teaching as Inquiry, Quality Learning Circles and peer observations have provided a framework that has enabled teachers to become cognisant of our organisation's goal. At the same time, they have been able to participate in personal reflection and focused group discussion about teaching and learning, and explore the realities of their practices based on evidence in their classroom.

It became clear that for deep and engaging talk to exist, a high level of trust was required. This was something that did not occur instantaneously. The development of the inquiry process steadily encouraged teachers to expose their vulnerabilities and address the facts in their classroom. Previously this would have been disguised behind defensive reasoning, distractive talk, or avoidance behaviour. However, with the growing sense of collegial support within the learning community accompanied by a clear focus of what the school was trying to achieve collectively, and the realisation that each individual plays an important part in that overall achievement of the organisation, teachers became more willing to share the truth. Collins (2001) captured this well,

> Yes, leadership is about vision. But leadership is about creating a climate where the truth is heard and the brutal facts confronted. There is a huge difference between the opportunity to have your say, and the opportunity to be heard. The good-to-great leader understood this distinction, creating a culture where in people had a tremendous opportunity to be heard and ultimately, for the truth to be heard. (p. 74)

Charged by the principal to lead school-wide professional development in inquiry learning, I began the venture 'single-handedly' without truly understanding the curriculum plan that was in place. On reflection, I am aware that a self-imposed sense of urgency led me to ignore the fundamentals of the change process. This was a significant error in taking the lead on this change for the leadership team. It was definitely a case of 'I didn't know what I didn't know' and it was not until a series of defensive reactions to change from staff occurred that I realised the methods employed by the leadership team required us all to have a greater understanding of the change process. Fullan's (2002) words now resonate,

> … it is essential for leaders to understand the change process. Moral purpose without an understanding of the change process is moral martyrdom. Having innovative ideas, and being good at the change process is not the same thing. Indeed, the case can be made that those firmly committed to their own ideas are not necessarily good change agents because the latter involves developing commitment with others who may not be so enamored by the ideas. (p. 5)

Paramount to this change process was the necessity to broaden the commitment from others. As a leadership team we began by identifying our 'fast walkers'. 'Fast and slow walkers' is an analogy that we use specifically in our leadership team for a group moving like hikers. While acknowledging that 'fast walkers' do not want to be slowed down by the 'slow walkers', the aim is to keep the whole group moving forward. Additionally, to foster sustainability it became imperative that there were also opportunities for others to lead (Collins, 2001) because sustainability depends on many leaders. As such, opportunities to develop leadership qualities needed to be available to many, not just a few.

By empowering leadership in others through Quality Learning Circles and peer observations; raising trust in their judgments; and steadily growing their sense of responsibility through distributed and supportive leadership practices, we were able to grow our 'fast walkers' in numbers and ability. Simultaneously this led to attrition, which reduced the number of entrenched teachers and created a situation where people had to decide to either join the group or 'move off the track'. We still had 'slow walkers' at the time of writing but the group is now consistently moving forward.

What I have come to understand was that creating structures within our organisation was simply not enough. The way I acted as a leader, and my ability to communicate and consistently 'walk the talk' was critical in developing a culture of trust. Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2009) reminded me that "No matter how sound a leader's pedagogical knowledge and problem-solving ability may be, their impact will be limited if relationships within the school are characterised by an absence of trust" (p. 47). Hence, in those everyday and practical situations that these authors refer to I could see that,

> effective leaders develop trust relationships by establishing norms of respect; showing personal regard for staff, parents, and students; demonstrating competence and integrity by modelling appropriate behaviour; following through when expectations are not met; acting in ways that are consistent with their talk; and challenging dysfunctional attitudes and behaviours. (p. 47)

What I came to realise too, was the importance of being charismatic in the way that charismatic leadership is described by Collins (2001) which is not in a 'look at me' way but in remaining positive and encouraging, and articulating and reinforcing the vision so that teachers could see evidence in their classrooms of worthwhile change. As Collins (2001) asserted, "leaders who built enduring greatness were not high profile, flashy performers" but rather were "individuals who blend extreme personal humility with intense professional will" (p. 21). I have been guided too by the words of the Chinese philosopher Lao-tsu who described humility as a quality of highly effective leadership, and acknowledged that leadership is not something that happens to people but rather with people and ultimately, within people.

> To lead people, walk beside them…. As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor [sic] and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate…. When the best leader's work is done the people say, 'We did it ourselves'.

There is no doubt that leading and managing change, and encouraging teachers to move along a continuum towards extended professionality (Hoyle, 1974) is a complex and challenging task. Leading change for change's sake is pointless. Achieving change that is sustainable long after anyone leaves, including myself, should be the goal. The most desirable outcome is to create a culture of continuous learning, resilience, and resourcefulness—one that is equipped with the ability to address the realisation that the only constant is change. Fullan (2002) described sustainability as "the likelihood that the overall system can continuously regenerate itself in an ever improving direction" (p. 9). He claimed that "leadership in a culture of sustained change will be judged as effective not by who you are as a leader but by what leadership you leave behind" (p. 10). It is with this premise, combined with a great deal of continuous personal inquiry and reflection, that I have become more aware of the complexities of leading sustainable change. I have extended my own professionality by acknowledging the fact that leading single-handedly is unsustainable and ineffective. Sustainable change requires the commitment and input of many.

This evolution in my thinking has not only come from the experience of trial and error and addressing the brutal facts of the impact and implications of my own leadership but also the situational change that I have had to make in coming to work with, and lead a large staff with a greater diversity of attitudes and needs than I had previously experienced. My endeavour has now come to be transformational. I see that I am one part of motivating teachers to explore and confront the realities of their practice, express their views in a culture of high trust, and offer lateral approaches to problem solving, while continuing to acknowledge the broader vision of the school.

It has been a long walk since that first teacher only day. The transformation of the culture of the school from then to now has been remarkable. We continue to grow as a learning community, enriching what is good at the heart of school with a determination that what we make great is

sustainable beyond any one person's tenure. What is exciting is knowing that we have transformed from a phase of professionality that Hargreaves (2000) would describe as "the age of the collegial professional" (p. 62) to a post-modern age where we are now beginning to inquire and collaborate across a cluster of schools. This has lead to the de-privatisation of teachers' practice and brought the focus squarely to sustainability, and the quality of learning and teaching. Reminded by Stoll (2001), I see that learning should underpin every aspect of school leadership.

> In times of rapid change and, indeed, in a future that is not entirely predictable, the leaders best placed to help their schools adapt to and deal with changing needs and demands are, and will be, ones that focus on and sustain continuous learning of their teachers, themselves, their communities, and the school itself as an organisation. Only then can they really realise the potential they have to achieve their ultimate purpose: pupil learning of the highest quality. (p. 8)

References

Argyris, C. (1991). Teaching smart people how to learn. *Harvard Business Review, 69*(3), 99–109.

Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap ... and others don't*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Fullan, M. (2002). *Principals as leaders in a culture of change*. Paper prepared for Educational Leadership. Revised March 12, 2003. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto.

Guskey, T. (1986). Staff development and the process of teacher change. *Educational Researcher*, *15*(5), 5–12.

Hargeaves, A. (2000). Four ages of professionalism and professional learning, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 6*(2), 151–182.

Hoyle, E. (1974). Professionality, professionalism and control in teaching. In V. Houghton, R. McHugh, & C. Morgan (Eds.), *Management in education: Organisations and individuals.* (pp. 314-320) London, England: Ward Lock.

New Zealand Teachers Council, (2009). *Registered teacher criteria.* Retrieved from www.teacherscouncil/rtc/index.stm

Opfer, V., & Pedder, D. (2011). Conceptualising teacher professional learning. *Review of Educational Research, 81*, 376–407

Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why. Best evidence synthesis iteration (BES)*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Senge, P. (2006). The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Currency Doubleday.

Smardon, D., & Charteris, J. (2012). Between a rock and a hard place: Teacher professional learning. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work, 9*(1), 27–35.

Stewart, D., & Prebble, T. (1993). *The reflective principal: School development within a learning community.* Palmerston North, New Zealand: ERDC, Massey University.

Stoll, L. (2001). *Enhancing internal capacity: Leadership for learning.* Nottingham, England. National College for School Leadership, Retrieved from www.ncsl.org.uk/knowledgepool/foundations

Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

Timperley, H. (2008). *Teacher professional learning and development. Educational Practice Series 18.* International Academy of Education & International Bureau of Education Paris, France: UNESCO. Retrieved from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/topics/bes/bes-programme