

# Editorial Introduction

*by Gordon Wells*

This issue of *Networks* contains a varied collection of articles, ranging from research in elementary classrooms to investigations carried out by university teacher educators; in all, there is a concern on the part of the authors to improve the ways in which they fulfill their responsibilities and entice and challenge the students with whom they work.

Jan Claes writes about her teaching of French as a second language in Nova Scotia, Canada, where English is the major language of communication. Her article addresses the problems of teaching French as a "foreign" language in a middle school where a substantial proportion of students are learning French through some form of immersion program. "Core French", as it is called, is perceived by administrators, teachers and students alike as more an imposed chore than a freely chosen challenge. As a result it suffers from a lack of enthusiasm on the part of all concerned. Challenged by her experience of attending a conference of teacher researchers, she decided to look critically at both her attitude to, and her practice in, teaching Core French. Her question became: *How can I improve the level of authentic communication in my Core French classroom?* In her article, Claes describes the changes she made to make interaction in her classroom more authentic and how this led to significant changes in her students' engagement in using French both outside as well as inside the classroom. As a result of sharing her research, Claes is now involved in a collaborative project with colleagues that is supported by the Board of Education that employs her.

The article by Christine Genovese reports a controlled comparison between two modes of teaching a course unit on molecular biology: Half the class experienced the course in typical face-to-face mode and the other half via the internet. In the latter mode, students found it required more time and commitment to complete the unit; as a group they performed less well on the final examination. There were, nevertheless, some advantages to the computer-based mode, notably the opportunity to revisit the well-prepared materials and take part in asynchronous discussion groups. Genovese intends to include these features in future face-to-face offerings of the course.

Eleanor T. Migliore and Angela Breidenstein, who work on the boundaries of educational psychology and preservice teacher education, explore the ways in which teachers and educational psychologists can learn to collaborate in working with the students and families who need their help. Approaching this issue when both groups were in their programs of initial professional education, the authors matched up school psychology students with students in the high school preparation program in two consecutive years and studied the ways in which they collaborated on a range of classroom problems frequently encountered by teachers. In their paper, they briefly present four case studies of pair collaboration and comment on the issues raised in the focus group discussions at the exit from the program. Of the factors that seemed to be key to the pairs' success in working together, the most important were the personal resources that partners brought to their collaboration and, in the second year, a clearer focus on outcomes. In concluding their paper, the authors reflect on what they have learned from their own collaboration and on directions for further research.

Roisin Donnelly undertook her research as a form of self-reflection on the match between her values and her practice in providing support for newly appointed academics in her role as a member of the learning and teaching center in an institution of higher education. She conducted her study by carrying out interviews with a focus group made up of new and recently appointed faculty and by keeping a journal in which she recorded and reflected on the processes of data collection and analysis. But perhaps the most important feature of her research method was to invite a "validation group" of colleagues to engage in dialogue with her about her procedures and findings, challenging her to extend or rethink her interpretations. As a result of this process, she has designed, and in collaboration with her colleagues begun to implement an action plan to establish an academic mentoring program in her institution. She is also determined to repeat the process of self-study in the future.

The final article in this issue, by Karen Lowenstein and James Damico, addresses an important question that continues to be hotly debated: What counts as legitimate research in and about education? Taking issue with the criteria of acceptability employed in the 2001 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and in many recent policy pronouncements, they focus on what is often seen as the central criterion, that of "generalizability". Drawing on the various traditions of qualitative research, they argue that practitioners' investigations of their own practice, while not based on the premises of experimental research, can also contribute to the dissemination of valuable insights and understandings. By sharing their work, clearly describing the contexts in which the research questions were posed and the observations made, teacher researchers can draw other practitioners into reconsidering their own beliefs and experiences and looking anew at the challenges that they face in their own particular contexts.

The issue concludes with reviews of two books likely to be of interest to teacher researchers and a note by the editor about plans to try to broaden the reach of *Networks* by making some future issues bilingual.