Editorial Introduction

by Gordon Wells

This issue of *Networks* is particularly interesting for the wide variety of articles it includes. They range from a high school science teacher's report of the strategy she used to improve her students' reading comprehension and the statistically significant result of her intervention, through contributions co-authored by collaborating partners in different institutions, to a practitioner's "ruminations" that intermingle poetry and prose on the relationship between teaching and research . Together, they demonstrate the many ways in which practitioner inquiry can be approached as well as the variety of genres in which it can effectively be shared.

While I have been assembling this issue, I have also been rereading *From Communication to Curriculum*, Douglas Barnes's seminal work on the role of exploratory talk in the classroom. I was particularly struck by the following paragraph:

School knowledge is the knowledge which someone else presents to us. We partly grasp it, enough to answer the teacher's questions, to do exercises, or to answer examination questions, but it remains someone else's knowledge, not ours. If we never use this knowledge we probably forget it. In so far as we use knowledge for our own purposes, however, we begin to incorporate it into our view of the world, and to use parts of it to cope with the exigencies of living. Once the knowledge becomes incorporated into that view of the world on which our actions are based I would say that it has become 'action knowledge'. (Barnes, 1992, p. 81)

Barnes's plea for classroom activities to be oriented toward 'action knowledge' was originally published more than a quarter of a century ago but his message is still as urgent today as it was then. With the pressure to "cover" the increasingly detailed curriculum and to "teach to the test" so that schools and districts perform well on these high stakes assessments, it becomes increasingly apparent that teaching is a moral enterprise in which what is really at stake is what counts as education and whether it provides opportunities for students to develop their potential as all-round human beings and as creative and responsible members of society.

It is heartening, therefore, that the authors of these articles, whatever their roles as practitioners, are concerned to find ways of creating and introducing activities that will effectively engage all students and lead them to learn, not simply to earn good grades, but in order to develop and extend their understanding of the world in which they live so as to be able to successfully meet the opportunities and challenges of life beyond the classroom.

The first three articles are all concerned with literacy. Laura Jordan, with the collaboration of Cher Hendricks describes her attempt to provide a wider range of ways of responding to the literature that her sixth grade students were reading. On the basis of the results of a survey based on Multiple Intelligence Theory, she assigned students to groups according to their MI profile and gave them a range of different ways in which they might respond to the novel they were reading. Using multiple methods of data collection, she found that her students showed increased

engagement and produced better work than previously. However, it was also clear that students needed time to adjust to the students-directed activities that she introduced.

The second article, by Cindy Joseph, addresses reading comprehension in a high school biology class. Finding that her students had difficulty reading newspaper or magazine articles related to the topics they were studying, Joseph decided to introduce 'concept maps' as a tool for relating new information to their existing knowledge, thereby hopefully encouraging them to think more deeply about the material that they read. Using a matched groups design, she found that one group scored significantly higher on their comprehension of a published article under the concept map condition and the other group showed no sign of improvement\, although, with the two groups combined there was a clear trend for students' comprehension to improve. As she argues, these results warrant further investigation.

The third article, by Merry Boggs, describes how, believing that those who teach writing should themselves be writers, she introduced writers' groups and process writing to make the writing assignments she set for her preservice teachers more authentic. All drafts of their papers - interim as well as final, were included in their writing portfolios, thereby enabling the author as well as evaluating readers to see how their written texts were improving.Despite finding a very considerable improvent, she realized with hindsight that she was still not giving her students sufficient ownership of their wriiting. This is something that she intends to change in her next round of research.

Also with preservice teachers, Barbara Pace, Jane Townsend and Susan Wood investigate the value of inquiry projects in their courses. Their focus, however, is on the research method they themselves used and, more specifically, on possible interpretations of the answers the students, mainly women, gave on the questionnaire used to assess the effectiveness of inquiry. In their article the authors go behind their students' words to listen to the 'voice' and what it told them about these young women's ways of knowing and attitudes to relationships. As they ask at the conclusion of their fascinating exploration of the complexity of their students' questionnaire responses, "do we know that what they say is what they think?"

Sitting on the deck in the evenings, Larry Giacomino and Michael Gose found themselves reflecting on their years of high school teaching and, in particular, on the issue of 'pacing' curricular activities to match the rhythms of the school week and year. Having made their intuitions explicit, they invited other teachers to express their agreement or disagreement with them. While the majority of their respondents acknowledged the rhythms that the authors had identified, and the impact of extraneous events on their teaching, several insisted that these were not so much limitations as challenges to be surmounted through the teaching skills they had developed. For Gose, now a teacher educator, this is helpful information for his preservice teachers.

Mark Girod, Michael Pardales, and Gina Cervetti are teachers now pursuing doctoral studies and, as they put it, " struggling with the pressures and stresses of balancing newfound researcher voices with our teacher voices." In their article, they argue for a closing of this gap and for a more inclusive "Great Conversation" about the goals and means of education. Recalling critical

events in their work as teachers, they call for collaboration across the divide in order to plan and carry out research that really makes a difference in the lives of students and teachers.

The closing article by Carl Leggo is more frankly autobiographical, as he ruminates on "living the research in everyday practice." Moving between poetry, narrative and exhortation, he tells of his own development as a teacher and parent and as a human being, learning to wonder and question and to collaborate with others. Curriculum, he suggests, should not be so much focused on disciplines, but on learning to care for and about ourselves, each other and the world around us. Most importantly, he includes his students in this vision of collaborative caring and inquiry. As he rightly says, "We are all teachers, learners, researchers."