CHANGE: TRANSFORMATIONS IN EDUCATION

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Change: Transformations in Education seeks to promote discussions of a wide range of issues, themes and problems arising from the varieties of change which now impacts upon education at every level, in different contexts and with enormously varied results. The orientation of the journal is cross-disciplinary and critical. The journal’s intended readership is that of education policy-makers, analysts and activists working in context of social and organisational change and development. It also aims to interest professionals involved in the planning and implementation of educational programs across all education sectors nationally and internationally. The journal is published twice a year, in May and November. These two issues constitute one volume.

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This edition of CHANGE: transformations in Education could best be described as a Pacific Rim one since there are contributions from Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Hong Kong. The six papers presented here deal with contemporary issues regarding policy, change, professionalism and the practices of education and educational research. Two papers in particular relate to issues of teacher professional development, while another two are concerned with broad policy issues.

Stephen Crump and Chris Ryan from the University of Sydney in their paper focus on issues of education policy as it relates to Australia’s Key Competencies Project which, officially concluded in 1996. They use this project as an example of educational change management emerging in the policy world. In this paper the authors look at the intersection between macro and micro policy, and focus on an initiative that had systemic implications which, were intended to significantly change local practices. The significance of this paper is that it problematizes the effects of policy to better understand the ways that policy inputs, processes and outcomes can be improved. Crump and Ryan argue that policy researchers have ignored a range of valuable tools readily available which, may provide much greater significance to their to their findings. The authors claim that these tools provoke policy meaning or action rather than submission or reaction. Significantly, the authors suggest that the aim of policy management should be to enable systems, sections and individuals to continue the policy process.

The second paper by Lyn Yates from University of Technology Sydney focuses on policy and school effects as these relate to a project she and a colleague carried out on a group of 12-18 year old young people. In this paper Yates discusses some evidence from a qualitative, longitudinal project based in four different school sites and the more complicated perspective this throws on what different types of schools are doing and achieving in relation to different types of young people. She discusses the methodological usefulness, even for policy purposes, of a research focus of particular students in particular school sites; the relevance of seeing schools and students as socially and culturally positioned, not simply as amalgams of ‘factors’ or as sites of ‘effective techniques’. The paper draws particular attention to what is learnt in schools as an ‘effect’ and suggest that we need to consider both in relation to individual life-chances, and to broad social formation.

Yates frames her paper by positing several questions: what can a qualitative study contribute to discussions of policy in relation to schooling? What particular contribution might a longitudinal study of students at four different schools from the beginning of their secondary school years make to an understanding of the post-compulsory years? How can we sort out what particular schools do to particular students? How do we take
account of what schools set in train for students, as distinct from the more straightforward ‘facts’ of what they produce in the short-term as success and failure, retention or early leaving? These questions lead Yates to conclude that debates about ‘school effectiveness’ are important, but they by no means exhaust what we need to research, theorize and act on in relation to ‘school effects’.

The third paper from Terry Locke from the University of Waikato in New Zealand raises questions about teacher professionalism. He argues that debates of teacher professionalism continue to generate considerable interest inside and outside of the profession. He argues that in the current education ‘climate in New Zealand and elsewhere that that teacher professionalism is being eroded. He supports this claim by considering the state of the profession against six markers which he maintains serve as indicators of the professionalism/deprofessionalization process. The markers against which measures teacher professionalism are: knowledge base, professional practice, goals, processes, content and conditions of training, conditions of work and service, registration, standard setting, monitoring, appraisal and discipline and processes and avenues of association and relationship. In response to what he judges to be the current crises in professionalism he proposes that one productive response is the adoption of an ‘activist’ professional agenda.

Dana, Gimbert and Silva writing from the US provide the fourth contribution to this edition and are concerned with teacher inquiry as a form of professional development for teachers in the US. They argue that teacher research can be used in two quite fundamentally different ways, each with significantly different effects and outcomes. The first is as the basis to act as a powerful stimulus for teachers to transform the education profession. More negatively though, they suggest that teachers can also use the process of inquiry merely to reinforce and celebrate what they are already doing well, instead of pushing themselves to examine, make sense of and critique their own life in classrooms, the beliefs and assumptions that inform their own practice and others.

This paper provides an overview of the teacher inquiry movement in the US and uses the authors’ experiences of working with teachers and administrators in Pennsylvania as they explore what is means to be a teacher inquirer and engage in inquiry in their own classrooms and schools. They see that teacher inquiry has the potential to significantly transform teachers’ practices in classrooms and schools.

Paper five is written by Mok, Yan Fung from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Again the focus is on teacher professional development, but this time it is an exploration of teachers’ participation in continuing education programs. Of the three school levels factors often identified as being significant for teachers in their professional development, namely teacher school fit, the role of the principal and motivation for promotion, in terms of the study presented here it is the latter that is the most significant factor that is important for teachers’ continuous learning. These findings are contradictory to the literature of teacher learning which suggests that school and teacher fit are the most important features of teachers’ learning.
In the final paper by Harris and Jimenez we return to the University of Sydney in our Pacific Rim voyage. This joint paper written by beginning researchers has developed as a result of the authors undertaking research degrees and the dilemmas and issues they have confronted during the course of their data analysis. In particular they seek to explore and make explicit the often implicit process of interpretation. They develop the idea of 'convergent space' within the research process which, they argue, provides a meeting point between the theory and the process of data analysis. Harris and Jimenez provide a conceptual model that makes explicit the relationship between the researcher, theory and data in the interpretative process. They conclude the paper by identifying dilemmas each experienced during their own research activities and how they resolved or dealt with these dilemmas.

JUDYTH SACHS, EDITOR