CHANGE

TRANSFORMATIONS IN EDUCATION

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Change: Transformations in Education seeks to promote discussion of a wide range of issues, themes and problems arising from the varieties of change which now impact upon education at every level, in differing contexts and with enormously varied results. The orientation of the journal is cross-disciplinary and critical. The journal is intended readership is that of educational policy-makers, analysts and activists working in contexts 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.

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS ARE SUBMITTED TO AT LEAST TWO REFEREES BEFORE BEING ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION.

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Editorial

This edition of *Change: Transformations in Education* grows from the proceedings of the Second International Practitioner Research Conference held in Sydney in July, 1998. The conference brought together academic researchers and those from the field of practice to consider ways in which practitioner research could be recognised and enhanced. As its title suggests it was the second such conference, the first being held in Cambridge in 1996. While the conferences are a new series, in terms of their international orientation, they follow a long tradition of such gatherings which have arisen from the joint work of the Cambridge Institute of Education, and the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE), University of East Anglia. These two institutions, under the guidance of such luminaries as the late Lawrence Stenhouse, John Elliot and Jennifer Nias, have been greatly influential in encouraging, enabling and critiquing practitioner inquiry. We are indebted to them.

It has not been possible to publish all of the papers. However, we have sought to collect together a sample of the many exciting and challenging studies and discussions which contributed to the success of the conference. We have foregrounded the three keynote addresses by Altrichter, Johnson and Noffke as they provide an important framework for reading the papers which follow. Each was asked to develop a specific perspective which would assist in driving the conference forward and this they did with great facility.

While we refer to each of the published papers in a serial fashion we recognise that our readers may well engage with them in a very different order. However, we believe that each paper does effectively build on the knowledge of the one which preceded it and that, particularly, the three keynote papers do provide a series of advance organisers to the texts which follow.

Altrichter's paper sets the stage in developing a set of quality criteria for action research as a form of practitioner inquiry. He quite deliberately frames his arguments within the current discourse of 'quality' in devolved environments—a discourse with which Australian educators are all too familiar. He argues that in such an environment action research has moved from 'the fringe of educational activities to its political centre, which is puzzling, satisfying and seductive'.

His criteria seek to increase the inventory for rules for research, following Feyerabend, and embody the following:

- That action research is characterised by confronting data from different perspectives;
- That action research is characterised by closely and iteratively linking reflection and action;
- That action research incorporates reflection and the development of educational values;
- That action research is characterised by holistic, inclusive reflection;
- That action research implies research and development of one's own self-concept and competency; and
- That action research is characterised by inserting individual findings into a critical professional discourse

Among his quality criteria he most cherishes the democratic, participative nature of action research and enjoins us to protect this characteristic.

Johnson's paper is of altogether a different order. With thoroughgoing competence and confidence she writes of the experience of leading a small South Australian School who has

been participative in a number of research enterprises in just the manner that Altrichter most values. Johnson commences her paper with a poignant account of her invitation to the conference and her suspicion that this was some kind of practical joke. The anecdote serves to highlight the often perceived differences and distances between the academy and the field of practice. However, the gap is belied by the paper itself which transcends the fissure, if it does indeed exist.

The paper rests upon two identified differences in the cultural practices of the academy and the field of practice, in this case the schools. One is in relation to valued forms of communication, the other to do with the nexus between theory and action. In each case Johnson makes more problematic the differences by requiring us to re-examine them. She roundly rebuts the idealisation of the culture of the 'other'.

Noffke, in the third keynote address, finds ways of cutting a swathe across the privileged discourse of the academy of which Johnson writes. In her paper Noffke makes clear the significant contribution of practitioner research to theory production. Like Altrichter, Noffke sees practitioner research as a 'growth industry' which generates its own hidden curriculum in relation to its transactions. Her paper addresses three basic questions:

1. What good is a theory? Issues of knowledge and vision.
2. What does a theory know? Issues of action and change.
3. What's a nice theory like yours doing in a place like this? Issues of interest and identity.

In relation to the first two questions Noffke draws attention to 'the fragility of our knowledge claims' by arguing that knowledge production not only engages us in the known, but also in acknowledging the unknown and unknowable. She makes the case for recognising that our theories influence our acts which in turn are always political in one way or another.

In discussing her third question Noffke argues for transformative learning through self understanding, whether 'self' is the individual or the institution. She asks us to take the time to see things differently, to be alert to and defend against the false consciousness of neutrality.

In the first of the papers which follow the keynote address Currie's particularly draws our attention to the matter of knowledge and vision. The knowledge generated by the vision of the Innovative Links Project as it was enacted by the ACIIC (Australian Centre for Innovation and International Competitiveness) South Coast Roundtable of which he was convenor. His articulation of the ethos of the Roundtable demonstrates a commitment to a number of Altrichter's quality criteria, in that no one person or group was to have 'a monopoly' on truth.

Merritt and Campbell's paper also grows from the work of the Innovative Links Project and its sister project, The National Schools Network (NSN). Co-written by a university-based and a school-based practitioner the paper is a case study of a university school partnership in a particular site. They are careful to indicate that the school's involvement in the work of these two major projects was congruent with an important aspect of the philosophy of the school, which was that the teachers could and should be engaged in school-based research. In spite of an initial concern about the kind of ambiguities which Johnson writes of, it became clear that the ongoing inquiry contributed to the professional learning of all of the stakeholders. Using White's metaphor associated with the messiness of

'digging where one stands' Merritt and Campbell focus upon the changing social relations between the participants as they develop their theories of practice.

While the major thrust of the paper is a portrayal of an effective research partnership it also outlines a number of unintended outcomes. Among these is the level of interest and participation by parents in the research process and subsequent theorising. Another was the extent to which the school acknowledged the professional development value of skilling teachers as researchers. An indicator of the success of the work is the extent to which the relationship continues to this day and an increased willingness, even eagerness, to continue to participate in projects of this kind.

Noffke's notions of interest and identity are strongly reflected in Brennan's discussion of practitioner research, where the practitioners are neophyte researchers in the context of a 'new university'. In forming their identity as researchers it was important that the tertiary practitioners became engaged in a research enterprise which had meaning and relevance for them. The paper raises important questions regarding the question of 'who counts as part of the academic community?' The action learning program, which is outlined, included not only the academic staff, but also the university's support staff. It was indeed participatory in the terms which Altrichter set out. Because the resulting action research, characterised as 'activist problem solving' was enacted with new researchers in an institution not yet infused with 'old university' culture the paper makes more problematic some of the notions in Johnson's paper which generally assumes a more mature academic environment.

The final paper in this edition is Goodwin's. The practitioner, in this case, is the author herself, endeavoured, in the context of a series of policy questions, to ask herself what happens when our theories of practice are disturbed and unsettled. Just as Altrichter, in his paper with its European focus, grapples with the notions of devolution, so too does Goodwin ask questions regarding the twin tendencies to devolve and centralise. What happens when the interests of the centralist government and the decentralised schools converge and collide?

Goodwin establishes that, contrary to the received wisdom, there is a sense of agency among her school-based peers in school administration, that hitherto has not been acknowledged:

> The state school principals whom I interviewed expressed the view that schools are dynamic organisations constantly meeting new situations, responding to conflicting demands and shaping and reshaping themselves. In this sort of endlessly fluid movement of needs, demands, personalities and situations, the principals saw their schools as the generators of policies, not the mere recipients of policies.

We regret that space does not permit us to publish all of the papers presented at the conference. It is our hope that a number will appear in later editions of *Change: Transformations in Education*, for clearly practitioner research has a great potential to transform not only our practices, but our knowledge and understanding of them.

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