

Reciprocal mentoring across generations: Sustaining professional development for English teachers

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ABSTRACT: This article draws on a collaborative research project entitled Teachers Investigate Unequal Literacy Outcomes: Cross-generational Perspectives, funded by the Australian Research Council 2002-2004 and awarded to Barbara Comber, University of South Australia and Barbara Kamler, Deakin University. The university researchers invited early career teachers in their first five years of teaching, and late career teachers with at least twenty-five years experience, to collaboratively explore the problem of unequal outcomes in literacy. Over a period of three years, the teacher-researchers conducted audits of their classroom literacy programs and the effects on different children; case studies of students they were most concerned about; and redesigns of their literacy curriculum and pedagogy. Bev Maney and Ivan Boyer collaborated as research partners in the context of their work together as English teachers at Portland Secondary College, Victoria. This paper is based on transcripts of their many conversations with one other and the research team and is represented as an interrupted conversation with the university researchers. Here they critique current models of professional development and the effects of standardised testing and argue for the importance of serious teacher conversations and ongoing school-based research.

KEYWORDS: Literacy, literacy curriculum, pedagogy, school-based research, professional development, standardised testing.

FOREWORD

Over a period of three years Bev Maney and Ivan Boyer have been working together in the Faculty of English at Portland Secondary College and for the past two and a half years as co-researchers in the *Teachers investigate unequal literacy outcomes: Cross-generational perspectives* project (see also Hutchison & Kerkham, Comber et al., this issue). Ivan has been teaching at the school for twenty years, lives in the local community and in 2003 he “semi-retired” after thirty-five years as a teacher. He has been an English and History teacher and recently, as the Manager of Effective Teaching and Learning (METAL, and known as “Heavy Metal”), he was responsible for assisting other teachers with various problems in their practice. Bev is an early

career teacher who was in her third year of teaching when the project began in 2002. She came to teaching after a successful career as a youth worker.

Both Bev and Ivan are passionate about making a real difference to the young people they teach. Bev invited Ivan to join her as a mentor in the research project because in her words, "he was the only 'old' teacher with enough experience left in the school" and because she "really looked up to him as a role model – but he didn't know that". Ivan accepted because, from his perspective, the project seemed unique in paying more than lip service to the notion that experienced teachers had something to offer. At the first research meeting at Deakin University in 2002, Bev expressed her amazement that Ivan had lasted in teaching for so long. He and other late career teachers, in turn, were equally curious as to why young people would choose teaching as a career at this time of great contradictions and tensions within the profession. Bev and Ivan were very articulate about the challenges they faced as English teachers, at very different points in their teaching lives. They also offered the wider researcher network of teachers and university researchers many important insights about "reciprocal mentoring" and professional development – a two-way dialogic process which they negotiated over the three years of the project.

In this narrative, we try to capture their ideas about working together and with a community of teacher-researchers. Their ideas are represented here as an interrupted conversation, drawing from a recent taped teleconference between them and the research associates on the project, Kirsten Hutchison and Lyn Kerkham. They also make reference to other conversations enjoyed during the course of the project and their working lives, written reflections and transcripts of workshops. Barbara Kamler and Barbara Comber, the university-based researchers, offer their reflections between the conversational excerpts and conclude with an afterword that highlights what they have learnt from Bev and Ivan about professional development and non-hierarchical mentoring. The conversation begins with Ivan's reflection on how their mentoring relationship began some thirty months earlier.

FORCING A CONVERSATION: THE RELUCTANT MENTOR

Ivan: I don't think Bev would mind me saying – but she was very dependent on me and that's the way it began, so therefore it ... did force an interaction, it forced a conversation, and the more I've been thinking about things here today, the more important that word "conversation" has become. Basically it forced me to reconceptualise things because I was put into a situation where Bev was depending on some answers. She needed them. Therefore that forced me to confront my practices, which in turn, led me to examine my teaching journey of the past 35 years. So in that sense it was a pretty full-on process, and I had some mixed feelings, understandably I suppose. Initially I had some concerns that what I had done didn't amount to much, but at the same time I was flattered that someone was interested. So there were those two things that promoted some mixed feeling about it. I think the self-esteem of teachers is just so vitally important, particularly at the moment. I don't think there's a lot of that around the teaching profession at the moment.

There's this feeling that really I'm on my own too much, there's not enough people around that I can talk to who are actually sharing the situation with me, and I suppose that's what has been really good with this project. Bev – we have lots and lots of conversations, and I think that's just a vital element and a lot of PD doesn't involve conversation, but that's what's good about this PD. Too often the only feedback you get is negative feedback when the wheels start to fall off, that's when you start to hear from people. So you are very lonely in that sense.

Kirsten: Can you say a bit more about how the conversations – I think you said in your email – led to a "kind of renaissance" in your teaching?

Ivan: Yes, because I think what had happened – I've always felt that I was doing things reasonably well. I've never felt low esteem really to any great degree, lots of frustrations, but I always thought that I was achieving reasonable things. But the conversations coupled with the necessity to do more reading and research enabled me to establish a clearer, more comfortable ideology that I feel is mine. For example, it's reaffirmed some of the things I do, but also moved me further, if I use Vygotsky's theory, into the zone of proximal development. At 56 that's an interesting place to be, that I'm pretty excited about new things as well as feeling OK about what I've done, and now feeling I can move on and grow in my own culture and successes.

When Bev invites Ivan to join her in research, initially at least as her mentor, their conversations "force" Ivan to consider what he accomplishes and how he does it. Her urgent need for answers pushes him to analyse his work in a serious way. He points out how classrooms are sometimes lonely places, even for a confident, experienced teacher. It is worrying, that even though students and teachers look up to Ivan in his professional life, he has never before had to produce a sustained and historicized analysis of his practice – or to articulate the principles informing his teaching. The absence of professional conversations, "a vital element", is in part what produces the loneliness and low self-esteem Ivan identifies as endemic to the profession "at the moment". Whilst the pressure to produce "answers" for Bev was confronting, joining her on the research trail offered him new and unanticipated opportunities for a professional "renaissance", so that he was excited about the new things he was learning about teaching, even at the end of his career. Given the increasing average age of the teaching workforce, finding ways to rejuvenate the profession, whilst inducting and supporting early career teachers is of great importance.

Bev: Yes, initially I was pretty dependent on Ivan because we see him as the guru, not only myself but other teachers in the school, and kids look up to him. So it was easy to look to Ivan for the answers because I thought that he was doing a fantastic job. I guess that's a metaphor that I kept coming up with that "I want what he's got."

Kirsten: And I want it now!!

Bev: That's right, and it wasn't just his position in the classroom that I wanted. I wanted the status that he has in the school...his ability to say things that are of concern and having the respect, because people will

listen to him. He is a thinker and he's also a "people person" so he's someone that will listen to where they're coming from.

We are also very like-minded – we are both passionate about teaching kids – what happens in our classroom is really important to us. We are both "big picture" people too, in particular on issues of social justice and the issues facing the public education system. We're also "people persons". We both have excellent working relationships with our colleagues. I guess that with Ivan's experience he's able to – how do I say it – I've got lots of fire in the belly and I'm angry about things that are happening, where Ivan has been around a lot longer than I and often pulls on the reins and says, "Well, we need to think about this Bev and talk it through." Whereas I'm quick to blurt out: "This is not OK," and stamp my feet. I still do that but not as often.

Bev's desire to emulate Ivan and her capacity to demand a professional relationship are impressive; she wants his knowledge and his status and she actively uses the conversations to push him to articulate what he knows. Whilst she admits being pretty dependent, she is clearly an active agent insisting with some urgency on her right to professional learning. She analyses through her everyday work observations and debriefs with Ivan how he pursues strategic action in the school. Working alongside Ivan as a co-researcher in her school context re-positions Bev as both a fellow learner and a fellow knower with respect to Ivan. She does not wait passively on the sidelines as an early career innocent hoping to learn from experience over time. Rather, it seems to us, the research relationship enables a fast-tracking of deep learning and growing mutual respect for both partners.

Creating the dialogic space for conversation across generations was a key move in designing the project so that teacher talk would go beyond chatting, and move toward sustained professional reflection and analysis. Bev and Ivan are not engaged in just any kind of conversation. The verbs used by Ivan to describe their talk include 'reconceptualise', 'force', 'confront', 'examine' indicating that this is not everyday chat – it is a particularly intense, discursive practice in which they are engaged. At 56 and now working part-time, Ivan has moved further along in his own development as a teacher as a result of his engagement with scholars such as Vygotsky, recently introduced to him by Bev. In terms of reclaiming the professional development agenda, Bev and Ivan work together from their different positions and histories to analyse and take action on what is going on in their respective classrooms, and, as we shall see, in the wider school community. The reciprocity in their professional relationship energises and sustains each of them.

RECIPROCITY IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Ivan: As far as PD is concerned, there are always more pressing and immediate concerns. So therefore, theoretically, we would argue that yes, professional development should be our number one priority, but practically it's lucky that it comes in at number three. I've been to so much PD that you would say is exciting, promising, etc, but you arrive back at school the next day and it just doesn't happen. I mean it might

smoulder away for a week or two, but eventually just the day-to-day routine of a busy life means it doesn't.

Like the Thinking Hats and the Multiple Intelligences in-service. I went to in-service after in-service about those things, and it was all so unbelievably exciting in what it was promising, but it was someone standing there telling you how good this stuff was, and I saw so many teachers go back to school and try to put it into effect. It didn't come off and those people were in a worse position than before they'd had the PD because they were really more dispirited by that stage. They went there looking for answers. They were given all these pseudo-answers, I suppose, and they came back to class, they tried it, it didn't work, and they're back on a lower rung of the ladder. That's really dangerous. A lot of PD does fall into that trap, I think.

Kirsten: It's not really about building on what teachers know.

Ivan: Exactly.

Ivan's bleak observations on the unintended effects of well-intentioned PD are telling. From his perspective, professional development outside the school does not work. It holds much promise and offers an abundance of fabulous ideas, but when teachers come back to school, they don't know how to put it together with other knowledges and practices. Moreover, other priorities take over. Ivan sees this kind of professional development as dangerous because it gives people pseudo-answers and demoralises them when they can't make it work. His insights, we believe, have much to teach those of us in the business of teacher education and in-service. Yet, how often are teachers positioned as serious evaluators of their professional development? How often and to what extent are the providers of professional development asked to make a serious, long-term commitment and trace the effects of their advice on the ground?

Ivan: See, I think that good PD should reaffirm what you're doing, the good stuff that you're doing and empower you. I noticed just with Bev, I've put here what she said: "The quality of our conversations became richer." This has been really evident to me lately when Bev realised she could tell me things as well, and she has been doing that.

Kirsten: So what kind of things has she told you?

Ivan: Well, the other day, for example, we sat down and had a really, really good talk about critical literacy because Bev had – I was reading her paper, something she had written – and she had used the term out of Curriculum Standards from the CSF. And I started to question, "Are they using critical literacy in the same sense there as you do?" We just had this really levelled conversation. It went on for well over half an hour about what critical literacy was. Now had we had that conversation 12 months ago, Bev would have probably been writing down what I said, but not now. To me that was a very valuable thing because I've been coming to terms with the whole issue of critical literacy just as Bev has, so that's why I say the conversation is so important. When you've got the younger teacher working with a more experienced teacher like myself, often young teachers have theories

and ideas that we need to share, we really need to know. The difference is, I reckon, that very often I guess I know how to make them work, or I've got some strategies that will make them work so that they will move on from just being theories. And I hope Bev would agree that that's been the case in our work together.

Bev: Yeah, definitely. I think that's exactly right because coming straight from your Dip Ed, you're immersed in all up-to-date knowledge and stuff like that, but when you get into your classroom it suddenly leaves itself outside the door because you're then having to deal with say the CSF document. So you're not immersed in the theoretical side of it. I had come into the profession with a real strong sense of justice and trying to meet the needs of those minority students, and I was looking for curriculum to help me with that, and it wasn't. And I was becoming frustrated. I was working lots of hours and trying to think, "How can I do this?" I guess what this project has done is given me some tools to think about "How would I address this particular issue in my classroom?" I think that's the thing that comes up for me in regard to PD is that because the PD is out there and not school-based, teachers walk away feeling disenfranchised about it all because there's no sense of belonging, of being a part of it.

And that's where my confidence has come because this project is school-based, it is about me in my classroom, and I've been given a voice about what happens. That's a lot of confidence that I've built up, and then I've been able to discuss that with a very experienced teacher. I am privileged to be working with someone who will think about what I have to say. Because I am in people's faces, I want answers. I'm not going away, but I also don't want to burn out too you know.

Evidence that Bev and Ivan have reached a more reciprocal relationship in their discussions is seen in Ivan's taking notes from what Bev says. Bev has moved from her dependent subject position to one which is more equal; where she also is able to speak authoritatively on some subjects. Ivan really wants and needs to know about Bev's theories on critical literacy, just as previously she wanted to know about his strategies for making theory work. When their knowledge is pooled, they both benefit enormously. In terms of professional development, the fact that they can work together on shared issues in their own school and classrooms is also key to the learning which occurs. It is not something they need to squeeze amongst other school priorities, but core school business enriched by their wider conversations and reading as participants in the wider teacher research network. Their professional development is directed by their needs and that of the school, but it is not curtailed by local constraints.

STANDARDS WORTH WORKING ON: STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Ivan: What I see is, say over the last 10 or 15 years, education has become a central part of political agendas and therefore obviously the government is, and understandably, they're going to start to talk

Standards. So I find the whole thing pretty frustrating because I do a lot of testing, I always have done. And I've developed lots of strategies, which I reckon reduce the impact of negatives, so I'm not just labelling. I try to use testing and assessment as part of the learning process, but I reckon kids have got a natural need and we all have, to know where they are. And you need to give them that feedback, but what I reckon is happening with tests like LAP, AIM¹, all those sorts of things, are giving testing and assessment a bad name. And some teachers are actually using this as an excuse not to do anything, and I see this as very, very damaging. I think, basically, it's worse than dishonest.

So all the testing and assessment is getting a bad name, therefore people aren't doing it, and therefore there's a lot of – I don't know whether Bev agrees or not, but to me there's a lot of ... classrooms that almost have reached a comfortable agreement between teacher and student that "We won't push too hard", and when the time comes "You'll be OK." Do you know what I mean? That worries me and I think it's leading to a dishonesty in education. I think it's starting to come to a head a bit in our school, and others as well. The other thing about testing, too, one of the reasons why I do it and value it, is that it sends a message to kids to say, "I value my subject. I value it enough to actually take the time out to measure whether you're learning it or not."

So within my classroom that's fine because I understand the kids, I'm actually measuring their progress ... but the LAP and the AIM Tests, they're basically arbitrary standards. And the real damage is being done for those kids who fall outside the range. That makes it hard for the classroom teacher because they're the kids who are going to lose hope and it will get to the stage where, if a school has a large cohort of these students, then the school loses hope as well.

Bev: I see what's happened too, is that teachers have broadened their assessment, and I think by broadening their assessment they're enabling kids to not extend themselves. I don't think that this has been the intention of teachers, it's just that we are continually inundated with new ways to teach and we seem to be trying to do it all at once. Subsequently, we end up "dumbing" down the curriculum in lots of ways because we seem to be moving away from the skills of reading and writing and, more importantly, critical thinking. These are the skills that are going to enable the young person to move up, because what we're finding in getting back to this behavioural issue is that even capable students are now becoming very complacent and refusing to read, and that's a real concern for us.

¹ AIM refers to the annual state-wide testing conducted in English and Mathematics at Years 3, 5 & 7 in August in Victoria (See <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/assess/aim/statetest.htm>). For information about the related Learning Achievement Program [LAP], see <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/parents/doc/csftxt.doc>.

Paradoxically, government rhetoric and action on Standards has deflected teachers away from their proper responsibilities in "testing", when testing is understood in Ivan's educative sense of finding out what students know and have learnt. The insistence on Standards (and with it standardised tests and measures of performance for both students and teachers) leads to resistance, avoidance and excuses for not conducting educative forms of assessment. Ivan's language signals how strongly he feels about this dilemma, as he describes current practices as "frustrating", "very damaging", and fostering "a dishonesty in education". Without trust and proper evaluation of the impact of teaching on students' learning, students remain uninformed about their progress. He paints a pessimistic scenario where students and whole school communities "lose hope". Bev identifies two further unintended side effects – a "dumbed down curriculum" and complacent students.

Ivan: That's the critical literacy stuff that we talked about the other day, Bev, wasn't it? That's what we were getting at, getting into the whole issue of assessment.

Bev: Yes, this project has made me think about assessment. In reference to my case study, had I only made reference to my student's previous school report which uses the CSF. I could have only said "He's deficit in this, I need to fix this." But what I did was I then looked at the other side – his funds of knowledge – and said "Wait a minute, this kid is actually quite literate, let me have a look at the positive aspects, and allow that to come into the classroom."

Ivan: But LAP testing is not going to let you do that.

Bev: No, that's right.

Ivan: That's my view too.

Kirsten: I think it's a continual challenge for literacy educators in particular, to develop measures of assessing development, which reflect the complexities of the kinds of literacies that the students are engaged in.

Ivan: That's exactly right. That's the point, that's what worries me. The signals we're sending to kids are the wrong ones, that they're not moving up into those challenging areas, areas that are going to challenge them. So when you use things like the Gardiner/Bloom Matrix idea, you have to say to kids, "Well, look, you have to do one out of every area of *Bloom's taxonomy*, and this is English so we're expecting that at least two of your assessment outcomes are going to come from Word, for example." It's actually forcing kids into other areas as well, but nevertheless a lot of the work that they are getting to do is in the zone that they feel most comfortable with. But that's not happening enough. I think that's one of the conversations the school needs to have, it's a conversation our school needs to have about the whole issue of assessment and evaluation.

Kirsten: Yeah, because the further up you go through the secondary school and universities, too, the way you're assessed is usually in a written form.

Ivan: Yeah, you can't escape words, not for too long. The ones that work best, as we've discussed at some of our meetings, are evaluative ones,

rather than the summative. And constantly governments want to head down the summative road, whereas teachers want to go down the evaluative one, and that's true of the relationship with Bev and me. It just actually just came into clear focus today. As I was sitting here writing, I was thinking about this mentor role that I've got with Bev. Had it been done on their model, that is a summative model, it would have involved things like I'd be visiting Bev's classroom with a check sheet. I would sit down the back and I would tick off boxes, and at the end of it I would give her a ... a grade, tell her where she is going wrong, a couple of points, give her a pat on the back, and I'd wander off feeling pretty good about myself. Bev may have mixed feelings – but that's the model they're talking about. Now the model that we've got is that we engage in conversation and problem-solving. Even though, yes, certainly in the beginning, the relationship was heavily biased towards my experience, now our conversations are about problem-solving. There's nothing in that other model forcing me to re-examine my practices, but in this model there is. I am constantly having to question what I do, and I'm constantly having to tell Bev about the things I do that I'm not happy with.

Ivan's and Bev's analysis is both deeply troubling and persuasive. We believe there is a need for a much wider investigation of this problem. Soft options for assessment ultimately do no one any favours. Nor do generic tests un-related to the curriculum or the local context. Bev and Ivan, by contrast, aim very high for their students and recognise that "you cannot escape words" for long. When it comes to assessing teacher performance, Ivan argues for a genuinely dialogic approach to actual, shared problems, such as his work with Bev – a far richer approach to improving the quality of teaching than the summative checklist implied by recent government initiatives. Once again, the paradox is that the checklist does little to improve teachers' teaching, or the quality of teachers' learning. It promotes a minimalist, performative, managerialist agenda, rather than an in-depth approach to improving pedagogy long-term.

CONFIDENCE, CONVERSATION AND CHANGE

Bev: Yep, I think my confidence has increased quite substantially, and that's through everyone's participation in the project where we attend our meetings in Melbourne. I've been able to share my knowledge with a primary school teacher, and that's been a reciprocal relationship because they're being able to do the same with me. The other thing I guess when I used that metaphor before was that I do feel like the project has been my parachute in that I've been given an opportunity to take this leap in the school, and that's been supported by a whole number of people, Ivan and everyone in the project. Without the parachute above me, I'd be jumping into depths beyond what I would be able to achieve without the project.

Ivan: Interestingly, I'd probably say similar things. I feel more confident, and confidence, I would say, was never a problem with my teaching. I

always felt pretty confident and at home in the classroom, but I do feel more confident now, and probably for better reasons, and I actually know a lot more. I know a lot more about literacy. I mean I don't think I was unaware. It's just I know a lot more from a different perspective, that's what I like about it. It's just thrown a whole new perspective on literacy teaching, and teaching in general, and yeah, I do see myself differently now. I see myself as part of a partnership rather than having to fathom the entire process by myself from start to finish. Teaching can be a very lonely job, especially if you are not engaged in meaningful conversation with your colleagues. I feel less lonely and less isolated. I reckon teachers are great people because they are actually very social beings, but nevertheless it is still a very, very lonely existence in your classroom. You go in there and close the door and if you are not careful, you can get into the situation where you feel totally responsible for everything that goes wrong. I feel less that way now. I see myself becoming much more reflective about my teaching and am able to place it within an ideological and social structure.

Lyn: What would you say has been the most significant issue or question that you've struggled with and shared with your mentor?

Bev: The thing that predominantly comes to mind is school change. What this project has shown us is that change is long term, and what we continually do in schools is we're dealing with the immediate, and part of that is based on the constraints we have such as time, resources, funding. And that's a concern for Ivan and me, because we see what comes out of that is that you get this kid for six months, but beyond there's more than that with this kid – that would be the big thing that comes up for us.

Ivan: We've certainly changed, and we've struggled with that because we have felt that probably what we're doing is not really part of the mainstream and what the school's about. And we want to make that part of the mainstream, we really want to bring that in. So we've really had to grapple with that one and actually make some important decisions about affecting change in our school. Our fundamental aim, of course, is to make sure that our approaches to literacy teaching in the school are going to work, and we're not repeating mistakes that we've made in the past. So we've struggled with the whole issue of how to use existing school structures to bring about the change – that's what we've learnt. We've learnt that we can't try to push the school in a totally new direction. For two reasons: just coming in and wanting change is actually going to really spook a lot of people. So we need to work with them within the existing structures, and work pragmatically and surely. We also need to look around at the things that are there, that are going to help us. Like who have we got in the school who is already thinking the way we are, or is approachable, and what structures have we got to actually get in there and make some significant changes within? It's also important to practice what we preach. Just as teachers expect good PD to build on and acknowledge the good things we are already doing, so too must we value the many

good things our school is doing, and then use this evaluation as a fundamental aspect of the process of change.

We are captivated by Bev's rich image of the parachute as an evocative way to capture the effects of engaging in the cross-generational research community. The parachute provided by Ivan and other teachers has given this young teacher support, as tangible and buoyant as a silk parachute, keeping her afloat, allowing her to take the leap into the unknown of teaching, always knowing there's a safety net, should she need it. Despite his 35+ years teaching experience, Ivan also resonates with the image. But for him it is the loneliness and isolation of the classroom which is abated. He doesn't need the same kind of support as Bev. Nevertheless he needs and wants the parachute, and happily the project gave this to him. He feels he knows more. Both Bev and Ivan see school change as their most significant issue. But they have learned different things, appropriate perhaps to the trajectory of their career. Bev has gained the perspective that change is a long-term accomplishment. For Ivan it is the intellectual partnership with Bev that stands out. He addresses problems and makes changes with new enthusiasm. His constant use of the collective pronoun "we" signals the importance of this collective effort and shared responsibility. Thus, the younger teacher who stamps her feet and the older teacher who feels alone learn how to initiate sustainable change in their school through reciprocal research-based conversation and mentoring.

AFTERWORD: LEARNING FROM TEACHERS

The approach taken in this cross generational teacher research project encapsulates the key priorities for reclaiming the professional development agenda, identified by Terry Locke (2003) – namely, the need to develop collaborative networks that foster "cultures of help and support", that foster teachers' strategic knowledge production and also to identify and critique structures and practices which diminish teachers' professional learning and judgement. It seems to us that Bev and Ivan's reciprocal school-based mentoring, within the wider network of teachers and researchers investigating shared problems – in this case unequal literacy outcomes – addresses these priorities and strengthens the resolve and capacity of the younger, early career teacher to keep demanding answers. At the same time, an experienced teacher in his latter days as a professional is rejuvenated and re-enthused.

In an early project meeting with the Victorian teacher-researchers at Deakin University, Ivan told the group about how local government councillors were given considerable attention and accolades on their retirement, even when their official length of service had been relatively short. He contrasted this with older retiring teachers, who, as he put it, "just shuffle off and disappear". Ivan drew our attention to the fact that all those years of contribution typically go unnoticed by the wider community, not to mention the knowledge and expertise that is also lost to the profession itself. Nobody had ever before asked Ivan about what he knew. It was not that Ivan romanticised older teachers' knowledge or teaching itself. From his perspective, there was room for considerable improvement in experienced teachers and the profession as a whole. Yet Ivan signals the dual problem – a profession which perhaps does not take itself seriously enough and which is losing status in the wider community.

A key issue for the profession is how to unleash and support the work of inquiring teachers who are prepared to tackle difficult problems and make lasting changes to pedagogy, school structures and assessment in ways that benefit all the students. We have learnt a great deal, in this regard, from working with Bev and Ivan and their colleagues in Victoria and South Australia. We invite others to join the conversation and examine the benefits and possibilities of:

- Reciprocal cross-generational networks of teacher and university researchers
- Sustained and supported school-based inquiries
- Ongoing in-depth professional conversations about students' learning and access to related research and theorising

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