Turn-around pedagogies: improving the education of at-risk students
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What is This?
Abstract
Internationally, normative discourses about literacy standards have rapidly proliferated, and spaces for teachers to engage in serious intellectual inquiry seem to be shutting down. Our concern about the impact of these forces on teachers led us to design a cross-generational teacher research project across two states of Australia to tackle some of the toughest challenges teachers face in their workplaces, including the issue of unequal outcomes in literacy achievement. In this article we report on how the project design sustained an intellectual community of inquiry and fostered ‘turn-around pedagogies’. We include excerpts from recent teacher writing (Comber and Kamler, 2005) to illustrate how teachers used technology and popular culture to reengage their most at-risk students. We argue that cross-generational models of practitioner inquiry hold great promise for improving the learning engagement of students, the productivity of schools and the professional renewal of the teacher workforce.

Keywords at-risk students, cross-generational, curriculum/pedagogic design, literacy, practitioner inquiry, teacher research, turn-around pedagogies
two states of Australia, Victoria and South Australia. In this three-year longitudinal study, funded by the Australian Research Council (2002–4), we fostered and developed a teacher-researcher collective which tackled some of the toughest challenges teachers face in their workplaces. Together we interrogated the issue of unequal literacy outcomes; teachers examined the effects of their own practices on different students; and they re-designed aspects of their literacy pedagogy to re-connect their most alienated students. In the process of collaborative practitioner inquiry, these teachers have not only made a demonstrable difference to their students (for which they have evidence), but have rekindled their faith in and energy for the political, intellectual and emotional work of teaching in hard times.

In this article we outline how the project design fostered an intellectual community of inquiry (Comber, 1999) and encouraged teachers to be involved in all aspects of the research, from analysing interviews and classroom interactions to writing and publishing analytic narratives. We then foreground the teachers’ research by presenting excerpts from their writing, recently published in the edited volume *Turn-Around Pedagogies: Literacy Interventions for At-Risk Students* (Comber and Kamler, 2005), a book which documents the multiple ways teachers ‘turned around’ student literacy achievement and engagement. Our argument is that these research-based curriculum interventions are an exemplary instance of how we might foster significant, sustainable change not only for at-risk students, but for their teachers and the schools in which they work.

**Designing productive research communities**

We recruited 20 teachers who were prepared to commit to the three-year project and to participate in the teacher-researcher networks. The teachers mostly taught in working-class and poor areas of South Australia and Victoria, including several regional and rural communities. The student populations included Aboriginal children, linguistic and culturally diverse groups of first or second generation refugees, as well as white working-class young people. These groups – Aboriginal, poor, some ESL learners and rural students – are those most statistically at risk of achieving in the lower levels of literacy performance on standardized tests in Australia (Masters and Forster, 1997).

The basic design of this study was to recruit at least five early career teachers (under five years of teaching experience) in each state (hence 10 early career teachers altogether) who were interested in exploring the problem of unequal literacy outcomes in their classrooms. The teachers ranged from kindergarten to high school. We asked these teachers to select an experienced teacher (over 25 years of teaching experience) to act as their mentor (hence 10 late-career teacher mentors). The late-career teachers would also investigate the problem of unequal literacy outcomes as it currently presented in their classrooms. As well as the empirical research in their own classrooms, the teachers were encouraged to carry out an in-depth interview with each other about their understandings about literacy education, socio-economic disadvantage, parent expectations and so on. The early career teachers’ interviews sought to have the experienced teachers conduct a retrospective analysis of the field of literacy education from the perspective of more than 25 years of experience.

Our aim here was twofold. We wanted to capture the articulated beliefs and knowledge of these experienced teachers. Firstly, knowing that the teaching demographic suggests
that the ‘baby boomer’ teaching generation will retire in the next five to 10 years, we
wanted to document what they had learnt from years of practice, having watched dif-
ferent trends come and go, having been proponents themselves of various approaches
and having always had children’s best interest at heart. What did they make of that
experience now, looking back? What did they always do despite changing bandwagons
in the literacy education field? What changes had they made over time? What questions
and doubts did they still have? The early career teachers in one sense were helping to
develop the project’s historical archive in terms of knowledge about teaching literacy.
Secondly, we aimed to provide a space for early career teachers to ask the kinds of
questions that perhaps were not easy to articulate in the everyday life of school, where
their performances might be scrutinized and monitored. As it turned out, early career
teachers got access to both the wisdom and the vulnerabilities of their mentors.

At the same time we wanted the late-career teachers to have the opportunity to learn
about and from their early career partners. What had brought them into teaching? What
did they understand about teaching literacy? What were their questions and passions?
So the late-career teachers conducted a similar interview which positioned their less
experienced colleagues as people with knowledge, relevant experience and things to
offer the profession. Hence, while we were keen to respect the knowledge that comes
with experience, we were equally keen to explore the different knowledge, energy and
ideas that we hoped recent graduates would bring. We believed that the mix was likely
to generate productive tensions and perhaps new perspectives on old problems (Kamler
and Comber, 2003).

In the first part of the project we worked with the two groups of 10 teacher-researchers
in each state to generate some theories about teaching that made a difference to at-risk
children. We also read selected international related research and theory about unequal
literacy outcomes and various attempts to address this problem (e.g. Dyson, 1993;
McNaughton, 2002; Moll et al., 1992; Thomson, 2002). In the second part of the pro-
ject, all of the teachers conducted an audit of their literacy curriculum (e.g. using
heuristics such as Freebody and Luke’s [1990] four resources model), what it made
available and its effects on different students. Out of that process they identified a
student (or students) who they were particularly concerned about. The challenge was
to learn more about the students’ ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll et al., 1992: 132), their
‘virtual school-bags’ (Thomson, 2002: 1), their family resources (McNaughton, 2002)
and their investments in popular culture (Dyson, 1993). In other words we asked the
teachers to turn to their ‘problem students’, those with the lowest outcomes for norma-
tive literacy, and learn about them as people – as ‘children of promise’ (Heath and

In order to learn more about their students, teachers engaged in a variety of activities
such as home visits, interviews, informal chats with parents, informal interviewing
and surveying of students. The key move was turning to students and their families to
listen and watch. Their research revealed not students ‘in deficit’ (Comber and Kamler,
2004), but young people whose potential resources remained invisible in the school
context. Teachers discovered parents who cared, children with talents, networks of
family and community practices in which young people were being inducted into
important aspects of their cultures (including fishing, camping, family practices,
sports, media, popular culture and so on). Armed with their new knowledge and new
recognition of these young people, they then re-designed an aspect of their curriculum (or sometimes the entire curriculum) and pedagogy to incorporate what young people carried in their ‘virtual school-bags’ (Thomson, 2002). Importantly, in so doing, they realized that when they made the curriculum better for their at-risk students, they were improving it for all their students.

The teachers were able to document not only changes in attitude and engagement levels for their case study students, but for their classes as a whole. They were able to show evidence of students’ repertoires of literate practices increasing significantly. Children were writing more, talking more, rehearsing their reading more, self-correcting more, choosing to write more. Significantly, the changes were being sustained beyond the popular topic or theme into new units of work. The motivation that comes from having an investment in work was evident and with that the positive self-sustained struggle to achieve more. Teachers took on challenges such as these in mini-projects:

• Improving the communication and interactions of children in the area Special Class through studying *Shrek* and making e-books;
• Improving the collaborative work and play of young people excluded from their schools (for extreme behavioural problems) by working with *The Simpsons* and making collective texts for display;
• Re-connecting refusing male writers by re-inventing writing as a social and performative practice;
• Infusing the early years literacy curriculum with technology rich tasks such as constructing radio programmes and video stores of child-directed films;
• Working with out-of-school knowledges and digital recordings of activities to re-imagine writing pedagogy.

While the above list short-changes the complex process of pedagogical change and improved student learning that occurred, this work has been documented by teachers themselves in an edited collection recently published by the Primary English Teaching Association in Australia (Comber and Kamler, 2005). In the remainder of this article we use excerpts from that collection to first explicate our notion of ‘turn-around’ pedagogies, and then to illustrate the complex and innovative ways some teachers used technologies and popular culture to turn around literacy performance and re-engage their most at-risk students.

**Turn-around pedagogies**

When the teachers in our research collective first began to document the impact of their literacy redesigns on their students, we were struck by how powerfully and quickly the literacy performance of many students was ‘turned around’: how histories of student failure or disengagement changed – sometimes, it seemed, against all odds. It was in this context that we began to use the metaphor ‘turning around’ to evoke the kind of pedagogic, curriculum and people work required for connecting and reconnecting students with literacy. We distinguish our use of the term from its more recent accountability driven usage, where politicians typically call for ‘the turn around’ – the miracle cure that will demonstrate how their government has made a significant difference to the educational futures of all students. In an age of increasing standardization, benchmarks and quality assurance indicators, educational bureaucrats and politicians often
use education as a platform for addressing a wide array of social issues and crises and ‘the turn around’ is required to validate their progress.

Our use of ‘turn around’, by contrast, has more to do with ‘turning around’ as a process, as an everyday (rather than miraculous) event that may not be as easy to measure, but which is no less profound. Turning around involves a physical and embodied turn by the teacher – moving to see the child and their families in different contexts with a new lens. It also involves a research-based turn – moving to a more informed, sociological analysis of diversity and literacy. This enabled teachers in our project to gain distance on the taken-for-granted practices in their classrooms, so that the problems children encountered were not just attributed to the individual, but seen in relationship to the structure and design of the teacher’s curriculum and pedagogy. Kerkham and Hutchison (2005) capture well the multiple levels at which this turning around occurred:

First, we noticed that when teachers recognised their students’ expertise and met it with their own expertise as educators, students were able to ‘turn around’ to literacy. This delicate balancing of teacher and student expertise created new spaces for students to develop a wider repertoire of literacy practices, and also allowed teachers to expand their range of strategies to incorporate children’s everyday language and literacy practices as resources for school success.

Second, when teachers communicated with parents and carers in ways that opened up different kinds of conversations, they gained insights into the histories, privileges and disadvantages of family lives as well as the children’s out-of-school practices and interests. All the teachers in the project successfully redesigned their literacy pedagogies to take into account their students’ knowledges, energies and cultural resources in ways that reconnected at-risk children and energised their entire class.

Thirdly, the teachers turned around to popular culture to bring new literacies and new technologies into the literacy work of the classroom. Literacy in these classrooms was shaped by the expectation that students’ textual products would be performed to excite, to inform and to entertain an audience. The privileging of traditional school literacy practices was supplanted by a dynamic connection between the worlds of home and school through these new literacies. Videos, CDs, PowerPoint animations, e-books and films moved between home and school as literacy artefacts, which had ‘currency’ in both environments. We heard vivid accounts of students rehearsing, revising and refining their work, and participating in animated, extended discussions of one another’s accomplishments. (Kerkham and Hutchison, 2005: 110–11)

When teachers critically explored the various forms of multimedia and technology their students already enjoyed – film, cartoons, computer games, radio and music – they drew initially on a ‘wow’ factor (Petersen, 2005), but moved beyond this initial stage to engage their students more deeply in the powerful communicative capacities of multi-modal forms of literacy. In various ways, teachers who ‘turned around’ to technology and multimedia, also shifted their ways of thinking about literacy teaching. They became aware of their tendency to privilege written and verbal forms of communication over visual and multi-model forms. (Kerkham and Hutchison, 2005: 117)

That is, they were wary of exploiting the drawing power of new technologies without sound pedagogical intent.

In the remainder of this article, we present some of the ‘technology-infused’ (Coogan, 2000) curriculum redesigns from the Turn-Around Pedagogies volume (Comber and Kamler, 2005). First we present writing by Cherie Pickering and Judy Painter from their chapter titled ‘Using Shrek and Bart to Build Respectful Learning Communities’;
and then by Caroline Duck and Kirsten Hutchison from their chapter titled ‘Animating Disenchanted Writers’.

Capitalizing on the social aspects of learning

Pickering and Painter are dedicated, innovative teachers who work with some of the most marginalized and disadvantaged students in the education system: Painter with students alienated by schooling and Pickering with students with intellectual and physical disabilities. This selected excerpt focuses on the way Pickering used popular culture texts to extend students’ literate repertoires and introduce them to e-books. We see her working against deficit assumptions that ‘these kids can’t do it’ and establishing new social relations around the production of digital, multi-modal texts. As a consequence, her students became highly motivated and produced texts that far surpassed the quality of what they could have produced with pencil and paper alone.

We both agreed that, as a first principle, it was necessary to acknowledge and develop the social aspects of learning opportunities in our respective classrooms. Educational settings such as ours are often dominated by psychological discourses – individual diagnoses and plans. In this research, we strove to also consider more directly the social nature of our classrooms and students’ learning. As Anstey (2002, p. 47) points out, literacy is constructed ‘by, through and around the social practices’ of environments, including school, and a key element of the social is language . . . We came to realise that talking and thinking are as central to literacy learning as reading and writing. So we both decided to provide more opportunities for students to work cooperatively, talk together, share ideas about their work and, where appropriate, disclose their thoughts and feelings to others within a safe and protective environment. In ‘special education’, sometimes the emphasis shifts so much to the individual student’s problems that the potential for the social is neglected or seen as ‘too difficult for these kids’.

. . . We decided to base our Term 2 unit of work around the theme of ‘Getting Along’ and began the hunt for resources and lesson ideas that would engage our students with a range of print and visual texts. The movie, Shrek, became central to the literacy curriculum and we introduced a special daily ‘circle time’ for students to speak about their experiences of being at school; the activities; expectations and experiences within the peer group; problems with the class as a whole; and/or social issues. This process gave the students a reason to engage more directly with peers and to reflect on their relationships.

With a view to addressing the social difficulties of the group, a structured social skills program was embedded within the academic program and ‘circle time’. A mix of resources was used for this purpose, including lessons from the Stop, Think, Do social skills program (Petersen and Adderley 2002) and others from the Program Achieve: You Can Do It (Bernard 2001). Participation in these lessons did not solve all the social issues within the classroom. However, coupled with ‘circle time’, they equipped the students with more appropriate skills to address head-on social issues of direct importance to them and their ability to ‘get along’.

. . . Both the social skills program and the literacy program dealt with similar themes, drawing on the popular movie Shrek, a visual text that proved familiar to the majority of students. Students listened to the original picture book Shrek! (Steig 1990) being read aloud, as well as the more recent version Shrek: The Novel (Weiss 2001) for several purposes, including to identify feelings, main ideas and events; to identify specific information about familiar topics; and to respond to others’ views.

As a group, we rewrote the ending of the story and decided to use this to create a class e-book. The e-book was created using Microsoft Powerpoint, with each student responsible for the creation of one page (slide) of the book. Students were assisted to record themselves reading their own text and to insert these recordings into their pages. Once the e-book (slideshow) was complete, students engaged in discussion that drove our project to a new

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level. They had been exposed to e-books created by students in previous years and wanted their creation to be as exciting. Specifically, they wanted options to enter and exit the text at varying points and to access audio throughout. The students wanted an interactive e-book text, requiring them to make decisions about how this could become a reality. The technical expertise required for success dictated a high degree of teacher input. The e-book was published on the school Intranet and each student was provided their own copy on CD-ROM for sharing with family and friends.

Creating an e-book is a challenge for any student yet these students with disabilities, who had believed they ‘could not do anything’, accepted the challenge with outstanding results. An important component of the e-book is the students’ narration. Assistance was provided for them to record themselves reading their own text passages and to then insert their sound files into their slides. Students were highly critical of themselves during this stage of the project, often choosing to rehearse and re-record their script several times until they felt that it was satisfactory. For one student who spoke so rapidly that understanding her was at times impossible, hearing herself speak proved the most powerful catalyst to change her speaking habits. Clearly, this demonstrated the value the students placed on their own work and achievements as well as the product as a whole. Importantly, getting it right required them to be persistent.

Our students created a complete and polished product that had value for them. The added bonus is that it is of value to others as an interactive product that can be used over-and-over again for pleasure. Their level of success is evident to all who interact with the finished product. More importantly, it is evident to the students themselves. The results include improved self-esteem, greater confidence in their own abilities, increased enthusiasm in their learning and a desire to do it again. (Pickering and Painter, 2005: 78, 83–5)

**Animated disenchanted writers**

Caroline Duck’s innovative work in her Grade 5 classroom with teaching visual literacies through Powerpoint animations. In order to engage students and extend their literate repertoires, Duck focused on student strengths, capacities, interests and cultural practices beyond school. Like other teachers in our research collective, her curriculum redesign went beyond the one-off token project to seriously capitalize on students’ range of knowledges with technology and popular culture over an extended period. As a consequence, students produced increasingly sophisticated and highly crafted multimodal texts because they perceived them as relevant to their lives and intrinsically interesting modes of entertainment.

. . . In her redesigned literacy curriculum, the aim was for students to develop visual, multimodal storytelling by using Powerpoint in innovative ways. The initial sessions were highly structured and were designed to give the students the basic skills required to develop a simple animation. Caroline demonstrated the steps involved in drawing figures and making them move, and students followed her. They were given time to experiment and worked in groups and in pairs, since there were not enough computers for everyone.

Caroline then invited students to incorporate what they knew about drawing into a simple story of between nine and 12 slides. In groups, they used the storyboard as a planning tool to draw their story sequence on paper before experimenting with what their skills allowed them to do on the screen . . . Caroline was amazed to see how quickly the students progressed. They introduced a range of special effects and began to experiment with ways of holding audience attention by using colour, dramatic explosions and visual humour.

Writing in this format encouraged students to present and critique their work publicly. Because the computers were networked, as soon as they finished, students were able to display their work to the class and Caroline was surprised at the frank climate of critique they sustained.
Caroline: ‘They became incredibly used to having their work displayed, and would say things like “That was crap!” and “Why are you using stick figures, you know how to make them a lot better – we did that ages ago – why aren’t you doing . . .”. They would say “That was lazy, you should have done more here”. Kids are far more critical of themselves than a teacher would be – they know what’s good and what’s not, and whether kids have tried and whether they haven’t – they’re very intuitive – so it was really, really interesting.’

To further develop their awareness of visual narratives, Caroline engaged students in the analysis of a number of children’s films, focusing on the elements used by the director to engage viewers. They looked at the use of humour in *Wallace and Grommet* and were asked to pay attention to the comic elements of the story. They also looked at Roald Dahl’s animated *Revolting Rhymes*, at Raymond Briggs’ *The Snowman* and at *Chicken Run*. They looked closely at scenes they found funny and were guided in unpacking how the humour operated and encouraged to attend to the various ways the use of music and colour enhanced the visual effects. Later, they retold the sections they had watched in storyboard or story-map format, or wrote reviews of the films. This kind of focused analysis of how animations were crafted repositioned students as insiders in filmmaking. Rather than simply consuming these films as entertainment, they viewed them as producers and directors of their own animated films . . .

Caroline’s redesigned curriculum made available a much richer range of literate practices for students to develop and display at school . . . Since Caroline understood writing as a social practice, she encouraged students to use their collective resources to create animated Powerpoint stories which were performed constantly throughout the drafting process. Students’ motivations for writing were sustained by anticipating and enjoying its social effects in the classroom and throughout the school. Power relationships in the classroom shifted, as high-status knowledge of computer-based drawing, writing and crafting was demonstrated and shared. Guided by Caroline’s analysis of visual texts such as animations and cartoons, students began to generate more complex texts and think more critically about one another’s writing and its effects on audiences.

Critical to the success of Caroline’s redesigned literacy curriculum were the elements of collaborative learning and modelling. Because classroom activities were based around collaborative learning, students came to view one other as key resources for learning. Caroline paid close attention to group processes and students clearly understood the demands and benefits of working together. Writing became a social, visual and performative process, rather than a solitary or exclusively print-based experience. An atmosphere of trust and constructive critique created the conditions for the production of high-quality, performance-oriented texts.

. . . As a consequence of producing their highly entertaining texts, students were positioned as experts able to speak with authority about the process of creating Powerpoint animations. Caroline’s students also introduced new literate practices to the school – for example, they used animation in reporting about the athletics carnival at school assemblies. Through a combination of text and visual storytelling, they subverted the traditional ‘boring’ assembly report genre by including humour and editorial comment in an arresting way. Students investigated, produced and performed new classroom and school literacy practices that had powerful consequences for student identities. (Duck and Hutchison, 2005: 22–3, 25)

**Turn-around pedagogies and sustainable educational change**

These chapter excerpts from Pickering and Painter (2005: 77–92) and Duck and Hutchison (2005: 15–30) give a rich sense of the way teachers in our project used a wide array of technological and other resources to make sustained changes in their classrooms and improve the learning engagement of all their students. Their research-based interventions also ‘turned around’ more traditional ways of thinking about literacy teaching, as they documented enhanced opportunities for students to talk, collaborate and develop their expertise in an expanded range of literacy practices.
What stands out for us, however, as we reflect on the power of the teachers’ collaborative inquiry, is its capacity to foster and sustain long-term educational change. When teachers positioned students as text producers and worked hard to design new learning contexts for engagement, students changed, often turning around histories of disengagement and alienation. However, changes in children were often reciprocated in various ways by changes in teachers’ professional identities. The positive impact of participating in changed learning communities where problem-posing, investigation and analysis became the norm was highlighted by a number of our teachers. Ivan Boyer, a talented late-career high school English teacher who retired at the conclusion of the project, articulated his sense of change this way:

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, that 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. (Boyer et al., 2004: 147–8)

Boyer and his early career partner, Bev Maney, also highlighted the ripple effect of change – how changes fostered through their reciprocal research-based conversations led to thinking about how to initiate sustainable change at the whole school level.

Interviewer: 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 I because we see what comes out of that is that you get this kid for six months, but beyond there’s more than that . . .

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? (Boyer et al., 2004: 148)

This excerpt from an interview suggests that collaborative, cross-generational teacher research communities have power to foster sustainable school improvement in current times. We would stress that Boyer and Maney were not unique in learning to see themselves as change agents. In fact, many of the teachers took up key leadership and promotional positions as a consequence of participating in the project. Of the 10 early career teachers, six won new positions in different schools: one as Assistant Principal;
one as ICT coordinator; one as a Humanities and Pastoral Care teacher responsible for integrating ICTs into the Year 7 literacy curriculum; one as a Middle/Senior School English and Psychology teacher; and two to promotion positions in primary schools.

Of the 10 late-career teachers, three took significant promotions; one as a Principal in a rural primary school; one as an ‘Innovation and excellence educator’ for a district cluster of schools; one as an Acting Principal.

Such changes suggest that cross-generational models of practitioner inquiry hold great promise for improving the learning engagement of students, the productivity of schools and the professional renewal of the teacher workforce. Elsewhere (Comber, 2005) we have noted how frequently teacher-researchers move on to become school leaders, advisers, curriculum writers and so on. In this project we have seen how much difference practitioner inquiry can make to teachers’ ability to articulate their beliefs and practice and to become catalysts for school and policy change. We would argue, therefore, that in current times, when spaces for teachers to engage in serious intellectual inquiry seem to be shutting down, it is more urgent than ever that we create research contexts for building researcher dispositions in the teaching workforce.

We would also reiterate the importance of involving early and late-career teachers in mutually satisfying, reciprocal research enterprises – those that make the time and space for educative inquiry and conversation. Moreover, this research should provide genuine opportunities for in-depth investigations of children’s learning, because ultimately that is what must inform teaching. For this to occur time is needed to induct teachers into research repertoires – interviews, audits, case studies, observation, analysis and writing. Schools and districts systems need to build the time and space for such research activities to be authorized as part of the infrastructure of professional in-service learning. Reciprocal relations between practitioner inquirers and the academy could be further fostered and sustained through credit arrangements for such work. In closing, we stress the importance of institutionalizing safe and educative research spaces for interrogating literacy practice in these times as a fundamental move in improving students’ learning and sustaining teacher innovation and responsiveness.

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