

In the Beginning ...

An interview with Cath Steeghs, Carol Watts, Graeme Nobilo and Paul Mitchell

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An interview with Cath Steeghs, Carol Watts, Graeme Nobilo and Paul Mitchell, who first identified a need to disseminate examples of effective practitioner work in education. They then worked as a group to initiate and sustain the publication Kairaranga.

WHAT GENERATED THE NEED FOR THE JOURNAL?

As the national pilot for Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) training progressed in the Waikato district, many RTLb began to consider stretching the boundaries of the training into higher qualifications. Thus many RTLb generated research into practice, and research on our practice, which we considered would provide a valuable source of professional research for dissemination among colleagues. We also wanted to provide a forum to discuss educational issues that were important to us as practitioners. The question then arose of how these could be assembled and published to create an identity for RTLb and support their professional learning and research.

WHY WAS KAIRARANGA ORIGINALLY BASED IN THE WAIKATO?

Waikato was where the RTLb national prototype occurred. The first seventy RTLb positions in New Zealand were created in the Waikato district. On the one hand we were labelled the storm troopers of *Special Education 2000* – out of “broom cupboards” and into classrooms and on the other hand at university undertaking requisite study. *Kairaranga* grew out of the need for a journal that could integrate field work and the university studies of RTLb. We considered that sharing our work experiences would be a way to support our colleagues as the RTLb initiative was implemented throughout the rest of New Zealand. It was always our intention to involve many more people from all over the country in *Kairaranga* but for ease of communication in getting it up and running, we started it locally.

WHO WERE THE OTHER PEOPLE WHO SUPPORTED YOUR TEAM BEHIND THE SCENES AND HELPED TO MAKE THE JOURNAL A REALITY?

There are a myriad of people who have supported *Kairaranga* on its journey. Key people were ourselves plus Grant Ackerman (RTLb) and Christine Mills (RTLb), Ted Glynn and Angus Macfarlane (Waikato University), Judith Hickman (Ministry of Education), Anthony Fisher (Specialist Education Services), Jan Pratt (Principal Adviser), and particularly Lewis Rivers (Specialist Education Services, national office).

Lewis had the inspiration and skills to gain support for the vision financially and also contributed advice for sustainability of the project. More recently, the invaluable input, support and guidance from Roseanna Bourke (Ministry of Education, Special Education) and from the university representatives contributed to the progression of the journal.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN PRODUCING KAIRARANGA?

The major challenge was to establish *Kairaranga* as a known journal about professional practice where first RTLb, then GSE and universities, may share examples of evidence-based practice. We now realise that the *Kairaranga* journey is likely to be a long one, and its evolution and progression will occur over a much longer period than the single year foci of the early days. The sustainability of the journal is now dependent on the partnership between RTLb, GSE, and tertiary institutions rather than on a small editorial committee.

Another challenge that we faced and have overcome was retaining the relevance to RTLb whilst encompassing the other stakeholders and ensuring those groups had as much ownership of the journal as its original RTLb group envisaged. As we enter into the third year of this partnership we are delighted that identity for RTLb and the other stakeholders has been achieved. This journal has retained the original intent and integrity, because it has evolved to embrace broader perspectives with relevance to a wider audience of those involved in supporting all learners.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE HIGHLIGHTS?

We have been pleased with the growth and expansion the journal's readership and the inclusion of other partners in the compilation and editing of the journal. The regular and positive anecdotal feedback we receive from subscribers is always reassuring. The gifting of the title, *Kairaranga*, and receiving the cover art for each issue and the regular feedback from RTLb colleagues are also very real highlights for us.

HOW DID YOU MANAGE THE WORK ASSOCIATED WITH THE INITIATION, DEVELOPMENT AND SUBSEQUENT REGULAR PUBLICATION OF *KAIRARANGA* ALONGSIDE YOUR REGULAR WORK AS RTLB?

Initially all work associated with the journal was undertaken during evenings, weekends and school holidays, and the support that we have received from our employing schools and clusters over the eight years has been pivotal to us maintaining our commitment to the journal. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support:

Huntly/Te Kauwhata Cluster (Huntly West School)
for Paul Mitchell;

Fairfield Cluster (Fairfield Primary School)
for Graeme Nobilo;

Fairfield Cluster (Hukanui Primary School)
for Cath Steeghs; and

Ngaruawahia Cluster (Glen Massey School)
for Carol Watts.

The driving force that has kept us on task in this endeavour has been the fun and enduring sense of shared humour. The camaraderie and laughter have certainly been highlights for the four of us, as well as meeting many new friends through the inclusion of GSE and the universities in the partnership that forms *Kairaranga*.

WHERE TO FROM HERE – HOW DO YOU SEE THE JOURNAL EVOLVING FROM HERE?

It is awesome to look at the ever increasing depth and breadth of the research and the writings published in *Kairaranga*. Our ambition is to see more practitioners with their names in print because it is our fervent belief that by sharing the stories of our fieldwork, we will lift each other's practice by reflecting on and celebrating successful practice. Finding the most appropriate balance between research articles and practice papers as well as the other writing categories that we publish will continue to evolve through the feedback of our readers. It is our commitment to be proactive to the needs of subscribers and responsive to requests received as we select material and prepare each edition.

Cath Steeghs, Carol Watts,
Graeme Nobilo and Paul Mitchell



INTERVIEWEE PROFILE

Cath Steeghs, Carol Watts, Graeme Nobilo and Paul Mitchell are RTLB practising in the Waikato district. They founded *Kairaranga* in 1999 and have contributed to its development to the present day.

Judith Hickman



INTERVIEWER PROFILE

Judith Hickman has worked for the Ministry of Education since its inception in 1989 and is the Student Support Development Officer (Special Education) for the Central North Region. She managed the Waikato prototype and the development of the RTLB service during 1998 and has been involved with RTLB and cluster management both regionally and nationally ever since.

Judith came to the Ministry of Education in Hamilton from Gisborne after many years teaching in various primary schools, followed by employment in the Department of Education as an advisor on junior classes and primary inspector until the advent of Tomorrow's Schools.

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