

Chapter 2

Making a difference: community change as a resource for connected primary curriculum



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How teachers make a difference to the learning and lives of their students is not always immediately apparent. As teachers in the middle years of schooling, the year or two that we have with our students is but a small part of their overall education. It is often not until years later (when we have the good fortune to meet them as adults) that we come to understand how we may have influenced them. But what is immediately apparent on a daily basis, at least in our experience, is when we are not making a difference.

Our students tell us quite blatantly how they feel about the curriculum and tests that we are required to deliver, as well as how we deliver them. In our work with students, it is not uncommon to hear 'this is boring' or 'this is shit', followed by the slam of the door or furniture being upended. For these students, official learning is over before it has begun, while the remaining students also suffer as time is taken away due to subsequent classroom management responsibilities.

It is with such challenges in mind that we developed a unit of work and an action-research project that took into account (and provided for) these students who regularly tell us that we are not 'making a difference'. For us, this notion of 'making a difference' remains constantly perplexing. As teachers, we often feel at odds with the official expectations of schooling, which we believe to have evolved around a competitive academic curriculum (Connell 1993) that promotes 'learning to earn' (Gruenewald 2003; Hattam & Howard 2003), rather than learning how to live and learn. Further, as the priorities of schooling are increasingly welded onto

the economy (Smyth et al. 2000), even in the primary-school context, we see a growing culture in which schools are expected to merely prepare children for the job markets of a globalised economy. While we do not deny that this is important, we do not believe that it should be almost to the exclusion of everything else. Thus, we are constantly caught in the tension between teaching the curriculum content that is handed down to teachers (in the context of an already crowded primary-school curriculum) and finding the space to foster authentic and community connected learning with our students.

In our experience, traditional transmission or 'banking' (Freire 1972) approaches to teaching do not encourage engaged learning amongst students, nor are they good for teachers and their school communities. We believe that education should be about social sustainability, which seeks a better future for our students, their communities and their environment. But if our classroom context of tears, verbal outbursts and flying chairs shows us anything, it is that traditional, competitive and learn-to-earn approaches are mismatched, disengaging, alienating and unsustainable. Thus, we set ourselves the challenge to educate our students in social sustainability by better understanding their social conditions, recognising the politics of power around them and acting as effective agents of change. We see this goal as being all the more important as urban fringe students find themselves in a context that often acts strategically to pacify them, to marginalise them, or to tell them that they are powerless or unimportant.

In this chapter, we tell the story of our attempt to take up this challenge. More specifically, we document how Monica (with the support of Brenton as her Masters' supervisor) tried to make a difference for her students by using recent urban renewal in the Salisbury region of Adelaide's northern suburbs as a resource for exploring students' 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez 1992) and developing community connected curriculum (Zipin & Reid 2008).

'Thisness' at school

Monica reflects:

I have taught in Adelaide's northern suburbs for the past nine years, and have spent most of my 20-year teaching career in other 'rustbelt' schools (not that I am comfortable with the term). In that time I have

become increasingly frustrated with government policy and ideology, along with community and media expectations, that have become increasingly unrealistic in my view. I have witnessed an almost deliberate erosion of public schools, curriculum and social justice. The reduction in funding for public schools and my school in particular, has made teaching extremely difficult, as we are continually asked to do more with less. Meanwhile, the curriculum increasingly has become based around a series of outcomes that do not reflect how our students learn, nor is it necessarily relevant to the knowledge that is important to our students, or even to the increasingly diverse and complex identities of our students. These things have become increasingly apparent over the decade that I have been at this school.

Monica currently teaches Year 6 and 7 students at a Reception to Year 7 school on the northern urban fringe of Adelaide. It can be a difficult place to work. A large proportion of students struggle to achieve the literacy levels specified by the national and state benchmarks in Literacy and Numeracy (LaN) tests. Due to a high level of disengagement, it is often a battle for teachers to get students to complete the tasks that enable measurement against set outcomes. Staff are constantly under pressure to obtain results with students, and students in return resist these efforts in a number of ways, including chronic lateness, absenteeism, work refusal, apathy, verbal outbursts and/or physical disruption during classes.

However, these challenges must be viewed in the context that there is much from students' lives outside school that interferes with their learning. A number of difficult issues impact on the daily lives of students. These include poverty, complex family relationships, unemployment, underemployment, substance abuse, crime and changing government policy. Many families live in Housing Trust homes* that offer cramped living conditions, little privacy from neighbours and limited access to information technology.

Our conversations with students have revealed difficult and troubling lives, and there is a darker side to many of their daily experiences (Zipin 2009). We frequently find that the students who cause the most harm to their peers and learning environments have themselves been subject

* Public housing in South Australia is referred to as Housing Trust. These homes were built across the state in the 1940s and '50s. By the 1980s, in Salisbury North 37% of houses were Housing Trust homes and nearly 80% of these were concentrated around the school.

to the most harm. In this context, teachers cannot expect students to drop all their troubles at the door so that they can be willing and carefree learners when they enter the classroom. Many students are sleep deprived, hungry and poorly clothed, while some also see themselves as carers for their parents and siblings. All these things can distract them from their learning and disrupt the learning of others.

The school context

There are also contextual barriers to learning on a school-wide level. For instance, schools in South Australia are funded on an index of disadvantage that has seven categories. The school consists of two schools combined (with the junior primary listed as a Category 1 school and the primary school listed as a Category 2 school). Further, school data show that over 50% of the families qualify for a School Card and the suburb has one of the lowest socio-economic statuses in the nation (City of Playford 2006; Elliott, Sandeman & Winchester 2005). Clearly, the school operates in a context of significant complexity and need.

Adding to this, enrolments have been declining due to an urban renewal initiative which sees many families being moved to other suburbs as their Housing Trust homes are bulldozed to make way for more modern housing, or renovated for sale in the private housing market. While this is not necessarily a negative policy, it has had significant implications for the school, as public schools in South Australia are funded according to enrolments. So, not only has this policy resulted in greater instability in the school, but the student population has halved in three years, dramatically affecting funding for social justice and equity programs.

The classroom context

Monica's classroom is situated in the north-west corridor of a 1965 U-shaped building. It is located between the counsellor's room and the other Year 6/7 classroom. The room measures approximately 40 square metres and is typical of most classrooms in the school, with a whiteboard at the front and pin-up boards at the back. The room is painted a lilac colour (supposedly due to its calming influence) and the carpeted floor shows the scars of many years of art activities. Two computers (loaded with Windows 98) at the back of the classroom allow for Internet access. Seating arrangements are negotiated with students, but there are space

restrictions which inhibit classroom activities and students often complain about the lack of room. It is not exactly a space that is conducive to modern teaching, nor suitable for a class of 25 to 30 middle years students. At the time of this project, the class was made up of nine girls and 17 boys. Thirteen of these students were considered to be 'at risk' by the school for reasons due to learning, family or social issues.

Such information is important to an appreciation of what Thomson (2002) called the 'thisness' of schools and classrooms. A major factor that is often overlooked in the current political climate, which emphasises standardised curriculum and assessment, is the importance of contextual influences and the learning needs of any one child. We believe that a one size fits all approach to learning is a major impediment to student engagement and learning, irrespective of the school that a child is attending.

For us, the concept of 'thisness' is helpful, namely because we believe it assists the teacher to consider the particularities of any school site, classroom or student cohort when planning learning experiences. It was the notion of the 'thisness' of a particular class, in a particular school, in a particular place, at a particular time, that was central to the planning of this teaching unit and the resultant action-research project, which is the focus of this chapter.

Planning the action-research project

As part of the RPiN project (Prosser 2008), this inquiry drew on conceptual resources such as 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al. 1992), 'virtual schoolbags' (Thomson 2002) and 'turn-around pedagogies' (Comber & Kamler 2005). From these, the notion of using resources from the students' lives and community as curriculum, as well as strategic efforts to challenge deficit views of students, was a powerful one for us. However, there were two further conceptual resources that influenced this project, namely 'democratic schooling' and 'place-based education'.

Democratic schooling

Relinquishing teacher power in a classroom and instigating a more democratic or collaborative approach is not easy for most teachers. However, it can provide a rich learning experience not only for students, but for teachers themselves (Apple & Beane 1995). Trust in students and in yourself is needed to negotiate learning. This can be a threatening, yet

gratifying, experience. Importantly, negotiation does not mean giving in to the low expectations of, or deficit views of, students. Teachers still set rigorous standards and use their expertise to guide learning, but democratic schooling acknowledges that the teacher is not the source of all knowledge.

Consequently, pedagogical approaches are developed that are different to the traditional method whereby knowledge is merely disseminated by the teacher. Instead, pedagogy is focused on the mutual interrelationships between teacher, learner and knowledge (Lusted 1986). In democratic schooling, knowledge is created, explored, discussed and theorised by teacher and student alike, with the lives and interests of the student as the basis of learning, rather than traditional school subjects (Beane 1991, 1995). Such approaches can result in greater student engagement, participation and active citizenship, each of which was an aim of this project.

Place-based education

A second conceptual resource, often called place-based education (Smith 2002), allows us to explore when students are participating and engaging with their contexts and environments in meaningful ways. This approach acknowledges that despite teachers' best efforts, the types of learning that occur in schools will always be qualitatively different to those which occur in the real world. By getting out of the classroom, students are encouraged to become involved in environmental activities, community service and actively solve community problems.

Place-based education can take a wide range of forms. One of its primary strengths is that it can adapt to the unique characteristics of particular places, and in this way can overcome the disjuncture between school and children's lives. (Smith 2002: 593)

Gruenewald (2003) suggested that learning needs to be based on home, school and community experiences. Doing so can create a society in which citizens are better connected to their communities and in turn are better able to identify with, care for, and work towards sustaining that community. By reconnecting, rather than disconnecting, students from their worlds, place-based education works to foster social sustainability and seemed an exciting way to engage marginalised students in a 'Society and Environment' curriculum unit.

Action-research question and method

With these concepts in mind, a research question was developed that took into account both student learning and pedagogical change. This question was: *'How can local community changes and experiences be used to motivate my students in their learning and assist in redesigning my pedagogy by defining deficit views about the ways students produce and apply knowledge?'*

To support an investigation of this question, we decided on a multi-pronged approach to collecting data. In addition to official school records, information was collected in the following forms:

- observations of classroom events recorded in a teacher's journal
- video recordings of classroom activities
- final work products from students
- structured interviews of students and the Deputy Principal by RPiN researchers
- structured interviews between the teacher and RPiN researchers.

The rationale for collecting these data was to record both student engagement and teaching practices.

The student interviews were intended to discover not only how focus students experienced the unit of work and their learning about the community, but also how they interpreted the meanings of 'successful at school' and 'a good teacher'. The teacher and Deputy Principal interviews were intended to supply additional information about good pedagogy at the school and the pedagogical strategies commonly used by Monica. Video observations were expected to offer an independent perspective to help compare the intended curriculum with the enacted curriculum (Manning 1996).

A chronology of a unit of work

Monica's initial question was 'If urban renewal was causing so much instability and concern for the school itself, then what sort of effect was it having on school families?' Monica set out to determine how the urban renewal policy was affecting the day-to-day attitude to school of the students, as well as the implications for their learning. All the students were aware of what was happening in their community, but unlike Monica, did not see it as a problem. In fact, most of the students reported that they were looking forward to the opportunity of being moved to a

new home (which would possibly be in a different area). They were not worried about being moved out of Salisbury as they believed that they could stay in contact with friends via mobile phone and the Internet.

Monica had not taken into consideration the 'glocal' opportunities that modern technology had given to students so that they could 'transcend the physical neighbourhood' (Carrington 2006) through virtual communities and networks. Neither had she considered that an issue based on her own immediate concerns may not be such a concern for her students. She was then faced with the need to change the initial research aims of the project. Such change is not inconsistent with action-research methods and, in response, Monica decided to refocus the research aims by maintaining an interest in the changes in the local community, but not restricting it to the urban renewal project.

Specifically, Monica chose to address 'Time, Continuity and Change', a strand in the Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) learning area of the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA). She had a particular learning outcome in mind, namely; the student explains why local and international communities have changed and are likely to change in the future. She felt that this would give her the opportunity to link a local issue to place-based learning and focus on a group of students who often disengaged from their learning across most curriculum areas.

Getting started

Monica started by devoting time to teaching research skills and giving students time to decide on their area of research. She provided the opportunity for this during Student Managed Learning (SML) time, which was held in the last session of the day.

There were three planned aspects to this project:

1. *Investigating the Past*: involving students in researching the past of Salisbury, looking into how and when the suburb started and what changes had occurred
2. *Investigating the Present*: involving students in interviewing staff and councillors from the Salisbury City Council about how change is determined, who makes decisions, and in whose interests these decisions are made
3. *Contemplating the Future*: where students would be given the

opportunity to plan how Salisbury could be designed, taking into consideration the issues and resources they consider important.

Due to numerous interruptions to the project and time constraints, the class focused mainly on the *Investigating the Past* component, which involved interviewing staff and councillors from the Salisbury City Council. Timing difficulties due to the calling of local government elections meant that Monica covered *Instigating the Present* aspect in a lesson. Likewise, the *Contemplating the Future* component was conducted through a survey rather than interviews and presentations to a council representative. The survey Monica developed asked students what they liked about the area and called for them to suggest other possibilities for it.

While all students participated in the *Investigating the Past* component, Monica identified nine focus students. They were students who the school had recorded as lacking motivation, as under-achieving, or as at risk of school failure. The majority of them were boys; only one was a girl. These students fell into two categories:

1. students who lacked motivation and/or students who under-achieved due to complex domestic and/or social issues
2. students who lacked motivation and/or students who under-achieved due to learning difficulties.

When Monica first presented to the students the idea of researching the history of the area, she was met with silence. One student offered an explanation. Many of the students had completed a similar project when they were in Year 3. They indicated that the project had been fun, but they were underwhelmed because they had done it before. Monica then asked them to consider ways they could run the project without repeating what they had already done. To frame their collaborative efforts, Monica adapted and explained the model of 'head work, field work and text work' (McWilliam, Lather & Morgan 1997).

Head work

During the next session, the class looked at what they already knew 'in their heads'. Some students drew on their previous research experiences and could remember who the founding father of Salisbury was. Other students were surprised that the area was not always like it is now. Monica then communicated to the students the research work that she had already completed and told them what options were available to them during

this project. She indicated that she was happy to support any options, as long as they were reasonable and the students could articulate what resources and skills they needed.

An extensive brainstorming session followed – more headwork. Students were particularly interested in visiting the Salisbury Library and the Salisbury and District Historical Society. It was possible for a history walk of the city centre to be organised through the Salisbury and District Historical Society, an idea that was very well received by students. They then looked at the different ways they could present information. Initially students suggested charts and written reports, but Monica presented a mini-documentary that a previous class had made. Suddenly, the ideas were flying and suggestions included models, maps, interviews and even a television program.

The class then discussed the skills they would need to complete their projects, which skills would benefit the whole class and which would benefit individuals. Once they had established the skills required, Monica set about explicitly teaching writing genres that would benefit specific projects. While the head work involved topic selection, working out what information needed to be gathered, where it could be found and what skills would be needed; the projects also required fieldwork to gather, filter and organise information.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork component included students visiting the Salisbury City Centre. After they had decided on their projects, they walked to the places they were researching to look for historic sites and to compare them with historical photos. A local historian agreed to visit the school and be interviewed by the students. During this time, Monica worked with students to interpret text and discuss their proposed content. Results from Internet searches were very limited, which surprised many students as they thought their community would be as important as Salisbury in the United Kingdom, about which they found plenty of information. During these activities students developed basic skills in identifying information sources, using information retrieval strategies, assessing the utility and reliability of evidence and comparative analysis of information. As students were gathering information in the fieldwork stage, Monica had frequent conversations with students about how they wanted to present the information that they had uncovered.

Text work

The text work that followed centred on the best form for presentation. Some students had very clear ideas about how they would present their work, while others took more time as they frequently changed their topic. Monica felt it important not to dictate how a project was presented and to allow students to find a way to present their projects so that they developed confidence in completing tasks. However, she did need to frequently present ideas to them to keep them motivated and engaged. When students kept changing their minds about what information they would present, she sat with them and brainstormed a number of ideas until they were satisfied with an idea that would work for them. She also regularly reminded them of the assessment criteria for the SOSE component so that they could negotiate to meet those criteria. As they explored the SOSE outcomes and she showed students the ones she needed to assess; and students understood what was expected of Monica in her role as teacher in relation to assessment. That they were still able to maintain control by choosing their area of research and how they presented their work, was satisfying and motivating for them. However, this transition from fieldwork (researching) to text work (assessment) still presented the greatest challenge to maintaining engagement.

Learning outcomes for students

During the project a number of practical issues emerged in relation to the learning of both Monica and the students. For instance, students were starting projects and realising that their initial concept was not working. Following this, they discussed what did not work in their initial attempt and then brainstormed other options. In these discussions, students focused on ways they had felt had worked in the past, but also talked about new things they would like to try. They were re-establishing their projects and not just giving up. Students took little interest in researching the history of the establishment of the district, yet negotiated their own areas of interest in the history of Salisbury. They discussed their projects with their parents and, when Monica spoke to the parents, they related how their children were enjoying the work and that they had never had so many discussions about school.

There were plenty of excuses why they should give up on their project when faced with difficulties; it required hard work on Monica's part to

anticipate problems and look for ways for students to reconnect with their projects. Students were only given one hour on four days a week for their project, but they often enthusiastically asked if they were doing RPiN that day. The term RPiN became part of classroom language. Throughout their projects, students also demonstrated a range of SACSA learning outcomes, including:

- understanding and valuing people's past
- understanding concepts of time, continuity, change, causation and heritage
- gathering and analysing primary and secondary sources of information
- presenting arguments based on historical evidence
- investigating the roles, intentions and motives of people and groups in relation to past and current events and issues
- a commitment to positively influencing present and future events and issues
- using electronic forms of technology and gathering and analysing statistical data
- understanding identity, both individual and group
- applying creative problem solving and conflict resolution skills
- valuing diversity, cohesion and justice
- recognising the roles and relationships of people and groups in political, legal and economic settings and systems.

While these were not as extensive as Monica had initially hoped for (she had hoped for more success in the areas of critical questioning, active citizenship and commitment to redressing oppression), these were still important outcomes for her students. However, the students were not the only ones learning, Monica was also learning about her contribution to socially sustainable schooling practices.

Reflecting on socially sustainable practices

As long-time readers of teacher research reports, and having attended many teacher conferences, we think that we can be forgiven for thinking that we are the only teachers who feel like we are not making a difference. Often, as we hear others report their success and the dramatic change in their students, we struggle to see classrooms that we recognise. Everyone else's classroom appears free of behaviour problems, chaos and constraints,

with learning outcomes achieved and clear research results delivered. It can seem so detached from our daily experience that we wonder how it could possibly work in our classroom.

This, however, is not what action research is about. Action research is based on the struggle with the nagging concerns and unsolvable challenges in our practice as we embark on cycles of questioning and re-questioning. And so it has been with this project. Due to the complexity of contexts, unexpected interruptions, competing curriculum demands and time constraints, this project did not achieve all we had hoped it would to foster social sustainability. However, we believe that these challenges will be familiar to teachers and make this research report all the more real and believable.

However, just because this project did not reach its high ideals does not mean we should overlook the positive steps it made. We do not know what changes it made in the lives of the students involved in it. In fact, we may not know unless we have the good fortune to meet them as adults. The influences on curricular and pedagogical approaches that emanate from the underpinning philosophy should not be discounted, and neither should the subtle influences that this can make on students in the long term. While negotiation or democratic decision-making may seem like small things to the teacher, their contribution to a student and their future contribution to social sustainability should not be discounted. However, research reports require tangible outcomes. So, what did this project contribute to our understanding of socially sustainable pedagogy?

Monica used thematic coding to analyse the data that were collected. More specifically, she looked for keywords and phrases related to her main themes of good pedagogy, community as curriculum and democratic classrooms. She did this not only in her journal, but also in the student interviews and in her interview with the Deputy Principal. She then looked at the video footage to see if she was demonstrating any of these themes in her practice. Monica wanted to see how her understanding of these things related to her enacted pedagogy. This analysis resulted in three main discoveries, which we will frame according to the main themes of this book: the effect on students, the effect on teachers and the effect on communities.

Firstly, there was an effect on students. Through this project students were more engaged – indicated both by the way they expressed their

enthusiasm 'to do RPiN', as well as by the rate of work completion. Students who had not previously submitted work did so for this project and there was not the normal struggle to get all the work completed and submitted, which is far from usual at this school. Further, each student had some success at school, which for many spilled over into having the confidence to try new things in other lessons. This is the core of the funds of knowledge and cultural capital approaches. If we can engage students and build their identities as learners, we can then start resisting deficit views and teaching the codes that can allow greater success in schooling.

When asked about what it was that worked for them in this unit of work, the focus students replied that they liked getting out of the classroom, exploring the community, working in groups, choosing what they were learning about and the challenge that this provided. There were also improved performances in rigour, both through focus students applying knowledge in new contexts and through performance against SOSE assessment criteria. These students also had success in enjoying, completing and being assessed for their work through negotiation and democratic decision-making.

The focus students were asked what they thought were the qualities of a 'good' teacher. They said that a good teacher:

- explains things clearly
- is a good listener
- is patient and has a sense of humour
- is organised
- is positive
- assists all students equally.

As these interviews were completed towards the end of the project, Monica was curious if the students made these comments because they believed it was her teaching practice or they felt these were qualities she was lacking and they wanted to communicate this to her. To check this, she reviewed the video footage and watched the way she interacted with students. This process leads to a consideration of the second of the key themes, namely the effect on teachers.

In watching the video, Monica found that for most students it was easy to consistently demonstrate the above 'good' pedagogies. However, it was with the focus students that she found that she was less successful. By looking closely at the video, Monica found that while she had assumed

she was negotiating and being democratic, often she was merely giving focus students a list of options, rather than allowing them to explore possibilities for themselves.

As the qualities of a 'good teacher', as described by interviewed students, were becoming more evident and as Monica was more receptive to their ideas, she realised afresh something that she thought she already knew: instead of dictating narrow parameters for these students, she needed to listen more to their ideas and facilitate their own project design. For many teachers, this may not seem a very significant insight. However, this was confronting for a teacher with over 20 years experience in schools who believed that she is a good teacher who negotiates successfully with all students and who has created a democratic classroom. It reminded Monica again of the difference between the intended and enacted curriculum.

The third theme was the effect on the community. Clearly, if external constraints had not limited the linkage with the local council, it would have been more possible to foster active citizenship, advocacy for the community and an orientation to the future. That said, the project still provided a new understanding of the role of local government, as well as new links with community members, including community historians. Students developed a heightened sense of their community (as well as its namesake overseas) and participated in advocacy on the part of their community. Monica hopes to build these small steps in future renditions of this action-research program.

Reflecting on the 'redesign' in RPiN

Monica reflects:

If someone asked me if using local community change can motivate student learning, I could confidently say 'yes'. However, it is answering the question about what I have learned from redesigning my pedagogy that shocks me most.

I believe myself to be a socially just teacher, always seeking what is best for my students – this belief is why I became part of the RPiN project in the first place. However, through RPiN, I realised that I had become complacent in my practice for some students, namely those identified as being at risk.

In essence, this project was a wake up call for me. I realised that

the only risk associated with these students was the risk I gave them. Whether I realised it or not, I was acting as though they were in deficit and I blamed them for their inability to learn and/or complete tasks. 'They lack motivation', 'they are frustrating', 'they continue to unreasonably resist', 'they refuse to take responsibility for their learning', all these things I found myself thinking. I do not know how these views snuck up on me, given my commitment to being a socially just teacher. Maybe I was not prepared to relinquish control, to really listen to them, to motivate rather than dictate. Maybe students were not necessarily resisting, they were just waiting to be heard.

There were many things I learnt from RPiN, and they have challenged the way I think about making a difference for my students. Most importantly, I learned that place-based learning and virtual schoolbags can generate a democratic learning environment where teachers and students create knowledge together. Not just in curriculum content, but also in providing students with the words, ideas and space to articulate why teachers have not made a difference in the past, and what they need for that difference to be made in the future.

But, despite my best intentions, I have found that previously I have been no better than teachers who practise the 'pedagogy of poverty'. However, through revisiting and renewing 'good pedagogy', I have had an opportunity to practise what I preach. I hope this reawakening can be a reminder for other educators who also call themselves socially just.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by reflecting on the fact that the ways that teachers make a difference to the learning of their students are not always immediately apparent. However, as this study has detailed, the barriers to doing this are not always clear. As experienced educators, we can assume that our commitment to social justice makes us immune, but we must not underestimate the subtlety, influence or invisibility of deficit views of our students and communities.

Through systematic examination, Monica discovered that what she thought she was doing well, she was doing superficially. And while it would be easy for Monica to give reasons for this, perhaps based on deficit views or unrealistic work demands, ultimately this would bring her no closer to her goal of being a socially just educator.

So what does this mean for Monica and sustainable pedagogy? In realising that she was thinking more than she was doing for her students that struggle most, Monica has found new energy to attempt and sustain more engaging, connected and inclusive pedagogical practices. She now has renewed understanding, renewed direction and renewed hope.

So while the steps taken in this study may not have been revolutionary in terms of pedagogical redesign, the study was an important step that we must all take. We hope that by realistically documenting its successes and limitations, other professionals will be encouraged to either think afresh about their long-term pursuit of social sustainability, or perhaps to look again at how they can make a difference in their practice.

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