

Mentoring Teachers with a Critical friend: Transforming Professional Development through Visual Tools

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Abstract

In 2004 the New South Wales Institute of Teachers introduced accreditation for beginning teachers that included a mentoring process. Recent feedback by the New South Wales Government (2013) in their paper reporting on this mentoring initiative, revealed a continued lack of professional development for mentors, as many who provided support were not trained in their role.

My inquiry was designed to help address this gap. I engaged four teachers, who mentored, in a participatory action research to develop and explore the implementation of a contextualised professional development model. My role as a critical friend to the mentors was also part of the inquiry. I worked with the mentors to assist them to critically reflect upon and negotiate a new understanding of their practice as part of their identities in their role as mentors.

Participatory action research engaged the mentors and myself in examining our own knowledge and the interpretative categories we held about mentoring and critical friendship. Through critical reflection we examined our understanding, skills and values. To organise my inquiry I utilised a participatory action research reflective model inspired by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) and Kemmis (2009). A multi-method approach to data collection was employed. There were three types: (1) Semi-structured interviews; (2) Video-tape recording of our participatory action research sessions and (3) My Reflective Journal. I drew on Social Cultural learning theory and Arts Based Research to describe, interpret and make meaning of the mentors and my learning and identity development as a result of our experiences from participatory action research.

Interwoven with the narrative text are numerous visual and verbal tools I generated in order to assist the reflection and reflexivity of the mentors. The text is further supported by

images from my digital animation “Communities of Practice - A social theory of learning developed by Etienne Wenger” and thus the dissertation is presented as a visual/verbal portfolio.

The portfolio includes a *Grab Bag* of visual reflective tools for use in the field of education by critical friends that professionally develop others or by mentors and/or teachers to stimulate self reflection. The conclusion to my inquiry is a series of abstract images to communicate my professional growth and learning as a result of my experiences from working as a critical friend with the mentors. I end with a conceptualisation of the critical friend who supported the professional growth and learning of mentors (beginning or experienced teachers) while working in a participatory action research as contextualised professional development. This conceptualisation provides a model for other researchers, who professional develop mentors.

Key words: Critical friend, Mentor, Participatory Action Research, Professional development, Visual tools, Self reflection, Arts based research.

Certification

I certify that the substance of this portfolio has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this portfolio and all sources used have been acknowledged in this portfolio.

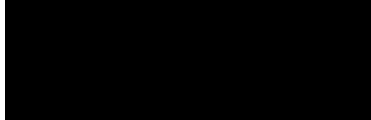


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