



Capitols to Columns 2, 3 and 4 - Introduction to Sections 6, 7 and 8

### **The schools' Communities of Practice**

To introduce the schools from which the mentors came, it was helpful for me as an outsider to construct an image of the school's current context. The mentors as insiders of their community of practice revealed much of what I have written.

#### **Picasso Catholic High's set of events**

Picasso Catholic High is an Independent single sex school in the metropolitan area of a major city in New South Wales, Australia. Established in 1931, the school now has approximately 1100 students of which ten percent were overseas students.

Upon entering the school I was struck by the juxtaposition of the buildings' architectural styles. The main entrance, originally the convent built in 1930, has a long tiled hallway, tall walls and ornate ceilings. The formal and austere feel of the reception area is counteracted by the friendly and welcoming personality of the secretary at the reception counter. The classrooms reflect the architecture from various stages of its developmental life. To the right of the reception is the most recent building, a multi-purpose theatre. This is a modern structure with clean angular lines and warm coloured slabs of metal, organised in diagonals to catch the light.

A traditional model of PD was currently operating for the staff at the school. PD presented to teachers by experts, usually conducted in sessions at various intervals throughout the year (Burke et al., 2010; Curry, 2008; Grundy, 1995). Teachers could also

ask to attend a PD day and were expected, upon their return, to share the information with others in their faculty (E.C Betlem, personal communication, July, 22, 2010). The principal referred to the school's current PD practice as a "shot gun" approach. She linked her metaphor to the school's need to develop a formal structure or theoretical framework on which to operate (personal communication August, 26, 2010).

The school had both long serving members of staff and new members, either experienced or beginning their career as teachers, who regularly joined the staff. As a result two induction programs had evolved (Assistant principal, personal communication, April 28, 2010). The first inducted new members of staff into the school. It commenced with a general meeting, and then was largely completed by the new member of staff as online modules of work. The second was a program for the accreditation of beginning teachers. This was a comprehensive process which involved three people. An external mentor came into the school on a regular basis to mentor the beginning teacher and predominately assisted them with the accreditation process. This person was an experienced past member of the teaching staff. The second person was an internal supervisor/mentor, who oversaw the accreditation process. This person was responsible for the delivery of "The Booklets" (unique to the school). The third person was usually the subject coordinator who established an ongoing mentor/mentee partnership with the beginning teacher. The subject coordinator was required to both, supervise/mentor the beginning teacher as well as induct them into Picasso CH as a new member of staff within their faculty.

There was no formal documentation of the process developed at the time of my visits for example, a policy statement or role descriptions. Formal evaluation of this process had not been conducted by the school. However, informally the beginning teachers were becoming accredited without any problems and this was seen by the members of the PLT as a good indicator of its success.

### **The Participatory Learning Team members**

The participants at this school consisted of three members, two teachers from Picasso CH and myself as the critical friend (see *Figure 18*. Picasso CH - PLT members in school board room). Lindi and Jacquie (pseudonyms for the two teachers) each held a coordinator's position within the school and joined the PLT with the view of improving their mentoring practice.

Lindi at the time of the PAR had been teaching at Picasso CH for 13 years, starting after her practicum in a part-time casual job. This developed into a permanent full-time position and within a short period of time she became the subject coordinator of a busy



*Figure 18.* Picasso CH - PLT members in school board room.

faculty. Lindi was very involved in extra-curricular activities at her school. She was a committed educator who also engaged herself outside of the school in areas of assessment, convening the trial paper and marking HSC examinations. A young mother of two, she was always on the go.

Lindi's experience in mentoring was informal, helping a number of colleagues who asked for assistance. This tended to be impromptu, "*thrust upon me and without any planning,*" she stated (personal communication, April 28, 2010). Lindi was concerned about doing the best for those that sought her help and thus wished to change the informal approach she currently used with some forward planning.

Jacque at the time of the PAR was in her eighth year of teaching at Picasso CH having done her practicum at the school before commencing a permanent teaching position. During this time Jacque has held a number of middle management positions; two Pastoral care coordinator positions, and now for the third year has been working as the coordinator of the International students at the school. There are approximately 120 students in this program. A large part of her role was to support the students on a day to day basis such as getting to class, behaviour management and attendance for Australian visa requirements. She also ensured colleagues were aware of the students' needs and cultural diversity.

Jacque had mentored a beginning teacher who was slightly older than herself. This ended a few years ago, and had been established by the previous principal. Jacque was asked to mentor the beginning teacher formally but to approach it informally. Jacque felt that this mentoring relationship was superficial and she considered this relationship had been a negative experience for both her and the mentee (personal communication May, 5, 2010).

The mentors had varied experiences in "research", Lindi had completed a research degree and Jacque was unfamiliar with research practices. Neither had been previously exposed to PAR.

We met as a group, every fortnight in the same allocated period of the day. The room was a formal meeting room in the reception building. It had a large wooden table that sat at least eight people comfortably and there were coffee and tea facilities.

Discussions during the first interview and early planning stage (the awareness raising stage of the PAR), revealed the mentors' initial context of their practice, summarised as a mind-map (see *Figure 19*. Issues, concerns and interests - Picasso CH). The mind-map outlines in the green boxes a number of issues, concerns and/interests identified by the mentors. The orange boxes were questions developed as a result of our discussions. These formed the basis of possible further investigations by the members of this PLT.

### **Matisse Catholic High's set of events**

Matisse Catholic High, like Picasso CH is an Independent single sex school in the same large city within New South Wales, Australia. Established in 1954 it now has approximately 900 students. Attached to the school is a high dependency learning unit. To approach the school I drove up a long formal driveway to a large roundabout, allowing visitors and parents to turn with ease. The main entrance to the school was a spacious comfortable foyer which I entered via double glassed doors. The receptionist and other administrative staff were behind a counter to my right. Advertising of what the school offered regarding curriculum, sport and extra curriculum activities were displayed on a digital screen using a slide show presentation above the reception counter.

Like Picasso Catholic High, Matisse CH had a traditional model of PD currently operating for the staff at the school. The teachers asked to attend a PD day and are expected to share the information with others in their faculty. One of the mentors noted that there had been a change in the past twelve months, a freeing up of who was able to go where. This was attributed to a change of 'Principal' and a new 'Director of Teaching and Learning' within the school.

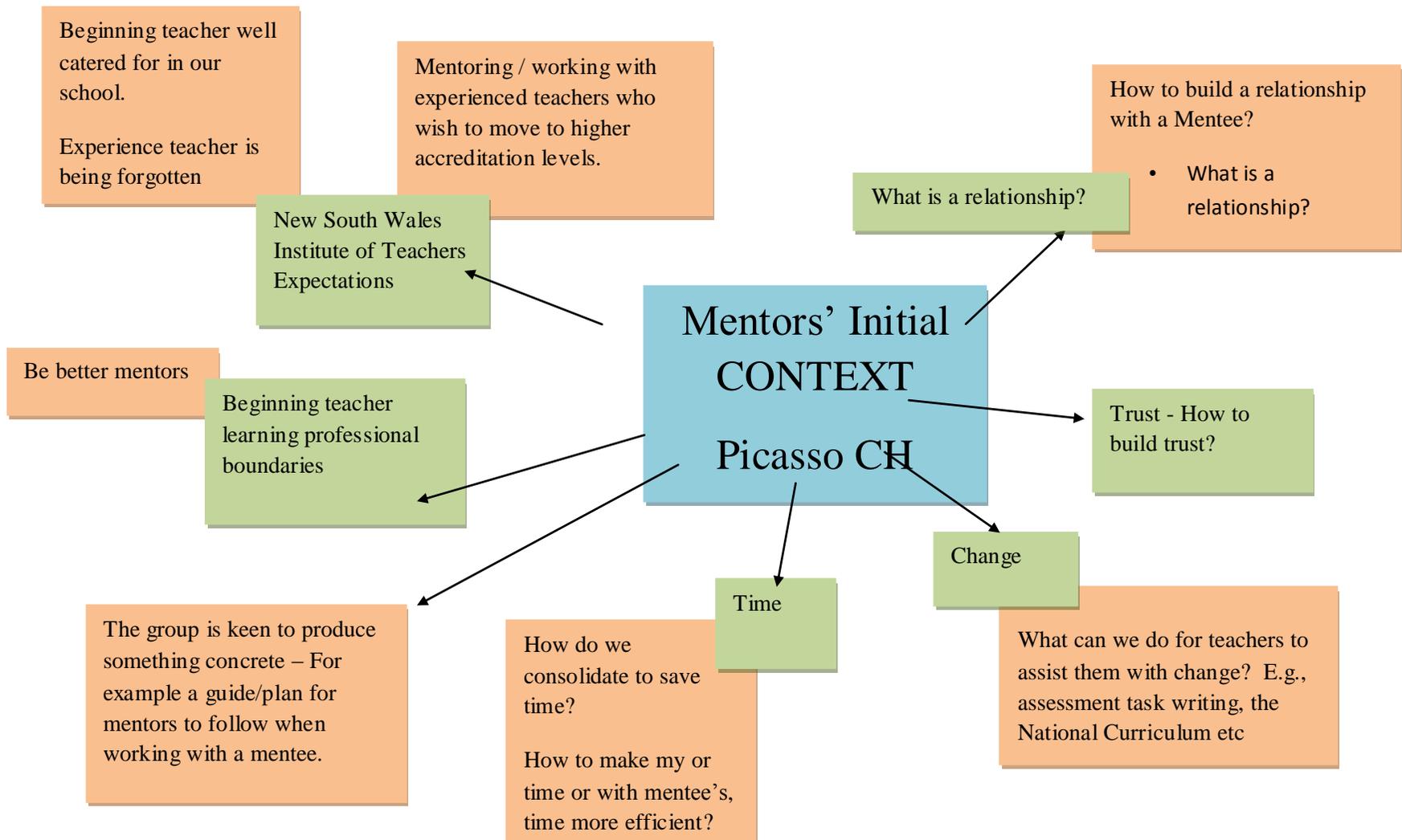


Figure 19. Issues, concerns and interests raised by mentors - Picasso Catholic High.

### **The Participatory Learning Team members**

The participants consisted of three mentors, two teachers from Matisse CH and myself as the critical friend (see *Figure 20*. Matisse CH - PLT members in school board room). The first participant, Joanna (pseudonym) was a Special Education teacher for ten years who had entered the teaching profession as a mature aged student. At the time of the PAR, she had been at the school for four years working predominantly in the high dependency learning unit attached to the school. The other participant, Julianne (pseudonym), recently became a Pastoral care coordinator and had been teaching approximately twenty years, with ten of these years at Matisse CH.

Joanna described Special Education as a demanding job with a high burn out rate. She herself was considering a new direction outside of teaching. However if Joanna stayed at the school she was also contemplating broadening her educational experience outside of Special Education to include becoming a Pastoral care coordinator. Joanna questioned the possibility of this occurring as she was concerned about how she was perceived by others on the staff.

Joanna said that as a teacher she was animated and engaging with her students and reflects on her day while driving home in the car. She was concerned about the curriculum for intellectually disabled students. Joanna saw herself as a mentor to the students she taught. Joanna discussed the difference between young beginning teachers, how they can be idealistic and that mature age teachers bring life experiences to the job. These life skills she felt were not always appreciated by colleagues who had not known anything other than teaching (Joanna, personal communication, May 4, 2011). Joanna joined the inquiry because she was looking at further education and believed in supporting those doing research. Joanna encountered some difficult experiences when she first started at Matisse CH which she believed could have been avoided if she had been assigned a mentor and thus was interested



Figure 20. Matisse CH - PLT members in school board room.

in learning more about mentoring others.

Julianne wished to improve her practice as a Pastoral care coordinator, seeing her role as a mentor to her colleagues. The school had a mentor model for the students. Julianne as a Pastoral care coordinator was responsible for the pastoral care and welfare of a year group of students. She worked with ten teachers who each “mentored” a pastoral care group of approximately sixteen students. Julianne said that the teachers followed the college guidelines but there was some negativity from some members of the team as they *“don’t actually like being a mentor teacher”* (personal communication, April 29, 2011).

Joanna had some experience with research as a result of post-graduate studies having commenced three different “Masters” courses. Julianne has participated in two research trials that were faculty related. Neither of the mentors had past experience in PAR.

Our sessions were mostly held in the school’s board room which had large windows that looked out to gardens away from the student areas within the school grounds. Placed in the middle of the room was a large conference table capable of sitting eight to ten people.

Attached to this room was a kitchen which allowed us to make coffee before the session started. On two occasions we used classrooms (see *Figure 21*. Matisse CH - PLT members in a classroom), a Physical Education classroom and a Special Education classroom. They both were typical classrooms where we had to move student desks to create an appropriate space for us to work.

Like the first PAR, discussions during the first interview and early planning stage (the awareness raising stage of the PAR) established an initial context of the mentors' practice, summarised as a mind-map (see *Figure 22*. Issues, concerns and/or interests - Matisse CH). The blue boxes outline a number of issues, concerns and/or interests raised by the mentors during this stage. The questions in the red boxes were developed as a result of our discussions and they formed the basis of possible further investigation by the members of this PLT.



*Figure 21.* Matisse CH - PLT members in a classroom.

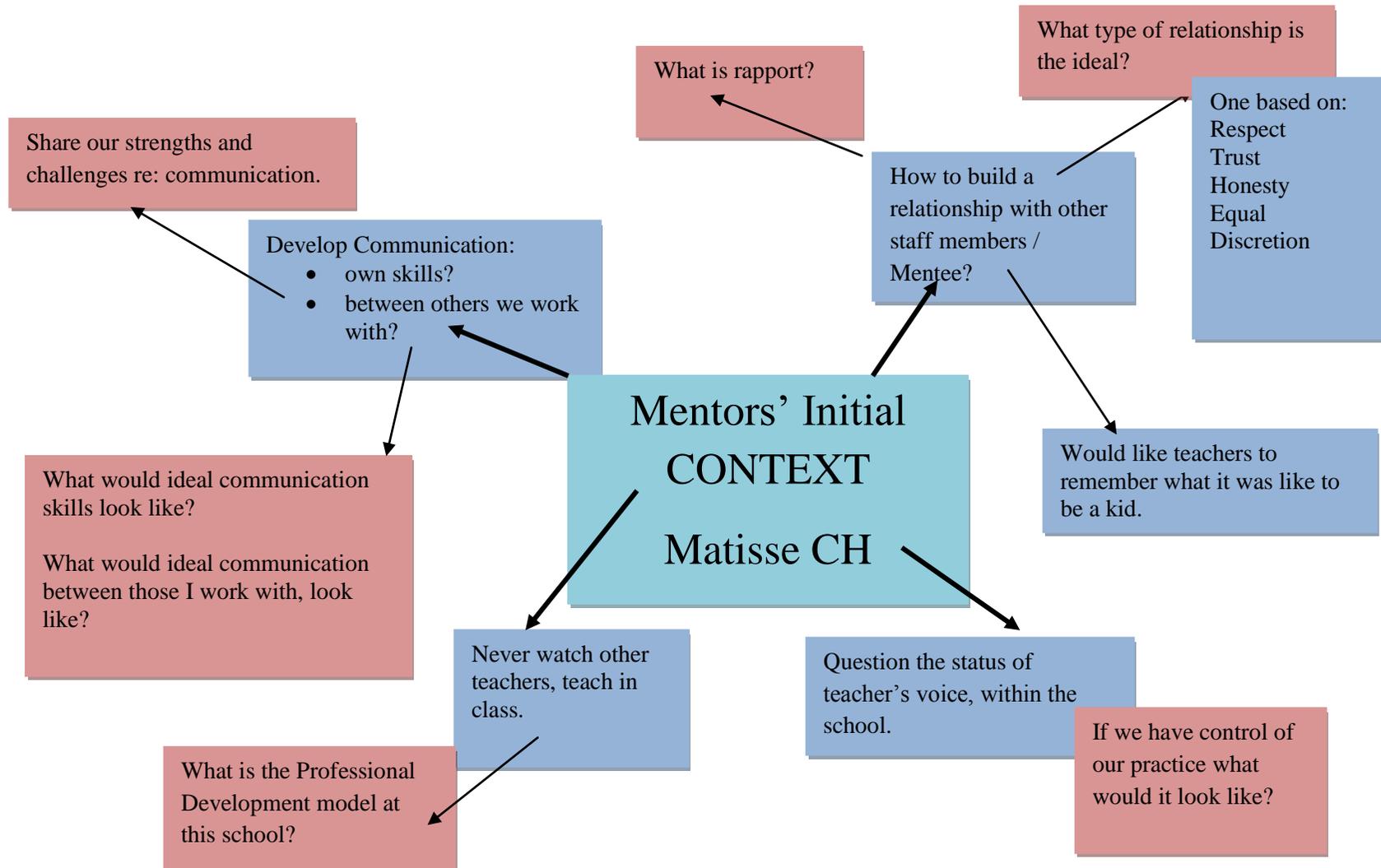


Figure 22. Issues, concerns and interests raised by mentors - Matisse Catholic High.

## Entering a new Community of Practice



Figure 23. “Entering a community of practice”, close-up image from animation titled “Communities of Practice - A social theory of learning developed by Etienne Wenger”

### Our journey of participatory action research

To introduce the mentors to the reflective concept of PAR I used a journey metaphor (Grundy, 1995) to illustrate the action research cycle of conducting a reconnaissance before planning, acting, observing and reflecting in order to create change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Presented to the mentors at Picasso CH in an early PLT session and at a school presentation to all staff at Matisse CH, I described how:

*Going overseas is something we do ourselves, we plan the trip, set out on our journey, experience the country, take photographs, buy souvenirs to keep as reminders and when we return home we tell others about the good and bad times we had while on the journey. In order to determine the direction I would travel to*

Vietnam, I had to first conduct a “reconnaissance”. I asked myself, what was it that I wished to explore about Vietnam? What cities and sites did I wish to visit so that I may learn about the culture of the country? How long would I spend in Vietnam? Applying this analogy to the PAR process, I explained, that the mentors had to consider what they wished to explore about their mentoring practice? They had to decide on the direction they wished to take in the action research. The mentors had to set a goal in regards to improving an aspect of their mentoring practice. I reminded them as teachers we have limited time, energy and resources (Grundy, 1998), thus they needed to consider something that was do-able within a limited timeframe (Maxwell, 2003).

Metaphor – going on an overseas trip to Vietnam

Reconnaissance in order to decide on a direction

What is it that **you** wish to explore about Vietnam?

Limited time  
energy  
resources

Use a Guide book

Figure 24. “Reconnaissance” slide from “Presentation to teachers”.

*Like I did to plan my trip to Vietnam, there was a need to use their imagination to think through their plan. How were they going to reach their goals within a short period of time? I explained that PAR would guide us into a general direction, like my plans for the trip to Vietnam which were somewhat open ended, so to, is PAR. This would allow us to be flexible and open to change.*

Metaphor – going on an overseas trip to Vietnam



PLAN - how to get there

Set a goal

Consider the factors that need to be taken into account in order to reach your goal.

Used my imagination to think it through

Figure 25. “Plan” slide from “Presentation to teachers”.

*“Acting” out my plans, continuing the journey analogy (Grundy, 1995), I experienced Vietnam and met other travelers and locals. We shared ideas and learnt from each other’s experiences along the way. The mentors would work with others in a group in order to improve their practice as a mentor while working as a mentor.*

## Metaphor – going on an overseas trip to Vietnam

ACT Begin to carry out the plans and strike out on the journey (Grundy, 1995) .

Consider who will be affected ?



What negotiations or preparations might you need to do to bring about the planned change (Grundy, 1995).



Figure 26. “Acting” slide from “Presentation to teachers”.

*Collecting evidence is the research part of action research. It was important to evidence their action, I explained.*

## Metaphor – going on an overseas trip to Vietnam

OBSERVE – Collect evidence is the research part of action research

Massive....  
No  
Good idea  
.....yes



Can judge from my evidence that I went to Vietnam



Planning stage need to consider evidence to be collected

Regularly recording in a reflective Journal what happens in and how the time is used in a mentor session.

Figure 27. “Observe” slide from “Presentation to teachers”.

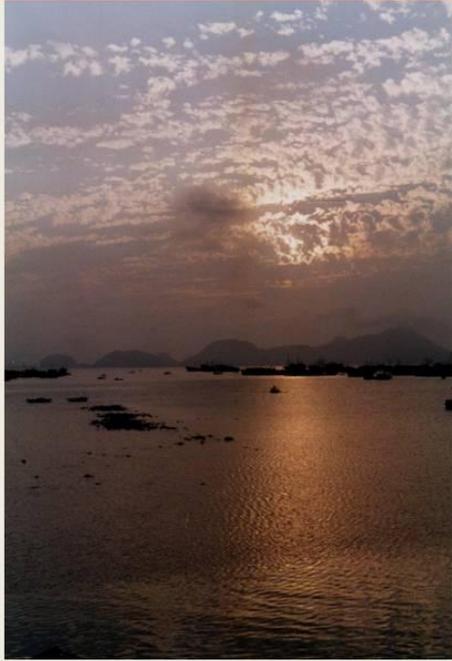
*They would “Reflect” upon this evidence and the decisions they made while on their journey. Considering what part of the trip would they do the same and what would they leave out. The mentors would reflect on what they had learnt from their “acting” in order to “re-plan” if necessary.*

Metaphor – going on an overseas trip to Vietnam

REFLECT – tell others about the adventures.

Reflect on what may have been done differently. REPLAN

Cyclical structure of PAR is reflective, evolving and fluid.



*Figure 28. “Reflect and Re-plan” from “Presentation to teachers”.*

*The mentors agreed to embark on a Journey with me working in a PAR as a form of contextualised PD (E.C.Betlem, personal communication, July 9, 2010 and February 19, 2011).*