



Column 4, Section 8

Participatory Action Research as contextualised Professional Development

Participatory action research (PAR) was offered to the mentors as an alternative form of PD that was contextualised within their school. A key component of our PAR was the opportunity for the mentors to remove themselves on a regular basis from direct engagement with their teaching in order to critically reflect upon their mentoring practice and to learn from these experiences. This permitted the mentors to view their mentoring practice from within the context of their school and at the same time as if they were outsiders looking in (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Wenger, 1998). Supporting them as a critical friend, allowed me to see my practice from within the critical friend paradigm (Kemmis, 2012). We worked collectively in small groups which I called “Participatory Learning Teams” (PLT) as they were fundamental to the process of our social learning in the PAR.

Working within the practice of PAR gave us insight into the *doing* of the PAR as a model of contextualised PD for mentors. The following, illustrates through our voices the advantages and limitations of this model and revealing our understanding of the PAR practice by *doing* PAR, along with suggestions for improvement of this model. I conclude this section with two stories one from Picasso CH and the other from Matisse CH. They are not intended to be compared or to be generalised from but are illustrations of how different contexts resulted in different responses of transformative change by the teachers.

At the beginning

The effectiveness of the open-ended approach and loose structure I utilised at the start of the PAR was questioned by the mentors “... *at the very beginning, be really clear about, OK this is my aim ... I want you to come up with something that is specific to your environment. Just in the first session make that really clear to people and what the involvement will look like, just really specifically*” said Jacquie from Picasso CH (personal communication, March 15, 2011).

Julianne (Matisse CH) felt that the structured process of doing their own PAR focused them, however there was a need for “... *that little bit more concrete ... probably at the beginning. I got it as time went on but at the beginning I was really unclear about what I was supposed to be doing or what was expected or I wasn't sure. I don't know why I didn't get it, because you explained it but it still wasn't clear to me*” (personal communication, November 28, 2011). In keeping with my earlier reflections of the consultants role in facilitating action research (see Step 1, Section 2 “My personal set of events and experiences”) I found that the teachers expected that I would take the lead, like a teacher does in class (Messner & Rauch, 1995). “*We didn't actually choose until you said “now we have to choose something” otherwise I think we would still be trying*” (Julianne, personal communication, November 28, 2011). Although I had explained my intentions this sudden change away from the conservative approach to PD employed currently at their schools placed the mentors in unfamiliar territory.

As a teacher and researcher coming into the school the opportunity to conduct an adequate reconnaissance was limited due to access, so utilising the first PLT session was important to gain a good sense of the mentors' context and an understanding of their personal set of events. Identifying the mentors' needs directed our professional growth.

Lindi and Jacquie from Picasso CH had both been at the school for a long time and been in their coordinating positions for a few years. They had become aligned to their coordinator practices and had taken on these roles as part of their identity. They placed an emphasis on producing a physical product, one that colleagues could use to support them with the process of mentoring. Joanna and Julianne from Matisse CH had both entered new communities of practice. Their concerns and issues were about how they related to others within their practice were the catalyst for their focus on developing their relationships with staff and/or students. They were working to align themselves as a new teacher within the school and a new coordinator, respectively. The different focuses reflected specific needs. Thus the mentors worked together to collaborative support each other on individual projects that were related thematically but met their individual specific needs.

Working together

The mentors valued working together in their PLT:

It's good to reflect. I don't think as teachers you often have time to sit down and reflect on what you're doing and where you're up to in things because it's such a fast pace. Which we got to discuss about "time" but because you're always going, going, going, thinking of that next thing, that next assessment, the next program, you know, all those sorts of things. It's good to sit back and reflect on the process and how you can do things better. (Jacquie (Picasso CH), personal communication, March 15, 2011)

Jacquie also valued the opportunity to work collaboratively with a colleague from outside her own teaching faculty.

I think it's successful because you have different perspectives like particularly if I'm just in my Pastoral care role and [in an office] just with other Year coordinators ... then that's the perspective that you're coming from. But it's good to

be with a Curriculum head and have their perspective of things. It just makes it broader and more diverse and gives you a bigger picture rather than your little world that you are operating from. So I like that concept of gathering ideas and contributing and learning from each other. (Jacquie, personal communication, March 15, 2011)

My role within the PLT, Jacquie said was like “... *being a teacher, you gave great feedback as well. I like what you’ve done here. I like how you’ve thought that ... always nice to hear ... I like a bit of positive reinforcement*” ... *you asked a lot of open questions you didn’t presume certain answers as well*” (Jacquie, personal communication, March 15, 2011).

Lindi felt that I helped them refine their thoughts “*gave us other things to think about, if we missed something, which was great to consider. I also liked the way that sometimes you played devil’s advocate, what if this?* The “*ability to professionally point out other strategies, other ideas*” she suggested. Lindi liked being challenged because as a Head of Department she was less likely to be challenged by those that she worked with in the faculty.

Yes, very happy, I think it’s an interesting change as well because I’m head of department. I’m less likely through status, which I don’t but that very nature of that, well you’re in charge they [the teachers in her department] don’t tend to [ask], well what about this? As readily as you [referring to me] may have said ... Have you considered this? Just little things like that. (Lindi, personal information, March 10, 2011)

Consequently, Lindi was happy working in a group “*I liked the idea of the group coming to formulate a document but as the process went we had our individual projects. That was fun!*

I liked the feedback from other eyes that weren't in my department (personal communication, March 10, 2011).

At Matisse CH, the exchanging of ideas with others outside her faculty area helped Joanna to solve problems.

Never really had the opportunity to work with Julianne in a faculty environment with purpose or any other purpose ... the exchange of ideas and the problem solving that was shared between us all or the problems that were shared and then the problem solving in terms to remediate that situation. (Joanna, personal communication, November 28, 2011)

Furthermore being supported by a critical friend and others from the PLT Joanna felt reduced the isolation. *"It [PAR] does require a little bit of extra time, ... but with that you are supported or 'padded' by a person such as yourself, the critical friend, and by someone else in your group so it's not just an isolated, it's not like you're doing it on your own which would be quite ... Finishing the sentence for her I suggested "disheartening" Joanna continued "Disengaging and quite discouraging actually (Joanna and E.C. Betlem, personal communication, November 28, 2011).*

The collaboration between Joanna and Julianne at Matisse CH permitted them to attempt their ideas within the safety of the small PLT. To *"test your ideas and thinking against other people and that can be quite affirming. Because you can get approval or it can be quite challenging, because ideas can be tested or challenged"* (Julianne, personal communication, November 28, 2011). *"We could bounce ideas back with one another and then maybe I could always touch base with you [directed at me] in terms of, you know, a situation that both Julianne and I were unable [to solve], because we've established rapport with you (Joanna, personal communication, November 28, 2011).*

Through the collaborative (Feiman-Nemser, 1998) and reflective (Carter & Francis, 2001; Webb et al., 2007) possibilities of working in groups the mentors' were able to gather ideas, contribute and learn from each other; to solve problems and to bounce ideas back and forth. Working collaboratively allowed the mentors to test their ideas within the safety of the PLT, to get approval from and be challenged by the members of the group. My support as a critical friend and others in a PLT reduced the isolated, disengaging and discouraging aspects of working by oneself. Furthermore, coming together into PLTs provided all a valued opportunity to work with colleagues (Bullough Jr & Draper, 2004) from outside our own faculties, where we could gain different perspectives and exchange ideas with those we did not normally work.

Giving all a voice

The value of each member of the PAR having a "voice" to encourage a democratic dialogue within the PLT such as described by (Kemmis, 2006) resonates in Joanna's (Matisse CH) statement "*oh each time, each time*" "*when I was providing opinions to Julianne, and even to you, when I came up with a good idea and you go [indicating that I would say] "that's a good idea", da da da! So a general voice was always [had], I always felt we were equal in that terms. And then to actually validate an opinion, always makes you feel good*" (Joanna, personal communication, November 28, 2011). Julianne also felt "*there was no real dominant person, we were quite good at taking turns, and we were quite good at listening*"

Lindi (Picasso CH) believed that her PLT had been democratic. "*Yeah, you always did, you were fabulous like that. You let us say our piece. You were very good so, yeah! I never felt, not heard, I always felt I could get my view across and was listened to*" (personal communication, March 10, 2011).

However Jacquie questioned whether it was possible to achieve democracy within a group (Kemmis, 2006) of teachers who held a variety of positions inside the hierarchy of the school. Her PAR at Picasso CH had initially included two members who came from upper management (both had withdrawn early in the PAR). Jacquie described how:

The dynamic changed and it became easier when we [referring to Lindi and herself] were all on the same page. I think maybe at the beginning when there were more people because your relying on stronger characters in the group to have their say and so I would just leave it to those people so I think when it became smaller I felt I was able to... “Interesting”! I responded and then asked. “Do you think the nature of the type of positions they held on the staff may have contributed to that?” “Probably in terms of rank, because I was down” Jacquie responded. “You’re younger and sort of bottom of the pecking order”? I asked. “Yeah, yeah, yeah! ... so I think working with Lindi, we’re more equals ... I don’t feel threatened by those people but I will let them [do the talking] ... and they’re more opinionated. (Jacquie and E.C Betlem, personal communication, March 15, 2011)

Like McGee (2008) who found that the inclusion of a senior member created an imbalance of power within her group of language advisors doing action research as PD, I noted a change in the dynamics of the group (E.C. Betlem, personal communication, October 21, 2010).

Working within the school’s community of practice subjected the PAR to the school’s culture and social context. The formal organisation and bureaucratic expectations of schools are translated into positions and offices, the critical ones being principal, teacher, and student. The very nature of this hierarchical structure often translates into a stratified power system placing the principal and executive at the top. This can set up power expectations that perpetuate both implicitly and explicitly to both the school community as a

group and to the individuals from that school community (Hoy & Miskel 1996). Jacquie revealed how the inclusion of upper management staff members had reduced her voice in the early part of the PAR. Consciously and/or subconsciously we are constantly exposed to some form of power. Power is found in and around all relationships. After the two from upper management had left the PLT, Jacquie saw herself as “an equal” to the remaining PLT member. Whether the members from upper management had a self-conscious awareness of how their positions on staff affected the other participants (Kemmis, 2006) I did not have the opportunity to explore, however, the question is important to consider for future inquiries by others.

Describing, what she felt was needed for the group to be democratic, Jacquie went on to say “*I think when a dynamic is set up where everyone has a voice, that is more successful, which I think was established but because of the existing relationships*” (personal communication, March 15, 2011). Jacquie and Lindi had both been at the school for a number of years and had worked together on extra-curricular activities. They had a similar church background and thus held similar beliefs. Jacquie suggested that:

Maybe it [PAR] is more successful when you don't even know the people. You don't have that pre-existing relationship ... maybe that's easier. Um ... I think ... when you have the same goal or the same understanding from the beginning, ... if it's really clear where we're headed, which I think you left vague for a reason so we could come up with something, but then some people didn't find that helpful so [referring to those who had left the group] but I think if you feel like you are all equals and everyone's voice is significant then that's a successful dynamic to have in the group. (Jacquie, personal communication March 15, 2011)

My role as critical friend was important to ensuring all had a voice. Through open ended questions and positive reinforcement I encouraged and challenged the mentors to

voice their opinions and ideas. There was a sense of equality in the PLTs as we all actively listened to each other. PAR allowed “*people to participate in the [PAR] and individuals to be heard collectively ... so that’s a great thing. So everybody feels valued and recognised, and I think that’s only positive*” (Lindi, personal communication, March 10, 2011).

In the middle: An interview

“*Maybe just speak to people, I’m just wondering, just to see how they’re travelling, independently rather than at the end*” suggested Joanna at our final interview. “*Maybe have a mid-way review because you started with one [Interview] at the beginning. ... one less combined [PLT] and then have one independent of one another [Interview]*”. A break, to see how the mentors were “*travelling, what you like? Don’t like? Are you happy? Aah, dah! dah and then you have the concluding one [interview]*”. She felt this important “*especially when busy ... because if you find that they’re getting here in angst then possibly their productivity isn’t going to be as good*” (Joanna, personal communication, November 28, 2011).

Time to do

Towards the end of a busy term, Jacquie and Lindi (Picasso CH) asked me to leave our work in the PAR until after the term break. *I think finding time and being prepared, you know suddenly in your working week where everything’s crazy and unpredictable, it’s this routine, I mean I find that hard but the actual process [of PAR] wasn’t hard, if that makes any sense*” (Jacquie, personal communication, March 15, 2011). We had been meeting once a fortnight during an allocated lesson in the school day and as numerous deadlines were looming, they were feeling “stretched” (see Column 2, Section 6 “Drawing, reflection and reflexivity” for a detail discussion of Jacquie’s and Lindi’s issues with time). Like many researchers before me (see for example, Goodnough, 2010; Harrison et al., 2005; James, 2006; McGee, 2008), found participants they involved in action research, raised time related issues. Jacquie’s and Lindi’s negative conceptualisation of time impacted on their

participation in the PAR. Engaging in the PAR process with me, became a burden (Harrison, et al., 2005) at a busy time during the school year and made it difficult for them to include the PAR in conjunction with all of their teaching responsibilities (Goodnough, 2010).

At Matisse CH our meetings were held after school which freed us from the tight time constraints of a single lesson in the middle of the school day. This allowed us to stay for often 90 minutes. I brought afternoon tea to increase the socialisation aspect of our PLT thus increasing the likelihood of positive interactions between the members of the group. Providing food was important said Joanna, *“providing us a little bit of something to ‘chomp on’ ... it relaxes you, you often come ... in either late or [with]something on our mind and you would have that little situation there [referring to the food] that we would then ease into, possibly a little too much at times but that’s OK, [I laughed] but it relaxed us and then we were able to commence* (Joanna, personal communication, November 28, 2011).

Towards the end of our PAR, time surfaced as an issue for Joanna:

I think just the time, the element of time unfortunately because of my situation I was always stressed to run off and I always felt guilty, it’s not just taking off, you know you think leaving Julianne to help you pack up or leaving there was that so, group work’s always trying on those... if you don’t have any, you know, obligations in terms of little ones or whatever you don’t have to drop something and go somewhere else it’s a lot easier.

You know truthfully if I didn’t have the renovations it wouldn’t have been an issue ... my home is my priority at the moment, because I can’t live in my home, I can’t think in my home ... Can’t think, you know my desk or my book, my brain is my desk at the moment it’s just all over the place (Joanna, personal communication, November 28, 2011).

Joanna’s reflections about time are a reminder that we are members of many

other communities of practice, such as professional bodies, church groups, families and hobbies. The effects of our experiences from one community of practice such as our family cannot be restricted to the context of the home. When Joanna went to school she did not cease to be a mother and home owner as she could not simply turn on or off her participation from home when she came to school (Wenger, 1998). The stress of being a single Mum with a teenage daughter and renovating her home, contributed to her identity as a teacher.

I found that weaving the mentors PD via the PAR process as part of the school week was advantageous. It taught the mentors that reflective practice was something we do as part of our ongoing practice addressing some of the issues regarding time so prevalent in the literature (Cockburn, 1994; Collinson & Fedorul Cook, 2001; Hargreaves, 2003; Liew, 2005). In addition, it mitigated some of the time issues that arose by the mentors during the PAR which presented some interference during the course of my inquiry.

Jacquie (Picasso CH) saw merit in our regular group meetings. A *space* of time that routinely removed the mentors from the day to day busyness of teaching. It was an uninterrupted time for reflection and learning. This space of time allowed for ongoing learning and sustained levels of engagement by the mentors, unlike the more traditional, one day “quick fix” (Grundy, 1995) process that they were currently experiencing at their school. “*We have been doing more [PD], but not, it’s not a participation thing it’s more lecture style*” (Jacquie, personal communication, March 15, 2011). The allocated lesson during the school day that we regularly met was “*like a funny space in the middle of your day*” said Jacquie. A time for reflection that was tight, kept us focused and very goal centred. “*Yeah but I’d like to keep learning, have the time to do that, I think often when you have senior classes your focused on that and the thought of taking time off, like we do [for] in-services, but taking time to do that impacts then on your kids, and I don’t like that*” Jacquie described. Referring to our sessions, I responded. “*It’s not a huge time but at least you’re [regularly]*

reflecting on what you're doing" (Jacquie and E.C. Betlem, personal communication, March 15, 2011).

At the end

Lindi (Picasso CH) was keen to apply her learning about the collaborative process she had experienced during the PAR. She was leading the faculty in *"reforming our [programming] to a degree, in all our free time, and so modelling around how we're going to do that together I'll be drawing on what I've learnt to help do that in a collaborative manner, rather than being the department head who goes, do it"* (personal communication, March 10, 2011)! Lindi decided to allocate an area of the syllabus to the various musical expertises amongst her faculty members.

So people have an ownership of them, you're the popular music expert, you're the jazz expert, they pick areas that they're familiar with so the others can draw on their strengths and we share it all ... it means that individuals aren't starting afresh every time, your drawing on that knowledge and expertise that already exists within the group and using it for good reason so then they feel good. (Lindi, personal communication, March 10, 2011)

Julianne from Matisse CH acknowledged that PAR had changed things for her it was *"Oh 80% effective"* but she had a concern that the *"20% would be me just falling back onto habits or things that, or being reactive to things without really thinking through a process"*. She was not sure *"if I would be involved in it [PAR] again I wouldn't say no, but in terms of managing my management style if you like. Whatever that is? If I even have one? I don't know? ... What would I, take to talk to somebody else? ... Could we draw out positives and negatives"* (personal communication, November 28, 2011)? However the idea of talking and working with others Julianne would do again.

The PAR gave Joanna from Matisse CH time to further reflect of her future in teaching.

I'm a natural thinker, that doesn't mean I'm a bright person, but I always reflect on things and it's made me even more reflective, upon possibly my role in education.

What do I want to get out of education? Why do I stay in education? So, that sort of stuff and, am I contributing to the students beginning of their day? How do I contribute to them? ... I do a lot of thinking but I suppose what I need to do is stop thinking and writing a bit more and planning which I don't think I do ... I think it's a lazy element of mine. (Joanna, personal communication, November 28, 2011)

Julianne summed PAR up as “*Oh it's not so scary ... it's a bit like donating blood, a bit painful but you know ... a good outcome*” (personal communication, November 28, 2011).

Reflecting on the process of PAR as a model for contextualised PD our “talk” reveals how we related to the model. I have summarised our talk thus far as a list of suggestions for future participatory action researchers working with mentor teachers as a critical friend.

Suggestions:

- Create a timetabled *space* within the school day for mentors to meet regularly - establish a routine, commitment to the group for ongoing reflective practice.
- Provide food to increase positive interactions.
- To maximise time include a reconnaissance in the first session - be overt about this.
- Be prepared to take the lead - develop structures which are slowly removed, opens the PAR towards self directed learning.
- Watch for teacher stress - have a review to see how people are travelling.
- Group together mentors from different teaching faculties to encourage a variety of perspectives and exchange of ideas with those they do not normally work.

- Avoid directly or indirectly disempowering participants - consider the composition of the group.
- Be supportive and democratic, encourage all to have a voice.
- Ask open ended questions and do not presume certain answers.
- Be a model of and encourage active listening.
- Work together to clarify and refine ideas.

The transformative potential of participatory action research

An alternative form of participation such as offered through PAR directed and supported the learning of mentors within their own context. The two stories one from Picasso CH and the other from Matisse CH illustrate how the learning achieved in each PLT's work was contextualised within the practice of those who conducted the research. The "Individual Mentor Plan" produced by Jacquie as a reified object of her work went beyond my pedagogical expectations as a tool, shaping her practice as a mentor and the practice of her colleagues as teachers of international students. The second story described PAR's potential of relationship building within a non-threatening environment. Working in their PAR permitted Joanna and Julianne time to support and understand each other not only professionally as teachers but personally as people.

Jacquie's story of transformative change through *doing*

Jacquie had not seen herself as "*a visionary kind of person I'm more of a get in there relational, nitty gritty, yeah just get it done rather than big picture*" (personal communication, March 15, 2011). However her story reveals a confident, reflective and imaginative approach to transforming how her colleague teachers, parents and fellow students understood the international students' learning style and cultural traditions so that they may improve relationships between all within their school context.

Lindi and Jacquie (Picasso CH) had placed an emphasis on producing a physical product as a result of their work during the PLT sessions of their PAR, focusing on the “process” aspect of mentoring. This act of *doing* as illustrated in Figure 50 (PAR is a reflective - reshaping *doing* Mentors focus from Picasso CH) was the catalyst for the critical reflective process they embarked upon (Kemmis, 2009). Lindi and Jacquie each developed an individual mentoring plan. It was a tool, used by me as a point of focus to guide the experience and assist the mentors with their learning (Wenger, 1998). Lindi’s work reified into a plan she called a “Mentor Program – New Scheme Teachers”. This plan gave a structure for other teachers to use as a guide to assist them with mentoring beginning teachers or those new to a school’s subject faculty. It reflected her personality, the need for a quick method to organise her time and thus it became a comprehensive and logically

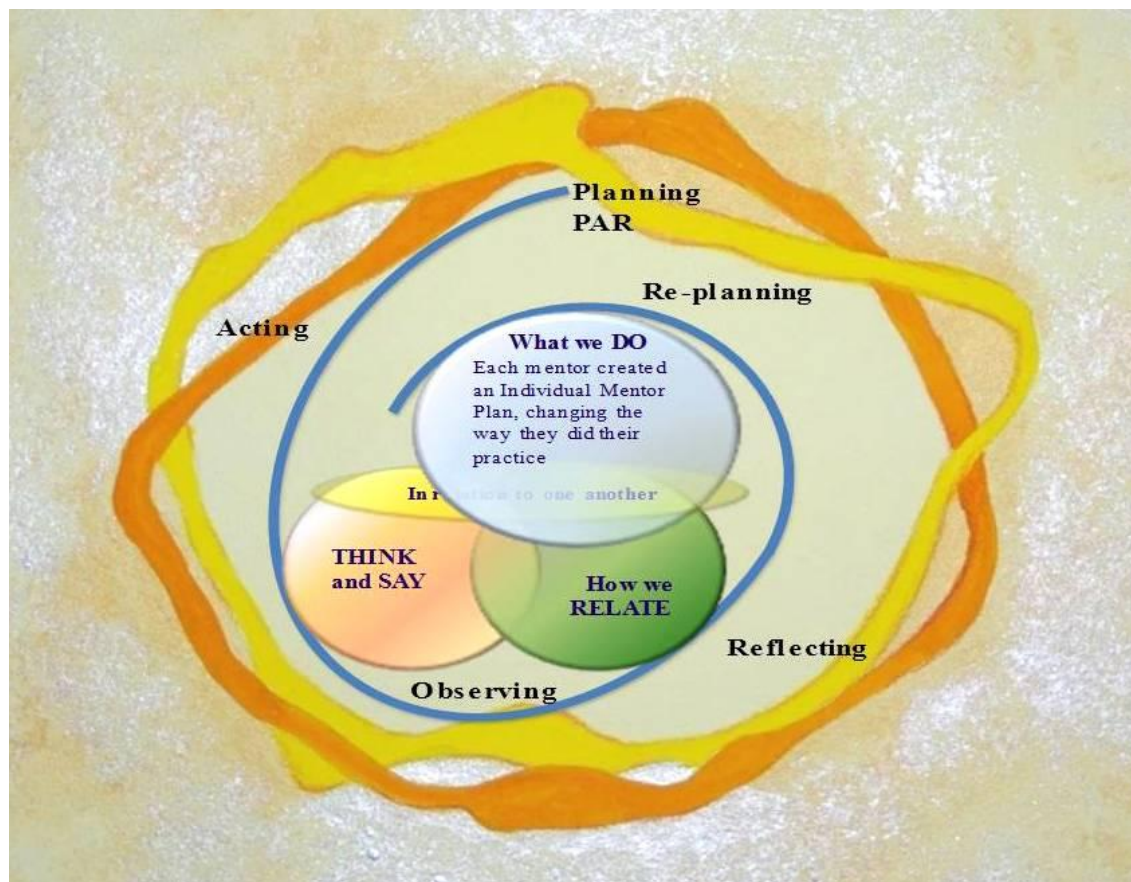


Figure 50. PAR is a reflective - reshaping *doing* Mentors focus from Picasso CH.

sequenced check list. Jacquie's work reified into a document that would inform others of international students' needs, a pastoral care guide for teachers working with overseas students. It was called "New Scheme Teachers of International Students – Teaching strategies".

Jacquie's "Individual Mentor Plan" had been given credibility at the school as it was placed in the 'Handbook' (an information book for teachers at Picasso CH) given to all staff members at the beginning of the new school year and also included in the school's induction program for new staff. Jacquie's "Individual Mentor Plan", if simply left within the 'Handbook', was at risk of becoming disconnected from the values that contributed to its inception (Wenger, 1998). Jacquie's desire for equal access to learning experiences for the international students and tolerance of different cultures within the school lead to her ongoing participation.

I had talked to various teachers, some new teachers, some teachers who have been here for a while and just asked them about the helpfulness of that document [her Individual Mentor Plan] and some of the teachers had said that it impacted [on] their planning, 'to ensure best practice', which was the quote that they said.

They were ensuring that they had photocopies to hand out to all the kids rather than relying on verbal information. Handing out vocab lists which was a suggestion I gave, and lots of them [her colleagues] said it was really helpful [to] hear about dramatizing and they've been putting that into practice in the classroom to explain it [concepts], ... even the local kids find enjoyment out of it, and find [it] interesting. It's good for the international kids... not to use jargon based language ... demonstrating, you know, giving them examples of how to do things. Which is good not just for international students but for kids with learning needs... These [were] things that I suggested that they [her colleagues] said that they had then put into

action in their teaching and they found it productive and helpful. (Jacquie, personal communication, March 15, 2011)

Jacquie's "Individual Mentor Plan" was a reminder to staff of possible teaching strategies which catered for the international students' learning style and language barriers. It was an "object" (as described by Wenger, 1998, p. 58) that the colleague teachers could refer to and use, and for some, the document encouraged them to reflect upon and change their practice in the classroom.

To further develop an understanding of the students' cultural differences, Jacquie went on to run an in-service for the Guardians, those parents from the school community who had taken the international students into their homes.

We talked about the cultural differences which were things that we were working on in that document [her Individual Mentor Plan] as well, and they [the Guardians] found that really interesting, to learn how to relate to their students and then communicate with the Home-stay's family. Just so that there was background information, just to make easy communication. (Jacquie, personal communication, March 15, 2011)

"So it's all grown, you kept adding to what you had done" I said. *"Yeah so that's been really good and the teachers have been really positive"* Jacquie said enthusiastically. *So what do you think you might go to from here?* I asked.

Well now I think this year I'm really working on, not necessarily teaching strategies but growing empathy in the students. So I've organised 'Harmony Day' next week and I've got some international kids and kids with disabilities ... to stand up in Assembly and talk about their stories of being different and how that can be celebrated and doesn't impact their life, in that they can successfully learn and grow, and that's cool. I think that [it is] really good [for] the kids to learn ... that sort of

thing. So this document has really taught the teachers to be empathetic and understand their culture. Now I want to really impart that in the local students in the college.

She went on to describe:

Some Year 8's were bullying some international kids ... so I took a really beautiful international girl to their Year meeting and she talked about what it was like coming to Australia and how scary it was leaving her family and friends, and the kids, you could of heard a pin drop, they were really responsive to that, so trying to breed empathy is where I'm headed. (Jacquie, personal communication, March 15, 2011)

So you're actually really creating change". I was very excited about her story. The "Individual Mentor Plan" as a reified object of Jacquie's learning in the PAR had extended beyond my pedagogical intentions (Wenger, 1998, p. 265). *Well I hope so"* Jacquie responded (personal communication, March 15, 2011).

Jacquie's story reveals the transformative nature of PAR through *doing*. Figure 51 (Jacquie's path towards creating change - trajectory of learning) summaries Jacquie's path towards creating change through ongoing reflection and re-planning based on requested feedback which led to further action by herself. Jacquie's sustained engagement with her individual mentoring plan during, and after the PAR through evaluation and additional related activities, ensured that her intentions were communicated. Working with members from her school's community of practice, the teachers, guardians and students, they learnt new ways of relating to the international students and as a result began to think and act differently about these students at her school. Jacquie's practice as a mentor was shaping the practice of her colleagues (Kemmis, 2012).

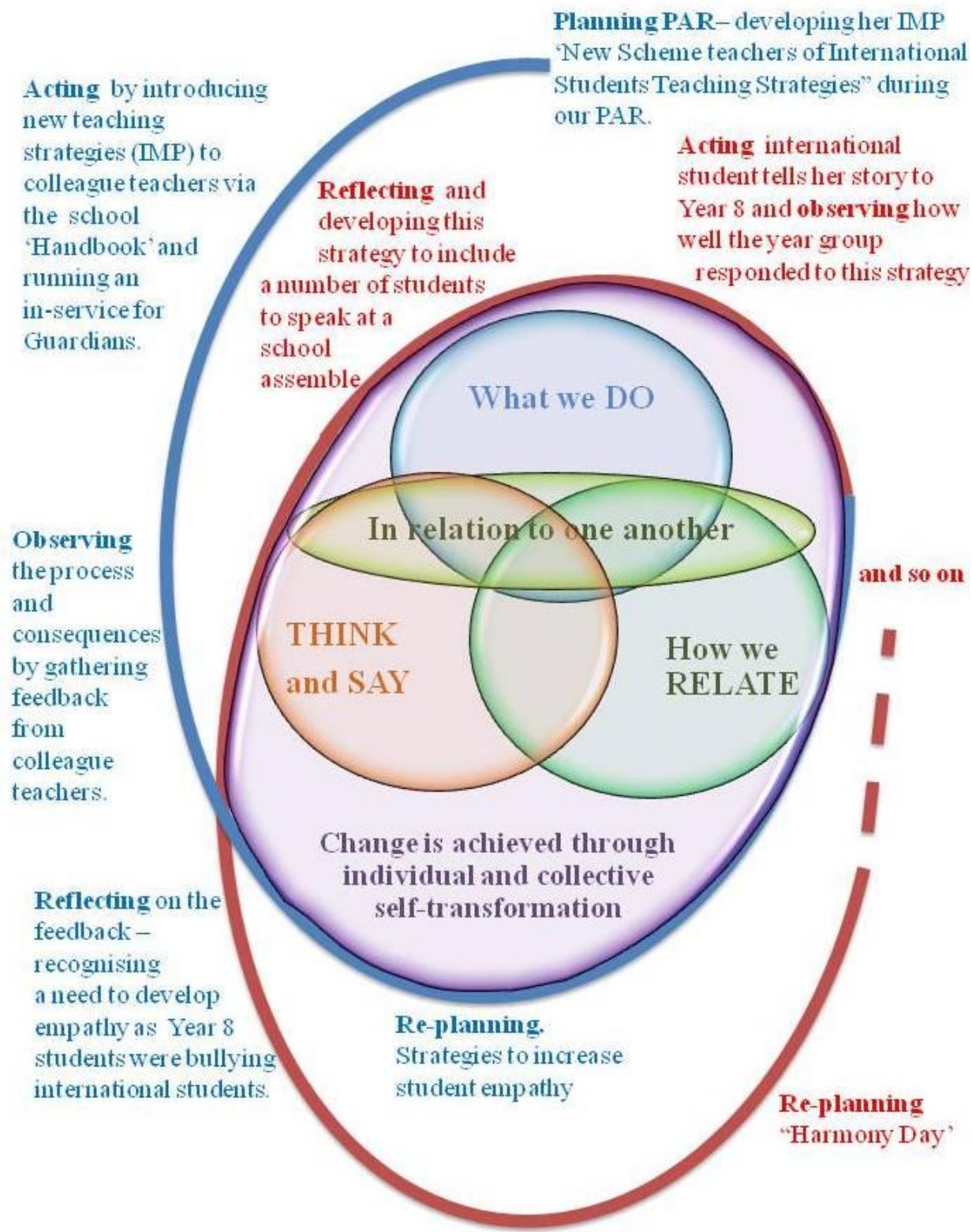


Figure 51. Jacquié's path towards creating change - trajectory of learning.

Joanna and Julianne's transformative change through *relate*

Joanna and Julianne laughed and joked about the image of themselves “*It is so funny, I look like my sister*” said Julianne. “*I never see myself in profile, I feel like I am in the 1950's, the hair, this bit here*” said Joanna pointing to the picture. I had just given Joanna and Julianne a “still” from the video recording I made each week of our PLT session (Figure 52. Still from video recording of Julianne and Joanna taken October 24, 2011). I used the image (which has been distorted to maintain anonymity) as a visual tool to stimulate reflection by the mentors of their developing relationship. The interaction between them was nice to watch. Eye contact, smiles, exchanges of jokes along with frank statements.

Julianne felt that she and Joanna had entered the PAR with a degree of trust:

We've kind of made a connection ever since she's been here. We don't spend a lot of time together but I think that when we have, we just got on well and haven't managed to brass each other off. So therefore I think we came into this group with quite a good base if you like. It was no kind of antagonism between us, so we could just build on that, I think. So there was already a degree of trust, I think. (Julianne, personal communication November 28, 2011)

I reflected how trust had developed within this group. We had reached “Role trust” (Bottery, 2003) quite early in the PAR. I was someone from outside of the school however my long history of working within Catholic schools; they knew I was someone who understood their context. Our relationship and level of trust had developed quickly between us, revealing a number of personal issues connected to their relationship with colleagues (see previous discussion Column 3, Section 7). Joanna and Julianne felt that I was someone who respected them and I could be relied upon. Bottery (2003) described this level of trust as “Identificatory trust”. However what I witnessed between them over the past several months was much more than a successful professional relationship, it was a growing friendship



Figure 52. Still from video recording of Julianne and Joanna taken October 24, 2011.

(friendship as discussed by Gibbs & Angelides, 2008). *“This was natural, as I am an outsider who challenged their assumptions, sometimes on a very personal level and I will be leaving soon. I hope they will continue to use each other for support and as reflective partners”* (E.C. Betlem, personal communication, October 31, 2011).

“Have a look at the picture, what does it say to you about how your relationship has changed over time” (E.C. Betlem, personal communication, November 14, 2011)? *“I got to know Julianne well over the years said Joanna, “... but I’ve been here but I never really interacting with you much [looking at Julianne] in terms of teaching etc. This has given me ... to hear some of the experiences that a coordinator, time out a bit, you know, with loosing it about them [Pastoral care coordinators], you know, it has given me insight”* (personal communication, November 14, 2011) ... *would you do that?* Julianne quickly asked. The conversation was diverted away from their relationship, to one about the Pastoral care coordinators’ role regarding behaviour management. *Tell me more about your relationship?* I asked, in order to redirect the conversation back.

I think we have understanding of whom we are and then the personalities behind the facades... I feel great sympathy for some of the struggles you have gone through and possibly likewise for you ... a stronger, distant bond had been built, even though we may not work on a similar matter ... that familiarity was developed from this little exercise [referring to her participation in the PAR]. (Joanna, personal communication, November 14, 2011)

"I concur" said Julianne and they laughed.

Because you know what schools are like ... and then every now and then you fly past each other ... at morning tea or across the college green, it was nice to understand some of your struggles and complexities as well ... they are quite unique ...it makes me feel a bit sad that you are not supported to bring out your strengths ... If you keep pushing someone hard enough where they are not entirely comfortable, but will cope if they have to, you will not bring out the best in them, and that frustrates me in terms of what I believe in that we should be a supportive environment for, not just the students but also the teachers as well. (Julianne, personal communication, November 14, 2011)

The culture of their school, like many, was a busy complex social system (Eisner, 2001; Hoy & Miskel, 1996; Wenger, 1998). Working in a PAR gave Joanna and Julianne time to understand each other not only professionally as teachers but personally as people. Factors such as the school's culture: the "personalities" of work colleagues, those they supervised or where supervised by and also other communities of practice such as their family, friends and university study (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2010) that the mentors where professionally and personally involved contributed to their identity as mentors. Joanna's ongoing anxiety over the relationship with a colleague and generally feeling of being unsupported by the school's hierarchy and Julianne's feeling sensitive and lack of

confidence when they entered the PAR (see Column 3, Section 7) provided them an opportunity to share their experiences and manage these emotions as part of their identities as mentors. It is interesting that little attention is given to the emotional factors of teacher identity in the literature (Day et al., 2006, p. 611).

“Whole heartedly” interrupted Joanna. Julianne continued to speak without stopping *“And that’s an ongoing thing that niggles at me ...we are flogging ourselves to look after the kids but who is looking after the teachers? How do we do that in a way that is non-threatening* (personal communication November 14, 2011)?

Engaging collectively with the mentors as their critical friend, PAR was flexible and open to change and driven by the mentors’, I could cater for the whole person, their professional and personal lived experiences as mentors. *I think she [Joanna] felt a sense of relief to be able to talk to you about that [her anxieties]. So I think her needs in that respect were greater... and took a higher priority,* (Julianne, personal communication, November 28, 2011).

Joanna and Julianne’s story revealed PAR’s potential for developing relationships within a non-threatening environment. Their sustained engagement in the PAR allowed Joanna and Julianne time to support and understand each other not only professionally as teachers but personally as people and as part of their identities as mentors. Joanna’s statement reveals how she became aware of the impact she had on the circumstances around her and how she related to others.

I may not be a “compassionate” to the greater audience and that is what this mentoring has given me understanding of the general public out there ... I just hope that the person you got to know on this side of the fence is different ...does present very different ... I present hard but I am deep down a soft person. (Joanna, personal communication, November 14, 2011)

Summary

Uncertainty of expectations had lead the PLTs into the unfamiliar territory of PAR. “Padded” by a person such as the critical friend, the mentors were assisted to slowly move away from the lecture style of PD they currently experienced to one that was self directed by, and catered for mentors’ individual needs. The collaborative and reflective nature of the groups during the PAR revealed teams that were open, responsive, and supportive of each others’ work which encouraged a variety of perspectives and exchange of ideas with those they did not normally work.

The length of PAR within schools is traditionally long, many over twelve months in their duration (see for example: Baskerville & Goldbatt, 2009, eighteen months; Harrison, et al., 2005, two years; Goodnough, 2011, four years; Wennergren & Ronnerman, 2006, three years). As I entered into my inquiry gaining a commitment from colleagues to join me on my journey was a challenge (described in Step 1, Section 2) and thus it was important to stay with my intended duration of six to eight PLT sessions. The creation of an allocated *space* for reflective practice in the mentors’ school timetable for mentors to meet regularly established a routine and commitment to the group. My sensitivity to their needs as well as flexibility with our meetings during demanding times in the school calendar along with the mentors’ sustained level of engagement helped to overcome some of the time related limitations attributed to PAR. Furthermore the potential of PAR to achieve transformative change of the mentors’ practice and also the practice of those that were part of their community of practice were not hindered by this shortened period of time.

Participatory action research conducted as contextualised PD within the school can subject a group to the schools’ explicit, yet more often implicit hierarchical power relationships of positions held by possible members of the group, for example, a school deputy principal with general teaching staff. Those coming together from different school

contexts may not be affected by the same relationships of power however the potential of developing positive relationships between the mentors who worked together in the PAR and colleagues from their own school context, such as those achieved by Joanna and Julianne cannot be achieved in contexts removed from the mentors' own community of practice.

Mentoring involves not only a process but more importantly relationships, the relationship within a school of mentor with mentor and subsequently the relationship of mentor with other members of their community of practice such as colleagues, parents or students as mentees. The contextualised nature of these relationships demands a PD that: provides opportunities to develop mentor relationships with others as part of their identity, is unique to the mentors' context and explicitly caters for their individual professional and personal lived experiences as part of their identities as mentors. As a social learning process, PAR is one such model.



Column 5, Section 9

Insights into the critical friend practice - Closing reflections

“Insights into the critical friend practice: Closing reflections” is the conclusion to my thesis. I have created an artwork as a vehicle to communicate my professional growth and learning from working as a critical friend with mentors in a PAR.

Viewing instructions

To cater for varied technological possibilities, I have provided two different formats, PowerPoint™ and PDF (Adobe™).

- 1. PowerPoint™ slide show is my preferred option as the quality of the image is not compromised.**

Provided on **DVD** (located inside of the back cover)

Insert DVD and double click on the folder to open the show. Press enter to advance the slides.

Also provided on a USB stick (located inside the front cover of my thesis).

Open the folder titled “Peristyle – the columns” it is labelled “Column 5 Section 9 Insights into a CF practice Slide show”

Please **project the slide show** presentation onto a viewing screen. The preferred size of the images is **A2**. The resolution of the photographed images is high enough to allow the viewer to enlarge the images and enjoy the textural qualities within the work. This interactive component will add to the audience’s experience of the artworks.

2. PDF format is provided for those who may not have access to Microsoft PowerPoint™. Located on the USB stick, in the folder titled “Peristyle – the columns” it is labelled “Column 5 Section 9 Insights into a CF practice Alternative”. This format reduces the quality of the images. It is best viewed on your computer.

**Please now view the slide show presentation of
“Insights into the critical friend practice - Closing reflections**



Frieze, Section 10

***Grab Bag* introduced**

The *Grab Bag* is what I return to the professional workplace as a result of my inquiry. The reification of my lived experiences as a critical friend resulted in a new repertoire of reflective visual tools. My *Grab Bag* is a collection of reflective visual tools which aim to stimulate and engage educators such as mentors and/or teachers in a reflective and reflexive practice. The visual reflective tools found in the *Grab Bag* can be used by critical friends, who collaborate with groups of educators to guide and support them or they can be used by individuals for personal reflection.

**The *Grab Bag* of reflective tools is placed in a plastic folder
attached to the back of the thesis**