

An aerial photograph of a winter landscape. The ground is covered in snow, with several irregular patches of golden-brown vegetation or moss. In the upper portion of the image, there are bare, white, tangled tree branches. The overall scene is serene and quiet.

Insights to the critical friend practice:
Closing reflections

Artist Statement

My artwork is a series of abstract collaged images interspersed with text that are culminating reflections of my emerging identity as critical friend. They represent some of my conclusions to my thesis.

These images are created by first, “mark making” with a variety of media such as watercolour paint, crayon, pencil and found materials to create textured images. I use these as the basis of new works. I cut and/or tear the textured images to reconstruct them into abstract collages. Like the fluid, open and responsive structure of participatory action research I enjoy working with the accidental surprises that this art making process creates.

Representing the nexus of my evolving identity as a critical friend these abstract collages visually connect with each other through texture, colour, line and tone. The images act as creative bridges to visually represent my sophisticated understanding about the role of a critical friend in participatory action research and my reconciliation of bringing together my multiple experiences as a teacher, artist and researcher to the critical friend role as part of my identity.



Insecurity



Confusion



Frustration

Pushed
and *pulled*

by internal
and external

forces

*(E.C.Betlem , personal communication,
September 19, 2011)*

A critical friend must have experience ... you actually provide the different avenues for the person to go on. So if the person comes lacking experience how can they be a critical friend outside of just being a person who may have had experiences in life?

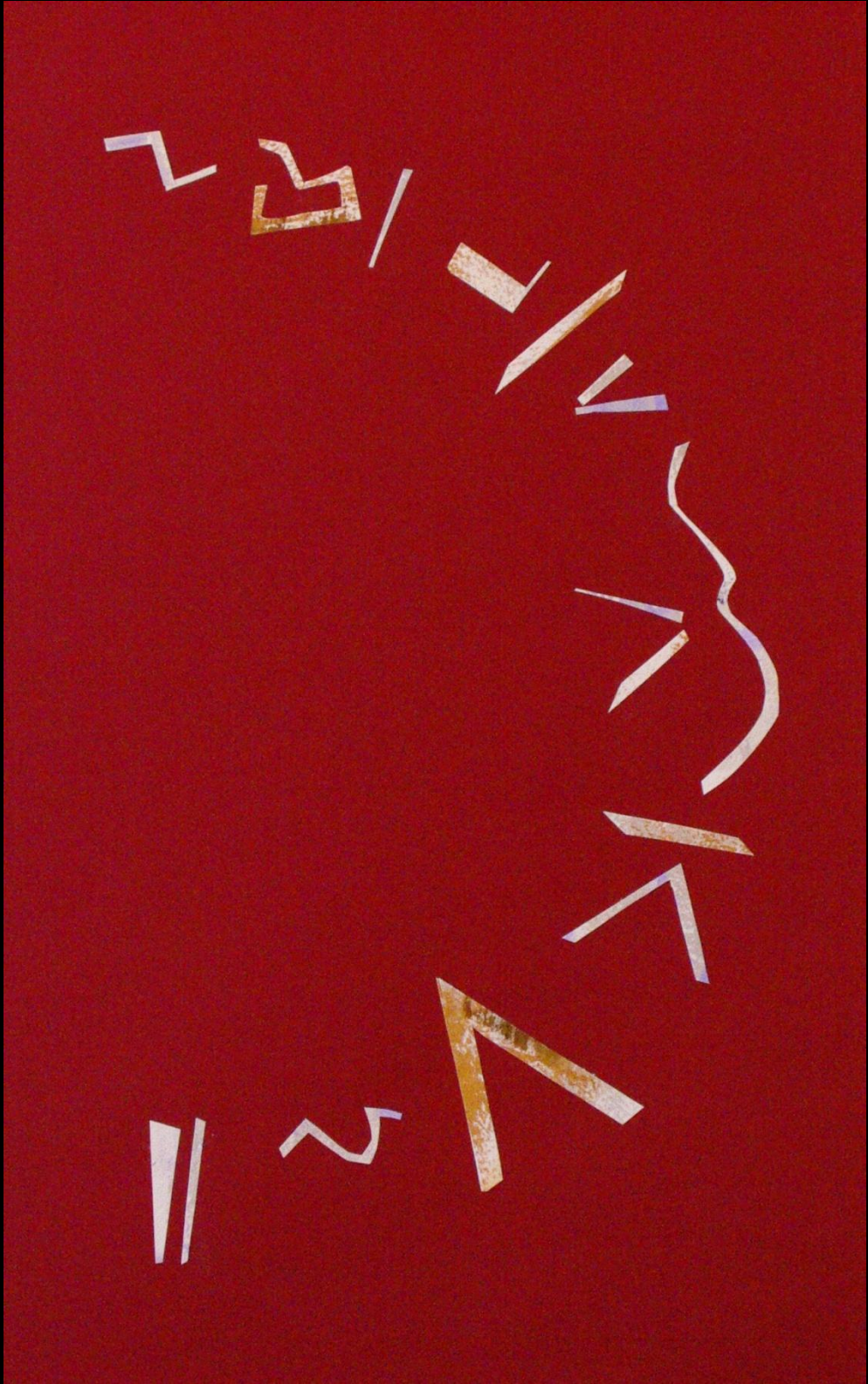
I think the fact that you related as a teacher, ... gave a lot of ground. The fact that you really never corrected us in terms of "no you're wrong"... so sensitivity must come into the role,

*obviously a listener,
impartial in terms of or
unbiased*

*(Mentor, personal communication,
November 28, 2011)*



Structure



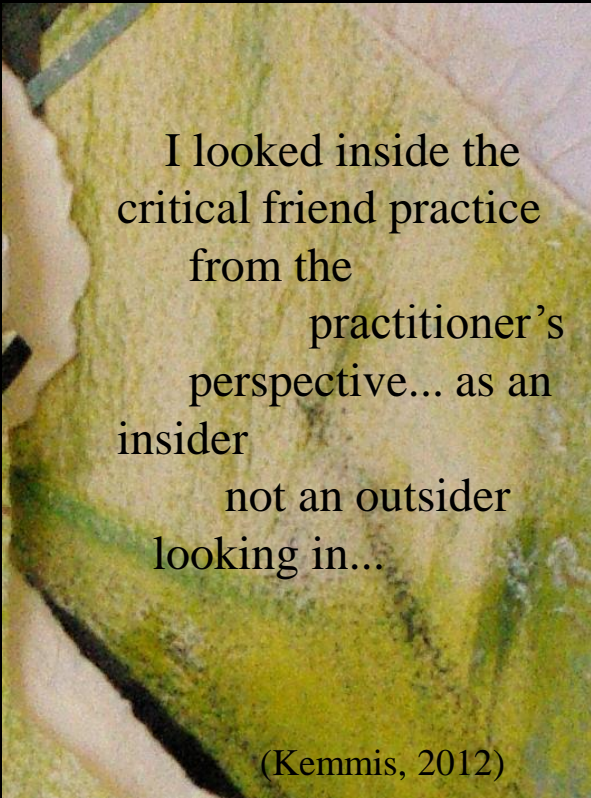
*If you
wanted to draw my attention
to something you
would push a bit of paper towards
me to direct my attention to
something specific....
those sheets ... drew me back
to thinking, like; what I was
supposed to be doing?
What's the point? Where am I going?
Where have I been?
That kind of thing,
I quite liked that.*

*(Mentor, personal communication,,
November 28,2011)*

A critical friend who works with mentors in a participatory action research as a contextualised professional development is an educator who is from outside the practice but at the same time familiar with the repertoire and context from within the workplace. A critical friend is a competent and confident educator prepared to share their varied experiences and use their individual talents to support the professional growth and learning of educators that mentor beginning or experienced teachers.



Revealed

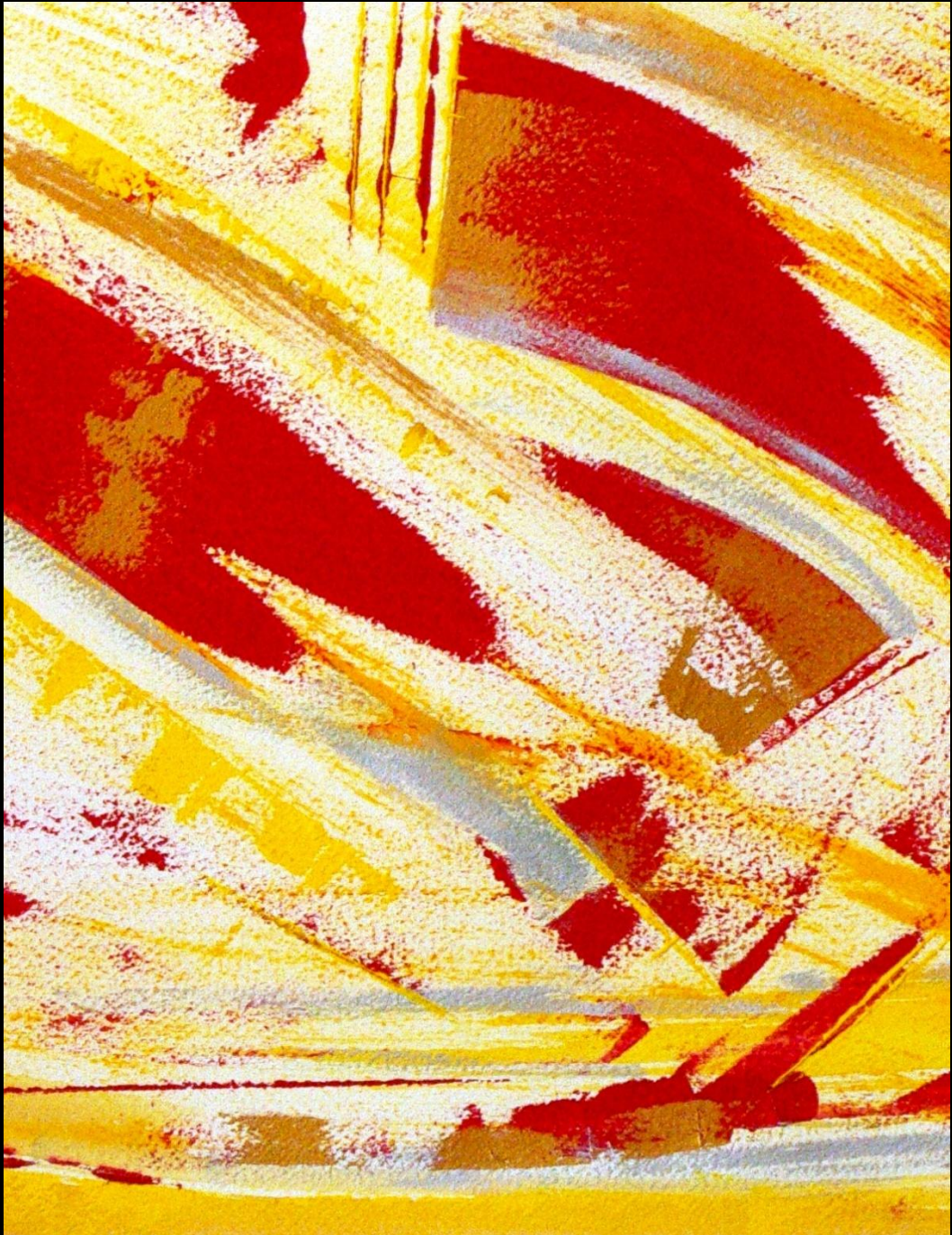


I looked inside the
critical friend practice
from the
practitioner's
perspective... as an
insider
not an outsider
looking in...

(Kemmis, 2012)

*Definitely a listener
from the listening
comes the experience
then from the experience
you then provide the
critical knowledge or
guidance that is required
... your experience
would value add to
anything that was said
and done here*

*(Mentor, personal communication,
November 28, 2011)*



Spontaneity

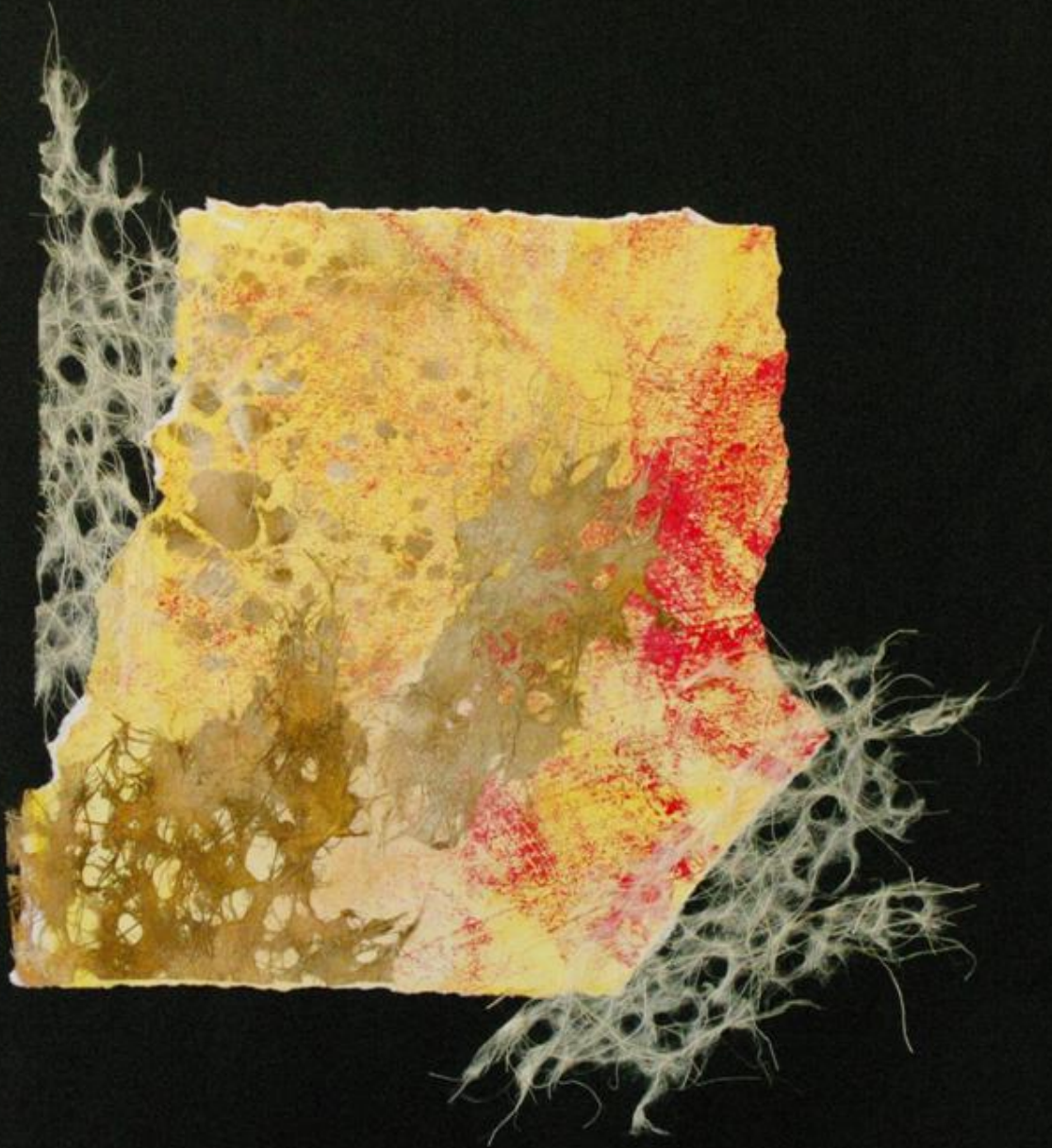
*I liked seeing, your aspects
come in,
of your background ...
it also personalises it and
also sticks it into my
brain, so I like that*

*(Mentor, personal communication
March 10, 2011).*

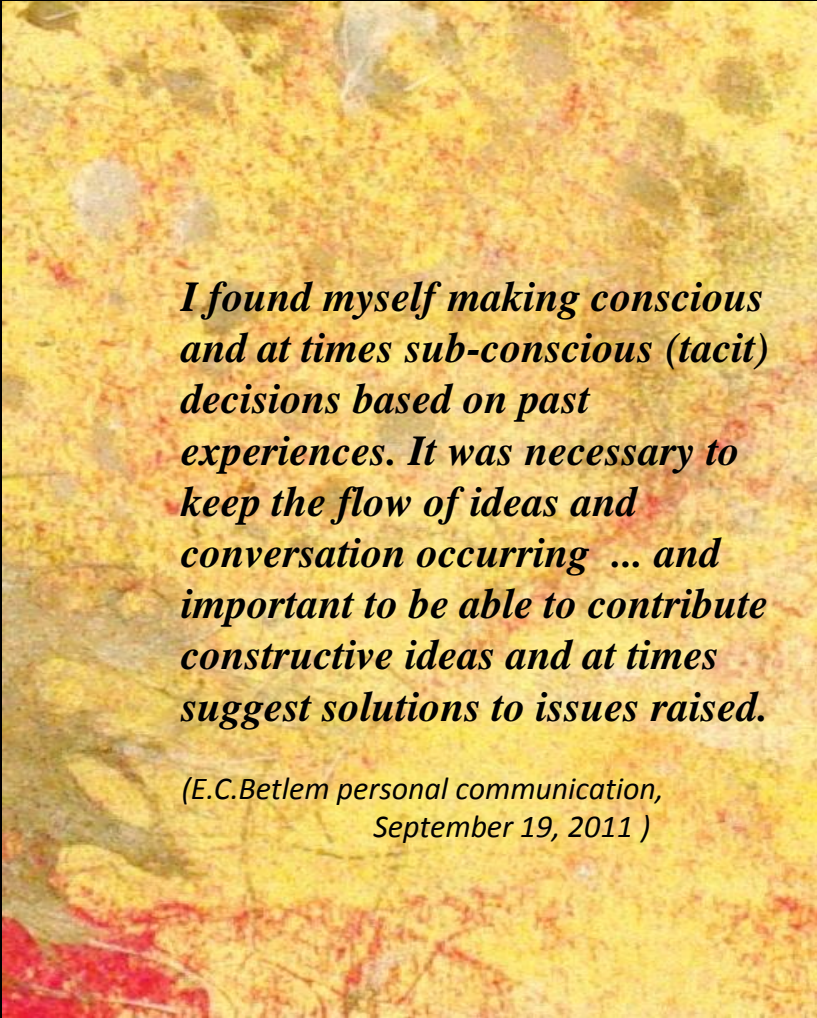
*I think when you gave us
that free time to
either doodle or whatever,
that creative element,
that was pretty cool
because then you
would interpret
something from it.*

*(Mentor personal communication,
November 28, 2011).*

The critical friend possesses a large personal repertoire from past experiences to draw upon and can be spontaneous, flexible and creative but at the same time structured and objective with that repertoire.



Reflection and Reflexive



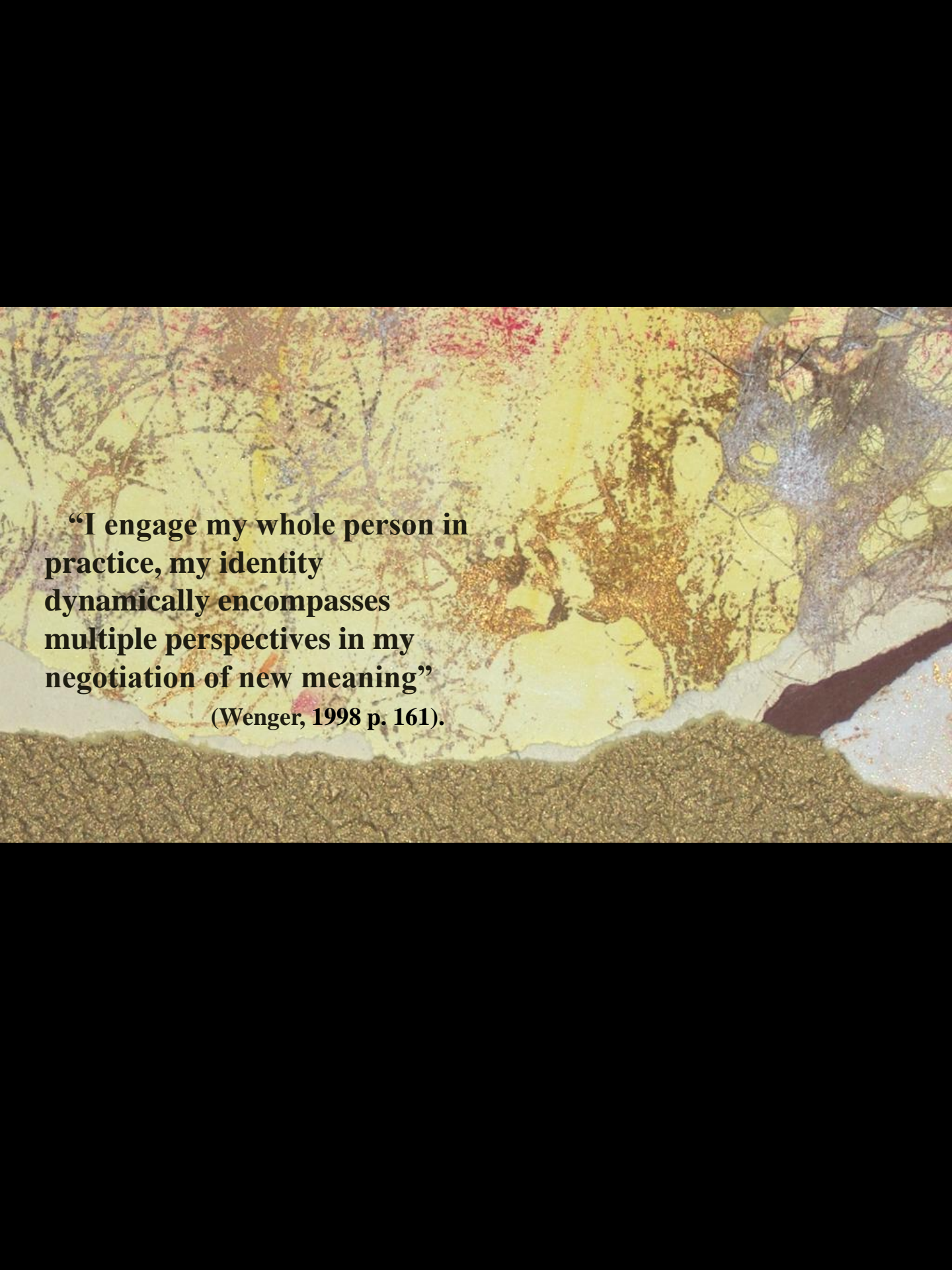
I found myself making conscious and at times sub-conscious (tacit) decisions based on past experiences. It was necessary to keep the flow of ideas and conversation occurring ... and important to be able to contribute constructive ideas and at times suggest solutions to issues raised.

*(E.C.Betlem personal communication,
September 19, 2011)*

Critical friendship requires continuous commitment to deep reflection and reflexivity of the role. The person acting as critical friend may then fully realise the potential of their individual talents as an educator and utilise those talents as part of their practice.



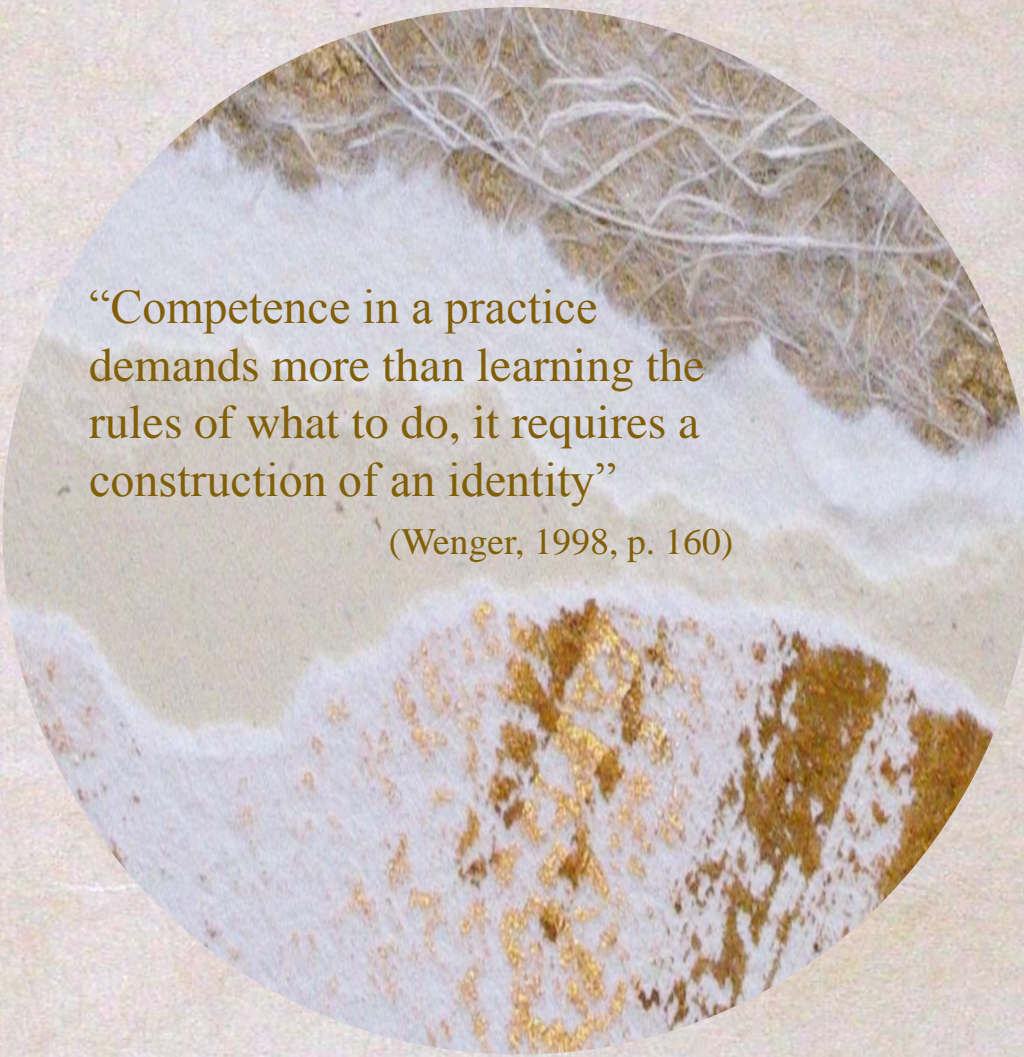
Nexus



**“I engage my whole person in
practice, my identity
dynamically encompasses
multiple perspectives in my
negotiation of new meaning”**

(Wenger, 1998 p. 161).

Critical friends do more than train the mentor in skills and knowledge of the mentor practice. They create varied pathways of learning for the mentors. Such varied pathways assist the mentors to align their personal and professional experiences to their role as mentor. The new understandings that arise from such an alignment forms part of their ongoing identity and development as a mentor.



“Competence in a practice
demands more than learning the
rules of what to do, it requires a
construction of an identity”

(Wenger, 1998, p. 160)



Reconciled