

**A New Democracy
for
Professional Development and Research

Learning to Find the Future**

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Abstract

Known as the Western Melbourne Roundtable, a group of school and university educators worked together for three years during the mid 1990s. The group was established under the umbrella of the Innovative Links Project, a nationally funded project which aimed to develop school–university partnerships focused on innovative practice. In the spirit of professional development and action research they worked collaboratively to improve student learning. Adopting case writing as a strategy for focusing their thinking members of the Roundtable documented their work both in and beyond the classroom. The nature of this work seemed then, as it does now, to be unique in its conception, intention and application. The aim of this study has been to gain a deeper understanding about the work of the Roundtable to see if a model might be developed which would enable the experience to be replicated and developed in diverse learning situations.

Following a qualitative analysis of the documentary records, individual and group interviews were conducted to confirm and further explore the emergence of three significant aspects of Roundtable work—dialogue, collaboration and inquiry. A theoretical foundation for the study emerged from the work of three theorists: Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action; Anthony Giddens’s theory of structuration; and Hannah Arendt’s theory of action. Each of these authors has stimulated significant exchange around their ideas and this study seeks to include this dialogue by drawing on the work of Stephen Kemmis; feminist theorists including Jane Braaten and Joan B Landes; Andy Hargreaves; and geographers including Linda McDowell, Neil Smith and Doreen Massey.

Seeking connections and distinctions between the qualitative material and the theoretical framework, the research process has revealed an attitude to learning which was inclusive, expressive, interactive and cognitive. As a result of adopting this attitude and creating four democratic spaces for action—contextual, dialogic, collaborative and inquiring—participants in the Roundtable engaged in learning which was connected, intimate, cooperative and creative. By combining these layers of understanding, it has been possible to suggest a new theory for professional development and research which meets the challenge of learning to find the future.

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Acronyms

CRG	Collaborative Research Group
ILP	Innovative Links Project
NPDP	National Professional Development Program
NSN	National Schools Network
PS	Primary School
SC	Secondary College
WMR	Western Melbourne Roundtable

Chapter 1: Setting the scene

There is widespread agreement that we are living and working in a rapidly changing world. As this study began Giddens (1999: 67–82) delivered a series of lectures in which he described the landscape of a ‘runaway world’. In considering how we might respond he argued the need for a deepening of democracy (1999:75). Several years earlier, Yeatman (1996:49), in her keynote address to the National Schools Network Reform Agendas Conference, introduced her paper *Managing the Politics of Uncertainty* by describing substantial changes ‘which are making us rethink the way we do things both as individuals and as members of a society’. Outlining a list of changes connected to the ‘personal, cultural, technical, organisational and economic features of our lives’ she noted that ‘we are generally uncertain about how we are going to respond to these challenges. Most of us recognise they demand new learning’.

Within this context the Western Melbourne Roundtable took an action research approach to innovation which was founded on democratic principles and shaped by a commitment to contextual sensitivity, professional dialogue and a network of professional learning relationships. By focussing on the work of Western Melbourne Roundtable, this study provides a significant opportunity to gain a deeper understanding about the nature of democratic action and the kind of professional development which might meet the challenge of learning to find the future.

Western Melbourne Roundtable

Located in the western region of Melbourne, the Western Melbourne Roundtable, usually referred to as ‘the Roundtable’, consisted primarily of six teams of teachers.¹

One team was formed by teacher educators at the local university and the other five teams were formed by teachers in schools—three primary and two secondary. These

¹ In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity the schools have been given fictitious names—Honeyeater Primary School, Kingfisher Primary School, Rosella Primary School, Finch Secondary College and Eagle Secondary College. Except in circumstances where Roundtable participants are quoted from published documents the names of Roundtable participants have also been changed.

teams are depicted as six small circles in the centre of Figure 1. The teams, generally referred to as ‘Links teams’, met frequently to discuss their local concerns and came together on a regular basis as the Western Melbourne Roundtable. They were joined by representatives from education systems (the Directorate of School Education and the Catholic Education Office) and teacher unions (the Australian Education Union and the Victorian Independent Education Union) and the National Schools Network (NSN).²

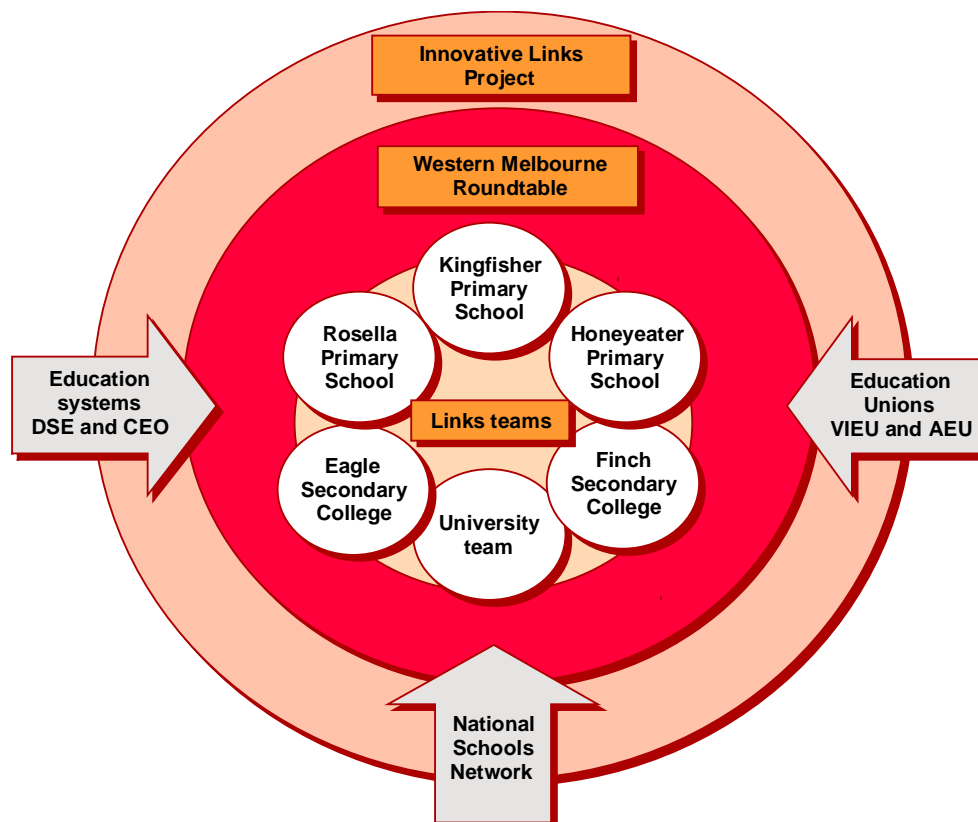


Figure 1: Western Melbourne Roundtable relationships

The people who joined the Roundtable made a commitment to collaborative and reflective practices and during the life of the Roundtable they recorded their experiences in pieces of case writing.³ As Sachs (2003) recently noted, this writing:

² The context, structure and activities of the Western Melbourne Roundtable are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

³ Case writing and associated activities are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

...encouraged teachers to be self-reflective, not only about educational practice but also in relation to wider circumstances, constraints and opportunities in and beyond the workplace (Sachs, 2003:88).

Over time they shared their documented practice both locally and through the nationally coordinated Innovative Links Project network.

Innovative Links Project

The Innovative Links Project (ILP) incorporated 16 regional roundtables (of which the Western Melbourne Roundtable was one) under a national umbrella organisation comprising coordinators, a national publication and a series of national forums. The main goal of the project was to achieve ‘improved teaching competence’ and ‘improved outcomes for *all* students’ through partnerships and action research.

The ILP aimed to build school–university partnerships which would be joined by teacher unions and employing authorities. Collaboration was seen as a crucial aspect in providing opportunities for understanding and ensuring teachers’ participation in educational change. There was an expectation that practitioner control of professional learning would be the norm and that outcomes would be viewed in terms of group rather than individual development.⁴ Reflecting on the work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable, Sachs (2003:141–2) noted the significance of creating different kinds of personal and professional relationships that supported writing, questioning and discussion and ultimately led to learning and improvement. Sachs’s observations identify the starting point for this inquiry.

Another ambition of the ILP was ‘the development of schools as learning communities in which research, rethinking and renewal (would be) regarded as normal and essential work practices’. The project adopted an action research approach to conducting and monitoring educational change connected to the national reform agenda and team generated research questions. It was anticipated that the action research would be characterised by structured support and democratic decision-making in development, process and interpretation. This meant that schools could

⁴ The nature of collaboration and Roundtable relationships is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

expect acknowledgment, ownership and confidentiality in relation to research outcomes.⁵

The Teaching Accord and the National Professional Development Program

The Roundtable was established following a train of events which began in 1993 with the signing of the Teaching Accord (1993), an agreement made between the Commonwealth Government and the teaching profession through the teacher unions. The Accord reflected the cooperative relationship between the signatories and indicated their shared desire to advance the quality of teaching and learning through educational change (1994:1). The Accord called on ‘States and Territories, non-government school authorities, the Commonwealth and the teaching profession...to participate and collaborate in a national effort to improve the quality of schooling in Australia in order to achieve the ten common and agreed national goals set out in the Hobart Declaration on Schooling’ (1993:6). The Accord laid ‘the foundation for improvements in the quality of teaching and learning’ (1993:5) by outlining four principles: informed participation by the profession; collaborative action and management which included governments, education systems and unions; collaborative responsibility at all levels; and connections between educational change and enterprise bargaining (1993:7–8). The Accord (1994) also identified ten priorities which shaped the national reform agenda: literacy; the middle years of schooling; post-compulsory education; curriculum statements and profiles; national equity program for schools; Aboriginal education ; education of girls ; education industry; and the collation and use of quantitative and qualitative data for educational planning.

Under the final priority, professional structures/career development, the National Professional Development Program (NPDP) was established. Between 1994 and 1997 a sum of sixty million dollars was allocated to promote teacher professional development based on the recognition that teachers must play ‘a pivotal role in implementing educational change’ and that ‘a well qualified, skilful and committed teaching profession is the best way to achieve increases in the general level of school

⁵ The action–reflection aspect of Roundtable work is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

attainment' (1994:2). The ILP was funded⁶ through the National Professional Development Program and committed to the objectives, principles and priorities specified in the Teaching Accord.

NSN

The National Schools Network (NSN) was funded under the same Accord priority.⁷ It had been a key player in the conceptualisation and planning of the ILP and it was therefore not surprising that the NSN and the ILP complemented each other and shared many principles. On a practical level the two programs worked side by side over the three years that the Innovative Links Project was funded. While the ILP focused on innovation and research within a network of regional roundtables, the NSN promoted and supported national and international opportunities for networking, professional development and research around the theme of 'rethinking our work and our schools for a changing future'. As will be seen in the following chapters, the connection between the NSN and the Roundtable was significant.

Thesis structure

Through an in-depth examination of the arguably innovative practice of the Western Melbourne Roundtable, this study aimed to produce new knowledge and theory about democratic practices which support teachers' learning in the context of a changing world and an uncertain future. The study was shaped by three key questions which were answerable, reflected the nature of the project and were connected to the literature.

The first question was open-ended and sought to identify the range of issues emerging from the data: *What was significant about the Western Melbourne Roundtable and in*

⁶ Some Innovative Links Project funding was used to coordinate national activities and the rest was distributed to the regional roundtables. The Western Melbourne Roundtable divided the available funds between the six teams with each receiving approximately \$10,000 over the life of the project.

⁷ The National Schools Network extended the work begun by the National Schools Project and has subsequently been renamed the Australian National Schools Network.

what ways, if any, did the experience of the Western Melbourne Roundtable make a distinctive contribution to the professional development of participants?

The second question sought to understand the connections between professional development, contextual sensitivity, collaboration, dialogue and inquiry. *How did the Western Melbourne Roundtable experience of professional development connect to national and local issues, the formation of partnerships, case writing and action research? What, if any, links were there between these ways of working?*

The third question framed that part of the research which sought to understand the practice of the Western Melbourne Roundtable in relation to social theory. The guiding question here was: *What does the practice of the Western Melbourne Roundtable tell us about the kind of professional development which will meet the needs of an uncertain future?*

In Chapter 2 this study is situated through a review of the literature. In the first part of the chapter the evolution of professional development is examined in the context of developments in school education and changing practices in adult education. In the second section the focus shifts to change and action. The chapter concludes with a closer look at four aspects of democratic action—context, collaboration, dialogue and inquiry.

Chapter 3 comprises a detailed description of the qualitative research techniques which have been used in this study. It includes the strategies which were used for collecting and working with the data and the framework for exploring Roundtable action. Attention is drawn to the importance of designing a research process which reflected the principles adopted by the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

Chapter 4 introduces the University, the schools, the teams and the teachers.

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 focus on four themes which were evident in the establishment of the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable and further explored in the literature review. Chapter 5 explores both the complexity of the context in which the Roundtable emerged and the new professional learning context created by the Roundtable. Chapter 6 examines dialogic action including a detailed

exploration of the distinctive characteristics of case writing and Roundtable communication. Chapter 7 focuses on Roundtable relationships, delving into the quality of collaboration and school–university cooperation. Then Chapter 8 explores the shape of Roundtable inquiry by focusing on the way in which contextual, dialogic and collaborative action combined in practice.

Chapter 9 returns to the question of teacher learning and, based on the layers of Roundtable action explored in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, a new democracy for professional development is mapped.

Finally, Chapter 10 returns to the question of methodology and research practice. By reflecting on the research process and making connections with the new model for professional development the challenge of democratising research is explored.

Throughout, reference is made to a number of appendices, cases and the researcher's journal and these have been collected together at the end of the document.

This study represents a unique opportunity to illuminate the initiatives of the Western Melbourne Roundtable and to make a valuable contribution to existing knowledge about professional practice, learning and development. The search is driven by a desire to gain both a deeper understanding of Roundtable practice and to inform future professional development. The study, while clearly focused on the professional development that occurred in the six workplace teams which made up the Roundtable⁸, seeks to gain a deeper understanding about patterns of successful teacher learning. The aim is to build on previous studies and theories and present a model of action and learning which will meet the needs of an uncertain future.

This investigation has local, national and international significance. It constitutes the first detailed report of the intersection between case writing and roundtable practice with evidence of the significant characteristics, structures and activities which have the potential to inform the practice of future roundtables, as well as contributing to the body of research which reports the Innovative Links Project. The study makes

⁸ Part way through the ILP the number of school teams in the Western Melbourne Roundtable was extended to ten but this study focuses on the original six teams.

connections between practice and theory in the search for a deeper understanding about the roundtable technology. While the outcomes of the study are particularly relevant for teachers and schools, teacher educators in universities, systems of education, education unions and all those associated with the Innovative Links Project, they could also be useful for individuals, groups and organisations with diverse needs connected to professional growth, reflective practice and organisational change.

Chapter 2: A review of the literature

In order to situate this study the first section of this chapter focuses on:

- developments in school education
- changing practices in adult education
- the evolution of teacher professional development.

The second section of the review is shaped by the voiced concerns about the future of professional development, the emerging knowledge about characteristics of successful professional development and the concepts which underpinned the design of the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable. This section of the literature review is therefore focused on:

- change and the nature of action
- context
- dialogue
- collaboration
- inquiry.

The final section of the chapter outlines a framework for the study which is based in the literature and gives shape to the task of answering the research questions and therefore gaining a deeper understanding about the work of the Roundtable.

Professional development in context

Developments in school education

In education two parallel developments that reflect global patterns of change can be observed. Firstly, the pressure of economic imperatives associated with globalisation has resulted in widespread system driven reform, affecting curriculum, educational management and the ways schools are funded and organised. For instance, in Victoria the provision of school education has been reconceptualised and reconstructed under the banner ‘Schools of the Future’. From the beginning of 1993, following the

election of a conservative government committed to economic rationalism, the pace of change in education in Victorian schools has accelerated. The changes, felt by both government and non-government education systems, are characterised by centralised policy development, commercialisation, corporate management, privatisation, competition and the introduction of numerous accountability mechanisms (Marginson, 1993; Davies, 1994; Sachs, 2003). On one side of the reduced bureaucracy—devolution coin government policies have promised power and control at the school level—with a particular role for principals and school councils including parents and the wider community. On the other side, and giving life to Giddens's (1999:13) observations about pressure for local autonomy, local responsibility has been accompanied by a reduced budget and a rigid set of centrally devised guidelines demanding accountability at all levels: a national curriculum framework couched in terms of outcomes; state-wide testing of students based on outcome indicators; performance appraisal of both teachers and schools; and school charters articulating priorities and targets connected to triennial school reviews (Davies, 1994; Rizvi, 1994; Smyth, 1994; Tickell, 1994). A new culture and climate has emerged (Morgan, 1993:3).

In Victoria, Caldwell and Spinks were instrumental in designing and guiding the implementation of a system wide shift to 'self-managing schools'. They argued that 'the values of effectiveness, efficiency, equity, liberty, choice and indeed excellence, are not mutually exclusive' and that they could be achieved through a shift in the 'centralisation-decentralisation continuum' in the management of education. (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988:vii). But not everyone agrees. Smyth (2001:28) for instance argues that self-managing schools have had significant and problematic implications for teachers work.

Teachers in Australia, in respect of participation, management, and control, find themselves in a not dissimilar situation to teachers in other parts of the world; they are excluded from meaningful participation in determining their own destinies, and are consulted only in the most tokenistic of ways. Like other parts of the world, Australia is gripped by the irresistible urge towards recentralisation of control over education, while trying at the same time to give the appearance of doing the reverse.

These developments have created significant concern within the education community and have led to a perception that governments are failing to maintain their commitment to social justice (Lingard, Knight & Porter, 1993). In the classroom new dilemmas include student disengagement, a crowded and shallow curriculum, teacher isolation and a chasm between beliefs and practices (Sizer, 1984; Harradine, 1995:9). Canada has experienced similar developments—Repo (1998) observes two competing reform movements.

One is driven by cost-cutting governments, flanked by business and advisory councils. It is centralized, top-down, geared towards accountability and testing. This “official” reform movement is preoccupied with how to produce students that fit the needs of what it refers to as “the global market-place.” The other reform movement is not oriented towards testing, surveillance, global competition. It is rooted in a solid curriculum and inspired classroom teaching. It is teacher driven, grassroots, bottom-up, a democratic movement which believes that schools should help to develop well-rounded individuals, good citizens and a just society (Repo, 1998:9).

In Australia bottom up reform, supported by government funding (for programs such as the National Schools Network and the National Professional Development Program), has resulted in schools identifying aspects of school organisation where there is a need to restructure and adopt change focused on technology; curriculum; class organisation; teacher education and professional development; assessment; pedagogy; time; general staff; student population; and school management (Ladwig, Currie & Chadbourne, 1994a:10).

Over the last decade, patterns of activity in schools reflect these concerns, with attention being focused on:

- integrating and negotiating the curriculum (Boomer, 1992; Beane & Brodhagen, 1996)
- addressing the alienation of students in the middle years (Beane & Brodhagen, 1996; Cumming, 1996; National Schools Network, 1996; Roberts, 1997)
- teaching children to think (Fisher, 1990; Wilks, 1995)

- recognising and encouraging the development of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993)
- adopting authentic assessment strategies (NSN, 1997)
- reorganising the way schools are structured (eg Team Small Group) to achieve improved learning outcomes for students (NSN, 1996).

In regard to professionalism Caldwell and Spinks (1988:9) argue that self-management leads to increased autonomy, fewer bureaucratic controls, more leadership opportunities and schools that are better places for teachers to work and learn. Disputing these claims, Blackmore (1999b:i-ii) observes that

...we are undergoing a radical shift from twentieth century modes of professionalism predicated on a sense of public service and advocacy towards postmodernist versions of professionalism premised upon technical expertise sold to the highest bidder in a market economy.

Blackmore (1999b:v) argues the need to balance accountability and professionalism and suggests that it is through collaboration and collegiality that teachers' professional expertise will be valued.

Changing practices in adult education

In adult education, which is variously conceived of as professional learning, adult learning and workplace learning, similar patterns are evident. From the early 1970s, Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998:4) distinguished between pedagogy and andragogy and articulated a set of core principles for adult learning which included:

- learner's need to know (why, what, how)
- self concept of the learner (autonomous, self-directing)
- prior experience of the learner (resource, mental models)
- readiness to learn (life related developmental task)
- orientation to learning (problem centred, contextual)
- motivation to learn (intrinsic value, personal pay-off).

While agreeing with the importance that Knowles's places on 'the recognition of the value of the individual', Burns (2002:238–9) is critical of the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy arguing that it is overgeneralised and its popularity 'probably says more about the ideological times than it does about learning processes'.

Seeking a contrast, Burns (2002:239–251) draws on the ideas of Dewey, Bruner, Rogers, Freire and Mezirow. In exploring these learning theorists he compares problem solving and self-actualising approaches to learning and adds an activist and transformative conception into the mix. Collecting these ideas together, Burns contends that teachers should:

- help learners identify and clarify the problems that they experience and that they wish to overcome; acknowledge their past experience and assist them to use and understand their own experiences as resources for learning through the use of discussion, role-play, simulation, etc.
- assist learners to apply the new learning to their experiences, to make the learning more meaningful
- develop a learning environment characterised by mutual trust and respect of learners' feelings/ideas; encourage mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression and acceptance of differences; accept each learner as of worth
- encourage cooperative activities and refrain from creating competitiveness or making judgements
- contribute to learners' resources as a co-learner in a spirit of mutual enquiry, involving them in a collaborative process as they share thinking about the options available in the design and articulation of learning experiences for the group
- help learners organise themselves into groups for independent study etc.
- assist learners to develop procedures for self-evaluation
- acknowledge and promote self-direction in learning and participate actively in the learning experience
- give learners a sense of progress towards their goals (Burns, 2002:251).

Developing a theoretical foundation for adult learning, Connelly (1998:44–55) and Collins (1998:92–99) draw on Habermas's conceptions of rationality and communicative action. Collins also connects with the work of Freire and argues that:

...a view of lifelong learning that focuses on the acquisition of communicative competence as conceptualised by Habermas, and actually practised in the internationalist pedagogy of Freire, goes against the manipulative effects of the marketplace advertising, mainstream media, soundbite messages, career politicians and profession 'spin doctors' (Collins, 1998:50).

Connelly focuses on the significance of Habermas's developmental account of rationality and his 'discussion of the relationship of the state and the public sphere', arguing that 'these themes demonstrate that adult education has a lifelong and educational and political role, which is important to the advancement of a more democratic and open society' (Connelly, 1998:92).

While each interpretation of adult education has its own particular focus, history and body of literature, each reflects dimensions and tensions of globalisation.

Demonstrating parallel developments similar to those experienced in the area of school education, and arguing that tension is not only created but demanded by globalisation, Beckett and Hager (2002:6–7) pair traditional concepts with 'interloper' concepts, pitting one against the other and indicating something of the same tension being experienced in school education:

- education vs. training
- attitude vs. skill
- character vs. competence
- process vs. outcome
- content vs process
- work vs labour
- profession vs professional
- performance vs practice
- thinking vs doing
- mental vs manual.

In each of these pairs, the first-named is the traditional, high-status concept, and the second term is the interloper: the brash new low-status concept.

Globalisation, however, requires the interloper. Not only that, but globalisation requires an accommodation between the interloper and the traditional concept. The site for this accommodation is the workplace...(Beckett & Hager, 2002:6–7).

Workplace learning has responded to these tensions and at one end of the spectrum achievement has been interpreted as accountability, with learning described in terms of content and competencies. At the other end, the emergence of practices such as learning circles (Collay, 1998) and authentic conversations (Clark, 2001) indicate an emphasis on the learning process and the desire for local focus and control. Beckett and Hager (2002) see this as a ‘continuum of orientations’ spanning the gap between modernism and postmodernism, with each complementing the other. Dividing the continuum in a Habermasian way, Beckett and Hager (2002) draw on Foley (1995) to identify three orientations to practice—technical, interpretive and critical.

The evolution of teacher professional development

Teacher professional development in Australia reflects both the push and pull of globalisation and the parallel developments in school and adult education referred to above. In Connell’s 1985 exploration of teacher’s work the only mention of professional development refers to the connection between training, promotion and ‘plodding through the long march of a part-time degree’ (Connell, 1985:161). Little more than ten years later a Senate inquiry into the status of teachers in Australia reported that professional development activities were diverse, covering:

...a very wide range of courses, seminars, workshops and other forms of education and training. They can range in length from a one off, one hour lecture to full post graduate courses. Some are accredited and some are not. Some are run from central locations and attended by teachers from many schools in the area. Others are school based and focussed on the staff of an individual school. Some are residential. They are run by university education departments, government education departments, subject and professional associations and, increasingly, by contracted private providers (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998:217).

However Wagner (1998:512) observes that many strategies are ‘rooted in obsolete, top-down or expert-driven management beliefs and practices that reflect neither what we know about how people learn nor what we have come to know about how organisations change’. Guskey and Huberman (1995:269-70), in discussing diverse models of professional development note the tension between ‘deficit’ and ‘growth’ models and make a distinction between individual and institutional imperatives.

Guskey (1995:117) also observes that the ‘powerful impact of context’ is often neglected.

The Senate inquiry noted that like other aspects of education, professional development has been:

...adversely affected by devolution and the consequent diminution in levels of central department support. Professional development is becoming increasingly the responsibility of individual schools, which have neither the resources nor the flexibility to organise regular, well structured professional development, even if they have an interest in doing so (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998:220).

In their final report, the Senate Committee (1998) articulated a widely held view that many professional development programs were inadequate and that the quality and content was variable. They and others (Retallick, 1994), were critical of professional development programs which featured:

- one-off activities with little or no follow-up
- a lack of teacher input into needs identification and the resulting design and implementation of programs
- little recognition of local factors
- poor intellectual quality
- a lack of conceptual framework.

Also focusing on barriers to teachers’ participation in professional development Hawley and Valli (1999:144) extend the list by including:

- institutionalised cultures, practices and thinking
- community concerns about taking teachers out of classrooms
- lingering scepticism about the value of research and the need for change
- poor experiences with previous in-service opportunities
- doubts about the feasibility of reform efforts.

But there was also an emerging consensus about the characteristics of successful professional development (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999:xix; Hawley & Valli, 1999:144). In making recommendations the Senate Committee (1998) also recognised features which seemed to contribute to successful professional development. In its submission to the inquiry, the Australian Education Union argued that it was a government responsibility to provide quality ‘professional development opportunities for teachers which allow them to keep abreast of educational research, practice and technological change...(and ensure) patterns of work organisation which facilitate participation in research, innovation and evaluation relating to educational change...’ (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998).

In fact, as can be seen in the following pages, the 1990s witnessed a proliferation of proposals for reforming professional development, and by the end of the decade there emerged a significant degree of convergence of ideas about the future of professional development for teachers (Hawley & Valli, 1999:136–144).

Striving to articulate the kind of learning environment that might support professional development, authors point to principles which they believe should underpin professional learning, arguing the importance of:

- incorporating adult learning principles (Retallick *et al.*, 1994)
- aiming for high task complexity (Caldwell, 1999; Goodson, 1999)
- recognising diversity including gender differences (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Retallick *et al.*, 1994; Fielding, 1999; Lima, 2001)
- being inclusive rather than exclusive (Nias, 1987; Nias, Southworth & Yeomans, 1989; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Sachs, 2003:147–149)
- favouring democratic rather than managerial professionalism (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Blackmore, 1999a; Fielding, 1999; Sachs, 2003)
- acting ethically (Sachs, 2003:147–149)
- being responsive and responsible (Nias *et al.*, 1989; Sachs, 2003:147–149)
- individual, collaborative and collective action (Sachs, 2003:147–149)

- recognising the expertise of people involved (Sachs, 2003:147–149)
- creating an information rich environment (Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Hawley & Valli, 1999:136–144)
- having multiple structures and levers for professional development which are long lasting, integrated and sustainable (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1999)
- providing appropriate learning conditions, materials and equipment (Retallick *et al.*, 1994)
- providing programs which conform with national standards and which result in accreditation (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998:217-220).

In relation to the scope of professional development, authors argue the importance of:

- being clear about aims and expectations (Sachs, 2003:147–149)
- valuing school-based professional development (Hawley & Valli, 1999:136–144)
- developing knowledge and skills for the classroom, personal growth and/or skills for improving work organisation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Joyce & Showers, 1995:xv)
- identifying goals connected to student performance (Hawley & Valli, 1999:136–144)
- providing at the personal, cultural and societal levels (Nias, 1987; Nias *et al.*, 1989; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Niemi & Kemmis, 1999).

Many argue that change will not be achieved by applying a method or technique, rather the future needs to be created or achieved over time through an organic, generative, constructivist process (Arendt, 1958; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Bird *et al.*, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Grundy, 1995; Kemmis, 1995; Yeatman, 1996; Giddens, 1998; Wagner, 1998; Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Habermas, 1999; Bauman,

2000; Cherednichenko *et al.*, 2001; Beckett & Hager, 2002; Sachs, 2003). Guskey (1995:117) suggests:

Our search must focus, therefore, on finding the *optimal mix*—that assortment of professional development processes and technologies that work best in a particular setting.

He also notes that settings and people are dynamic, responding and adapting to personal and institutional influences and therefore the ‘optimal mix’ will change over time.

There is a growing body of work which indicates that teachers, whether they are engaged in pre-service, induction or continuing professional development, value the opportunity to engage in structured, continuous, self directed and supported interpretation of what the teaching profession means to them, and to determine how they would like to develop as teachers (Nias, 1987; Nias *et al.*, 1989; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Harradine, 1995; Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998:217-220; Fielding, 1999; Goodson, 1999; Hawley & Valli, 1999:136–144; Niemi & Kemmis, 1999).

Significant input by teachers is a contributing factor to successful professional learning programs (Retallick *et al.*, 1994; Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998; Hawley & Valli, 1999). Hawley and Valli (1999:136–144) argue that effective professional development must be inclusive of teacher-identified needs; Hargreaves (1992) extends this idea by drawing attention to the link between teachers’ changing needs and stage in career. In seeking solutions for improving teacher development the literature also converges around the importance of making connections between teacher and student learning (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999:xv; Hawley & Valli, 1999:127). Research conducted within the Australian school reform movement (Harradine, 1995; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995) suggests that ensuring teacher input guarantees that professional growth will be school, student and practice-based and driven by goals.

Finding a future for professional development

As noted, there is an emerging consensus about what professional development might look like in the future and the remainder of this literature review has been shaped to reflect the threads of agreement in order to inform and shape this study into the work of the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable. To achieve this goal the following pages focus on the broad concepts of change and the nature of action and then in more detail on specific ideas about context, dialogue, collaboration and finally inquiry.

Change and the nature of action

Hawley and Valli (1999: 136–144) argue that effective professional development is connected to a comprehensive change process. In fact there seems to be a shared understanding that the pressures and challenges of an uncertain world not only provide the impetus for change but demand change. Many voices in the literature (Bird *et al.*, 1993; Giddens, 1994; Cox, 1995; Argyris & Schon, 1996; Yeatman, 1996; Giddens, 1999; Sen, 1999; Bauman, 2000) suggest we need to actively rethink, respond, reshape, reconceptualise, reconstruct and recreate. They argue that we need to engage in ‘thinking futures’ and that this will involve understanding, learning, generating knowledge, making judgements, reaching unforced consensus, all towards continuous improvement; there are a plethora of opinions, methods and techniques which suggest how this might be achieved.

Over the last 50 years, social commentators and theorists have constructed theories that they believed would help to both explain change and shape social action. Many of their ideas have been developed over time to involve a broad conception of action and a re-conception of democracy. While authors begin their analysis from different positions there are some stark themes that emerge as sociologists, economists, geographers, philosophers and educators explore and weave their ideas. These themes are explored here in order to inform the challenge of finding a future for professional development.

It may be that as we try to grasp the nature of the present and seek options for the future that Bauman’s (2000:2) metaphors of fluidity and a liquid modernity—which he contrasts with the idea of a solid past—may fittingly represent a world now

characterised by mobility and inconstancy, and give some clue as to how we might proceed. Yeatman, also concerned with uncertainty and the pain of change, asserts that it is possible to renegotiate core values and seek new learning—if the change seems purposeful and meaningful, if there is an opportunity to grieve for those things that must be given away and if we are able to ‘maintain a sense of our own agency’ (Yeatman, 1996:49).

In developing his theory of structuration, Anthony Giddens (1984; 1990) focuses on the concepts of agency, structure and reflexivity. He maintains that reflexivity:

...should be understood not merely as “self-consciousness” but as the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life...The reflexive monitoring of action depends upon rationalization, understood here as a process rather than a state and as inherently involved in the competence of agents (Giddens, 1984:3).

Giddens talks about the importance of making a distinction between practical and discursive consciousness in the process of reflexive monitoring and in so doing stresses the importance of engaging in an ongoing process of reflection and action which includes the shift from ‘knowing’ to ‘verbal expression’.

In the same vein Sen (1999:10-11) makes a connection between development and freedom. He allows for different kinds of participatory freedoms and argues that individually each enables and influences public discussion and social interaction while together, as both the means and the ends of development, they strengthen one another. Sen (1999:17) believes that process and opportunity can create the possibility of development through freedom to act and to make decisions. Sen (1999:9) stresses that these interactions and discussions ultimately impact on the values that mediate the exercise of freedom.

While Sen takes a position based in human rights, it is interesting to note that Yeatman (1996:49), Habermas (1999), Giddens (1999) and Bauman (2000:178) all warn against approaching change with a fixed ethical framework, arguing instead that everything must be contested and negotiated. And so there emerges a question about what an achieved–procedural kind of democracy might look like in practice and what the repercussion of such actions might be.

Observing the impact of globalisation, Cox (1995) seeks a foundation for change based on the concept of a civil society in which we ‘recognise the supreme importance of social connections which include plenty of robust goodwill to sustain difference and debate’ (1995:1). In her 1995 Boyer lectures she explained: ‘Some of my keywords are trust, reciprocity, mutuality, cooperation, time, social fabric and social capital’ (Cox, 1995:5). In developing her ideas about the civil sphere Cox draws inspiration from the work of Hannah Arendt which contrasts public and private life. Arendt argued that places are actively produced and evident in action and relationship. She distinguishes between the public and private realms and claims that when people come together in the public realm, connected through ‘word and deed’, there emerges the possibility for a ‘space of appearances’ (Arendt, 1958). Landes explains:

...in Arendt’s public sphere individuals perform deeds and narrate stories; they are not just talking heads but embodied, suffering subjects who move in the world in relation to others. Such a world is a “web of relationships” constituted by “enacted stories” (Landes, 1995:100).

In her three-part conception of the *vita activa*, Arendt makes a connection between change and collective action. Cox (1995:7) describes how Arendt contrasts family life and paid work with a ‘public life, in which we collectively create civil spheres... (as) only human beings have the capacity for thought and collective debate and action’. From Arendt’s perspective the public space of the polis is the realm of freedom, and losing the public realm means a loss of freedom (Kaplan, 1991). Taking a position which might be likened to that taken more recently by Habermas, Yeatman, Giddens and Bauman, Arendt insisted that it is not up to the political theorist to tell people how to act. Hill (1979:x) reports Arendt’s belief that ‘it is up to the actors themselves to judge how to act, and to persuade each other on the best course to follow...(Arendt) saw her task as showing us how to understand and appreciate the possibility of freedom in the world, not as teaching us how to change it’ (Hill, 1979:xi). Her theory of action, developed in the post-war 1950s, has more recently stimulated significant exchange; feminist theorists including Braaten (1996) and Landes (1995) have contrasted Habermas’s and Arendt’s ideas, seeing value in each. Most significantly, in the context of rethinking democracy they have been critical of Arendt’s seeming

inclination to privilege some voices over others. This too is a challenge in seeking a future for professional development.

Inviting us to understand and appreciate the possibilities of freedom—so that we might play an active part in interactions and discussions which shape values, actions and decisions for the future—Arendt connects freedom and natality (the birth of ideas) arguing that together they foster hope and courage and create the possibility of new beginnings (Cox, 1995:7).

The metaphor of birth—and this is one of Arendt's key concepts—is about the possibility of finding new beginnings. In the possibility of change lies 'hope', the final figure from Pandora's box of troubles. Without hope we are discouraged from trying (Cox, 1995:7).

Giddens (1994) proposes a model of generative politics as a process for achieving alternative development, active trust and equality. His model is built on reflexive engagement, respect, self-reliance and integrity, individual rights and shared responsibility, sensitivity to local demands and protection of local interests as well as inquiry based strategies for achieving emancipation and empowerment. He argues for change which is not top down but organic and responsive to both local and global issues and which provides opportunities for building active trust, gives autonomy, allocates resources that promote autonomy and attends to the relationship between the political centre and decentralisation (Giddens, 1994:93).

This work has been an inspiration for educators and during the early 1990s; Hargreaves and Fullan for instance drew on Giddens's ideas about the 'reciprocal relationship between risk and trust' (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991:73). Most recently, seeking a political and conceptual basis for thinking about teachers' work, Sachs (1998; 2003) also draws on Giddens's notions of 'active trust' and 'generative politics' to build a protocol for engagement within an activist view of professionalism. Sachs bases her model on principles of inclusivity; collective and collaborative action; clearly articulated aims and expectations; recognition of the expertise of all partners; creation of an environment of trust and mutual respect; responsiveness and responsibility; passionate action; and fun. Sachs sees partnerships and practitioner research as 'two vehicles through which activist teacher professionalism' might be developed (Sachs, 1998:9; 2003).

Using the idea of creating the future, Senge (1992) talks about generative learning and its impact on a learning organisation.

Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we never were able to do. Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life. Within each of us there is a deep hunger for this type of learning... This then is the basic meaning of a “learning organisation”—an organisation that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future... for a learning organisation “adaptive learning” must be joined by “generative learning,” learning that enhances our capacity to create (Senge, 1992:14).

Promoting a constructivist process for school change based on Senge’s (1990) vision of a learning organisation, Wagner (1998) incorporates the action research cycle (identifying a problem, planning, acting and reflecting) and argues that leaders working in a constructivist way must be equipped with emotional intelligence, intellectual skill and an ability to ‘coach’ school communities through change (Wagner, 1998:517).

MacIntyre (1999) also distinguishes between being told what to do and seeking a solution. He conceives the argument in terms of enlightenment and points to a condition where people can ‘think for themselves rather than in accordance with the prescriptions of some authority’ (1999:245) and he acknowledges that thinking for oneself requires courage (1999:247). Drawing on Foucault’s belief that it is not possible to identify a set of moral rules or universal structures MacIntyre proposes a way forward which involves ‘investigating our contingency and our particularity... to test those limits that we must transcend, if we are to become free’ (1999:246).

Comparing different conceptions of democracy—and searching for an ideal procedure for both deliberation and decision-making—Habermas (1999) proposes a procedural model of democracy which grows from discourse theory and connects purposeful and dialogic action by integrating elements from both a liberal and republican view of democracy.

Weaving together pragmatic considerations, compromises, discourses of self-understanding and justice, this democratic procedure grounds the presumption that reasonable or fair results are obtained. According to this proceduralist view, practical reason withdraws from universal human rights, or from the concrete ethical substance of a specific community, into rules of discourse and forms of argumentation. In the final analysis, the normative content arises from the very structure of communicative actions (Habermas, 1999:140).

Favouring a process oriented towards understanding and unforced consensus Niemi and Kemmis describe the importance of

...developing circumstances under which people can raise and explore questions, concerns and issues as a precondition for identifying new possibilities for action and improvement. It involves considering the...tensions and interconnections between system functioning and the lifeworld processes (cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation-individuation) which jointly constitute the program or setting (Niemi & Kemmis, 1999:60).

Applying these ambitions to a framework for a communicative evaluation of teacher education, Niemi and Kemmis (1999:55) propose that ‘critical thought, communication and partnership become criteria for effectiveness... (and the) functions of the communicative evaluation are described in terms of revealing, anticipating and aiming for communication and partnerships’. In addition to communication and partnerships they argue that practically speaking this process would also entail a critical dimension revealing ‘what is and is not achieved and why’ and examining barriers to effectiveness and the expectations of different partners.

Stenhouse (1975:156-7), exploring ‘the possibility and the problems of teachers casting themselves in the role of researchers’ stresses the importance of the known context as a starting point.

It is important to make the point that the teacher in this situation is concerned to understand better his own classroom. Consequently, he is not faced with the problems of generalizing beyond his experience. In his context, theory is simply a systematic structuring of his understanding of his work.

He goes on to suggest that connections can be made with other locations as teachers' systematic inquiry is made public.

Each classroom should not be an island. Teachers working in such a tradition need to communicate with one another. They should report their work. Thus a common vocabulary of concepts and a syntax of theory need to be developed. Where the language proves inadequate, teachers would need to propose new concepts and new theory (Stenhouse, 1975:157).

In combination these theories indicate the significance of acting contextually, dialogically, collaboratively and inquiringly and as these ideas also informed the work of the Roundtable they will shape the remainder of this literature review.

Context

In focusing on context the aim is to explore the scope of action. Seeking to specify a theory of society, Jürgen Habermas (1987:118) distinguishes between systemsworld and lifeworld yet proposes that 'we conceive of societies simultaneously as systems and lifeworlds.' Sergiovanni (2000:5) in his exploration of leadership adopts this distinction describing systemsworld as

...a world of instrumentalities, of efficient means designed to achieve ends.
The system world provides the foundation for the development of management and organizational and financial capital that, in turn, contributes to the development of material capital, which further enriches the systemsworld. This is a cycle of "material reproduction".

Applying this to a school setting Sergiovanni (2000:ix) argues that the systemsworld comprises 'management designs and protocols, strategic and tactical actions, policies and procedures, and efficiency and accountability assurances'. Seeking to clarify the distinction he continues:

When we talk about the stuff of culture, the essence of values and beliefs, the expression of needs, purposes, and desires of people, and about the sources of deep satisfaction in the form of meaning and significance, we are talking about the lifeworld of schools, and of parents, teachers and students. The lifeworld provides the foundation of the development of social, intellectual, and other forms of human capital, which then further enriches the lifeworld itself. This is a cycle of "cultural reproduction".

Echoing Habermas's view, Sergiovanni (2000:7) argues that 'the two worlds must be successfully balanced to function effectively'. Considering a situation where this balance is not achieved Habermas (1987) notes that too great a focus on systemsworld results in a 'colonization of the lifeworld'. In a school situation such colonisation would mean that 'goals, purposes, values and ideals are imposed on parents, teachers and students rather than created by them' (Sergiovanni, 2000:7-8).

Habermas (1984; 1987) further articulates his ideas about lifeworld by conceptualising a three-part lifeworld—personal, cultural and societal—arguing that people who are engaged in the process of reaching understanding 'come to an understanding about something in the world' (Habermas, 1996a:346). This conception has been used to understand a number of educational contexts. Sergiovanni (2000:14) for instance in his exploration of the lifeworld of leadership, distinguishes between culture which 'provides us with knowledge, beliefs and norm systems from which we derive significance; community, which 'lets us know that we are connected to others...(and) reminds us of our responsibility to the common good'; and person, which refers to individual competencies which 'help us in our search for individual identity, meaning and significance'.

In another context, and over an extended period of time, Kemmis (2001) has made connections between Habermas's ideas and the practice of action research. He and Niemi (1999), in their development of a framework for communicative evaluation for teacher education argue that each aspect of lifeworld has 'a special task in the process of cultural reproduction and transformation' and that recognising and responding to each level ensures an understanding which is multi-layered. They explain:

Habermas uses the term 'horizon' to describe the situational factor which helps people with different situationally-located perspectives to reach common understanding. If a person's interpretive horizon changes, their interpretation of the situation in which they find themselves becomes difficult. Habermas uses the expression 'moveable horizon' to describe the accomplishment required to interpret changing circumstance across complex and differentiated lifeworld settings, and to penetrate the triviality and unquestioned solidity of different settings seen entirely in their own terms (Habermas 1987, 123-124)...We live increasingly in a world characterised by moveable horizons. In a familiar, unchangeable situation, the context creates

a safe guide for how to work and act. But if surprises—accident, structural changes or new pressures—are emerging, the situation loses its familiarity. We have to be ready to evaluate our direction continuously. Even though it may be impossible to find consensus, we have to try to clarify the horizon of all partners of the action and what is relevant from their stand-point. Especially in changing situations, it is important to become aware of our own and others' horizons (Niemi & Kemmis, 1999:60).

This process involving clarification, evaluation and the achievement of awareness and consensus has been theorised by Habermas (1996b:119) who understands communicative action as 'a process of reaching understanding' and this is discussed in greater detail in the following section focussed on dialogue.

The third aspect of Habermas's conception of the scope of action can be understood as three forms of interest and Kemmis (2001:92) applies Habermas's classification of interests in the context of inquiry interests. He argues that *technical* interests are geared towards changing the outcomes of practice, *practical* interests towards changing both outcomes and practitioner understanding and *critical* or *emancipatory* interests connect outcomes and understanding within a critique of context.

Beginning from a very different starting point, Smith also distinguishes between different contexts. He conceives 'the politics of daily life as inherently spatial' (Smith, 1993) and develops the idea of 'scaling places' as a strategy for exploring connected action—he begins from the scale of the body and extends to the global scale. While he believes that scale is actively produced and open-ended he has developed a typology which 'provides a framework for organizing a more coherently thought out analysis of spatial scale' (1993:102).

The construction of scale is not simply a spatial solidification or materialization of contested social forces and processes; the corollary also holds. Scale is an active progenitor of specific social processes. In a literal as much as a metaphorical way, scale both *contains* social activity and at the same time provides an already partitioned geography within which social activity *takes place*. Scale demarcates the sites of social contest, the object as well as the resolution of contest...It is geographical scale that defines the boundaries and bounds the identities around which control is exerted *and* contested (Smith, 1993:101).

Smith recognises that ‘the making of place implies the production of (geographical) scale in so far as places are made different from each other.’ Scale, therefore, represents ‘the criteria of difference not so much between places as between different *kinds* of places’ (1993: 99, original emphasis). In this socio-spatial sense, scale has recently been adopted as a central organising device in a number of geographic texts about difference. Linda McDowell for instance argues that by:

...defining places, distinguishing the difference between them by scale, does not imply that they are constituted by processes that operate at a single spatial scale. Thus a home, or a neighbourhood, is a locality that is bounded by scale—that is the rules/power relations that keep others out—but its constitution is through a range of factors that may coincide there but are not restricted to the local level of their operation. Massey (1991) has argued, localities are produced by the intersection of global and local processes—social relations that operate at a range of spatial scales. This produces what she terms a ‘global sense of place’. Places may no longer be ‘authentic’ and ‘rooted in tradition’...they are instead defined by socio-spatial relations that intersect there and give a place its distinctive character (McDowell, 1999:4).

Giddens seeks to make connections between global and local process, observing that while belief in the democratic process is high, there are many global issues (such as ecology, economy, technology) that have escaped the democratic process, and that as a result trust in politicians is diminishing. In his view, democracy needs democratising. By way of suggestion he notes that information is a powerful democratising force and that strategies for effective devolution of power need to be found. He proposes that this might be achieved by bringing decision-making closer to the everyday concerns of people and ensuring that single-issue groups that raise problems and questions are not ignored. He advocates fostering a strong civic culture based in tolerance, a democracy of the emotions and looking to transnational and international organisations (Giddens, 1999:67–82).

In the context of education Little and McLaughlin (1993:3-4) recognise the importance of considering context and so provide inspiration for this study. They express their view that:

A more robust theoretical conception of teachers’ professional lives requires more systematic attention to the ordinary pattern of life in schools and the

ordinary configurations of independence and collegueship among teachers. To specify the meaning of teachers' cultures, we argue, requires close attention to the contexts in which they are formed, sustained and transformed over time...(each occasion and location) of teacher interaction provides a microcontext for collegial relations that may operate by quite different rules, focus on different issues, and carry different significance for teachers' lives and careers.

This brings us to a consideration of the place of dialogue, collaboration and inquiry in considering the future of professional development.

Dialogue

Many authors cited in the earlier section of this chapter argued that professional development requires structured, long term and comprehensive programs where time is allocated for reflection, talk and professional conversations (Grundy, 1995; Harradine, 1995; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995; Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998).

Dialogue is also a very strong theme running through the writing of social theorists such as Giddens, Habermas and Arendt, with each connecting the value of communication to diverse aspects of action—developing relationships, reaching understanding, dealing with pragmatic considerations, achieving fair results, as well as reconciliation and making way for new beginnings. Giddens (1998) connects communication with the process of building relationships and achieving emotional democracy; Habermas (1999) argues for a procedural democracy based on association and communication; and Arendt (1958) connects action and speech with situated critical thinking, reconciliation and making way for new beginnings. Bauman declares that 'the most promising kind of unity is one which is *achieved*, and achieved daily anew, by confrontation, debate, negotiation and compromise' (Bauman, 2000:178).

In developing his theory of communicative action Habermas distinguishes between strategic action which is oriented to success and communicative action which is oriented to understanding (Habermas, 1984:285). He makes a connection between collaboration and acting communicatively arguing that communicative action is evident when 'the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through

egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding’ (Habermas, 1984:287).

Habermas (1996b:119), who understands communicative action as a process, contends that in order to act communicatively and participate in the process of reaching understanding a person cannot avoid raising four validity-claims: ‘1 *uttering* something understandably; 2 giving (the hearer) *something* to understand; 3 making *himself* thereby understandable; and 4 coming to an understanding *with another person*’. Habermas (1996b:131) presents the presuppositions of this process and their correlations in tabular form (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Presuppositions of communicative action

Domains of reality	Modes of communication: basic attitudes	Validity-claims	General functions of speech
“The” world of external nature	Cognitive: objectivating attitude	Truth	Representation of facts
“Our” world of society	Interactive: performative attitude	Rightness	Establishment of legitimate interpersonal relations
“My” world of internal nature	Expressive: expressive attitude	Truthfulness	Disclosure of speaker’s subjectivity
Language		Comprehensibility	

Recently, exploring different models of democracy, Habermas (1999:140) applied these ideas to support his argument promoting the concept of a procedural model of democracy founded in discourse theory. He argued that understanding the concept of an ideal procedure for deliberation and decision-making requires an examination of forms of argumentation and rules of discourse suggesting that ‘normative content arises from the very structure of communicative actions’.

There are a range of views about what constitutes dialogue. Nias and her colleagues (1989:79-80) for instance argue that ‘chat’ is a high-level activity. From their point of view talk reveals perspectives, leads to trust and mutual openness and conveys complex ideas. Taking a different position to Nias and her colleagues, Senge (1992) distinguishes between two distinct forms of conversation—dialogue and discussion.

In dialogue, there is free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep “listening” to one another and suspending of one’s own views. By contrast, in discussion different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the view to support the decision to be made at the time. Dialogue and discussion are potentially complementary, but most teams lack the ability to distinguish between the two and to move consciously between them (Senge, 1992:237).

As Habermas distinguishes between strategic action and communicative action, Senge suggests that discussion and dialogue result in different outcomes.

Both dialogue and discussion can lead to new courses of action; but actions are often the focus of discussion, whereas new actions emerge as a by-product of dialogue (Senge, 1992:247).

Maintaining that in dialogue ‘people become observers of their own thinking’, Senge (1992:242) suggests that the

...purpose of dialogue is to go beyond any one individual’s understanding...(to engage in) a free exploration that brings to the surface the full depth of people’s experience and thought, and yet can move beyond their individual views (Senge, 1992:241).

In education, it is these opportunities for deliberation and decision-making which enable teachers to participate in evaluation, feedback, follow-up and the general process of reaching understanding (Showers, Joyce & Bennett, 1987; Niemi & Kemmis, 1999).

Drawing extensively on David Bohm’s ideas about dialogue, Senge (1992:243-7) identifies three basic conditions which he claims are necessary for dialogue: the ability of participants to suspend their assumptions; the necessity for participants to regard each other as colleagues; and the need for a facilitator who ‘holds the context’ of dialogue.

This raises the question about how people might work together to give life to such a procedural view. Writers distinguish between different roles for those engaged in communication. ‘Habermas’s individuals participate in the public sphere as speakers and readers’ (Landes, 1995:100) whereas Arendt’s individuals do this as storytellers

and visitors. Disch (1994) describes how Arendt not only uses her own story but promotes the idea of ‘storytelling’ and ‘going visiting’ as strategies for achieving situated critical thinking. She draws a connection between the storyteller (testifier), the audience (auditor) and the resulting conversation and notes that while the

...testifier wants to be heard and to be responded to with emphatic affirmation...a story exhorts its auditor to “go visiting,” asking “how would *you* see the world if you saw it from *my* position?” The “visitor” is invited not emphatically to assimilate the different perspectives he or she finds, rather, to converse with them to consider how they differ from his or her own (Disch, 1994:13).

One strategy which has been used to record stories and to make connections between theory and practice is the case writing method (Shulman, 1992; McAninch, 1993). McAninch draws connections between Shulman’s (1986, 1992) and Dewey’s (1904) belief that the key to the professionalisation of teaching is through the development of judgement and theoretical knowledge. Shulman and others (Shulman, 1992; Wassermann, 1993b) have developed the case method of recording narratives. Shulman identifies the availability of time, the identification of ideas and a particular way of thinking as being requirements for engaging in case writing.

Writing cases to be shared with colleagues defies several norms embedded in the culture of teaching as work. The first is writing. Teaching is a ‘doing’ profession. In my experience working with teachers ...I find many resistant to writing about their work. Writing requires time—a precious rare commodity for most teachers. It also requires having something to write about and a way of thinking that is typically not part of the professional training of teachers (Shulman, 1992:156).

Clandinin and Connelly (1995:259) argue that such deliberate storying and re-storying of one’s life is a fundamental method of achieving personal and social growth and as such is a fundamental quality of education. This process of writing, sharing and thinking together suggests the importance of considering the literature which relates to plurality.

Braaten (1996:141–2) sees Habermas as a ‘strong partner in dialoguing’ because his theory demands plurality of participants in dialogue and provides an insight into the

inter-dependence of conceptions of knowledge and conceptions of community. In addition Braaten sees a resonance between feminist interests in multiple voices and the 'ideal discourse consensus' committed to overcoming relationships of dominance and submission, sharing power, and opening discussion to all perspectives. In developing ideas about feminist thinking, analysis and solidarity, Braaten (1996) draws on Habermas's theory of communicative rationality and his tandem conceptions of autonomy (the ability to participate in argumentation/communicative competence), social relationships (based on the mutuality of shared grounds) and finally community (seen as a community of the communicatively competent) (Braaten, 1996:141).

Landes (1995) sees a distinction between Arendt and Habermas. Whereas Habermas focuses on the value of association Arendt 'deems action to be the only sphere in which individuals distinguish themselves...through word and deed when they narrate the distinctive story of their own lives' (Landes, 1995:99-100). Both Habermas and Landes are critical of Arendt's position here, taking the view that there is an elitism evident in the stories which might be told, disadvantaging or silencing some, such as women and minorities, and privileging others such as the male land holders of the *polis* in Aristotelian times. However Disch claims that Arendt's storytellers:

...initiate political reconciliation. Their work is to tell stories that accord permanence to fleeting actions, crafting them into events whose meaning can be opened to public disputation. This reconciliation is neither retrospective nor passive, but the quintessential realization of natality, the condition that makes way for new beginnings (Disch, 1994:73).

Opting for critical distance through engagement, Arendt argues that this storytelling strategy avoids the trap of making political judgements from a distant (Archimedean) vantage point. Seyla Benhabib (1995), inspired by Arendt's ideas, emphasises the importance of people telling their own stories:

...from the time of our birth we are immersed in "a web of narratives", of which we are both the author and the object. The self is both the teller of tales and that about whom tales are told...When a story of the life can only be told from the perspective of others, then the self is a victim and sufferer who has lost control over her existence (Benhabib, 1995:199-200).

Landes (1995:100) describes how Arendt took her ideas about the public sphere one step further by arguing that:

...it is in performing rather than writing the story that each actor reveals his individuality...individuals perform deeds and narrate stories; they are not just talking heads but embodied, suffering subjects who move in the world in relation to others. Such a world is a “web of relationships” constituted by “enacted stories”. Neither labor (the metabolic interaction with nature) nor work (the making of products), but action produces relationships that bind people together.

Concluding her thinking about this aspect of Arendt’s work Landes notes that feminists have been interested in her work because she:

...addresses the performative dimension of human action and human speech. She implies that insofar as persons display themselves in public, they do so as storytellers, revealing aspects of their selves by acting in and through their bodies. Perhaps most radically, Arendt suggests that the subject is displaced within a wider communication network. Still let us not confuse her metaphors of the stage with a poststructuralist abandonment of the subject. Her foremost objective is to describe and exalt exemplary moral actions (Landes, 1995:101).

Both Arendt and Habermas agree on ‘the potential of words or discourse to generate power, and they see this potential of the public sphere apart from violence or force’ (Landes, 1995:100). Arendt connects her ideas about communication with the public sphere and Landes observes that ‘Habermas has learned a great deal from Arendt’s discussion of the public sphere...the two theorists share a strong appreciation of the political implications of speech and language’ (Landes, 1995:100).

MacIntyre conceptualises the public sphere in terms of a reading public. He raises questions about the context in which reading occurs and the characteristics of the group of readers. He argues that:

...public reasoning always occurs in a local context as part of a set of conversations that have their own peculiar history. We reason not just in the company of others but in the company of particular others, with whom at any given time we will share some set of background presuppositions...the

specifications of the social and intellectual context of our enquiries and debates...The reading public at any particular time and place is always some particular, highly specific, reading public with its own stock of shared assumptions, expectations and focus of attention. What is regarded as obvious or taken for granted, what is treated as problematic, which considerations have more weight and which less, which rhetorical modes are acceptable and which not, vary from reading public to reading public (MacIntyre, 1999:247-8).

MacIntyre observes that dialogic engagement involves a relationship based on shared standards.

...what I say both to myself and to others and what they say both to themselves and to me has to involve recognition, almost always implicit rather than explicit, of shared standards of truth, of rationality, of logic, standards that are not mine rather than yours or *vice versa*. This kind of relationship to others is an essential and not an accidental characteristic of thought (MacIntyre, 1999:249).

Continuing, MacIntyre debunks the idea that people think alone by arguing that

...thinking for oneself always does require thinking in cooperation with others. Some episodes of thought do of course consist in solitary monologues. But even monologues have to begin from what others have provided, and their conclusions have to be matched against rival conclusions, have to be stated in such a way as to be open to critical and constructive objections advanced by others, and have to be thereby made available for reflective interpretation and reinterpretation by others, so that sometimes one comes to understand only from those others what one means or must have meant. We learn to think better or worse from others, and we find ourselves contributing to a complex history of thought in which our debts to our predecessors are payable only to our successors (MacIntyre, 1999:249).

Wondering about the relationship between thinking for yourself, effective action and the transference of the ability to think and act from one situation to another, MacIntyre (1999:249) makes a connection between writing, the reading public and systematic inquiry (1999:250) arguing that

...the kind of reading public which provides the context for genuine thought will be a network, not of individuals but of small face-to-face conversational groups who pursue their enquiries systematically and make their reading part of those enquiries (MacIntyre, 1999:251).

Bauman's (2000:178) ideas about liquid modernity focus on achieving unity through confrontation, debate, negotiation and compromise', while MacIntyre examines the idea of thinking as a social activity and the impact of a failure to think for oneself:

...because all thinking is social, such failures are generally more than failures of individual thinkers, and the only effective remedies for such failures may always involve some change in the social conditions of thought, in those social and institutional frameworks within which rational enquiry is carried on and by which it is sustained...Thinking, in any particular time and place, let alone thinking for oneself, always involves thinking with certain particular others, thinking in the context of some particular and specific public, with its own institutional structure...The key question at any particular time and place is then: within what kind of public with what kind of institutionalized structures will we be able to identify the limitations imposed on our particular enquiries as a prelude to transcending those limitations in pursuit of the goods of reason? (MacIntyre, 1999:251-2).

In raising these issues MacIntyre poses questions about the kinds of structures which might support or impinge on the ability of individuals and groups to think and create anew.

Collaboration

This brings us to the question of collaboration. Yeatman (1996:50) attests that 'ordinary citizens' value the sense of being 'in it together'. She explores the importance of collaboration in the management of change, arguing that there seem to be:

...five principles of the pro-active management of change—learning, participation, collaboration, democracy, and cooperation—(which) together form a cluster of values. This cluster of values constitutes a *culture* of pro-active approaches to the management of change.

Abstracted from the others, any one principle does not deliver much. On the other hand, shaped by the principles, any particular one becomes powerful and effective in its cultural effect. It is possibly the case that democracy and cooperation are more primary values or principles than the others. After all, learning, collaboration, and participation do not make all that much sense without an anchorage in democracy and cooperation. In this sense, learning, participation and collaboration can be regarded as further specifications of a democratic cooperative ethics (Yeatman, 1996:54).

Without exception the literature points to a layer of action which involves people working together in joint, united, cooperative or collaborative action. Many—Hargreaves (1992; 1997), Fullan (1991), Collay (1998) and DuFour (1998) to name just a few—argue that professional learning is most successful when it is collegial and collaborative and embedded in daily work. Hargreaves argues that collaboration has become:

...a *metaparadigm* of educational and organizational change in the postmodern age...an articulating and integrating principle of action, planning, culture, development, organization and research...a productive response to a world in which problems are unpredictable, solutions are unclear, and demands and expectations are intensifying. In this kind of context, the promise of collaboration is extensive and diverse (Hargreaves, 1994:244).

He suggests that a collaborative solution embodies a number of principles: moral support, increased efficiency, improved effectiveness, reduced overload, synchronised time perspectives, situated certainty, political assertiveness, increased capacity for reflection, organisational responsiveness, opportunities to learn and continuous improvement.

However Hargreaves (1994:245-247) warns of possible dangers in collaboration, including comfort and complacency, conformism, contrived situations and cooptation. White and Wehlage (1995) take a similar position, warning against institutional collaboration being top down, non-involving and distant from the problems. They argue that collaboration is not just a question of 'getting professionals to work together more efficiently and effectively (but of) how to get whole communities to engage in community development' (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Also concerned about possible dangers in collaboration McDowell (1999) refers to the work of Iris

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Marion Young (1990:300) who warns that a city broken into separate spaces or communities, where the people feel comfortable in their face-to-face interactions with people like themselves, too often tends to be based on a 'desire for social wholeness and identification that underlies racism and ethnic chauvinism on the one hand and political sectarianism on the other' (McDowell, 1999:120). Young, responding to her own warning about the dream of community, wonders about the lessons that might be learned from a shift in the feminist movement from the pressure for a common identity in the 1960s to a more recent acceptance of difference and an awareness about inclusion and exclusion.

Many conceive of collaboration in terms of community. Argyris (1996) for example argues that students and teachers must be learners and schools and universities must be learning organisations. Yet Blackmore (1999a:31) disagrees.

Recent reform has tended to shift the focus away from systems, communities and groups towards schools, families and individuals, ie., towards learning organisations. This focus is misguided, because the quality of the educational experience in the future is dependent on relations: the networks, pathways and partnerships between systems, communities and groups, the values which imbue those relations, and the social and structural infrastructure which underpin them...Rather than focus on learning organisations we need to focus upon a socially-just learning system, ie., we need strong—not weak—democracies in a high risk environment because individual schools need support.

Lima (2001:102), in considering the literature on community in teaching, identifies 3 central elements:

...community of *understanding* (common values, shared beliefs, goals and norms at the site level – what I have called the idealistic side of teacher cultures...(2) community of *practice* (teacher mutual support, collaboration, and collegiality); and (3) community of *affectation* (personally meaningful relationships among teachers)...(and he asks) Should teacher communities be full-fledged communities of understanding, practice and affection? To what extent are these three elements interdependent? Are all of them necessary? Are some possible without the others? Is this desirable from a school change perspective?

Having asked these questions, Lima (2001) focuses on the idea of a community of affection, distinguishing between strong ties (here he draws on the work of Joel Westheimer) and weak ties (with reference to Nias and Adelman, Parks and Albrecht). He makes the distinction between ‘*friendly relations*’ and ‘*friendship relations*’ (Lima, 2001:108). Although arguing from a different position to those mentioned earlier who warn against comfort and complacency he argues that ‘cognitive conflict’ can be a catalyst for school change.

Taking a different tack Sachs (2003:147–149) argues that professional development should ensure that teachers act with passion, experience pleasure and have fun. In the same vein Goodson (1999) talks about the importance of providing active care for learners which includes an emotional dimension. This was also a strong thread in Arendt’s work and she argued that:

Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance (Arendt, 1958:50).

Yeatman’s observation that change can require an opportunity to grieve and Arendt’s connection between natality, hope and courage give us an indication that the emotional side of action is important. Seyla Benhabib (1995:191) refers to Arendt’s ‘web of human affairs’ and Carol Gilligan’s ‘networks of care and dependence’ arguing that it is not only children, but adults too, who have needs, vulnerabilities, emotions and desires. Blackmore (1999a:31-32), drawing on the work of Nel Noddings, extends the idea by arguing the importance of ‘an ethic of care which is about a sense of public responsibility (which needs to be developed by) professional educators’ in relation to issues of social justice.

Giddens (1999:62-63) claims that communication is the foundation for a democracy of the emotions. From his perspective a good relationship is based on understanding the other person’s point of view and this is achieved through talk or dialogue in an environment where active and mutual trust mean that people do not hide too much.

Trust, he contends, has to be worked at and is in fact mobilised and sustained through open dialogue which is a core property of democracy.

By conceptualising this kind of action as a democracy of the emotions, Giddens gives us a way of thinking about the freedom to engage emotionally. He explores the notion of a relationship characterised by emotional engagement where the rewards gained would form the basis on which the relationship continues. He sees this 'pure relationship' as having quite different dynamics from more traditional social ties, arguing that active trust and self-disclosure are a basic condition of intimacy. All of this, Giddens suggests, contributes to the emergence of 'a democracy of the emotions in everyday life' which features equality (with both rights and obligations); respect and wanting the best for the other/s; understanding of the other person's point of view; talk or dialogue; mutual trust; and finally, freedom from arbitrary power, coercion or violence. Giddens claims that such relationships facilitate risk, allowing for the condition of excitement and adventure, which might lead to new beginnings informed by an assessment of hazards and possibilities.

Hargreaves (1994:141) raises questions about the emotions of teaching. He says that while we have come to understand more about what teachers do and think, we know little about how they feel about their work and 'how they talk about the emotional dimension of their work'. Hargreaves notes that while researchers tend to talk about concepts like pride, commitment, uncertainty, creativity and satisfaction, teachers are more likely to talk about anxiety, frustration and guilt. He explores guilt in some detail, concluding that 'guilt is a key feature of (teachers') emotional lives. He maintains that guilt, with its associated impulse for repair and replenishment, can help create and sustain positive sources of caring and concern within the professional community of teaching, yet warns that teacher behaviour that is excessively guilt-ridden and guilt-driven can become unproductive and unprofessional (Hargreaves, 1994:155).

In considering the conditions that promote change Nias (1987) draws on Habermas's theory of social change and SH Foulkes's formulation of 'group-analytic psychotherapy'. In developing her argument she identifies many similarities in their work including the value of association to individual change and the importance of allowing and encouraging 'all individuals to contribute and feel that they are of equal

worth' (Nias, 1987:4-6). But she argues that Foulkes (and the interpretation by MLJ Abercrombie of Foulkes's ideas in an educational setting) adds another significant dimension by highlighting how 'groups can help the individual to change' (Nias, 1987:53). More recently Cox (1995), Blackmore (1999a:32) and others have conceptualised the idea of 'both-way learning' as reciprocity. Nias believes this two-way interaction is significant.

The emphasises of both (Abercrombie and Foulkes) upon the individual as a participating member of a group, and upon the group as a means of enabling the individual to question and change his or her perspectives and relationships, forms a bridge between descriptive accounts of action research and school-based innovation, and the theory-building of philosophers and social scientists. (Nias, 1987:45)

Nias and her colleagues confirm this in their study of primary schools when they note that individuals should be 'welcomed, appreciated and fostered for their own sakes, but also for the mutual enrichment which comes from diversity' (Nias *et al.*, 1989:74). She further argues that 'change in education will come about only when teachers are given the opportunity to assume radically different perspectives from the ones they hold at present' and she stresses the value of 'free' discussion in groups.

The key to the development of such groups is not in imposing membership of them upon all teachers, many of whom may be reluctant or suspicious, but in observing the use some already make of collaborative discussion, fostering their activities and encouraging other teachers to become similarly engaged. (Nias, 1987:53)

But Nias (1989:43-44) also notes that when a sub-group develops a 'distinctive and exclusive patterns of interaction, it might become perceived by other sub-groups as a clique'. She argues that such perceptions of exclusivity can result in hostility and as a result opinions are less likely to be aired and the development of a single staff culture can be inhibited.

Lima (2001), also considering the conditions which will promote change, argues that we should forget about friendships and develop a deeper understanding about the use of conflict as a catalyst for school change. In developing his argument he explores the

notions of collegiality, community and personal bonds but argues that teachers would be better off aiming for ‘cognitive conflict’.

(T)eacher communities that rely entirely or even predominantly on strong interpersonal ties are not necessarily better prepared to initiate and sustain this change. Communities where ties are not given priority over other forms of connection are probably more innovative, more flexible and more reflective.
(Lima, 2001:116)

To the list of issues requiring exploration in understanding partnerships Niemi and Kemmis (1999) make connections between institutional structure, administration, power, control, and cooperation between different partners.

Within the move towards collaboration much emphasis has been placed on forming partnerships. School-university partnerships have been blossoming in Australia (Yeatman & Sachs, 1995; Peters, Dobbins & Johnson, 1996a; Williams, Tunney & Greal, 1996; Sachs, 1998; Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998). Their value has been recognised in relation to professional development (Gore, 1995; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995), collaborative research (Ladwig *et al.*, 1994b:16) and supporting school change (Harradine, 1995; Peters *et al.*, 1996a; Southern Cross Roundtable Portrayal Evaluation Team, 1996; Sachs, 2003). But collaboration is not all plain sailing. While both Sachs (2003) and Gore (1995) argue for simultaneous renewal for schools and teacher education they note that there has been a lack of success to date. Somekh (1994) gives an indication of the separation, size and immovability of the two institutions by visualising schools and universities as separate castles, arguing that educators in schools and universities need to learn how to inhabit each other’s castles. Echoing Bauman’s (2000) ideas about an achieved unity, Yeatman and Sachs (1995) argue that successful professional learning occurs when academics and teachers work together as co-learners, when roles are debated and negotiated and when outcomes are mutually beneficial.

The literature also suggests the importance of expanding partnerships and developing relationships with students (Mukherjee, 1998; Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998:217-220), parents (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998:217-220; Hargreaves, 1999), non-teaching staff in schools, and community members (Senate Employment

Education and Training References Committee, 1998:217-220). Fielding (1999:28), while arguing against the concept of collaboration, conceives the expansion of partnerships as radical collegiality and argues the value of 'the reciprocity and energy of dialogue'. He suggests that it is important to acknowledge that teachers learn not only from their peers but from students, parents and members of the community and argues that within a radical collegiality opportunities for achieving a deeper understanding need to be purposefully created so that everyone might participate. He believes this approach would produce a 'responsive and responsible professionalism appropriate to and supportive of an increasingly authentic democracy' (Fielding, 1999:28). Eraut (1994) focuses on collaboration between different professions and observes that the idea of 'interprofessional relations are strangely absent from accounts of the ideology of professionalism'. But more recently in Australia, inter-professional collaboration has emerged in practice and become the focus of a number of studies (Ryan, 1996; Kemmis, 1998a; Kirner, 1998; Mukherjee, 1998; Semmens & Stokes, 1998).

Arendt maintains that freedom lies in diversity of opinions and the right to express opinions without coercion (Kaplan, 1991). She talks about the value of being different yet working together around common concerns. Hill (1979:xi) describes how she calls this 'acting in concert...a model of solidarity premised not on a common identity or essential sameness but on a limited, principled commitment to respond to a particular problem...'. She reasons that 'plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live' (Arendt, 1958:8). Arendt also contends that 'plurality means that the possibility of community is never simply given or essential to human beings but must, rather, be built by speech and action' (Disch, 1994:32).

These beliefs are echoed in the propositions presented by Lima (2001) (2001). He argues that too much importance can be attached to closeness, friendship and collegiality and that there is great value in building on weaker connections and encouraging cognitive conflict. He believes that by working in this way it is more likely that individual creativity might be expressed and independent thinking occur (Lima, 2001:112).

The creation of a collaborative environment has increasingly been conceptualised as the building of community, with evidence that work places can be organised to promote collegial working conditions (Retallick *et al.*, 1994; Harradine, 1995), the sharing of fellowship (Hung & Mashhadi, 1999) and opportunities to build learning communities (Yeatman & Sachs, 1995). Kemmis (1998a:4–5) describes this kind of workplace community as a ‘community of practice’, characterised by its ‘caring, inclusive, engaging and enabling relationships’.

Cox draws on the work of Putnam (1993, 1995) who suggests that trust is developed through active relationships, the kind that might be found in ‘civic’ groups which are ‘generally run democratically: people participate because they want to and their processes involve members working on tasks, developing trust and mutually rewarding relationships’ (Cox, 1995:18-19). Nias, Southworth and Yeomans (1989) in their study of staff relations in primary schools note that ‘trust is an almost inevitable outcomes of participation’ in a ‘culture of collaboration’. Sachs highlights the significance of this dynamic when she (2003:147–149) argues that an activist professionalism is created in an environment of trust and mutual respect.

Another aspect of collaborative action involves networks. Yeatman and Sachs (1996:55), in their formative evaluation of the ILP, identify both the devolution process and networks as significant organisational features:

Networking is an organisational device which allows for information exchange and professional peer support on a scale that breaks out of the parochial limitations of any particular organisational context whether this be of a particular school or its employing authority...Networking thus enables an organisation (schools in this instance) to belong to a wider universe (to think globally) while devolution enables an organisation to have the capacity to manage its own affairs (to act locally).

Bringing a new understanding to the concept of networks Massey (1993:66) argues that:

The uniqueness of a place, or locality...is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are

actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself...Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings (Massey, 1993:66).

Goodson (1999) discusses the importance of allocating authority within partnerships and this has implications for leadership within partnerships. Since the 1980s the debate about leadership in education has mirrored the parallel reform movements discussed earlier. On one hand there has been a shift towards corporate management connected to economic rationalism and therefore characterised by competition, management and productivity. This was the leadership model adopted by Caldwell and Spinks (1992) as part of the Schools of the Future program introduced into Victorian schools in the early 1990s. In this model principals were leaders and teachers were followers. The parallel reform has been conceptualised as educational leadership and those writing in the field (Smyth, 1989b; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Hargreaves, 1993; Smyth, 1993, 1994) have been highly critical of the movement away from leadership towards management.

Smyth (1989) argues that corporate management is anti-educational, autocratic, bureaucratic and hierarchical; that teachers are silenced and therefore become invisible; and that teaching becomes a technical process with a narrow focus on the work in the classroom. Developing an alternative he proposes a model which includes dialogue about the nature of schooling, less privileged leadership, more inclusivity, an environment where people help each other to uncover meaning, where people know they have the capacity to change, improve and transform practices, where teachers are seen as leaders...and where teaching is considered as an integral part of social change. In looking to new forms of leadership Smyth seeks not only to avoid new power dominance but to establish the importance of a commitment to collectivity (Davies, 1994:52–53).

Others seeking to understand school restructuring and rethink school improvement have focused attention on the links between collaboration, leadership structure, culture, democratic practices, emotional engagement, purpose, politics and learning (Peters, Dobbins & Johnson, 1996b; Louis, Toole & Hargreaves, 1999).

In the context of thinking about the future, Hargreaves (1994:248–251), insists that vision-building should be a collective activity rather than something which principals do on behalf of the school and the staff. In another example of how things might change Senge contends that leaders also need to think of themselves as learners. He believes that they must:

...work relentlessly to foster a climate in which the principles of personal mastery are practiced in daily life. That means building an organisation where it is safe for people to create visions, where inquiry and commitment to truth are the norm, and where challenging the status quo is expected—especially when the status quo includes obscuring aspects of current reality that people seek to avoid...The core leadership strategy is simple...Commit yourself to your own personal mastery (Senge, 1992:172-3).

In considering the traditional clashing of university and school cultures Gore (1995) suggest the importance of this opportunity for reconciliation when she asserts that past patterns of poor communication and unexplored territorial issues need to be challenged. School–university partnerships need to develop trust and build understanding around all partners’ perspectives, recognising the distinctive interests of all parties, taking joint responsibility for planning from the very beginning and establishing common goals which result in change for all. Such relationships must be democratic rather than hierarchical, promote communication and allocate time for reflection. And this suggests the significance of inquiry, the final theme for this chapter.

Inquiry

Reason and Bradbury (2001:xxviii), in the introduction to *The Handbook of Action Research*, indicate not only the importance of the inquiry process but the connection between context, dialogue, relationships and inquiry. They quote from the South African *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report*.

It is particularly important to emphasise that the truth could not be divorced from the affirmation of the dignity of human beings. Thus, not only the actual outcome or findings of the investigation counted. The process whereby the truth was reached was itself important because it was through this process that the essential norms of social relations between people were reflected. It was

furthermore, through dialogue and respect that a means of promoting transparency, democracy and participation in society was suggested as a basis for reaffirming human dignity and integrity.

Truth as factual, objective information cannot be divorced from the way in which this information is acquired; nor can such information be separated from the purposes it is required to serve. (1998: Chapter 5, pt 42 and 44)

As with context, dialogue and collaboration there are many views about inquiry. Giddens (1984) argues for a reflexive strategy and Stenhouse (1975) extends this idea to emphasise the importance of systematic inquiry. Niemi and Kemmis (1999) argue that the process must include opportunities for raising and exploring questions, concerns and issues and MacIntyre (1999) stresses the importance of uncovering contingency and particularity. Each of these authors makes connections between inquiry, learning and change .

Inquiry is often associated with the idea of reflective practice. Smyth (1989a) identifies four reflective behaviours: describing, informing, confronting and reconstructing while Cherednichenko and her colleagues (1998b), link reflection and dialogue, articulating a distinction between practice described, practice interpreted and practice theorised. Habermas (1987:75) connects reflection and self criticism, envisioning reflection as ‘relation-to-self’—an activity which demands a capacity to learn, act and express on the basis of subjective experiences. He sees the subject as epistemic, practical and affective. Grundy (1995:16) believes that it is imperative that reflection provides critique. She takes a position that, as far as possible, reflection should entail a dispassionate view of events which would enable a rational and supportable judgement. She thinks of this reflective action as being ‘against the grain’, an activity which involves the researcher wondering if another interpretation is possible. This, she contends, opens up the possibility of ‘real rather than pseudo improvement’.

There are a range of authors who argue the value of inquiry and reflective practice in promoting professional development. They argue the importance of:

- collaborative problem solving (Hawley & Valli, 1999:136–144) and developing a culture of collaborative help and support for teachers as problem solvers (Goodson, 1999)
- incorporating evaluation, feedback and follow-up (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998:217-220)
- building on professional knowledge and judgement (Eraut, 1994)
- practising discretionary judgement (Goodson, 1999)
- aiming for cognitive, self directed continuous learning, (Goodson, 1999)
- providing an opportunity for developing theoretical understanding (Hawley & Valli, 1999:136–144).

In the context of school improvement Louis, Toole and Hargreaves (1999) highlight the idea of ‘teachers as generators of professional knowledge’. Cochrane-Smith (1999) uses the term ‘inquiry stance’ to argue that inquiry involves adopting an attitude, posture or position taken to asking questions, searching and seeking, instead of inquiry being thought of in terms of activity or project. She allows that while such a stance makes teaching more difficult, nuanced and complicated it also enables richness by creating a space for understanding complexities.

Reviewing a ten year period, Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that teacher research has been prominent in teacher education, professional development and school reform. They observe that conceptual frameworks for teacher research have been developed based on social and practical inquiry and describe this practice in terms of ‘ways of knowing in communities’. Australian research in education also suggests the importance of promoting professional learning through opportunities for research and testing new ideas within a culture of possibility (Harradine, 1995; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995; Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998; Niemi & Kemmis, 1999). In identifying common threads in teacher research Cochrane-Smith and Lytle note that many variants share an emphasis on:

...teacher as knower and as agent for change...(and) new kinds of relationships that assuage the isolation of teaching. This is especially true in

inquiry communities structured to foster deep intellectual discourse about critical issues ...(which) become spaces where the uncertainties and questions intrinsic to teaching can be scrutinized—not hidden—and can function as grist for new insights and new ways to theorize practice (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1999:22).

Action research is one such variant and while there are many interpretations of action research it is widely recognised as a process for change and professional learning based on a systematic search for knowledge and understanding. Grundy (1995) argues that this kind of inquiry is made powerful through its connection to practice, its commitment to collaborative inquiry and the resulting possibilities for real change. Sachs (2003) suggests practitioner research as a vehicle for action while Reason (2001:336)—searching for connections between the group, the community and the individual—proposes an integrated participative inquiry model which draws on participatory action research, cooperative inquiry and action inquiry. Tripp (1993:4) sees action research as ‘any systematic, deliberate, thoughtful and self-conscious, on-going use of a *plan, act, reflect* sequence’. Zeichner (2001:273–280) outlines the development of action research in Australia, Britain and the US. In concluding, he sets three challenges: to include the growing literature about action research in Latin America and Africa; to improve access to the work of action researchers; and to engage in dialogue about the value of action research as a methodology in education.

While acknowledging that there are huge variations in the practice of action research, Reason and Bradbury (2001) have worked towards a definition of action research in which they identify five shared characteristics:

...is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities...(it is) a practice for the systematic development of knowing and knowledge...(it) has different purposes, is based in different relationships, and has different ways of conceiving knowledge and its relation to practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:1).

Insisting that action research must be participatory, practical and collaborative, emancipatory, critical and recursive Kemmis (1997:8) sees action research

...as a deliberate social process designed to help participants learn more about (and theorise) their practices, their knowledge of their practices, the social structures which constrain their practices, and the social media in which their practices are expressed and realised.

Kemmis (2001:92) goes on to distinguish between three forms of action research: technical, practical and critical–emancipatory. He defines technical action research as being focused on functional improvement and problem solving, with the outcomes usually measured in terms of success. Practical action research, while focused on improving practice, also informs the decision-making of practitioners, supports self-understanding and helps others to see. To these characteristics, critical–emancipatory action research adds a critique of work and work settings. Kemmis maintains that only a small body of action research fits into this third category and that this dimension is evident when action research:

- aims at intervening in the cultural, social and historical processes of everyday life
- focuses on the work, the worker *and* the workplace
- recognises that goals may be limited, inappropriate or based on misunderstanding
- involves being critical and self-critical
- is based on an understanding that people and settings are ‘shaped and re-shaped discursively, culturally, socially and historically’
- aims to connect the personal and the political in seeking to transform problematic situations.

When professional development and practitioner research are connected the aim is to revitalise the work, the worker and the workplace through an open and continuous process of reforming and transforming (Kemmis, 1997:6), dialogue and debate, trialing, reflecting and hypothesising (Retallick & Groundwater-Smith, 1996). Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1999) also note that teacher research has been

disseminated beyond the local level and has had an impact on university culture in terms of professional development, research practice and teacher education.

The idea of community action research has been developed by Senge and Scharmer (2001). They believe that community action research not only involves ‘producing practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives’ and valuing ‘knowing-in-action’ but also places equal emphasis on building learning communities by fostering relationships, creating settings for collective reflection and promoting cross-institutional links.

But bringing the theory of community action research to life involves conditions that are only now beginning to be understood. It starts with genuine commitment on the part of a group of managerial practitioners from diverse organizations, consultants and researchers to work together. It further requires an agreed upon system of self-governance and learning infrastructures that enable relationship-building, collaborative projects, and sharing of insights across the whole community and beyond. Lastly, it entails appreciating and encouraging emergent learning networks that arise in ways that can neither be predicted nor controlled (Senge & Scharmer, 2001:239).

It is Senge’s and Scharmer’s belief that such organisation has the potential to produce both the organisational change and the new knowledge needed to ‘re-invent Industrial Age institutions’ which would not be possible using traditional strategies such as consultancy-based problem solving, academic research or management driven change programs. In many ways this aligns with Niemi’s and Kemmis’s (1999) idea that action can be viewed in terms of combined efforts around critical thinking, communication and partnerships. But there are tensions surrounding the status of different kinds of research. Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1999) note that over an extended period teacher research has been the subject of critique in terms of knowledge generation, methodology and purpose. Yeatman and Sachs (1995) distinguish between academic and action research, suggesting that each serves different interests and purposes (see Table 2). They argue: ‘it is only when this distinction is clearly made that the question can be approached of how these two types of research might be used to inform each other’ (Yeatman & Sachs, 1995:57).

Table 2: The differences between academic and action research

	Academic	Practitioner/Action research
Orientation	Meta-analytical Cross-contextual	Practice Specific context/context bound
Test	Validity	Trustworthiness
Mode of communication	Academic writing	Direct oral reporting, dialogue, group work
Intent	Explanation/analysis	Improving practice
Audience	Academics	Practitioners (including academics in practitioner roles)

Drawing a similar distinction, MacIntyre (1999) reaches a different conclusion. He presents a view that the ‘moral and political concepts and theories of the Enlightenment’ are now interpreted within two broad reading publics. One is academia where ideas are implemented to a high level yet there is little connection between the thinking and any outcomes or solutions. He then contrasts this with a reading public in the areas of political, legal, economic and social life where ‘decisive outcomes and conclusions cannot be avoided’ (MacIntyre, 1999:254). Developing his position MacIntyre argues that most structures are insulated from criticism.

It is the compartmentalization of social life as a result of which each sphere has its own set of established norms and values as a counterpart to the specialization of its tasks and the professionalization of its occupations. So the activities and experiences of domestic life are understood in terms of one set of norms and values, those of various types of private corporate workplace in terms of somewhat different sets, the arenas of politics and governmental bureaucracies in terms of yet others, and so on. It is not of course that there is not some degree of overlap. But the differences between these compartmentalized areas are striking, and in each of them are procedures for arriving at decisions, procedures generally insulated from criticism from any external standpoint (MacIntyre, 1999:254-5).

In drawing together the threads of his argument MacIntyre observes that we have not only failed to reach an agreed set of Enlightenment standards but that modern institutions:

...do not provide—in fact they render impossible—the kinds of institutionalized reading, talking and arguing public necessary for effective

practical rational thought about those principles and decisions involved in answering such questions as: ‘How is a human life to be valued?’ or ‘What does accountability in our social relationships require of us?’ or ‘Whom, if anyone, may I legitimately deceive?’—questions to which we need shared answers...we do not have the kinds of reading public necessary to sustain practically effective social thought (MacIntyre, 1999:256-7).

Arendt (1958:14), exploring a similar tension, distinguishes between contemplation (*vita contemplativa*) and action (the *vita activa*) tracing the tension back to the time of Plato when a distinction was made between contemplation and action based on a belief in the superiority of the *bios theoretikos*.

...the enormous weight of contemplation in the traditional hierarchy has blurred the distinctions and articulations within the *vita activa* itself...(and she declares that her use of) the term *vita activa* presupposes that the concern underlying all its activities is not the same as and is neither superior nor inferior to the central concern of the *vita contemplativa* (Arendt, 1958:17).

Referring to the divide between academic researchers and teachers, Coulter and Wiens (2002) draw on Arendt’s ideas and develops an argument that we need to work so that ‘all educators foster good judgement’ which means being both actors and spectators.

Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1999:22) wonder how to define and justify:

...appropriate “outcomes” of inquiry based teacher education and professional development, (and) how to reconcile the idea of co-construction of knowledge by teachers and their students with the current move toward increasingly specified curriculum frameworks, how to hold on to the larger goals of democratic education in the face of intense pressure to evaluate success based on students’ performance on high stakes tests, and how to support communities of teachers working together on the questions that matter to them in the light of mandates at many levels to collaborate on the implementation of system policies (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1999:22).

Also aiming to challenge the belief that action research lacks validity, Anderson and Herr (1999) have developed a framework for examining validity in practitioner research. They have identified five criteria for assessing validity in practitioner

research—outcome, process, democratic, catalytic and dialogic validity. Bassey (2001), taking a different tack, has explored the broader question of valid findings in social research, suggesting that research findings might be accorded the status of fuzzy generalisations.

A framework for understanding the work of the Roundtable

The aim of this chapter has been to present a review of theoretical and professional literature which would help to contextualise, inform and ultimately shape this study. Setting a backdrop, the first section of the review focused on significant developments and changing practices in both school and adult education. This section then traced the evolution of teacher professional development. While the literature suggests an emerging agreement about the need for reform in teacher professional development, there is also a continuing debate about how the accepted principles might translate into organisational and instructional practice (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999:xix; Hawley & Valli, 1999:144). What might professional development look like in the future?

The second section then turned to look at change and the nature of action and there emerged a high level of synchronicity between the key concepts in the literature and the aims of the Roundtable. Theories of structuration (Giddens, 1984), communicative action (Habermas, 1984; 1987) and the human condition (Arendt, 1958) indicate the significance of context, dialogue, collaboration and inquiry and, following similar themes, the Innovative Links Project was designed to include local and national issues, build partnerships and work in an action research way. This relationship is represented in Table 3.

In combination the literature and the Innovative Links Project/Western Melbourne Roundtable principles suggested a multi-layered analytic framework not only for ‘mapping’ the practice of the Western Melbourne Roundtable but for locating the practice in theory.

Goetz, LeCompte and Ausherman (1988) use the idea of ‘theoretical frames’ to shape their research and Table 3 suggests a structure for using a combination of the professional and theoretical concepts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:53) evident in this review. In doing so it establishes a framework which might guide the examination of

the work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable and enable an exploration of the significance of context, dialogue, collaboration and inquiry in shaping professional development.

Table 3: Connecting Roundtable and literature

Themes	The Western Melbourne Roundtable aimed to...	The literature review indicates the importance of...
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Work locally and make connections with the national reform agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Rethinking for a changing world▪ Acknowledging and making connections between personal, cultural and societal interests▪ Respecting diversity
Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Adopt case writing as a strategy for focusing on teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Opportunities for dialogue▪ Discursive consciousness▪ Emotional engagement
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Build partnership between schools and universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cooperation, collectivity and democratic relationships▪ Trust▪ Reciprocity and mutuality▪ Building community and networks
Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Engage in action research to achieve innovation and reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Adopting a process for gaining a deeper understanding and generating change▪ Creating information rich environments focused on the technical, practical and critical

Having established this framework the following chapter describes the search for the ‘right’ methodology and the research process which was eventually adopted in order to gain a deeper understanding about Western Melbourne Roundtable practise and democratic professional development.

Chapter 3: Gaining a deeper understanding

Chapters 1 and 2 describe a changing world and identify a need to rethink education for the future. They show that many voices are united in seeking new ways of thinking about professional development. By identifying and exploring the significant characteristics of the innovative professional practice of the Western Melbourne Roundtable and by making connections between practice and theory this study sought to build on current thinking and therefore inform contemporary debate.

The study was based on the hypothesis that the combined activities of the Western Melbourne Roundtable—including case writing, building partnerships and engaging in action research—made a significant contribution to the professional development of those involved.

Therefore the broad aim of the study has been to reveal new knowledge and theories about how roundtables promote professional development, specifically exploring the combined dimensions of context, dialogue, collaboration and inquiry. Having said this, the study was also structured in a way that new hypotheses might evolve gradually through cycles of data analysis and connection with the literature (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Glaser, 1992; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Searching for the ‘right’ methodology

Despite having identified an hypothesis and connected this with research aims and questions, the detail of what had to be done to achieve the aims and therefore answer the research questions was not so clear. In reality there was not one ‘right’ way of conducting this research process and an analytic strategy was not immediately obvious. The challenge was to design a research strategy that would support the research aims and fit the particular circumstances.

Because the Innovative Links Project and Western Melbourne Roundtable documents highlighted the importance of respect for Roundtable members and their work the researcher was forced to ask questions such as: How might a researcher work in a respectful way? How might a researcher design a process which is respectful of the Roundtable reflection process, practitioner writing, collaboration and reflexive solutions? Therefore, the first step was to establish principles which would underpin

the conduct of the study. On one level, it was important to reflect the stated principles articulated by the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable. On another level it was important to reflect the ideas and concepts which had emerged in the literature. This process paved the way for designing a research framework which was informed by shared principles, related to concepts in the literature and which could then be connected with the literature on research methodologies.

Table 4 shows the relationships between the Western Melbourne Roundtable aims, the significant concepts indicated in the literature review and the formulation of research principles.

Table 4: Connecting Roundtable, literature and research

Themes	The Western Melbourne Roundtable aimed to...	The literature review indicates the importance of...	The research sought to...
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work locally and make connections with the national reform agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> rethinking for a changing world acknowledging and making connections between personal, cultural and societal levels of activity respecting diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider local context consider whole context and make connections act with awareness of inclusion and exclusion
Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adopt case writing as a strategy for focusing on teaching and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> opportunities for dialogue aiming for discursive consciousness emotional engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide opportunities for dialogue provide opportunities for storytelling allow for emotional themes to surface
Collaboration	build partnership between schools and universities in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> teams a roundtable a national network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cooperation, collectivity and democratic relationships trust reciprocity and mutuality building community and networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> collaborate and cooperate develop trust consider the value of research to all parties extend existing community and networks
Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> engage in action research to achieve innovation and reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adopting a process for gaining a deeper understanding and generating change creating information rich environments with technical, practical and critical focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide opportunities for exploration which lead to new knowledge and new beginnings focus on teachers, classrooms, schools and the wider education community

In establishing 16 roundtables the Innovative Links Project expressed a clear expectation that teams of teachers would focus their work locally yet make clear connections with the broader context—including the national reform agenda—and the literature reinforces the idea that there is a need to rethink schools within the context of a changing world. Habermas (1987) Giddens (1998; 1999) and Smith (1993) all argue the importance of acknowledging various contexts by making connections between personal, cultural and societal levels of activity. There is also a strong indication of the importance of respecting diversity (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Retallick *et al.*, 1994; McDowell, 1999; Sachs, 2003). In the context of this study, these expectations and ideas indicate the importance of considering the whole context with an awareness of inclusion and exclusion and a commitment to seeking connections.

The Western Melbourne Roundtable made a decision to adopt case writing as a strategy for focusing communication around teaching and learning. The literature indicates the importance of strategies that provide opportunities for teachers to engage in narrative and storytelling (Arendt, 1958; 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) inspired by emotional moments (Shulman, 1992) and the possibility of moving from practical to discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984). The decisions made by the Roundtable and these observations in the literature suggested the importance of designing a methodology which included the kind of opportunities for storytelling and dialogue (Senge, 1992) which would allow for an emotional dimension to surface.

It seemed particularly important to ensure that the voices of Roundtable members remained central throughout the process. Incorporating the principles of respect and trust in collaboration suggested:

- privileging sources of information which were either spoken or written by members of the Roundtable
- adopting analytic and interpretive strategies which privileged teachers' vocabulary, descriptions and insights
- enabling Roundtable participants to voice their recollections in interviews and conversations which were designed to confirm, clarify and expand their ideas and opinions about the work of the Roundtable.

While one side of this coin suggested respect and recognition of teachers the reverse demanded consideration of the power relationship between the researcher and the members of the Roundtable participating in the research. Was it possible to be an outside researcher and work ethically with the people and documents of the Western Melbourne Roundtable? Clearly it was important to consider how the research could be designed to offset the issues created by an external researcher. In this way, the role of the researcher shifted from creating new ideas to revealing the ideas identified by members of the Roundtable. This study was therefore committed to a:

...process of meaning construction...(where the researcher was) concerned with what the narrative means to the people who create it or read it...(and not one) in which the researcher imposes his or her own predetermined categories and theory on the text' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:58).

The Innovative Links Project was structured so that partnerships could be built between schools and universities and that people would work collaboratively. Once again this matched a trend in the literature oriented to cooperation, collectivity and democratic relationships (Arendt, 1958; Hargreaves, 1993; Harradine, 1995; Kemmis, 1998b; Giddens, 1999; Habermas, 1999; Niemi & Kemmis, 1999; Bauman, 2000; Sachs, 2003). The benefits of working in this way were couched in terms of trust (Cox, 1995; Giddens, 1999; Sachs, 2003), reciprocity and mutuality (Arendt, 1958; Cox, 1995) and the possibility of building communities and networks (Arendt, 1958; Cox, 1995; Yeatman, 1996; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Kemmis, 1998a; Senge & Scharmer, 2001). These ideas suggest the importance of conceptualising research as a collaborative, cooperative activity which involves the possibility of extending existing communities and networks.

The Innovative Links Project expected that Roundtable members would engage in action research to guide reflection, innovation and reform. In the literature this is conceptualised as a process for gaining a deeper understanding and generating change (Habermas, 1996b; Giddens, 1998). The literature proposes that creating information rich environments (Hawley & Valli, 1999) focused on the technical, practical and critical (Kemmis, 2001) will support this endeavour. In the context of this study these ideas suggest the importance of focusing on teachers, classrooms, schools and the

wider education community and providing opportunities for exploration which might lead to new knowledge and new beginnings.

As indicated in the literature review there is an unhelpful gulf between academic and practitioner research (MacIntyre, 1999; Coulter & Wiens, 2002). Yeatman and Sachs (1995) suggest the importance of distinguishing between academic and practitioner/action research on the basis of orientation, test, mode of communication, intent and audience (see Table 2: The differences between academic and action research, p63). They argue that it is only by articulating the distinction that it might be possible to find a way in which the two kinds of research might complement each other. Arendt (1958) and Coulter and Wiens (2002) argue the importance of being both spectator and actor and in this study the researcher aimed to be both actor and spectator.

Given the commitment to gaining a deeper understanding about professional development and the Roundtable, it was clear from the beginning that this would be a qualitative research project—it was the richness and complexity of the Roundtable work which was significant—with the aim being to report the multiplicity of experiences as well as the differences and variations. Issues of quantity were not of paramount significance; yet having said this, experiences common to multiple locations were sought. The study was therefore based on the collection of qualitative data and employed qualitative methods for analysis and theory building. The key methods were document analysis, individual and group interviews and a researcher's journal.

In combining these techniques the intention was to map the complexity of what happened in the Western Melbourne Roundtable. Wolcott (1992:22, 160) describes this as producing a qualitative research 'tree' where different views can be gained from each branch and each branch represents a different qualitative strategy. The document analysis was closely connected to the Roundtable focus on case and commentary writing and the interviews reflected the many opportunities for conversation which were facilitated by the Roundtable. The researcher's journal was also closely connected to the Roundtable commitment to documenting practice and was used as a device for the researcher to mirror Roundtable practice. This made it possible to be both actor and spectator as Arendt (1958) and Coulter and Wiens

(2002) recommend. In this situation the focus was on the experience and dilemmas associated with conducting research. Each of the research activities is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

There are many criteria for evaluating research and decisions about which criteria to adopt are usually shaped by the particular paradigm or theory which underpins the work. For instance, a positivist/postpositivist paradigm demands internal and external validity while a constructivist paradigm is more likely to favour criteria such as trustworthiness, credibility, transferability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b:13). Refining this constructivist paradigm, Anderson and Herr (1999) have argued a validity framework for practitioner research which identifies five criteria or tests for validity: outcome, process, democratic, catalytic and dialogic validity; and within the context of a longitudinal study into school restructuring Kruger and colleagues (2001) report opportunities for each of these tests to be applied. Taking a critical standpoint such as that adopted by feminist, ethnic or Marxist theorists, research is more likely to be considered in terms of dialogical, race, class, gender, lived experience or caring criteria (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b:13). While starting from the position of assessing communicative action, Habermas (1996b:119, 131) applies the tests of comprehensibility, truth (accuracy), truthfulness (sincerity) and rightness (moral appropriateness); Niemi and Kemmis (1998a; Niemi & Kemmis, 1999; 2001) have used Habermas's framework to inform evaluative and action research projects. Noting the multiplicity of issues involved in selecting criteria Ely and her colleagues (1991, 1996) noted:

What seems important for researchers in any paradigm is to understand thoroughly what needs doing in order for their research to be trustworthy and to work to communicate that as clearly and as non-defensively as possible (Ely *et al.*, 1991, 1996:95).

Therefore, if the shape of the research suggests the criteria by which it is to be understood, and if the concerns identified by the Innovative Links Project, the Roundtable and the framework outlined at the end of the literature review were to be extended, then the issues of contextuality, communication, collaboration and reflection had to be included in any consideration of validity. In addition, if the

researcher was to be both actor and spectator then validity tests needed to respond to both aspects of the endeavour.

Trustworthiness was a primary concern for members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable both in terms of process and content. University researchers challenged the traditional divide between practitioner and academic researcher by seeking methodological solutions which valued collaboration and reflexivity. This concern and commitment can be seen in the multifaceted search for research outcomes that were accurate, useful and connected to local practice and the interests of practitioners and students. Therefore in seeking trustworthiness within this study it was important to plan for a collaborative verification process which involved the researcher and practitioners working together. Exploring and verifying the research propositions with the authors and members of school teams and then checking cross-site themes through group interviews achieved a level of trustworthiness and validity which was not possible for the researcher to achieve alone.

In order to address these concerns it was also crucial that whichever analysis strategies were adopted, the process—including the researcher's train of thought and work—had to be traceable. A simple process was required, one which could be applied consistently and repeated while still honouring the complexity and fluidity of practice in the Roundtable. This was checked by asking: In examining practice, how can I capture processes, steps, stages and movement over time?

Within the Roundtable a form of self-reflexivity was achieved by the school and university colleagues as they trained their gaze on themselves, and later engaged in discussions about ideology and methodology. The process made explicit their stance as both actors and spectators, both ideologically and methodologically. It has encouraged critique and problem solving around issues such as democratic relationships between university and teacher researchers, and questioning how choices are made.

Meeting both the demands of the Roundtable and the need for a framework for qualitative research triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a:214), the study has been designed to support the claim for both trustworthiness and validity on a number of levels.

- *Data triangulation* was planned through the use of a variety of data sources including cases and commentaries, interview transcripts and school reports.
- *Investigator triangulation* was planned by including the voices of the researcher and other Roundtable participants, document authors and members of teams.
- *Methodological triangulation* was planned through the use of multiple methods (document analysis, individual and group interviews and researcher's journal), the subsequent checking of research propositions identified during document analysis, and the subsequent conduct of individual and group interviews.
- *Theoretical triangulation* was addressed through the application of multiple perspectives to the data as suggested at the end of the literature review.

The research process

The remainder of this chapter describes the research process which was adopted in this study. It focuses on each stage of the research process describing the associated activities, the connection to principles outlined in the first section of this chapter, the purpose of adopting each strategy and the process of implementation (Miles & Huberman, 1994:12). The first stage involved collecting and working with the Roundtable documents, the second involved conducting a series of interviews with individual members of the Roundtable and the third involved three group interviews. Throughout these three stages a researcher's journal was maintained and the process of analysis and interpretation was pursued in an ongoing and cyclical way.

The combined strategies outlined below in Table 5 and described in detail in the following pages led to a gradual revelation of information and ideas and a deeper understanding about professional development and the work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable, ultimately providing an opportunity to develop a new model for professional development.

Table 5: Relationship between stages of research, research activity and the production of research documents

Stage of research	Research activity	Research document/s produced	Appendix
Working with documents	Collect documents and audit by document type, team, date	Document register	Appendix 1: Document Register, p376.
	For each document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sketch and thread ▪ Translate into research proposition ▪ Bundle propositions 	Propositional statements for each document	For example see Appendix 2: , p385.
	Bundle document statements for each team	Team portraits (These documents were extended after interviews) Team profiles and mini biographies of participants	For example see Appendix 3: A portrait of ILP at Eagle Secondary College, p391.
	Identify cross-team themes	Theme statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ case writing ▪ working together ▪ reflection 	For example see Appendix 4: Case writing, p428.
Individual interviews	Link emerging themes to interview questions	Schedule of questions	Appendix 5: Schedule of questions for individual interviews, p440.
	Conduct interviews	Interview transcripts	For example see Appendix 6: Interview with Laila, p442.
	Connect theme statements with interview transcripts	Three cases of Roundtable practice: Chris' reflections on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ case writing ▪ working together ▪ action and reflection 	See Appendix 7: Chris' reflections on working together, p462, Appendix 8: Chris' reflections on case writing, p464, and Appendix 9: Chris' recollections about action and reflection, p466.
Group interviews	Conduct interviews using Chris' reflections as discussion starters	Interview transcripts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ case writing ▪ working together ▪ action and reflection 	For example see Appendix 10: Case writing interview transcript, p469.
Exploration and reporting themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connect: ▪ research propositions ▪ individual interview transcripts ▪ group interview transcripts ▪ literature 	Draft chapters	

Working with Roundtable documents

The first stage of the research involved collecting and working with the Roundtable documents and there were a number of steps involved. The first step involved compiling a register of all documents used during this study and it was created by detailing each document collected and entering the document details or factual attributes (Kelle, 1995:Ch 6) onto a spreadsheet (see Appendix 1: Document Register, p376). The register not only served as a record of all the documents used within this study but acted as an organisational device for sorting, exploring, grouping and relating the documents by category. This provided the possibility of using the register as a tool for analysis and for theorising.

Together, the Roundtable members produced, collected and archived both individual and group records ranging from official documents through to personal records (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a). These written records of the Western Melbourne Roundtable became key artefacts of the project. As a collection they represented a unique record of a school–university partnership, describing the Roundtable structure and mode of operation as well as revealing the interests and actions of Roundtable members during the project. These materials were an integrated aspect of the action research activities of the Roundtable. The first step in this study was to collect the documents and records of the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

Importantly, the documents enabled different ways of looking at what happened in the Roundtable. The official records of the Western Melbourne Roundtable contributed to a chronological and contextual understanding of the activities undertaken: the way the group was organised; the issues for the group; and the nature and development of the partnerships. The written cases and associated commentaries built on this historical and contextual picture by representing teachers' voices describing their Roundtable experience. They gave a personal view of each individual as teacher, researcher and collaborator. The interview transcripts record focused personal and group reflections, and as such provide evidence of the reflective and reflexive process undertaken by the group. Finally, a number of documents produced by Roundtable members about the work of individuals and the group were published in a variety of contexts. These documents gave an indication of how the group members interpreted their work and

how they presented themselves to a broader audience. Each group of documents is described below.

Official records

The first group of documents which were collected were the files and official records (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:58) of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. They comprised materials kept between 1993 and 1998 and began with the lead up to applying for funding and the development of a submission and also included: guidelines; agendas and minutes of meetings; forum, seminar and conference proceedings; correspondence; discussion papers; reports including financial dispersal and accountability; and photographs. In addition to these central Roundtable records which were meticulously filed by the Roundtable convenor, each team kept their own records including their original proposals, policies, planning and evaluation documents and notes. Final reports were also prepared by four of the five school teams. In some instances individual members of the Roundtable kept personal records and when combined with the central and team records they provided an impressively comprehensive set of documents.

Another group of documents were concept maps; there was one for each of the six teams and in some instances they were incorporated into the school reports. Designed as part of the reflective process, the task of constructing the maps helped people to look back over the three years of the project and encouraged visual depictions of the scope and nature of the work undertaken within each team. In addition to describing the scope of each teams' work they gave some idea about the nature of the experience including participation, emotions and change over time.

As well as providing detail about school settings and the priorities identified by each team, these concept maps also provided a sense of place and time, contributing to an understanding of the Roundtable participants' conceptualisation of the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable. They gave a strong sense of the project over time, the activities which marked different stages and the relationship between activities at different levels. They also gave an insight into the connections between policy, planning and evaluation for each school with the final reports explicitly or implicitly presenting their perceptions about their engagement with change.

Cases and commentaries

As case and commentary writing was adopted by the Roundtable as a strategy for documenting practice within cycles of action research, these documents were the second group of documents collected during this study. Over 100 cases and as many associated commentaries (Shulman, 1992; Wassermann, 1993b) were authored by members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable with seventy-four cases and sixty-one commentaries being collected as part of this study. The cases are personal narratives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:58) and/or reflections on critical incidents connected to teachers' work. They are teachers' descriptions, interpretations and in some instances theorising about teaching and learning and therefore shed light on how the authors made sense of their world and their work. The commentaries are responses to the cases. Teachers, in the spirit of a professional dialogue, responded to their colleagues' cases, making observations, raising issues and asking questions which promoted further consideration and reflection.

Cases and commentaries became the major focus for all Roundtable activities especially for discussion and thinking within teams and at Roundtable meetings. Members of the Roundtable also used selected written cases in activities such as lectures, workshops and forums. Over three years, members of the Roundtable shared their documented practice both locally and through a nationally coordinated network. Where available, records of the use of cases have been incorporated into the study.

Cases and commentaries are connected to every aspect of this thesis. They were central to reaching a deeper understanding about the experiences of the Western Melbourne Roundtable and gaining new insights about the links between professional development, practitioner research and change in education. They were an extremely rich resource because they provided evidence about what the teachers did, why they did it and how they understood their work (Dalmau & Guðjónsdóttir, 2002). A description of how cases came to be used and the process of their introduction into the work of the Roundtable is provided in Chapters 4 and 5 and a detailed exploration of the case writing process is included in Chapter 6. The importance of case writing in Roundtable partnerships is explored in Chapter 7, while the connection between case writing and the action research process is explored in Chapter 8.

Transcripts of collaborative interviews and dialogues

In addition to the cases and commentaries there were a number of transcripts which were records of taped Roundtable conversations. One particular transcript recorded the conversation of a team after they had read a case together. While case conversations were a common occurrence in Roundtable activities only one transcript was collected during this study. It proved a valuable insight into the process and nature of such conversations and included detail which made connections between practice, case writing and school context, and confirmed the detail of other documents collected at that school.

In addition, a set of five interview transcripts were collected. They record five collaborative interviews which were conducted, one with each school team. Towards the end of the Innovative Links Project the Western Melbourne Roundtable decided to reflect on their experience of case writing and subsequently conducted a series of interviews between November 1996 and March 1997. The group designed questions and then split into groups with several members of the Roundtable visiting each school team to conduct a group interview based on the agreed questions. These transcripts were never used by the Roundtable as the project funding ceased and so for the first time the interviews transcripts have been used in this study to provide valuable information about how individuals and groups experienced and used the case writing activity.

Published documents

Finally there was a group of public or published documents which were authored by members of the Roundtable or written about the Roundtable by others working in conjunction with the Roundtable. The most notable publication was *Teachers Write: A handbook for teachers writing about changing classrooms for a changing world* (Western Melbourne Roundtable, 1997). Not only did this book include 16 cases and associated commentaries but, based on the experience of the Roundtable, it highlighted issues of concern—working with cases and commentaries, talking about other people's work, connecting case writing with professional development, leading case discussions and connecting with the bigger picture through learning organisations and teacher professionalism. Published in 1997 by the National Schools Network, *Teachers Write* also gives an insight into the broad themes which reflected

the concerns of teachers in the Western Melbourne Roundtable. Within the context of this study *Teachers Write* was an important starting point and helped guide the identification and grouping of issues as the study developed.

The *Big Link*, the national Innovative Links Project journal was also significant in terms of the published work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. Most editions of the *Big Link* included a summary of recent Roundtable activities and also featured articles from various roundtables. Members of the Roundtable contributed to this publication. The *Big Link* included articles which gave an insight into issues which were emerging across roundtables and connected the work in Australia with the work of overseas educators. The national activities of the project were also featured.

Academic writing based on the use of cases and the broader work of the group was also produced by members of the Roundtable. All conference papers and journal articles were written collaboratively (Ryan, 1996; Cherednichenko *et al.*, 1998b). In some instances school and university colleagues worked together to detail the work of the Roundtable (Fiocchi, Kruger & Grundy, 1994) and in others university colleagues collaborated in their descriptions of the application of Roundtable ideas to other situations, most notably in teacher education (Cherednichenko *et al.*, 1998a; Kruger *et al.*, 2001).

Once the documents were collected the challenge was to design a process for working with the documents. Document analysis was included in the research methodology in order to record the teachers'/researchers' understanding of each document and to achieve a deeper understanding about what teachers had written. The process needed to identify themes and collect evidence which contributed to deeper understanding about the connections between professional development, case writing, collaboration and change in the work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

The process also needed to incorporate and mirror both the project and research principles outlined earlier in this chapter. On the one hand it needed to be respectful of the Roundtable participants, the processes and the resultant pieces of practitioner writing; if at all possible the aim was to design a process which incorporated collaborative and reflexive activities which would offset the problems created by an external researcher. On the other hand the methodology had to maximise the chances

of finding an answer to the research question: *What do these documents reveal about roundtables, specifically the connections between professional development, change, action research and partnerships?*

The usual approach at this point in a qualitative study would be to undertake exhaustive coding of the documents. Techniques including factual coding, referential coding and open coding could have been employed by focusing on words, sentences and paragraphs. However methodological dilemmas emerged with the first attempts to code cases and commentaries (see Excerpts from researcher's journal, p515). After much consideration and trialing of alternatives, the methodology from a longitudinal study (Kruger *et al.*, 2001) was adapted for use in this study. It promised a respectful strategy for analysing practitioner accounts of practice as well as a traceable process for identifying patterns and connections in practice thereby facilitating the identification of tentative/fuzzy yet generalisable research findings.

The methodology used in the longitudinal study was committed to keeping the teachers' texts whole (Kruger *et al.*, 2001:) and ensuring that the language used by authors was the basis for creating summaries, key words and research findings. It was conceived as:

...a recursive process from a reading of the cases, through a comparison of contextualised understandings, agreement on collective explanations and then a re-interpretation of the cases to refine explanations (Kruger *et al.*, 2001:41).

The longitudinal study suggested new activities and a new vocabulary for an alternative research practice. Based on an examination of cases, the first step involved creating a 'sketch' and a 'thread' of practice. To create a sketch the teachers underlined key phrases in the texts/cases. When combined these phrases became a sketch of practice. The thread was created by identifying key words from each segment of the sketch so that a practical explanation emerged. Following a subsequent collaborative validation process a number of recurring themes were identified and representative research propositions were drafted (Kruger *et al.*, 2001:44-46).

Prior to adapting the analytical process from the longitudinal study for use in this study of the Roundtable, consideration had to be given to the similarities and differences between the two studies. The complete collaborative process could not be

replicated in this study but needed to be adapted while still searching for alternatives which would address the interconnected principles of respect and collaborative generation of new knowledge. Any change had to keep teachers' practice and voice central in the research whilst also providing a process for tracing the identification of research findings.

In the first instance, both the longitudinal study and this study were focused on case writing. It therefore seemed that in broad terms the methodology could be applied to the cases produced by the Roundtable, with the added possibility of the methodology being applied to commentaries and other Roundtable documents. But one distinction between the longitudinal study and this study of the Roundtable was immediately clear—the longitudinal study, like the original work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable, had been negotiated, collaborative, practitioner research whereas this study was designed and conducted by an external researcher. It was important to consider the implications of a researcher, as distinct from the practitioner researchers in the longitudinal study, undertaking the sketching and threading activity.

Sketching, threading and crafting research propositions

Yet there were still many questions: How could practice be described without overlaying the researcher's perceptions? How could practice be described and a distinction be made between the researcher's and teachers' perceptions? How could the researcher create keywords and 'bundling' for coding categories? How would the researcher let teachers speak for themselves? By keeping the cases intact was the researcher really letting teachers speak for themselves? Which data analysis strategies would keep teachers' voices central?

The process of sketching and threading became a crucial aspect of this study because it ensured that the focus remained on the words and ideas of the case authors rather than slipping into coding based on the researcher's preconceptions. In the search for research propositions this process optimised the chances for trustworthiness.

However transferring the strategy from practitioner sketching and threading to researcher sketching and threading raised a number of questions: Was there more than one way to sketch and thread a case? How could the researcher be sure that the sketch and thread accurately reflected the intentions and ideas of the case author? What was

included and excluded in the process of sketching and threading and bundling? Did the sketching and threading undertaken by a researcher provide a foundation for crafting research propositions and statements? Because it was not possible to check every case with every author a procedure was designed which made it possible to trace the researcher's work and identify the source of any research propositions which were made. The work was recorded in a table format as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Case—sketch—thread—research proposition (E:06)

Case/Sketch	Thread	Research proposition
My case highlights the welfare and discipline approach taken by our team in the context of the Team Small Group method.	welfare and discipline	Teachers develop approaches for dealing with student welfare and discipline.
As a teaching team, I believe we click very well. No-one is held up as an expert in the group: we are educators first and teachers of Science, Maths and English second. There's a mixture of backgrounds and experience on the team, and although there is only one female , the male teachers are perceived by students in a nurturing and counselling role . We also realise that the more the work is shared , the less work there is and the better the team functions .	teaching team clicks	Teams click when teachers are seen as educators rather than experts or method teachers, where there is diversity of background and experience, where male and female teachers challenge stereotypical roles and where the work is shared.

The first column contained the case text entered one paragraph to a cell. Where the document was not available in electronic format the paragraphs were numbered on the original and matched with numbered cells. In this column the research activity involved highlighting key phrases to create a summary of the case. When combined these highlighted phrases created a summary of the case, a sketch of practice. (Kruger *et al.*, 2001:43-44)

The second column contained a 'thread' of practice which was formed by isolating key words in the sketch to 'tell the story' so providing a brief explanation for each segment of the sketch. It was important to review the sketch and thread to ensure strong connections. These sketches and threads described critical incidents in

teachers' work with colleagues and students. Sometimes the stories involved a train of events while in others multiple observations about a single event were made.

The third column recorded the 'research propositions' (statements of understanding) which had been explicitly or implicitly identified by the case authors. The words highlighted as the sketch and those identified for the thread were often key words in the research propositions and use of them in the translation from case to proposition helped to ensure that the meaning of the author was maintained. Use of the sketch and thread also helped to reveal the timing, movement or sequence of events.

Behind the sketching, threading and crafting of propositions sat several research questions: *What is the author's main message? What is the opinion, interpretation or theory being expressed by the author?*

In the instances where commentaries accompanied cases research propositions were also crafted paragraph by paragraph. It was interesting to note that compared with the cases, most commentaries did not require sketching and threading. However because they were particularly rich in their explicit expression of opinions, interpretations and theorising they were recorded as research propositions.

Aiming for respect also meant that there needed to be a constant questioning of the process: What is the basis for identification of key phrases? Does the sketch represent the intentions of the author? Are there multiple ways of highlighting one piece of writing?

Seeking to identify the author's intentions was not a precise activity and over time it was obvious that it was nearly always possible to change/improve what had already been done. Personal knowledge and experience both assisted and interfered with the task of interpreting and understanding and of course this was not static. A book read or conversation with a supervisor, friend or colleague could lead to thinking about a document in a new way.

An example of this process is depicted below in Table 7.

Table 7: Commentary to research proposition (E:06)

Commentary	Research proposition
<p>I have read a couple of cases now which describe a student who has left the school. Is there an unusually high rate of students who leave the school and either transfer to another or drop-out altogether? Are these teachers more ‘connected’ to their students so that they feel more responsible? Does this impede objectivity? Is objectivity desirable/necessary? What factors are present in the school which encourage this behaviour? Most of the cases which describe this phenomenon question the teachers’ actions, the role of parents and the structure of table groups and teaching teams. Yet this case poses a slightly different perspective. If the close nature of the school structure is such that it puts pressure on students to perform, there are, as a consequence, no places to hide which may be more readily found in a more traditional structure. Exposed, the student and the teacher have to find common ground on which to work and to relate. Obviously this worked well while the student remained on task and teachers remained flexible. Was the group so supportive that the student began to feel there would be no consequences? I am curious about the reasons the student may have for not wanting to return to the school?</p>	<p>Schools which have a traditional structure may have places to hide that are not readily found in a school where closeness puts pressure on students to perform. Exposed in this way, students and teachers have to find common ground on which to work and relate. This works well while the students remain on task and teachers remain flexible.</p>

Given these observations, new questions arose: *Are there any principles which would guide sketching and threading? Are there criteria by which a sketch and thread could be judged as trustworthy?* Based on the experience in this study it seems important to ensure that:

- those ideas which have influenced the context and the conduct of the research are clearly articulated
- the sketch and the case tell the same story
- the sketch rings true

- alternative sketch constructions are considered
- the sketch respects the intentions of the original case
- similarities and distinctions are identified between associated cases and commentaries.

By recording the text segments (sketch), the key words (thread) and the research propositions side by side the connections were clear. It was possible to check the process and adjust any aspect. With the added step of distinguishing between the practitioner and external researcher propositions another level of respect was included through the recognition of the interpretations and theorising articulated by practitioners. The idea that document analysis was traceable or replicable was important within the framework of collaboration as well as being significant in the search for trustworthiness and validity. Any mapping or synthesising work undertaken by university researchers will be bounded by their knowledge, skills and the research questions they ask at the time of inquiry. When looking from one perspective this may appear to be a weakness in the research methodology. This would be true if the research claim was presented as a definitive finding. If however, a different researcher, at a different time, with different questions was able to replicate or was at least able to trace the work then the methodology provides the possibility of an even deeper understanding.

Bundling ideas in cases...case connected propositions

In the longitudinal study the teachers, having completed the sketch and thread, wrote a summary statement for each case. However, in this study it seemed extremely difficult and inappropriate to represent a case in one statement. Writing such a statement ran the chance of narrowing the understanding when it was not necessary to do so. The real need was to collate and connect the research propositions for each case, making sure to include the propositions from any associated commentaries. Therefore for each case the propositions were combined and each group of ideas was given a heading or sub heading. The aim was to connect statements that related to each other and to regroup the information using an assertive propositional genre—a confirmation and refinement of the translation from the first person narrative to an assertive research voice. Appendix 3: A portrait of ILP at Eagle Secondary College (p391),

demonstrates how this process was conducted for the combined cases from Eagle Secondary College and a short excerpt is included here in Table 8.

Table 8: Combined research propositions (excerpt from E:06)

Team Small Group, welfare and discipline

The Team Small Group (TSG) welfare and discipline approach is effective and strong because it is consistent. It enables teachers to support each other and the students, and it gives a consistent message which is reassuring to students. The responsibility is to the group, not just an individual. It is hard to assess whether this strategy may have an opposite effect, causing a student to leave.

team cohesion

Teams click when teachers are seen as educators rather than experts or method teachers, where there is diversity of background and experience, where male and female teachers challenge stereotypical roles and where the work is shared.

building and maintaining teaching teams

Although it is preferable for one teacher to take responsibility for a specific problem involving a student and their family, working in a small team means that all teachers have enough insight to step in if the situation will not wait for the right teacher to become available. Teachers regularly exchange information about students in informal situations such as the staffroom and formal discussions between teachers ensure that there is a common and consistent approach which is known to students. The talk is constructive, not disparaging. Teachers engage in active planning based on the formal and informal discussions about students' behaviour and needs.

teachers' professional knowledge

Teachers are flexible in organising learning programs for students who are at risk of leaving school. They monitor the situation regularly. Low achievers, even though they can be unreceptive to learning, and work only when they are interested and confident of their abilities, can nevertheless be successful in a leadership role. Teachers give these students lots of responsibility.

teacher student relationships

It is hard for students to be invisible in the TSG structure. The close nature of the structure puts pressure on students to perform and removes hiding places which may be found in more traditional structures. Exposed, the student and the teacher have to find common ground on which to work and to relate. Obviously this works well while the student remains on task and teachers remain flexible.

The significance of the outcome lies in the open process which can be checked and repeated by another person. In this instance the conceptual foundation for grouping ideas comes from the framework established for this study but if repeated using another framework then an extended and deeper understanding would be achieved. This process is clear and the emerging portraits and analysis can be connected to a defined and clearly articulated framework.

Compiling team portraits

The next step in working with the documents involved identifying headings and sub headings and connecting statements across multiple documents from one school team. The result of this process was a team portrait for each of the six teams that made up

the Roundtable. Appendix 3: A portrait of ILP at Eagle Secondary College (p391), is one of the six portraits. While not a collaborative activity in this study, this aspect of the methodology could be likened to the connections that were made between documents during the collaborative validation phase and the drafting of school case studies in the longitudinal study.

By connecting statements across the combined cases from one team it was possible to achieve a detailed picture of the interests and concerns of each group, to form a very rich understanding of thought and activity and to identify areas of agreement and difference in the focus and exploration undertaken by each team. In carrying out this work it was also possible to identify detail which related to the research questions for this study (professional development, action research, change, partnerships, etc) and when this occurred statements were also grouped under those headings. The final result, a collection of the combined research propositions from each team, provided a team portrait where the headings were generated, in most instances, from the content of the statements.

Within each team portrait there was also a lot of contextual detail about the participating organisations and the people who participated in this study. Therefore it was possible to build a picture of the University, each school, the teams and the teachers and this detail was collected to form the profiles which make up Chapter 4 and serve as an introduction to the Western Melbourne Roundtable. Because specific data was not sought from each person or organisation these profiles are mini biographies and are not always consistent in terms of coverage, instead reporting the detail which teachers felt was relevant to include in the documentation of their work.

Identifying cross-team themes and compiling theme statements

By this stage the methodological process had resulted in six team portraits. They were structured by the headings and subheadings suggested by the grouped research propositions and through an examination of the combined headings some broad themes were evident. Every team portrait had a group of research propositions that related to case writing and these were collected. Further themes included structures and procedures; activities; people and partnerships; teacher research; and change and professional development. In addition there was detailed material relating to each

team's focus area—Team Small Group (TSG) and teaching teams; literacy and numeracy; negotiated curriculum; multiage grades in the junior years of primary schooling and student self assessment. Across these areas of team focus common themes were evident. In more than one situation teachers had examined the importance of including students' voices, opportunities for students to work together and possibilities for rethinking pedagogy.

By working in this way with these diverse and richly descriptive documentary research artefacts, it was possible to reach a high level of detail and complexity in describing and understanding what had happened in the Western Melbourne Roundtable. By grounding abstract concerns such as partnerships, practitioner research, professional development and school change in actual people, places and situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) new knowledge about the Roundtable was identified.

Interviews

The document analysis led into individual and group interviews. Having crafted propositional statements, team portraits and theme statements it was important to take this work back to the teacher–authors. The interviews gave the researcher an opportunity to describe the work that was being undertaken and distribute the documents that had been produced. The relevant team portraits were given to each of the interview participants and they were invited to read them at their convenience and respond if they wished. While a highly transparent process had been adopted for the document analysis, distributing the work provided an opportunity to check the trustworthiness of research propositions and the headings identified during the bundling activities.

The interviews also provided an opportunity to engage in conversations with the document authors in order to verify and expand on the knowledge which had been revealed by teachers in their documents. The decision to conduct interviews was taken after consideration of other options including questionnaires, surveys and phone interviews. Face-to-face interviews were chosen as a strategy because they mirrored the work of the Roundtable, adding a dialogical, collaborative and reflexive dimension to the research process. The interviews were designed to check the

significance of the ideas that were emerging and to validate and challenge the research claims identified by the researcher.

The interviews were also seen as a technique for gaining a deeper understanding of individual and group perspectives. Fontana and Frey (1994:361) argue that interviewing makes sense as a method for collecting qualitative data because interviewing is interaction and sociology is the study of interaction. This connection between research methodology and context is especially true of this study of the Western Melbourne Roundtable which was built on an understanding of the importance of providing opportunities for teachers to engage in conversations about teaching and learning.

Two kinds of interviews were employed in this study: face-to-face individual interviews and face-to-face group interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994:361). The individual and group interviews each played a different and important part in achieving the goal of meaning construction by providing different opportunities to clarify what the narratives meant to the people who had created and enjoyed each others' documents. The interviews helped to short circuit and challenge any predetermined ideas imposed by the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:58). The interviews in this study combined the characteristics of semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994:361-2). They were designed to further construct, refine, develop and verify.

Prior to conducting the interviews it was important to think about the interview context, to consider which principles might apply and to identify any factors which might stimulate or inhibit responses.

The first issue was participation. A decision was made to include any Roundtable participants who wished to participate: letters inviting participation in individual and/or group interviews were sent to all identifiable and locatable members of the six teams which made up the Roundtable. Table 9 shows the membership of the Roundtable teams and a breakdown of the participation by team in both individual and group interviews.

Ten of the sixty seven identified Roundtable participants were unable to be contacted as they had either resigned, taken extended leave or were otherwise untraceable and so in the end fifty-seven letters of invitation were sent out. Nineteen positive responses were received and interviews were conducted with all those who offered to participate—18 individual interviews were conducted and 14 Roundtable members participated in three group interviews. There was participation from each of the teams with at least two responses received from every team. The representation of men and women and of primary, secondary and tertiary participants closely reflected the composition of the Roundtable, although the percentage of males who responded was higher than the percentage of females.

Table 9: Participation in Roundtable teams, individual interviews and group interviews

Education sector	Team	Number in team			Individual interviews			Group interviews		
		male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total
Primary	RPS	3	4	7	1	1	2		1	1
	KPS	4	13	17		2	2		2	2
	HPS	1	12	13	1	2	3	1	1	2
Secondary	ESC	6	9	15	2	2	4	2	2	4
	FSC	4	5	9	1	1	2	1	1	2
Tertiary	VU	2	4	6	2	3	5	2	1	3
TOTALS		20	47	67	7	11	18	6	8	14

Participation of 5 out of 6 university colleagues was a high percentage response in comparison to primary and secondary teachers but it was seen as positive because it resulted in the participation of a university colleague attached to each of the five school teams. The higher representation of university teachers might be explained in a number of ways: university colleagues may have had greater flexibility in their working day; they may have maintained greater connections and/or commitment to the Roundtable work whereas teachers in schools may have moved on to new and

unconnected projects and schools; and research in general may have been a higher priority for them.

In addition to seeking participation, and as noted above, it was important that all members of the Roundtable were well informed about the study. To achieve this end a description of the study (see Appendix 11: Information relating to a research project about the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable, p492) was distributed with the letter of invitation. The information sheet outlined the research activities, the nature of the project, ethical considerations, the processes for briefing and consent, details about the conduct of interviews and details about anonymity and confidentiality. The letters of invitation also included the proposed interview questions (Appendix 5: Schedule of questions for individual interviews, p440). These questions were based on the key research questions and sought to check the significance of the Western Melbourne Roundtable and to explore the emerging themes indicated by the document analysis.

Having provided the relevant information it was important to create the right atmosphere for each interview and this involved considering the best time and place for interviews. While the decision was made by each interviewee, the researcher encouraged teachers to select a time and place that would be conducive to conversation and minimise the risk of being interrupted. Most interviewees invited the researcher to conduct the individual interviews at their schools. While a quiet, private space is often hard to find in a school, each participant went to considerable lengths to make arrangements which meant they were undisturbed for the duration of the interview. The length of interviews was also an issue and they were planned to be approximately one hour in duration. Where consent of the participants was gained, the interviews were taped, transcribed and returned to participants to check for accuracy.

Another critical issue involved consideration about relationships and presentation in the interview context. Fontana and Frey, in the context of developing a new relationship between interviewer and interviewee, observe that for an interviewer:

The decision of how to present oneself is very important, because after one's presentational self is 'cast' it leaves a profound impression on the respondents and has a great influence on the success (or failure) of the study (1994:367).

However in the context of this study, where the author of this thesis and the two supervisors had all been members of the Roundtable, the existing relationships seemed to facilitate the lead up to the interviews. People knew each other and had built trusting relationships during the project and this seemed to reduce the possible gulf between the researcher and the interview participants. However there was still a question about the power relationship between interview participants and the researcher—who was after all collecting information which would be used to retell their stories. Fontana and Frey (1994:361) with reference to Benny and Hughes (1996) suggest that all parties in an interview tend to behave as though they have equal status even though this might not be the case.

It was therefore important to reconfirm the trust which had grown through the life of the Roundtable. This was achieved by presenting concrete examples of the work which had been undertaken in the document analysis phase. The aim was to show how the research process—the sketching, threading and bundling—was thorough, trustworthy, would keep teachers' voices central and had been designed to uphold the principle of respect which had driven the conduct of the Roundtable. As Fontana and Frey (1994:367) noted, 'Gaining trust is essential to an interviewer's success, and even once it is gained it can be very fragile indeed.'

Contrasting with Fontana's and Frey's (1994:367) view that the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is 'cast', Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis in discussing the art and science of portraiture argue for a research process—one which is built on productive and benign relationships:

It is through relationships between the portraitist and actors that access is sought and given, connections made, contracts of reciprocity and responsibility (both formal and informal) developed, trust built, intimacy negotiated, data collected, and knowledge constructed (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997:135).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997:146-148) raise the issue of empathetic regard in research relationships, talking about empathy in terms of identification, as an impulse for insight, as respect and open acceptance of actors' views and as intimacy which they believe is critical for honouring multiple perspectives. They argue that empathy in research relationships should not be confused with sympathy but can be recognised

by the quality of attention, connection of life experiences and deep understanding. Evidence of empathy had already emerged in the document analysis phase of this study and was especially obvious in the interaction between cases and commentaries. It was important to continue the pattern of empathetic relationships and to explore opportunities for incorporating this principle of ethical research.

There was also an issue about the role of the researcher in the interviews. Fontana and Frey (1994:364) describe the role of the interviewer in structured interviews as being ‘neutral and building a balanced rapport...being casual, friendly yet directive and impersonal...being an interested listener, rewarding but not evaluating responses’. While the interviews under discussion here were not structured these ideas were also applied to the semi-structured and open interviews conducted as part of this study. It was important not to suggest answers, give personal opinions and views or interpret questions yet the existing personal relationships demanded acknowledgment and this replaced the impersonality which was suggested by Fontana and Frey. It was nevertheless still important to ensure the interviews were procedurally consistent and to reduce the possibility that the interview participants would give answers in order to please the interviewer or to feel they had to hide or omit information. The interview participants also needed to feel free to provide both rational and emotional responses.

Confidentiality was also given a high profile in all the interviews, with the researcher giving an undertaking that the names of people, schools and any other identifying information would remain confidential.

Individual interviews

The purpose of the individual interviews was to check with Roundtable participants—to ask about their recollections and to confirm and clarify their perceptions of what was significant about the Western Melbourne Roundtable. The aim was to collect additional information which would build a deeper and more complex understanding of roundtable practice at an individual, team and roundtable level. In particular the individual interviews connected to the documents written by each author, the six team portraits and the major themes which were emerging in these research documents. To this end the individual interviews included reporting, describing, storytelling,

checking, clarifying, exploring, expanding, interpreting and theorising. Ely and her colleagues, in the context of their studies argued the importance of checking:

There is no question but that we are wholehearted about another aspect of being credible: checking out interpretations periodically with the very people we are studying. This is called member-checking by Lincoln and Guba (1985:329), and it is, in their view, at the heart of establishing credibility...During the final month of my study I interviewed ...as part of the process I also shared some of my emerging findings...I felt I was at this time closer to recognizing the consistent patterns...and more equipped with knowledge that allowed me to elicit detailed descriptions and comparisons from the informants by introducing explicit examples of what had happened. Obtaining feedback about my findings in these interviews helped me to establish credibility, but it also deepened and substantiated data gathering in other ways (Ely *et al.*, 1991, 1996:165).

Because the aim of the interviews was to build on the document analysis consideration was given to the possibility of connecting the interviews with the process and outcomes of the document analysis phase. Could the team portraits be taken to the interviews for validation and checking? In this scenario the interviews would become dialogues, stimulated by the team portraits, which might validate and/or challenge the propositions crafted by the researcher. These documents were lengthy and so, giving consideration to existing demands on teachers' time, it was decided that to ask interview participants to undertake this amount of reading prior to the interviews was inappropriate.

Another option was the possibility of asking case authors to replicate the sketching, threading and bundling process which had been carried out by the researcher. This option was attractive because it would have provided a comparison and therefore an understanding of methodological accuracy on a document by document basis. This option would also have been extremely time consuming and would have severely restricted and controlled the nature of the contribution by each of the participants. The process also ran the risk of being very artificial for the participants. Another problem was that the process could only be undertaken with those who had volunteered to participate, raising questions about how to deal with those cases that had not been checked with authors.

Traditionally interviews are based around a set of questions but as Fontana and Frey (1994:361) note, ‘asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it might seem at first’. In this study initial consideration was given to asking specific questions in each interview, connecting them to the sketches, keywords and propositions in the documents authored by the person being interviewed. This was a complicated strategy, requiring 18 different sets of questions. This created problems with consistency because not all authors were being interviewed. Another concern with this option was the possibility of the researcher’s work, opinions, ideas and themes interfering with ‘natural’ recollections and responses. This suggested that a simpler, less directive approach should be taken by adopting broad ‘open’ questions as the stimulus for the interview; this was the option which was selected in the end.

Using the *Schedule of questions for interviews* (Appendix 5: Schedule of questions for individual interviews, p440), which was circulated prior to the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their Roundtable experience and Roundtable artefacts such as cases, commentaries and interview transcripts. In the first instance they were asked the very broad question: What was significant about the Western Melbourne Roundtable? This question provided the opportunity for each participant to identify what was most important for them about their participation in the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

It was then possible to connect their recollections and interests to the themes that had been identified by the researcher. As an alternative to the dot points listed on the *Schedule of questions for interviews* a pictorial version of themes was used as a prompt during the interviews (Appendix 5: Schedule of questions for individual interviews, p440). The picture also provided opportunities for identifying further themes.

During each interview it was also important to report to participants about the conduct of the research to date, to reiterate the information which had been provided in the information handout (see Appendix 11: Information relating to a research project about the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable, p492) and to outline the purpose and role of the interview in relation to the project. In undertaking this task the process which had been developed for working with the documents was described and participants were given a copy of the relevant team

portrait. Participants were asked if they had any observations, suggestions or questions about the project or the interview. Prior to the questions being asked they were given a notebook and pen and encouraged to identify any issue that they particularly wanted to discuss during the interview. Any notes were checked before the interview ended to ensure that the questions had not stopped them from discussing issues they felt were important. The details of the register of participants were checked.

Group interviews

It was anticipated that a number of key issues would emerge from the combined documentary analysis and the individual interview data. The expectation was that some issues would suggest further exploration of particular sites, subjects, topics, questions and/or themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:54) and that these would be identified as a focus for group interviews. Depending on the number of issues that were identified it was expected that between three and five group interviews would be conducted.

Following the individual interviews the transcripts were translated from first person accounts to research propositions using the same process that had been employed during the document analysis. This resulted in a new set of research propositions which were then re-bundled with the propositions from the team portraits. As this process unfolded, three major themes began to emerge: case writing; working together; and action and reflection. The range of ideas connected to each theme were collected, connected to the literature and the analytic framework and formed into draft chapters.

These drafts became the foundation for further exploration and questioning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:54) in three group interviews. In research terms the group interviews provided methodological triangulation with the document analysis and the individual interviews. The purpose of the group interviews was phenomenological (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994) in that specific, significant issues and theories identified by the researcher and teacher researchers in the study were explored and interpreted in greater depth. Group interviews provided an opportunity for:

...systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in formal or informal situations...group interviewing is not meant to replace individual interviewing, but it is an option that deserves consideration because it can provide another level of data gathering or a perspective on a research problem not available through individual interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994:364).

The intention in using this research technique was to take the cross-site themes which had emerged back to Roundtable members for verification, refinement and further exploration. Fontana and Frey (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a:364-5) note that group interviews, as a qualitative research strategy, can be data rich because they are recall aiding, cumulative, elaborative and draw on group diversity. In addition they can be stimulating for participants and they have the advantage of being inexpensive and flexible. The group interviews, conceived in terms of an explicit shared reflection between participants in the Western Melbourne Roundtable, were the final stage in checking the main themes emerging in the study.

As with the individual interviews there was a question about how best to organise the group interviews to maximise the chances of checking and expanding understanding. The challenge for the group interviews was to make the most of having a group of people sitting around a table. In designing a process it was important to make sure that each person had a chance to speak without being interrupted and that issues of concern to individuals and the group could be explored in some detail. It seemed that the best way to conceptualise this situation was not as an informal interview but a structured conversation.

The question then became one of stimulating participants to discuss their recollections together. The first option considered was to draft a set of questions, based on the draft chapters, that would be used in a structured and/or semi-structured format. Pursuing this option resulted in a long list of questions and it seemed that such a list might get in the way of conversation. Another option was to identify several key questions but this seemed to narrow the possibilities for conversation. Using this strategy the role of the interviewer would have been somewhat directive, presenting connections, distinctions and theories and seeking responses from the participants to the threads of practice and research propositions. These options did not seem to fit.

Eventually, and once again drawing on the process of the Roundtable, it was decided to represent the ideas from each draft chapter in three one-page composite stories which would be used as a starting point for the structured conversations (Appendix 7: Chris' reflections on working together (p462); Appendix 8: Chris' reflections on case writing (p464); and Appendix 9: Chris' recollections about action and reflection (p466)).

All participants in the individual interviews were invited to participate in the issue-based group interviews. The group interviews, accommodating all those who expressed interest, were an explicit shared reflection aimed at further data collection. It was anticipated that Roundtable members would be attracted to participate in those group interviews that were most closely connected to their experiences and/or interests thus, the group interviews would draw on the expertise and perspective of those who had been acute observers and practitioners around particular issues.

As with the individual interviews these structured conversations were approximately one hour in duration. They were held during the late afternoon in a central location. Because the tapes from the individual interviews had been invaluable records the researcher sought permission to tape the conversations in the group interviews. The transcripts, as with the individual interview transcripts, were returned to participants for checking.

In each of the group interviews a process was suggested and participants were asked whether they thought the process seemed reasonable and whether there were any questions. On each occasion the participants were happy to proceed with a process where time was allocated for reading *Chris' reflections*. Participants were asked to identify a question or issue they would like to discuss and then during the conversation they were given a chance to present their issue. This led into an open discussion based on the issues raised and additional thoughts which had emerged during the exchange.

To ensure the fullest coverage of the topic Fontana and Frey (1994:361) identify a number of concerns for a group interviewer: avoiding one or more people dominating the group; encouraging reluctant participants; and ensuring everyone participates in the discussion. These concerns seemed to dissipate with the structure which had been

adopted. Fontana and Frey (1994:361) also note the dual responsibility of the interviewer who must keep the questions in mind and manage/moderate the group dynamics as the discussion evolves. Once again the strategy employed removed the need to be asking questions, and for a large part of the session there was no need to facilitate the conversation. Instead, the researcher's role was minimal, making sure that the process flowed smoothly and recording any observations or questions which might be raised in the open discussion at the end.

A final issue, also raised by Fontana and Frey, suggests the possibility that an emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression in a group setting. While everyone who participated in the group interviews had been part of building a culture of working together in the Roundtable there was little evidence that Roundtable culture adversely influenced individual expression within the group interviews. The only suggestion of dissatisfaction came from one participant who expressed a concern that people were 'too nice' and that this got in the way of grappling with 'hard' questions.

Following the conduct of the three group interviews the process of creating research propositions was repeated and the propositions which had emerged from the documents, the individual interviews and the group interviews were combined.

A researcher's journal

As mentioned earlier in this chapter the researcher in this study sought to be both actor and spectator (Arendt, 1958; Coulter & Wiens, 2002). Making a commitment to keeping a researcher's journal was critical in achieving this ambition.

Keeping a journal is a practitioner research strategy commonly used by teachers (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993) and in this particular situation it mirrored the journalling and case writing of the teacher researchers who were members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. It was an important aspect of the methodology because it ensured systematic record keeping, promoted reflexivity and increased the internal and external validity as well as the trustworthiness of the project. Constructed in this way the journal was both a record of the project and an additional source of data.

The scope of data collected in the researcher's journal is recorded below in Table 10.

Table 10: Researcher's journal—research questions and data collection

Data collected in research journal	Research questions
A chronological record of activities including date, description and notes	What was the research process?
Reflections on the research process	What were the ethical dilemmas and conflicts? What were the methodological considerations?
Lists and notes about the literature	What did the researcher read and how did this link to the study?
Peer review	Who has the researcher talked to and how have these conversations affected her thinking ?
The development of ideas and theories	What patterns can the researcher see emerging from the data? Are the findings grounded in the data?
Reflections on analysis and synthesis	Is the framework appropriate? Is clarification needed? Are inferences logical?
Autobiography and personal reflection	What things about the researcher, feelings experiences etc, affected this study? What is the nature of researcher bias?

The journal was kept in a variety of formats. Firstly, following traditions established in qualitative research, a handwritten journal (a chronological series of notebooks) contained reflective fieldnotes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) or memos (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) The journal was a place for asking questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a:434), for recording 'speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices...(a place to record) plans for future research...(and a place to) clarify and correct mistakes and understandings' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:123). Ultimately the intention was to record the researcher's efforts to explore assumptions, distinctions and connections. In the same vein, a second aspect of the researcher's journal was written electronically and usually comprised notes recorded at the end of working documents. These notes often reflected the working and thinking connected to theme identification or methodological issues.

A third aspect of the research journal, also written and stored electronically, comprised a set of cases. They were descriptions and reflections on some of the critical moments experienced by the researcher during the study. These pieces of

crafted writing were in the same genre as the pieces of case writing which had been produced by members of the Roundtable and in some instances commentaries were sought from peers. In this way they differed from the traditional idea of a journal because they were usually inspired by a critical event, problem or dilemma and they were crafted rather than ‘stream of consciousness’ journal writing. They were also written with an audience in mind, and while not all of them were shared publicly, they were written with the care that authors take when their work will be read.

Given the scope of the journal it was possible to collect a range of information addressing a number of research questions and these are also indicated in Table 10.

Shaping the following chapters

Both the review of literature reported in Chapter 2 and the conduct of the study described in this chapter suggest that professional learning might be understood in terms of context, dialogue, collaboration and inquiry. These four aspects of action will therefore be explored in the following chapters in order to gain a deeper understanding about Roundtable action and to determine what significance each layer of action might have in constructing a new model for professional learning.

Building on Smith’s (1993) belief in the spatial quality of daily life, each layer of action will be considered in terms of the different kind of space that it created for professional development. In order to understand the different kinds of spaces, each layer of action will be investigated from four perspectives:

- the relationship between lifeworld and action
- the structure and process which shaped action
- the basic attitude that underpinned action
- the quality of engagement that was achieved through each layer of action.

The decision to explore these dimensions of action reflects Giddens’s (1984) theory of structuration including concepts of structure, agency and reflexivity; Habermas’s (1984; 1987) theory of communicative action including concepts of lifeworld, attitude and validity; and Arendt’s (1958) conception of the *vita activa*.

The key ideas that emerge will be presented in a diagram based on the template shown below in Figure 2. The central square will indicate the broad area of action being investigated. Thinking geographically, each plane of action will then be explored by looking from four directions which might be conceived as the points of a compass. In effect the first part of each chapter will investigate the north–south axis of the diagram. Looking from the northern aspect will provide an opportunity to examine the personal, cultural and societal threads of lifeworld and examine any systems–lifeworld tensions and the southern view will focus attention on structure and process.

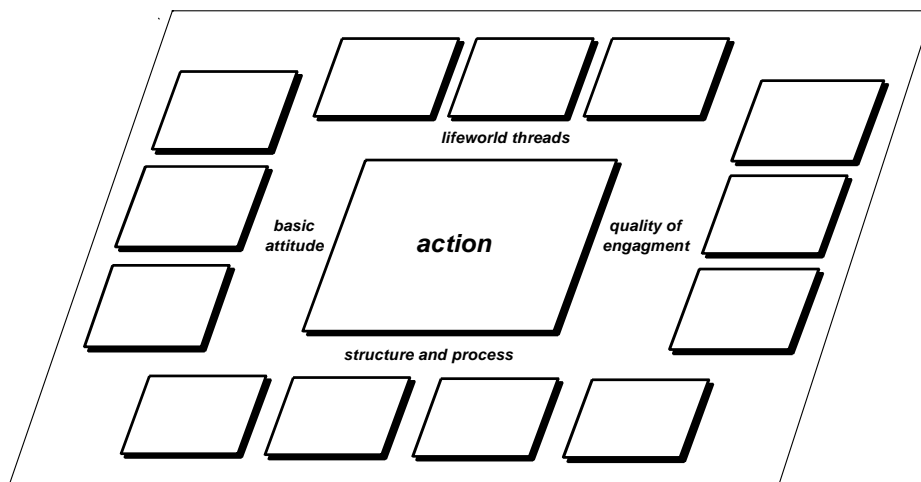


Figure 2: Template for examining each plane of action

In the second part of each chapter the discussion will turn to the east–west axis exploring the basic attitudes that underpinned each layer of action, and finally, examining the quality of engagement which was achieved.

Following this pattern Chapter 5 will explore contextual action, Chapter 6 will focus on dialogic action, Chapter 7 on collaborative action and Chapter 8 will turn to examine inquiry action. Chapter 9 will draw connections between these layers of action.

But before concentrating on these four aspects of action it is important to set the scene by introducing the University, the schools, the teams and the teachers who made up the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

Chapter 4: The University, the schools, the teams and the teachers

The Western Melbourne Roundtable comprised teams of teachers from five schools—Rosella, Kingfisher and Honeyeater Primary Schools and Eagle and Finch Secondary Colleges.⁹ Each team worked in partnership with one or more university colleague from the sixth Roundtable team formed at the local university. This chapter introduces the University, the schools, the teams and the teachers through a profile of each school and a mini biography¹⁰ of each participant in this study. The profiles and mini biographies have been constructed from information contained in the documentary records and the transcripts of individual and group interviews.

Little and McLaughlin (1993:3-4) observe that:

Teachers associate with colleagues in many settings or circumstances: in their department, groupings associated with instructional or cocurricular assignments, the school, district-level activities, and teacher organizations. Teachers' affiliations with one another may be circumstantial, a by-product of a common teaching assignment; they may be induced, a result of mandated committee responsibilities, special assignments or special projects; or they may be elective, an attachment to teachers' organizations, informally organized by special interest groups, and friendship nets. Each of these occasions and locations of teacher interaction provides a microcontext for collegial relations that may operate by quite different rules, focus on different issues, and carry different significance for teachers lives and careers.

This chapter sets the scene by introducing the microcontexts that combined to form the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

⁹ All school names are fictitious.

¹⁰ The mini biographies included in Chapter 4 were constructed for each of the people who participated in the individual and group interviews which were part of this study. They have been grouped by team in order to show the diversity within each team and across the Roundtable.

The University

At the time that the Roundtable was forming the staff in the Department of Education had recognised the challenge to establish better school–university relationships and were searching for new ways to work with teachers in schools. Recalling this period they identified three activities which coincided and impacted on the formation of a university team and the establishment of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. One activity saw a group of staff forming a Collaborative Research Group, a second involved several staff from the Department of Education attending a workshop on case and commentary writing conducted by Judith Shulman, and a third involved the development of a working relationship between the university’s Department of Education, the National Schools Network and the loosely affiliated National Teaching and Learning Consortium.¹¹ Based on individual recollections and official records, these three activities are explored below in terms of the establishment and direction of the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

The university had only been in existence for a few years before the Roundtable began to take shape. This meant that it was ‘struggling to become a university’ and ‘trying to generate a research identity for itself’. It had received money from the Commonwealth government to establish a skills based collaborative research program. Nine staff from the Department of Education at the university, led by Steve¹², the acting Head of Department, sought funding under a university initiative to establish a Collaborative Research Group (CRG) focused on action research in schools. It was to be a skills-orientated, mentor-based program and the staff from the university’s Department of Education proposed developing skills for working with teachers in schools.

Because the members of the CRG believed that action research skills were best learned through building collaborative research relationships, they planned that members of their group would work in conjunction with teacher colleagues in schools

¹¹ The Consortium was an expansion of the National Schools Network’s New South Wales Academic Reference Group.

¹² In order to maintain anonymity for Roundtable participants all names used are fictitious except where they are acknowledged as author/s of published material which is referred to in the text.

to undertake action research focused on teaching, learning and classroom practice. They recognised that the government focus on self-management of schools and student learning outcomes would influence their work. They proposed that their research be supported by skills development and therefore, as part of their preparation for working with colleagues in schools, the CRG organised a workshop to explore issues in developing research partnerships with schools.¹³ They focused on the question: How can we work with teachers on work they want to do? During the workshop they developed a picture of what a successful school–university partnership might look like. They imagined that it would be neither top-down nor bottom-up, that academics would see themselves as working with teachers who were friends and not objects, that there would be opportunities for informal social interaction and that the primary impetus for projects would be support for improving practice. Note was made of the importance of developing an awareness of both the social context and internal politics of each school in conjunction with an emphasis on group problem posing. The group also identified the importance of gaining support from the Directorate of School Education and the Catholic Education Office and ensuring that projects were organised to occur at times which suited teachers.

At about the same time Judith Shulman conducted a workshop introducing the idea of case writing.¹⁴ During the 1980s and through the 1990s Shulman and others (Shulman & Colbert, 1987, 1988; Shulman *et al.*, 1990; McRobbie & Shulman, 1991; Shulman, 1992; Silverman, Welty & Lyon, 1992; Barnett, 1993; Wassermann, 1993a, 1993b) had used case and commentary writing in teacher education to explore diversity, the experiences of mentors and inductees in schools, professional development, research and change. Three members of the Department of Education at the university—Inge, Mark and Paula—attended this workshop and on returning they suggested to their colleagues that case writing could be used within the CRG as a strategy for

¹³ Colin Henry from Deakin University was invited by the group to design and facilitate the workshop at the University.

¹⁴ Judith Shulman was the Director of the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in California.

documenting and gaining a deeper understanding about teaching and learning. They also thought the case writing strategy could be used by educators in schools.

*It seemed to be a respectful and limited methodology for documenting practice which teachers wouldn't be frightened about. It wouldn't get separated from their own documentation of practice by some kind of methodological justification... We actually wanted to have something other than meetings. We wanted an initial research product. Our interest at the university was undertaking work with colleagues in schools around action research and moving beyond the local restrictions of action research which keep the findings or action research contained within the local place.*¹⁵

It was decided that the CRG expectation of skills development would be achieved by university researchers working with teacher researchers, writing cases in school settings.

The third parallel activity involved formal and informal conversations between a loosely connected group of people who shared a common concern for social justice through their work in teacher education, teacher unions and programs such as the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) and the National Schools Project (NSP).¹⁶ Together they hatched the idea of building partnerships between schools and universities (Groundwater-Smith, Parker & Arthur, 1993), and the development of these ideas lead to the birth of the Innovative Links Project.¹⁷ Steve was involved in these conversations and he subsequently participated in the formal work of the

¹⁵ All quotes from interviews conducted during this study are presented in italicised text. Quotes from published documents are presented in plain text.

¹⁶ Both the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the National Schools Project were federally funded. The National Schools Project was later refunded as the National Schools Network.

¹⁷ An 'open' history of this process was published in the first issue of the ILP national journal *Big Link* (Ladwig *et al.*, 1994b:15–16). The authors issued an invitation to others involved in the ILP to tell the history from their experience and perspective in order to make connections between multiple experiences and perspectives. In telling this story about the establishment of the Western Melbourne Roundtable this chapter picks up that invitation.

National Teaching and Learning Consortium (Ladwig *et al.*, 1994b) as it prepared a submission which sought funding for the ILP.¹⁸ Steve recalled the coming together of these three activities.

So at the end of 1993 we've got the Innovative Links Project kind of popping out of the ground over here, we've got a bunch of people who are interested in case writing over here and then the university has established what it calls a Collaborative Research Grants process to initiate new research strategies and new research groups in the university. They all came together.

Members of the CRG were invited to join the Innovative Links Project and as a result six lecturers from the Department of Education at the university—including some members of the Collaborative Research Group and those who had attended Judith Shulman's workshop—formed the first Western Melbourne Roundtable team. They were Steve, Paula, Inge, Lily, Mark and Anna. As well as being part of the University team each tertiary teacher was also a member of one of the five school teams and each of these teams is introduced in the pages that follow.

Rosella Primary School

Rosella PS, a primary school with about 450 students, opened in 1976 and served a community characterised by diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The school was organised into three learning teams—junior, middle and senior—with a specialist team including the English as a Second Language, Integration, Italian and Physical Education teachers. The school promoted team teaching and team planning and consultative processes were evident in decision-making throughout the school. The school provided a whole language approach to literacy and an integrated curriculum which recognised that learning is more appropriate to children when

¹⁸ The Innovative Links Project was an action research based professional development program where school and university colleagues formed local partnerships and a network of regional roundtables. The university in western Melbourne was one of the 12 university signatories to the proposal eventually funded, under the National Professional Development Program (NPDP), as *Innovative Links between Universities and Schools for Teacher Professional Development*.

curriculum areas are connected. The teachers placed emphasis on children's input into planning, encouraged cooperative group work and fostered the development of research skills, thinking skills and personal qualities. Importance was placed on providing a calm caring learning environment that promoted children's self esteem and confidence. Equal opportunity principles and strategies were incorporated and provision was made for the learning needs of all children in an atmosphere where they were actively encouraged to do their best. In an effort to provide curriculum coherence and appropriate transition arrangements for all students the school cooperated closely with neighbouring schools and kindergartens. Parents were supportive and active in all aspects of the school's operations including classroom programs and their understanding of curriculum and operations was promoted through information evenings and other focused parent programs.

Rosella PS established a Links team which included three classroom teachers (junior, middle and senior) and two specialist teachers (PE and Integration). Two colleagues from the university were also part of the team. Some members of the team participated for the duration of the project, some transferred to other schools and new members also joined the team. They all shared a common interest in quality teaching and improving learning outcomes for children and saw the project as an opportunity to increase their skills, morale and confidence. They also anticipated building partnerships with their university colleagues and felt that whatever might happen this was the beginning of creating a culture of lifelong learning. None of the teachers were really sure what Links would involve and how the project would operate and as they prepared for change, there was much discussion about what the project was at both at the school and Roundtable levels.

The team proposed focusing on one charter priority. They decided to focus on the whole school plan to change the student assessment and reporting procedures so that student self assessment could be included in the ongoing teaching and learning program and also in the official school report. They saw the development of student self assessment skills as an extension of the students' contribution to topic and activity planning. Teachers believed that student self assessment might:

- allow children to become more responsible learners and therefore ensure improved learning outcomes

- be used as a tool to indicate learning outcomes both in social development as well as curriculum content areas
- help foster collaborative partnerships between teachers and students
- improve their teaching and organisational practices
- impact on the evaluation of projects and influence future action plans.

As a whole school they planned to develop, trial and review new self assessment formats. Members of the Links team saw Links as an action research approach to whole school change and expected that it would support them during this period of innovation. To support their work they identified a need for professional development linked to action research, student self assessment, case and commentary writing as well as ethics.

By participating in the Roundtable they believed they would have the opportunity to document strategies, issues and explorations through cases and commentaries and then use them for discussions about student self assessment and the review of charter priorities at the whole school level. They imagined they might use the first group of cases for a seminar as part of a school development program aimed at integrating student self assessment into ongoing programs.

Rosita, Peter and Lily were members of the Links team at Rosella PS. When Rosita joined the Links team she felt as though she was part of an active school with a number of new staff. On a personal level she noted that it was very timely.

...I'd got to 11 years and I'd been given this bit of responsibility, and (I asked myself) What do I want to do? Where am I going? I felt under skilled in lots of ways, and then in other areas I had lots of skills that I didn't recognise.

At a school level Rosita was attracted to the Links project.

...(I felt) we would actually be looking at something that was relevant and important to us at the time...we would be able to make decisions and it would be about real stuff, not just theorising or having a topic imposed on us. We could choose so that appealed to me.

Rosita was aware that when you are a teacher you talk a lot. She found talking easy but noted there was a danger of not listening enough. Rosita saw herself as being confident in lots of ways but found writing difficult and was intimidated by the idea of working with university people. She connected this intimidation with her upbringing which included respect for elders, hierarchy, structures and systems and also with her doubt that she would have anything of value or worth to say to a university person.

When the Links project began Peter was a young Physical Education teacher in a young staff. He believed that in any group of staff you will have blockers, drivers, myths and legends and that the staff make the culture. He noted that there were a lot of drivers in his Link team and felt that he was a follower. He saw himself as a reflective kind of person. He observed that it was unusual to see university lecturers in schools except in conjunction with teacher experience programs and in the broader context of education he noted the culling of teachers and the slashing of funds which was evident at this time.

Lily had been working at the tertiary level, in teacher education, for many years. She was always surprised when people didn't just see each other as people and felt she was not good at being labelled as a university person and therefore distinguishable from a school person. But Lily did recognise different personal attributes as the Links teams formed—she saw herself as a person who could 'sit down and write a story at the drop of a hat' and assumed that others could too but became conscious that some of her colleagues were fearful of writing.

Kingfisher Primary School

Kingfisher PS was a Catholic primary school with an enrolment of approximately 600 students organised into 20 classes. Most students came from low socio-economic and non-English speaking backgrounds. Twenty nationalities reflected recent trends in migration with Asian cultures, particularly Vietnamese, and a significant number of students from more established Croatian and Maltese families. The school enrolled a number of recent arrivals each year and was part of the National Equity Program from 1994–1997. There were 35 staff members including nine specialist support staff covering library, music, English as a Second Language, integration, DSC, Reading Recovery, language support and literacy enhancement. Formal structures such as

committees and meetings ensured that all staff members were involved in collaborative decision-making, the teaching and learning process and professional development.

The school had developed a number of policies that guided their work. The *Vision Statement* outlined the beliefs and values on which the school was founded and connected these values and beliefs with the school's aims, the atmosphere, programs and curriculum. The *Learning Belief Statement* was the basis for school decision-making and teaching policies. It described how the school would provide for the needs and experiences of children and gave direction about teaching styles which would provide relevant, stimulating and consistent learning experiences for children. The statement expressed a belief that children learn when they are: given relevant feedback; immersed in a variety of experiences; provided with opportunities in which they can be successful; in an environment which encourages them to take risks; given time to reflect on the task so that they can become more responsible for their learning; provided with positive demonstration; given the opportunity to explore learning by using all their senses; actively engaged in the task by 'doing'. The *Learning Belief Statement* also noted that children learn when they feel valued as a member of a group and their individual efforts are recognised, when they have a good relationship with their teacher and their peers and when they have an opportunity to work individually, in pairs and in groups. Finally the *Statement* expressed a belief that learning tasks must be relevant, stimulating, interesting, challenging and enjoyable and that the learners should know what is expected of them and know what to expect from others. The Links/research coordinator also promoted the idea that Links was significant in taking up the challenges identified by Barry Dwyer in *Catholic Schools—Creating a New Culture*, including fostering a reflective culture, building collaborative partnerships, fostering collaborative communities and serving the poor.

The teachers at Kingfisher PS were committed to rethinking their work to ensure improved learning outcomes for all students and began exploring issues of school reform with the National Schools Network in mid 1993. They linked this work directly to the School Development Plan and to the appraisal aspect of their Tripartite Agreement by focusing on two aspects of their work: teams as an organisational and management structure and the Partners in Literacy project, an NSN funded action

research project which sought to enhance student learning outcomes by altering the way in which teachers were organised during literacy sessions.

An invitation was made to all staff members to participate in the Links project. Ten teachers, about 1/3 of the staff, joined in the first year. They were joined by a university colleague and Laila, the Curriculum and NSN Coordinator, was appointed as the school's Links/research coordinator. The school identified its existing NSN project, Partners in Literacy, as its area for investigation and connected this with their concerns about the relationship between classroom organisation, teaching practice and students' learning.

Laila, Olga and Steve were members of the Links team at Kingfisher PS. Laila was working in the school library when the Links work began. She noticed that she was making lots of connections between ideas and programs around issues of social justice yet felt inexperienced in terms of taking a leadership role. Laila did not know what she was getting into when she joined the Links team. On one hand she felt as though she did not have anything to contribute yet she took on school responsibility for Links/research coordination and wondered whether she had been petulant in pushing to participate in the first national Links meeting.

Olga, one of Laila's school colleagues, was a classroom teacher who identified Edward de Bono and Einstein as heroes. She noticed what a big mistake she had made presuming that kids knew how to think. Olga and her colleagues were struggling to engage the students.

Everyone was a bit dissatisfied with what was happening, the kids' behaviour, the curriculum itself was too dry using Tinkler. A life skills program was brought in to try and help with the horrible behaviour of the upper school and none of it was working. It was good programming but it still wasn't solving the problem. There was a big hole that needed to be filled.

She knew things had to change and she asked teachers to join her in trying something new.

Steve, a university colleague who was also the convenor of the Western Melbourne Roundtable, joined the Kingfisher PS team. He was driven by a commitment to educational equality and social justice. He made connections between knowledge, policies and democratic education.

I think for me there is a strong political edge. I'm frustrated in my own life but also in looking at the world around us...a particular kind of knowledge comes to be imposed on the practitioner and practitioners have what appears to me no resources to argue against particular kinds of research findings and the policies which emerge from them. I think it is an immoral state which we should be acting and doing something about. But there is only one kind of knowledge that's given the cachet knowledge. It is dangerous for something that is supposed to be as democratic as education, you know the Adelaide declaration says all kids should learn. Well the facts are that that is not happening, it has never happened in mass education.

Steve was also committed to democratic processes for decision-making and working together. He felt that if the Roundtable was to be democratic that the primary decision makers needed to be the teachers and that if they objected to something the university colleagues had to 'sit up and take notice'.

I didn't see myself as some kind of pedagogical leader that was bringing the good news. But I was committed to the idea of practitioners documenting their own practice as a means of understanding what was going on, having some kind of democratic participation in what was occurring which had tentacles out to the students' participation.

Honeyeater Primary School

Honeyeater PS, one of the largest primary schools in the area, opened in 1985 and had grown to 791 pupils. While there was a large ethnic population—over 80% in the district—problems with spoken language were not evident in the school. Most of the working parents were craftsmen, factory workers and labourers. Four per cent of parents were receiving a pension and 20% were unemployed. The school was

organised into single year level classes with the exception of the Junior School which was organised as a multi-age setting designed to cater for individual learning of children in their first three years of schooling.

Honeyeater PS was supportive and friendly. There was an expectation that students would be committed to high academic standards, display a commitment to improving skills and knowledge, value quality performance by taking pride in completed work, become independent and self motivated learners, view their learning as an active partnership between themselves parents and teachers, develop an awareness of their rights and the rights of others and recognise and respect individual and cultural differences. There was a high level of consistency between values cultivated at home and at school. Parents made it known that they approved of the pursuit of 'high standards' in the basic subject areas and that they desired a firm, consistent discipline policy and a school uniform. A high level of motivation, positive attitude and constructive activity for the benefit of children characterised the relationships both within the school and beyond the school, to homes and families. An openness in the community ensured parents, teachers and children participated in the identification of needs and in the development of suitable programs to meet these needs. The quality of these relationships, and the mutual regard and respect they implied was greatly valued and reflected in the school policy.

The school motto—Learn to Live—supported their view that children need to be recognised as individuals who have a right to an ever widening range of experience that will enable them to live a fuller life as children in today's society and prepare them for a full life as tomorrow's adults. The school therefore offered a seven year developmental program covering all key learning areas including Japanese in Year 4. Curriculum was supported by a range of activities including: camps; excursions; computer education; life education; swimming and sport; an instrumental music program; and support programs such as Perceptory Motor Program, Integration and Reading Recovery which catered for students with special needs. Honeyeater PS had identified many charter priorities including Physical Education and sport and providing ongoing support for students who had specific learning needs. Transition and curriculum networks were being established with schools in the district.

In the first year of the Roundtable five teachers volunteered to join the Links team at Honeyeater PS and Frank, the Assistant Principal, was the coordinator. A decision was made that the focus of the Links project would be the early years of schooling. Honeyeater PS considered the early years of children's schooling as vital and had decided to adjust the conventional age/grade groupings to multi-age groups. They planned to combine grades Prep, 1 and 2 to form Junior grades and it was considered inappropriate to mention grade levels within this structure. The transition was planned so that in 1994 the children would be in combined Prep/Grade 1 groups and in 1995 they would be in combined Prep/1/2 groups.

In joining the Links project the school aimed to improve student outcomes by reflecting on teaching practice in the context of the Junior School and to produce documentation which would reveal details about the trial and possible implications for the establishment of multi-age groupings further up the school. They also thought their documentation could be used for professional development materials examining the establishment, operation and evaluation of multi-age settings and finally that they might serve as a resource for the broader education community including trainee teachers. The Honeyeater PS team summarised their work as involving the processes of facilitation, collaboration and reflection.

Dora, Frank, Robyn and Inge were members of the Links team at Honeyeater PS. Dora remembered being 'very, very young in my teaching days' at the beginning of the Roundtable. She recognised that teachers differed in their attitude to change:

...there are those teachers that are comfortable in a particular area and are very happy to stay there year after year and then there are others, and I'm one of the others, that like a bit of variety, move around the school and try different things...I often seek changes, it's the way I am.

While Dora was comfortable with herself she was concerned about changes in education and society and observed the stress and distress this caused for schools and teachers.

Frank, Dora's colleague, was the Assistant Principal at the school. He was involved with the Junior grades and was also responsible for organising professional

development and curriculum days for the school. While Frank had worked with students and lecturers from the university and recognised some of the teachers from other Roundtable schools he also noted

...at that stage I hadn't had a lot of contact beyond the school environment really. It has only been in recent years that it has become the norm to be working with others outside the school. I was pretty insular in the early part of my career.

Frank saw the Roundtable as an opportunity to work as an equal with people from the university. He felt that his school was 'not too bad' and hoped that the university colleagues would be able to learn a few things from them too.

Robyn, an experienced teacher, was another member of the Honeyeater team. At the beginning of the Links project Robyn shared a class with another teacher and they really had their hands full before the Links project even started.

I can just recall it being such a hectic time. There was change with the Early Years Literacy Project coming into practice and us being a pilot school, and also with my colleague we had the team teaching going...we taught Reading Recovery as well as the classroom level. We had to get together and plan. So I can just remember it being such a hectic time. And then the junior school trials as well.

Inge, a member of staff in the Department of Education at the university was also a member of the Honeyeater team. She came from an educational psychology background and saw herself as someone who was

...always looking for new things. So I went to conferences to find new things I could use in my own teaching...that's why I elected to go (to the Shulman workshop about case writing)...I did that individually...But once we had this idea about case writing we thought it would make a very good model for the Collaborative Research Group...

Eagle Secondary College

Eagle SC was a new secondary school located in a rapidly growing new residential area. Having opened in 1993, the 1994 enrolment was 336 (Year 7 and 8 only) with a projected enrolment of 1500 by the year 2000. About a third of the students received the Education Maintenance Allowance and approximately 30% of the local households had an income in the \$30,000-40,000 bracket. Those parents who were employed worked equally in the trades, clerical and professional categories. English was spoken in 77% of homes in the community with Italian being the most common language other than English. The co-educational college aimed to provide an environment in which excellence was achieved through cooperation between all members of the College community.

Before the Links project began, Eagle Secondary College was working in conjunction with the National Schools Network researching and rethinking the basic pedagogical building blocks of the school, initiating and trialing innovative practices. They saw the Links project as being complementary to both the NSN partnership and two of their charter priorities. They identified two priorities for their Links work. The first centred around Team Small Group (TSG) which the School Council had already identified as a strategy for rethinking the traditional structures for secondary schooling. Using the TSG structure, students were grouped into student teams identified by colour and within classrooms they worked predominantly in table groups which accommodated cooperative activities and peer teaching. Teachers were organised into teaching teams and the majority of their teaching allotments were with the same students. It was envisioned that groups of students and teachers would work together over two or three years. The second priority was to provide professional development for teachers which would help them to meet their own goals of improved teaching and improved practice in implementing cooperative learning strategies, inquiry based learning and an integrated curriculum. This strategy incorporated an aim to 'document and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning within the integrated curriculum'.

The Links project was introduced to staff through a number of information sessions: a whole staff briefing, an Administration Advisory Committee, teaching team meetings and then a meeting with Steve, the Roundtable facilitator. The school management

supported participation in the project and Anna, the university colleague was not surprised when 13 teachers (almost half the staff) indicated that they wanted to be involved in the project. She knew they saw the Links project as an opportunity to produce ‘concrete documentation about the interface between teacher and table group and teacher and team...a structure for the process of research and renewal at the heart of the NSN project.’ In particular, Eagle SC proposed that their participation in the Roundtable would provide an opportunity to examine the TSG structure through the use of individual teacher cases by focusing on:

- the table group (Are table groups an effective learning medium?)
- teaching teams (What does our work show about team formation, team building, team cohesion and present team operation?)
- teaching practice (Has teaching practice changed/remained the same within the TSG model?).

Eagle SC saw the focus on researching teaching teams as being directly connected to the schools’ bi-weekly professional development sessions and they predicted that the research on teaching teams would inform the selection of new teams. In preparation for beginning their work they participated in professional development on ‘Case writing as Action Research’ which was run by the CRG at the university.

Bill, Ian, Janine, Eleni and Anna were members of the Links team at Eagle Secondary College. Bill, an English teacher, had been teaching for ‘thirty odd years’. Thinking about his approach to teaching he reflected

I’d always been quite theoretical in the way that I’d thought about teaching which is a little bit different from a lot of people who perceive themselves as...artisans or the British concept of being a teacher...(where) it’s almost like some kind of special thing. Well I never thought about it like that. I always thought that if you really think about it then you can become a better practitioner. So the praxis thing has always been really important to me. So I’d always had...(a) pretty deep sort of understanding of where my practice came from, and could

always have that kind of referent benchmark. And a key factor in that was action research...

When Janine, the Principal asked Bill if he wanted to take a leadership role in establishing a Roundtable team he admitted that he ‘didn’t like to be a person who set things up’ but saw it as a chance to get a group of colleagues ‘to put their hands up to have their own roundtable and encounter all the mysteries and worries...(and) to talk’.

Ian, Bill’s colleague, was nearing retirement and looking forward to it. He felt that the work they were doing at Eagle Secondary College was different and it was important to let other people know about it, but acknowledged that he and his colleagues were having difficulty working out how to document what was going on. Ian saw himself as a person who was happy to talk about things but avoided writing.

Janine was the principal of Eagle Secondary College. In planning for the opening of the school she had asked the staff: What stops you from being the best teacher you want to be? In seeking answers she made connections between the opportunities presented in establishing a new school, the ideas and resources of the National Schools Network and possibilities afforded by the government’s Schools of the Future policy. She felt it was important as a leader to model what you believed and so joined the Links team in order to focus on school administration, leadership and relationships.

Eleni, another member of the Eagle team, was a ‘first year out’ Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teacher. She felt as though she did not know a lot about how things operated or what was happening in education but that ‘just stepping in was a fantastic opportunity’. Eleni was nervous when she found out that she was talking to university people and remembered feeling like an apprentice.

Anna was the university colleague on the Eagle Links team. She had only just begun working in the Department of Education at the university when the Roundtable began. Anna saw the opportunity to participate in the Roundtable as a gift.

...having come from schools, being one year out of the classroom, here I was asked to think about teacher education and here I was working with a school being asked to think about school teaching from scratch.

Celebrating difference had been a continuing theme in Anna's work and she came to the Roundtable with a belief in the importance of establishing democratic relationships between school and university colleagues. This commitment was based on her experience both in school and in university settings where university people were accorded a higher status and that made her feel angry.

Finch Secondary College

The fifth school which made up the initial Roundtable was Finch Secondary College. It catered for about 900 students from Years 7-12 and was a high school until the conversion of high and technical schools into secondary colleges in the 1980s (Southern Cross Roundtable Portrayal Evaluation Team, 1996).

Finch SC aimed to provide a secure, caring and supportive environment so that students could 'maximise their opportunities' and 'achieve a sense of belonging'. The school was committed to providing 'opportunities for developing leadership and citizenship skills, self esteem and confidence' and 'encouragement for students to work effectively inter-dependently and independently'. In relation to curriculum the College had developed 'a challenging, comprehensive curriculum, to prepare...students for a future in a highly competitive and rapidly changing society'. In support of this aim the college provided opportunities for all students in each of the key learning areas with a special focus on Italian, Spanish and the performing arts (including music, drama and dance). They aimed for maximum support for students during the transition from primary to secondary school and then again from Year 10 to Year 11 with a focus on tertiary education and employment options.

In developing a proposal for the Links project the teachers at Finch SC decided to focus on one charter priority which involved 'improving junior school literacy and numeracy across the curriculum'. They planned to allocate resources and design programs which would develop skills with a particular focus on making provision for English as a Second Language students. In identifying this focus they described how the staff had had extensive input into the formation of College priorities and how there was broad acceptance of and commitment to the objectives and associated programs.

The staff at Finch SC believed that in order to improve student learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy they needed extensive and intensive professional development which included information and opportunities to trial and reflect on changes to their teaching practices. Their expectation of the Links project was that it would ‘encourage staff to think more deeply about their own teaching and that of their colleagues and help develop a more collegiate approach to curriculum development and delivery’. They hoped that the Links project would initially help them to open and unravel their classroom experiences and subsequently expose the contents and operations to others. They felt that the ensuing discussions would add a richness and relevance to their thinking about work organisation and practice.

Finch SC made connections between the Links project and another joint project they were engaged in with Deakin University. In this project they were examining the use of text materials across the junior secondary curriculum. They saw that by connecting the Links and Deakin projects they would facilitate the sharing of information between the tertiary and secondary education sectors. Their proposal indicated that they saw their role as providing a venue for professional development and research initiatives and expected their university colleague to provide information about the latest educational research and programs.

Helen, Oliver, Terese and Mark were members of the Links team at Finch Secondary College. Helen, an English teacher who retired soon after the Roundtable concluded, was coordinator of professional development as well as the Links coordinator at Finch SC. Helen observed:

...in a traditional sort of structure in a high school...you only vaguely know what people do in their classrooms...(and) I guess you tend to be fairly insular in your own faculty area...

She was also aware that

...teachers usually go into professional development being prepared to make a change but the change doesn't become intrinsic or integral to the method of operating because it's a kind of one off lesson and you go out terribly enthusiastic and then because of the pressure of other things you fall back into autopilot and you start doing things the old

way again...you need time to make those changes part of your normal level of operating...

Oliver, a fellow English teacher focusing on literacy, had the impression that he and his colleagues were struggling to benefit the students. He noticed for instance that while he might consider something in the classroom to be a burning issue ‘someone else may not give two hoots’. He felt that it was hard to create a unifying context for teachers to work through disparate and diverse struggles together. Oliver saw himself as someone who thought about education, was prepared to take a few risks and liked to support his peers to be a bit experimental. While he felt that he had been roped into joining the Links team he was a ‘happy prisoner’. Oliver was aware of many contextual issues which impacted on his work in the classroom. He noticed that societal regard for teachers was not ‘riding high’ and that the curriculum was overcrowded.

Terese, a maths teacher, picked up on the numeracy aspect of the Links project at Finch SC. While she had an inner circle of friends she recalled being insular and pretty hesitant about being part of the Links team and had not joined of her own accord but was encouraged by Helen, the Professional development/Links Coordinator, to participate. She thought she had been given an opportunity and she may as well make the most of it. Terese thought about the Links work in the same way she thought about all her teaching practice, in terms of what the students would get out of it. She had just returned from family leave and thought that being a teacher was a bit like being a mother—you do not often verbalise the activity but do it instinctively.

Mark was the university colleague at Finch Secondary College. He had a physical science background and had worked in various positions including being a teacher and an industrial chemist. He believed in his ability to act democratically but also saw himself as someone who expressed his views very strongly. Mark identified as a novice researcher and felt that research was very important. It was his view that in the social sciences research should be looking for new insights, new ideas and new knowledge.

The Western Melbourne Roundtable

These six teams, or locations, met locally on a regular basis and came together each month as the Western Melbourne Roundtable. These profiles and mini biographies show that the Roundtable comprised many microcontexts—personal contexts, school and university contexts and that each was aware of and influenced by the broader context. Participants brought their personal contexts to the Roundtable landscape. They came with knowledge, assumptions, expectations, interests and needs which were connected to their specific situation. These personal contexts impacted on each team and on the establishment and conduct of the Roundtable. They also shaped the distinctiveness of Roundtable work. In addition to the personal contexts, the six Roundtable teams represented six cultural contexts. As the profiles show, the organisations had different histories, distinctive pressures and were situated in different communities. These and other factors shaped their priorities and their relationship to the Roundtable. Individuals and teams also revealed an awareness of the contextual influences beyond the workplace which impacted on their work and learning.

Because each of these contextual threads—the personal, cultural and societal—was significant in shaping Roundtable action the nature of contextual action will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Acting contextually

This chapter of the thesis was first conceptualised as a description of the Western Melbourne Roundtable focused on structure and context. However, it soon became clear that structure was not a static framework and context was not a fixed environment—in reality each was actively produced over time. Therefore this chapter begins the examination of Roundtable practice through an exploration of contextual action. Each section of this chapter combines to build an argument that the Roundtable achieved contextual democracy by including many contextual threads, creating new spaces for learning, adopting an inclusive attitude and aiming for a connective kind of engagement.

To support this argument the discussion first turns to the multiple contexts which were revealed by members of the Roundtable both through their writing and in subsequent interviews. They provided a wealth of information to describe how they saw the context in which the Roundtable emerged. Official documents, such as the initial team proposals and final reports, gave a strong picture of school and university culture, revealing the values, policies and priorities which helped to shape each Link team's project and activities. These documents also revealed both a personal dimension and an understanding of the broader context in which Roundtable work was located. Detail in the records of meetings, cases, commentaries and Roundtable publications reinforced this picture and deepened the understanding of the Roundtable work over time. Finally, the transcripts of interviews conducted during this study supported and expanded the picture by providing both individual and group perspectives and reflections on the Roundtable work in context. Within these collected documents members of the Roundtable conveyed information about the multiple and intersecting contexts that impacted on their world and their work. This data was used by the researcher to create the 6 team profiles and mini biographies that made up Chapter 4 and the discussion in this chapter is based on these profiles and the extended portraits referred to in Chapter 3¹⁹.

¹⁹ For an example of an extended portrait see Appendix 3: A portrait of ILP at Eagle Secondary College, p391.

Contextual threads

Context can be understood in different ways. Habermas (1984; 1987), for instance, distinguishes between systems and lifeworld and argues that lifeworld incorporates a personal, cultural and societal dimension. Niemi and Kemmis (1999) draw on Habermas's work and stress the importance of exploring the tensions between systems and lifeworld as a precursor to taking action across the lifeworld 'horizon'. The Western Melbourne Roundtable adopted an open and inclusive attitude to its work by incorporating many contextual threads and the following section examines the various contexts which combined to form the Roundtable 'horizon'.

Personal contexts

Roundtable participants brought their personal contexts to the Roundtable landscape. As noted at the end of Chapter 4, the profiles and mini biographies show that they came with knowledge, assumptions, expectations, interests and needs which were connected to their specific situation. These personal contexts impacted on the establishment and conduct of the Roundtable and also shaped the distinctiveness of Roundtable work.

Individual educators were at different stages in their careers, undertook different roles in their workplaces, taught different age groups and curriculum areas, enjoyed a variety of pre-existing and developing relationships, thought uniquely about their skills, interests and needs and had varying perceptions about the beginning of the Roundtable. During the individual interviews participants talked about their personal contexts by describing themselves, telling stories about their personal experiences in the Roundtable and talking about their motivations, expectations and needs. Over 60 individuals participated in the initial six Roundtable teams and each Roundtable member contributed to the complexity of the Roundtable landscape and added richness to this study. The nineteen mini biographies included in Chapter 4, describe different yet connected personal contexts and give life to the scale of the body. Each biography reveals something about 'personal space' and experience as well as information about ideas, feelings, perceptions and expectations. In some instances connections are made between participants' working and personal lives and often broader contextual observations are made about this period. The diversity of voices

creates the plurality which Arendt argues is a necessary condition for action (Arendt, 1958:8).

Demonstrating how stage in career can impact the nature of engagement Eleni and Dora described themselves as excited and listening beginners. Ian at the other end of his career gleefully presented as a ‘close to retirement type’ and Rosita described how she was looking to gather ideas from across the 10 year span of her career. Giving an insight into the range of issues connected to school leadership, Frida identified her concern for balancing administration and teaching; Janine brought a principal’s perspective; and Laila expressed the concerns of a curriculum coordinator.

On a personal level, acting contextually demanded an awareness of people’s feelings and the identification of a plan which allowed for an emotional response. The school profiles and portraits reveal a range of emotions which initiated and influenced Roundtable activities. People expressed anger and frustration about aspects of their work—Anna’s anger about the unequal status of teachers in schools and universities, Olga’s dissatisfaction with the Tinkler program, Steve’s frustration with the privilege accorded to knowledge generated by academics and Oliver’s struggle to benefit the students through the English program. Others expressed doubt—Rosita’s feelings of having lost her way, Terese’s reticence about joining the group, Eleni’s nervousness about the value of her contribution and Robyn’s reluctance to add another thing to her plate. However the prospect of the Roundtable produced optimistic and enthusiastic responses—Frank’s pride in his school and the prospect of sharing it with others, the unfolding of Laila’s awareness and her desire to be involved, Bill’s hopes for encountering mysteries together with his colleagues, Inge’s and Dora’s enthusiasm and readiness for change, Janine’s determination to lead through involvement and Helen’s wish for valuable professional development through revealing teachers’ work in classrooms. There could be no doubt that acting contextually drew on people’s emotional responses to contextual challenges and therefore generated a heartfelt engagement in seeking change.

Cultural contexts

At a cultural level, the Roundtable comprised teams of teachers from five schools—Rosella, Kingfisher and Honeyeater Primary Schools and Eagle and Finch Secondary

Colleges.²⁰ Each team worked in partnership with one or more university colleagues from the sixth Roundtable team formed at the local university. The six teams might be thought of as six different places or six cultural contexts.

The university

The Department of Education at the university could be recognised as a distinctive place because of the people who worked there, the culture of the group and its broader societal connections. Each person had a different background and brought particular interests to the university team. Some identified as educational psychologists and others as sociologists. They were inspired by an eclectic group of writers including Sandra Acker²¹, Jerome Bruner, Seymour Papert and Lawrence Stenhouse.²² Despite their different orientations and personal interests the university team shared a desire to develop skills in the application of the case method for documenting classroom and school-based narratives. They believed this would support collaborative research between university and school-based researchers.

On the one hand it could be argued that the establishment of the Western Melbourne Roundtable was a serendipitous intersection of funding possibilities, new ideas and events; however Steve believed that the Roundtable was formed through a series of purposeful connections and decisions. At the time he explained to his colleagues:

...(the Innovative Links Project) offers us an opportunity to apply the strategies in our CRG project in a funded activity...The CRG and ILP should *not* be confused however. Each has a specific agenda: in the case of the CRG, the goal is research training. The next phase in the CRG is the establishment of collaborative teams of teacher researchers and university researchers in schools. We can connect the CRG and ILP however, so that the teachers with whom we work in the CRG are drawn from those schools involved in the ILP.
(Collaborative Research Group Progress Report No 3, 2/5/94)

²⁰ All school names are fictitious.

²¹ Acker inspired an interest in career narratives and metaphors.

²² Stenhouse articulated the importance of seeing research as systematic inquiry made public.

In preparation for working with school teams, the university team identified goals which they hoped might guide their collaborative work.

Whether it was enough, or we made things clear I have no idea. We were really flying by the seat of our pants at the time. We wanted to make certain that our colleagues in schools knew as much as we did and were able to participate in the Roundtable activities as equal partners so that it wasn't the university driving what was going on. That was certainly our intention, certainly my intention anyway, with incredible help from colleagues. My recollection is that...as much as you could expect the relations were democratic. I have no idea what went on in other schools, and I've got no idea how other people see what we did. That was our goal.

In line with the process outlined in the funding submission, Steve took responsibility for facilitating the formation of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. The schools were selected by an Interim Roundtable Steering Committee which had the responsibility for ensuring that the selection process resulted in representation from primary and secondary schools and the government and non-government education sectors.²³ While other Roundtable Steering Committees issued a general invitation to schools to express interest in participating in roundtables, the Western Melbourne Roundtable Interim Steering Committee decided to target schools and invite them to submit a proposal describing their intentions within the guidelines of the Innovative Links Project. Reflecting on the process Steve recalled:

There was a discussion at the Interim Steering Committee about which schools would participate...the NSN representative was really keen that Eagle Secondary College would come on board because it was powering ahead with the Team Small Group stuff and deserved

²³ The membership of the Interim Steering Committee overlapped with the Victorian National Schools Network Steering Committee. It comprised representatives from the Department of Education at the university (two including the acting Head of School), the Directorate of School Education, the Catholic Education Office, the National Schools Network, and the teacher unions (the Australian Education Union and Victorian Independent Education Union).

additional support, it was really doing interesting things and it would be great to have documentation about that. I think...the union representative sought schools in the western region and came up with Rosella Primary School. The CEO representative nominated Kingfisher Primary School. We (at the university) had strong relations at that time with Honeyeater Primary School through teacher education, they seemed to have progressive relations and some of their teachers had been involved in some of our professional development programs. And Finch Secondary College, how did it come on board? I can't recall, it got nominated.

While acknowledging that the committee process could be questioned on democratic grounds, Steve believed that it had been an open and negotiated process and was designed to facilitate a speedy start to the project.

It is clear that the university team played a central role in initiating and establishing the Western Melbourne Roundtable and as the Roundtable began its work the team continued to play a key role. The university team:

- recognised the need to improve school–university relationships
- recognised the university pressure to build a research culture
- wanted to work in an action research way with teachers in schools rather than conduct research on teachers and schools
- recognised the impact of the broader education agenda especially in relation to self-management and the pressure for improved student learning outcomes
- recognised the importance of being sensitive to school culture around issues of time and local politics
- wanted to establish democratic working relationships
- thought case writing would be a respectful research strategy.

The schools

The five schools which joined the Roundtable were different kinds of places from the university. The schools shared characteristics which distinguished them from the university. In most instances:

- there was a heightened awareness about the pressure of external expectations articulated by education systems
- there was a practical, rather than a research interest in focusing on workplace concerns
- research was not an expected or integrated aspect of work practice
- there were few connections beyond the local context
- there was a wariness about working with educators from university.

The schools were also different, one from another—they varied in size, they were organised differently, could be distinguished by their policies, programs and priorities and they brought their unique histories and cultures to the Roundtable. In their proposals to join the Roundtable they identified different problems and questions which would underpin their action and reflection. Despite these differences they were all committed to working together over time to rethink teachers' work so as to improve student learning outcomes.

As with their university colleagues, the teachers in schools drew on a variety of thinkers and ideas. When it came to big picture thinking about education, teachers talked about people and ideas from beyond the workplace, mentioning the following: Fullan and Hargreaves's 'What's Worth Fighting for?', the Coalition of Essential Schools, Ted Sizer's ideas in *Horace's School* and *Horace's Dilemma*, Elly Whittington and the Foxfire work from Kentucky. They also referred to the ideas expressed by Van Davey, Bob Lingard, Anna Ratzki and Viv White in various National Schools Network forums.

There was a shared interest in incorporating thinking skills into the classroom; sources of inspiration included Gardner's ideas about multiple intelligences, Bloom's

taxonomy and Socratic dialogue. Teachers also referred to Edward De Bono's 'thinking hats'. At Honeyeater Primary School Frank observed that teachers were

...dying to get to De Bono in-services, or Lane Clarke, we've had a lot of that stuff on here. And they are breaking their necks to do it and they don't worry about time after work or anything else. They are willing to do it...

Another group of ideas focused on alternate processes and strategies for classroom organisation. Kingfisher Primary School were moving away from Tinkler's thematic framework and other schools were drawing inspiration from Kath Murdoch's writing about learning through an inquiry process and integrated curriculum units, the work of Anne Ratzki and the Koln-Holweide School in developing the concept of Team–Small–Group–Plan and James Beane's and Barbara Brodhagen's ideas about negotiating the curriculum. Other participants focused on understanding the dynamics of working relationships and referred to disparate sources, including Myers-Briggs ideas about personality typing, which was used in the formation of teaching teams, and Joan Dalton's work on cooperative learning which was applied in the classroom.

Societal contexts

The impact of the world's reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force (Arendt, 1958:9).

The broader context of school education was referred to in many of the Roundtable documents. There were references to national and state government initiatives and connections were often made between the broader context and local concerns. Members of the Roundtable indicated a practical awareness of the centralisation which has been described and analysed by Blackmore (1999a) and Smyth (1993; 1994). Referring to the 'official' reform movement in Victoria—the 'Schools of the Future' policy—Rosita observed how there were 'volatile changes in education, sometimes politically motivated and often beyond our control' noting that one of her colleagues saw it as never-ending. Oliver also alluded to a feeling of powerlessness when he talked about change and the circulars that were issued 'from above' which meant that 'all of a sudden...(you had to) do something'. These observations about change were echoed in conversations connecting the big picture with school level

repercussions, and contrasting state trends with the work in Links schools. Steve observed that as the Links project began its collaborative, reflective practice, it was an 'horrific' time when 'the greatest damage you could imagine was being done to the fabric of relationships in government schools'. Teachers were forced to leave the teaching service and 'over entitlement' teachers were consolidated in 'hard-to-staff schools'. This was particularly evident at Eagle Secondary College which was a new school.

Giddens's (1999:13) observed that centralisation or pulling upwards was also accompanied by a pushing downwards which created new pressures to introduce local autonomy; Janine, the Principal at Eagle Secondary College, felt some of these pressures. She noted that while an abysmal process was applied to the introduction of the Schools of the Future policy it did seem to provide greater freedom and flexibility at the local level and she supported the shift of resources closer to the chalkface.

While the 1980s had been a time of curriculum innovation within broad policy guidelines, the strongest development in curriculum during the 1990s was the introduction of centrally determined curriculum frameworks (Smyth, 1993, 1994; Blackmore, 1999a). A grid of curriculum outcomes and indicators, divided into seven levels across eight key learning areas, was used for defining, measuring and reporting student learning outcomes. Nationally these were developed as statements and profiles and in Victoria as the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF). The CSF was coupled with the Learning Assessment Project (LAP), a program of statewide testing in primary schools. At Rosella Primary School the staff, who were unhappy about these system initiatives, decided to direct their energy towards a parallel initiative involving student self-assessment rather than focus on the introduction of the Learning Assessment Project. Their work demonstrated the conjunction of systemsworld and lifeworld; the parallel education movements sat side by side.

Another example relates to the systemic priority given to literacy and the associated mushrooming of federal and state funding as incentive to improve literacy standards and outcomes. The Victorian Early Years Literacy Project was an example of this momentum and increasingly became associated with the pressure to introduce multiage classes in the early years of primary education. This systemic focus on literacy standards coupled with the introduction of multiage grades created the

impetus for inquiry at Honeyeater Primary School. The teachers argued that they could not cater adequately for students with such diverse needs and so designed an inquiry process to examine and document the teachers', students' and parents' experiences and perceptions about multiage groupings. The inquiry process was initiated in response to the structural imposition, directly related to personal stress and concerns about equitable outcomes for students and was designed to inform planning for the future.

The accountability articulated by Blackmore (1999b) was a theme in all Western Melbourne Roundtable schools. In accordance with system demands, accountability structures were introduced at the school level and mandatory School Charters identified local priorities and targets. As can be seen in the school profiles in Chapter 4 each of the Western Melbourne Roundtable schools connected their roundtable work to local charter priorities: improving literacy and numeracy outcomes, improving assessment and reporting strategies, improving student participation and engagement in the middle years. For teachers, accountability was required through appraisal procedures—in Victoria this was known as the Victorian Professional Recognition Program (PRP). University colleagues noticed parallel shifts in the university during the life of the Roundtable and talked about the increased accountability demands in terms of publications and qualifications, and a shift away from the collaborative and mentoring focus in research towards an emphasis on individual research students.

All of these conditions support Hargreaves's (1994:118–120) claims about the intensification of teachers' work where there is little time for relaxation, preparation or professional development, and where teachers feel constantly overloaded with increasingly diverse responsibilities which undermine their ability to do their jobs well. Interestingly Hargreaves draws on Apple's (1989) and Densmore's (1987) work and suggests that teachers are inclined to respond to the pressures of intensification in the name of professionalism.

The second reform movement which teachers identified was connected to 'grass roots' issues including equity and social justice. Observations of the two parallel movements mirrored Repo's (1998) observations in Canada. Within the context of social justice reference was made to student disengagement, a shallow curriculum,

teacher isolation and a chasm between beliefs and practices (Sizer, 1984; Harradine, 1995). Roundtable projects responded to these concerns—alienation and disengagement in the middle years inspired the introduction of a negotiated curriculum and a reorganisation of students and teachers into teams and small groups (Team Small Group); concerns about curriculum and assessment inspired greater involvement of the students; teacher isolation inspired team work at the school and community level; and concerns about democratic practices shifted attention to inclusive processes.

Steve connected the Innovative Links Project and the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL):

...the ILP occurred at a particular time, came out of the quality teaching agenda, was being driven by people with at least a social democratic commitment to education and had national support. It (was) a good foundation. The problem (was) that it was driven by the quality agenda and despite what people say I find that it is impossible to put quality, as currently defined, and social justice in the same sentence without a negative in between them. But that's my ideology and a lot of my impressions are ideologically driven.

Laila, the Links coordinator at Kingfisher PS, recalled a personal awakening about democracy, participation and social justice.

...I remember...the Disadvantaged Schools Program coordinator...She really started asking those questions about 'What is it that is happening here? What are proving to be the barriers to those kids accessing their world and their society as full participants?' The whole idea of democracy and participation...So for me it was the emergence of the themes around social justice.

As well as connections with the NPQTL and the Disadvantaged Schools Program some of the schools that joined the Western Melbourne Roundtable had been working with the National Schools Network. Laila noted how the NSN had played a critical role in articulating principles. From her perspective the NSN

...was about trying to make education better for all Australian kids. It had this really big equity focus...and also the principles around a collaborative approach to decision-making for us as teachers and also the part about engaging kids more actively in their learning. So those three principles that the Network had worked long and hard on and had clearly stated, they were significant ones, I think they really made a contribution to helping raise awareness around those things...it broadened our understandings at a social, cultural, political level around these kinds of things. We had been pretty closed in, pretty insular, you know... We were not political people at all and it was a bit of a political awakening...people who could participate in that kind of way make differences.

Steve, who was the university colleague at Kingfisher Primary School (as well as the acting Head of the Department of Education at the university) was clear about the connection between the National Schools Network and the conception and implementation of the Innovative Links Project, both in terms of underlying principles and in terms of sharing responsibility for research, professional development and networking:

...from our point of view at the Western Melbourne Roundtable the NSN provided what the ILP never intended to do...professional development in school reform and pedagogy. And it was unashamed about it. Schools went into the NSN knowing that they were going to be getting a particular kind of professional development which was directed towards whole school change, whereas the ILP was action research and was being driven by the teachers in the school.

The Roundtable emerged in the context of these parallel reform movements—one driven by economic imperatives and the other by a concern for justice and equity—and members of the group determined to reconstruct their learning world taking these pressures, ideas and influences into consideration.

New places for learning

Looking from a different perspective, Smith (1993) and McDowell (1999) reason that ‘scaling’ places creates a ripple-like geography starting from the body and stretching outwards to home, community and then urban, regional, national and global sites. Smith (1993:101) contends that scale ‘demarcates the sites of social contest, the object as well as the resolution of contest’. Arendt (1958:181 and 199) also differentiates between places in her conception of the *vita activa* by distinguishing between the private and public realms and conceptualising a ‘space of appearances’ which is created when people come ‘together in the manner of speech and action’ within ‘a web of human relationships’. Giddens (1984:71) conceptualises this coming together as contextuality or ‘strips’ of ‘time–space in which gatherings take place.’ Giddens sees such gatherings as social occasions and distinguishes them from casual encounters. All of these ideas are distinctly geographical and when combined suggest a contextual landscape comprising different places, spaces and dimensions which might shape action and learning. This perspective is adopted here to shape the search for a understanding of context and action.

The Western Melbourne Roundtable created new, inclusive spaces which enabled participants to address the problems they had identified and to make connections between system functioning and the personal, cultural and social threads of their lives. Niemi and Kemmis (1999) argue that including multiple contexts demands a response at multiple levels and the Western Melbourne Roundtable created new opportunities for gathering and working together which were inextricably connected to the multifaceted landscape in which they emerged.

Using Smith’s (1993) ideas about scaling places, the Roundtable could be understood in terms of scaling places, or creating a string of new places for working together. The detail of the classroom was brought alive through case writing and then there were new opportunities to focus on these descriptions—locally teachers were part of a Links team, regionally they were part of a Roundtable and nationally they participated in networking opportunities provided by the ILP and the NSN. The new scale of the Western Melbourne Roundtable is depicted below in Figure 3.

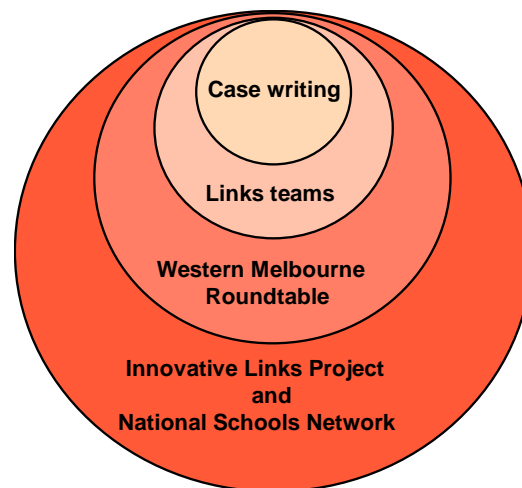


Figure 3: Scaling the Western Melbourne Roundtable

Case writing

Case writing promised a different kind of space—an opportunity to put individual teachers and their work in classrooms at the centre of inquiry by focusing on and expressing the detail and emotion of the classroom.

As described earlier, three members of staff from the Department of Education at the university attended a Judith Shulman workshop on case writing and suggested that the technique be used in the CRG and the Western Melbourne Roundtable. The university team thought case writing would provide a means of documenting action research in schools but were clear that schools should be free to choose what they wrote about. The university colleagues imagined that the cases, once written, would be used as a basis for reflection and seeking understanding.

Therefore, in agreeing to participate in the Roundtable each Links team agreed to use the case writing methodology to document action research around their own team-identified issues. As Steve recalled it was presented as a trial.

‘(Let’s) have a go at it.’ They were the words we used when we went to schools, ‘Let’s have a go at it, we don’t know whether it’s going to work or not, let’s see how it goes’.

And so case writing became an integral and significant component of the new context created by the Roundtable. It promised a space for individuals to reveal the detail of

their classroom experience so that people in different places could focus on dilemmas related to teaching and learning.

So what you had in a place like Kingfisher Primary School was on one hand a small group of teachers who were committed to NSN ideals and practices and who were getting involved in pedagogy like the James Beane negotiated curriculum stuff²⁴ and also the same group of teachers who were being asked to undertake action research using this case writing methodology. So you actually had something to write about and a few people got committed to writing about negotiating the curriculum.

At Eagle Secondary College, Bill recalled that the Links team did not start with negotiation. As with the selection of schools, Bill took a pragmatic approach by asking for volunteers to join the Link team but stipulating that it would involve writing cases about the Team Small Group (TSG) model which they used for organising students and teachers at the school. People chose whether they wanted to join the team knowing that participation involved writing cases about TSG.

While the idea had been suggested by the university team, no one was a skilled case writer and all members of the Roundtable had to learn together. As a first step the CRG organised a workshop, *Case Writing as Action Research* led by Lawrence Ingvarson.²⁵ The workshop was designed to support teacher and university researchers to inquire into school change and to develop specific skills in expression through case writing. The full day workshop was devoted to an investigation of the use of the Shulman Case methodology for the description of teachers' work. The group discussed the application of case writing in schools and its potential to enable teachers

²⁴ Beane and Brodhagen (1996) developed a strategy for negotiating the curriculum which involved the students identifying self and world questions, seeking common questions and then using the questions to help shape curriculum content and classroom activities.

²⁵ Lawrence Ingvarson was from the Faculty of Education at Monash University and he had been involved in hosting the Judith Shulman case writing workshops. The workshop was attended by representatives from each Roundtable team and the National Schools Network State Coordinator was also a guest at the session.

to justify their work in the current ‘outcomes focused’ context in Victoria. Ingvarson connected the usefulness of case writing with studies of school change emphasising the importance of denoting teachers’ personal convictions, meanings and understandings. The nature of the case method as ‘narrative’ was discussed and thus the need for attention to making personal reasoning explicit.

Participating teachers made the readily accepted point that staff reductions in schools had expanded teachers’ work so much that they could not take on additional large scale responsibilities but they indicated that the case method offered a means to describe their work without imposing a research method which had excessively technical demands. The final session examined the process of getting started, the questions which might be asked and how the university members of the Roundtable might work with schools and teachers. Picking up on a national trend towards formalising the recognition of workplace learning, they discussed the possibility of credits for postgraduate studies as an incentive to encourage participation.

Following the Ingvarson workshop, those who had attended returned to their Links colleagues and conducted school-based workshops. To support the establishment of collaborative research Inge compiled a list of publications on the case study methodology and the CRG purchased multiple copies of relevant publications for each team. Some members of the Roundtable drew on the literature to learn about writing cases and commentaries. Even so, as the case writing began, it was still a puzzle for some people to work out what they were supposed to do.

From a Habermasian perspective, cases promised an opportunity to adopt an expressive attitude and to gain a deeper understanding about how the personal, cultural and societal aspects of lifeworld link in practice. Niemi and Kemmis (1999) argue that each of the lifeworld dimensions has ‘a special task in the process of cultural reproduction and transformation’ and that recognising and responding to each dimension of the lifeworld ensures an understanding which is multi-layered. They argue the importance of:

...developing circumstances under which people can raise and explore questions, concerns and issues as a precondition for identifying new possibilities for action and improvement. It involves considering the...tensions and interconnections between system functioning and the

lifeworld processes (cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation-individuation) which jointly constitute the program or setting (Niemi & Kemmis, 1999).

From an Arendtian perspective the combination of case writing, multiple opportunities to meet and focused inquiry promised to bring the private nature of teaching and learning into the public arena, thereby creating intimate, cognitive spaces. Arendt used the idea of a ‘space of appearance’ to suggest the power that might be generated when people connect through word and deed. She argued that

...whenever people gather together, (a space of appearance) is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever...it comes into being wherever men are together in a manner of speech and action...Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company...where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities (Arendt, 1958:199–200).

From a cultural geography perspective Smith (1993:102) argues that the ‘dialectic of identity and difference is central to the definition of scale but nowhere more important than with the body’. Case writing, the aspect of Roundtable scale which was closest to the body, promised a space for the individual and the classroom to be revealed. The decision to adopt case writing as a strategy to support cycles of action and reflection was central in achieving professional development.

In addition to creating a different kind of space in the classroom, the scale of the Roundtable provided new spaces for people to meet and interact beyond the classroom. While each place could be distinguished by its distance from the classroom it could also be distinguished in terms of the frequency of meetings and the nature of participation. As outlined in the following section, the Links teams involved small groups which had an open membership while the Roundtable and networks were much larger groups which required representatives to be nominated. In terms of focus, the work could also be distinguished by its connection to personal, cultural and broader educational and social issues. And finally each place could be distinguished in terms of its contribution to building relationships, allowing for multiple voices and demonstrating democratic practices.

Meeting in teams

Members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable met locally in Links team meetings. In each of the six Links' places members of staff were invited to participate. Unlike most workplace meetings, participation was voluntary and having a choice about participation was seen as democratic. The Links team meetings, usually attended by all members of the team, were the most regular opportunities to get together with teams often allocating Links time each week. Judging by the references to these meetings in the documents and during the interviews they were highly significant opportunities to interact and work cooperatively. The team meetings provided an opportunity to explore individual and local concerns and they were precious times for talking, writing and thinking. As Rosita recalled, 'at our school we said the best thing about the (Links) money was that it bought us time'. These meetings could be distinguished from the usual staff and sectional meetings because the group could set and control its own agenda. Another distinctive aspect of the local team was its connection to the Roundtable and the national Innovative Links Project and National Schools Network networks. Each of these connections provided a further opportunity for interaction.

Forming a roundtable

Representatives of the six Links teams met regionally as the Western Melbourne Roundtable Steering Committee (commonly referred to as 'the Roundtable'). These meetings were also identified by Roundtable members as a significant opportunity to meet and work cooperatively. The composition and function of the Roundtable was specified in the National Professional Development Program tender document. It stipulated that representatives from each Links team were to join with education system representatives (from the Directorate of School Education and the Catholic Education Office) and union representatives (from the Australian Education Union and the Victorian Independent Education Union). Their official task was to allocate funds to affiliated schools, foster and facilitate communication between affiliated schools, coordinate the dissemination of knowledge from the Roundtable and liaise with other roundtables, the National Executive and the wider educational community. On reflection these meetings were significant for many reasons, some entirely unexpected. The dynamic of the Roundtable opportunity will be discussed in detail in

Chapter 7. For many school-based educators, having a chance to participate in meetings beyond the school was a new experience.

The Roundtable organisation was also distinctive because it indicated the group commitment to building equal, democratic partnerships.

We made a decision early on that the Roundtable Steering Committee meetings would be held every two months in a school and would be organised by the schools. I think that was symbolically powerful and I think politically powerful too, that the schools felt that this was their territory and that these were their meetings. They got money for putting on the lunch and teacher release from the project funds. The schools were really generous in welcoming us and they made us feel as though this was important work and it was contributing to the development of the schools. From each of the schools we worked in we felt welcomed and that this was valuable.

In addition to the regular meetings the Roundtable hosted three forums. Whereas the Roundtable meetings were attended by representatives from each Links team the forums provided an opportunity for everyone to get together. By adopting a cooperative approach, the forums sought to achieve a deeper understanding about the work of the Roundtable by making connections between the work and experiences of individuals and teams. The first forum in May 1995 was organised around the theme: *Learning Communities: School Reform*. The second, *Mapping Change*, was held in March 1996. As the title for this forum suggests the intention was to ‘provide an opportunity for teachers...to map changes in personal and organisational practices which (had) resulted from the ILP. In particular (they were) interested in the effectiveness of case writing in the documentation of changes in professional practice and organisation’. The outcome of this forum was a set of ‘collaborative maps’ which were included in the final report produced by each team. The third forum, held early in 1997, signalled the end of the project.²⁶ It focused on the questions: What? (What

²⁶ By the end of 1996 a new federal government had been elected and as with the conservative state government, elected in 1992, it was committed to reducing the influence of unions. As a result one of its first actions was to discontinue the projects which had been funded under the Accord made

have we achieved?); So What? (What does this mean?) and Now what? (What are the next steps?) These questions aligned closely to a set of questions that Beckett and Hager (2002:23 and 65) suggest are useful for encouraging 'sensitivity to a richer, more purposeful epistemology of practice' leading to an organic kind of workplace learning.²⁷

Networking roundtables

The third site of Roundtable action, the furthest from the classroom, was at the national level where the work of the 16 roundtables was connected through two national ILP coordinators who were supported by a National Executive.²⁸ The Western Melbourne Roundtable was represented on the National Executive by one university and one school-based educator, Steve and Laila. Laila recalled the formation of the executive.

...(E)ach of the roundtables was asked to send people to Sydney. I don't know whether I was petulant about that or not but I really wanted to go and it came down to myself and Ivan and I think we just flipped a coin and he was to go. But you know, I really wanted to go. Well, Steve found a way for us both to go, and we both spoke. We stood up in the hall at Sydney University and we spoke and at the end of that meeting I was on the National Executive. It was like: 'Far out, I don't know what's going on here.' It was huge.

between the Commonwealth government and the teaching profession. All teams found it impossible to continue their Links work without the modest financial support which had been available through the ILP and without opportunities to write and work together, within 6 months the Western Melbourne Roundtable as a viable, ongoing program had collapsed.^(Steve01)

²⁷ Beckett's and Hager's (2002:65) questions were: What are we doing? Why are we doing it? What comes next? How can we do it better?

²⁸ Reflecting the composition of local school–university partnerships there were two coordinators, one with a school and the other with a university background. The national coordinators, in conjunction with the National Executive, were also responsible for overseeing the production of a national journal *The Big Link*, and this provided an opportunity to build a network through publication and exchange

During the life of the Innovative Links Project the national network facilitated three national forums which were reported in the Innovative Links Project journal, the *Big Link*.²⁹ Members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable attended these forums and they were identified as significant cognitive opportunities which had an impact on their Links work. The Roundtable documents record people's enthusiasm about learning, sharing and making personal and professional connections.

The National Schools Network provided a parallel national network with a focus on school reform. In conjunction with the Australian Teaching Council,³⁰ the NSN ran professional development schools which were usually named after the season in which they were held. Several times a year, these week-long, intensive professional learning experiences were conducted for small groups around key topics. Reflecting on the 1996 Spring School, King noted:

It was one of the most intense and unique learning opportunities that I have experienced. When I came back I wrote for days and days because I wanted to capture the excitement of what I had experienced while it was all still fresh in my mind. I did not think it was possible to work so hard, learn so much, meet so many interesting people and have so much fun in one week. Yet again this was a springboard for new friendships, and my experience contributed to my ideas for the introduction of the Junior School, encouraged me to apply for higher duties and much more (King, 1996).

Being included in this kind of activity has clear implications not only for learning but for developing relationships, ideas and career confidence.

of ideas. The national coordinators also organised national forums and fostered links with the National Schools Network.

²⁹ The first was held in Sydney in September 1994 (Innovative Links Project, 1994), the second in Melbourne in May 1995 (Innovative Links Project, 1995) and the third was held in mid 1996 (Moore, 1996).

³⁰ The Australian Teaching Council was a national professional body which no longer exists. As with the ILP and the NSN it was dependent on federal government funding which was discontinued following the election of a conservative government in 1996.

In 1996 the NSN ran a *National School Reform Conference*. More than fifteen members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable attended the conference with some presenting a paper about learning organisations and their partnership experience in the Western Melbourne Roundtable (Moffat & Cherednichenko, 1996).

The NSN also ran a number of special seminars including one conducted by James Beane and Barbara Brodhagen about negotiating the curriculum which was attended by two teachers from Kingfisher Primary School. As a result of their attendance they returned to their school with a proposal for negotiating the curriculum in the middle years which is now an integrated and ongoing practice at the school. The National Schools Network also worked in the area of leadership. Connections through the NSN and the ILP also provided links to international networks and ideas.

At the end of 1996, with the goal of increasing, communicating and recording knowledge, the Innovative Links Project and the National Schools Network joined forces to conduct the Southern Forum, a regional forum for ILP and NSN members from Victoria, Tasmania, and South Australia.

Heeding the advice of Michael Fullan, “Have good ideas but listen with empathy”, the participants grouped themselves around major themes (Moore, 1997:25).

The themes included the middle years, learning in teams, technology and pedagogy, work organisation, ways students learn and teacher appraisal.

Reflecting on the scale of the Roundtable, three layers of opportunity could be seen: the team, the Roundtable and the national networks each provided a different kind of place for interaction and working together beyond the classroom. These new places were established parallel to the traditional gathering places such as staff and section meetings. They did not replace the old sites for gathering, but created new social occasions focused on teaching and learning which complemented the existing places.

Adopting an inclusive attitude

The Western Melbourne Roundtable adopted an inclusive attitude and it was inclusivity that provided the key to understanding contextual democracy. The first part of this chapter focused on the way in which the Roundtable work revolved

around personal, cultural and societal contextual threads. It described how individual people, the university, schools and system policies and programs each impacted on the formation and subsequent work of the Roundtable. This was followed by an examination of the new, inclusive places and spaces created by the Western Melbourne Roundtable—the Links teams, the Roundtable, the national networks as well as case writing. These contextual threads and the scaled aspects of Roundtable action make up the north–south axis in Figure 4: The contextual plane of action.

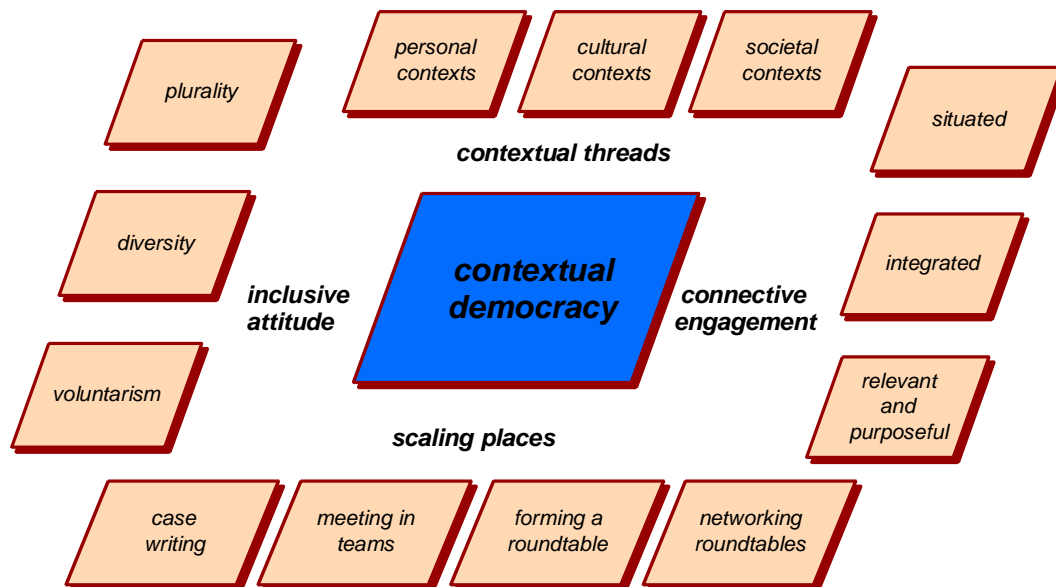


Figure 4: The contextual plane of action

Giddens (1999:67–82) argues that democracy needs democratising and suggests bringing decision-making closer to the every day concerns of people. Yet, as noted earlier there were doubts about whether the Roundtable could really be considered democratic when the university team initiated the work, when schools were nominated, when people had no choice about case writing, when the structure was predetermined and when many of the principles which underpinned the project were pre-determined by the Accord, the NPDP the Innovative Links Project, the National Schools Network and system-wide policies, programs and initiatives. However, in setting new boundaries for their work together, members of the Roundtable signalled an intention to resist ‘colonization’ and to connect systems and lifeworld and commit to democratic practices and a partnership of equals. This democracy was initially conceived as: voluntary participation; negotiation; shared power and control; shared decision-making; and balancing rights and responsibilities. With these tensions as a

backdrop, the remainder of this chapter will examine contextual democracy by looking at what it meant to adopt an inclusive attitude and aim for meaningful engagement.

In order to understand the significance of this dimension of contextual action it is useful to return again to Smith's (1993) use of scale. Smith argues that scale is an active progenitor of social process and in developing his ideas about the scale of everyday life he refers to the creation of a 'Homeless Vehicle'.³¹ He puts a proposition:

If the Homeless Vehicle provides an oppositional means for reinscribing and reorganising the urban geography of the city, it does so in a very specific way. It opens new spaces of interaction but does not do so randomly. Rather, it stretches the urban space of productive and reproductive activity, fractures previous boundaries of daily intercourse, and establishes new ones. It converts other spaces, previously excluded, into the known, the made, the constructed. In short it redefines the scale of everyday life for homeless people (Smith, 1993:90).

This gives a strong lead into understanding how the Roundtable changed professional learning by stretching, creating and converting oppositional spaces and fracturing and redrawing boundaries to make the professional learning opportunities more inclusive. As the creation of the Homeless Vehicle redefined 'the scale of everyday life for homeless people' so too the Western Melbourne Roundtable redefined the scale of cognitive opportunities for its participants.

As Little and McLaughlin (1993:4) note each occasion and location 'of teacher interaction provides a microcontext for collegial relations', and the Roundtable opened new spaces of interaction and 'stretched' the learning environment so that

³¹ Neil Smith (1993:87-95) explores the idea of 'scaling places' by focusing on the development of a work of art called the 'Homeless Vehicle'. First tested in New York, it is modelled on the supermarket trolley incorporating a sleeping space, a storage compartment and a wash basin. Smith observes that it is 'more than simply a critical artwork heavy with symbolic irony, the Homeless Vehicle is deliberately practical: indeed it works as critical art only to the extent that it is simultaneously functional'.

different people with diverse concerns and perceptions could be included and all their interests could be pursued. Giddens (1999), Bauman (2000) and Arendt (1958) all argue that a key component in achieving democracy and unity is through plurality and the inclusion of multiple voices with diverse interests. The Roundtable achieved plurality and diversity through the participation of people from different contexts with diverse concerns and perceptions.

Habermas's (1984; 1987) conception of lifeworld has been used throughout this chapter to understand the Roundtable 'horizon'. Looking back it seems that the inclusion of the personal, cultural and societal dimensions of lifeworld stretched the Roundtable work. Including the personal dimension meant that it was possible to focus on educators; including the cultural dimension meant it was possible to focus on their work; and including the societal dimension meant it was possible to focus on the workplace, the system and the world beyond.

Thinking about democracy, and referring to single issue groups, Giddens (1999) argues that no problem or question should be ignored and in the case of the Roundtable, adopting an inclusive attitude and including everybody's concerns maximised the chance of achieving meaningful engagement. At Honeyeater Primary School for example, the teachers wanted to inquire into the range of perceptions relating to multiage student groupings. Interestingly their concern went against the grain in two ways—it challenged reform interests and government policy. The value of multiage groups was first promoted during the 1970s and 80s as a strategy to challenge the belief that all students at the same year level should be taught the same thing, in the same way, at the same time. In the context of this innovative project one might have expected the teachers at Honeyeater Primary School to share this view. However tension was created as a result of the government agenda. The Ministry of Education argued that the value of multiage student groups was evident both in terms of efficiency (small cohorts of students at different levels could be combined) and effectiveness (the Early Years Literacy program was based on the idea that in their first three years of schooling different students develop at different rates). The teachers felt they were not able to adequately cater for students' needs and that the demands on the teachers working in this way were extreme. And the Innovative Links Project, without judging their concerns one way or another, provide an opportunity for

them to explore this tension. Because diverse interests and perspectives were expressed, incorporated and valued then practical, technical and emancipatory questions emerged. This created a solid foundation for adopting a cognitive attitude to professional development.

Smith's observations about the way in which the Homeless Vehicle fractured boundaries of daily intercourse and established new ones were also matched in the Roundtable context. Teachers were ready to fracture existing boundaries and establish new ones and this happened in several significant ways. In the first instance members of the Roundtable recognised their feelings of powerlessness in the face of change which they considered was beyond their control. They felt the pressure to be technicians, responsible for local/classroom implementation of centralised policies. The Roundtable provided an opportunity to 'fracture' existing practice and shift the boundaries so that there were new opportunities for democratic practice, including exercising power and taking control. Niemi and Kemmis (1999) stress the importance of exploring tensions between system and lifeworld as a precursor to taking action across the lifeworld 'horizon'. The experience at Rosella Primary School was a good case in point. When the system introduced a statewide testing regime it was at odds with the school's existing philosophy and practice. This tension led them to rethink their philosophy and practice, to devise a new student self assessment strategy, implement their ideas, and then observe and reflect in an action research way. Ultimately they incorporated both strategies, seeing the necessity to implement government guidelines and at the same time adopting an alternate strategy which fitted the school ethos and teachers' lifeworld.

Another boundary that was challenged was the divide between school and university educators. The Roundtable responded to this tension by privileging teachers' interests and classroom concerns. Thinking about democracy, Bauman (2000:178) emphasises the importance of 'negotiation and reconciliation...(rather than) denial, stifling or smothering out of differences'. However, Collay (1998:112) insists that adopting a teacher-centred attitude does not necessarily develop reciprocal relationships or challenge traditional notions of power and authority, and this raises questions about the value of taking this course of action. This question will be returned to in Chapter 7 in the exploration of working relationships.

Smith (1993:90) further argues that creating a Homeless Vehicle ‘converts spaces, previously excluded, into the known, the made, the constructed’, and like the Homeless Vehicle the Roundtable converted spaces and created new spaces for interaction in a very specific way which gave new meaning to professional learning. Case writing, for instance, promised to convert the way people observed, talked and thought about their professional lives. It promised a strategy for teachers to reveal the detail of their work—as Arendt (1958) argued, an opportunity to bring something that had been previously hidden out into the open, to make it known. This revelation, or movement from the private to the public, allowed educators to focus on and connect the personal, cultural and social dimensions of their lifeworld. While Roundtable participants had vastly different responses to this possibility—such as Lily’s willingness to write a story at the drop of a hat and Ian’s fear of writing—opportunities to participate in professional conversations and write cases promised a kind of engagement which was connected, intimate and creative.

The Roundtable also formed school-based teams, connected them regionally as a Roundtable and then linked them to other like groups around Australia. This created three new opportunities for interaction. Circumstances that had prevented teachers from working together were challenged as each space suggested new and different ways of cooperating—opportunities usually out of reach for most teachers. Giddens (1984:71) conceptualises coming together as contextuality or ‘strips’ of ‘time–space in which gatherings take place.’ He sees such gatherings as social occasions and distinguishes them from casual encounters. By creating a new scale for professional learning the Roundtable formalised opportunities for gathering. But they were not isolated opportunities; each was connected, forming what Arendt (1958: 181 & 191) might call ‘a web of human relationships’. Each aspect of the Roundtable scale suggested another possibility or ‘space of appearances’ which Arendt argued is created when people come ‘together in the manner of speech and action’.

Smith (1993:101) states that scale ‘demarcates the sites of social contest, the object as well as the resolution of contest’. This conception of scale helps to understand the significance of the scale created by the Roundtable. Case writing seemed to provide the space closest to the ‘body’ with the teams, the Roundtable and the networks forming sites of contest and resolution which were increasingly distant from the body.

Each place provided a different opportunity for exploring system–lifeworld tensions and the distinctive features associated with each place are discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Connective engagement

The uniqueness of a place, or locality...is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself (Massey, 1993:66).

The Roundtable aimed for meaningful professional learning by making connections. Participants knew that they wanted whatever they did to be purposeful, valuable, useful, relevant and worthwhile. In the first instance they achieved meaning by adopting an inclusive attitude and linking their work to the multiple contexts described throughout this chapter. Sutherland (1998:5) argues that workplace learning derives its purpose from ‘the context of employment’ and while this was true of the Roundtable, a broad interpretation of the employment context was adopted through the inclusion of personal, cultural and societal contexts. People expected that their work would make a difference across the ‘horizon’ of the Roundtable. At a personal level they expected to improve their own skills and understanding, at a cultural level they anticipated the introduction and evaluation of innovative work practices and at a societal level they expected to grapple with issues of justice, equality and democracy. There was an expectation that outcomes would be relevant across the scale of the Roundtable—for individual participants, for teams, the Roundtable and the national networks.

Kemmis (2001:92) distinguishes between three kinds of inquiry interest. He argues that *technical* interests are geared towards changing the outcomes of practice, *practical* interests towards changing both outcomes and practitioner understanding and *critical* or *emancipatory* interests connect outcomes and understanding within a critique of context. The different kinds of interest were evident in the Roundtable.

At a technical level numerous problems were identified and solutions sought. At Finch Secondary College for example, teachers wanted to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students in the middle years and began by changing the way they taught comprehension and percentages. They explored the use of ‘hooks’ to capture the imagination of the learners and strove to connect the work in the classroom with the world beyond. One example involved making a connection between Hiroshima Day and literature connected to the dropping of the bomb. Through similar endeavours, all individuals and teams involved in the Roundtable argued that they had improved student learning outcomes through attention to a range of technical interests. Teachers changed curriculum content, adopted new strategies for teaching, assessment and recording student progress. They devised new processes for planning and introduced new ways of organising themselves and their students.

All schools identified an interest in improving student learning outcomes and at a practical level teams connected their own practice with their desire for improved student learning outcomes. They wanted ‘every kid to be successful’ and within this broad goal teams focused their energies in different ways. At Honeyeater Primary School, for example, where the teachers wanted to improve literacy outcomes in the first three years of schooling, they set out to achieve a deeper understanding about the value and the drawbacks of working with multi-age grades.

In other circumstances student learning outcomes and practitioner understanding were connected to critical–emancipatory issues which gained their meaning through connections with ideas beyond individual classrooms and schools. Teachers were aware of and engaged with broader social issues such as democracy, social problems such as student alienation and disengagement and possible solutions such as increasing student control and building relationships. At Rosella Primary School the teachers wanted to democratise the curriculum by encouraging students to take greater responsibility for their learning. They extended student participation in the curriculum by introducing student self assessment at all grade levels and across all curriculum areas and reflected on the innovation in order to gain a deeper understanding about democracy in practice. At Kingfisher Primary School the students were asked to identify self and world questions and these questions shaped the curriculum. And at Eagle Secondary College students worked in small teams identifying and

implementing collaborative projects. In each context the teachers noted the significant achievements made by students and observed increased control, ownership, participation and engagement in their learning.

As Niemi and Kemmis (1999) suggest, meaning is also achieved by exploring the tension between system and lifeworld processes. Roundtable participants were aware of the range of contextual factors that influenced their technical, practical and emancipatory interests. As exemplified by Honeyeater Primary School in their questioning about multiage classes, system initiatives created tension in the workplace and this became the inspiration for seeking alternative ways of thinking and acting. For others, including the teams at Kingfisher Primary School and Rosella Primary School, the tension between system initiatives and the principles of social justice was a significant contributor in shaping their work. Giddens (1994:93) argues for a generative politics—change which is organic rather than top down, responsive to local and global issues and attends to the relationship between the political centre and decentralisation. In this way, acting contextually—being free to connect context and action—enabled learning and innovation in the Roundtable.

As well as the practical, technical and emancipatory interests associated with the classroom, members of the Roundtable identified a range of interests connected to their work outside the classroom. They wanted to reduce the isolation and feelings of powerlessness they were experiencing and challenge the idea of ‘teacher as technician’. Oliver noted the value of trying different strategies for reflection and aiming to gain a deeper understanding of action. He, like others, wanted to move beyond professional development connected to system initiatives, and improve learning outcomes for all students through creativity and innovation supported by partnerships and research. And, as mentioned earlier, members of the Roundtable also wanted to challenge the unequal status of teachers in schools and universities. All of these interests gave contextually democratic meaning to the work of the Roundtable.

Members of the Roundtable associated meaning with the opportunity to inquire, ask questions, explore, check, challenge and try things out. In joining the Roundtable individuals and groups indicated a desire to work together—learning, judging and seeking solutions to their problems. There was a shared understanding across multiple contexts of the need to respond, reshape, reconceptualise, reconstruct, recreate—a

creative approach to action was required. MacIntyre (1999:245–246) puts the point of view that in order to rethink institutions such as public education we must be courageous, learn to think for ourselves ‘rather than in accordance with the prescriptions of some authority’ and seek a solution by investigating contingency and particularity. The Roundtable created the possibility for new beginnings by providing opportunities for collaborative inquiry in context. Incorporating multiple contexts and creating a scale of new, inclusive spaces for inquiry and learning seemed to build a commitment to the project which aligned with Yeatman’s (1996:49) observation that new learning and a renegotiation of core values in response to our changing world, while painful, is possible if it seems a meaningful thing to do.

By focusing on the contextual plane of action it has been possible to reveal the way in which the Roundtable created and converted spaces, redrawing boundaries and redefining the scale of professional learning. The new scale promised a great deal and raised many questions, especially in terms of situated dialogue and collaboration; both of these aspects of Roundtable action require further investigation to understand what Roundtable members did with these opportunities in practice. This is the task for the next two chapters.

Case writing promised an opportunity to record the detail of teaching and learning and there was an expectation that technical, practical and emancipatory concerns would be voiced, valued and pursued. But there were questions: Were all interests included and treated equally with no one concern or question being neglected or privileged over another? Did case writing lead members of the Roundtable to gain a new level of intimacy that helped them to solve problems and reach a deeper understanding? Did case writing support the exploration of intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions as a precursor to building collegial relationships? Did case writing support action and reflection across the scale of Roundtable? Did case writing contribute to professional development, innovation and inquiry? The connection between case writing and the dialogic plane of action will be examined in Chapter 6.

And there are similar questions about the nature of Roundtable relationships and the connections between context, dialogue and collaboration which shape the exploration in Chapter 7. The Links teams, the Roundtable and the national networks provided new opportunities to work together and Roundtable participants clearly associated

meaningful engagement with collaborative action. But what did these new opportunities look like in practice? What kind of interactions were possible in each space? Who was included and who was excluded? Were the relationships democratic and did everyone feel equal? Did cooperative relationships contribute to professional learning?

Chapter 6: Acting dialogically

The purpose of this chapter is to gain a deeper understanding about the second of four aspects of Western Melbourne Roundtable action—dialogic action. The intention is to extend the exploration of Roundtable action begun in Chapter 5 by focusing on aspects of Roundtable communication which were connected to case writing—storytelling and listening, writing and reading cases, and case-inspired conversations.

In the exploration of contextual action it was argued that Roundtable members adopted an inclusive attitude and in doing so created a scale of spaces for professional learning (case writing, teams, a Roundtable and networks) which encouraged and supported expression, interaction and cognition. It was further argued that by adopting this kind of attitude and acting contextually the Roundtable not only achieved connectivity for Roundtable participants but also set the scene for engagement which was intimate, cooperative and creative. Each of these aspects of Roundtable action are depicted below in Figure 5: Connecting contextual and dialogic action.

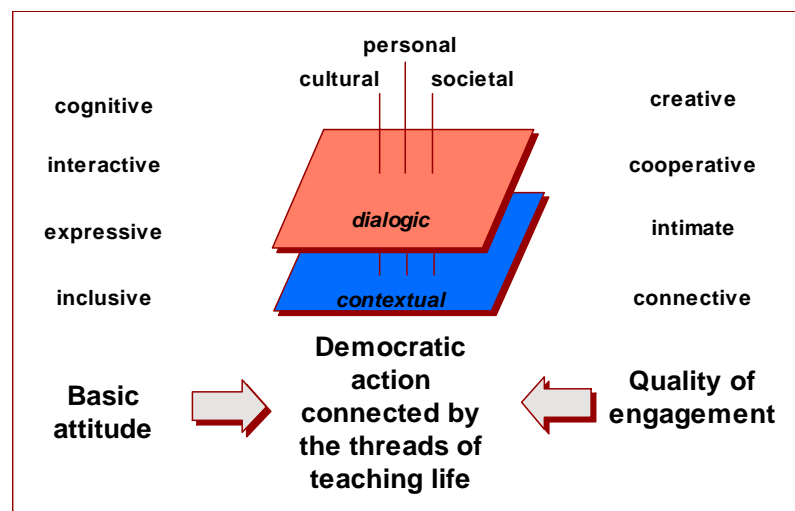


Figure 5: Connecting contextual and dialogic action

The examination of dialogic action in the Roundtable will be achieved by investigating the connection between contextual action and dialogic action and seeking to understand the basic attitude and the quality of engagement evident in this second dimension of action.

The literature indicates that dialogue is significant in building relationships (Giddens, 1999), achieving reconciliation (Arendt, 1958), reaching understanding (Habermas, 1984; MacIntyre, 1999) and making way for new beginnings (Arendt, 1958).

Habermas believes that those who wish to achieve a deeper understanding, which he sees as the principal goal of communication, must have the ability to participate in argumentation, enjoy the mutuality of shared grounds and participate in a community of the communicatively competent (Braaten, 1996:141). Habermas further argues that in order to act communicatively and participate in the process of reaching understanding:

The speaker must choose a comprehensible (verständlich) expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true (wahr) proposition...so that the hearer can share the knowledge with the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully (wahrhaftig) so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right (richtig) so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another (Habermas, 1996b:119).

More recently, Habermas (1999:140), seeking a model for deliberation and decision-making, has argued for a procedural democracy which is achieved by ‘weaving together pragmatic considerations, compromises, discourses of self-understanding and justice’. In this context he suggests the need to focus on the rules of discourse and the forms of argumentation. These ideas, and the interpretations and challenges articulated by others provide a framework for seeking to understand the space, form and characteristics of dialogic action in the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

Many Roundtable documents contained references to communication in the Roundtable—the cases and the minutes of Roundtable Steering Committee meetings portrayed the dialogic experiences as they were happening. The collaborative interviews conducted by and for the Links teams in 1996-97 looked back, in an evaluative way, at the case writing activity. Finally, Roundtable members who participated in the individual interviews conducted during 2001 as part of this project identified case writing as a key aspect of Roundtable activity. Their insights formed the basis for the document *Chris’ reflections on case writing* (Appendix 8: Chris’ reflections on case writing, p464) and set the scene for the subsequent group

interview/structured conversation which was conducted in 2002. These interviews provided a third and more distant reflection on the dialogic activities of the Roundtable. While it was with mixed feelings that members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable adopted case writing as a central activity, by the end of the project, and now five years on, there is no doubt that this ambivalence was replaced by a shared enjoyment of, and commitment to, the case writing process. The detail presented in this chapter shows that case writing, as interpreted by the Roundtable, featured dialogue which was meaningful because it was contextually connected, cooperative and promoted both intimate and creative engagement.

Dialogic flow

The first step in gaining a deeper understanding about dialogical action is achieved through an examination of dialogic flow. As described in Chapter 5, case writing was the central aspect of dialogic action in the Western Melbourne Roundtable. It was adopted by the Roundtable following a seminar conducted by Judith Shulman, and the university colleagues who attended the session believed the strategy might be appropriate for collaborative research. Case writing promised both support for and documentation of local investigations into innovation in teaching and learning. Participants anticipated identifying critical incidents, revealing details of practice, discussing issues raised, making decisions about future action and documenting action research. Because case writing was central to Roundtable activity the connection between case writing and dialogic action is of paramount importance in the context of this chapter. However, case writing was preceded by storytelling and listening.

Storytelling and listening

For action and speech...are indeed the two activities whose end result will always be a story with enough coherence to be told, no matter how accidental or haphazard the single events and their causation may appear to be (Arendt, 1958:97).

The Roundtable members found that just talking was important. The first aspect of what Braaten (1996) might call communicative competence was oral storytelling. Within the Roundtable, dialogic activity began with storytelling and during this study it was mentioned repeatedly and fondly. While there was an expectation that cases

would be written and so become a focus for discussion, the importance of simply telling and listening to stories was not anticipated and certainly not articulated in any of the early Roundtable documents. Teresa, who had recently returned from family leave, thought that teaching was

...a bit like being a mother, you know, you just do it instinctively. I s'pose what this project made us do was verbalise it, that's what we had to do.

Prue, a teacher at Primary School, expressed the view that it was the talk which was important and whether people wrote or not was an optional next step. Olga recalled:

Well, when I was first involved we used to find it was a really good time just to talk about things. You never have time just to sit back and talk about things in a small group where you can interact and just talk about your own experiences with teaching, with working with other teachers and that kind of thing. So I just found it a good time to get things off my chest or just ask, just to listen to other people. I guess I just kept doing it that way just for the talking but it was just a time where we didn't have to worry about the routine of the classroom or the work you had to do, you could just sit back and talk about things that were going on in the school.

Nias and her colleagues (1989:79) argue that 'chat' is a high-level activity. In reporting their study of staff relations in primary schools they note that in schools with a collaborative culture

...staff spent a great deal of time talking to one another and that their conversations were usually a mixture of chat about themselves and discussion of their teaching...everyday talk was the medium through which shared meanings first evolved and then were continuously and implicitly reinforced.

The significance of chat was also felt in the Roundtable and members of teams noted the new space for talking and listening. Dora contrasted the new opportunities with a memorable day when she had felt worn out, frustrated, 'annoyed in a big way' and all she had received in response to expressing these emotions to a colleague was the throwaway line, 'Just having another happy day Dora?'

While teachers were used to telling stories about their work in informal situations—around the staffroom table, in the passageway, in the car park—as the teams got going they soon realised that the Roundtable was distinctive because it created a particular space and time to talk. Storytellers found that talking to their Links team colleagues enabled them to say things that they would have been too scared to say in the staffroom. They compared the Links opportunity with past circumstances where they had not relished the chance to talk and had been unlikely to turn to their colleagues, instead ‘keeping it all within’, ‘suffering in silence’, and feeling like they had to find a way to deal with a problem for fear that others would see them as incompetent. Arendt (1958:50) argues that bringing things into the public realm ‘assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves’ and teachers in the Roundtable noticed that once they began to talk, reflect and think together about context-related issues, problems and questions, the things that did and didn’t work, it relieved the stress. ‘Like a drink’, Dora noted.

Those who participated in local team meetings valued telling and listening and in this way a discourse of self understanding (Habermas, 1984) became systematic and public (Stenhouse, 1975:156–7). Teachers were aware that they rarely had a chance to speak to other teachers about specific things that happened at work and that when time was not allocated for talking it was a strain to find it. Therefore when they received the Innovative Links Project money³² it not only became possible to buy time for talking but it indicated that others thought this was important work. The local teams of colleagues who exchanged stories were exactly the kind of groups that MacIntyre saw as providing a context for genuine thought—‘small face-to-face conversational groups who pursue their enquiries systematically’ (MacIntyre, 1999:251).

Even when teachers recognised the unique opportunity to talk they were still challenged by the barriers. Frida, reflecting on the Eagle Secondary College experience recalled:

³² Each team received approximately \$10,000.

...The meetings we had were always very interesting because we got to talk about educational issues that didn't...come up very often when talking together at other times, however they always seemed like a bit of a pressure because it was something extra to do in the working day rather than something that seemed genuinely part of what you were doing.

Picking up on another challenge, Moore (1995) reported the problem of interrupting normal day-to-day school arrangements, especially when teachers were committed to building a community of learners in the classroom and knew that to leave the group was a threat to the stability which was such an important ingredient in their work together. As Bill observed:

What's always been a tension...is just the sheer physical thing of leaving...the students to go to meetings...No matter if there was financial remuneration for it or whatever because our experience has been that if we are not with our kids then bloody mayhem can ensue...We tried to find ways of overcoming that. One of the suggestions was that we (might)...tag a designated CRT³³ teacher for the year. That was the intention, it never happened, we couldn't do it, we couldn't get anyone. It was just a bloody joke. I really reckon that is an important consideration...

And Eleni noted the day-to-day interruptions:

...we could easily get lost...Everyday things happen at the school—someone's got the wrong school shoes on—and suddenly they become more important. Rather than sitting down and writing...your day gets filled up with the small things and you don't have time for the big ones.

Threats to the dialogic space varied from one person, one team and one school to the next and given the observations about finding a space for telling and listening it was not surprising that Eleni observed 'half of us don't even think about our practice let

³³ A CRT is a casual relief teacher.

alone write about it'. But it was worth taking up the challenge and developing this aspect of communicative competence because talking, telling stories and listening seemed to be a rehearsal for writing and reading cases.

Writing and reading cases

Writing cases to be shared with colleagues defies several norms embedded in the culture of teaching as work. The first is writing. Teaching is a 'doing' profession. In my experience working with teachers...I find many resistant to writing about their work. Writing requires time—a precious rare commodity for most teachers. It also requires having something to write about and a way of thinking that is typically not part of the professional training of teachers (Shulman, 1992:156).

The Roundtable had created a space for dialogue, the stories seemed to be flowing and it was in this context that case writing and reading became the second kind of dialogic activity within the Roundtable. It was the written version of telling and listening; in fact many people referred to case writing as though it was spoken and reading as though it was listening. Inge, who had attended the Shulman workshop and subsequently incorporated case writing into many aspects of her work, observed that case writing

...is a wonderful way of professionals speaking and listening to each other whether they are school teachers or workplace trainers or paramedics who do training as part of their work...it is a wonderful way for them to talk to each other.

But case writing and reading also differed from telling and listening and teachers realised they had adopted an activity which encapsulated their experiences, opinions and feelings. Rosita contrasted talking and writing:

I think it is very easy to have discussions, but the words aren't there, they're not solid, you can't see them, you can't hear them again if you want to. So writing things down freezes that moment and your ideas and thoughts at that time and even though they date—like when I look back and think oh my goodness—it helps you to mark things, mark

milestones or time, you know what I mean. And you can say, yeah, that was where I was at the time.

In this different expressive space teachers observed a shift from something that could be construed as ‘just having a chat or a whinge’ to recorded stories and as with the telling, teachers felt reassured by the activity, this time with an added sense of professionalism. However, talking continued to have a significant role because it was through talking and telling that cases emerged and the importance of this connection between stories and cases was another aspect of communicative competence.

For some Roundtable members it was difficult to take the step from talking to writing. Steve observed that in most instances teachers commenced the writing of a case ‘only after intense description and analysis of a practical situation with colleagues.’ He recalled one such occasion at Kingfisher Primary School:

I’m sitting down having a cup of coffee because there is a meeting coming and Kylie rushes into the staffroom. She’s looked at me, said ‘Wait there!’, rushed back and got some kid’s work, shown me this kid’s work and excitedly told me about how this kid had actually put pen to paper for the first time and had made this leap, this learning leap. I said ‘Would you like to write a case?’ and she just sat down, there and then, and wrote a case. Fifteen minutes and she had a page of writing. Done. And it was a very powerful time, and it described an important moment in this teacher’s life.

When a couple of teachers at Eagle Secondary College could not think of anything to write Anna took them out for a coffee and as they talked she scribed. After 45 minutes they stopped and looked at the record of the conversation—three hours later one of the teachers had written a seven page case. It seemed that teachers had to ‘visit’ their practical consciousness before they could achieve a discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984:41–5 and 374–5). At Rosella Primary School Peter noted:

It’s really hard because initially you have to really make a conscious effort to see what’s around you because unless somebody asks you a question sometimes you don’t really see what’s happening ... you’re so

busy with the day-to-day stuff that you kind of have to stop, look back and think...

Janine also described how hard it was to identify what was important when you were in the middle of things. She recalled wondering what to write about.

I used to think of a lot of things and think they are probably only trivial but if you go back and think about them now you think no they were important things. I think there was a lot more that I could have written on or could write on now or that I probably rejected.

The time needed to take the step from storytelling to case writing varied from one person to the next. For some it seemed easy yet for others it was a six month struggle. For the latter group, when a topic suddenly emerged and they got down the first line it seemed easy, the story just came out and they found they could write and write. At Rosella Primary School the teachers tried to focus their work by sitting around a table together reading cases written by people in other professions. As they reviewed the cases each person interjected with stories and experiences indicating there were many stories to be told. Having identified a story some teachers stumbled again, doubting whether their stories were good enough to share, often needing reassurance before making their stories public. As Olga recalled:

...I was the Link person in the school at the time, and (a teacher) would show (a case) to me and say 'Do you think this is worthwhile taking to the group?' and I'd say 'Well anything you want to tell us is worthwhile'. And that gave them a little bit more confidence...I felt the same way as that person when I showed my first case to Steve, and that was the response that I got and so I passed it on.

Dialogic action in the Roundtable involved a formal storytelling process that allowed teachers to stop, look together and see things they had not seen before. Then they began to craft cases. Teachers observed that case writers were telling it like it was and in doing so rejecting the idea of constructing a contrived discourse.

People had a choice about whether their cases became public or not and in some instances the case writer was both storyteller and the only audience. But in general,

members of the Roundtable wrote cases in the knowledge that they would become public—they believed that there had to be a reason for writing; if no-one was going to read their writing and it was ‘just going into a box’ there would be less eagerness. In the beginning case writers generally imagined two specific audiences for their stories—their Links team colleagues and student teachers. But eventually cases reached multiple audiences extending beyond the individual and the team, to the Roundtable and the network beyond. Oliver noticed how the audience grew rapidly over time:

...I think probably beyond—would I be fair in saying?—even beyond people’s expectations, in terms of (cases) getting to...and being valued by a much larger number of people. I don’t know, perhaps I’m too isolated or something, but I don’t think there are all that many opportunities whereby you get that positive feeling out of that sort of contribution.

Cases, made public, became the focus for dialogic relationships. Disch uses Arendt’s ideas to understand the relationship between storyteller, story and visitor.

(While the) testifier wants to be heard and to be responded to with emphatic affirmation...a story exhorts its auditor to “go visiting,” asking “how would *you* see the world if you saw it from *my* position?” The “visitor” is invited not emphatically to assimilate the different perspectives he or she finds, rather, to converse with them to consider how they differ from his or her own (Disch, 1994:13).

Case writers revealed their stories and expected others to ‘visit’ their experience. They sought affirmation and conversation inspired by their ideas. In the beginning they wondered whether others would be interested in what they had to say but soon realised that bringing their experiences into the public was significant for both storyteller and audience. When case writers realised they were writing for somebody else and that their writing would become public it influenced the nature of the writing—they knew it had to be the truth, not ‘a lot of bull’, and that it needed to move beyond flowery report writing to something below the surface that included ideas as well as descriptions of problems. Arendt (1958) conceptualised this response

as achieving critical distance through engagement. This might be seen as another aspect of communicative competence.

Case writers wanted to share their dilemmas and bounce ideas off their colleagues because they knew others could often see things they had missed.

In the Links teams teachers noticed that they would do something, write it down and then pass it on to someone else to read. The readers would respond: 'Yeah, that's how I felt.' or 'Why did you do that?', and the writers got good feedback from each other.

From the visitors' point of view, they gained an intimate insight into other people's working lives and therefore had an opportunity to make connections with and reflect on their own practice. Janine thought that the reciprocal nature of the process had contributed to her personal learning and changed her practice.

It was a good way to open one's eyes critically. When you write you often have 400 different ideas coming in at one time...So it's sometimes good (to work together) because it's hard to extrapolate or identify the single issue because there are so many things that affect our decisions and our practice...And actually sometimes in the raw form it was very informative because you could see the complexity of the job...We often worked through the writing process itself...There were three of us who were particularly writing on administration, but to get things on paper in an articulate manner is as hard for me speaking as it was writing. That process was actually very interesting...the process was important...people working together through it was a nice process...

When Roundtable members listened to each other they recognised the stories and found that they often shared the same problems. Like the storytellers, those listening also felt reassured by the realisation that they were not alone and this reduced their fear of admitting when things were not working. At Finch Secondary College a group of teachers agreed to write cases together because they shared a common problem in teaching reading comprehension skills. They thought case writing would give them the time to reflect and share ideas and perhaps come to some conclusion. This kind of collaboration paved the way for moving on. As Arendt (1958:177-8) observes, story

telling (the coming together of action and speech) creates the conditions for new beginnings. In this way the storytelling–visiting dynamic practiced within the Roundtable was a significant interactive, dialogic and creative activity.

Oliver also connected personal expression with the cooperative and inquiring aspects of Roundtable practice.

You know the more I think about it, the more I consider it was almost a kind of luxury, that we had that little window where you were allowed to take this moment in your day-to-day teaching life where you really could reflect and then structure writing. You could talk about it with others and you could work that through with people.

Oliver thought of the case writing space as a window of opportunity and Alice, echoing Arendt's idea about 'going visiting' explained how reading a case was like 'entering into another person's classroom', an opportunity through which she had engaged in the most meaningful professional development and gained a deeper understanding about practice which had contributed to diversifying her teaching. Cases allowed Alice and others to use their 'visiting imagination' (Coulter & Wiens, 2002) to explore diverse perspectives. For Alice, the experience of reading cases also made her realise that it was OK to make a few mistakes in the context of a positive approach and this made a big difference to her morale.

Rosita also believed that interaction stimulated by the dissemination of cases was a significant aspect of the Roundtable. She recalled the intimacy that flowed from case writing.

(It) led to us knowing a lot of other people, it brought us into contact with a lot of other schools of different kinds. Now that's all stopped and I can say that was a really major part of the case writing. You started with the cases which led you to listen to your own school and then to others and the circle got wider. So it wasn't just primary schools or Catholic schools, it was all schools and anyone who had something to do with education, it wasn't just teachers it was people from universities, people that wanted to visit and listen, all that kind of

thing. And it sort of spread pretty rapidly, and we thought that was the really great thing about it all.

Cases also played a part in disseminating information and as Giddens (Giddens, 1999:72–3) observed, information is power. Oliver realised how much teachers valued exchanging information with each other. He found that he put more value in cases than in theoretical or book information because it came from teachers who had tried out the ideas; he saw a connection between case writing and changed practice in schools and teacher education at the university. The information provided in cases covered diverse topics and catered to diverse audience interests. Ross, for instance, expressed a preference for reading cases that focused on social issues and contrasted these with curriculum focused cases. After reading cases from a neighbouring school, he developed the idea of working with the same group of students over consecutive years—he believed this would help him to build better learning relationships in the classroom.

Case writers wanted to pass on information, by letting others know about successful strategies and programs. Gerald recalled:

I did a reflection on the demerit system of student management that Jim and I were talking about once just over drinks on a Friday afternoon and I suppose that was more to try and share that with other staff because often you're doing something in your team and you know it works quite well but you don't get to share that experience with other teams...

By disseminating cases teachers found that there was a greater chance of reaching the whole staff. However they made a distinction between writing to communicate information and writing for professional development and wondered whether a failure to be clear about the purpose might lead to a dissipation of the potential. As teachers wrote their cases it confirmed their belief that these would be useful for beginning teachers. Thinking about their own experience of beginning teaching they recalled that it had been really hard without anyone to speak to or any books that helped with solving problems, and in this context the cases seemed a good vehicle for communicating with student teachers—they were current, encouraging and practical.

Case-inspired conversations

When cases were written and left without conversation they were considered an untapped resource, because telling and listening to stories and writing and reading cases inspired a third dialogic space—the opportunity to engage in case-inspired conversations. These conversations were conducted across the scale of the Western Melbourne Roundtable and extended expression beyond the individual viewpoint or informal exchanges towards more structured face to face conversations and interactions between case and commentary writers.³⁴ These conversations promoted an inclusive, expressive, interactive and cognitive attitude and for some Roundtable participants conversations were more memorable than the writing.

Commentaries were written responses to cases and members of the Roundtable enjoyed writing back to one another. Looking back, members of the Roundtable thought that case–commentary dialogue was personal, positive, respectful, reflective, critical and questioning and there was a clear connection between these characteristics and the articulated desire that commentaries should avoid evaluating, judging or problem solving. Cases had made stories public in a more permanent way than oral storytelling; in the same way commentaries made interpretive expression public in a more lasting way than case discussion. Face-to-face conversations were like spoken commentaries.

Case-inspired conversations stretched Roundtable expression beyond the descriptions of practice and the presentation of individual viewpoints towards what Habermas (1996b:119) describes as ‘coming to an understanding with another person’. In other words, this was the aspect of dialogic flow in which people came together to work through the issues and concerns raised in cases. Referring to Fiocchi’s (1994) case which was published in *Big Link*, Grundy observed:

The case...does not just tell the story of this teacher’s thoughts in relation to a specific area, it makes these issues public in a systematic way that enables collaborative reflection within the learning community of the school in partnership with the academic colleague (Grundy, 1994).

³⁴ Some of the cases and commentaries written by Roundtable members are included as appendices to this document, see *Cases 1-5*.

Eventually, case-inspired conversations provided an opportunity to engage in dialogue which extended far beyond the local Links teams. However, in shaping this section of the thesis it was not scale but understanding the nature of the conversation which created the biggest challenge. What were the mutually shared grounds which underpinned the case-inspired conversations? The first dimension of this challenge is already evident in the paragraphs above, with references to chat and talk, dialogue, conversation, collaborative reflection and the process of coming to an understanding. What was the nature of the dialogic exchange in the Roundtable? Understanding this action was no easy task, especially given the range of opinions about communication which might be found in the literature.

Habermas (1984), in his theory of communicative action, and Senge (1992), in conceptualising a learning organisation, distinguish between different kinds of conversations, specifically contrasting discussion and dialogue. On the one hand they identify the kind of conversation where views might be presented and defended for the purpose of decision-making. These discussions, Habermas (1984:287) argues, are likely to focus on actions with a strategic focus which are oriented to success. He contrasts these with dialogue in which ‘the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding’. Senge agrees:

In dialogue, there is free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep “listening” to one another and suspending of one’s own views. By contrast, in discussion different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the view to support the decision to be made at the time. Dialogue and discussion are potentially complementary, but most teams lack the ability to distinguish between the two and to move consciously between them (Senge, 1992:237).

Drawing on Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality, Braaten (1996) further contends that dialogue is identifiable by its commitment to plurality and equality in participation. Habermas, Senge and Braaten all privilege dialogue over discussion. However they each take a different position when considering the relationship between discussion and dialogue. Senge, as noted above, believes that both discussion and dialogue have a place and the most important thing is to distinguish between the two. Braaten (1996:156), developing the concept of communicative thinking, stresses

the importance of recognising and resisting any pressure created by mainstream agendas which might undermine the integrity of dialogue. Habermas (1996b:130) highlights the distinction in terms of communicative and strategic action yet at a later date (Habermas, 1999:140) articulates the dimensions of a procedural democracy which might be achieved by ‘weaving together pragmatic considerations, compromises, discourses of self-understanding and justice’.

Habermas’s conception gives the strongest lead into understanding Roundtable communication because in the Roundtable it was not easy to draw a line between discussion and dialogue—the nature of case-inspired conversations differed from one situation to the next, changed over time and varied from one team to another—and it seemed that discussion and dialogue were usually intertwined within commentaries and case discussion.

It is common for schools to provide a variety of opportunities for teachers to engage in discussion aimed at strategic outcomes in meetings, committees and the like and the Roundtable provided another opportunity in this regard. However the significance of the Roundtable was that dialogue and the search for deeper understanding preceded discussion, decision-making and subsequent action. Having established a foundation based in understanding, the value of the work could be extended in numerous ways, but understanding was the primary focus. Senge (1992) stressed the importance of making a clear distinction between discussion and dialogue and it appears, in retrospect, that more attention might have been paid in the Roundtable to revealing this distinction and seeking an awareness about the value of different kinds of conversation.

At the beginning no-one was sure how to conduct case discussions or write commentaries and as a result there was substantial negotiation within Links teams, and at Roundtable meetings. Bill indicated something of the questioning nature of the case–commentary dynamic when he described how reading cases

...really challenged me to want to write commentaries or to talk to people...(to ask) what are the questions and how do they resonate back to my own teaching and the way I am going to continue?...How am I going to improve? What am I going to do?

At an early Roundtable meeting a case was presented to the group and people asked:

How might we start a discussion on this kind of case? What is this a case of? What are the important issues? How will others judge the narratives?

Through a process of collaboration and negotiation Roundtable members designed a set of questions to guide case discussions and they were trialed at the first Western Melbourne Roundtable forum.³⁵ Following these early developments, negotiated questions became a regular device for shaping case discussions. At Finch Secondary College, Teresa remembered the Links team using questions as a basis for a case discussion about Year 10 Mathematics. They asked: What does the case tell us about Finch Secondary College in regard to: Student learning? Approaches to teaching? School organisation and structure? Change and improvement? The team taped and transcribed the case discussion and the transcript was used to identify issues and questions for future conversations in the Links team with the suggestion that it might also be used outside the group. Mark observed that referring to previous conversations when beginning new discussions facilitated taking the next step rather than beginning from scratch. In his view this led to the development of a deeper understanding about the issues under discussion.

Putting cases on the table and agreeing to write commentaries also created a space for asking questions of mutual interest. In some instances the questions were inspired by cases and in other instances they were inspired by the intersection of a case and other contextual conditions. In one instance this involved the meeting of local questions and those articulated by the National Schools Network.

...The big question that the National Schools Network always posed...was 'What is it about our teaching that affects our students' learning?' And that was part of our case writing too... What are we doing that affects the kids? and it sort of rolled onto another case. What are we going to do about what happened at the end of this case?

³⁵ See Appendix 12: Case questions, p496.

*I'll write another one to work out the ideas and bring it to the group
and see if someone else has got an idea on what we can do here.*

But it was not only questions that needed negotiating. Developing protocols for public dialogue also turned out to be quite a difficult thing to achieve. During case-inspired conversations some case writers had the sense that they were being criticised and felt it was unfair for questions to be raised when they were in the room. This was a 'fairly rugged experience' for some case writers and an awakening experience for the Roundtable as a whole.

...The case discussions were often difficult and challenging as they touched on issues at the heart of our everyday practice...(they) also raised a number of issues regarding intellectual property, professional ethics and confidentiality (Cherednichenko, 1995).

As a result the Roundtable developed and documented a protocol for working with each other's cases.³⁶ It was designed to be respectful of teachers, their practices and the students they worked with every day and eventually it was included in *Teachers Write*. Mark observed that protocols were also necessary when writing commentaries.

I think if you are going to write a brief paragraph back to someone that there is a skill in that too. What am I doing here? What is the key issue in the case? How do I respond to that?...commentaries weren't about getting stuck into somebody, they were conversation. So you have to have a view about what it was all about.

Protocols were used in a variety of situations. Anna described a process developed in the university team:

We took our own work and we shared it...once a month we'd have a meeting...(where we) discussed one person's case. And the person whose case it was scribed the (spoken) commentary, they didn't speak. I think it was an excellent strategy. There was no temptation or need for them to explain anything. To me that holds the case as a whole

³⁶ See Western Melbourne Roundtable (1997) *Teachers Write: A handbook for teachers writing about changing classrooms for a changing world*, Ryde, NSW: National Schools Network.

piece. This is the information you have. How does it relate to you and your practices? It really commits the readers to not solving the problem or making judgements about the writer because they are in the room and you can't ask them questions about it. It was a very good skill to learn, a different way of thinking and talking about someone's work.

Negotiating questions and protocols for case discussions gave some structure to the activity but building democratic relationships and finding the 'right' ambience for the conversations was equally significant. A teacher recalled: 'we were not critical but interested...most of the connection was done through the talking and the shared case writing' and 'it was really professional dialogue, people really sitting down and talking about things and there was no competition. There was that friendliness, sounds silly...'

They noticed that instead of being faced with the usual professional development where people who 'know' disseminate information to people who listen, in the Roundtable there was a reciprocal and receptive interaction in which everyone had something to offer and learning was achieved through exchange. As Helen noted:

...writing the cases, and the reflection and discussion and sharing that went on before the cases were written, meets the criteria that's often spouted that teachers learn best from other teachers and we talk about this but it rarely happens. Mainly we go to people who are the experts to give us whatever they think we need. This offered us a formalised, disciplined way of doing it.

Oliver agreed:

...There are too few opportunities for teachers to discuss what they do without the preconception that if I'm going to talk it is because I know everything that I'm talking about. That difference was a big one I feel. Most other professional development it's sit and give, (whereas with case discussions) you're giving it and you're receiving an awful lot along the way as well...whereas the other professional development is passive...but you can't do one without the other.

Being given the opportunity to work together meant that the emotional dimension of teaching and learning was included. Janine argued the importance of structured conversations in recognising and investigating emotional engagement.

...we've gone away from the emotions and I don't think we can afford to, we have to recognise when teachers are excited or distressed because that is a really powerful learning time and we actually haven't taken the conversation to investigate those feelings, 'What is it about this? Where did we get it? How did we do it?'

Responding to Janine's concern Oliver expressed the view that commentaries took people in that direction, especially when you asked searching questions such as: 'What happened that made the learning so good?' and 'Why does this interest so many of us?'

Another challenge articulated by Coulter and Wiens (2002) was avoiding the trap of university colleagues (as spectators) making judgements about teachers (as actors). Yet in the Roundtable spectators and actors opted for critical distance through engagement (Arendt, 1958). Indeed most members of the Roundtable were both case and commentary writers and once teachers had participated in thought provoking conversations or experienced an interested university colleague asking them questions about their work they knew their thoughts and ideas were valued and they became much more receptive.

In receiving feedback through commentaries, roles switched and the storyteller became 'visitor' to their colleagues' comments and ideas. While case writing helped them (as the person involved in the action) to clarify things, getting feedback in the form of a commentary challenged them to see things differently and to look again. In this way storyteller and visitor discovered they had a mutual interest in case-commentary dialogue. While the case writer enjoyed the feedback, commentators recognised in others' cases an opportunity to both gain an insight into someone else's world and reflect on their own teaching.

Involvement in case-inspired conversations reinforced Roundtable members' realisation that they valued information from their colleagues and writing commentaries created an intimacy amongst team members.

I think the team came together more when we wrote the commentaries. We sort of spoke about our cases, and I think we did that very much on an individual level and then came together as a team and wrote commentaries for each other. And I think through discussion, by following on, you strengthen those links as a team.

Peter, when asked about how it felt to receive commentaries, distinguished between responses from his Links team colleagues and responses from beyond the team. He said he felt:

...Comfortable, very comfortable...with my own peers and to a degree I suppose the commentaries from the people outside the school were probably a little bit more abstract. I probably felt more connected with the people in my team and the commentaries that they wrote than possibly the commentary from (an external) professional in that area. I would have read it and thought that is a great idea but I probably took more from the people within my team. So I think that if I were to do that again I think it is more powerful getting a commentary from another team member.

Nevertheless, case writers did invite a range of people to respond to their cases—principals, students, colleagues from other Roundtable teams, colleagues beyond the Links teams as well as union representatives. Teresa for instance asked the Assistant Principal to write a commentary on her case and when she responded Teresa was ‘really pleased, thankful, grateful...because it would have taken time’. The Links team at Honeyeater Primary School sent their cases about multi-ageing to Rosella Primary School for them to write commentaries. They wanted some distance between case and commentary writers and even though they worked together well, they felt they knew each other too well and that it would be hard to write a commentary. This aspect of Roundtable interaction suggests the importance of valuing those who are close at hand but also valuing plurality and diversity in dialogue.

The negotiated processes, protocols, ambience and inquiry came together in different kinds of conversations. The teachers at Kingfisher Primary School provided some insight into this claim. They had chosen to work together, made a decision to

introduce a negotiated curriculum for the grade 6 students and they were committed to making it work. Teachers knew they needed to talk with each other about how to proceed because it was not possible to work together without agreement between those involved and they found they talked informally at any opportunity—before school, after school, playtime and lunchtime. According to Habermas's and Senge's distinctions this would be categorised as strategic rather than dialogic. It was not random verbalising, the talk was focused, purposeful, structured and systematic and the teachers observed that small groups were good for thinking and making decisions about new ideas. On the basis of these discussions they made plans for the future, identified necessary modifications and made decisions about what to keep and what to scrap. But this pressure to respond did not undermine their ability to engage in the free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues and the possibility for deep listening that was described by Habermas (1984) and Senge (1992). As they wrote cases and conversed in a case-like way, discussing what worked well and what was a nightmare, they wondered about priorities for the students they taught and about issues such as democracy and control. There was a dialogic dimension to their conversations—they revealed their experience, displayed a depth of understanding, valued plurality and equality in participation, moved beyond individual views and understandings and explored the possibility of new actions emerging from the exchange—all of which indicated that discussion and dialogue did sit side by side, at least in some circumstances.

The threads of working life

The collections of stories which teachers carried in their heads were inextricably connected to the web of contexts described in Chapter 4 and 5 and every story was distinct, reflecting personality, stage in career, teaching specialities as well as the many and different self-identifications of the authors. As Arendt observed, 'we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live' (Arendt, 1958:8).

As with the oral stories, the content of cases was selected by individuals and the writing grew from teachers' passions and interests. In writing cases teachers seemed to be adopting what Habermas (1996b:131) would call an expressive attitude, revealing the detail of their inner worlds and aiming for a truthful disclosure of their

experiences. This aspect of Roundtable action indicated that communicative competence involved dialogic inclusivity—Roundtable writing mirrored teachers’ experience and thinking which meant that they wrote about themselves, their work and their workplaces (Kemmis, 1997). For some teachers there were so many choices about what to write that it was overwhelming just working out where to begin. The writing included detailed descriptions, sometimes of small moments, and featured questions and issues connected to the things teachers were wondering about.³⁷

The worker

Teachers focused on themselves as workers, indicating a ‘sensitive and self-critical, subjective perspective’ (Stenhouse, 1975:157) toward their inquiry. They used cases to voice uncertainties and questions about their roles and working relationships and when they wanted to say something that was negative, such as criticising a planning session that did not work, case writing provided a vehicle for conversation that was public yet respectful. In this way their ideas were shared rather than creating a situation of possible isolation based on holding a different point of view. The opportunity to tell these stories led to a recognition of the expertise of all parties and as Sachs (2003:148) suggests: ‘The diversity of people’s expertise is a resource to be taken advantage of and fostered.’

The work

Case writers were often inspired by particular events that contained an emotional thread—the excitement of a learning moment, the frustration of a resistant child, the hope associated with a new idea—fitting with Shulman’s (1992) suggestion that presence of emotion will usually be one of the criteria used for selecting a case. At one end of the emotional spectrum, and in some instances revealing an insecurity about personal competence, teachers wrote about stress, suffering, frustration, anger,

³⁷ Looking at Inge’s story (see Case 1: A question of language) a richness can be seen in the description of events, the emotional thread of the experience (big buzz–sinking heart–dilemma–mustered courage–questioning and confusion), the exploration of values and beliefs (freedom–democratic process–allowing for difference–power relations within the group) and other threads of experience that underpinned her responses.

fear and dissatisfaction. Janine reminisced: 'One of (the cases) I still remember...it just brought tears to my eyes every time I read it, and still does, it's that powerful of a piece.' Then at the other end of the emotional continuum they wrote 'good news' stories about things they found really exciting, things that had gone really well, where the results were 'fantastic', where there was evidence of learning and where they could see the children's excitement.

Teachers also took a pragmatic approach when deciding which problems, questions or dilemmas they brought to the table. In some instances they focused on documenting the introduction, implementation and reflection stages of innovations and wrote cases to describe comparative situations. From their point of view case writing provided a good record of their work, a way of remembering processes and details that might otherwise be forgotten. Writers were particularly motivated when they sensed that others were critical of innovations, believing that cases provided evidence of learning. Case writers documented curriculum initiatives, integrated programs, the development of team bonding and the introduction of organisational structures such as Team Small Group.

Still focusing on the classroom, teachers told stories about the children with whom they worked and turned them into cases; they were like snapshots of individual children. Teachers wrote about students when they were concerned about their progress and noted that it was possible to predict which students their colleagues might write about because there were often glaring incidents and problems. In cases, they related the way they worked with different grades and different children. Steve was struck by the way the case writing at Kingfisher Primary School provided such rich descriptions of students' learning practices. In his experience cases were often teacher centred, whereas these cases pointed to the possibility that teachers who negotiated the curriculum and used students' interests as a starting point for teaching might be less concerned with demonstrating their own practical sophistication.

When working in a specialist area such as administration, physical education or English as a second language, teachers connected with the team focus but wrote about issues specific to their roles. The leadership team at Eagle Secondary College for instance, decided to write cases to check on their goals and principles:

...in fact two of us writing on the same issue was actually a very powerful insight...just tracking how we were feeling about it...(Were) we being true to what we'd established? So in that regard I think it was a really valuable tool for checking your mission and values component...It actually influenced my practice and I don't know how much that...actually rolls on, that ripple effect that you have across a school or a classroom. I think it was really challenging personally. At the time I was a principal and it was very challenging to expose my work to others.

The workplace and beyond

Some cases focused on workplace culture and processes and even when these issues were not central, case writers often connected writing about themselves and their work to observations about the workplace. Throughout, case writers conveyed values, beliefs and personal theories connected to particular incidents and accumulated experience. They noticed that as they finished writing a case there were often new questions and this was a common pattern which invariably led into new cases and new thinking. The diversity of interests detailed in cases reflected the inclusion of the multiple contexts described in Chapter 5 and as a result the dialogic space was meaningful for Roundtable participants, supporting the development of a new self through shared intimacy.

Adopting an expressive attitude

Based on the evidence, it has been argued that the Roundtable created space for a dialogic flow and that this flow facilitated professional development associated with the threads of working life. Connecting a number of ideas such as communicative action, universal pragmatics and procedural democracy, Habermas (1984; 1987; 1996b; 1999) argues that understanding the concept of an ideal procedure for deliberation and decision-making requires an examination of forms of argumentation and rules of discourse. In doing so, he suggests that 'normative content arises from the very structure of communicative actions' (1999:140). Applying this proposition, the first part of this chapter focused on the dialogic flow, presenting action as connected forms of argumentation—telling and listening to stories and writing and reading

cases. The second aspect of structure was created through the inclusion of the threads of working life. These ideas are depicted below in the north–south axis of Figure 6: The dialogic plane of action.

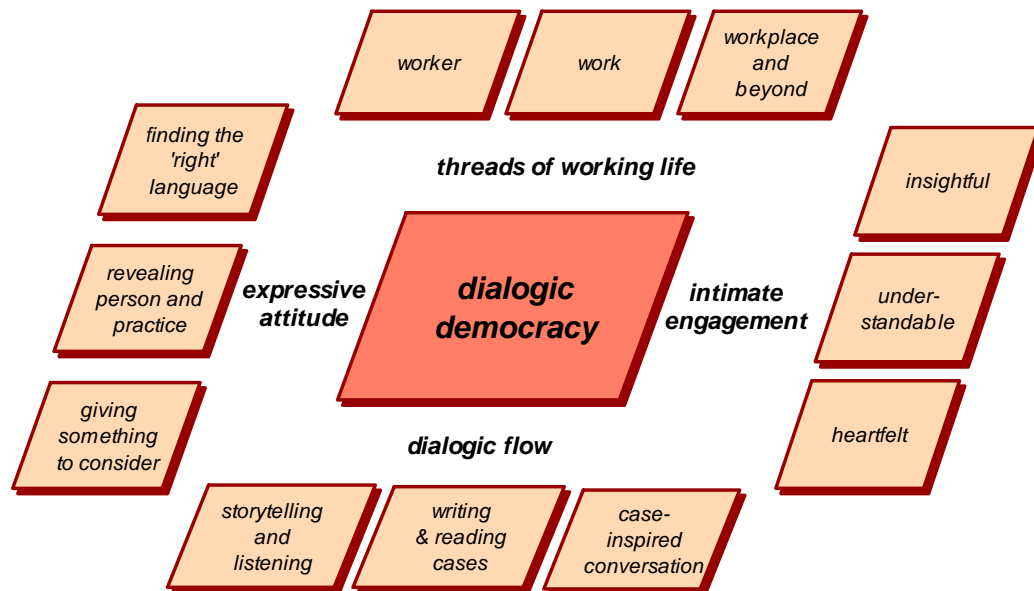


Figure 6: The dialogic plane of action

The remainder of this chapter shifts to an examination of the nature of discourse; the aim is to seek a deeper understanding of dialogic democracy by focusing on the dimensions of adopting an expressive attitude and the quality of intimate engagement.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Habermas (1996b:119) stipulates that a person acting communicatively must raise four validity claims and these have emerged as the key to understanding the expressive attitude which contributed to dialogic democracy in the Roundtable. As depicted in Figure 6: The dialogic plane of action, the strengths of dialogic expression were that:

- the language used by storytellers and case writers was comprehensible to their colleagues (*'uttering something understandably'*)
- the storytellers and case writers gave their visitors something interesting to think about (*'giving (the hearer) something to understand'*)
- case writers revealed themselves and their practice (*'making himself thereby understandable'*)

- finding meaning was a shared endeavour (‘coming to an understanding *with another person*’).

The following pages explore these issues in more detail, focusing on the significance of finding the right language, revealing person and practice and giving other people something to think about.

Finding the ‘right’ language

Within the dialogic flow, language was an ever present issue. At an early Roundtable meeting Steve, the Roundtable convenor, raised the question of an appropriate language for expressing the detail of practice and suggested the possibility of using a common language for cases based on the national curriculum outcome statements. As he introduced the idea Inge’s heart sank as she noticed the confused looks on her teacher colleagues’ faces. Her emotional response to Steve’s suggestion inspired her to write a case exploring the issues which this discussion had raised (see Case 1: A question of language, p497). For Oliver this was also an emotionally-charged moment. He disagreed with Steve, believing that plainer writing, rather than the curriculum jargon which Steve had suggested, would be practical and lead to greater openness and broader audience appeal. He saw case writing as an opportunity for readers to build experience beyond their years and for writers and readers to reach an awareness of areas in which they might grow. Having explored these issues the Roundtable decided that teachers would be free to choose the language they thought most appropriate for their cases and with one or two exceptions, cases did not use the language of curriculum outcome statements.

Seeking to transfer the power of storytelling into case writing, Roundtable members encouraged each other to write as though they were telling a story. Their belief in the importance of writing in a natural and conversational style was a strong argument against the use of language couched in terms of learning outcomes. Habermas (1996b:129) argues that language, as ‘a segment of reality’, is connected to the validity-claim for comprehensibility. The Roundtable struggle to find a language for cases shows the importance of the connection between speaking in a language which is real, making oneself comprehensible to others and achieving communicative competence.

Teachers also realised at the beginning of the Roundtable that they needed a descriptive–reflective language for writing cases. They needed to develop the kind of language which could accurately depict what they wanted to say about their work.

One of the things I found hard when I first started writing was that I didn't have a lot of the language that expressed what I perhaps wanted to say, you know my language is developing through case writing...initially it's a conscious effort to do something about it then it becomes part of your whole way of working.

This observation about the connections between action, language and expression indicates the complex and constantly evolving nature of the relationship.

Case writing was distinguished from the writing that was a regular and required part of teachers' work—student reports, program plans and reports, annual reports and the occasional policy document. They found themselves questioning the value of end of year reports, contrasting them with cases which they saw as relevant, valuable and raising serious issues about teaching and learning. In making the distinction they realised that case writing encouraged them to look at their work from a different point of view. Instead of being outcomes oriented the activity was open-ended and guided by the interests and concerns of the writer who could exercise control over the content instead of being restricted by external reporting and evaluation demands. Teachers argued that case writing worked best when the writer had a clear purpose and something to say. Teachers saw case writing as a special style of writing because of the value of the honesty and lack of pretence. But they did warn against overusing case writing as they believed this might lead to formulaic writing designed to make someone else happy—the kind of writing which they felt did not express feelings or present anything worthwhile.

Teresa used readability as a criteria for selecting a style of writing.

Well I remember writing this (case) as a story, as something that people would read for enjoyment as well...Actual stories where you include what the students are saying. I think that that is probably more interesting than just the teacher's blurb...Goodness me, I wouldn't normally write like that...That piece was probably more readable than

other things that I would write nowadays where you waffle on to get the message across.

Teresa's determination to consider issues of language also extended to aiming for accuracy and richness in students' voices and this led her to record classroom interactions before sitting down to write.

I did notes, and I remember as I was going around the class I was racing back and jotting down a few things that the kids were saying along the way...that was a very accurate report...and then I wrote it from beginning to end. It wasn't hard, it was easy, 'cause I was writing about what I knew about.

The Roundtable had high expectations of case writing. It had to be appropriate for the situation, accurate and honest, relevant, valuable, purposeful, focused, knowledgable, comprehensible and enjoyable to read.

Revealing person and practice

Understandably, there was some reluctance to face the challenge of engaging in such revealing activities which could demand change; case writers often needed reassurance. While Shulman (1992) talks about teachers being resistant to writing, in the Roundtable it was reluctance that emerged in many guises and people argued that writers had to feel safe about recording their stories. In the Roundtable communicative competence demanded that reluctance was recognised and that reconciliatory steps were taken.

Some writers were reluctant to reveal their professional practice. The prospect of others reading what they had written made case writers feel nervous and as Janine noticed this exposure was often challenging. From the beginning, there was an awareness that teachers can often be quick to diagnose problems and equally quick to prescribe alternative action. Within the Roundtable teachers observed that these patterns of communication led to wariness and so there was a sense of determination among participants that case writing was 'first and foremost a collaborative activity, with equal partners engaged in critical inquiry for purposes of improvement' (Western Melbourne Roundtable, 1997:82). Anna felt that it was because of the Roundtable

commitment to inquiry and understanding that participants felt safe bringing issues, questions and problems to their colleagues—they knew they would be met with an empathy and inquiry rather than an evaluating, judging, critical or problem solving attitude.

Some teachers were especially worried about revealing their practice to university colleagues, which was not surprising given the history of school–university relationships that preceded this project (Gore, 1995; Moffat, 1996; Coulter & Wiens, 2002). Teachers were not used to university staff coming into schools to talk and write and some felt it was threatening to participate in conversations because they saw themselves as ‘just teachers’, and not ‘up there’ like their university colleagues. Both university and school colleagues had to move beyond their previous lecturer/student-teacher relationships and challenge the pattern of a university lecturer visiting schools as an expert, observer or supervisor.

Case writers admitted that sometimes it was very hard to be honest and to put down what one really thought. They recognised that when teachers write they leave themselves wide open for critical comments and they recalled that some teachers had been tentative. Sylvia wondered about the pressure to write what other people wanted to hear and appreciated being able to write cases anonymously because it helped her to be honest in her reflections. Eleni questioned whether case writing was advisable in every situation, noting that in some instances teachers might feel vulnerable in terms of future employment or promotion:

...perhaps cases were a strategy for a particular school, at a particular time, maybe not for schools where there are lots of contract teachers around or people who are going for promotion. All those kinds of things where there's a public process...cases may not (fit), because they do require a certain disclosure. So I just think that maybe case writing is only for a particular kind of teacher in a particular kind of organisational environment, maybe it's not for all.

Moore (1995), observing the struggle that some teachers had with writing, raised the issue of preferred learning styles, noting that teachers who were ‘extremely articulate in verbal or visual communication did not feel that they could express themselves

adequately in writing'. But for others, writing felt safer than talking and they were more willing to put their thoughts on paper. Rosita observed that cases were a good outlet for people who would not normally say anything at staff meetings or in big group discussions and Helen realised that:

...case writing enables the shy, the reticent, the hesitant, the modest to do what they would never do in a public arena. They simply wouldn't do it. So it gives everybody an opportunity to participate. I think kids as a rule are not prepared to stand up and talk to the public about how they feel about education but in an atmosphere such as case writing where it's treated with respect and treated seriously, where it may be published with confidentiality considerations being taken into account I think you could get them to participate too.

Some teachers were also reluctant to 'blow their own trumpet' by telling good-news stories. They found that when they were proud of the students' achievements or their own achievements it could be easier to communicate with parents rather than fellow staff members and easier to talk about innovation to people outside the school because they seemed to be more receptive. It seemed that in some situations reluctance could be associated with different tensions evident in different kinds of working relationships and this will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

While Anna reached the conclusion that it could take five years for some teachers to overcome their hesitancy and begin to write self-initiated cases, a number of supportive strategies were used to speed up the process. Isabel, a teacher at Honeyeater Primary School, suggested that finding a colleague who thought the same way and was also prepared to take a risk might be the only way that some teachers would begin to write. At her school they staggered the introduction of writing, with a small group of teachers beginning and then others gradually joining them. Helen observed that modelling writing could make a difference. She noticed that when teachers saw their colleagues engaged in case writing or had an opportunity to write a commentary that they were more inclined to have a go at writing in the future. She believed that there was safety in numbers, that writing cases together and forming a kind of partnership provided reassurance as well as guidance. As teachers encouraged each other to record their stories and to overcome their reluctance to write they really

enjoyed it, realising that it was easy and immediately thinking of additional stories to tell. A number of teachers wrote commentaries but not cases and it seems possible that for some this was the safest thing to do.

Another dimension to reluctance seemed to revolve around losing control. Arendt (1958) observed that a story once told takes on a life of its own. Eleni and Ian echoed these sentiments, noticing that they had to feel personally confident about revealing stories about their own practice. Because ‘once you write it has a different sort of permanency...people will reflect on it, and people make judgements. I think that was what we were worried about’. Writers were also concerned about taking cases beyond the Links team. While they believed that it was important to inform their colleagues about innovations they feared that discussion would lead to debates about the value of the innovation rather than dialogue leading to deeper understanding. Seeking to address this situation the Roundtable trialed and developed a protocol for discussing cases and this is discussed later in this chapter.

Some writers felt reluctant because they did not feel confident about their writing abilities. To maximise participation in the case writing endeavour, enormous efforts were made within the Roundtable to ensure that everyone felt competent and confident about case writing and had a chance to overcome any reluctance based on their writing ability. In some instance, case writers had to develop writing skills and this could take a while especially for those who worried that their writing had to be word perfect. To begin the process of learning about case writing representatives from each school team participated in a skills development workshop led by Lawrence Ingvarson and subsequently conducted workshops for each school-based Links team. Helen was convinced that it was important to keep making time for writing so that it became habitual and instinctive. Rosita was not sure whether her confidence had developed because of the writing or whether it was the other way around and the writing had improved because of her confidence, but she noticed that as she gained confidence her writing included more detail. Teresa, a maths teacher, doubted her writing ability and realised it had been a long time since she had written anything. Her strategy was to scan other cases and work out which style appealed to her most.

... I read some (cases) that had been done overseas. I read a whole lot of them and I think that I decided to pick the eyes out of the ones that I

found most readable and then I wrote mine when I decided what I was going to do. Then I just made it fit in with what I was teaching at the time, which happened to be percentages. So that's what I did.

Teresa was surprised to find that she really enjoyed the case writing once she had actually got it done and ranked this achievement as significant in her personal and career development. At Eagle Secondary College team members recalled how Anna, the university colleague, had spent quite a bit of time early in the piece 'just talking and teaching us how to write a case ...you know, where to go and how to do it...in the early stages it was just something so new to teachers...(so) there was the technical support'. At Kingfisher Primary School they found that it was effective to identify some questions then allocate the role of scribe which meant that the group could sit and talk with one team member typing as they spoke. They also thought a good strategy was to start with a 'snapshot', something short and quick. The Links coordinator at Eagle Secondary College adapted the case writing activity for reluctant writers by employing a professional writer to work with them.

...(W)e had a guy there who was a metalwork teacher and basically I don't think since college time that he'd actually put pen to paper...we got in somebody who took his words and wrote. So he did the tape and he got the transcript. And the value of that was really enormous, it was just a very important celebration of his teaching, in being a teacher and I think really being able to say...we're really thinking about...this issue, this problem, this is what we do with kids and teachers and parents...(he was) really able to think about it and write about it and talk about it and something's coming from it...you take it back into your teams. So it was a way of thinking and acting and working it through and then taking it on.

Braaten (1996:141) argues that Habermas's conception of communicative rationality needs to be developed in tandem with 'conceptions of autonomy, social relationship, and community'. Developing this idea she contends that communicative competence, or the ability to participate in argumentation, delivers autonomy. Up to this point in the exploration of dialogic action in the Roundtable, communicative competence has been evident in the adoption of an expressive attitude and described in terms of:

- telling stories
- listening to self and others
- translating stories into cases
- speaking/writing in a language that is comprehensible
- contextual inclusivity
- revealing and anticipating
- reconciling reluctance.

The second aspect mentioned by Braaten was ‘social relationship’ and she argued that this could be understood in terms of ‘the mutuality of shared grounds’ (Braaten, 1996:141). In the Roundtable, cases made public, promoted relationships between storyteller and audience.

Giving something to consider

However case writing was more than an expression or celebration of what teachers did. Because it encouraged individuals and groups to think back, capture the detail of their experience and to imagine future action it had an interactive and a cognitive dimension. Niemi and Kemmis (1999) consider this communicative process in terms of revelation and anticipation and Cherednichenko and her colleagues (1998b) describe discourse characteristics and the shift from ‘practice described’ to ‘practice interpreted’.

Looking from a writer’s perspective Dora observed that reflecting on herself and looking at difficulties in a particular situation led her to working through them and trying to find a solution. Looking from a reader’s perspective Bruce noted the value of case writing in loosening people’s tongues and exposing what they did in the classroom. As a result of reading one case he realised that by adopting a number of new strategies and steps in his classroom students would eventually learn, and that he need not get ‘het up or in a knot’ but could be more relaxed and enjoy his classes. Clandinin and Connelly (1993:259) argue that such deliberate storying and re-storying

of one's life is a fundamental method of achieving personal and social growth and as such is a fundamental quality of education.

Teachers believed that cases were truthful expressions of their experience—they captured some of the uncertainty, question marks and torture in their work and they used the dialogic process to ask questions and move forward. The cases were demonstrations of situated critical thinking and as a result of writing and reading teachers came to realise that there were possibilities they had not imagined. They observed that because case writing made them open up they talked a lot more about other problems they were having and that once everyone was writing cases, the problems they had previously seen as 'my problem' became everyone's problem; the fear of being judged as ineffectual was replaced with a realisation that others had similar feelings. Anna believed this distinguished the Roundtable case writing from the case writing described by Shulman which she saw as being focused on judgement and correction.

Because the cases revealed the emotional side of teachers' experiences, the writing activity itself had a therapeutic effect, helping authors to get things out of their heads, express and leave concerns, clarify thoughts, validate thinking, deal with stress, move from feeling negative to feeling positive, cleanse the soul, and make way for new experiences. Habermas (1984:21) labelled this clarifying form of argumentation as 'therapeutic critique', conceptualising it as an expressive search for truthfulness and sincerity of expression through an understanding of systematic self deception.

Intimate engagement

Working through a dialogic flow, focusing on the threads of working life and adopting an expressive attitude led to an intimate kind of engagement in which participants conveyed their *intimate knowledge* about teaching and learning in an *intimate genre* and included an *emotionally intimate* dimension.

The multiple facets of intimacy are stressed here because it is unusual to think about professional learning in terms of intimate engagement and at a first glance no specific references to intimacy were evident in Habermas's work. Indeed, Habermas's rationally grounded theory of communicative action almost seems at odds with the idea of intimacy. However, in some respects his ideas about communication,

disclosure and democracy overlap with Giddens's ideas about intimacy and relationships. In conceptualising communicative action, for instance, Habermas (1996b) links expression, disclosure and truthfulness and later, seeking a procedural model for democracy, he stresses the importance of 'discourses of self understanding' (Habermas, 1999).

Giddens (1999:59) conceptualises intimacy in terms of emotional communication, arguing that communication 'is the means of establishing a tie in the first place and it is the chief rationale for its continuation.' Applying his ideas to couples in sexual or love relationships, parent-child relationships and friendships, he argues that intimacy 'depends upon a process of active trust—opening oneself up to the other. Disclosure (he claims) is the basic condition of intimacy' (Giddens, 1999:61). Applied in the Roundtable context, emotional communication, or the process of achieving active trust, could be seen to support the establishment of ties and form the basis on which relationships would continue.

Developing these ideas, Giddens (1992), focuses on the emergence of new relationships between men and women during the twentieth century, observing that there are enormous changes for women; he conceptualises these changes as a transformation of intimacy.³⁸ While this may seem an extraordinary diversion from the question of dialogic democracy, it is possible that Giddens's broad ideas might be applied in a consideration of the importance of dialogic intimacy in the transformation of learning relationships. Following Giddens's train of thinking, and applying it to the Roundtable, intimate engagement might be couched in terms of:

- freedom from fear and control
- opportunities to express emotions
- negotiated relationships

³⁸ Giddens (1992) puts a general proposition: that because women are now free from fear of pregnancy and free from control by men that they now enjoy a new intimacy based on emotional expression and bodily intimacy, a different concept of sexuality and the opportunity to negotiate relationships rather

- consideration of difference.

Arendt (1958:50), also placed her discussion of intimacy in the context of changing conceptions about the public and private realms. She connected the idea of intimacy with the ‘passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, (and) the delights of the senses’ and argued the importance of transforming them ‘into a shape to fit them for public appearance’.

Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before. The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves (Arendt, 1958:50).

In the Roundtable the process of expressing the intimate detail of teaching and learning and bringing it into the public domain demanded a democratic way of working. Using Sen’s (1999) way of thinking about development and democracy, the Roundtable introduced participatory freedoms which were in stark contrast with past practices—members of the Roundtable had the opportunity to engage in processes and develop abilities which enabled and supported communication.³⁹ The freedoms related directly to the four validity claims identified by Habermas and might be described as:

- the freedom to speak for yourself in a language that seemed right
- the freedom to focus on issues of personal and mutual interest
- the freedom to reveal the detail of practice in an emotionally inclusive way
- the freedom to talk things through together (in a way that build relationships and achieves a deeper understanding).

than experience imposed power and struggle. McDowell (1999) argues that while Giddens’ general argument has some value, questions of difference (class, age, region etc) also need to be considered.

³⁹ The idea of dialogic ability was inspired by Braaten’s (1996) reference to Habermas’ thinking about communicative competence.

Insightful

The first significant aspect of Roundtable communication was that teachers were free to speak for themselves. Coulter and Wiens (2002) noted that teachers' stories are more likely to be told by spectators than by the actors themselves and members of the Roundtable observed:

Teaching is a profession in which the practitioners are not the primary publishers of knowledge about practice. The public representations of teaching more often than not are those communicated by policy makers and university researchers (Western Melbourne Roundtable, 1997:12).

Meehan (1995) articulates the significance of being able to speak for oneself. Referring to Arendt's work she emphasises the importance of people telling their own stories by explaining that:

...from the time of our birth we are immersed in "a web of narratives", of which we are both the author and the object. The self is both the teller of tales and that about whom tales are told...When a story of the life can only be told from the perspective of others, then the self is a victim and sufferer who has lost control over her existence (Meehan, 1995:199-200).

The dialogic flow facilitated intimate engagement through opportunities to identify and share insights.

Understandable

Having created a space for talking and listening, members of the Roundtable negotiated the freedom to speak and write in a conversational, storytelling language. Looking back, Steve realised that the language used in cases was a key to understanding the value of the activity. He believed that case writing had enabled his school-based colleagues

...to use their language to describe teaching and learning...all the cases I've read contain assertions, conclusions, observations about how schooling affects the teacher and the students and not just in a procedural way but in...(an) emotional way and a personal way, you know a practical way.

The success of case writing seems to be contingent on the authors' freedom to write in a language that was comfortable, a language of choice, because to do otherwise may have been as difficult as trying to capture the descriptive and emotional richness of a story in a second language. In fact it may well be that teachers' ability to assert their authority was based on freedom of expression in relation to both the subject and mode of expression—as Steve noted, an emotional–personal–practical form of dialogue. As Gibbons (1991:61-2) (in relation to children using their mother tongue in the classroom) argues, being able to speak in a first language:

- allows for learning which is connected to the *total* language experience
- allows for the continuation of conceptual development
- facilitates ease of understanding
- facilitates learning concepts in a new language
- provides a supportive social–emotional environment
- provides a link to the language of the 'comfort zone' which therefore lessens trauma or alienation which might be caused by a new language
- maintains confidence and self esteem because it sends a message that the person and their culture will be included and accepted
- is educationally sound because it builds on existing competencies and abilities and the first language which is one of the greatest resources which is brought into the learning situation.

Roundtable members had to search for, and negotiate the 'right' language for cases. They had to develop a language of reflection and description that would accurately convey their intimate knowledge in a way that made sense to other people once it became public. Seeking to conceptualise practice in postmodernity, Beckett and Hager (2002:168) explore the power of discourse and draw on Dewey's ideas:

According to Dewey human thought (language) is something that has grown out of and been shaped by experience. He thinks of it as a tool that has evolved as humans have employed it and developed it to make sense of their

experience and to shape subsequent experiences. Thus Dewey agrees with postmodernists that language is inherently contextual. In a very significant way, he thinks that it records human experience. But whereas postmodernists claim that language is *sufficient* for experience—that is, language constitutes experience—Dewey argues that language is merely *necessary* for experience—that is language plus something else constitutes experience. This ‘something else’ is the acting and being acted upon, the doing and the being done to.

Adopting a natural, conversational style of language for cases made it possible to record the intimate experiences of Roundtable members in a way that felt honest and ‘real’. The result was a two-way relationship between language and experience where experience shaped the content and language of cases and in turn the language of cases gave an intimate insight into experience and so became a tool for making sense of experience and shaping the future.

Members of the Roundtable were free to choose which stories they wanted to tell and in doing so they conveyed the inter-woven nature of the threads of teachers, working lives, focusing on issues of personal and mutual interest. Habermas (1996b:128-131) describes a connection between language and the three domains of reality—“the” world, “our” world and “my” world—and this was certainly true in the Roundtable. As indicated earlier in this chapter, individuals wrote distinctive stories about themselves, their work, their workplaces and beyond. Even when they focused on the small detail of a classroom incident they made connections between the threads of their working life.⁴⁰ Gay and Ryan (1997:4) drawing on Thomas’s (1995) work characterised the knowledge revealed in cases as personal practical knowledge anchored in the concrete and specific from within each school, community and school system. They saw this as highly contextualised knowledge in comparison to researchers’ decontextualised discourse.

Stories were recognised and valued equally by storytellers and visitors as truthful records of teaching and learning, and the process of revelation and recognition seemed

⁴⁰ See for example, Case 4: We struggled at planning last night, p504.

to create a new intimacy between those involved. MacIntyre suggests there is a connection between this kind of recognition and thinking:

...what I say both to myself and to others and what they say both to themselves and to me has to involve recognition, almost always implicit rather than explicit, of shared standards of truth, of rationality, of logic, standards that are not mine rather than yours or *vice versa*. This kind of relationship to others is an essential and not an accidental characteristic of thought (MacIntyre, 1999:249).

Through the mutuality of shared grounds a new level of intimacy was achieved between members of the Roundtable. But as Giddens and Braaten both warn there were dangers too and these will be explored further as working relationships are explored in Chapter 7.

Heartfelt

Another significant aspect of the dialogic flow was the freedom to reveal the detail of practice in an emotionally inclusive way. As members of the Roundtable transformed their experiences into stories they realised they had found a shape for including the connected detail of head (thought), heart (feeling) and hand (action).⁴¹ In Arendt's (1958:) observation about the producer in the market place only the products of work were significant; the personal was irrelevant and only revealed to family and friends.⁴² It might be argued that this has always been true for teachers, or maybe, that this is increasingly the case. However, what is certain is that with the increased focus on

⁴¹ This distinction between head, heart and hand was part of the 'Framework for Teambuilding' used by the National Schools Network and based on the work of Perls, Maslow, Rogers and Jung. (Harradine, 1995:25)

⁴² Arendt acknowledges that revealing one's innermost thoughts and feelings is an unusual situation for a worker in the workplace and she uses an example of a producer in the market place: "...the people who meet on the exchange market are primarily not persons but producers of products, and what they show is never themselves, not even their skills and qualities...but their products...and the power that holds the market together and in existence is not the potentiality which springs up between people when they come together in action and speech but a combined "power of exchange" (Adam Smith) which each of the participants acquired in isolation...men show themselves only in the privacy of their families or the intimacy of their friends. (Arendt, 1958:209–210)

measurable student learning outcomes, teaching is increasingly presented (especially by governments) as a technical exercise related to improving outcomes (Smyth, 1989b). In this context little time or value is given to understanding the personal, cultural or societal dimensions of teaching and learning, and so, to a large extent, they remain hidden.

Cases and stories were spaces where teachers gave ‘shape’ to this hidden knowledge, revealing what Arendt called intimacies of the heart, mind and senses; she argued the significance of revealing the intimate details of our lives.

Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance (Arendt, 1958:50).

Hargreaves (1994:141) observes that we know little about how teachers feel and ‘how they talk about the emotional dimension of their work’; however because the Roundtable provided scope to reveal the emotional dimension of teaching and learning this resulted in a conversational flow which was founded on an expressive—intimate engagement. Teachers in the Roundtable indicated that the intimacy of this engagement provided a welcome alternative to system-initiated professional development, the isolation of the classroom and the experience of self doubt.

Reflecting on the dynamic, case writers described how they experienced an initial fear of being judged but quickly came to see the experience of ‘visiting’ their own experiences and those of their colleagues in terms of insight and revelation. They talked about ‘opening one’s eyes to’, ‘an opening up’, ‘a window upon’, ‘entering into’, and ‘seeing something new’. In visiting each other, members of the Roundtable were exposed to different experiences, emotions and points of view and invited to engage in self and collaborative reflection.

It is evident in these descriptions of dialogic democracy that they cannot be understood without an understanding of the nature of collaboration and this will be the focus for the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Acting collaboratively

I think it gets more complicated than that 'cause there are a whole lot of things that happen in the process, it's not just the writing. I think it's that whole connecting with all sorts of people, having interaction with them and learning from them and getting that sort of feedback...it's that trust and professionalism that people in the project have shown that helps you to feel comfortable and say things that you really mean and really being able to discuss issues rather than going round in circles. (Collaborative research interview, 1996-7)

The Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable set out to build partnerships between school and university colleagues within school-based collaborative teams. This collaborative plane of action formed the third significant aspect of Roundtable work and adds another dimension to the contextual and dialogic planes discussed in the last two chapters. Figure 7 depicts the relationship between these three planes of action, showing how each plane of action is connected by the personal, cultural and societal threads of teachers' lives.

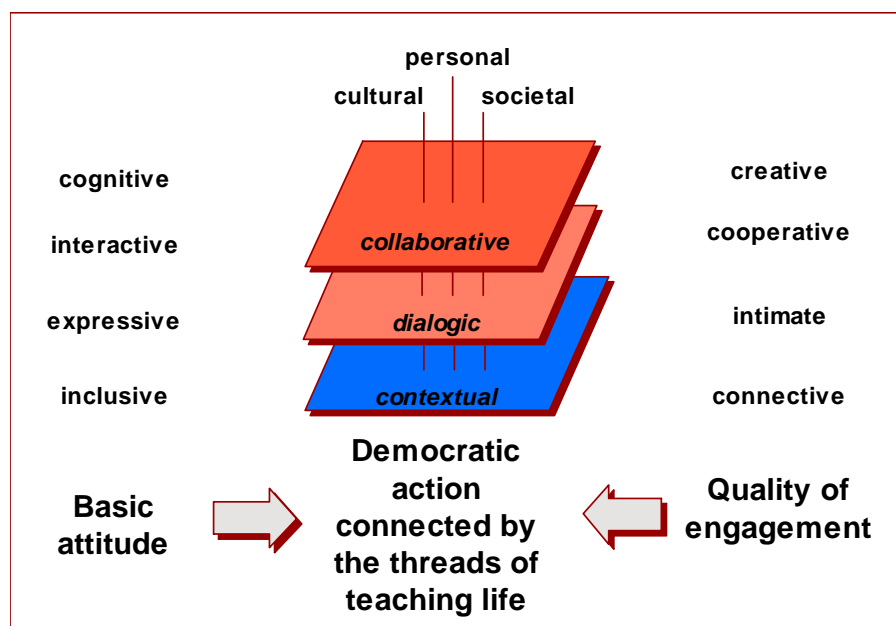


Figure 7: Three planes of Roundtable action

Chapter 5 revealed a context in which school educators were isolated (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1999:22) with few opportunities to work collaboratively around

shared concerns. This situation, and the pattern of poor relationships between school and university educators (Somekh, 1994; Gore, 1995; Zeichner, 1995) inspired the ILP to adopt an inclusive attitude with multiple opportunities for teachers and their university colleagues to work together around issues and problems of mutual concern. The creation of a contextually inclusive structure set the scene for connected and meaningful engagement.

The Roundtable adopted case writing as a strategy to document classroom practice and Chapter 6 delved into the case writing experience, identifying a dialogic flow involving storytelling and listening and case writing and reading. By adopting an expressive attitude the Roundtable opened the door for an intimate kind of professional learning which depended on contextual inclusivity.

This chapter returns to the scale of the Western Melbourne Roundtable—the Links teams, the Roundtable and the national ILP–NSN networks—seeking to understand the nature and geography of working relationships by examining the opportunities provided in each location⁴³. The chapter is driven by a desire to achieve a deeper understanding about the interactive attitude adopted by the Roundtable and the quality of democratic relationships.

Massey (1993:65–66) argues that it is not just through an understanding of movement and communication but through an understanding of social relations that places can be understood and instead of ‘thinking about places with boundaries’ she imagines ‘articulated moments in networks of social relations’. The idea of social relations in which people come together is variously presented in the literature using concepts such as collaboration (Hargreaves, 1994), cooperation (Yeatman, 1996) and ‘acting in concert’ (Arendt, 1958); and united groups have come to be characterised as communities of practice (Kemmis, 1998a) and learning communities (Stenhouse, 1975; Senge, 1992; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995; Sen, 1999; Lima, 2001). Within these interactions substantial value is attributed to equality and democratic practices (Arendt, 1958; Cox, 1995; Kemmis, 1998a; Giddens, 1999; Habermas, 1999; Bauman, 2000), relationships of care (Benhabib, 1995:183–84), active and mutual

⁴³ See Figure 3: Scaling the Western Melbourne Roundtable, p138.

trust (Sachs, 1998; Giddens, 1999), reconciliation (Arendt, 1958; Bauman, 2000) and Giddens's overarching conception of a democracy of the emotions (Giddens, 1999). Within this context Giddens (1999) and others (Arendt, 1958; Cox, 1995; Kemmis, 1998a) stress the importance of developing mutually rewarding relationships, arguing that such rewards become the basis for continuing relationships. Hargreaves (1994) notes that, for teachers, the advantages which might result from collaboration include reduced overload, situated certainty, capacity for reflection, opportunities to learn, continuous improvement and political assertiveness. He also claims that collaboration has advantages for schools including greater organisational responsiveness, increased efficiency and improved effectiveness. Despite these and other advantages there are some who argue that the concept of community must be abandoned. McDowell (1999:120–121) draws on the concerns expressed by Iris Marion Young (1990) and argues that comfortable face-to-face interactions too often lead to the suppression of difference and so to social divisiveness. Hargreaves (1994:247) also sees comfort and complacency as dangers in collaboration and adds conformism, contrived situations and cooption to the list of concerns. Lima (2001) picks up this thread distinguishing between strong and weak ties and arguing that 'cognitive conflict' can create the conditions for creativity and independent thinking.

Changing conceptions of educational leadership have mirrored the parallel reform movements discussed earlier.⁴⁴ On one hand there has been a move towards corporate management. Connected to economic rationalism, corporate management has been characterised by competition, corporate management and the promotion of leader–follower relationships. This model was adopted by Caldwell and Spinks (1992) as they designed the Schools of the Future program for the Victorian government in the early 1990s. A parallel reform movement has promoted the idea of educational leadership and those writing in the field (Smyth, 1989b; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Hargreaves, 1993; Smyth, 1993, 1994) have been highly critical of the trend away from leadership towards management.

Smyth (1989b), for instance, contends that corporate management in schools promotes relationships which are anti-educational, autocratic, bureaucratic and

⁴⁴ See Chapters 2 and 4.

hierarchical. In this model, he argues, teachers have been silenced and become invisible and teaching has become a technical process with a narrow focus. Developing an alternative, he proposes leadership relationships which are more inclusive; less privileged; where teachers are seen as leaders; where people know they have the capacity to change, improve and transform practices; and an environment is created where people can engage in dialogue to help each other to uncover meaning. 'In looking to new forms of leadership Smyth seeks not only to avoid new power dominance but to establish the importance of a commitment to collectivity' (Davies, 1994:52–53).

Articulating relationships

The Innovative Links Project was designed as a network of relationships, and school-based Links teams were established on the basis of a commitment to local engagement centred around school–university partnerships and democratic decision-making. The Links teams were connected locally through roundtables such as the Western Melbourne Roundtable and then regionally and nationally to the Innovative Links Project and NSN networks, which provided further opportunities for meeting and working together. Opportunities at the national level differed from those experienced in roundtables and teams and members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable had a lot to say about the distinctive and diverse ways they worked together in each location. This chapter seeks to reveal the nature of these relationships by drawing on a number of Roundtable documents, including the cases and commentaries written by members of the Roundtable and the reflective, collaborative interviews conducted by and for the Roundtable at the end of the project. The individual interviews conducted as part of this study confirmed that relationships were a highly significant aspect of Roundtable work and a subsequent group interview further explored the theme.⁴⁵ Combined, these documents and interviews provide three time-connected perspectives—in situ, immediately post project and five years on—about the working relationships and the collaborative processes and opportunities which led to learning, development and change in the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

Building teams

The process of establishing teams laid the foundation upon which working relationships were built and there were a number of factors which made this process distinctive. The first was that participation in the Links teams was voluntary, and having a choice about participation was seen as democratic, connecting with Arendt's (1958) and Nias's (1989) views about voluntary participation and the importance of choosing to act. At Kingfisher Primary School, for instance, the Links coordinator issued an invitation to all staff members to join the team and about a third of the staff subsequently volunteered. Nobody was forced to participate and anybody who wanted to participate was included. Yet Anna challenged the idea that people made an informed choice to participate. She argued that joining did not necessarily mean a knowledge of the project.

How do you make a decision to participate when over and over people say they didn't really know what they were agreeing to? I mean I didn't. I was here about a day and I came to a meeting and that was it. You just do that stuff. I guess I made a decision to participate but I had no idea what I was deciding to participate in and others made decisions not to participate.

While it is hard to quantify what people did and did not know as they made their decisions there were multiple and intersecting contextual factors—personal, cultural and social—which clearly influenced people's decisions about joining. This fits with Guskey's (1995:117) observation that the 'powerful impact of context' is often neglected in shaping professional development programs.

Prospective members of the Roundtable knew that there needed to be legitimate reasons to work closely together and decisions about participation were based on the development of a vision about how the Links Project might fit within each educational context. The formation of the Roundtable facilitated contextual inclusivity which enhanced the possibility of situated certainty (Hargreaves, 1994:246). At the

⁴⁵ Appendix 7: Chris' reflections on working together, p462, is a constructed case which was used during the group conversation about working relationships.

university for instance, the connection between the Collaborative Research Group⁴⁶ and the Innovative Links Project was established and all members of the CRG were invited to participate. Schools also connected context with project aims and formed teams on the basis of school priorities and interests. At Rosella Primary School the idea was discussed with the whole staff and they decided to focus on student self assessment and formed a representative Links team. At Finch Secondary College the professional development coordinator decided the focus would be on middle years literacy and numeracy and particular teachers were targeted. They reported to the Southern Cross Roundtable Portrayal Evaluation Team (1996:58) that initially,

...individual staff who were known to be interested in reflecting upon their practices, and were prepared to share these and to make changes, were approached. Subsequently, this invitation to participate was extended to other teachers in the college.

The formation of the Links team at Rosella Primary School indicated the complexity of decision-making. Dora recalled an inter-weaving of school and personal factors that influenced their decision-making.

...(The) group that was selected to be involved in the Roundtable was the Junior team...because at the time we were exploring...multiage grouping for the little ones—the Prep, ones and twos. So there was a need to explore. Can we do it? Is there commitment? Are the children going to learn? Resources? There were a number of issues and it was very interesting because the group was a very large group. Part of the group participated in the case writing and that was the existing group that was comfortable working together. The new people, who had just got put into the multiage level, had the option and they said 'No'. They listened to a couple of talks, spoke with us, they gave us feedback, but they actually didn't want to do much of the writing, if any.

⁴⁶ The Collaborative Research Group was a university funded program designed to develop research skills (see p128).

People were influenced in their decision to join Links teams when they felt personally connected to other people in the group. For some there was a personal–emotional dimension to the consideration about whether to participate. As Dora noted, comfortable pre-existing relationships had the effect of encouraging teachers to participate and Eleni echoed this sentiment, recalling that when she joined the team it was good to know an existing member of the group. She felt that if teachers worked in teams they liked then team members were more likely to show commitment. Conversely Steve recorded how his relationship with Michael had been a barrier to Michael’s participation in the new project and he linked this to a belief that trust on a personal level did not always exist naturally between teachers and teacher educators.⁴⁷

When teachers doubted the contribution they could make to the project, university colleagues encouraged them to participate. Steve recalled his initial discussion with Eve in which she interpreted her lack of experience as a lack of professional expertise and translated this as a diminished ability to contribute to the project.⁴⁸ He was concerned about the professional dynamic which might underpin this train of thinking and played a part in convincing Eve to join the team. Anna noted that ‘personality drives things too’. Janine, the principal at Eagle Secondary College, agreed that particular teachers might have been more inclined than others to participate in the Links project.

My impression was that the people who chose to go into it, because it was a voluntary thing, were probably those who were what I would call questioning practitioners...people who felt there was always something to be learning or doing.

Relationships between organisations also influenced people’s feelings of connectedness. When the Roundtable Steering Committee decided to invite two National Schools Network schools to submit expressions of interest they did so because they were excited about the possibility of extending their NSN work. Laila worked in one of these schools and knew that the work of the NSN was guided by a

⁴⁷ See Case 2: Michael, Sophie, Eve and Penny, p499.

⁴⁸ See Case 2: Michael, Sophie, Eve and Penny, p499.

set of clearly articulated principles including a commitment to collaborative approaches in decision-making. Initially she puzzled over why a group of teachers who were already hard working would invest more time in planning for learning and teaching but realised that the prospect of support for collaborative work outweighed any initial suspicions. Similarly, participation was also influenced by connections between schools, teachers' unions and the university. People joined because they had some insight into a philosophical framework or working relationships which indicated the type of work they might expect to be engaged in.

Membership of teams was flexible and sometimes increased when teachers could see connections between their work and the creative and reflective endeavours of their colleagues. While participants had the chance to opt in and out of Links teams, most stayed. Olga noted that teachers who chose to join the Links team at her school were receptive to talking, listening and opening up and seemed to be determined to make the team work. It seemed that the range of factors influencing people's decisions indicated that they valued the chance to join a learning community which promised multiple dimensions—a community of understanding, practice and affection (Lima, 2001).

As the teams formed, members of the Roundtable were conscious of the unequal relations and entrenched expectations which had traditionally characterised the relationship between school and university educators. Anna recalled that prior to the Roundtable she had had experiences in both schools and universities which suggested there was a perception that university teachers were of a higher status than secondary school teachers, who in turn had a higher status than primary school teachers. She felt this was inappropriate and incorrect and such perceptions angered and upset her. For the university colleagues, involvement in preparing the submission for the Innovative Links Project funding and the early work of the CRG had helped them to clarify their expectations of the project. They looked forward to the possibility of challenging existing perceptions and forming relationships that might extend their work into future projects, curriculum development and teacher education. They imagined a reciprocal relationship in which they could make a contribution and learn something too. While they felt they had a strong background in schools they wanted to develop skills in

working with schools. Each member of the university team joined a school team and stayed with that team as a university colleague for the duration of the project.

In schools, teachers were unsure about what to expect of the project and of the new relationships with their university colleagues. One teacher described how she felt initially threatened by the university colleague—he seemed to be ‘up here’ or ‘out there’ and she half expected him to ask her to do something as though she was still a student teacher. Moffat’s (1996) case highlighted the nature of the cultural divide between school and university teachers, noted by Gore (1995) and others, yet at the same time he gives a sense of the hope which balanced his doubt.

Teachers and academics working together in an equal, mutually productive partnership for school change? You’ve got to be joking...So it was with some trepidation that I attended the first meeting of what was to become our Roundtable. Who would be setting the agenda? Would we be baffled by ‘academic speak’? How open would our academic colleagues be to the suggestion, that all the education providers needed to embrace change? Was it really possible for universities and schools to forge an open equally productive, dynamic partnership?...At that first meeting I think everyone was nervous. I was wondering about hidden agendas and who might be thinking about using the project as the next rung on the ladder of their academic career. I had come to the project with the hope that we could begin to document some of the changes that had been occurring at my school, and use this documentation as a springboard for reflection and further change. I was also hoping to build some bridges to the university which would have an honest foundation and continue to last beyond the funding of the project. I didn’t have any clear idea as to a methodology to do all of this. (Moffat, 1996)

The teachers at Rosella Primary School noted that it took time to build a team—time to plan how the team would operate, who would be responsible for tasks, what professional development was needed and then more time to get to know each other and develop trust and a commitment to the common task. Teachers also knew that in order to work together effectively they needed time to practise skills in real contexts followed by opportunities for peer feedback and making explicit connections between

changed work practices and student learning. Time was identified as a critical issue in building trust:

...we talked about trust and sort of layers—and to me one of the key foundation stones of trust is time...time for fermenting and consolidating and I think that it took time to actually get through the thinking and the fear of writing and let that trust up. Even when we work closely together. (Group Interview: Working together, 2002)

When faced with dilemmas relating to time the university colleagues responded by making full use of the flexibility they had and working with the Links coordinators to find creative solutions to time management problems. It seemed, as Hargreaves (1994:245) suggests, that working together helped to reduce the overload.

Working as a Roundtable

The Western Melbourne Roundtable Steering Committee (referred to within the group as Roundtable meetings) provided a different kind of opportunity to develop working relationships. The Roundtable comprised representatives from each Links team and because of the representative nature of the group not all members of the six Links teams were able to attend. Questions were raised about how to avoid a sense of exclusion for those who were unable to attend and various arrangements were made including rotating participation. Solutions were made on the basis of discussions and negotiation within each team.

The Roundtable meetings took teachers another step away from the isolation of working in classrooms so that they were able to meet teachers from other schools across the different education systems. Laila recalled the opportunity provided by the Roundtable meetings.

I loved going to the Roundtable. The people that I loved to listen to most were Daniel and Bill from Eagle Secondary College and I used to come and think ‘What the hell am I doing here? I’ve got no ideas. I can’t talk the way that these people talk. I’ve got nothing to contribute.’ But I loved listening to it because they were really eloquent and they had some big ideas and they were really good at saying what they were saying. My mind got so stretched. That was like, ‘wow’.

Given this opportunity to bridge the gap between systems and sectors in education they realised that there was in fact very little gap and while participation in the Roundtable did not allow people to get to know each other in an in-depth way, as was possible in the Links teams, it gave them a point of reference. Dora recalled how fortunate she felt to be able to attend the Roundtable meetings.

...That was very powerful because I was listening to other people and what they were experiencing such as specific problems with the writing process...And it was interesting just listening to all of that and I felt worthwhile because well I could then offer (my opinion). 'Well I'm experiencing the same kinds of problems and I guarantee that those issues are in other schools as well.' I found that very helpful, it was a very nice form of professional development...talking on a topic is a very, very powerful thing...I worry that I see a lot of teachers just reading a reference book, this is what you do, read it and do it. Whereas it's the magic when you actually devise something. Even if it is over a cup of coffee, that's a really powerful time I think. Just to think of ideas. I would come away, and as I said I was really fortunate because I was early in my career, I'd come away with great things, or this has happened and OK I've got this wealth of experience.

Olga also thought it was fascinating listening to people from different places and she observed that as teachers developed a range of contacts at the Roundtable they realised they had opened up new avenues beyond the classroom and the school. As they saw the same people in different situations and got a broader view of education beyond their school they also noticed that it was easier to take a risk, even if they only knew others by sight. After a while it was even possible to laugh at each other's mistakes. Inge remembered how these meetings gave her a sense

...of teachers as thoughtful practitioners, innovative practitioners which I found very interesting. It gave me links to teachers across primary and secondary in that particular group. So I think it was significant from that perspective.

But Inge also felt that her voice had not been heard in the same way that others had, suggesting that it is hard to achieve a feeling of acceptance for everyone.

I felt some of the things I would say wouldn't be as acceptable as what other people said. I don't come from a sociological perspective and some of the things I would say and some of the ideas I would have would not be as acceptable as others.

Others thought the Roundtable meetings were boring and a waste of time. Frank, the Links coordinator and a member of the school's leadership team at Honeyeater Primary School, saw himself as the go-between for the Roundtable and the school team.

...They were quite happy to be part of the project provided they could get on with their teaching and have a bit of time to think about it as a professional development activity. But they really didn't want to know about going to meetings or stuff that wasn't relevant for them, they were quite dogmatic about that. And I respected that. So I said I'll look after all the admin side, lets move on, that's how it operated...I was the person who went to all the Roundtable meetings and the others didn't attend except when it was held at our school. So they relied on me to get the background of where we were trying to go.

Like the teachers at Honeyeater Primary School, Teresa also felt that attending Roundtable meetings was not a good use of time and articulated a perception that the university colleagues had more time for this kind of activity than their school colleagues.

...(W)e were pretty pushed. So some of those meetings I went to outside the school I thought, I've just wasted two hours where I could have been doing this, this, this and this which would have been a lot more useful, which is a pretty cheeky thing to say...

Lily distinguished between the active engagement in team meetings and the formality of Roundtable meetings and puzzled about whether there might have been another way to organise the Roundtable meetings to extend the kind of engagement that was evident in the school teams.

I think that maybe there was, from my point of view, a greater formality about some of the meetings than was perhaps necessary. I think that to

some extent that changed their nature, there was a different feel about those than there was about the active engagement of the (Links teams) around the project within the school. Now having said that I'm not necessarily saying that's a negative thing because I think that probably that was what gave the whole project some sort of shape and ensured that there was ongoing, effective documentation... So I'm a bit betwixt and between. I think... in my heart maybe that part could have been done differently, but (in my head) I don't know well enough how it could have been, and I think if it hadn't been done a lot of good stuff could have just vanished, it could have just been momentary, transient rather than something more.

Roundtable relationships demonstrated Nias's (1987:53) contention that there is a two way interaction between individuals and groups in which individuals bring richness to the group and the group provides new opportunities for personal learning and development. Indeed relationships formed at the Roundtable became the basis for new opportunities for cooperation. In one instance the Links team at Honeyeater Primary School shared their cases with the Links team at Rosella Primary School and they responded with written commentaries. This meant that even those teachers who preferred to be school focused and decided not to attend Roundtable meetings benefited from the connections forged at the Roundtable. Rosita recalled that the relationships and communication between the two teams had resulted in strengthened professional ties; and at a personal level she realised she had become clearer about classroom goals and was working towards better organisation, improved teaching strategies and greater efforts to maximise each child's learning.

A number of procedural events marked some of the early struggles to change past practice and build democratic ways of working. Firstly, the allocation of the university colleagues to school teams was negotiated at a Roundtable meeting. It was an open process where schools identified their teams and outlined their projects, then people expressed preferences and made suggestions until the university colleagues and schools were matched. It seemed that strong relationships were forged when there was an opportunity to express interest and preferences and the importance of personal connections was again evident.

I remember sitting at the first meeting of the Roundtable listening to people talking around the table and listening to the university colleagues talking and thinking 'no I don't want to work with you, I don't want to work with you, oh I think I could work with you, yeah you'd be alright' and being fairly proactive in making an approach to the person that I thought I could work with.

Considering this situation in the context of Lima's (2001) argument about the significance of developing friendly relations (rather than friendships) as a foundation for cognitive conflict there does seem to be a need for some message or indication that friendly relations will be possible, that there is a degree of trust that will underpin working relationships so that they might lead to productive outcomes.

Once the Roundtable was established Steve, the Roundtable coordinator, struggled to achieve his goal of sharing the organisational responsibilities.

We tried to have a school chair at each meeting, and I'd meet with them and we'd try to set it all up. But it was just impossible, it was very hard to organise, and it worked quite well once or twice. There was one memorable meeting where it worked hopelessly at Eagle Secondary College.

Despite this struggle, the Roundtable provided an opportunity to explore tensions and discuss topics of mutual interest. It seems possible that in the space created by the Roundtable people were able to broach issues in a different way than was possible at the team level. There were, for example, a number of displays of political assertiveness (Hargreaves, 1994:247) at the Roundtable. As discussed in some detail in Chapter 6 one instance was the heated debate surrounding the question about the language that would be used in case writing. As a result the group rejected the formal language of the National Statements and Profiles in preference to a 'story-telling' genre which the teachers felt matched their verbal descriptions of teaching and learning. Other issues debated and negotiated at the Roundtable included what members of the group would call each other, the name of the Roundtable and the location of Roundtable meetings. All of these issues concerned matters of principle which could be related to creating equal relationships. The importance of these seemingly small issues was significant at the time because each discussion and

decision represented a commitment to hearing the voices of all participants, to recognising past inequalities and adopting democratic processes. As Anna observed,

...democracy in a partnership between schools and universities is about an equal sense of voice. One indication of democracy was that teachers did not feel railroaded but felt free to voice their uncertainty, reluctance, unwillingness and avoidance.

When it came to reconciling the tension in relationships between school and university colleagues there was a clear difference in how this was achieved in Links teams and at the Roundtable. At the team level, school and university colleagues seemed to negotiate their personal relationships in the context of their dialogic and contextual action. While this was also evident at the Roundtable there was an added dimension as the group explored the question of unequal relationships in a more detached and principle-seeking way. One of the Roundtable's 'reconciliation stories' was about choosing a symbol to represent school–university partnerships and this seems an excellent example of Lima's (2001) cognitive conflict where independent thinking led to creative solutions.

The Western Melbourne Roundtable was determined to ensure that all aspects of their work demonstrated their commitment to building an equal partnership and it was at the fourth meeting of the Roundtable that the issue of the new ILP logo was raised. The National Newsletter No.5 had featured a new logo: 'As you can see we have a new logo for the Project...to symbolise "the link" between universities and schools...We hope you like it!' But at the Roundtable Steering Committee meeting Laila expressed dismay at the logo. With the schools (represented by an 'S') seeming to hang off the universities (represented by a 'U') she interpreted this symbol as indicating an inferior role for schools. Following plenty of formal and informal discussions, members of the Roundtable agreed that she should draft a letter to the National Executive asking that consideration be given to the development of a logo which better signified the intent of the project.

Based on this request, the national Executive Committee did discuss the matter of the logo at its next meeting and a range of views were expressed. After discussing options and costs a process was agreed where alternative/s would be sought and circulated for

comment and a national vote. As a result of this process a new logo was chosen. The third edition of *The Big Link* sported the new logo which had been selected by an overwhelming majority. Not all roundtables shared the concerns of Laila and the Western Melbourne Roundtable and some responses to the National Executive expressed concern about the waste of time and money involved in the search for the new logo. 'We hope that in future the Links body finds issues of greater substance on which to spend its time.' And: 'We are amazed that this matter created any interest at all. (*The Big Link* No. 3, September 1995) But for Laila the process and the decision were significant. Based on the logo experience she believed that Steve and the Roundtable

...had an exceptional view about democracy and an exceptional view about teachers' voice being critical... We were able, Steve enabled that, to have the discussion around the table which allowed us as a Roundtable to say 'we don't like this logo, it doesn't capture for us what the relationship is that we want to develop at this Roundtable and we would like you to consider changing it'. Now I had people from other roundtables ring me and say you are obviously not doing a good job at your roundtable because you are having these kinds of discussions—trying to intimidate me. But personally, I can't speak for anyone else, I thought it was just the best symbolic gesture that I could ever hope for. It said 'well, if you think this is important, then it's important'. And it's kind of the same thing with the kids. That same mirror image with the negotiation process. If you think it is important, then we are going to do it. And it gave us the confidence, it may well be one small thing, but it gave us the confidence to tackle other bigger more significant things. Confidence in the people that were in positions of power and authority in the group...it built a relationship in the group and it also built a trust in the university colleagues in the group...you know it was a power relationship and that had to be recognised. I think in that instance and in a number of other instances the behaviour, the way that Steve handled things really gave us confidence that we were equal members of the Roundtable.

It seems reasonable to suggest that these discussions may not have occurred if the Roundtable had not existed and the project had comprised unconnected school-based teams. While democratic relations were negotiated within Links teams, the Roundtable seemed to provide a safer opportunity for exploring broader issues of equity and for developing friendly relations.

In addition to its regular meetings the Roundtable Steering Committee went on to organise a number of forums which were opportunities for all members of the six Links teams to get together to focus on shared issues in more depth than was possible in Roundtable meetings—a different kind of working together.⁴⁹ Kerry observed that Roundtable meetings and forums facilitated collegiality with teachers from other schools by focusing on issues of shared interest. These opportunities broke down the barriers between the primary, secondary and university sectors. A mixture of responses indicated the importance of the forums in bringing people together and building a sense of the Roundtable:

...The best aspect of the Forum was not the grand Committee Room at Moonee Valley, where it was held, but the fact that the Forum had been structured, organised and conducted by the teachers themselves. This project is the project of the teachers, supported by people from universities, unions and the National Schools Network. This was modelled in the Forum planning and review...the Forum was a very powerful event which brought together people with the same commitment to change for the improvement and rethinking of schools...Our project has tried to value and celebrate teachers' knowledge and work, and by sharing this in a pleasant and relaxed setting we can hopefully all relax a little and learn a lot (Cherednichenko, 1995:14).

The development of Roundtable relationships supported inquiry. However, some case writers observed that sharing cases and facing questions led to a sense of being criticised and they felt this was unfair. Once again demonstrating the value of conflict as a catalyst for change (Lima, 2001), it was this articulation about the importance of

⁴⁹ In the first forum one session was allocated for small group case discussions; another was designed to reflect on the research process by looking at strengths, outcomes and plans; and a third provided an opportunity to interpret cases creatively. More detail about these forums is included in Chapters 4 & 5.

fairness which resulted in the development of protocols to ensure that case writers and their cases were respected.⁵⁰ The protocols became an evolving set of ideas used within teams and in all situations where cases were brought into the public and used to inspire conversations about teachers' work. Once again the Roundtable played a role in shaping the work across the Roundtable scale. Issues raised and strategies modelled at the Roundtable emerged from and fed back into the work and practices of teams; the relationships and processes built in teams and at the Roundtable connected to activity at the regional and national levels of the ILP–NSN networks.

National networking

The Innovative Links Project provided a range of opportunities for connecting the world inside the classroom to the world outside and each member of the Roundtable developed a different relationship with each space provided by the Roundtable structure. While some worked solely within their Links teams, Anna observed that others had different outer levels of relationships—for some it was the Roundtable while for others it extended to the national networks. She believed that those who connected beyond the team were exposed to different ways of working, different approaches to action research, different levels of awareness and different classroom practices. Pat and Inge saw themselves as 'worker bees', involved at the local but not the national level. By contrast, King was 'out there', a place beyond her 'comfort zone'—she saw the Western Melbourne Roundtable as a unique opportunity to participate in the Links team, the Roundtable and national networks. In the national arena she participated in an Innovative Links Project national forum and a National Schools Network professional development school.

...I had the pleasure of meeting educators from all over Australia. It was interesting to hear about what other schools and Roundtables had been doing. We found some differences but many common threads. There I met Gillian Dawkins from the Northern Territory, a fellow teacher also exploring issues about reporting. She proudly presented me with her school's publication on

⁵⁰ The protocols which were developed by the Roundtable for case discussions were included in the introduction to *Teachers Write* (Western Melbourne Roundtable, 1997:12-17). The issue of case discussions is also examined here in Chapter 6: Acting dialogically, p157.

reporting, and we have since faxed each other and I have sent her copies of our school reports. Soon I will be sending her a draft of our school's Link publication—a set of cases and commentaries on Student Self Assessment. It's very exciting to receive letters and faxes and communicate with people from all over Australia...(then) I was introduced to the work of the National Schools Network (NSN) and with encouragement from other Link and NSN friends I applied to attend the Australian Teaching Council/ National Schools Network Professional Development Spring School in Sydney last September. It was one of the most intense and unique learning opportunities that I have experienced. When I came back I wrote, for days and days because I wanted to capture the excitement of what I had experienced while it was all still fresh in my mind. I did not think it was possible to work so hard, learn so much, meet so many interesting people and have so much fun in one week. Yet again this was a springboard for new friendships, and my experience contributed to my ideas for the introduction of the Junior School, encouraged me to apply for higher duties and much more (King, 1996).

It is clear that for King her physical movement or engagement at different locations was a significant aspect of working together in the Roundtable. Smith (1993:90) sees 'the politics of daily life as inherently spatial' and using his ideas about 'scaling places' King can be seen to have built relationships in different kinds of places. She was able to leave the classroom to work in the Links team, able to leave the school to work with colleagues in neighbouring schools on Roundtable business and supported to participate in state and national activities. For her, as for others who participated at this level, the opportunity to move beyond her 'comfort zone' was 'a springboard for new friendships', experiences and ideas; and there was a 'domino effect' where 'one thing led to five others'. Yet the departure point for King's 'whirlwind' of learning experiences was her active participation in the Links team at her school and her work in the classroom. The National Schools Network also provided international connections through networks such as the Coalition of Essential Schools in the USA and teachers made links between their local innovations and the developments of their overseas counterparts. By running workshops such as the Beane–Brodhagen workshop on negotiating the curriculum the NSN also provided opportunities for learning with educators from other countries.

It seemed that in the Roundtable, relationships created the potential for further action and agency. Participation and relationships in one structure seemed to open the door for entering and participating in another structure, with relationships promoting links across the scale of the Roundtable. Observing the value of engagement across the Roundtable prompts a question about what the ramifications might have been for those who for one reason or another did not engage across the scale of the Roundtable. Inge, for instance, indicated that she felt to some extent marginalised because she had not been part of the group that went off to ILP meetings and other similar activities. Were there advantages to be gained that were only available at the scales beyond the team? Was she disadvantaged by only being connected at the team and Roundtable level?

Threads of working relationships

These descriptions of articulated relationships spanning Links teams, the Roundtable and the national networks give a clear sense that there were different kinds of relationships evident in the work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable, some close and others more distant—in effect a continuum from strong to weak ties (Nias *et al.*, 1989; Lima, 2001). As with the contextual plane of action where lifeworld (Habermas, 1987) included personal, cultural and societal contexts, the dialogic plane of action covered issues to do with the worker (person), the work (culture) as well as the workplace and beyond (society). Bringing the concept of lifeworld to this examination of working relationships, or using Smith's (1993) conception of scale, has prompted consideration of the different kinds of relationships that were evident in the Western Melbourne Roundtable—friendships (close ties), partnerships and co-leadership, and associations (weaker ties and professional acquaintances). Each of these will be discussed below.

Friendships

At one level, distinctions between working relationships seemed to be connected to scale. Friendships for instance were clearly evident in the establishment and building of teams, partnerships more visible in the Roundtable and associations reflected in the broader NSN and ILP networks. But this was not a definitive separation; friendships, for instance, emerged across the scale of the Roundtable. Another distinguishing

factor related to the presence of an emotional dimension and once again the intensity changed across the scale of the Roundtable. The friendships which developed in teams and in conjunction with the dialogic flow exhibited a high level of emotional intimacy in comparison with the more distant professional associations. But once again the distinction was not definitive.

Ian, Eleni and Anna discussed the factors they thought were associated with the development of strong relationships between teachers at Eagle Secondary College. The first thing they noticed about the Links team was that they were not alone; other people were suffering the same dilemmas and asking the same questions. Therefore, by coming together they provided each other with moral support, a principle which Hargreaves (1994:245) associated with collaboration. They recalled becoming quite close as they regularly spent a ‘fair bit of time...going around issues’ and sharing their thoughts and ideas. The Links team spread ‘like an umbrella over the top’ of their teaching teams—enabling their conversations to go further—and they noticed that formal dialogue in a non-administrative setting led to cross-team fertilisation. As new people came into the group and it became bigger ‘things were being questioned and people were viewing things differently’. Even if the aim was to achieve the kind of relationships that Lima called ‘friendly relations’ they realised it was a mistake to assume that relationships existed; they observed that without an opportunity to talk about ‘why we work like this, how we work like this and what the problems are’ they did not have a common understanding and the conversations did not go as far. It seemed that if relationships were to blossom, discussing the process was as important as sharing and discussing personal dilemmas and that a shared understanding about process eventually led to greater depth in conversations.

Lily noticed that the regular team meetings at Rosella Primary School provided a demonstration of ‘the joy teachers felt in their work and in working together’.⁵¹ When they gathered the conversation was light and friendly and there was a spirit of camaraderie. At the Roundtable there was a sense of (extended) family as people questioned hierarchies, checked on who was doing what and shared experiences which ranged ‘from the massive to the mundane’. Ivan, in his commentary on Lily’s

⁵¹ See Case 3: Getting started, p501.

case, noted that these opportunities to work together demonstrated the beginnings of friendships and partnerships, teams and networks.⁵² Teachers were engaged in ‘beginning the reculturing of the teaching profession’ and ‘working together to build the learning communities of the future...communities of lifelong learners’.

Partnerships

Inge also saw the significance of the relationships which grew through collaboration within the university team.

...I think it brought us together within the Department of Education, working as a group, working on a common project. We'd taught together but we hadn't actually worked together in a collaborative group like that, on a bigger project. So it brought us together as a team in a bigger sense and it drew in those schools that were involved as well. So it was significant, I guess, at several levels, bringing us together and bringing us into contact with the teachers.

Equality was achieved through care and responsibility and teachers knew that in order to work together effectively there needed to be opportunities to develop skills for effective team work, the kind of skills needed to build and maintain friendly relations. Members of the Roundtable knew that practising equality was an important aspect of building close relationships and looking back they felt the Roundtable had tried in significant ways to challenge any inequalities and ensure that participation was a reality.

Honest to god, the really most important skill, and the thing that was modelled constantly through the Roundtable was the equality of the players and that is the same with kids. If you start from a position of saying 'I know', like the traditional teacher, you're not going to get anywhere. Kids pick it up really quickly, so do teachers. So if you actually set up structures which are round and not linear you are automatically and visually doing something that is different. Then if

⁵² See Case 3: Getting started, p501.

you really and truly try to get people's voices heard and you find ways of valuing them—One thing that I did as a person who was leading the (Links team)...was recognising that some teachers were totally freaked out by writing, by physically writing. So I used part of my money to employ somebody to do it, to record their words...

Bill noticed that opportunity did not always result in equal outcomes and in some instances equality had to be worked at over time. Oliver felt that instead of being faced with an 'immovable object' the egalitarian efforts of the university colleagues meant that his work and his opinions were valued and independent thinking was encouraged.

You know when you don't have to go to the mountain and the mountain comes to you that creates a lovely context to begin with because you know your work is valued and you value that other person's work...That was a really important thing. Then a consistent effort was made to use plain speak and that was a really valuable thing along the way. I don't know, it's a bit hackneyed and it doesn't quite work this way but the problem shared is a problem on its way to being solved...

Laila saw the relationships between school and university colleagues as central to the significance of the Roundtable. She felt that through reciprocal work opportunities and regular and challenging interactions she had developed confidence in her university colleagues.

The relationship that we built with the university and our participation in the Roundtable I think was really extraordinary. I think it resides in the relationships we built with people...Anna and Steve particularly. The confidence that we had in them ...They would come and work in our places and understood our work, and we got opportunities to go and work in their places too, to work along side them and understand their work. So we actually developed stronger ties from the partnerships around the idea of teacher education which hadn't been in place before...Having the (university) colleague coming to your school weekly, fortnightly, how ever often it was, was fantastic. Wonderful. Just to have that person to talk to, listen to you, motivate

and extend your ideas about thinking, asking some hard questions. I really like the idea of having the critical friend...I think we keep being able to enrich each other's work by doing that. But not to the same degree, not the same depth.

The kind of relationships that were formed in the Roundtable shifted the power dynamic. The unequal relationship between school and university colleagues, which was noted earlier, changed so that now the relationship seemed to fit with Gilligan's conception of a morality based on relationships of care and responsibility. Dean (1996:209) notes that Gilligan distinguishes the ethic of care from a morality of justice based on rights and rules and she quotes Gilligan (1982) who argues that care requires 'a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract'. The university colleagues engaged with their school colleagues in positive, enabling and supportive relationships. Indicating the shifting nature of school–university relationships Janine reminisced: '...they didn't make us doubt ourselves actually...(working together) was mutually helpful'. Both Laila and Rosita noted that the relationships they formed with their university colleagues in the Roundtable were enduring; there seemed to be a shared understanding or history which meant that relationships could lie dormant but you knew they were still there. Rosita felt that in the Roundtable she had made the kind of connections where she knew what people were talking about.

...I feel like I could pick up the phone now and ring Steve and say 'Can you help me with this?' And he would. I haven't done that, but I know that if I want to I can and that knowledge that I can is really important.

Because the dialogic flow was connected to multiple personal and school contexts, many voices, interests and points of view were heard. The possibility of plurality and hearing all participants' perspectives demonstrated some of the characteristics of communication valued by Habermas (1984), Giddens (1994), Arendt (1958), and feminist theorists such as Braaten (1996) and Benhabib (1995). Yet while there was much attention paid to building caring relationships and hearing multiple voices there was also the danger of exclusion. Against the tide of detail about the value of building relationships there were indications of alienation both within and beyond Links teams. As McDowell (1999:120–121) and Hargreaves (1994:247) note, there is a danger in

the comfort which comes from face-to-face community building and members of the Roundtable realised that while they had found their own voice in the Links teams there were others who felt excluded or silenced. Robyn, a member of the Links team at Honeyeater Primary School, recalled writing a case with her team-teaching colleague but noted that it had not been included when the cases were compiled. She was not sure why it had been excluded but thought that others may have seen it as too critical.

Inge felt that while the Roundtable was exciting it was also frustrating. One aspect of her frustration aligned with Hargreaves's (1994:247) fear that collaboration might lead to conformism. She believed that:

...there was a flip side. When you are working with a team you have to give away aspects of what you think and what you really believe and it has to be more group-speak. It is in the giving away that I thought there were elements that I didn't like.

As the relationships within the Links teams strengthened the distinction between those who were in the team and those who were not also became more obvious and Links teams ran the risk of being seen as exclusive within their schools. In one instance, as a Links meeting was coming to a close at Finch Secondary College,

...two teachers (who were not part of the Links team) came into the staffroom...grabbed a stubbie each from the fridge and marked their territory as clearly as any teenager pushed out of her bedroom by a visiting relative.

At Eagle Secondary College, Eleni noticed a similar pattern. As the staff numbers increased the Links team became a kind of 'in house thing'—the old people knew and the new people didn't, some people were in and some people were out. Cliques (Nias *et al.*, 1989) formed. Anna wondered how long you needed to be 'in' before it was hard for everybody else to get in. These insights into personal and group alienation and Anna's ruminations indicate a constant awareness about inclusion and exclusion. Dora rued the impact of a lack of communication between the Links team and the rest of the staff at her school.

I think probably what we didn't do well initially was just keep the others that weren't writing informed of what we were doing. We probably didn't have to do it often but we probably should have just done a lot of that sharing as professionals (because) now that it is all over and done with, the people who are still there think 'Oh that (Links project) was a silly thing'.

Also seeking a solution to this problem, Eleni thought that if time had been allocated each week to 'mix and match' with the new staff then 'many of the prejudices, worries, concerns, misunderstandings' about who people were and what they did would have been overcome. She also wondered about the possibility of structuring the Links team so that it represented staff composition across year levels and teaching teams. At Rosella Primary School the recognition of tension led to the next reconciliatory step in the process of working together.

The first thing I remember was feeling shocked that others would see us as different—'It's alright for you, you've got money to do this sort of stuff.' I felt offended in a way. I don't know if that's the right word but I just thought well why would they feel badly towards us? It was a really strange sort of realisation initially and then I had to think well is it because they feel they are being left out? But it made me think about what we were doing as a group and we talked—OK we're doing this, can we share some of the processes, some of what we are doing to include everybody? Because what we are talking about is probably the sort of issues that the other teachers would be grappling with as well—and I think that's when we took a really major step and decided that yes, we were going to...look at some of the issues that were happening at our school...(By using the cases) another school had written about multi aging it took it away, it wasn't about us but we were using...other people's work to discuss something as a whole staff which then brought that inclusivity aspect again and made the others feel like oh, this is what cases are about, this is how we can talk about our work, we can use this etc. So I guess it made me really conscious about us as a Link team, our role and our responsibility, because we were given this time and money—we were elite in a way, I guess, and I wondered: What

was our responsibility then to the rest of the school? Our staff? And our students? So I think it was a really important step connecting all the staff. I think it had a nice effect in that everyone understood more about what was being done. They were also learning in a different way and hopefully that had a flow-on effect into all sorts of different areas. And I know that that was just the first step and for many years after a lot of those procedures and things that we put into place continued. The way staff worked trialing things in classrooms and coming back and making decisions together, yes we would go multi age and we would have our Prep, one, twos all together and bring the community in and the students. Just all sorts of things seemed to really come in and work well together, it was probably some of the most exciting work I think that I remember doing.

At Rosella Primary School, having decided to share the Links money around, they provided writing time to people who were not in the Links team which meant

...they actually then started to write cases too...And when we did that they were happy to start doing some of this discussion and talking about and writing. Then they could do it. That was good for us then too...

As Habermas's conception of communicative action helped in understanding the dialogic plane of action, Giddens's (1999:61–65) conception of a democracy of the emotions is helpful in seeking a deeper understanding of the cooperative democratic ethic. It seems especially useful because of the connection between public and emotional democracy which was also evident in the Roundtable. Giddens (1999:61–65) argues that the principles which apply for public democracy are the same as those that apply for intimate relationships; while he uses this conception to think about friendships, sexual and love relationships and parent-child relationships, it seems that the ideas have great relevance for the Roundtable. Indeed, the Roundtable experience seems to indicate that these ideas are significant in fostering a particular kind of working relationship, whether it is a close relationship, a working group or a professional association. The principles seem to apply across the continuum from weak to strong ties.

Giddens (1994; 1998:117–120; 1999:59, 61–65), in conceptualising a democracy of the emotions, gives us a way of thinking about the connections between intimacy and cooperative engagement. He explores the notion of a relationship where the rewards gained form the basis on which the relationship continues. He sees this ‘pure relationship’ as having quite different dynamics from more traditional social ties because they demand active trust and self-disclosure as a basic condition of intimacy or emotional communication. All of this, he argues, contributes to the emergence of relationships which are ‘implicitly democratic’, featuring equality, respect and wanting the best for each other; understanding of the other person’s point of view; talk or dialogue; mutual trust and finally, freedom from arbitrary power, coercion or violence. This, Giddens (1999:61–65) concludes, enables an assessment of risk and hazard in relation to future possibilities, and allows for the condition of excitement and adventure which might lead to new beginnings.

Another aspect of partnership was co-leadership; this model of educational leadership dovetailed with the guiding principles of the Innovative Links Project and leadership in the Western Melbourne Roundtable but clearly challenged the shift towards corporate management in Victorian schools.

There were a number of people, including Steve, Laila and Janine, who had designated leadership positions in the Western Melbourne Roundtable. Steve was the Roundtable convenor, Laila was one of the five Links team coordinators and Janine was the principal at Eagle Secondary College. These leaders, seeking to build different kinds of leadership relationships, cast a critical eye on their relationships with other members of the Roundtable. Through their words and actions they indicated their commitment to what Lima (2001) described as a community of understanding characterised by shared values, goals and norms. Each in their own way aimed for inclusivity by ensuring that everyone was in it together and paying attention to extending everyone’s sense of ownership. Much of their effort was aimed at improving their patterns of interaction and they sought to:

- be self reflective and personally and professionally revealing
- recognise the impact they had on others
- work closely with both individuals and teams

- increase their awareness of others both individually and in groups
- heighten their sensitivity to emotions
- work collectively, sharing responsibility and decision-making
- be a part of the learning
- support risk taking
- support others to their ultimate leadership.

They understood that a key to achieving changed practices was adopting a dialogic attitude and so they organised gatherings where people's ideas were heard and valued, and they promoted situations in which everyone helped each other to reach understanding. They saw themselves as part of a learning community which supported innovation and they expected that development would touch the personal, cultural and societal threads of their lives. The kind of community relationships they sought to build indicated that in addition to their commitment to a community of understanding they also aimed for a community of practice and affection. Considered in the context of Lima's (2001:102) question about the interdependence of these three aspects of community it seems possible to argue that Roundtable partnerships not only valued this connection but further, the connection was significant in understanding the type of learning community that had been created.

Within the Roundtable people in designated leadership positions interpreted the concept of learning community to show that they aimed for a community of practice which was collaborative, collegial, provided support and delivered mutual benefits. Janine, for example, recognised the leader–follower dynamic but saw herself in a co-leadership relationship with both teachers and the NSN. She felt that this combination meant it was easier to make co-leadership happen.

...I think everybody, because of the structure, could see themselves as leaders... and to me the whole idea of servant leadership—and I think that's what we interpreted the NSN as being based on—meant that it was important for the principal, or whoever it was, to support others to their ultimate leadership, whether it was in the classroom as a kid or in

the classroom as a teacher, or in the staff meeting or whatever it was...They need to develop the skills of their 'followers' to be leaders...

Janine applied her ideas in staff meetings:

...if I modelled in the staff meetings that it wasn't my meeting, it was a meeting for us to be learning together in some way, then frequently I would ask other teachers, I mean if they put something on the agenda then they should be running it...if they have the responsibility for something I think they should have the authority to do it. And that was practised very, very consciously. One of the cases I wrote about was a conflict when I didn't agree with what we were doing, but I said I would support them. That was my role...you try to model what you believe is important.

Bill, a teacher at Eagle Secondary College, valued Janine's leadership and the relationships she developed with her colleagues.

The person who is the best kind of leader possible in a school is somebody like Janine. Simply, she knew where to put people to do things and then got out of the way, and just encouraged. It's incredibly important to have somebody like that, who basically says 'take some risks, have a go and do it', then protects your arse. It's the Nugget Coombes way of being a bureaucrat, because that's what they are, people in principal positions, dealing with all that other paraphernalia, the bigger organisation and somehow making sure that innovation continues...what she did in those five years, I'll be forever grateful. She was just amazing.

As Bill suggested, leaders sometimes made strategic decisions such as targeting particular people for specific jobs which seemed to be at odds with the ideal of democratic relationships. At Kingfisher Primary School for instance, Laila, the Links coordinator, having organised funding for two teachers to go to a professional development program in New South Wales had to make a decision about who would go. She remembered thinking how she would have loved to attend herself but decided

that by sending others it would extend the sense of ownership in the team and so offered the opportunity to two of her Links colleagues. On reflection she thought this was ‘not a fantastic process’.

Probably a better process would have been to call everybody together and make it far more democratic—Who would like to go? Names in a hat—but I actually picked the people who I thought would have the most influence, the most understanding and the most opportunity of having something happen when they got back. It was strategic.

While Laila felt her decision was less than democratic her strategic intentions bore fruit. On returning to school Olga, one of the teachers who had attended the professional development program, connected what she had learned at the Beane–Brodhagen workshop with the problems that were emerging in her case writing.⁵³ She took a proposal to the principal.

I remember one time after writing cases—you ask all your questions but you don’t find an answer—and then you think well, the answer’s got to be with (the Principal)...So I went up one day and I said—I was shaking in my boots but I thought no, I’m going to do this—and I said, ‘Here’s my problem and this is what I want to do about it.’ And he (the Principal) said ‘No.’ And I said ‘Well, why not? Do you have some good reason for why not?’ And that was the first step in the process of the change that we went through, that I actually questioned his answer about what we could and couldn’t do. I remember that now and I still shake when I think about it. But it was good because from then on the process started, a lot of great things happened, a lot of writing happened...and it reflected up to the boss too. (I said) ‘You know, you’ve got to change too, not just us... you can’t just be the director, you’ve got to give us a hand or let us do what we can to try and do something better for the kids.’

⁵³ The National Schools Network sponsored James Beane and Barbara Brodhagen to run workshops on ‘Negotiating the Curriculum’ and these were attended by two members of the Links team at Kingfisher Primary School.

By taking professional development opportunities, connecting the new ideas with existing problems and writing cases Olga devised a plan, took leadership and in so doing challenged and changed her relationship with the Principal. In that moment of confrontation she made a new beginning, embarking on a process which seemed to incorporate the qualities that Bauman (2000) argues are integral to an achieved unity and which Olga felt held the promise of change—negotiation, reconciliation and compromise. Within traditional leadership models vision is usually seen as something which a principal develops on behalf of the school and the staff (Hargreaves, 1994:248–251). But in Links schools teachers like Olga challenged this idea, showing that there was a connection between the dialogic flow and the generation and presentation of visions.

As Laila looked back she realised how much she had learned about leadership and relationships.

...my level of awareness around what was democracy in the workplace, and what were good processes for decision-making were at a very low level then, in comparison to what they are now...(you come) to understand what the consequences are if you do behave in less than democratic ways. What kind of effect does it have on people? Morale? How people can become disaffected when they feel like they haven't got a voice in the situation. Just being able to keep transferring the reflections about how you feel personally in a situation to what it might be like for other people when you are working with them. Just continually trying to build your level of awareness around yourself and your practice, your influence on your colleagues. I think that is a really enormous thing for leaders to develop, that kind of awareness.

Laila's reflections seem to indicate that while her decision to send Olga to the professional development activity had paid off in such a dramatic way, there were other repercussions which might have been avoided had she acted more democratically. Laila believed that the National Schools Network played an important role in developing her awareness about the connection between leadership and relationships.

The stuff that the NSN did with Graham Harvey, in terms of professional development for (NSN and ILP) leaders, is one of the key things that I think helped raise that level of awareness for me, and I think probably for lots of us, in terms of understanding group behaviour and being able to manage change, the kind of interpersonal skills that you need to be able to do this...And we did practice the stuff, we listened, we role played, we tried it...We didn't come alone, we Victorians we really had a lot of people that we could talk to about 'what does that mean to you?'. We used to have lots of big discussions...and we'd try to nut (things) out...

Steve was clearly a locus for leadership activity. As the Roundtable convenor, he played a pivotal role in facilitating a 'fit' between the origins and principles of the Innovative Links Project and the work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. By virtue of his position he had access to information and relationships across the scale of the Roundtable. Anna noted that Steve was not only at the centre of the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable but also at the centre of the Bachelor of Education program and the Collaborative Research Group at the university as well as the National Schools Network. From her perspective they were all connected ideologically and practically and she believed that Steve's vision had something to do with this situation. While Steve held a privileged position in relation to his colleagues, members of the Roundtable thought that the way Steve worked was democratic and enabling.

The power dynamic between Steve and other members of the Roundtable was tested on numerous occasions, including the instance mentioned earlier where Laila voiced her opposition to the ILP symbol, and the Roundtable meeting when Oliver argued against using the language of curriculum outcome statements in case writing. In the moments that Laila's and Oliver's opinions were heard a shared leadership relationship became a reality, and the group was able to work cooperatively towards a deeper understanding about the relationship between school and university colleagues and a comprehensible language for case writing. These incidents indicate some of the qualities that Smyth (1993) associates with educational leadership—inclusivity, dialogue, having a capacity to influence decisions, an avoidance of power dominance

and a commitment to collectivity. So too did they indicate a community of affection where meaning was achieved through what Lima (2001:111) calls ‘*cognitive conflict*’.

But significantly leadership was not bounded by these tagged positions—instead it was more like a network of leadership moments within a broader ‘networks of social relations and understandings’ (Massey, 1993:66) and these moments emerged each time a case or commentary was made public. Indeed, the possibility that every case and commentary author might be seen as a leader was the most surprising aspect of leadership. In bringing their stories into the public domain case writers initiated a dialogue based on their particular experiences and reflections, thereby creating the opportunity for conversation and new beginnings. Referring to *Chris’ recollections about action and reflection*,⁵⁴ Steve observed:

...what I’m seeing here is action–reflection–conversation. It’s all one thing. I think that’s what I’m seeing and when I look at it that way there is a new action that becomes apparent and the only word I’ve got for it is leadership and there are multi layers of leadership that you see...So there is action in the teacher group and there is action in the classroom and all of a sudden you have got this different kind of action which you interpret and leadership is the product of this action–reflection–conversation and it’s not a thing which is invested in an authority position. It comes from the kinds of opportunities that were afforded by the Project in all its levels...there was the time...this kind of democratic action...democratic forms of leadership, (and it) might have been stimulated by case writing...

Rosita also recognised this connection between democratic action, reflection and conversation.

Just looking at the way people were getting ideas from each other and how a different case had such relevance to all of us...I saw that as

⁵⁴ Appendix 9: Chris’ recollections about action and reflection, p466, is a constructed case based on the documented experiences of members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. It was used as part of the research methodology during a group interview.

really powerful and I think that was the initial thing that spurred me on to thinking ‘Can we do that back at school?’ So, straight into the (Principal and Assistant Principal’s) office and I’d sort of drawn up a plan, we can do this, this, this and luckily I was doing a lot of professional development and (they) gave me a lot of leeway to run with things when they saw how everything fitted in. They just said ‘Go’.

Here too, a network of diverse yet connected leadership moments is evident: presentation of cases; observation of the power generated in the recognition of stories; identification of a vision for applying that experience in a new context; and negotiation with those in formal leadership positions. Anna thought the fact that Rosita had ‘barged into the office with a plan’ was a demonstration of ‘I feel empowered’ and as such an indication of ‘democracy at work’ and Rosita argued that it was a reciprocal relationship because her Principal and Assistant Principal had supported the Links work which had ultimately accelerated the process of empowerment and she compared this with her current situation:

...it has taken four or five years to get to a situation where I feel now that I can barge in. Whereas...(during the Links project) I had only been there two years and I felt that way. So I’m very confident in saying that it did accelerate that process of connectedness and being able to say ‘I have ideas. Can I do something with them? I think this would benefit the school.’ Then for the principal to trust me enough to say ‘Yes, there is a place for that.’ or ‘Not at the moment, come and work on this.’

In this way it could be argued that the dialogic spaces as well as the network of relationships combined to achieve shared leadership. In combination each leader and each leadership moment created a plurality drawn from the difference of every person and every situation. Anna argued that ‘leadership came out of democracy (and) even though there were a lot of people being leaders there was still a clear direction.’

Associations

While friendships and partnerships were clearly the most significant Roundtable relationships there was also evidence suggesting the importance of associations. Lima

(2001:106-8) drawing on the concepts of 'acquaintance' and 'weak ties' develops the idea of friendly relations. He distinguishes this 'more limited' kind of relationship from friendships which are founded on closeness, intimacy, self-disclosure and trust. In the school teams and the Roundtable there was evidence of friendly relations but the distinction is probably most clear in the interaction and cooperation between members of the Roundtable and other educators beyond the Roundtable.

Little did I know when I joined Link that I would...develop friendships with people from all over Australia. It's been a bit like the domino effect: I do one thing and it leads to five other things. (King, 1996)

It is unusual for teachers to have opportunities for working in a national environment but in the Roundtable associations with people beyond the group were made possible through network activities such as Innovative Links Project and National Schools Network forums, professional development schools, conferences and other state-wide or national events.

... Through Link I was introduced to the work of the National Schools Network (NSN). With encouragement from other Link and NSN friends I applied to attend the Australian Teaching Council/ National Schools Network Professional Development Spring School in Sydney last September. It was one of the most intense and unique learning opportunities that I have experienced...I did not think it was possible to work so hard, learn so much, meet so many interesting people and have so much fun in one week. Yet again this was a springboard for new friendships, and my experience contributed to my ideas for the introduction of the Junior School, encouraged me to apply for higher duties and much more. (King, 1996)

Even in the Roundtable not everyone had an opportunity to develop associations at this level and some people indicated regret in this regard. However King's case (1996) gives an insight into the benefits of this kind of opportunity.

...It was interesting to hear about what other schools and Roundtables had been doing. We found some differences but many common threads. There I met (a teacher) from the Northern Territory, a fellow teacher also exploring issues about reporting. She proudly presented me with her school's publication on reporting, and we have since faxed each other and I have sent her copies of our school reports. Soon I will be sending her a draft of our

school's Link publication—a set of cases and commentaries on Pupil Self Assessment. It's very exciting to receive letters and faxes and communicate with people from all over Australia. (King, 1996)

King realised that she was part of something bigger than either her team or the Roundtable and that networks provided an opportunity to form many mutually rewarding professional associations.

...There is a great deal of enthusiasm, experience and knowledge out there and I know that I am a part of it, have contributed to it, have learnt from it and now thrive on it. (King, 1996)

King calls these kinds of relationships friendships and there does seem a degree of emotional engagement. Yet using the distinction articulated by Lima (2001:107) the exchange of information and ideas would seem to fit more closely with the concept of friendly relations characterised by some distance, a lack of deep intimacy and fewer obligations.

Adopting an interactive attitude

In both the contextual and the dialogic planes of action there were many references to the significance of Roundtable relationships. Therefore, at the beginning of this chapter it was proposed that collaborative action be considered with reference to the threads of teaching life; the connections between the contextual, dialogic and collaborative planes of action; and finally an examination of basic attitudes and the quality of engagement.⁵⁵ To understand how the original ideas of collaboration and partnerships were interpreted and realised the first part of this chapter examined articulated relationships and the threads of working relationships.

It seems that by including the threads of teaching life (in this instance experienced as a variety of working relationships) and adopting an inclusive, expressive and cognitive attitude to interactions, the Roundtable maintained and extended connective and intimate engagement and revealed a deeply cooperative kind of engagement.

⁵⁵ See Figure 7: Three planes of Roundtable action (see p199).

These ideas, which summarise the practice of collaborative action in the Roundtable, are depicted below in Figure 8. Each aspect will be reviewed below.

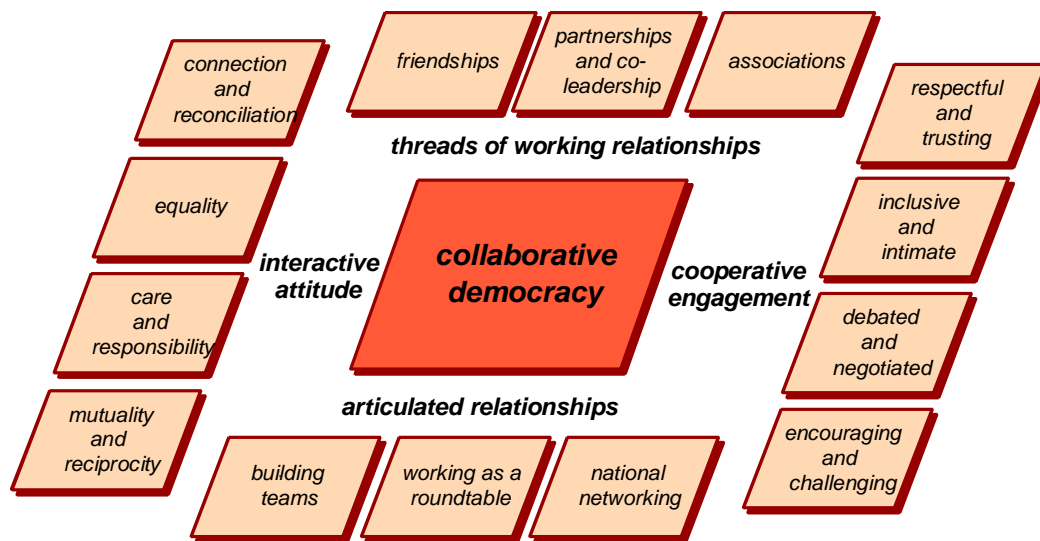


Figure 8: The collaborative plane of action

Yeatman (1996) noted that collaboration did not necessarily mean cooperation and in the context of this study it could also be argued that inclusivity does not imply cooperation. However, in the Roundtable, cooperation and democracy were interwoven in the interactive attitude and emerged as:

- connectedness and reconciliation
- equal rights and obligations
- care and responsibility
- mutuality and reciprocity.

The Roundtable comprised many connected cooperative interactions across the scale of the Roundtable—each person and every Roundtable space formed a locus around which cooperative relationships were built and the activity at each locus articulated in many directions. Rather than one large collaborative activity there were many disparate yet connected activities. Kemmis argues that it is only through articulation that improved practice might be achieved:

...developing practice *requires* “building a community of practice”. It requires not only developing the behaviour or activity of particular

individuals, but also developing an interconnected social world in which it is embedded as a living, growing part of that world (Kemmis, 1998a:5).

The idea of an interconnected social world has been one of the key ideas running through this chapter and one of the significant aspects of the Roundtable was its success in building on existing connections and making new ones. The Roundtable valued connections:

- between people (team members, activists and their colleagues, school and university colleagues)
- between organisations (education systems, unions, the ILP and the NSN)
- between people and organisations
- between lifeworld dimensions (personal–cultural–societal contexts; interests relating to the worker–work–workplace and beyond; and friendships–partnerships–associations)
- between the sites of Roundtable action (local teams, the Roundtable and the national networks).

When disconnectedness or tension was evident, such as the inequality identified between educators in schools and universities, the Roundtable worked towards reconciliation and new connections. Combining the contextual, dialogic and collaborative planes of action supported the process of reconciliation. As members of the Roundtable gained a shared history over time, Rosita noted that their relationships ‘could lie dormant but still be there’ and she believed this was an indication of the strength of the connections which had been made.

In the Roundtable relationships formed and endured on the basis of mutual and reciprocal rewards which were additional to the pragmatic outcomes that people also sought. Within their teams Roundtable members experienced the rewards as newfound relationships—friendships, partnerships and collegial associations—and beyond the team they saw the value of making connections with educational colleagues across the scale of the Roundtable. Within these relationships they developed democratic and dialogic skills and gained rewards from applying them in

Links teams, the Roundtable and national networks. They learned different ways of being together which involved sharing, trusting, reconciling, caring and giving each other moral support. As Giddens (1999:61–65) suggests, the rewards became the basis for the relationships to continue.

Contextual inclusivity ensured that there was a connected and meaningful quality to Roundtable engagement. Arendt conceptualised such a connection between purpose and cooperation as “acting in concert” and according to Hill (1979) she saw such joint action as creating:

...a model of solidarity premised not on a common identity or essential sameness but on a limited, principled commitment to respond to a particular problem (Hill, 1979:xi ?).

And this was the situation in the Western Melbourne Roundtable. Cooperation was exercised in different places, at different times, with different people and the working relationships demonstrated a contextual sensitivity and a responsiveness to explicit and implicit personal, shared and social needs. Despite differences in expertise and experience, perception and motivation each team worked to develop a shared purpose, vision and ultimately an understanding connected to purpose. This articulation of disparate interests meant that the Roundtable was more than the sum of its parts; a new network-like entity which had grown from respect and knowledge of each of its partner’s goals and achievements. Without the contextual dimension of action there would have been an absence of focus, leaving collaborative action bereft of meaning. Instead, members of the Roundtable could see the purpose in what they were doing. They enjoyed the opportunity to engage in professional learning which had mutual and reciprocated benefits that could also be associated with improved student learning outcomes.

Benhabib (1995:183) refers to Gilligan’s (1982) concept of an ‘ethic of care’ in terms of making a ‘contribution to the development of a non-formalist, contextually sensitive, and postconventional understanding of ethical life.’ In seeking to understand the democratic cooperative ethic in Roundtable action it is interesting to consider what it meant to act in a caring and responsible way. In the Roundtable people cared for each other by engaging in interactions which were inclusive, expressive and cognitive. They paid attention to each other, responded thoughtfully in

dialogue and helped each other to make sense of experience. In many ways this kind of ethic can be connected to the idea of friendship which Giddens associates with a democracy of the emotions. Paying attention to the contextual dimension of Roundtable work and then engaging dialogically led people to cooperate in this caring kind of way. This same dynamic also meant that people took responsibility for themselves, their ideas and also for each other. Members of the Roundtable enjoyed the friendship and camaraderie they associated with the Roundtable and considered the relationships they built as being dependable, relaxed and conducive to thoughtfulness. Together they shared responsibility and assumed authority and noticed that as a result they gained confidence.

Partnerships between the school and university colleagues did not start from a point of equal relationships. Adopting an interactive attitude meant that first there had to be a possibility of forming different kind of relationships and then a relationship of equals had to be achieved through ongoing cooperative work. As the Roundtable began some felt threatened, others felt nervous and there was a general wariness about hidden agendas and ulterior motives. While everyone was aware of the unequal status of participants there was an expectation that this would change and there would be a shift in power relationships. Members of the Roundtable found that cooperative skills had to be developed and equal relationships had to be modelled and worked at over time. It was a cyclical rather than a linear process where agendas were negotiated and connected to context and voices were heard and valued. Roundtable members were obliged to realise that in order to build new relationships everyone had to change and that caring and responsible interactions would provide a foundation for realising their expectations.

Cooperative engagement

The network of social relations which made up the Roundtable revealed a new dimension of action which might be seen as cooperation. While the Innovative Links Project used the term collaboration to describe their ambitions, cooperation seems to be a better overarching term to describe the way people actually worked together in the Roundtable. In light of Hargreaves's (1994:248) entreaty that we look beyond collaboration to 'meet the educational challenges of the twenty-first century' the

remainder of this chapter seeks to look at the Roundtable contribution to finding a way of getting ‘beyond collaboration’.

Yeatman (1996) gives some insight into this distinction by listing five principles—learning, participation, collaboration, democracy and cooperation—which she believes come together to form a ‘cluster of values’ for the proactive management of change. She refines this idea by arguing that:

...it is possibly the case that democracy and cooperation are more primary values or principles than the others. After all, learning, collaboration and participation do not make all that much sense without an anchorage in democracy and cooperation. In this sense, learning, participation and collaboration can be regarded as further specifications of a democratic cooperative ethic (Yeatman, 1996:54).

The Roundtable based its work in a democratic cooperative ethic and the specificity of the work provides an opportunity to discuss, challenge and develop Yeatman’s ‘cluster of values’. The impact of adopting an interactive attitude was evident in the intersection of democratic collaboration and cooperative engagement. This is depicted in Figure 8: The collaborative plane of action (p236). This shows that cooperation involved engagement which was:

- respectful and trusting
- inclusive and intimate
- debated and negotiated
- encouraging and challenging.

Giddens argues that emotional democracy is dependent on disclosure as the basis of active trust and freedom from arbitrary power, coercion and violence. As described above, the dialogic flow within the Roundtable was based on stories revealed in moments of self disclosure and through the process of revelation members of the Roundtable achieved active trust. In a reciprocal cycle, this trust provided a safe environment in which new stories might be told and this practice of sharing built a new level of trust. In this way trust seemed to be part of the process as well as an outcome. As Sen (1999) suggests when considering the importance of participatory

freedoms, respect and trust became the meeting point of equality and openness. Through the dialogic process, participants in the Roundtable had a right to speak and be heard and an obligation to both speak and listen. This openness and mutual exchange led to a better understanding of each other's point of view. All of this resulted in relationships which were characterised by respect and care for one another.

The dialogic flow brought an emotional dimension to Roundtable work which supported the establishment and maturing of relationships. The act of storytelling brought what had been private into the public and in telling and writing stories Roundtable members revealed intimate details of their usually private working lives. By focusing on significant moments in their working lives case writers brought the emotional dimension of teaching and learning into the public realm. In so doing they created intimate moments around which friendships, partnerships and other professional associations could be built. Teachers found that through case writing they learned to withhold judgement of their colleagues. Instead they began to respect each others' opinions, see alternative points of view and feel more comfortable about disagreeing. Through case writing they achieved a level of understanding that would not have been reached otherwise and they were able to support each other to move on. They believed the process had a built-in trust factor and that the intimacy of revealed practice was sustained in cooperative and caring relationships. As Arendt (1958:50) has argued, the 'presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves...'. It seems that in this 'space of appearance' a kind of personal and shared power was achieved which was evident in mutual recognition, understanding and shared leadership. This intimacy became a foundation for connecting people and places and moving forward.

McDowell (1999:120–121) draws on the concerns expressed by Iris Marion Young (1990) and argues that comfortable face-to-face interactions too often lead to the suppression of difference and so to social division. Hargreaves (1994:247) also sees comfort and complacency as dangers in collaboration and adds conformism, contrived situations and cooption to the list of concerns. Understanding the complexity of these possibilities is difficult within the scope of this study. While the tension between school and university colleagues was acknowledged and tackled in a very public way there were other instances where tensions were not dealt with in such a public way

and many which probably remain as private thoughts to this day. Based on the stories told during individual and group interviews there are a few concerns which might be pursued in further studies. They include continuing the search for ways to:

- be explicit about tensions and conflicting interests and more accepting of different points of view
- question the implications for people who remain on the edges
- deal with the exclusion which might result from the formation of intimate relationships
- challenge the dominant position, especially for those who are likely to feel unequal
- talk about manipulation, cooption and other dangers mentioned by Hargreaves.

Members of the Roundtable worked together democratically and through debate and negotiation they achieved a sense of unity. The quality of the relationships was connected to the ways people worked together, not just in isolated moments of engagement, but in connected events over space and time. Bauman (2000) conceptualises this as working towards an ‘achieved unity’ and he develops an argument that:

...the most promising kind of unity is one which is *achieved*, and achieved daily anew, by confrontation, debate, negotiation and compromise between values, preferences and chosen ways of life and self-identifications of many and different, but always self-determining, members of the *polis*... This is, essentially, the *republican* model of unity, of an emergent unity which is a joint achievement of the agents engaged in self-identification pursuits, a unity which is an outcome, not an *a priori* given condition, of shared life, a unity put together through negotiation and reconciliation, not the denial, stifling or smothering out of differences (Bauman, 2000:178).

Looking at the Western Melbourne Roundtable from Bauman’s perspective, a unity was achieved. Case writing provided a vehicle for self identification which included the possibility of determining what aspect of working lives would be brought into the public domain. Through bringing context into a dialogic and cooperative environment

people came to know themselves better and opened the way for others to get to know them better too. Through conversation in different locations concerns were debated and futures negotiated.

Arendt believed that when people come together there emerges a possibility for a 'space of appearances' but this is only possible when people are connected through 'word and deed' (Arendt, 1958). From this perspective members of the Roundtable revealed themselves not just through their cases but in their cooperative interactions. As they worked together in the Links teams, in the Roundtable and in the national networks they created a new space for understanding action. Through personal connections and collective enthusiasm a new kind of intimacy and emotional communication was achieved. Once people came together and cases were presented there were opportunities to ask questions and explore both issues and processes. Both the dialogic action and the cooperative action made way for confrontation, debate and negotiation. Each space was a site of contestation with the ultimate goal of deeper understanding and reconciliation. The aims, although not always achieved, were to invite participation; to give everyone a voice; to recognise how people felt; to recognise, explore and challenge unequal power relations and other inequalities; to encourage rather than stifle difference; and where necessary to achieve compromise through democratic processes. Yet it was through the process of 'doing democracy' that democracy was actually achieved.

Giddens (1999:62-63) takes the view that communication is the foundation for a democracy of the emotions. From his perspective a good relationship is based on understanding the other person's point of view; this is achieved through talk or dialogue in an environment where active and mutual trust mean that people do not hide too much. The trust has to be worked at and is in fact mobilised and sustained through open dialogue, which is a core property of democracy.

Through dialogue and cooperation members of the Roundtable encouraged each other to adopt an inclusive, expressive and interactive attitude and engage in a meaningful, connected, intimate and cooperative way. They encouraged each other to move beyond the comfort zone, to develop new friendships and engage in personal and professional dialogue. By working cooperatively they provided moral support and motivated and extended each other. Encouragement was also experienced as

challenge, as roundtable participants questioned themselves and each other. This questioning, challenging aspect of Roundtable action was most evident in the inquiring plane of action and this final aspect of Roundtable action will be explored in Chapter 8.

The necessity for new beginnings has been a consistent thread throughout the last three chapters. An examination of context in Chapter 5 revealed a demand for new beginnings which led to the creation of the scaled structure of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. Then, using case writing as a new tool, the Roundtable brought stories about teaching and learning into the public arena and the dialogic flow again opened the way for new beginnings. Seeking relationships which would achieve the goal of renewal led the Roundtable to create links and build cooperative relationships and processes. Such relationships, Giddens (1994; 1999) insists, facilitate risk; they allow for the condition of excitement and adventure which might lead to new beginnings alongside an assessment of the hazards in relation to future possibilities. It is this challenge and the question ‘How was context, dialogue and cooperation connected to a process of reflection and action?’ which leads us into the final aspect of Roundtable action.

Chapter 8: Acting inquiringly

From the inception of the Innovative Links Project there was an expectation that roundtables and their teams would be committed to reflective practice and action research focused on local issues in teaching and learning. This expectation was based on a broad commitment to democracy and an associated belief that teachers should be recognised for their capacity to inquire into and generate knowledge about teaching and learning. The task of this chapter is to gain an understanding of what it meant to act inquiringly in the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

As highlighted in the review in Chapter 2, there is a large literature focused on action research and while there are many interpretations, common threads can be identified. Reason and Bradbury (2001) attempted a synthesis and suggest that action research is:

...a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities...(it is) a practice for the systematic development of knowing and knowledge...(it) has different purposes, is based in different relationships, and has different ways of conceiving knowledge and its relation to practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:1).

The decision to undertake action research was made with an awareness of a long standing tension between academic and practitioner research which has been and continues to be debated in the literature (Somekh, 1994; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995; Zeichner, 1995; Coulter & Wiens, 2002). Yeatman and Sachs (1995:57), in their formative evaluation of the first year of the Innovative Links Project, picked up on this tension and reflected on the two methods of research, arguing that they are assessed by different tests, result in different modes of communication, are driven by a different intent and cater to different audiences (see Table 2: The differences between academic and action research, p63). They conclude that the different research orientations must be recognised and kept distinct in order to value each and so maximise the possibility that they might complement each other.

MacIntyre (1999) also distinguishes between two contexts—academic and public life—yet he argues against maintaining the separation on the basis that to do so would mean that the academic reading public would continue to enjoy opportunities for rational discourse which had little chance of influencing social life and the practitioner public would have little opportunity to balance the influence of power and money with a thoughtful approach to decision-making. MacIntyre (1999) calls for the creation of a new reading public, one which includes practitioners and connects deep thinking with change.

Sachs (1998) contends that partnerships and practitioner research are two vehicles for achieving a connection between structure and agency; taking a similar position Grundy (1995) makes a link between action research, professional development and achieving improved student learning outcomes. Zeichner (2001) observes that while there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence to support such connections, there have been few intentional, systematic studies which have set out to investigate these claims. However, on the basis of existing research, he tentatively suggests a number of conditions that appear to be related to positive outcomes for both teachers and students including: the importance of taking teachers' knowledge and expertise seriously yet balancing voice and self-critique using moral and educational criteria; ensuring teachers have control over the research process (including participation, focus and methodology); incorporating intellectual challenge and stimulation in a context of thinking rather than problem solving; and providing an opportunity to work over time in a safe, supportive and predictable environment (Zeichner, 2001:279).

Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1999) wonder how to define and justify:

...appropriate "outcomes" of inquiry based teacher education and professional development, (and) how to reconcile the idea of co-construction of knowledge by teachers and their students with the current move toward increasingly specified curriculum frameworks, how to hold on to the larger goals of democratic education in the face of intense pressure to evaluate success based on students' performance on high stakes tests, and how to support communities of teachers working together on the questions that matter to them in the light of mandates at many levels to collaborate on the implementation of system policies (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1999:22).

Building an argument for the validity of action research, Anderson and Herr (1999) have identified five criteria for assessing practitioner research: outcome, process, democratic, catalytic and dialogic validity. They link outcome validity with the resolution of a problem; process validity with the idea of ongoing learning; democratic validity with collaboration; catalytic validity with energising and transformation; and dialogic validity with peer review. These ideas are returned to later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters too.

In order to make connections between these ideas and the contextual, dialogic and collaborative work of the Roundtable this chapter focuses on the connection between thinking and doing. Figure 9: Four planes of Roundtable action, shows:

- the addition of inquiry as a fourth plane of Roundtable action
- the way in which these planes of action are connected by the threads of teaching lives
- the basic attitudes which underpinned Roundtable work
- the key qualities which indicated the nature of Roundtable engagement.

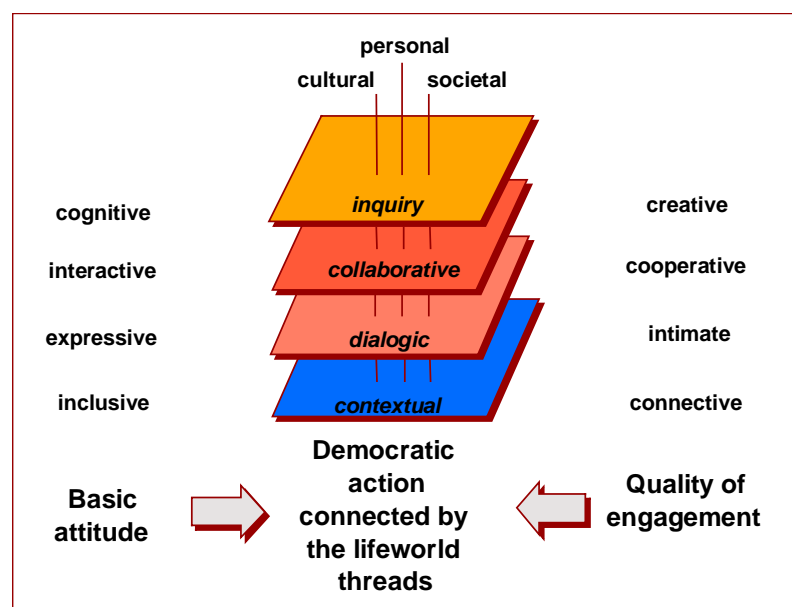


Figure 9: Four planes of Roundtable action

In a similar process to the last three chapters this exploration of Roundtable inquiry will be shaped by looking at action from four perspectives: lifeworld and the personal,

cultural and societal threads of Roundtable concern; the process of reflexivity; the characteristics associated with achieving a cognitive attitude; and the creative quality of engagement which was achieved by the Roundtable.

Threads of concern

As with the contextual, dialogic and collaborative layers of action discussed in previous chapters, recognising and including personal, cultural and societal interests was critical in the initiation and conduct of meaningful investigations into teaching and learning. The importance of adopting an inclusive attitude to inquiry was evident in the articulation of concerns and questions which spanned both the lifeworld of Roundtable participants and the scale of Roundtable activities. Action research demands a focus on local questions (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:1) and the Roundtable began by creating opportunities for personal and team questions to emerge. Over time, the Roundtable extended the focus of its work by connecting local questions to questions articulated beyond the group. This created a high level of cross-contextual sensitivity.

Personal concerns

Self reflection led to the identification of questions and problems which had a personal dimension and this gave meaning to Roundtable inquiry. The diversity of personal concerns was at the heart of the Roundtable endeavour and the work of each team was influenced by the concerns and questions articulated by its members. The mini biographies⁵⁶ give an indication of the range of personal concerns and questions with, for example, Rosita asking, 'What do I want to do? Where am I going?' and Janine asking her colleagues, 'What stops you from being the best you can be?' While some questions were articulated at the beginning of the project, over time many new questions emerged as innovation led to stories and people engaged in conversation aimed at achieving a deeper understanding.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 4.

Cultural concerns

Each of the six Western Melbourne Roundtable Links teams articulated their concerns and identified clear questions, expectations and aims. Two school-based teams chose to investigate their practice so they could judge the need for change and three investigated changed practice.⁵⁷ The university team members elected to investigate their efforts to improve their partnerships with school based colleagues.

Interaction between the Western Melbourne Roundtable and the Innovative Links Project added a further critical, questioning dimension to the work in Links teams. The mere existence of the Innovative Links Project implied the question: In what ways do partnerships between school and university colleagues support inquiry, professional development and innovation? Then, as the inquiry progressed Laila observed:

...the ILP was sitting over here helping us question what we were doing. 'Is this doing what we want it to do?...What is happening with the kids? Is it actually improving their learning?' So I think that's what the ILP helped us to do.

And the National Schools Network also provided a very powerful incentive to question practice, asking: 'What is it about the way our work is organised that gets in the way of students' learning?' (White, 1995).

Towards the end of the project, and adding another layer of inquiry, the Roundtable looked back and asked: How did case writing support the work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable?⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The particular focus for work in the five school Links teams is described in Chapter 4, and explored contextually in Chapter 5. Finch Secondary College focused on literacy and numeracy and Kingfisher Primary School began with a focus on literacy. Eagle Secondary College adopted a Team Small Group structure, Honeyeater Primary School trialed multi age grades and Rosella Primary School introduced student self assessment. Over time Kingfisher Primary School introduced a negotiated curriculum and their inquiry focused on the new arrangement.

⁵⁸ In response to this question the Roundtable conducted Collaborative Research Interviews with each team. The transcripts of these interviews were used in this study.

System agendas also had an impact on personal and cultural concerns.⁵⁹ Questions were implied in the priorities which made up the national reform agenda: How can we improve literacy standards? What strategies will increase the engagement of students in the middle years? State education agendas also influenced personal and team concerns and questions. The introduction of statewide testing, for instance, prompted the question: What are the issues in student assessment? And the pressure of government policies also pushed teachers to ask: What is the best way to organise students in the early years? and What can teachers do to improve literacy and numeracy education and outcomes?

Societal concerns

The Roundtable also supported connections between local questions and ‘big questions’ about democracy and equity. The teachers at Eagle Secondary College, for example, were concerned about the effect of the table group structure on teaching and learning and they connected local questions to broader questions about team building and the nature of decision-making. Anna felt that behind the Roundtable work lay the ‘whole question of social justice, equity and change for improvement’ and Laila remembered the influence of the Disadvantaged Schools Program coordinator on her Links inquiry.

She really started asking those questions about ‘What is it that is happening here? What are proving to be barriers to kids accessing their world and their society as full participants? (It made me think about)...the whole idea of democracy and participation. And all those kinds of things started to emerge for me and it was a really different way of thinking about school and curriculum and kids and access and all those things. Things that I hadn’t really had any strong background in at all. So for me it was the emergence of the themes around social justice.

Arendt (1958:182) argues that ‘most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent’

⁵⁹ System concerns were articulated in Chapter 4 as part of the description of contextual threads (p132).

and Laila's observations indicate that she learned to make explicit connections between her own experience and broader social and cultural issues. Indeed, beneath each description of practice in Roundtable cases were underlying questions which voiced teachers concerns about making things better for themselves, improving learning outcomes for all students and making the world a better place.

Not only did questions emerge across the scale of the Roundtable but contexts were integrated. Personal and team inquiry interests were linked and connections were made with state and national priorities. As the members of each team determined a focus for their work, they considered the national reform agenda, referred to their school priorities, considered their obligations in relation to system policies and programs and found a way of conceptualising their work so that all of these things were brought together through inquiry. Including diverse questions meant that it was possible to recognise and inquire into tensions and interconnections between system functioning and lifeworld processes and therefore begin to anticipate and imagine the future (Niemi & Kemmis, 1999). Cases provide stark evidence of these interwoven connections.⁶⁰

Reflexivity: the processes of a discursive environment

There is a high level of agreement that the future needs to be achieved over time (Bauman, 2000) through a systematic (Stenhouse, 1975), generative (Giddens, 1994; Sachs, 1998; Senge & Scharmer, 2001), procedural (Habermas, 1999) or constructivist (Wagner, 1998) process rather than by applying a method or technique.

Giddens's (1984:3–4) conception of reflexivity assists with understanding the inquiry processes adopted by the Western Melbourne Roundtable. He argues that reflexivity 'should be understood not merely as "self-consciousness" but as the monitored character of the ongoing flow of daily life'. In the context of this chapter, and the work of the Roundtable, this indicates the importance of looking again at the layers of Roundtable action, this time focusing on the continuous and 'monitored' character of the Roundtable's work. Giddens (1984:3–4) suggests that reflexivity might be

⁶⁰ See for example, Case 4: We struggled at planning last night, p504.

understood in terms of contextualised ‘sets of processes’ and so, in the same way that it was important to explore the rules and forms of argumentation in Chapter 6, examining Roundtable inquiry in this way provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how systematic inquiry (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:1) was achieved. Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1999) and Schön (1996) broadly conceptualise this task as understanding the inquiry stance and the next section of this chapter demonstrates that the inquiry stance adopted by the Roundtable might be understood as a set of processes. Given the layers of action which have been explored in previous chapters, examining the inquiry stance adopted by the Roundtable necessarily involves looking at the inquiry process in terms of context, dialogue, collaboration and cognition.

A contextual inquiry process

A foundational aspect of the inquiry process undertaken by the Roundtable involved providing opportunities for collaborative inquiry in context and actively including personal, cultural, and societal threads of concern.⁶¹ This process created the possibility of finding new beginnings. As noted in Chapter 5, the combination of case writing and multiple opportunities to meet brought the private nature of teaching and learning into the public arena, thereby creating new spaces for learning.

In particular, case writing provided a space to put individual teachers and their work in classrooms at the centre of inquiry by focusing on the practical and emotional dimensions of the classroom.⁶² By focusing on themselves, their work, the workplace and beyond, members of the Roundtable indicated a ‘sensitive and self-critical, subjective perspective’ (Stenhouse, 1975:157) toward their inquiry. They used cases to voice uncertainties and questions and working in this way meant it was possible to incorporate the range of inquiry interests which Kemmis (2001:92) argued were so important. Personal or technical interests were geared towards solving problems and changing outcomes; cultural or practical interests focused on outcomes; and gaining a deeper understanding about practice and societal or critical–emancipatory interests connected outcomes and understanding to the broader community or global context.

⁶¹ Described above under the heading *Threads of concern*, p248.

⁶² See Chapter 5, Writing and reading cases, p163.

Yet the contextual inquiry process gained its significance when combined with the parallel processes associated with dialogue, collaboration and learning and each of these processes is explored below.

A dialogic inquiry process

The dialogic inquiry process adopted by the Roundtable was connected to the expressive attitude and the dialogic flow explored in Chapter 6 and was based on a commitment to monitoring the ‘ongoing flow of daily life’. This process was achieved in the Roundtable by using cases to describe practice.

Having laid the foundation for inclusive and meaningful inquiry by connecting context across the scale of the Roundtable, the next aspect of the inquiry process was to move beyond identifying concerns; storytelling gave individuals the opportunity to describe, question and think about their own experiences as a precursor to recording them in cases so they could be shared with others. As noted earlier this aspect of dialogic inquiry could be thought of in terms of ‘practice described’ (Cherednichenko *et al.*, 1998b). Case writing, which was integral to the dialogic flow described in Chapter 6 and significant in achieving the democratic cooperative relationships explored in Chapter 7, was also the centrepiece for achieving democratic inquiry. Cases were expressions of personal inquiry and the telling and visiting was part of an intimate inquiry process.

Storytelling and case writing gave each member of the Roundtable an opportunity to articulate the dilemmas and intimate detail of their practical and emotional work and in so doing they created many spaces for ‘visiting’ and focused inquiry. In telling and recording stories in cases, members of the Roundtable identified and collected the ‘data’ which became the focus for inquiry. Inherent in case writing was a disclosure not just about ‘what’ was happening in teachers’ lives but ‘who’ teachers were; looking at what was ‘in-between’ the words and deeds created what Arendt (1958:183) called a “web” of human relationships which she argued was ‘no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common’, despite its intangible quality. Bill described how he had begun by recording ideas in a reflective journal but soon realised that the opportunity to write cases provided something new. As he wrote cases he noticed how he kept posing questions: ‘Well what is this? What is that?’ and

he was aware that this kind of reflective writing really demonstrated the way in which he considered things.

Case writing helped people to see where things fitted, to determine the direction in which they were heading and make connections between the different threads of their lives. Indeed the introduction to *Teachers Write* suggested that teachers made:

...connections between the personal, organisational and the social often by writing 'inside-out', commencing from descriptions of classroom practices and introducing school and system questions by reference to specific incidents (Western Melbourne Roundtable, 1997:12-13).

The subsequent opportunities for case-inspired conversation prompted the reflective and self critical behaviour that helped members of the Roundtable to think systematically about themselves, their work, the workplace and the world beyond.

Peter realised that when faced with a problem his normal response would have been to seek an answer but with case writing the emphasis shifted to thinking:

...It was more like you were basically telling a story, along those lines, and just thinking about your practice and what's happening around you and the change.

Rosita observed how she used case writing to think about and clarify her place in the action, and teams and individuals used cases to look back and reflect on past problems asking: How is it going now? What have we done? Have we solved the problem? What did we do to solve it? Serena recalled:

...(writing cases) forced me to think about specific initiatives in the junior school, it forced me to think about what we are actually achieving...sort of thinking about the little things that happen during the day...

Dora felt that case writing helped her to trust her own thinking.

...The very fact of writing it makes you validate what you're thinking about because sometimes you think to yourself 'Well am I succeeding here?', but because you've got it down in black and white you think to yourself 'Well hang on a minute I've given this some thought'

There was a question about the degree to which writers might challenge themselves and Inge articulated a cautionary note arguing that there were some situations in which the scope of reflection might be limited.

I now realise you can write a case five thousand different ways, and still reflect on it. But the difficulty is when you write about one particular incident and reflect on that—that's a very narrow aspect of the work that teachers do, particularly if (teachers) reflect on individual students that they are having difficulty with in the class, it's not looking at the big picture as well.

However, Oliver believed that cases provided a powerful mechanism, incentive and opportunity for learning how to ask better questions about practice and Olga observed:

...I always seem to end my cases with more questions that's why I've got another coming up. I don't think it's going to ever stop because at the end of one (case) I think: Oh, in the next one I can do this.

The Assistant Principal at Honeyeater Primary School explained how he was interested to read cases because it gave him an opportunity 'to see what (teachers) were doing and how they were thinking about what they were doing' and Rosita noticed that sometimes what was not said was intriguing too, and as a result she found herself asking more questions.

Teachers found that reading cases written by their colleagues and then responding in a written commentary was a powerful incentive for their own self reflection. It was a two way process with mutual benefits. Cases provided an opportunity for people to engage in inquiry as both actors and spectators (Coulter & Wiens, 2002).

I have written a couple of commentaries...and I found that really good...by reading what other people are doing...(then) writing your commentary you tend to reflect on your own (practice)...How would I have done it? To me I think I got as much out of writing the commentary as I did the case.

An expressive–cognitive attitude was significant in initiating inquiry for both actor and spectator (Coulter & Wiens, 2002). From Anderson’s and Herr’s (1999) perspective members of the Roundtable enjoyed opportunities to learn (process validity) and opportunities to achieve understanding which they connected to rethinking practice (catalytic validity).

Case writers drew on the intensity of real life situations and found that expressing themselves in cases made them think about the detail of their work in greater depth. They noticed that once their focus was clear and as they began to write they moved to thinking about specific details and achievements. At Rosella Primary School for instance, they used cases to record their attempts to introduce new student self assessment processes. They saw cases as vivid and honest portrayals of their efforts to implement innovative strategies, which highlighted the apprehension, frustration and difficulty of the task as well as the satisfaction of having achieved a measure of success.

Helen compared case writing to writing for formal study because she felt it gave her ‘that disciplined, ongoing, sustained sort of thinking about things’ and, she added, ‘on top of that, this was fun.’ Within the context of inquiry, Roundtable participants used case writing as a method of data collection and Bill observed:

...I believe it is a very powerful way to reflect upon what one does as a teacher and it helps a teacher to become a really clear researcher of their own practice...that’s the empowerment I have felt through case writing.

Bill saw cases as windows which revealed his practice and he found that it was sometimes difficult to find the appropriate window but hardest of all was crafting a case so that its insights and questions resonated loudly enough to demand a response from the reader. In terms of Habermas’s (1996b:119) conception of communication, each storyteller–case writer was involved in ‘uttering something understandably’, ‘giving (the hearer) *something* to understand’ and ‘making *himself* thereby understandable’. In this way the emergence of context and meaning in the dialogic

flow provided a basis for the validity claims of truthfulness and comprehensibility.⁶³ At a time when teachers' work was becoming increasingly invisible because of the pressures to implement the government's many agendas (a mandated curriculum framework, associated reporting requirements and statewide testing to name just a few), case writing seemed a subversive act. The detail of teachers' experiences, questions and dilemmas described in cases revealed their wisdom—which was sometimes evident as opposition and resistance.

Participants in the Roundtable showed a preparedness to tell stories and to 'visit' others' stories in their search for knowledge and understanding. Laila believed teachers had to be more aware, competent, skilful and critical in order to help children cope with multi-literacies and other aspects of the changing environment. She felt that there was an increasing and constant need for teachers to think hard about how to make things better but she noticed that not all teachers were interested in the opportunity to reflect and think.

This idea that substantive conversation about pedagogy is just a 'talkfest' is still the battle that we come up against—that idea of finding a way to put kids' work (together with) ideas about teaching and learning in the middle of the table and be able to talk about them in ways that actually push our thinking and influence our practice as relevant and useful—people think that it is not practical and they haven't got a grab bag of things to take away...I have colleagues, not always more experienced, some of the younger ones too, who think that they would prefer teaching to be a more technical kind of thing that they didn't have to think about. Just tell me what to do and I'll do it and that will be good, and I can go home at the end of the day and I don't have to think about it any more.

Dora also observed that some of her colleagues were looking for immediate solutions and that they did not make the connection between focused conversations and improved teaching. She realised that it was only by being involved over time that her

⁶³ The dialogic flow was discussed in Chapter 5.

Links colleagues saw the value and it was not easy to convince others. They were reluctant to engage in substantive conversation and seemed unconvinced about the possibilities afforded by connecting thinking and action. Instead they expressed a preference for a technical rather than a thinking approach to teaching, appearing to have made a decision that this was the easiest or best way to proceed. Given Roundtable members' observations that it was demanding to participate 'on the edge' it is not entirely surprising that this was the situation, especially given the 'technical' expectations of the Directorate of School Education during this time of dramatic change.

Yet for those who participated there was a reciprocal benefit in connecting inquiry and expression. Inquiry, with its implied connection to change, gave expressive activity a purposeful dimension and the expressive attitude gave inquiry substance and depth. By combining the inclusive and expressive attitudes to inquiry the broad areas of interest identified by teams were complemented by the opportunity to learn about the intimate detail of other people's teaching lives and the quality of their personal investigations. Teachers believed that because their cases usually focused on emotionally charged or critical incidents they raised questions which provided a useful starting point for debate about learning. Niemi and Kemmis (1999) argue the importance of power and control in building inquiring partnerships: in this regard case writing allowed everyone to contribute to the inquiry agenda by making public their interests and experiences, and there was support for working in this way.

At an early Roundtable meeting, Steve expressed some doubt about whether all cases were useful within an inquiry context, however Olga was quick to challenge this idea. She felt that there was not only personal value in questioning what she was doing but that every case also had value for the group.

I don't think there would ever be a bad case...if someone has taken the time to write down something that they either feel was good or needed help with then how can it be bad? It raises questions, it makes people get together and help each other and talk about it...just to know that the person is not by themselves really, they can talk about the things that are happening to them without fear of someone being negative.

However, while the cases played a role in facilitating self-expression and promoting self-questioning there seemed no guarantee that an expressive attitude would stimulate challenging questions or initiate the collaborative examination of contingency and particularities. A strategy for building a cooperative and critical approach was needed to extend the inclusive and expressive attitudes to inquiry and this was evident in the interactive attitude adopted by the Roundtable.

A collaborative inquiry process

The collaborative inquiry process was connected to the interactive attitude and the articulated relationships examined in Chapter 7 indicated the importance of building inquiring relationships across the scale of Roundtable endeavour.

The development of Roundtable relationships supported inquiry and these cooperative relationships were significant in shaping reflexivity. MacIntyre (1999) and Kemmis (2001) both set a challenge to find a collaborative inquiry space. MacIntyre observes:

Thinking, in any particular time and place, let alone thinking for oneself, always involves thinking with certain particular others, thinking in the context of some particular and specific public, with its own institutional structure...The key question at any particular time and place is then: within what kind of public with what kind of institutionalized structures will we be able to identify the limitations imposed on our particular enquiries as a prelude to transcending those limitations in pursuit of the goods of reason? (MacIntyre, 1999:251-2).

By bringing cases into the public domain authors invited interaction and the flow from telling and listening to writing and reading and then to conversations and commentaries was seamless, at each stage promoting a cooperative, questioning environment. As Anna recalled:

Right from the beginning there was a strong sense that case writing was not about making judgements...It is much safer to put out a problem if I know that people are going to empathise with it rather than try and solve it. So I think the case writing really supported the sense of democracy...that ability to talk in structured ways, in focused ways, that was about practice, that had us inquiring collectively into

practices about which we had shared understandings, shared experiences, and that connected the universities and the schools, the schools amongst each other, the coordinators in the schools with the principals in the schools with the teachers in the schools. It equalised people.

Moffat (1996) was enthusiastic:

... For an educational community to consciously craft pieces of writing based upon reflection of all facets of their work and to then seek written response from others within this community seemed then, as it does now, to have the potential to powerfully make teachers their own researchers and agents for change. Eventually a shift could be effected from what we had always encountered, the top down driving of curriculum, with teachers the passive recipients of received wisdom and its concomitant hierarchical, non-inclusive structures of school organisation. Teachers would have the tools for their own professional development: the cases and commentaries they had written based on real problems which needed real solutions.

Inquiring relationships were also built through reflective conversations. As Rosita talked with her colleagues she found that she reflected on what she was doing, began to think about where she was going and she saw that this helped her to put things into perspective. Laila noted the connection between talking and professional learning, recalling how she eventually learned to articulate and record her thoughts. She believed the Roundtable had provided her with an opportunity to learn how to tell stories and convey the ‘meta level thinking’ that was in her head. Listening also encouraged thinking and learning and Eleni recalled that as she listened to her colleagues she found herself wondering: ‘Well does that fit into my situation?’ If it did she put it into her ‘bag of tricks’ for use at some other time. Inge observed how the team at Honeyeater Primary School seemed to have identified common problems and as they reflected on their changed practice they made judgements together—‘Well these things are working well, these things aren’t’. They seemed to be setting the scene for moving on.

At Eagle Secondary College members of the administration group engaged in action–reflection–conversations to check how their work reflected the mission and values

identified by the school. Janine, the principal, noted how personally challenging it was to reflect on her decision-making processes and values, to track her feelings and assess how true her practice was to the school's established principles, and then expose her work to others. Yet she felt that the power of her insight was enhanced because she had engaged in the process with colleagues. She recalled how working together had made her more conscious about what she said, what she did and the impact this might have on her colleagues. In acknowledging that the cooperative–reflective process had influenced her practice she found herself wondering whether there had been a ripple-like effect which extended her changed practice across the school. Also at Eagle Secondary College, the Links team wrote a collaborative case focused on their negotiation with students over a six to seven week period of time.

We focused on one particular class of students...we wanted to develop a collaborative approach to working through (change)...with (them). We sat down together and, with Anna basically note taking, documented the approach that we were taking and so it was an ongoing action research model and that was written up as a case which went out in the book of cases that we finished at the end of that year...

Steve made a connection between case writing, creating a discursive environment and subsequent change.

In our research now we are using the words discursive environment where people feel as if they need to explain what's happening, who's doing what, and why it is occurring. So there is a discourse, a discourse of description and explanation. And I think that's what happened at Kingfisher Primary School within small groups, and I suspect at Eagle Secondary College across a large number of teachers so that you could say it was a whole school change with the setting up of this discursive environment.

Steve thought there was a degree of luck attached to adopting case writing, but he was interested to note how case writing seemed to capture the tone of conversations and how case conversations seemed to be occurring in a particular kind of way that enabled the group to look back and think about what had been happening. While Inge wondered about the nature of the overall influence of case writing, she recalled the

debates and said she was clear that case writing was ‘part of the process of working together, asking questions, challenging and things like that.’

At the outset teachers held doubts about the possibility of developing democratic–cooperative–inquiry relationships with their university colleagues, yet their perceptions were challenged on the basis of their experiences. They found that over time they shared a preparedness to ‘face up to the challenge’, take a risk and participate in a negotiated inquiry process, and case writing was significant in this achievement. In the introduction to *Teachers Write* the Roundtable reported:

A strength of case writing is that it provides a new context for the relationship between school and university colleagues which gives the conventional and practitioner-academic form of the relationship a problematic character. As the Western Melbourne Roundtable has approached case writing, the usual role of the academic researcher who studies and interprets a teacher’s practice has (at least partially) dissolved (Western Melbourne Roundtable, 1997:12-13).

At Rosella Primary School Peter recognised the changing nature of school–university relationships:

Just by participating, that was the most important thing, being there, being with people, talking about things, asking lots of questions, people challenging me. That was a bit hard at first. And people asking me, ‘Well, what do you think about this?’ and ‘Where do you want to go with it?’, ‘How do you see it fitting there?’. And you sort of think: Aren’t you supposed to be telling me the answers?

However instead of university colleagues providing ‘answers’ to problems, everyone worked together, eventually achieving a degree of comfort about working in a questioning environment—and Peter thought that as a result of this experience he was less likely to shy away from hard things than he had been in the past.

Mark connected the idea of being challenged with having a critical friend.

I think the presence of a critical friend is a key feature of action research. And I’d go so far as to say that if a democratic critical friend is not there that I would claim it is not action research. The thinking behind that is that although anything is possible it is hard for me to see

how groups can challenge their own thinking and their own practice by themselves. Even for people who want to do that it seems to me that to have other outsiders—democratic members of the team, not the outside expert or that sort of thing—is such an essential element, that if it's not there I think the process is incredibly weakened.

Lima (2001:115-6) contrasted the idea of 'critical friend' with 'friendly critic' and argued the value of friendly critics.

In all fairness, schools need *friendly critics*, not critical friends. They need people from within and from outside who are not concerned with disguising their ability or willingness to look at the school from a different perspective and who do not feel the need to pretend they are friends in order to produce these judgements. These individuals hold a strong potential for promoting a change of frames of reference in schools. Of course, this should be accomplished in a *friendly* manner, by showing respect for the school and the teachers' culture, within the framework of built in mechanisms that are intentionally organized to promote the emergence of critique, divergence, dialogue and dynamic decision-making.

Teachers in the Roundtable did not use the term 'critical friend' to describe their university colleagues (or anyone else) but they often associated their university colleagues with the questioning dimension of Roundtable work. Teachers' observations tell the story of how their university colleagues were encouraging, supportive, helpful and patient—according to the teachers, university colleagues helped develop the culture of a reflective practitioner, they listened and did not try to provide answers and just at the right time they asked 'hard' questions that didn't have right or wrong answers. Teachers observed that their university colleagues were interested to 'get a feeling' for what teachers had to say and their responses often had the effect of inspiring the writers to think again.

Janine and others felt that cooperative relationships promoted inquisitive behaviour and they appreciated the challenging, critical, questioning nature of the relationships. Teachers noticed it was possible to find questions together and that good questions made them think more; they recognised the difference between questions which sought correct answers and questions that made them think in a different way. But in

some circumstances, a questioning attitude was not palatable. Steve recalled a situation at the beginning of the project when his questions, addressed to a school colleague at Kingfisher Primary School, were interpreted as an attack on her teaching competence.⁶⁴ In seeking to understand the situation Steve wondered about the tension between objective questions and practical interests. The contrast between Steve's early experience and the comments above suggest that as people listened to each other and engaged in cooperative reflection and thinking, trust developed between the school and university colleagues and a challenging, questioning environment was negotiated.⁶⁵ People learned to value each others' opinions, to create their own questions and to challenge each other—sometimes with 'hard' questions—in a helpful, encouraging, patient and supportive (rather than intimidating) way. This introduced a level of collectivity and diversity into the critical, questioning dimension which had been missing in the expressive attitude and extended Zeichner's (2001) observations about the value of self critique.

Finding a space did not only mean a conceptual space but also a temporal and physical space and members of the Roundtable noticed that the way schools were organised, or the scale of their working lives, and the pressure of day-to-day demands resulted in considerable barriers to finding a collaborative inquiry space. Dora observed the difficulty of having enough time for meeting the day to day demands of the classroom and then the added pressure of finding extra time for talking and thinking at a different level about the things that impacted on the 'day to day stuff'. She compared her Roundtable experience with other professional development activities.

There is a lot of professional development going on in my school, but I just wonder how much of it is followed up with people talking and thinking—Mmm. OK. This is what I thought about that—and not just talking in the car park...

⁶⁴ See Case 2: Michael, Sophie, Eve and Penny, p499.

⁶⁵ The issue of trust is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Dora distinguished between car park talk and the Links opportunity to stop, remove yourself from the working environment, talk with colleagues and think in the context of challenging practice and moving forward. In an interesting twist, some of Dora's Links colleagues, in search of a space to think and write, took to their cars in the school car park after failing to find any other suitable thinking and writing space in the school.

By adopting an interactive attitude people in the Roundtable came to think differently and achieve a deeper understanding about themselves and their world. Storytelling and case writing not only promoted the self inquiry and self awareness evident in the expressive attitude but invited an inquiring response from Roundtable colleagues. In this way the expression of contextual detail in stories and cases created the basis for inquiring interactions between Roundtable participants, and by reflecting and thinking together members of the Roundtable gained another level of consciousness and awareness about their own work and the work of their colleagues.

By adopting the voluntary and involving characteristics of a 'civic' group (Cox, 1995) and avoiding the danger of institutional, top down, non-involving collaboration (White & Wehlage, 1995), it seems that a new kind of democratic inquiry space was indeed created. Inquiry was a shared endeavour and the outcomes related not only to gaining new knowledge but also to the building of new research relationships. At a personal level, adopting an interactive attitude led people to think differently and achieve a deeper understanding about their world. At a group level, members of the Roundtable built inquiring relationships based on their shared interests and the desire to achieve a shared understanding.

A cognitive inquiry process...public reflection in action

The cognitive inquiry process, a fourth and final aspect of Roundtable reflexivity, extended the contextual, dialogic and collaborative processes by facilitating a connection between reflection and action. Whilst the contextual, dialogic and collaborative processes facilitated the description and interpretation of practice, the cognitive inquiry process moved towards what Cherednichenko and her colleagues (1998b) identified as 'practice theorised'. In addition, there were indications of a connection between theorising and changed practice. This characteristic of the inquiry

practice aligns with MacIntyre's belief that new knowledge should lead to change, Stokes's and Tyler's (1997) articulation of 'practice changed' and Smyth's (1989a) thoughts about a 'reconstructive' process. Considered together, these patterns of practice suggest the significance of a contextually inclusive, generative inquiry process which values expression, interaction and opportunities for generating knowledge that ultimately lead to new action.

Case and commentary writing was seen as a process; however having engaged in telling and listening to stories, writing and reading cases and then case-inspired conversations, the Roundtable had to feel its way, not sure where the dialogic process would lead the group: there was still a question about how things would come together. Inge conceptualised case writing as a first step and commentaries as the second step:

....going back over those events, beginning to draw out some general principles and that, to my way of thinking, is a form of theorising from practice...And the teachers were involved in that, and perhaps, in some ways, that was where they were struggling and grappling. Do you know what I mean? The separating of the actual doing and the practice from (the theorising) was probably one of the harder things to do if you are looking at this notion of case writing itself as a procedure.

Anna added a third step, making inquiry public. Reflecting on the inquiry process in the Eagle Secondary College team, she recalled how the inaugural Western Melbourne Roundtable forum:

...was the first time we really went public. It took us 18 months to be public about our practices outside (the teams). To get to that point we had to do it in our schools and then to get some feedback and be critical about it...once we had something public, once we had the old systematic inquiry made public, once we had public statements about practice, we were able to sit and think about inquiry...I think at that stage it started to become action research.

Anna observed that what started as action learning around the question 'How do I change my practice?' shifted to action research focused on the question 'How do I become a better researcher?' Anna believed that the shift in emphasis was directly

connected to the development of trust and respect and the connection between responsibility and authority.

While Anna and others conceptualised the learning process as action research others showed a reluctance to think about their work as research, instead conceptualising the process as professional development.⁶⁶ Some made a connection between research and professional development and yet others observed a change in perception over time. There was no evidence of pressure to describe the work one way or another and despite the different conceptions, there was a shared view that the broad aim was to generate understanding which would lead to improved teaching and learning and the focus was therefore on negotiating a process for achieving this end. Yeatman and Sachs (1995) observed that roundtables in the Links Project seemed to be researching in an 'action oriented' way and this was true in the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

Members of the Roundtable recognised the connection between the struggle articulated in cases, the achievement of personal understanding and the subsequent generation of shared understanding through commentaries and conversations.

Case writing is not just simple description of a teacher's practices. In the process teachers select and describe an aspect of work which demonstrates the presence of a dilemma, contradiction or achievement. The power of case writing is its initiation of inquiry by both writer and reader into the features of a teacher's practice...The writer's representation of practice thus requires the active interpretation by colleagues of the meanings in a case and logically leads to the writing by readers of commentaries which challenge those interpretations. Case writing thus is oriented to the collaborative generation of explicit teacher-based understandings of practice informing ongoing Action Research (Western Melbourne Roundtable, 1997:12).

However, most university colleagues argued that the Roundtable had not gone far enough in generating explicit understandings. Some argued that the work of the Roundtable was headed in that direction but that time had run out. They felt there was

⁶⁶ At the end of the first year of the Innovative Links Project, Yeatman and Sachs (1995) also noted in their formative evaluation that there was a degree of reticence amongst teachers about describing the Links work as research or seeing themselves as researchers.

a lack of attention given to bringing things together and a lack of analysis and identification of research findings. Anna thought of the case discussions as collective critical reflections rather than analysis because no collective set of findings had been generated. She saw this situation as having huge potential but believed more thinking was required in relation to the analytical process. Steve observed that at the time they did not 'have the analytical strategies which would put that process in the hands of school colleagues'. Members of the Roundtable had various ideas about how this process might be improved in the future. Given more time and more attention, they argued, it might have been possible to:

- make better use of commentary writing
- connect different discussions in different schools
- investigate implications across sites
- encourage greater plurality, for example, English teachers listening to science teachers
- engage in focused discussions, arguments and teasing out of ideas and questions
- develop a way to go from the case writing to general discussions to imagining possibilities.

Mark suggested the idea of a 'case conference' as a strategy for bringing things together in a systematic way and consolidating learning across contexts of practice; Steve noted that subsequent work between the university colleagues and teachers in other schools had resulted in:

...a way of reading cases, we call it 'threading a case', finding the thread out of the case and then putting the threads of cases together and saying... 'What does this tell us about our school? What are these threads telling us?' And to pick out the key words and relate the key words to the key features of the school.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ This work is detailed in Longitudinal Study of School Restructuring 1996-2000 (Kruger et al., 2001).

Another suggestion for extending case discussions was based on the idea of linking cases with student work samples. Reflecting on the day when a teacher had rushed into the staffroom with a story about student learning, Steve reminisced:

...if we'd known then what we know now we would have put that kid's work and the learning next to the case and had a conversation around it (asking) 'How has my teaching contributed to this? How has the school organisation contributed to this? and because the parents were involved 'How is the school relating to the parents?' and all that kind of thing. You know we would have had that conversation.

Despite these doubts and the feeling that the inquiry process might have been improved, members of the Roundtable shared their cases and talked about the 'nitty gritty' of teaching practice, and in doing so they realised that the conversational opportunity helped them to achieve a terrific level of understanding about themselves and their work. It seems clear that having engaged in the dialogic process within Links teams (storytelling–writing–reading–conversing) that teachers' patterns of communication had changed. Case-inspired conversations provided an opportunity to:

- investigate and diagnose shared issues
- explore directions for change
- document innovation which would allow people, at some point in the future, to look back to 'see some of the early thinking'
- stimulate further work.

And even though some felt frustrated by the paucity of 'findings' and scant articulation of shared knowledge, by the time the Western Melbourne Roundtable funding had ceased, collections of cases and commentaries had been compiled in a variety of ways and for different reasons. Arendt (1958) and Senge (1992) extend the conception of dialogue, both arguing that by bringing experience and thought to the surface and by moving beyond individual views and understandings, new beginnings and actions are possible. Considered in this way the collected cases and commentaries seemed to take on a new significance and they provided another way of looking at the cognitive achievements of the Roundtable. They seemed to say more than, 'This is my

story.’ and in order to consider whether the collected cases constituted a cognitive mode of communication (Habermas, 1984) and whether they led to new beginnings it is important to look at the process of compilation and the subsequent usage.

Eagle Secondary College prepared its Links team report by collecting fourteen cases and eleven associated commentaries and grouping them, to allow readers to focus easily on different aspects of organising using the Team Small Group (TSG) model. They believed that their cases and commentaries were easily accessible to the casual reader and that even though they were anecdotal they reflected the ‘problematic of the school’, telling stories that were deep enough to lend themselves to further discourse. Within each case and commentary there were explicit and implicit statements which, when collected and connected, formed an authoritative picture of their understanding about teaching and learning in general and more specifically about their work within the TSG structure. Within that context, Frida talked about the process of selecting and rejecting stories which might be told.

...we chose to reflect on our (new) practice of Team Small Group...(We wanted) to help others understand some of what that entailed whether they be new staff joining the school or the many people from other schools that wanted to know. For me a lot of the reason then that stories got rejected as cases was because I would write them down and would stop and think: Is this really reflecting on the Team Small Group model or is this really something that could have happened in any school or in any classroom anywhere? I often found myself thinking: No this could have happened in any school, in any classroom, anywhere—even though they were stories that were worth telling... What I finally chose to write about was...how to forge a successful small group.

The writers at Eagle Secondary College collected their writing in a purposeful way, not aiming to produce a definitive book about the school, rather a collection of writings which demonstrated teachers’ work. They wanted the collection of cases to be seen as open to continuing discourse and so in the introduction of their report they encouraged others to add commentaries and even cases because they thought the more voices that were heard the deeper the vein of experience from which they could all

benefit. When collected, they used the document for a wide range of people who wanted to read about the TSG innovation—colleagues, administrators, university colleagues, student teachers, visitors to the school, teachers seeking employment at the school and parents. Bill, the Links coordinator at Eagle Secondary College commented on the importance of publishing cases.

I think one of the good things that has happened here is that the cases here have been published. I think that is terrific because I think all people who write need to see their work published because it gives it that sort of credence that it doesn't perhaps have when it's private writing, but I don't think people know about it and I think it would be good for the school to look at ways in which the material could be used because there is a lot that is very valuable in it.

It is hard to imagine that teachers would promote the publication and dissemination of writing unless they believed it to be valid in the way that Habermas (1996b:131) suggests, that is, that it is a comprehensible and a truthful disclosure, that it seems the right thing to do in terms of establishing legitimate interpersonal relationships, and that people understand the disclosure as a representation of the facts.

Each Links team targeted its writing around a common theme with each teacher contributing to the 'whole' story.⁶⁸ In this way, a richer understanding about each theme was achieved through collaboration and accumulation. For example at Rosella Primary School cases were collected and ordered to tell the Links team's story about introducing student self assessment into their classrooms. To the reader/visitor these collected cases created a layered revelation which detailed the complexity of incorporating student self assessment. Together the cases and commentaries created a new story with multiple voices and perspectives interacting like a conversation. Once public, the collection/conversation became a springboard for new conversations.

As with single cases it took a bit of work to develop the reading skill of focusing on issues rather than individual teachers, but for case writers there seemed to be some security in 'going public' together. Rosita recalled:

⁶⁸ The school-based themes are detailed in chapter 4.

So at the staff meeting people read our cases and we talked about our own experiences to try to help them talk about their own experiences... There were a lot of different feelings and I think the good thing was that there were a number of (case writers) there and we were all very supportive of each other... and we said to them: 'We aren't the experts... this is just an idea, this is just a sharing, a moment. It might mean you think of things, this is a starting point.' And that's how we introduced it... I think initially some people went 'Oh, that teacher doesn't know much'... Obviously we didn't use names on the case writing and we learned to discuss issues rather than the people and I think that was really important. When you deal with people in teaching it is very easy to make people feel uncomfortable and put them down instead of thinking well 'Why do they think that way?... you know, just valuing people's ideas. So it took a little while for us to be able to use them and for people to discuss them without putting people down or judging. I think teachers can be quite judgemental so it took a bit of work. But I think it got past that and we looked at it and we were able to think and say 'OK, so for self assessment, we've read some of the experiences in relation to junior children and integration students— How does it help them? How will we deal with it? How do we...? Obviously we can't do things the same way across the school or with these particular children—so we learned a lot about the way to implement student self assessment.

At neighbouring Honeyeater Primary School, where they were introducing multiage grades in the junior school, teachers wrote cases revealing their personal experiences and opinions about the multiage trial and this was important because they were not happy just to 'write and write and write' and not have a question answered—they preferred to be more specific. Once the writing had been completed, they collected their cases and used them as a basis for making recommendations to the principal. Teachers presented and defended their views with the express purpose of influencing decision-making. The Links team at the school also found that the collected cases were a useful tool for raising issues and questions in other schools where teachers were wanting to explore similar issues.

As King noted:

We used cases from...Honeyeater Primary School to familiarise new Rosella Primary School Link members with action research and case writing, and to initiate a whole school discussion on multi-ageing... We had a different structure at the time so we used their cases at our staff meeting...to start discussion about multi aging and what it meant to us... So we really learned from each other and used their experiences to learn from it and say, 'Well, how does this compare? Where do we want to go? What can we learn from that?' ... As a result, we have planned and implemented a successful Junior School, strengthened professional ties with Honeyeater Primary School and provided feedback to them through written commentaries. I know that the process has made me more clear about classroom goals. I am also working on becoming more organised, improving teaching strategies, and working hard to maximise each child's learning. (King, 1996)

From King's perspective collected cases led to questioning, written dialogue, focused conversation and personal and group thinking about teaching and learning, professional development, the development of working relationships, planning and organisational change. The Links team also noticed that during this process the whole cohort of staff of their school was touched by the adoption of case and commentary writing. It recalled teachers reading cases then writing small pieces of commentary and self reflective writing in response. The members of the Links team were not sure whether their colleagues were even conscious of this happening and on reflection wondered whether they should have made it clear to the whole staff that they had been involved in action research, thus naming the activity and making it meaningful.

Teachers found that when a cross-section of staff were involved in writing around a common theme the result was extremely rich because each person had written about their concerns in a unique way and made specific suggestions. It was interesting to compare and identify variations between cases and commentaries written on similar topics and Lily noticed that the cases collected into school reports indicated a collective depth of experience. Depth was also achieved as individual teachers collected their own cases. Olga realised as she looked back over her compiled cases

that they provided a story about personal change and innovation over time and allowed others to get a sense about the flow of events. She thought that her first cases had been about sadness and ‘wondering what to do’ but over time they had begun to focus on individual students and seemed to get more exciting. Dora noticed that over time her cases moved from a school and team focus to issues of personal concern and she hoped that this change would lead to sharing more of her ideas with others.

At one stage there was a suggestion that collected cases be made available electronically so that teachers beyond the Roundtable might have a chance to read what their peers had to say and eventually consider writing their stories too. This idea is strikingly similar to Stenhouse’s dream of a ‘Contemporary Educational Records Archive’ (Burgess & Rudduck, 1993:47).

Adopting a cognitive attitude

The inquiry plane of Roundtable action was the meeting space for diverse threads of concern and four inter-woven inquiry processes. The north–south axis of Figure 10: The inquiry plane of action summarises the first two sections of this chapter, firstly depicting the presence and importance of the personal, cultural, and societal threads of concern which combined to deliver an inclusive inquiry process. These concerns set the scene for the contextual, dialogic, collaborative and cognitive inquiry processes which combined to create reflexivity.

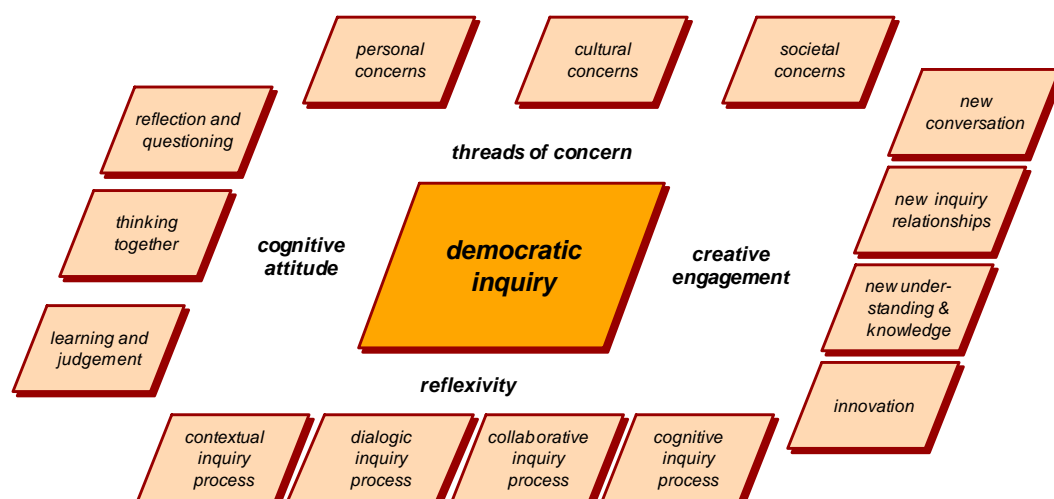


Figure 10: The inquiry plane of action

The next section of this chapter examines the characteristics of the cognitive attitude which shaped the inquiry processes and the final section turns to an examination of the creative nature of engagement which is achieved when a cognitive attitude is adopted and diverse threads of concern are explored reflexively.

The cognitive attitude adopted by the Roundtable was recognisable in a number of situations. Firstly, it could be seen in the reflection and questioning which supported intellectual challenge and stimulation (Zeichner, 2001) as well as struggle and doubt (Cherednichenko *et al.*, 1998b)—the kind of behaviour that Smyth (1989a) describes as informing inquiry. Secondly, it was evident as members of the Roundtable began thinking together, connecting practical, personal and professional knowledge and moral principles (Cherednichenko *et al.*, 1998b); and adopting a critical stance, searching for explanations and making connections with broader interests and concepts—the kind of behaviour that Smyth (1989a) would categorise as confronting inquiry. Finally, it was evident as a commitment to learning and the search for meaning (Habermas, 1996b); and the inevitable movement from contextualised understanding and learning towards judgements connected to new beginnings (Arendt, 1958)—the kind of behaviour that Smyth (1989a) would conceive as reconstructive.

Reflection and questioning

Looking back Laila recalled the initial conversations between teachers and university colleagues. She remembered how the teachers had struggled to understand.

We kept asking questions like: 'Is this what you want?'. They said: 'Don't ask what we want. What do you want?' We didn't really have a clue. We didn't really have a sense, I guess, of this idea that we could start asking our own questions.

It seems that the Roundtable was distinctive because it allowed for inquiry connected to the diverse threads of teachers' lives.⁶⁹ Structurally, the Roundtable incorporated

⁶⁹ The scope of concerns which motivated inquiry was introduced in Chapter 4 and the idea of including technical, practical and critical interests was discussed in Chapter 5.

and integrated multiple contexts across the scale of Roundtable inquiry and this allowed teachers to make connections between system functioning and the personal, cultural and social threads of their teaching lives. Working within this comprehensive and integrated context meant that teachers could engage in inquiry around technical, practical and critical–emancipatory questions. Ian and his colleagues at Eagle Secondary College, for instance, set out to gain a deeper understanding about the Team Small Group strategy for organising students. Within this context Ian took his inspiration from the classroom and an enthusiastic group of students:

...in all my years of teaching I'd never seen a group of kids empowered so much to actually get out and do it and I questioned in my mind: What was it that made them?

Having asked himself the question ‘What made those students feel empowered?’ (technical), Ian connected his personal inquisitiveness with his team’s interest in understanding the impact of the Team Small Group model on student learning (technical and practical) and in so doing indicated an awareness of issues to do with empowerment and student alienation in the middle years of schooling (technical, practical and critical-emancipatory). The inquiry space seemed to provide an opportunity to reflect on personal experiences and ask questions in the context of local issues, all with awareness and knowledge of broader social issues.

Similarly engaging in inquiry which combined technical, practical and critical–emancipatory concerns, the teachers at Kingfisher Primary School, dissatisfied with student participation in the classroom, invited students to bring their concerns into the classroom by identifying ‘self’ and ‘world’ questions. Together, teachers and students negotiated a curriculum by connecting student questions and curriculum frameworks with school priorities and expectations. By taking this step teachers achieved a significant level of consistency in the principles they were applying to inquiry-learning in the classroom and their own professional learning. They improved the level of enthusiasm both for themselves and their students, they adopted a reflective process for reaching a shared understanding about change and they challenged

existing power relationships, creating a new level of ownership for students in the classroom and for teachers in their professional relationships.⁷⁰

As teachers began to ask their own questions they developed a sense of ownership in relation to inquiry and this changed both the nature of the relationships and inquiry. In working together in this way Roundtable members developed an attitude of responsiveness and responsibility connected to reflective exchange and found critical distance through inquisitive engagement. Anna argued that when people were stimulated enough to ask themselves questions, the questioning became an action in its own right and ‘not just a reflection’.

...I think (questioning) is beyond reflection, it is another action which is about taking the next step. OK I'm prepared to quiz myself about what I think and believe...That's an action in itself, the act of thinking. Very often we can think of it simply as reflection but I actually think that for many of us, for me, sitting down to consciously try and understand something is not just reflection it is actually something that I am doing. I think that is really good, that the questioning environment can promote both things and deliver both things.

The possibility that many different concerns could be considered without privileging one over another was crucial to the integrity of inclusive inquiry in the Roundtable. Because participants were free to identify and pursue their own interests within a broader context they experienced action research as an opportunity to connect with their concerns in a way that promoted self understanding, professional development, information sharing, shared insights and understandings and consensual decision-making. From Arendt's perspective, individuals and the group were free to engage in situated critical thinking. Yet there seemed to be some tension and a lot of questions surrounding the scope of inquiry. On the one hand, Mark suggested that action research could only be considered successful if it attained a critical–emancipatory character. On the other hand Teresa specifically shaped her inquiry around technical–

⁷⁰ This work is discussed in Case 5: Left with many questions, p509, and also referred to in Chapter 6 in the discussion about relationships and co-leadership, see p220.

practical concerns associated with teaching percentages in mathematics, so that students would get something out of the project. Seeming to sense the pressure, she recalled in a self deprecating way that her questioning had been at a 'low level', suggesting her awareness that others may not see the importance of her interests because they were based in the classroom and focused on student learning outcomes.

While doubts have been expressed about the success of the Roundtable in valuing everyone's research interests and building confident inquiry relationships for all participants it seems that the open, inclusive attitude adopted by the Roundtable allowed for a diversity of concerns to emerge. In some instances—but not always—the inquiry achieved a critical-emancipatory nature and where this occurred it resulted from the process rather than from a predetermined ethical position. This might indeed be conceived as a strength as it connects with Habermas's (1999:140) observation that if we are to pursue a procedural democracy then we might find that 'practical reason withdraws from universal human rights, or from the concrete ethical substance of a specific community, into the rules of discourse and forms of argumentation...(where) normative content arises from the very structure of communicative actions.' Having said this, it also seems important to have an awareness of the different questions and concerns which signal technical, practical and critical-emancipatory attitudes to inquiry, to make a conscious decision about which form the inquiry takes and to develop an awareness about barriers that might prevent individuals or groups from adopting a critical-emancipatory stance.

Questions seemed significant within every facet of Roundtable work. Inspired by context, questions emerged throughout the reflexive process as Roundtable members expressed their experiences and feelings and then as they engaged in dialogue with their colleagues across the scale of the Roundtable network. It seemed that Roundtable relationships supported a questioning environment and that questioning played a significant role in the formation and growth of cooperative democratic relationships.

Thinking together

Kemmis (2001:100) argues for '*the formation of a communicative space* which is embodied in networks of actual persons'. This space, he claims, 'is constituted as

issues or problems are opened up for discussion, and when participants experience their interaction as fostering the democratic expression of divergent views'. Kemmis believes that the legitimacy of knowledge and decisions is directly connected to the authenticity of the engagement.

The Roundtable created a communicative space or a network of reading publics made up of 'small face-to-face conversational groups' (MacIntyre, 1999) situated close to the place where consensual decisions would be made and action taken. These groups, committed to working towards individual and shared understandings about teaching and learning, explored the contingency and particularity of their practice through intimate pieces of case writing. In this way, case writing and cooperative relationships combined to produce an inclusive–dialogic–interactive attitude to inquiry. Cases not only brought together the inclusive and expressive dimensions of inquiry but they were significant in bringing people together and promoting democratic–cooperative inquiring relationships. Anna was of the opinion that case writing supported collaborative inquiry in a way that equalised participants from schools and the university. She believed that this was possible because they had space to talk as well as extra space to stop talking and to listen.

Rosita noticed the value of the exchange with her colleagues:

When the commentaries were written about my case that gave me a lot of feedback and a different view point...sometimes when you're deep in the middle of the situation you don't see so it makes you think again and reflect on what you're doing in a different way.

In exploring the importance of thinking together, MacIntyre makes a connection between dialogue, relationships and understanding:

...thinking for oneself always does require thinking in cooperation with others. Some episodes of thought do of course consist in solitary monologues. But even monologues have to begin from what others have provided, and their conclusions have to be matched against rival conclusions, have to be stated in such a way as to be open to critical and constructive objections advanced by others, and have to be thereby made available for reflective interpretation and reinterpretation by others, so that sometimes one comes to understand only from those others what one means or must have meant. We

learn to think better or worse from others, and we find ourselves contributing to a complex history of thought in which our debts to our predecessors are payable only to our successors (MacIntyre, 1999:249).

Within the Roundtable, where knowledge and emotion sat side by side, certainty and uncertainty were combined with an attitude of openness and this made it possible to consider a range of possibilities, to think outside the boundaries and to express doubts and struggle in the search for knowledge and understanding. Cochrane-Smith and Lytle noted that this kind of pattern is:

...especially true in inquiry communities structured to foster deep intellectual discourse about critical issues ... (which) become spaces where the uncertainties and questions intrinsic to teaching can be scrutinized—(not hidden)—and can function as grist for new insights and new ways to theorize practice (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1999:22).

Certainty was created by connecting Roundtable work to local agendas. Each team identified a focus for their work and associated projects evolved over the life of the Roundtable.⁷¹ Uncertainty, doubt and dissatisfaction emerged as questions in context. At Eagle Secondary College teachers' concerns led to shared questions about the connections between learning, the arrangement of learning teams and the impact of personality, personal need, personal preference and individual learning styles.

Mark was of the view that uncertain action and difficult situations were the key to deep thinking and he felt that the Roundtable had not gone far enough in creating opportunities for engaging in uncertain action and deep thinking. But other members of the Roundtable argued they had indeed been involved in difficult and uncertain situations. The team at Finch Secondary College for instance reflected on their work, mapped it and then titled it 'Uncertainty and Confusion'. Oliver, a teacher at the school, expressed his belief that uncertainty had driven change.

⁷¹ The teams focused on student self assessment, multi age student groups in the junior primary school, negotiated curriculum in the middle years, literacy and numeracy across the middle years curriculum and the Team Small Group approach to structuring secondary education. The detail of each team proposal and the connection with local and national education agendas is described in Chapter 4 and 5.

If we were all sure about everything we wouldn't bother, you know...testing (our) own uncertainties, that's what's bringing about change. The things that you are already happy with, you are just happy with and you keep going along that way. I think in education, especially secondary, we have been quite happy with our little (subject) compartments, our little boxes, and no one felt the need to change until some people stepped that little bit further out, put themselves at that bit of risk, that bit of uncertainty and said well maybe there are other ways of doing it.

In a recurring theme teachers described their preparedness to be open to possibilities, to take risks and to make changes which were personally demanding. Oliver observed that his colleagues came into the project:

...not thinking that they had answers but rather being prepared to open themselves to new questions and then new possibilities and answers. And that openness—I think that's something that kids really like—and that willingness...that attitude, it seems you need to think about that attitude and how you can renew and keep yourself fresh along the way, and still look forward to retirement...I think that's the big idea I got out of all of it really.

At Kingfisher Primary School the 'old way' of teaching was not working and they decided to introduce a negotiated curriculum. They were aware of the demands associated with engaging in a cognitive process—stepping into the unknown required courage, confidence, skill, effort, energy and a preparedness to challenge existing power relations. As teachers made changes in their classrooms they realised that they had to think in a different way, they had to think outside the boundaries of their experience and consider new possibilities. Some wondered whether they were equipped to step out of their comfort zone and challenge their work and their beliefs. Would there be rewards that compensated for the effort of 'working on the edges'? Would uncertainty lead to renewal and would they be reinvigorated?

While teachers were aware of the emotional demands of uncertainty they also felt the passion, excitement, exhilaration and energy that was attached to trying something

different. Roundtable participants felt that because they were engaged in something new and somewhat experimental it put pressure on them to critically analyse their practice and its effects—more so, they thought, than if they had been working within an established framework. It would be reasonable to question whether it was the nature of the project or just being part of the project⁷² which promoted this willingness and invigoration; yet time and again teachers used cases to document the movement between certainty and uncertainty and then engage in personal theorising, which provided a practical demonstration of Zeichner's (2001) ideas about intellectual challenge and stimulation.

Learning and judgement

The third indicator of a cognitive attitude was the movement from thinking to learning and judgement. Grundy (1995:16) observes that reflection is about 'having a good hard look at the evidence of what went on...it is about making a rational judgement on the basis of the evidence about what occurred and how worthwhile it was.' The team at Honeyeater Primary School exemplified this attitude as they used cases and commentaries to record and reflect on the introduction of multiage classes. Having conducted their inquiry, they ultimately decided to modify the structure so that it involved two rather than three year levels and Anna saw this as an example of a productive and valid research process:

I think that is perfectly valid because that was a really conscious decision, it was about saying well we've analysed it now, we've thought about it, we've talked, it's public, we don't like it, we are not going there. And that's what you do it for.

But Dora, a teacher at the school, was frustrated by the decision. She had enjoyed teaching three combined year levels and was not happy with the decision. In addition,

⁷² Connell (1994:139) refers to this possibility as the "Hawthorne effect" which he says is 'named for the factory where a famous experiment found industrial workers increasing output no matter how their work was arranged by the experimenters. The researchers finally realized that it was the experiment itself, not the manipulations within it, that was creating a supportive group and boosting the workers' morale.'

she felt the outcome had been interpreted by some of her colleagues as a failure of the Links project and she was unhappy about this view which seemed to indicate a lack of confidence in the process which she had valued. In this instance there does not seem to have been an opportunity for her to voice her frustration or test these perceptions, which may suggest a weakness in the process of moving from thinking to learning and judgement—at least from Dora's viewpoint.

However, the collection of cases and commentaries which recorded the inquiry conducted by Honeyeater Primary School also provided an opportunity for others to achieve what Habermas (1996b:119) described as 'coming to an understanding' and 'bringing about an agreement'.⁷³ The staff at Rosella Primary School, for instance, used the collected cases from Honeyeater Primary School to initiate a whole school discussion around their shared interest in multi age student groupings. The reflective activity facilitated thinking and learning connected to the organisation of their own junior school. On the basis of gaining a deeper understanding they reached agreement about an action plan and identified issues which might be addressed within a professional development program. As they reflected they also familiarised new members of their team with both the case writing genre and the action research process. They also provided feedback to the case writers from Honeyeater Primary School through written commentaries, thereby initiating a new dialogue and strengthening the professional ties between the two schools. Once again the connection between relationships and coming to an understanding was evident.

In a simultaneous personal inquiry loop, Rosita found that the team process helped her to clarify her personal classroom goals and ambitions—she resolved to become more organised, improve her teaching strategies and work harder to maximise each child's learning.

Practising 'reflective judgement' and moving from the particular to the universal the teachers at Honeyeater Primary School and Rosella Primary School showed, as Arendt (1978:69) had argued, that being a good judge was about linking action and thought. They were all involved in writing and thinking about multiage grouping in

⁷³ Collected cases and commentaries were discussed in Chapter 5.

the early years of primary education and throughout the dialogic flow they made connections and decisions drawing on their professional knowledge and principles. Understanding connected back to the contextual plane of action where the inquiry had gained its impetus.

Teachers were both actors and spectators (Coulter & Wiens, 2002), all involved in action and all enjoying an opportunity to step back and look from another point of view. As storyteller–case writers and visitor–commentators, members of the Roundtable had many opportunities to connect thinking and acting. Olga was clear about the connection between writing and change: ‘When teachers started writing down and questioning their work, they started to do something about it.’ In this way they were involved in making judgements which connected action, thinking and new beginnings.

There seemed to be a common thread of concern; teachers constantly questioned the implementation of new ideas and wondered what innovation could achieve—What might be the value for students, teachers and parents? Anna believed that because the team at Eagle Secondary College made a connection between creating the questions and making a decision to change the conditions which sparked the question in the first place, the connection was the basis for democratic action. Between the identification of questions and the decision to make changes it seems there was a process which involved collecting all the information and ideas and making a judgement about what was the best way to proceed. The process seemed to be based in an attitude which valued and connected reflection and questioning associated with dilemmas and possibilities, looking and thinking together and the pursuit of understanding, learning and judgement in action.

Creative engagement: new knowledge and other new beginnings

Finally, the focus turns to the achievements of the Roundtable, and it seems that members of the Roundtable enjoyed a creative kind of engagement which led to many new beginnings—new conversations, new relationships, and innovative practices based on new understanding, knowledge and questions. In the preface to *The Handbook of Action Research* Reason and Bradbury (2001) quote from the South African *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report* and this seems a powerful lead-

in to understanding the nature of engagement in the inquiry plane of Roundtable action.

It is particularly important to emphasise that the truth could not be divorced from the affirmation of the dignity of human beings. Thus, not only the actual outcome or findings of the investigation counted. The process whereby the truth was reached was itself important because it was through this process that the essential norms of social relations between people were reflected. It was furthermore, through dialogue and respect that a means of promoting transparency, democracy and participation in society was suggested as a basis for reaffirming human dignity and integrity.

Truth as factual, objective information cannot be divorced from the way in which this information is acquired; nor can such information be separated from the purposes it is required to serve (1998: Chapter 5, pt 42 and 44).

While the Roundtable experience might seem trivial in comparison with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the connection between engagement and outcomes was similar. Within the Roundtable outcomes could not be separated from purpose or process. As with the Commission, where the process ‘indicated the essential norms of social relations between people’, it was the nature of the inquiring conversations and relationships that led to the generation of outcomes which connected back to the multiple desires expressed by members of the Roundtable. Like the Commission, the Roundtable aimed for democracy through participation, dialogue, respectful cooperation and public transparency.

Considered in this way, creative engagement needs to be considered in terms of new beginnings and in the Roundtable this meant new inquiry relationships and an ongoing process of achieving mutual trust, (Habermas, 1996b:119), new questions and conversations and a connection between thinking and action through judgement and the creation of new beginnings (Arendt, 1958; Coulter & Wiens, 2002). These links between learning and creativity are evident in the transformation and reconstruction of ideas and practice (Smyth, 1989a), in efforts to recreate and re-perceive the world (Senge, 1992) and in a commitment to continuous improvement (Hargreaves, 1994:245-247).

New conversations

The dialogic inquiry process, involving case and commentary writing and case inspired conversations, created the necessary space for exploring struggle and doubt, searching for meaning and explanation, making connections and engaging in personal and collective theorising. Reading cases for instance, promoted an inquiring, thinking environment for both individuals and groups and Bill observed that even though cases seemed to have the potential to make connections between reflection, professional development and school level change, this kind of document was not common in his school. In considering possible applications he argued that cases were more than just a celebration of teachers' work; they informed him about what teachers were doing, they revealed the way his colleagues were thinking about their work, they raised questions connected to a particular set of circumstances and they challenged him to respond by writing commentaries and talking to his colleagues. When Bill read other people's cases it promoted self reflection and he found himself asking questions about how he might improve his teaching and what plans he might make based on what he had read. He recalled, for instance, being

...vitaly interested in what Kingfisher Primary School was doing (in regard to negotiating the curriculum)...I could see that it really was a move that had its moment to come in secondary schools and that structures at our place could support (the introduction of those ideas)...and so I was trying to work out how to seize the moment.

Dialogue opened the way for recreating, reconstructing, reshaping and rethinking, and these creative opportunities demanded a different kind of conversation. The process of telling stories and writing cases and the content of stories provided the foundation for moving on. Disch (1994), drawing on Arendt's work describes this process.

Storytellers initiate political reconciliation. Their work is to tell stories that accord permanence to fleeting actions, crafting them into events whose meaning can be opened to public disputation. This reconciliation is neither retrospective nor passive, but the quintessential realization of natality, the condition that makes way for new beginnings (Disch, 1994:73).

At a personal level case and commentary writing were creative activities, an opportunity for members of the Roundtable to be autobiographers—authors of their

own stories. This process of self recognition and disclosure created the possibility of generating change, whether connected to classrooms or professional relationships. Once public, the cases created the possibility of new beginnings for the group and case-inspired conversations provided a place which was a shared opportunity for ‘thinking futures’. The distance created through isolation and an absence of dialogue, was reduced and the unequal relationships between school and university colleagues were reshaped. Constant personal and collaborative questioning—a feature of the dialogic flow—indicated an openness and a critical approach to thinking about the future, and therefore the possibility of beginning something new.

Oliver contrasted the learning achieved through action–reflection conversations with the learning possible through external professional development programs. He argued the importance of beginning with an understanding of teachers’ existing knowledge:

...One of the things about the Link project was it didn't treat people as if they were blank slates that could be written on, you could do your own writing and that gave (the learning) a very different character...But I think the problem is that professional development, in some people's minds is characterised by going off somewhere for a day and you sit down and they give you a bundle of things and they talk at you and then you go home.

Oliver questioned whether this kind of external professional development produced anything of value for schools. Evident in his comparison between Roundtable learning and external professional development was a belief that professional learning was more likely when it was created rather than delivered and when teachers had an opportunity to start conversations, renew relationships, generate enthusiasm, with a view to making their work easier and more fun. Oliver clearly believed that there was a connection between conversations, relationships and coming to a new understanding. Bauman saw such a process as:

*...an emergent unity which is a joint achievement of the agents engaged in self-identification pursuits, a unity which is an outcome, not an *a priori* given condition, of shared life, a unity put together through negotiation and reconciliation, not the denial, stifling or smothering out of differences (Bauman, 2000:178).*

New inquiry relationships

In the Roundtable the formation of new inquiry relationships was inspired by these new conversations and together they contributed to an intimate engagement which led to deeper, more intimate understanding about teaching and learning. As people talked things through they seemed to form a dialogic network. The stories, often revealing familiar experiences, became the substance around which close personal connections and meaningful conversations were built. The literature aligns with this observation, indicating that dialogue is significant in building relationships (Giddens, 1999), achieving reconciliation (Arendt, 1958), reaching understanding (Habermas, 1984; MacIntyre, 1999) and making way for new beginnings (Arendt, 1958).

Braaten (1996:141), drawing on Habermas's conception of communicative rationality, argues that to engage in dialogue actors must be part of a community which is communicatively competent, and it seems that those who enjoyed the dialogic freedoms offered by the Roundtable developed the ability to participate in a dialogic community. Some of the relationships emerged as one-to-one interactions and Arendt's conception of a relationship between storyteller and visitor has been used throughout this chapter to indicate this intimate interaction—after all, no-one would invite a stranger, or someone who was a threat, to visit them. In addition to the storyteller–visitor relationships, Roundtable members gathered in conversational groups to think and ask questions about their work. In effect they were new reading publics (MacIntyre, 1999), small face-to-face groups of people who had chosen to work together to gain a deeper understanding about their work. Returning to Giddens's ideas about the transformation of intimacy, it is possible to see how the intimate nature of the dialogic flow transformed inquiring and learning relationships in the Roundtable.

Roundtable members wrote cases to inform others about their views and the things they had learned. This writing allowed practitioners to take responsibility for telling stories—making public that which was usually invisible—and for providing 'visitor' access to many details and points of view about teaching and learning. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997:146-148) raise the issue of empathetic regard in research relationships, talking about empathy in terms of identification, as an impulse for

insight, as respect and open acceptance of actors' views and as intimacy, all of which they believe are critical for honouring multiple perspectives.

New understanding and knowledge

Adopting a cognitive attitude meant that Roundtable inquiry relationships and dialogue culminated in new understanding and knowledge which could be variously described as learning (Kemmis, 1997, 2001), reciprocal understanding and shared knowledge (Habermas, 1996b:119) or personal and collective theorising (Cherednichenko *et al.*, 1998b). In a sense these outcomes of inquiry might be seen as facts associated with the validity claim of truth (Habermas, 1996b:131) or the end point of a cognitive process (Arendt, 1958:170). Yet there was not a shared view about what the Roundtable had achieved in terms of new knowledge and understanding.

Some saw truth, facts and findings as the pinnacle of the inquiry endeavour and expressed a degree of frustration about the Roundtable's success in generating shared understandings. Eleni for instance, had the feeling that while the research was clearly connected to action, more could have been done with the collected cases. She felt as though they had collected data and information but had never got around to really sitting down, analysing and taking the next step. Having collected cases and wondered about the possibility of identifying generalisations, Mark felt that it seemed impossible to take the next step or answer the question: 'What does it mean? Voicing a desire to make connections, Steve wondered: 'How can you...transform that localised thinking into something that is akin to research findings?' These concerns set a challenge to understand what was and was not achieved in this aspect of Roundtable inquiry.

Others believed that the Roundtable had provided an opportunity to be systematic and public and they were quick to compare this situation with other experiences where change was implemented on the basis of decisions from 'on high' rather than 'on the ground inquiry about practice'. They connected the opportunity to control change with the possibility of being systematic and public about their actions, decision-making and change. Rosita felt this at a personal level.

So...for me, it's brought a whole new focus...it's put together for me in my own head the last 15 years of teaching...what I've been doing has given me a focus of the sort of things that are really important to me and to be able, like the children ... to articulate those things—where I've been, where I want to go, what I think is important for me, what I think is important for the children—and to be able to defend those issues especially in the light of the political things that are happening, to defend those issues in front of the parents, administrators, anybody. So more than just classroom stuff personally, nationally it's just been amazing over the last three years, it's the best that has happened to me since sliced bread.

At a group level, teachers compared the Links experience with other situations where change was beyond their control, where there was no opportunity to be systematic and public about what was happening, there was no engagement in decision-making and no possibility of being strategic and having a plan for thinking about what should and should not be done. Reflecting on the Roundtable process Anna wondered whether they had answered Stenhouse's (1975:156–7) call for a critical and systematic approach to examining practice:

...well maybe that is what happened in the Roundtable whether we thought we were doing it or not. We thought we were trying to do research but we weren't terribly rigorous about that, we just went on with our work. But it seems to me that in looking (back)...there was some kind of systematic inquiry—we did something, we looked back and we thought about it and we did something and then we wrote something down, we made it public, we wrote it down and then we talked about it in Roundtable meetings, we shared it with colleagues. And out of that, which I think is really powerful, grew this new knowledge that we had...across the Roundtable, that did lead to new decisions.

Innovation

By adopting a cognitive attitude to inquiry people in the Roundtable had an opportunity to reach a deeper understanding about themselves, their work and their workplaces and they used what they had learned to create the future. This kind of innovation provided a stark contrast to the systemic, one size fits all innovation identified in the earlier discussion about developments in education (see p19). Through writing, reading and discussing cases members of teams and the Roundtable focused on initiatives, identified new directions and gained a different view of the change process. By pursuing this inquiry process they were able to respond to the expectations articulated by different members: their desire for generalised understanding and meaning, their desire to learn so that practice could be improved, their desire to gain status for teacher generated findings and their desire to make a difference.

As observed in the literature review many voices suggest we need to actively rethink, respond, reshape, reconceptualise, reconstruct and recreate. Bird and his colleagues (1993) for instance, argued that we need to engage in ‘thinking futures’ and others suggest that this would involve understanding, learning, generating knowledge, making judgements, reaching unforced consensus, all towards continuous improvement. Arendt (1958) invites us to understand and appreciate the possibilities of freedom so that we might have the courage to play an active part in interactions and discussions which shape values, actions and decisions for the future. As Cox observes:

The metaphor of birth—and this is one of Arendt’s key concepts—is about the possibility of finding new beginnings. In the possibility of change lies ‘hope’...Without hope we are discouraged from trying (Cox, 1995:7).

The Innovative Links Project expectation that Roundtable activity would connect learning and innovation meant that the Roundtable also aimed for natality (1958:9).

Over time the Roundtable generated a new way of working which comprised processes and opportunities which valued and supported an inquisitiveness and an openness about creating the future. Members of the Roundtable were constantly setting the scene for new thinking and new beginnings by asking new questions. Eleni, who had been asking herself questions about one group of students, recalled

that by reading a colleague's case she was inspired to ask new questions which then became a 'springboard for her next set of actions'.

A new democracy for professional development?

The investigation is significant because it has provided the first detailed examination of the intersection between case writing and roundtable relationships and patterns of inquiry and in so doing has demonstrated characteristics, structures and activities which have the potential to inform the design of future professional development activities.

By drawing on the comprehensive Roundtable records and the illuminating perspectives of Roundtable members it has been possible to argue that four layers of democratic action made a distinctive contribution to the professional development of participants. Combined, the last four chapters describe how the Western Melbourne Roundtable experience of professional development was achieved through contextual sensitivity, case inspired dialogue, inquiring relationships and a culture of reflection and continuous improvement. By exploring these aspects of action this study has informed the search for new knowledge about professional practice and development and contributed to a deeper understanding about innovation and professional learning.

This surely sets a challenge to synthesise the work of the Roundtable so that others too might enjoy the possibility of new beginnings and this is the task for Chapter 9.

Chapter 9: Mapping a new democracy for professional development

What is needed in the democratic countries is a deepening of democracy itself. I shall call this *democratising democracy*...we need to democratise above—as well as below—the level of the nation. (Giddens, 1999:75)

The challenge established at the end of the literature review was to find a future for teachers' professional development and Giddens (1999), in the quote above, implies the need to think at many levels when considering the future. Significantly, Giddens is not alone in his view that social action might be considered in spatial terms and Smith (1993), Massey (1993), Habermas (1984; 1987) and Arendt (1958), to name just a few, all provide further inspiration to think about professional development in this way. Indeed, taking this approach seems particularly relevant given the new places and spaces that the Western Melbourne Roundtable created for professional learning.

However, before proceeding to map a new democracy for professional development it is important to recall the context in which the future is sought. Since Connell's (1985) observations about teachers' work the 1980s, the pattern of individual professional learning has shifted from being connected to formal academic pursuits to one-off events often linked to the implementation of government policy characterised by:

- a strong emphasis on the technical aspect of teaching focused on curriculum frameworks, associated student assessment and a one-size-fits-all model of curriculum delivery
- little emphasis on emerging problems such as student disengagement and a move away from addressing the social justice concerns which have attracted attention and funding during the 1970s and 1980s
- little recognition of teacher knowledge or responsiveness to the problem of teacher isolation
- an increasing connection between professional development, student benchmarks (especially in literacy and numeracy) and professional accountability.

Australian teachers have been critical of these professional development opportunities which they believe are designed with little consideration of local needs and little (if any) teacher input (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998). Providing a contrast, the literature also reveals an emerging unanimity about alternative characteristics which might contribute to an alternative model of professional development (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Beckett & Hager, 2002:115; Sachs, 2003). While there are few examples of professional development based on this knowledge about what works and what does not, Sachs (2003) has drawn on a number of programs including the work of the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable to develop a protocol which reflects activist trends in teacher professionalism. Covering some of the same ground, this in-depth study of the Western Melbourne Roundtable confirms the significance of the principles which have shaped Sachs's protocol and adds a further layer of understanding. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 have featured four distinct but connected layers of democratic action—contextual, dialogic, collaborative and inquiry. Throughout, the broad characteristics and the connections between each layer of action have been depicted using a vertical view (Figure 11) whilst horizontal planes (Figure 12) have presented the detail of each layer of action.

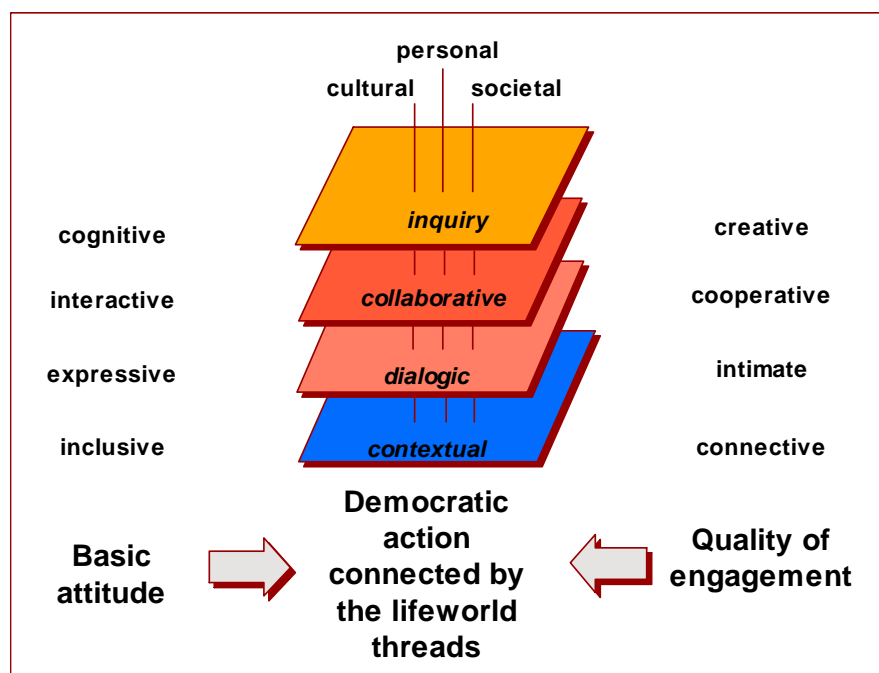


Figure 11: A vertical view of democratic professional development

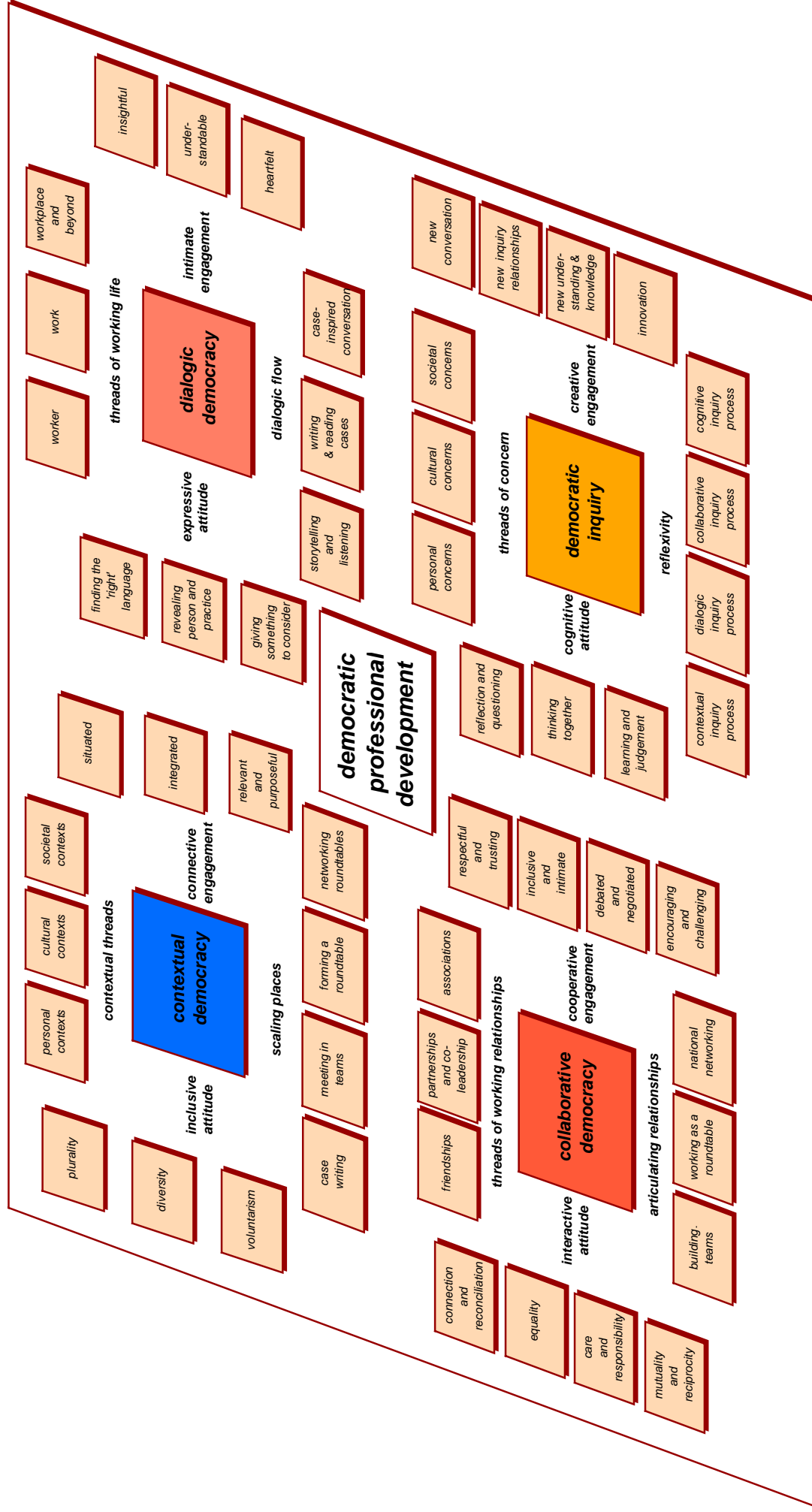


Figure 12: A horizontal view of democratic professional development

The detail depicted in Figure 11 and Figure 12 combines the factors which describe professional development in the Roundtable. By making connections between the different layers of action it is now possible to see that a new democracy for professional development would involve:

- adopting a democratic attitude (based in the principles of inclusion, expression, interaction and cognition)
- incorporating a wide scope of interests (where personal, cultural, and societal interests emerge as contextual threads as well as threads of working life, working relationships and concern)
- participating in parallel and complementary processes (which involve scaling places for learning, a dialogic flow, articulating relationships and reflexivity)
- aiming for democratic engagement (in which people are connected, intimate, cooperative and creative).

Inspired by these layers of action and understanding, the remaining task is to map what this might mean for the future of professional development. This will be achieved by first mapping five distinct processes that might shape a new kind of professional development and then integrating these characteristics in four new places where professional learning might take place.

What kind of a place for professional development?

We talk about the place of art in social life, the place of women in society, our place in the cosmos, and we internalize such notions psychologically in terms of knowing our place, or feeling we have a place in the affections or esteem of others. We express norms by putting people, events and things in their place and seek to subvert norms by struggling to define a new place from which the oppressed can freely speak. Place has to be one of the most multi-layered and multi-purpose words in our language. (Harvey, 1993:4)

In the context of this study the struggle is to find the kind of place that will provide an alternative to current professional development opportunities. Smith (1993:99) argues that ‘the making of place implies the production of (geographical) scale in so far as places are made different from each other’. He believes that scale is ‘the criterion of

difference not so much between places as between different *kinds* of places’ and holds the view that this kind of ripple-like geography can be actively produced. Smith’s position is born out in the Roundtable experience which provides a convincing argument for creating a new scale of locations for professional development.

Locational scale

In developing a language for discussing locational scale Smith (1993) begins with the body and moves out to the home and community, and then to urban, regional, national and global sites. This study highlights the difference between a common scale of professional development and an alternative scale which creates new opportunities or ‘social occasions’ (Giddens, 1984:71) for professional learning. This distinction is highlighted in Figure 13.

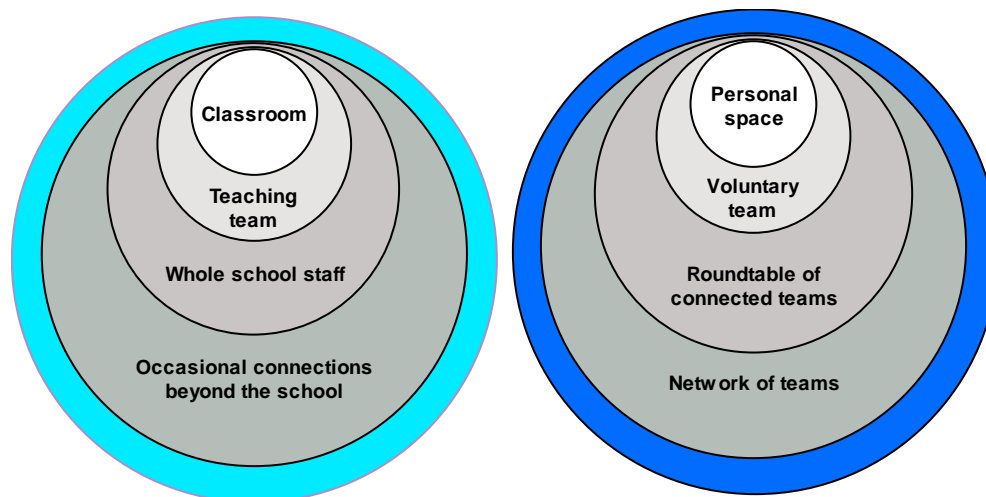


Figure 13: Two different locational scales for professional learning

The diagram on the left depicts the common locations for learning. In this scenario informal learning is the closest to the body and it takes place in the classroom or as teachers enjoy fleeting conversations in staffrooms, car parks and corridors. This is usually characterised as gossip rather than professional learning. Formal learning is associated with teaching or administrative teams (home) and school-wide staff development (community). Occasionally, professional development programs are located in places beyond the school (regional) and hosted by organisations including education systems, subject associations, unions and universities. Opportunities beyond the regional scale are rare.

In establishing an alternative scale for professional learning the first step is to create a personal space for learning (body). This opportunity takes on new importance at the centre of a scale that extends out to teams (home), roundtables (community/regional) and networks (national/global). Each place in the new scale is connected but able to be distinguished (geographically), initially by distance from the personal space. And each of the new places is a different kind of place to those associated with existing professional development practices.

The new scale indicates the value of focusing on individual experience while at the same time enabling teachers to voluntarily leave the isolation of their classrooms and come together with colleagues in collaborative activities. The experience of the Roundtable demonstrates the importance of creating what Arendt (1958) called a space of appearance, in this instance understood as a scale of opportunities for teachers to reveal their experiences as a foundation for reconciliation, learning and new beginnings.

In a somewhat cautionary vein, it is also important to note that creating each new place for learning has a temporal dimension. As mentioned frequently in the Western Melbourne Roundtable, finding time is a critical issue and this aspect of place is widely associated with the availability of financial support. Disturbingly, it seems almost impossible to work across a locational scale without funding. This means there is an ongoing challenge to find the money which will buy time for individuals, teams, roundtables and networks to work in a different way. Even when money is available there is a reluctance to add another layer of activity to an already stretched schedule. One option which seems to diminish the need for funds and avoid creating more work is to consider replacing some aspect of current practice with new places and possibilities for learning. In most instances this would be seen as a big step, yet the experience of the Roundtable showed that these alternative places deliver significant outcomes for both individuals and organisations including reflective practice, meaningful dialogue, deeper understanding, improved teaching and learning, strengthened working relationships and innovation aimed at improving student learning outcomes.

It is the qualities that go towards making each place different from the other that contribute to these diverse outcomes. Smith (1993) suggests that the difference

between places can be revealed by focusing on identity, internal difference, the borders with other scales and possibilities for resistance whilst Massey (1993:66-67) gives another hint about how to conceptualise the task when she argues that places are not static but are in fact processes. Taking this direction, a new democracy for professional development can be understood by examining the parallel and connected scales, or processes, which shaped professional learning in the Roundtable.

Dialogic scale

Creating a new democracy for professional development involves finding different kinds of places for dialogue and the Roundtable experience highlights the significance of creating a dialogic process which involves a flow between four connected opportunities: writing and reading stories; telling and listening to stories; dialogue for deeper understanding; and dissemination. Figure 14 shows the dimensions of this scale.

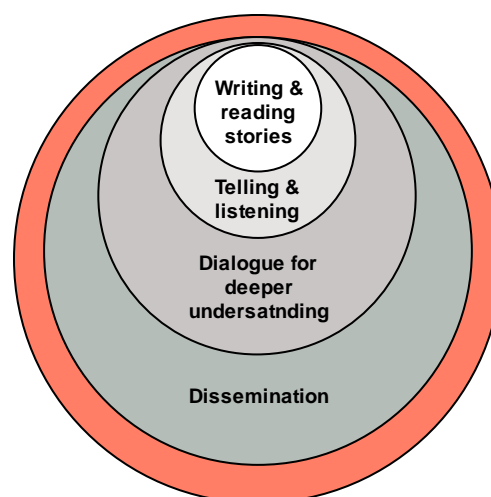


Figure 14: A dialogic scale for professional learning

While this flow could be considered a stand alone process, when connected with the locational scale it further defines the new sites for learning so that each new place is able to be distinguished one from another on the basis of dialogic activity. In other words, locational places are made different from each other by the dialogic action which coincides in each place. Looking from another perspective different kinds of locations facilitate different kinds of dialogue and recognising this two-way relationship is significant in building a new democracy for professional development.

At the centre of the scale, the creation of a personal learning space gains its significance through strategies that focus attention on practice. One option is to formalise learning through personal writing focused on the details and dilemmas associated with practice and case writing was the strategy adopted by the Western Melbourne Roundtable to serve this purpose. The next step in extending dialogue involves telling stories and in doing so inviting others to listen. Once shared these stories become the focus for other kinds of dialogic activities such as conversations aimed at achieving a deeper understanding and the collection and dissemination of stories and knowledge to an even broader audience.

A dialogic process, underpinned by the principle of expression, enhances the chance of achieving a more intimate understanding about teaching and learning. The Roundtable experience shows that this is especially true when the learning process begins with insights into classroom practice and is followed up with time to achieve a deeper, more intimate understanding. Creating an opportunity to recount stories based on personal experience and then using them as a basis for individual and shared learning signals that teachers' knowledge is valued and that teachers concerns are recognised. Expression which is open and inclusive in this way allows for diversity in dialogue and learning.

Relational scale

Another significant aspect in mapping a new democracy for professional development involves finding a place for different kinds of relationships and developing an understanding of the ways in which diverse relationships support professional learning. Once again drawing on the Roundtable experience, it seems that relationships can be scaled in the same way as locations and dialogue by starting close to the body and moving outwards. Further, when the locational, dialogic and relational scales are placed side by side it is possible to see a close connection between the three scales with each exerting an influence on the other. The result is somewhat like Arendt's (1958:183) web of human relationships or Massey's (1993:65–66) 'articulated moments in networks of social relations'.

The experience of the Roundtable points to the importance of fostering a variety of work-based learning relationships and valuing both strong and weak ties (Nias, 1989;

Lima, 2001) such as partnerships, friendships and associations. In addition to considering the interpersonal nature of relationships there is also significance in developing a relationship with self—the task of achieving greater self awareness. Figure 15 depicts this scale.

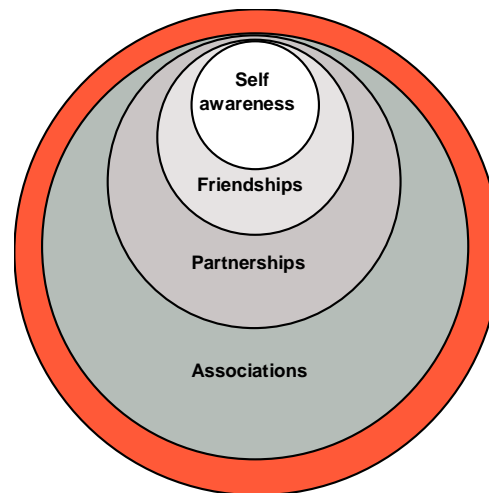


Figure 15: A relational scale for professional learning

Personal learning is at the centre of the relational scale and is associated with the responsibility that people have for their own learning and the development of self awareness. Yet the whole idea of considering a scale of relationships challenges the idea that professional development is an individual matter and in the context of this mapping exercise describing a relational scale shows the significant value of interaction and cooperation in creating a new democracy for professional development. The Roundtable experience demonstrates that by adopting voluntary and involving characteristics within a collaborative process—and challenging the kind of collaboration which White and Wehlage (1995) identified as institutional, top down and non-involving—a new kind of democracy can be created. Once again this is a strong theme in Sachs's (2003:148) conception of activist professionalism and she stresses the importance of collaboration and collective action in creating 'an environment of trust and mutual respect' in which people act ethically, responsively and responsibly.

For Sachs (2003) 'acting with passion' as well as 'experiencing pleasure and having fun' are also significant aspects of conceptualising activist relationships. This study confirms the importance of these characteristics and indicates that cooperation is

influenced by the emotional, heartfelt and intimate expression of the dialogic scale. By building on these connections, and taking an interactive and cooperative approach to professional development it is possible to create a place where people feel able to take risks, to step outside their comfort zone and experience the freedom of finding the future together. Working in this interactive–cooperative way means that relationships are not only sustained through debate, negotiation, encouragement and challenge but the process of working in this way actually builds these relational characteristics.

The quality of interaction not only shapes what is learned (Billett, 2001:98) but becomes the basis for continuing relationships and there are clear indications that it is important to think broadly about the kind of interactive place that might be created through a new democracy for professional development. Proceeding in this way means that finding the future becomes a shared endeavour where outcomes relate not only to gaining new knowledge but also to building new learning relationships.

Reshaping current structures to form an articulated scale of relationships for professional development provides a quite different scenario for professional learning, and diverse new relationships are likely to be forged and blossom within the different kinds of settings. As Smith (1993:101) observes, ‘scale is an active progenitor of specific social processes’; in this instance, conceptualising a scale of relationships and linking it to a locational scale reveals the significance of each in building a new democracy for professional learning.

Inquiry scale

The fourth scale emerges in the process of inquiry and the Roundtable experience reveals that reflexivity gains its strength from the connection between location, dialogue, articulated relationships and the process of achieving new knowledge and other new beginnings. In this way the scale of inquiry begins with personal reflection and questioning, develops in the act of thinking together and then, judging by the experience of the Roundtable, results in innovation and other new beginnings such as new conversations, new inquiring relationships and new knowledge and understanding. Figure 16 depicts this scale of inquiry.

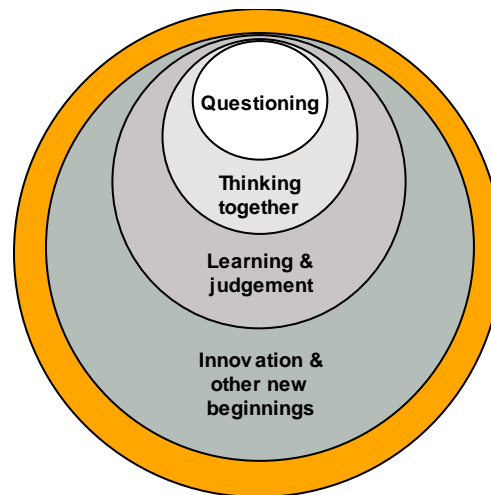


Figure 16: A scale of inquiry for professional learning

Across the scale of inquiry, the principle of inclusion inspires questions and concerns founded in a commitment to contextual sensitivity. This means that in different locations different concerns can and will emerge. These threads of concern guide the reflexive process and also provide the impetus for creativity. Including inquiry within a new democracy for professional development points to the significance of learning which involves the freedom to question, to struggle and voice doubt, to engage in a systematic and collaborative search for meaning and the freedom to engage in inquiry where judgement is associated with the creation of new beginnings.

Indeed, the fourth scale makes it possible to establish what Stenhouse (1975) describes as a systematic approach to public inquiry. The idea of reflexivity and the conception that professional development might occur over time, connects to the idea of systematic inquiry and challenges the notion that professional development is achieved through attendance at one-off training sessions. This shift in thinking does not exclude the notion of targeted training events but suggests the significance of accommodating an ongoing process of inquiry, learning and change which is situated and integrated in different locations.

Developing such a cognitive attitude responds to Arendt's (1958) and MacIntyre's (1999) insistence that we must find a future by connecting thinking and the search for meaning and new knowledge with judgement (Beckett & Hager, 2002; Coulter & Wiens, 2002) and action. In this way professional development is clearly connected

with Arendt's ideas about natality, interpreted here to include the possibility of innovation, reform, renewal, transformation and creation.

Creativity is not a concept often associated with professional development, yet it provides a useful umbrella for focusing on innovation, change and new beginnings. This seems significant in terms of Bruner's (1960:50) observation:

There has been much written about the role of reward and punishment but very little indeed on the role of interest and curiosity and the lure of discovery...(where a learner might have) a chance to exercise his full powers, so that he may discover the pleasure of full and effective functioning.
(Bruner, 1960:50)

Adopting a cognitive attitude and participating in reflexive practices paves the way for creative engagement. In this context, significance emerges as a new found capacity to link learning with the task of finding the future and once again there are multiple connections. In practice, creativity gains meaning from contextual inspiration, increased intimacy, collaborative inquiry, and learning which is organic and directed towards rethinking, reconceptualising and recreating.

The significance of providing an opportunity for creating the future is articulated by Arendt in her exploration of natality. As Cox (1995:7) says:

The metaphor of birth—and this is one of Arendt's key concepts—is about the possibility of finding new beginnings. In the possibility of change lies 'hope', the final figure from Pandora's box of troubles. Without hope we are discouraged from trying.

As with the cultural geographers who 'wanted to find ways of "thinking futures" amid the accelerating instabilities of all kinds of value, meaning and identity' (Bird *et al.*, 1993:xiv) the significance of seeking the same goal applies to others who find themselves in the same situation. However, finding the future through professional development involves more than a one-off learning event and the inquiry scale suggests a structure through which the future might be achieved over time through the adoption of democratic principles within a number of intertwined procedures.

Scale of interests

What is at stake is the revelatory character without which action and speech would lose all human relevance...(t)hese interests constitute, in the word's most literal significance, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together. Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent. (Arendt, 1958:182)

The Roundtable experience demonstrates that threads of interest not only bring substance to professional learning but play an important role in connecting different learning processes. As noted in Chapter 2, Habermas conceptualises the substance of action as comprising a three-part lifeworld—personal, cultural and societal—arguing that people ‘come to an understanding about something in the world’ (Habermas, 1996a:346). The experience of the Roundtable demonstrates that teachers’ interests span this lifeworld and that these three aspects of lifeworld could be thought of as a scale. But Giddens’s (1999:13) observations about the push and pull of globalisation indicate the importance of including a fourth dimension of interest and thus Figure 17 depicts the scope of interests as a four-part scale.

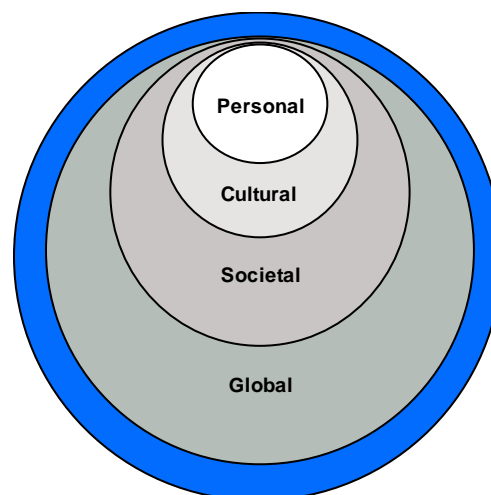


Figure 17: A scale of interests for professional learning

The scale of interests gives contextual shape to professional learning. It draws attention to the importance of including and connecting personal, team, roundtable and network interests and concerns. Case writing has the capacity to reveal this

diversity and the intersection between different interests and concerns. Many authors (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Niemi & Kemmis, 1999) have argued the importance of including and connecting diverse interests and the Roundtable experience demonstrates that adopting this kind of inclusive and connective orientation to learning makes it possible to link the past, present and future; build from experience; address current workplace dilemmas; start from what learners know; and respond to social–global issues such as poverty and social justice.

Making these kinds of connections leads to situated and integrated learning which is relevant, purposeful, practically useful, personally engaging and intellectually stimulating. Participants involved in this kind of learning not only develop technical skills but also enjoy the pursuit of personal and professional inquiry, and the opportunity to work cooperatively and think creatively to shape work practices (Billett, 2001:99) and the world beyond the classroom and the school. Ultimately, connective learning has the chance of being meaningful for the person, the enterprise and the community. These patterns maximise the chance that learning will be useable beyond the learning situation, provide connections between knowledge and structure (Bruner, 1960:32–33) as well as being robust and worthwhile (Billett, 2001:39–40).

Four new places for professional learning

The construction of scale is not simply a spatial solidification or materialization of contested social forces and processes; the corollary also holds. Scale is an active progenitor of specific social processes. In a literal as much as a metaphorical way, scale both *contains* social activity and at the same time provides an already partitioned geography within which social activity *takes place*. Scale demarcates the sites of social contest, the object as well as the resolution of contest...It is geographical scale that defines the boundaries and bounds the identities around which control is exerted *and* contested (Smith, 1993:101).

Having mapped these five distinctive scales it is now important to turn the focus back to the locational scale and ask: When all of these scales are considered as a whole, what does democratic professional development look like for individuals? What does

democratic professional development look like in teams, roundtables and networks? And what is the value in each opportunity? In the first part of this chapter, each scale was presented as a four part process and it would be very neat if the respective parts in each process connected directly from one scale to the next but unfortunately this is not the case. In reality, multiple aspects of each scale intersect in different locations creating a rich learning landscape that is impossible to depict in a simple diagram.

The next step, therefore, is to map the four locations—personal space, teams, roundtables and networks—and their significance will be considered in terms of the different opportunities that each provides for pursuing a range of interests, engaging in dialogue, building learning relationships and conducting inquiry.

A personal space for learning

The experience of the Roundtable highlights the significance of creating a personal learning space. Such a space provides the possibility of focusing attention on the complexity of teaching and learning and on the connections which exist between diverse aspects of teachers' lives. Whatever the shape of a professional development program or activity, each person comes to the activity with distinctive knowledge, assumptions, expectations, interests and needs which reflect the individual and the specific situations in which they find themselves. Professional development which values this diversity sets the foundation for including, integrating and connecting personal threads with other lifeworld threads.

Professional development has traditionally focused on technical interests and recently there has also been a particular emphasis placed on professional learning connected to student performance (Hawley & Valli, 1999: 136–144). Teachers need to keep abreast of curriculum developments as well as the latest ideas about improving student learning outcomes. Indeed, the Roundtable experience shows that teachers appreciate opportunities to learn about new ideas that are of practical value and which improve their day-to-day work in classrooms. While the literature points out that teachers think of professional development in terms of personal growth, gaining knowledge and skills for the classroom as well as skills for improving work organisation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Joyce & Showers, 1995:xv) there seem few opportunities for engaging in professional development which focuses on the personal dimension of

growth. The Roundtable experience reveals the value of taking a broader view. Adopting an inclusive attitude means that professional learning not only involves the technical and practical but also the emotional and critical aspect of teaching and learning. Working in this way means that technical interests are considered in context and applied in a thoughtful way.

Stretching the scope of professional development and facilitating connections between the different dimensions of practice provides an integration and connectedness which is unusual in current conceptions of professional development. The impact of these connections suggests a new understanding of professional development. Instead of being focused on skill development associated with distant agendas, professional development might now be seen as learning which connects the personal, cultural and societal dimensions of teachers' professional lives. Professional learning which is situated in individual experience and integrated into daily routines is likely to be relevant and purposeful for each individual.

In classrooms, teachers make decisions about improving their practice and in many instances the knowledge which informs decision-making is never articulated; it is private learning which rarely finds its way into the public domain. Whether conceived in terms of intimate knowledge (Arendt, 1958; Giddens, 1992) or 'know how' (Beckett & Hager, 2002), this private knowledge is an untapped resource in the context of professional development, research and innovation. Loughran (1999:3) argues that teachers' knowledge needs to be 'better understood, to be helpful, informative and valuable to the profession and the education community at large'. Yet Connell (1985:171) observes that:

...it is extremely difficult for a teacher to describe her knowledge of how to teach, to express it in formulas. Much of it takes the form of intuitive decisions about what to do at a given moment in a given classroom, how to respond to a given student's difficulty in grasping a given point... Yet this *is* knowledge, and very important knowledge which should be given a full measure of respect in the process of educational reform.

These observations all suggest a need to create a place in which teachers' knowledge can be articulated and the Roundtable experience demonstrates that case writing provides a personal space. It is therefore an extremely successful strategy for

translating the intimate detail of teachers' practical and emotional work into written form. Case writing creates a place for recalling and recounting incidents of practice and provides an opportunity to achieve what Bauman (2000) would term a pursuit of self-identification and Habermas (1996b) a process for revealing segments of reality. Arendt (1958) conceptualises this kind of expression as storytelling and she highlights the political significance of telling stories that bring what has been private into the public realm. In this way case writing promotes listening to self and gives shape to the personal learning space.

Case writing builds on the informal practice of exchanging anecdotes in transient spaces such as corridors and car parks and provides a more formal opportunity to express intimate knowledge about worker, work and workplace in such a way that reveals detail, insight, emotion and connection. From both a writer's and reader's perspective cases provide a significant personal learning opportunity because they promote reflection and focus attention on the stories that are judged to be worth telling. It would appear that increasing the diversity of stories produces what Hawley (1999) would call an information rich learning environment. There is however a danger in expecting that case writing will suit everyone and if Roundtable members are any indication, there will be people in every group for whom alternative strategies—photographs, diagrams, flow charts, mind maps and drawings to name just a few visual options—will be needed in order to facilitate self-identification and articulation. If written cases are the only option then some voices will in effect be excluded.

Adding to the importance of articulating experience and knowledge, the freedom to ask questions is at the heart of personal learning; understanding the scope and role of questioning adds another layer of complexity to the personal space. Questioning provides an opportunity for asking self reflective questions and these questions mirror educators' concerns and interests. Professional development which features a questioning environment challenges the tendency towards a technical approach to teaching and learning. The status quo would have the content of teachers' professional development dictated by an unquestioning approach to implementing government policies and programs or the theory associated with university-driven teacher education. In contrast, the experience of the Western Melbourne Roundtable shows

the significance of stepping beyond the technical approach and gaining inspiration for learning from the connection between personal, cultural and societal questions as they emerge in context. Bruner (1960:40) observes that:

...it is easy to ask trivial questions...It is also easy to ask impossibly difficult questions. The trick is to find the medium question that can be answered and that takes you somewhere.

The Roundtable experience shows that by identifying personal questions individual teachers achieve a degree of control which encourages them to feel ownership for both their own and their students' growth. In the same way as teachers strive to teach school-age students the skill of critical literacy, a new democracy for professional development promotes a critical approach to professional learning by bringing a questioning and reflective approach to understanding the world and the process of change. This makes it possible for individuals to confront pressing concerns such as student disengagement and the broader demands of achieving social justice and a civil society. The scope of questions influences the scope of professional development and each new question presents another challenge in seeking the future. Professional development which is based in individual questions signals a commitment to inclusivity, plurality and diversity and it is therefore important to check by asking: Whose concerns are included/excluded?

The combination of case writing and reflective questioning provides individuals with an opportunity to listen to themselves; identify personal interests and concerns; get to know themselves better; gain a deeper understanding about their relationship to the world; voice opinions and preferences; speak for themselves; and disclose details about themselves to others. Ultimately, it is in storytelling that struggle, doubt and questions emerge and these set the scene for inquiry, learning and the creation of new beginnings, in effect creating what (Habermas, 1999:140) would term a discourse of self understanding.

This act of observation and reflection begins the process of recognising teachers' intuitive knowledge and provides the foundation for bringing different and diverse interests and concerns into a public arena. It also encourages people to recognise and take responsibility for their own learning, and prepares them to engage in dialogic relationships which are based in a commitment to reciprocity and the expectation of

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mutual rewards. This suggests the value of creating a scale of opportunities for professional learning that begins with the personal, and in doing so forms a foundation for professional learning which is a shared endeavour in ever-expanding forums such as teams, roundtables and networks.

Learning in teams

The Roundtable experience demonstrates the significance of connecting the personal space with collaborative endeavours. The personal space is enhanced when there are team opportunities that enable people to work and learn together. Forming voluntary, interest-based, workplace teams provides new opportunities for learning which are close to the classroom. Such opportunities differ significantly from the compulsory involvement in teams which are focused on school organisation and accountability.

In order to achieve plurality and diversity, inclusive opportunities need to be actively created so that people have the freedom to participate and to participate voluntarily. Local teams have a key role in this regard and there is a need to develop both an awareness of the things that influence people's desire to participate in a voluntary way as well as any qualifications, restrictions or requirements which might structurally exclude or interfere with people's freedom to participate. The experience of the Roundtable demonstrates the significance of being conscious of those who are included and those who are excluded, confirming Sachs's (2003:147) observations about the value of aiming for inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness.

Voluntary action adds a particular dimension to inclusion yet it is important not to assume that voluntary participation is a simple matter of choice. Arendt (1978:5) stresses the importance of opportunities where people can choose to participate and contrasts structural freedoms with an '*inner* disposition' in which people '*feel free*'. The Roundtable experience indicates that some individuals are more likely than others to feel comfortable about working and learning in voluntary teams. Ultimately, voluntary teams are shaped by those people who choose to participate and there is clear value in encouraging the broadest participation possible. As Sachs (2003) argues, 'the broader the constituency and range of interests and expertise the greater the chance there might be for mobilizing the interests of broad sectors of society'.

Like the voluntary and involving nature of civic groups (Cox, 1995), people will choose to participate, sometimes without knowing exactly why, where the activity seems contextually legitimate or holds meaning in other ways. In the Roundtable people chose to participate because the activity seemed relevant, purposeful or made a connection in one way or another. Across the group, people joined because the opportunity seemed to:

- reflect valued principles
- include identifiable and interesting expectations
- connect with a vision
- provide possibilities for extending current activities
- stir a sense of excitement
- build on existing relationships
- promise collaboration, support and new relationships
- promise practical and action based learning.

Local teams provide a forum for bringing many and varied self-identifications into a safe, but public domain where they might become the substance around which collaborative inquiry is initiated, learning achieved and new beginnings created. The opportunity differs significantly from the mandated agenda in compulsory workplace teams. Forming teams such as Links teams provides the freedom to be different—not only to initiate and pursue projects outside the mainstream agenda but also to introduce system initiatives in a way that connects them with existing practice in a critical and thoughtful way.

While the personal space provides an opportunity for individuals to gain a greater self awareness, teams provide a different kind of dialogic opportunity, one in which it is possible to air and respond to stories and the Roundtable experience demonstrates that this happens in a number of different ways. Firstly, conversation in collegial teams makes it possible for storytellers to test and explore their stories in order to gain a deeper understanding prior to writing. It is almost impossible for teachers to leap

straight into case writing and in most instances finding a place for oral storytelling is a necessary first step in supporting individuals to recount and think about their experiences as a precursor to recording them in cases. When people have the space to stop, think and encapsulate their experiences, opinions and feelings by telling their stories to others they engage in an interactive discourse of self understanding and teams play an important role in this regard. Dialogic opportunities in teams can therefore be associated with a shift from practical to discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984) and the development of communicative competence (Habermas, 1996b). Professional development which facilitates the translation of stories into cases, and provides opportunities to listen and read, demonstrates a commitment to inclusion, diversity and pluralism and the experience of the Roundtable suggests that this kind of activity is highly significant in giving shape to the team space.

Looking from another perspective, stories give team members something to think about and once voiced, these stories become an invitation to others to look together, in order to develop a sense of professionalism and to find new beginnings. In this way, storytelling is not only significant for the storyteller but also for the listener and reader. Each time a story is disclosed, orally or otherwise, it provides an opportunity for people to ‘visit’ (Arendt, 1958) their colleague’s world and the experience of the Western Melbourne Roundtable shows that these opportunities also promote learning and self reflection. In effect storytelling establishes a basis for further dialogue in teams.

Sharing intimate knowledge and stories leads to intimate conversations and understanding. In other words, intimate dialogue can be associated with inclusion, expression, interaction and cognition and the creation of opportunities based on these principles paves the way for achieving meaningful professional development. In addition to face-to-face responses to cases, written commentaries provide another dialogic alternative. In this instance, interaction between writer and commentator continues the process of telling and listening and begins the collaborative task of gaining a deeper understanding in teams.

Articulating practice—whether orally, in written form, through diagrams or some other medium—demands that the storyteller finds a language that does justice to the story and is comprehensible to others. It is critical to search for and negotiate the

‘right’ language for expression and it seems, as a general rule, that the right language will be recognisable in its capacity to provide a rich picture which connects the personal, practical and ethical dimensions of experience. Finding the right language facilitates communication of intimate knowledge and paves the way for a deeper, more intimate understanding. Conversely, when there is no freedom to choose a language which fits the situation or when a common language is imposed it leads to confusion, as well as a lack of richness and authenticity. This has clear implications for democratic professional development in terms of ownership and authenticity of voice. When the storyteller identifies a story and tells it in the right language it means that the story will ‘ring true’ and therefore carry some authority. Keeping true to the stories of practice ensures comprehensibility and invites interactions which are caring and respectful.

The act of telling and listening to stories brings team members closer together and friendships result from the intimacy of shared stories and expressive learning experiences; as Arendt (1958) observes, it is in telling stories that the process of reconciliation begins. The Roundtable experience demonstrates the connection between telling stories, reconciliation and the blossoming of new relationships in teams—friendships grew between teachers, between teachers and students and between teachers and their university colleagues.

Friendships are rarely mentioned in the literature on professional learning yet in the context of professional development they are both impetus and outcome; friendships can lead people into new learning as well as being an outcome of shared learning experiences. The space created by teams engaged in telling and listening provides an opportunity for people to get to know each other and in teams that meet frequently, close relationships form. Indeed, Roundtable experience shows that through intensive professional development opportunities, and through connections maintained over time, there is a possibility that friendships, characterised by trust, risk taking and respect, may form across the locational scale.

While friendships can provide increased support they can also cause new friction; in the formation of close relationships there is a danger of excluding others. As Marion Young (1990:300) warns, when people feel comfortable in their face-to-face interactions with people like themselves this too often tends towards a ‘desire for

social wholeness and identification that underlies racism and ethnic chauvinism on the one hand and political sectarianism on the other' (McDowell, 1999:120). Experiences across the scale of the Roundtable show that as close relationships form other people feel excluded; there emerges a new need to engage in reconciliation in order to rebuild and recreate damaged relations.

Teams which take their shape from the act of telling and listening, and which open the way for friendships to grow, are the kind of place in which university and school colleagues can work together to generate a deeper understanding and new knowledge both locally and cross-contextually. Professional development which promotes this intersection between intimacy and cooperation leads to participation in intimate conversations which facilitate the sharing of intimate knowledge and insights with others and the possibility of testing the value of knowledge that might seem mundane. It is through this inclusive—expressive cooperation that it is possible to achieve both an intimate self understanding as well as participate in the collaborative generation of knowledge about teaching and learning. Intimate engagement in teams provides a foundation for deeper understanding, learning and the task of finding the future.

While the personal space provides an opportunity for personal reflection and questioning, thinking together in teams adds another dimension to professional learning. When individuals work in teams there emerges a new opportunity to connect personal inquiry with questions pertaining to the local cultural context. In British Columbia a group of researchers, teachers and leaders observed that:

...research activities are acts of listening and dialogue, a much more reciprocal way of relating than previous, more traditional professional development experiences that were deep-rooted in the 'telling' stance.
(Grimmett & Dockendorf, 1999:103)

When a dialogic process is adopted by teams it invites interaction between colleagues and results in shifts in the learning approach. As people talk and listen to each other, and engage in collaborative reflection, trust develops and a challenging, questioning environment can be negotiated. People learn there is value in each others' opinions, that it is possible to create questions and to challenge each other—sometimes with 'hard' questions—in a helpful, encouraging, patient and supportive way. This

introduces a new level of collectivity and diversity into the critical, questioning dimension of finding the future.

In addition to expressing the detail of context, the impetus to learn provides an opportunity for expressing the struggle and doubt which is associated with finding new beginnings. Once again interconnections are obvious in the collective effort to seek the new knowledge and learning which contributes to change. The joint ambitions of action research—improvement and involvement (Grundy, 1995)—meet in the exercise of cognitive freedom. In teams, struggle and doubt can be balanced with the opportunity to share, appreciate, encourage, support and build new relationships founded on mutual trust.

The expression of contextual detail in stories creates the basis for inquiring interactions between people, and through a collaborative reflective process another level of awareness is gained. In this scenario inquiry becomes a shared endeavour and outcomes relate not only to inquiry but to the task of building of research relationships in teams. At a personal level connecting the dialogic flow with the anticipation of new beginnings leads people to think differently and achieve a deeper understanding about their world while at a group level, articulated relationships connected with a creative expectation lead to the growth of inquiring relationships focused on shared interests. This provides a foundation for the important task of disseminating research and learning beyond the team and the local level so that individual and team learning might have an impact on both school and university culture in terms of professional development, research practice and teacher education.

Aiming for plurality in participation and seeking to make connections between diverse interests necessarily leads to tension, yet it is not the kind of tension which results from the pressure of external expectations or a fixed framework of ethics but instead, the pressure of critical issues which are felt by those involved in the team. Working inclusively acknowledges the need to develop ways of understanding self and others as learners, the importance of skills development in generating knowledge then connecting it to the creative endeavour and last but not least the importance of building relationships which mean that there is a unity in ‘finding’ the future.

Therefore, in addition to the personal reconciliation that is made possible through interaction, there also seems to be a possibility of reconciling the tension between parallel reform movements. In reality, as Beckett and Hager (2002) indicate, it is almost impossible to proceed without acknowledging and including the pressures of globalisation and systemic interests and so it seems that democratic professional development in teams needs to be based on a belief that the future might be found by investigating the connection between systems and lifeworld. This possibility emerges if, as Bauman (2000) suggests, we shift the focus from taking and holding an ethical position to a new way of working in which the future is confronted, debated and negotiated within a democratic procedural framework that ensures inclusion, expression and cooperation.

Learning in roundtables

Roundtables provide a third place for professional development—an opportunity for people from different workplace teams to cluster together. Being one step away from workplace teams and two steps from the personal space, roundtables provide an opportunity to build on the learning achieved in personal spaces and teams and to make connections between the interests of individuals and teams and community or regional concerns. At a time when there is encouragement for schools to compete against each other, and one neighbourhood school is being compared with the next, this kind of collaborative activity between schools challenges the trend.

The experience of the Roundtable indicates that when roundtable work is organised as an extension of the personal and team space, learning continues to be shaped by the interests and concerns of participating individuals and groups. However, expanding involvement to a place beyond distinctive work locations increases group diversity, thereby swelling the range of concerns that might be included and enhancing the possibility of cross-site connections being made. In teams the focus is likely to concentrate on local interests and concerns, whereas in roundtables the dialogue expands to reflect the diversity of interests brought by the group. Significantly, when cases are used by roundtables as inspiration for conversation, diverse interests can be accommodated while the focus remains situated in and connected to personal experience. In this way personal and group concerns are integrated and a high level of relevance and purposefulness is achieved.

This study reveals that roundtables play a particular role in supporting writing, promoting the idea that there is value in writing as well as coordinating skill development. When difficulties are experienced across teams, roundtables also play an important role in exploring dilemmas and supporting individuals and groups to take the next step.

Roundtables also provide new opportunities for telling and listening; as with teams the place created by a roundtable provides both stage and audience. But in this instance the interaction is at a scale beyond the local school, providing a chance for individuals and teams to reveal their experiences and thoughts to a broader audience and to exchange ideas in an environment characterised by diverse interests and concerns. In the usual scaled experience of professional learning, there are few opportunities for teachers to move beyond the school to share their experience and learning and even fewer opportunities where they can shape the agenda. Creating this kind of place enables individuals and teams to make new connections, to find new opportunities for cooperation and to encounter broader ideas about innovation.

The experience of the Western Melbourne Roundtable demonstrates that the place provided by a roundtable supports the process of moving towards a deeper understanding and opens the way for activities such as identifying overarching concerns, seeking shared principles or developing and testing protocols. Having achieved these outcomes a roundtable can also play a significant role in supporting the dissemination and publication of both individual and group work.

Both the self awareness achieved in a personal space and the friendships built in teams create a solid foundation for participating in professional learning activities beyond the local context. When participation extends to a roundtable environment people are exposed to new opportunities for increasing self awareness and developing friendships. However, because roundtables are likely to meet less frequently than teams, they also foster different kinds of relationships. These professional partnerships do not necessarily display the same level of intimacy as friendships but in some instances this is an advantage as they provide a different kind of opportunity for making connections and bridging gaps. In order to build partnerships it is necessary to recognise any tensions which may have resulted from past patterns of poor communication, unexplored territorial issues, unequal power (Gore, 1995),

contradictions or pressures created by parallel reform agendas. Bringing tension into the open means that the processes of understanding and reconciliation might begin. Because of their distance from the personal–local context, roundtables can provide an opportunity to explore and negotiate around contentious issues and make a significant contribution towards initiating and supporting the process of reconciliation.

In relation to the observed tensions between school and university educators (Somekh, 1994; Gore, 1995; Harradine, 1995; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995; Peters *et al.*, 1996a; Southern Cross Roundtable Portrayal Evaluation Team, 1996; Sachs, 2003), the Roundtable experience demonstrates the significance of seeking reconciliation by working together in different places. At a personal level, adopting case writing means that school and university educators are both spectator and actor in relation to their own and each other's professional learning. In teams it is possible to build friendships and partnerships based in storytelling and visiting. Exercising this freedom of expression supports the reconciliation process as the subsequent dialogue contributes to a deeper understanding of each other's 'castles' (Somekh, 1994) and opens the possibility of negotiating new roles within new relationships. In the place created by a roundtable, reconciliation is achieved through a preparedness to discuss thorny issues and to find a new equality based on care and responsibility as well as debate and negotiation.

While roundtables foster plurality and inclusivity, and promote the sense of a learning community, there are a number of barriers which can impact on the ability of roundtables to achieve these goals. As the Western Melbourne Roundtable practice shows, the further the location of professional development is from the classroom, the less chance there is of maintaining the level of participation that is achieved in a local team. In some instances this might be the result of structural barriers such as representative rather than whole team participation. But equally, the barrier might result from self exclusion and as some teachers in the Roundtable argued, the relevance to student, school and teacher decreases with distance from the classroom. Teachers who hold this view may choose not to leave classroom and school, even when there is an opportunity to extend the scale of their professional learning. This sets a challenge to create a place which has some distance from the classroom yet is

organised in such a way that participants feel the learning is situated, integrated, relevant and purposeful.

When it comes to the role of roundtables in contributing to a research agenda, the Western Melbourne Roundtable experience demonstrates that roundtables can support and extend personal and team inquiry-based learning by providing a different kind of place for questioning. With a critical awareness of the scale of interests, roundtables can facilitate connections between various threads of concern; personal questions, questions inspired by teams and the questions of a nation and globalised world can be brought together. In an action research way, being open to systematic inquiry seems to allow for the possibility of addressing issues of social justice which do not necessarily emerge in practice-based learning. However, this is not an automatic aspect of roundtable work and Roundtable experience shows that opportunities to connect a scale of concerns need to be actively created.

Collaborative inquiry in roundtables provides another opportunity for thinking together, for linking practice, theory and action. This learning and judgement increases the chance that new knowledge will inform practice for both school and university educators. The exercise of inquiry in roundtables has the capacity to focus on learning across the personal team and roundtable scale and Roundtable experience shows that taking responsibility for collaborative reflection is best undertaken at this scale.

Learning in networks

Networks provide a fourth place for professional development and a further opportunity to work collaboratively. Networks link individuals, teams, roundtables and the wider profession. Stretching the scale in this way further enhances the prospect of achieving plurality and diversity by bringing many people, their varied experiences and their different cultural contexts together. While the place created by a network has a key role in connecting roundtables it also plays a significant part in linking and extending the work of individuals and teams. Maintaining these links between and across locational scales ensures that learning continues to be situated, integrated, relevant and purposeful for individuals, teams and learning communities.

Working across locational scales is a two-way process. Looking from a local perspective it is clear that participation in networks provides information and inspiration for individuals and teams. Conversely, while continuing to work locally it is possible to feel connected to the world beyond the classroom and the school. Based on the relationship between the Western Melbourne Roundtable, the ILP and the NSN it is clear that networks can have a crucial role in articulating philosophical parameters as well as connecting individuals and teams with broader agendas. Looking from the network perspective, working in this way means that the broader social and educational landscape can be closely connected to personal, local and regional contexts. Articulating learning in such a manner reveals a reciprocal and mutual benefit which is achieved by connecting the different aspects of scale, and yet indicates that scale needs to be open-ended enough to respond to social forces and processes which emerge in diverse situations. In this formation a strong link is created connecting global and personal.

While case writing demonstrates that people learn in the midst of their work, working together across a network provides different possibilities for shifting learning from the private into the public domain. The roundtable experience shows the significance of extending learning in steps starting with the step of presenting stories to a local team, then to a roundtable and ultimately to a broader network. By creating a space for oral or written presentation networks provides an opportunity in which intimate and heartfelt insights can be revealed to the broadest audience. From the perspective of audience, a network provides a place in which diverse ideas can be presented and inspiration for learning gained. This kind of place is realised when cases and commentaries are used in workshops or conference presentations or alternatively when they are published in group and theme-related reports or in articles for national newsletters, magazines, journals and books.

Roundtable experience shows that from the point of view of the storyteller, the process of collecting, sorting, selecting and generally preparing for publication provides yet another opportunity to gain new insights. When an individual or a group is involved in collecting and preparing new knowledge for publication, ideas are linked and connections are drawn between the experiences of individuals and sites.

In addition to the value of diverse friendships and partnerships between educators in teams and roundtables, there is also value in the associations formed with educators who are distant from the local connections. While associations are possible across the locational scale the infrequent connections made in networks are most likely to fit into this category. Like friendships, professional associations are a little-mentioned dimension of professional learning relationships, yet the Roundtable experience demonstrates that sometimes, just knowing that others are facing the same dilemmas, or knowing that someone wants to swap ideas, can change an individual's perceptions about learning and their place in the world.

Trying to facilitate professional associations is a challenge because there are few existing foundations from which to build such articulated connections. Education systems are state-based which means there is little cooperation across state boundaries. This leaves the responsibility for initiation of professional associations to national interests such as unions, professional associations or academic networks and so there is a question about how this might be achieved outside the agendas of specific interest groups. The Innovative Links Project and the National Schools Network facilitated this aspect of Roundtable relationships. They had a particular role and were funded to carry out this work. Given the lack of naturally occurring national coordination of teacher learning in Australia, and the lack of funding possibilities, there is another question about how the value of this work might be recognised and integrated into existing national or state-based structures.

While there is widespread agreement that collaboration, cooperation and collectivism are an important aspect of professional development, the idea of scaled or purposefully articulated relationships is not evident in the literature on professional learning, adult learning, workplace learning or action research. If the aim is to achieve learning which is the outcome of a collaborative endeavour then the likelihood of this is strengthened when practitioners have a choice about learning together with their colleagues in different kinds of professional relationships both within local and broader community networks. It seems that having an opportunity to work cooperatively in diverse locations and to enjoy different kinds of relationships makes people feel less isolated and generally more connected in the world. Based on the Roundtable experience there are clear indications that diverse interactions promote

connectivity and enhance learning. Considered in this way the importance of professional development in supporting improved student learning outcomes is connected to the growth of diverse and articulated professional relationships.

Networks also have a clear role in facilitating inquiry that is focused on questions which emerge at a national or even an international scale. Questions generated in the context of a network have the capacity to bring people and ideas together⁷⁴. Networks can also play a role in making connections between action research projects. This might be expressed as a formal expectation of collaborative and systematic inquiry but could be extended through a process of reporting and publishing in network forums. This would be particularly significant in situations where the network challenged the idea that action research findings are necessarily restricted to the context in which they are produced and facilitated further dialogue aimed at reaching fuzzy generalisations (Bassey, 2001) or cross-contextual understanding.

Learning to find the future

Where the past has lost its hold, or becomes one ‘reason’ among others for doing what one does, pre-existing habits are only a limited guide to action; while the future, open to numerous ‘scenarios’, becomes of compelling interest. (Giddens, 1994:93)

Teachers need to be able to meet the uncertainty and challenge of a changing world and this study demonstrates the significance of rethinking and reconstructing professional development in order to meet these demands. The hypothesis articulated in Chapter 3 was that the combined activities of the Western Melbourne Roundtable—including case writing, building partnerships and engaging in action research—made a significant contribution to the professional development of those involved. This study has not only confirmed this proposition but developed a scenario which connects professional learning with the need to find the future.

⁷⁴ Examples of questions that have the capacity to bring people together include the NSN question: What is it about the way our work is organised that gets in the way of students’ learning? (White, 1995) or the PEEL question: How can we help our students to be active (rather than remain as passive) learners? (Loughran, 1999).

Taking the first step involves recognising the value of moving beyond one-off professional learning experiences and reconceptualising professional development as a multi-layered democratic procedure. In the literature review—based on Yeatman's (1996:49), Habermas's (1999), Giddens's (1999) and Bauman's (2000:178) views that everything must be contested and negotiated—a question was posed about what an achieved-procedural kind of democracy might look like in practice and what the repercussions of such actions might be in relation to professional development.

Based on the experience of the Western Melbourne Roundtable, it has been argued in this chapter that procedurally democratic professional development can be thought of as a number of intertwined processes, or scales, which combine to shape learning. While each scale can be associated with specific principles and a particular kind of engagement, ultimately—and aligning with the argument against adopting fixed ethical frameworks (Giddens, 1999; Habermas, 1999; Bauman, 2000)—any aspect can be contested, negotiated and moulded into a shared and evolving position.

New, democratic learning opportunities have to be actively produced and shaped and four articulated 'places' for learning—personal spaces, teams, roundtables and networks—have been given prominence in this chapter. Each has been defined according to the democratic principles and processes which combine in that location to produce a quality of engagement which is variously connective, intimate, cooperative and creative. In this scenario, each aspect of action is interconnected and it is the interaction between different principles and processes which produces new depth and complexity and a different kind of meaning for professional development. Together, these places combine to form a powerful model for learning which makes it possible to connect the past, present and future.

Learning does not happen in isolation and allowing for the participation and contribution of many people and organisations enhances the scope and richness of any professional learning activity—this means including differing situations, diverse interests and concerns, and a variety of starting points and expectations. There is criticism of decontextualised professional learning (Beckett & Hager, 2002:116) and while there is an emerging agreement about the strength of teacher development which is based in the workplace (Hawley & Valli, 1999: 136–144) there are those who have argued that it is under-theorised (Smyth, 1999:67) and poorly valued in

comparison to the educational mainstream (Beckett & Hager, 2002:125). Taking into account these arguments about the shortcomings of workplace learning it is clear that whether the primary goal is professional development, innovation or action research, the workplace is usually the best place to begin. But if the Roundtable experience is anything to go by, it is only a beginning; the groundedness which is gained through workplace learning is just the first step in a process which involves extending democratic professional development across a scale of locations. The practice of scaling professional development—from the teacher/case writer, to the team, the roundtable, the network and the world—is particularly revealing and signifies the value of actively sharing with others beyond the workplace.

Paying attention to the shape of communicative practices seems to go right to the heart of what it means to engage in procedural democracy. The value of talk, the chance to tell revealing stories, the implicit invitation for others to visit all suggest a commitment to describing, understanding and sharing both routine and critical incidents in current practice. Subsequent dialogue—focused on reaching a deeper understanding—and judgement connected to innovation, indicate the value of expression, interaction and cognition in stimulating the creativity associated with finding the future.

Building relationships is another cornerstone of democratic professional development. Often conceived in terms of partnerships, the Roundtable experience reveals that many different kinds of working relationships combine to form a ‘web’ or articulated network of learning moments. Through the exercise of a complex ethic of interaction, procedural democracy leads not only to learning but to enhanced social connections. Opportunities to enjoy different kinds of professional relationships, to strengthen existing relationships, to build new relationships, to reconcile tensions, to form relationships beyond the school, have a significant impact on the learning experience of individuals and teams. In this way there is a close connection between creating new knowledge, new relationships and finding the future.

Scaled action gives new knowledge and learning value beyond the workplace and suggests that over time increasing numbers of people might have a chance to participate in theorising based in practice. This re-conception changes the whole idea of workplace learning so that knowledge previously considered applicable only in

context, and not transferable or generalisable to other situations, can now be shared, adapted and applied across different sites and contexts in a dialogic and cooperative climate.

Procedurally democratic professional development comes together in the powerful connection between context, dialogue, collaboration and cognition. Individually and in combination each layer of action contributes a forward looking overlay to learning. It is clear from this study that professional development conducted in this way provides a significant alternative and delivers more than individual professional learning. When experienced as a number of intertwined processes located in different but articulated places, professional development results in personal, group and organisational learning with each contributing to the richness of the other. This kind of learning is not stuck in the past or confined to the present but a pathway to finding the future.

Chapter 10: Mapping validity in democratic research

Given the nature of this study it seems crucial to pause at this point and reflect on the research. It seems particularly important to think about the principles, processes and engagement which characterised the inquiry and to make connections between a number of issues: the decision to mirror the work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable in the methodology, the ongoing discussion about validity and trustworthiness in research, Giddens's (1999:75) call for a deepening of democracy in all levels of action and the need to meet the challenge of a rapidly changing world.

The methodology for this study⁷⁵ was designed to reflect both the democratic principles associated with the Roundtable and the ideas and concepts which emerged in the literature review. Therefore the purpose of this chapter is to map the different layers of democratic action and reflect on the significance of conducting qualitative research that is inspired by context, dialogue, collaboration and inquiry. By proceeding in this way, the same framework and methodology which have shaped preceding chapters are used to guide this reflection.

Looking again to documentary records to gain a deeper understanding⁷⁶, this reflection is informed by the documents produced by the researcher during this study. Emails, records of meetings, transcripts of interviews, journal entries, and especially researcher cases and commentaries⁷⁷ all provide different insights into the quality of research engagement. By taking this approach it appears possible to reveal another layer of understanding about democratic action and to shed light on the task of learning to find the future.

Based on the demands associated with Roundtable principles, and the assumed need for triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a:214), the study was designed to support the claim for both trustworthiness and validity on a number of levels:

⁷⁵ The methodology is described in detail in Chapter 3.

⁷⁶ Document analysis was a key strategy in gaining a deeper understanding about the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

⁷⁷ Excerpts from these research documents are included in Appendix Z.

- *Data triangulation* was to be achieved through the use of a variety of data sources including cases and commentaries, interview transcripts and school reports.
- *Investigator triangulation* was to be achieved by including the voices of the researcher and Roundtable participants—the document authors and members of teams.
- *Methodological triangulation* was to be achieved through the use of multiple methods including document analysis, individual and group interviews and researcher's journal.
- *Theoretical triangulation* was to be achieved through the application of multiple perspectives to the data as suggested at the end of the literature review.

Having completed this study the multiplicity of issues involved in understanding validity seems even greater, yet Ely's (1991, 1996:95) advice provides inspiration to construct a simple way of talking about these ideas:

What seems important for researchers in any paradigm is to understand thoroughly what needs doing in order for their research to be trustworthy and to work to communicate that as clearly and as non-defensively as possible.

The aim then in the following pages is to describe as clearly as possible some emerging ideas about the layers of democracy which shaped this study, and to present each layer in terms of what this means for validity.

While on one level it seems entirely reasonable to shape the following discussion using the different kinds of triangulation described above, on another it seems a deeper understanding would be gained by once again drawing on Smith's ideas about scaling places. Therefore, following the geographical approach established in earlier chapters, this chapter seeks a deeper understanding about democratic research practices by mapping place and the scale of social action evident in this study. As noted in previous chapters, Smith (1993) contends that it is important to acknowledge and think about different levels of activity. He sees 'the politics of daily life as inherently spatial' (1993:90) and believes that scale is actively produced and open-ended. In order to support this kind of understanding he has developed the idea of 'scaling places'—from the scale of the body to the global scale—as a strategy for

exploring connected action. Smith (1993), McDowell (1999) and Massey (1993) have all argued that scale not only contains but produces different kinds of places and that these can be better understood through an examination of the factors which coincide in each location. They argue that the criteria of difference, or uniqueness, can be seen in social relations and processes that span the local–global scale.

Layers of democratic research

As noted, methodological triangulation in this study was to be achieved through the use of multiple methods including document analysis, individual and group interviews and a researcher's journal. Leaving aside the researcher's journal for a moment, Smyth and Hattam (2001) in their exploration of students who were 'dropping out' of school identified similar phases: finding the voices; in-depth conversations about issues; and checking back (Smyth & Hattam, 2001:408). Anderson and Herr (1999) conceptualise the use of a variety of methods, or data sources, as process validity. Yet when thought of in spatial terms, the decision to create four research 'places' looks more like a locational scale (see Figure 18). Thinking in this way points to the significance of using a researcher's journal, thereby creating a place close to the body. Gradually expanding outwards, the second space is created through the collection of Roundtable documents including cases and commentaries; the third space by inviting all members of the Roundtable to participate in one-to-one conversations (individual interviews); and finally, the fourth dialogic space is created through group interviews.

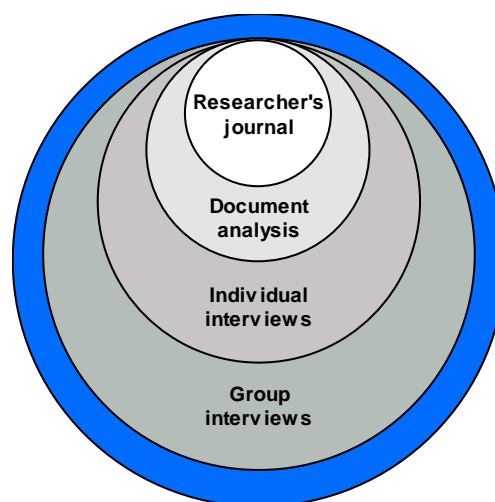


Figure 18: Scaling research places

Thought of in this way it is possible to argue that locational validity means creating articulated places which start from the body and expand to include those places that are close to home and those that are more regionally oriented, gradually expanding outwards. As Smith (1993:101) notes, each place becomes a site for ‘contested social forces and processes’ but also ‘an active progenitor of specific social processes’. Therefore the quality of each of these places needs to be understood through the meeting of different layers of democratic action in each of these places. On the basis of evidence collected during this study it is possible to argue that a new understanding about democracy in research can be achieved by describing and making connections between the four places and the associated scales—a contextual scale, a dialogic scale, a collaborative scale and a scale of inquiry—and each one will be explored below.

Contextual democracy

The principle of inclusion influenced the scope of research interests and set the scene for research which was contextually situated. In order to achieve contextual democracy it was necessary to include diverse contexts and in doing so to recognise and value the researcher’s personal interests, the diversity of Roundtable interests, trends in education and professional development and a changing global context (see Figure 19).

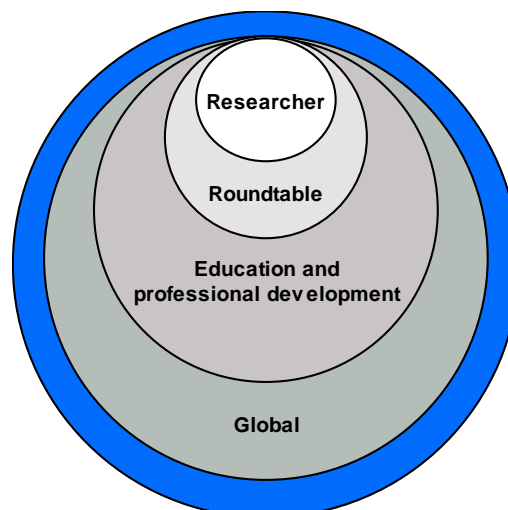


Figure 19: Scaling research interests

Personal

At the level of the body this study was shaped by the scale of researcher experiences, self identifications and passions. The interests were recorded in the researcher's journal and based on the documented evidence. It was evident that in most instances a chain of connections led to particular books and ideas.

During earlier studies I had been introduced to the work of Anthony Giddens and as I began this study his Reith Lectures on globalisation inspired me to return to his earlier work on structuration and reawakened my interest in global change. Inspired by friends and colleagues, fiction and non-fiction, different chains of events led me to explore the ideas of Arendt, Habermas and the work of cultural geographers including Smith, Massey and McDowell. All of these connections fanned my desire to understand professional development in different ways—in terms of finding the future, creating spaces, democratising democracy, the *vita activa*, communicative action as well as structuration and reflexivity. (Excerpts from researcher's journal p515, 13 December 2001)

Roundtable

Including the scale of interests identified by members of the Roundtable was the key factor in shaping this study.

...I knew that I wanted to keep the cases whole, not to segment them and not to let the issues lose connection with the contexts in which they emerged. I wanted the Roundtable teachers' voices to remain central, to keep the intensity and the passion alive...(Excerpts from researcher's journal p515, 21/7/01)

Inclusion meant focusing on diverse interests and concerns and in order to paint a rich and intimate picture of Roundtable members and their activities, it was the researcher's role to ensure that all interests, concerns, questions, voices, emotions and ideas were included. This was especially significant when there was evidence of tension, a lone voice, the need for connection or reconciliation. Document analysis and the conduct of individual and group interviews extended the opportunity for dialogue which had been afforded by the Roundtable and shaped the process of identifying and connecting these diverse interests. As a result, research dialogue ranged far and wide. By creating these research places Roundtable members were able

to reflect on many levels—personal interests, workplace and Roundtable culture, the business of teaching and learning, the work of the Roundtable as well as observations about education in a globalised world.

Educational and global

There were two significant aspects in seeking to understand and make connections between the local and the global. Firstly, the research process was designed to identify observations made by members of the Roundtable about the connections they saw between their work and the world beyond the Roundtable. The second activity, the task of reviewing the literature, ensured that connections were made between the local and global. By valuing and combining the knowledge residing with Roundtable members and the literature it was possible to achieve a kind of research which was integrated, contextually situated on different levels, and relevant and purposeful not just for the researcher and members of the Roundtable but also for the world beyond the Roundtable.

Contextual validity

Given these reflections it seems possible to pose some tentative ideas, or fuzzy generalisations (Bassey, 2001), about the characteristics of contextual validity. In general it seems that contextual validity is achieved in research which is shaped by an inclusive attitude, is contextually situated, creates inclusive research opportunities and makes connections aimed at achieving meaningful engagement.

An inclusive attitude is evident in research which achieves the participation of many (plurality), different (diversity) people who have a choice about participating (voluntarism). Plurality and diversity are encouraged through the creation of inclusive research opportunities. It seems in the context of this study that creating a scale of research locations is significant in achieving inclusivity. Contextual inclusivity can be seen as connecting with investigator triangulation where the research aims to include the voice of the researcher in addition to the other participants in the inquiry. When efforts are made to achieve inclusive research it creates the possibility of responding to issues of difference such as race, class, gender and variations in lived experience. Adopting an inclusive attitude implies an associated awareness of the dangers of exclusion.

Contextually situated research encourages the inclusion of a local to global range of research interests; it is exemplified by research that is situated across the lifeworld horizon and that connects personal, cultural, and societal and global contexts. Working inclusively indicates an awareness of the danger of inquiry which is not grounded and therefore conducted without reference to the scale of contextual interests. Because contextual validity encourages the inclusion of the broadest range of interests, it might also be linked to the idea of theoretical triangulation and the task of making connections between diverse interests and multiple perspectives in the literature.

In practice, research gains meaning, relevance and purposefulness through contextual connections. In this way contextual validity might also be associated with Anderson's and Herr's (1999) conception of outcome validity where research is meaningful, relevant and purposeful not only to the researcher but to all participants. Looking from this perspective, contextual validity not only connects to the source of inspiration for inquiry but also to the audience for research findings. This suggests questions such as: Does the research undertaken within the PhD serve the interests of the people who generated the data? How will you know? To what extent did the research serve the interests of the participants? Are the findings presented in a way which allows them to be tested and applied by the practitioners? Do the findings enable the practitioners to struggle for the kind of practices which they value...? (Excerpts from researcher's journal p515, 31 July 2001)

- Finally, contextual validity is most likely to be achieved in situations where different kinds of action are connected and integrated and this is obvious in the close links between contextual validity and opportunities for dialogue.

Dialogic scale

This study can also be understood in terms of different kinds of expression. Like professional learning in the Roundtable the dialogic research process, or scale, involved a dialogic flow comprising different opportunities for listening, writing, conversation and going public (see Figure 20). The characteristics of the this dialogic layer of research action once again align closely with the Roundtable experience of professional development.

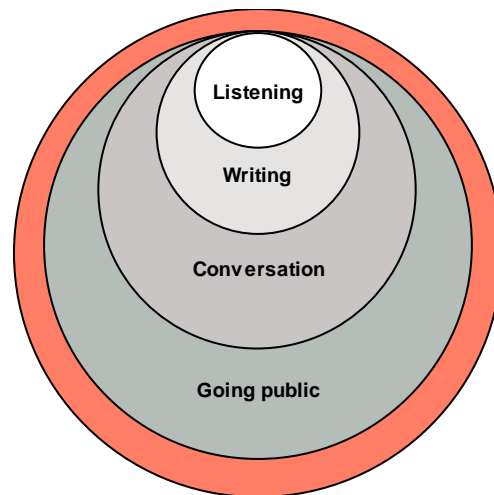


Figure 20: Scaling research dialogue

By picking up the diverse threads of interest, adopting an expressive attitude and developing a dialogic flow this layer of activity achieved an intimate kind of engagement. By valuing the intimate knowledge expressed by teachers in their many pieces of case writing and then using this knowledge to extend the dialogue begun in the Roundtable it was possible to revisit teachers' intimate knowledge through individual and group interviews. Incorporating a range of documents ensured diverse voices and different perspectives on the Roundtable work. The combination of these dialogic opportunities confirmed and extended the earlier work of the Roundtable and led to a more intimate understanding of the personal, team and Roundtable experience.

While the diagram suggests a gradual movement from one activity to the next, over time it became clear that acting dialogically in a research context involved constant movement, backwards and forwards, across the dialogic scale. As a result, each layer of activity was expressed in various ways at different stages of the study and each of these dimensions is examined below.

Listening

Within this study, the dialogic process involved different kinds of listening—self (researcher) listening, listening to the voices of Roundtable members in various pieces of writing, listening to individuals in face-to-face interviews and structured conversations and then listening to others beyond the Roundtable through reading and face-to-face meetings.

The cases and commentaries written by Roundtable members began the research dialogue. Incorporating cases as data from the beginning meant that it was possible to include teachers' voices, stories and emotions and incorporate the ways in which teachers make connections between the personal, cultural and societal dimensions of their working lives. The case writing activity, an extension of teachers' talk, supported the shift from a practical to a discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984) and included an emotional dimension (Giddens, 1994, 1999). In Habermasian terms listening to what was being said in stories gave the researcher something to think about. As they had for members of the Roundtable, cases invited the reader to visit the Roundtable experience of teaching and learning, and the significance of listening in this way was extended by incorporating different kinds of documents. Not only cases, but minutes of meetings, flow charts, transcripts of conversations and national publications provided diverse outlets for expression and different opportunities for listening.

This kind of listening might be thought of as visiting (Arendt, 1958)—this gives a strong sense of the intention to listen and interact with the ideas. It was important to listen with a quality of attention that indicated flexibility and objectivity (Fontana & Frey, 1994:365) and also empathy, and intimacy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997:85). Listening to what case authors had to say was the first step in the dialogic flow and it led to translation and then interviews. Listening in the context of this flow demonstrates the importance of being receptive to both what people have written and what they have to say in a conversational setting.

The value of self listening for a researcher cannot be underestimated; adopting the Roundtable strategy of case and commentary writing and applying it in a research context was highly significant. While it sometimes required a concerted effort to write cases, the benefits of listening to self were numerous: case writing supported the process of identifying and linking different interests, facilitated a self dialogue and supported the process of reflection and investigation. In some instances cases were shared, thus giving other people something to think about and forming a basis for methodological and theoretical conversations.

Writing

On reflection, the range of different writing genres contributed to creating a distinctive research process. Case writing was important but the research journal also

included field notes, diagrams and other artefacts which revealed the process of working things out. There was also the process of translating Roundtable cases into assertive propositional statements and the subsequent task of compiling school reports. Finally contrived cases, representing cross-site themes, gave people something to think about and set the scene for structured conversations in group interviews.

Considered in terms of scale, the journal was the kind of writing that connected with the scale of the body or as Habermas (1996b) would say, it was an expression of ‘my world’. The opportunity to write in this private way enabled the recording of thoughts and the struggle and doubt associated with the research process. Journal entries were also a source of ideas for case writing.

The researcher’s cases and commentaries (Excerpts from researcher’s journal, p515), conceived here as a particular kind of personal narrative (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:58), give a clear indication of the significance of writing in a dialogic research process. Keeping a research journal and writing cases based on critical moments made it possible to include and make connections between the different dimensions of lifeworld—researcher, research practice and the world beyond the study—and in this way case writing represented a move from practical to discursive consciousness. As with the Roundtable cases, the researcher cases became an extremely rich resource because they provided evidence about action in the face of a dilemma—the reasoning and the thinking (Dalmau & Guðjónsdóttir, 2002) as well as an emotional dimension. Using case and commentary writing as a tool, it was possible to describe the various influences on action and thinking, as well as articulate the basis on which decisions about practice had been made and how these connected to the world beyond the study. The challenge of establishing a dialogic flow within the research context and the struggle involved in making a decision about the placement of the school profiles and the mini biographies in the thesis provide two of many examples (Excerpts from researcher’s journal p515, January, 2003).

Promoting discursive consciousness in a research context means that it is possible for both the storyteller and the reader to visit the research experience in order to gain an insight into the technical detail of decision-making, the values and culture of the project and the feelings of the researcher. As the Roundtable cases initiated public

dialogue in this study, research cases made it possible to begin a dialogue which promoted learning and ultimately supported the ambition to find a new future for research.

Having read and listened carefully to the stories of teaching and learning, the next step in the research process involved translating cases from first person narratives into an authoritative propositional genre (Excerpts from researcher's journal p515). In drafting statements it was important to keep true to the stories—the task did not involve finding new ideas but revealing what was already there and allowing case authors' observations to surface. It was a struggle to find a process for achieving this aim, and in the end a solution was inspired by a conversation with a friend who worked in the legal profession. She described a process in which case decisions are translated into an authoritative propositional genre and through this process become precedents. Learning about this process led to the idea of giving teachers' cases authority by presenting the knowledge articulated in cases as authoritative propositions. Translating every document from the case genre into a more assertive genre involved being vigilant about using the teachers' words, as this helped to maintain the accuracy of descriptions, interpretations and theories.

Just as members of the Roundtable had to struggle to find the 'right' language for writing about teaching and learning, language was also problematised in the research process. In the first instance it involved a decision to begin with teachers' descriptions and observations about themselves, their work and the world and a subsequent decision to value the 'vernacular' (McLaughlin, 1996). Smyth and Hattam (2001), in their exploration of students who were 'dropping out' of school, draw on McLaughlin's efforts to understand Afro-American experiences through blues music. Referring to his work, they note that:

...even though such vernacular theories start out in local dialects and are not concerned about constructing 'macrosystems of explanation' (p.6), in the end they can be remarkably similar to 'the best of academic theory' because they begin in 'specific interpretive complexities'...(Smyth & Hattam, 2001:407).

In many ways the methodology used in this study matched the 'voiced' research described by Smyth and Hattam (2001). Using the vernacular meant staying close to the content of the documents throughout the process of framing questions, crafting

research statements and drafting each chapter. In fact, right through to the final draft of the thesis, subscript markers, connecting ideas back to the source documents, were a reminder to honour the vernacular and not change the language or the connections made by case authors. In each situation the challenge was to fulfil the validity claims identified by Habermas (1996b:119)—the work had to be accurate, it had to be sincere, comprehensible to the reader and it had to set the scene for gaining a deeper understanding with others. The process of translation was significant in achieving these outcomes.

Another important development in the research process was reaching a decision to use composite cases, a narrative genre, as a vehicle for reporting the emerging layers of action back to groups of Roundtable members. One option had been to write an academic piece, possibly the conclusion to a chapter, but this did not seem appropriate. Reporting findings seemed too formal. Working out how to present the ideas to each group was a dilemma until the idea of a ‘contrived’ case was found. It seemed a good solution because the genre would be familiar to the group and also the practice of responding with dialogue or commentaries would be based in past experiences. Using the adapted case genre encouraged writing which was in the ‘right’ language and prompted stories that rang true. The idea was to inspire dialogue, but as one teacher observed it is difficult to find the appropriate window and hardest of all is crafting a case so that its insights and questions resonate loudly enough to demand a response from the reader.

Conversation

At the centre of the research design was a desire to provide opportunities for expression, and this was achieved by creating new spaces for storytelling and dialogue. Interviews allowed for intimate conversations in which people shared the search for a deeper understanding about teaching and learning and the work of the Roundtable.

The first opportunity was provided in the individual interviews, and here, on a one-to-one basis, members of the Roundtable were able to reflect on their Roundtable experience and voice their opinions about the significance of the project. These conversations allowed Roundtable members to express themselves through storytelling, interpreting, theorising, reiterating and predicting. It was an opportunity

to listen again, check and question. The individual interviews were also an opportunity to report to Roundtable members about the conduct of the research, to check that they were satisfied with the shape of the project and to contribute their ideas. This exchange of information and ideas was significant in building trust.

During the individual and group interviews, teachers often repeated the stories they had told in cases. The inclusive spaces created by the individual interviews then provided a further opportunity for teachers to articulate the connections between professional development, case writing, and action research. It also mirrored and built on the Roundtable commitment to including emotions in a way that would not have been possible if other options, such as questionnaires or even telephone surveys, had been adopted. Those who chose to participate, while enjoying different experiences, came with visible goodwill and a desire to contribute.

Nevertheless, there were silences created by the voices that were not heard and the things that were not said—it was important to think about the things that people did not want to talk about (Wadsworth & Epstein, 1998). For those who participated, were some too polite? Were there some things that were too hard to talk about? For those who did not participate, was it because they did not feel positive about the Roundtable? Had some ‘moved on’ to new situations where it was no longer a priority to spend precious time involved in this research? Without including these voices in some way it is of course impossible to answer these questions.

Following the cyclical process of listening, translating and dialogue in individual interviews, the time came when the key themes began to coalesce and the emerging ideas needed to be presented back to the group. To meet this need a second space for storytelling and dialogue was created. Three structured conversations, focused on case writing, working relationships and action–reflection, provided another opportunity to tell stories, interpret, theorise, reiterate and predict, however this time the dialogue was extended through a structured conversation. Here the composite cases were used to feed information back to the group and to stimulate dialogue. This activity indicated the value of thinking together and the importance of collaboration in identifying, connecting, checking, refining, theorising and reaching understanding. Making connections was achieved through the integration of dialogue and collaboration within the search for a deeper understanding about teaching and learning

which seemed meaningful, relevant and purposeful. It was yet another opportunity to listen, to check and to seek more detail and depth.

Going public

While not well articulated in the shape of the methodology there was a place in the dialogic scale where the research activity involved ‘telling’ and it seemed as though there were layers of going public. At one end of the scale there was the researcher’s journal, generally a place for keeping things private. But moving outwards, some documents were shared locally; school reports were distributed to those who participated in the individual interviews and contrived cases were distributed to those who participated in the group interviews. These documents were designed to report the progress of the research and to give members of the Roundtable something to think about.

At another level, working documents were disseminated to a small number of colleagues including two supervisors. Papers airing issues and thinking, reports of work in progress, case writing and draft chapters were distributed in the hope that they would give others something to think about and therefore lead to dialogue aimed at gaining a deeper understanding. The resulting exchanges ranged from informal emails to more formal responses. On one occasion conversation about case writing, inspired by a draft chapter, was taped and incorporated into the study as a new research document.

In addition there were documents and ideas that were shared beyond the project. In fact the desire to tell the story of the Roundtable was a driving force behind the study. Over the life of this study presentations were made and papers were presented at seminars and conferences, once again seeking to give others in the broader education and research network something to think about and hopefully opening up new opportunities for dialogue.

Different kinds of research relationships contributed to this study and there were also indications of a two-way connection between dialogue and collaboration—the dialogic flow contributed to the formation of a new and extended intimacy and various relationships promoted different kinds of dialogue. The relationship between

collaboration and other scales of research therefore becomes the focus for the next section of this chapter.

Dialogic validity

Dialogic validity relates to research that values expression, provides for diversity in both scope and process of dialogue and achieves an intimate kind of engagement. Here research validity is connected to the significance of providing the kind of space in which both researchers and practitioners can reveal themselves and converse with each other in a way that is intimate, includes emotions and contributes to the search for a more intimate understanding.

The first significant aspect of dialogic validity relates to the availability of scaled and articulated opportunities for participating in dialogic exchange. Once again this might be connected to methodological triangulation—yet scale goes further than distinguishing between different methods. Creating scaled opportunities brings awareness to the need for places which begin with the body and extend outwards until there is a global connection; the articulation of places acknowledges the significance of connecting different opportunities.

Habermas (1996b), in his articulation of the dimensions of communicative competence, provides pointers for research that seeks to achieve dialogic validity. On the basis of his ideas and the experience in this study it seems that dialogic validity demands the kind of expression which is comprehensible (and this involves finding the ‘right’ language); accurate (and this involves telling the truth using strategies such as keeping close to the story, keeping the story in context by valuing the ‘real’ story, and translating); sincere (and this is achieved through the expression of intimate knowledge and emotions in pieces of case writing as well as subsequent conversations); and rightness (seen as moral appropriateness).

Another aspect of dialogic validity emerges in the power of talk to tell stories which have political significance. These opportunities allow storytellers the possibility of voicing resistance or exploring tensions such as ownership or democracy. Arendt talks about the power of a story to begin the process of reconciliation; Anderson and Herr (1999) talk about catalytic validity and they refer to Lather (1986:272) who talks about “the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energises

participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it”. This seems significant, both from a personal and cultural perspective, especially in the context of global change. Finally, the significance of connecting inclusivity and dialogue is felt in dialogic validity which points towards the value of hearing multiple voices and multiple perspectives.

collaborative scale

...Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings (Massey, 1993:66).

Interaction was the third broad principle which underpinned this study and as with the work of the Roundtable, a further layer of understanding can be gained through consideration of research relationships. While an academic researcher, in a study such as this, will most usually be considered as an outsider looking in, this study aimed at some level to work *with*; the research sought to build on the relationships and partnerships which had developed between school and university educators in the Roundtable. It was hoped that by working in an interactive way it would be possible to demonstrate the continuing value of collaboration in terms of reconciliation, equality, care and responsibility and mutuality and reciprocity. The aim was to form articulated research relationships built on a cooperative kind of engagement.

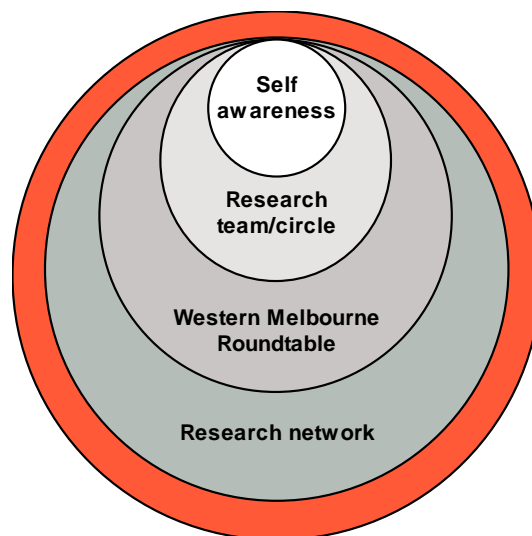


Figure 21: Scaling research relationships

As with the Roundtable it is possible in the context of this study to understand the scale of research collaboration as a ripple-like series of scaled relationships involving a relationship with self, with Roundtable members, with the research team and a broader research network. Within the space created by each research relationship a different kind of interaction and cooperation was possible and in combination the different relationships contributed to the search for understanding and the task of finding the future.

Self awareness

At the scale of the body the research processes led to a greater self awareness for the researcher and keeping a research journal was critical in achieving this end. It was significant in exposing and supporting the process of researching and learning; capturing thoughts; and in recognising, valuing and distinguishing between different people's interests. The process of journalling laid the foundation for a deeper self knowledge which in turn provided a foundation for engaging in dialogue with others and building research relationships.

There is an interesting dilemma associated with the next step in this scale. Close but very different relationships were built between the researcher and the members of the Roundtable who participated in the research. On the other hand close relationships developed between the researcher and the research team. Even when thinking about these relationships being characterised as 'home' the nature of the place is still not entirely clear—through documents, interviews and subsequent transcripts, days were spent with people from the Roundtable; yet looking from another perspective members of the Roundtable were more physically removed than the research team. Which relationship is best conceived as being closest to the body?

Research team/circle

The close research relationship built between research student and supervisors was an extension of an existing relationship and from the beginning it felt like a cooperative venture. Although participating in different capacities, all had been members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. Because of the shared history it was constantly sobering to wonder how the supervisors would respond to the work. Would they identify with the story being told? Should they identify? Were they satisfied with the accuracy? Did they feel I was exaggerating, fabricating or shifting ground? Like the

process of translating, this relationship was a significant check which helped me to focus on comprehensibility, accuracy, sincerity and ‘rightness’ (Habermas, 1996b). As noted in the discussion about relationships in the Roundtable, people often base collaborative work on existing relationships and this situation was replicated in the study. While the benefits include working from an established and known relationship and starting with a shared view of the study, it is easy to imagine how this kind of situation might go wrong—with one person or another feeling unhappy about the progress of the project.

However, care shown by the research team—demonstrated in the dialogic exchange between case and commentary (Excerpts from researcher’s journal p515)—indicates a connection between members of the team giving a sense of equality, mutual interest, reciprocal responsibility and benefit in the exchange, as well as respect, trust, debate, encouragement and challenge. Demonstrations of this dynamic are evident in journal entries, notes made during face-to-face meetings and the many emails exchanged. The relationship provided inspiration in many instances—including the process of developing the methodology from the longitudinal study.

In addition to that established with the two supervisors a close relationship also developed between this team and two other research students. In terms of scaled research relationships this intimate connection might be thought of in terms of a research circle that exchanged work and discussed shared issues. A discussion about an early draft of Chapter 5 gives a sense of this exchange (Excerpts from researcher’s journal p515):

S ...the person who is a case writer might be looking at the world in a different way...there is a structure of thinking which the roundtable enabled to bubble up to the surface and they are the ones who may have joined because they thought that way.

LC or did they come to think that way because of the process?

AD there was one teacher who was on the edge...

AB so there’s a set of excluding things

LM It seems like there are visible and invisible structures that set the context and the visible ones are in, but today we've really talked about the invisible ones, and they are the ones that are very interesting...

AB a lot of that will be there in the interviews, what distinctive things people brought with them, what the assumptions were, the connections they made, my three things...

LM maybe using that kind of structure to set the scene for case writing, the notion that a space was carved out for them in the roundtable, that there was this notion of legitimacy, a strong way of setting the scene, less of the professional development chronology...(Excerpt from a transcript of conversation between the research team and two colleagues, March, 2002.)

These conversations provided another opportunity to talk things through and as a result of this work intimate friendships were established and extended. There was an equality founded in shared experience and a sense of care and responsibility founded in a shared understanding of the work undertaken together. In the safety of these relationships it was possible to debate differences of opinion and challenge each other to find the future. People gained inspiration from each other.

Researcher–Roundtable

As noted above, the research was connected to existing relationships which had formed during the life of the Roundtable and over time it became clear that because the research was being conducted in conjunction with two supervisors who had established trusting relationships with the schools and individual members of the Roundtable, the goodwill was extended to the project and the whole research team. This meant that the people who chose to participate were generous with their time. They trusted that things would be done the right way.

But even so, being engaged in an academic project meant that the relationship changed. For instance, the audience changed—whereas the Roundtable had been focused on negotiating and delivering outcomes for the Roundtable, in the new context there was a non-negotiable dimension associated with an academic audience interested in ideas but not necessarily interested in the practical implications for the Roundtable.

There was a danger that there would be a re-emergence of the tension between university and school culture. In this new context the research team was on the outside looking in and the activity had switched from being action research to individual research. Questions bubbled to the surface: Who stands to gain? And who stands to lose? Clearly a Doctor of Philosophy student has a lot to gain both in the knowledge gathered in the research and the potential award of a postgraduate degree. Would there be any value for those who would be asked to participate? Would there be a benefit for individual teachers or their schools?

It was important to face up to the reality that the power dynamic had changed and then to devise strategies for building a new kind of trust and respect which would be a foundation for collaboration in this study. It was unwise to make any assumptions and so the first step was to know the documented version of events and experiences inside out. Roundtable members were central and their participation was established as they agreed that their cases could be included in the study.

This meant that when meeting with principals to request permission to proceed with the study, it was important to be knowledgeable about the work of each team as it would indicate respect and interest in their experiences and expertise.

I was very nervous...I'd been thinking and writing about the Roundtable documents for two, almost three years...Now it was time to ask the principals if I could proceed to invite the teachers to participate in interviews...What if they won't let me talk to the teachers? What if the teachers don't want to talk to me? What if the schools don't care any more? What if they don't like what I'm doing? What if they think I am the researcher they have always decried, using the work of teachers for their own advancement? So, taking a very deep breath I rang the first school...They all instantly and enthusiastically welcomed my proposed visit each making a positive comment about the Links project. Over two days the principals welcomed me, on time, making time. Each by their actions and their conversation let me know that without any doubt this had been an important project and they supported the work that we were doing. Phew!...there was also a sense that each of the principals had prepared in their mind for our meeting. As they reflected they recalled and described the value of the project and made connections with the present and the future. In each case I was able to respond based on what I have learned

from the documents and I felt proud that I could discuss their school with them. (Researcher's Journal, 29/8/01)

It was important to be explicit about the nature of the study, to distinguish between the qualitative research undertaken by the Western Melbourne Roundtable and the qualitative research undertaken in this study. The dual intention of the Roundtable was collaborative professional development and research. In contrast, this study was not a negotiated project. Instead it comprised a research process designed within an academic framework by an external researcher. What kind of relationship would be appropriate for the individual interviews? Would it be neutral, casual, friendly, directive or impersonal? How would existing relationships be acknowledged?

As had been the experience of university and school educators in the Roundtable, the gulf between external researcher and participants was broken down through one-to-one conversations which were respectful and transparent; it seemed important that if research was to be based in the value of interaction and cooperation then participants needed to be well informed about purpose and intent, process and scope. It was important to identify clear expectations and employ a thoughtfulness in relation to possible pressures inherent in participation. Initially, this was achieved by distributing information about the study (Appendix 11: Information relating to a research project about the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable, p492); negotiating suitable times and places for interviews and offering options for participation. A schedule of questions (p440) was circulated prior to the interviews and participants had a choice about going through the questions or responding to an open-ended question: What was significant about the Western Melbourne Roundtable? Yet this list looks much like what you might expect in any study seeking to consider and protect the interests of research participants. Was there anything in particular which distinguished the kind of interaction between myself and members of the Roundtable?

...several people suggested that the Roundtable members I interviewed would be curious about my research: What had I been doing? What were my findings? What was I going to do with my work? What was in it about them? So I considered what I would take to show them, and what I would give each person to take away. Firstly, I decided I would take a selection of the documents which would visually stimulate recollections of the ILP and the

Roundtable. This collection included *Teachers Write*, the school reports, copies of the *Big Link* as well as various articles, reports and evaluations. As people looked over these documents you could see the flicker of recognition and the mental travelling back to the project, 'Oh, I remember that' ... 'That's on my shelf, I still use it' ... 'I had that whole report put onto computer disks' ... (Researcher's Journal, 14/11/01)

The group interviews were critical in making sure that participants were well informed about findings and revelations. Responses to the process adopted in the group interviews indicated that participants appreciated information that was shared, when they could actually see the research process and products and when there were opportunities to gain new knowledge and understanding from the interaction. It also seemed significant to work in a way that meant participants would recognise themselves in the work. For this reason, keeping teachers' voices central and comprehensible had a significant impact on achieving interactive research relationships.

Trusting interactions and equality in relationships seemed to be associated with adopting an open attitude where purpose and process were explicit, where research was open to scrutiny, and where interactions made it possible to express goodwill, give feedback and respond to curiosity. Challenges still remain in regard to achieving reciprocity and balancing openness with ethical obligations and responsibilities. While there was room for negotiation at each stage of the research process it is hard to assess whether participants really felt they could change the process; therefore the possibility of achieving a truly negotiated project remains a challenge.

Research network

Finally, there were more distant associations which were significant in gaining a full picture of research relationships. A number of conferences⁷⁸ took place within the life

⁷⁸ The Second International Practitioner Research Conference (Sydney, July 1998) provided the initial inspiration for this thesis; the Annual Conference of the Association for Qualitative Research (Melbourne, July 1999) allowed me to explore 'Issues of Rigour in Qualitative Research'; at the 1999 and 2000 Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) annual conferences I was able to present papers; at the World Congress: 5th on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management (ALARPM) and 9th on Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Ballarat, September

of the study. There was also an ongoing connection with the work of the national Innovative Links Project network and the Australian National Schools Network. Through these Networks it was possible to keep in touch with other roundtables, with international networks and with the ongoing work of colleagues.

As noted earlier, casual connections—sometimes work related and sometimes associated with personal friendships—provided challenge and inspiration, and as the study progressed a sense of international dialogue and collaboration about learning and research was fostered through reading books and articles.

Collaborative validity

Collaborative validity can be associated with research that adopts an interactive attitude, allows for different kinds of articulated research relationships and achieves a cooperative kind of engagement. It will be through collaborative and cooperative work that new relationships will be forged and the process of reconciliation begun. Research that demonstrates collaborative validity would be organised to allow for the growth of different kinds of working relationships and the inquiry would be organised in such a way that equality, mutuality and reciprocity would be foundational characteristics. Within these relationships each person would balance care and responsibility.

Scaled interactions—recognised as different kinds of relationships connected locally, regionally, nationally and internationally—are significant in achieving collaborative validity. It seems that different kinds of relationships each play a role in supporting collaborative research outcomes. Each researcher needs to develop a strategy for increasing their self awareness and then employ diverse interactions—which might be thought of as friendships, partnerships and associations. Inspired by the desire to explore power relations and to work cooperatively, it is important to ask questions such as, ‘What steps need to be taken to sort out the power problems in the research?’ (Commentary, 31 July 2001)

2000) the theme of reconciliation and renewal inspired me to consider the work of the Roundtable from this perspective.

In order to achieve cooperative engagement in research, tensions such as those between school and university colleagues need to be acknowledged, new relationships need to be negotiated and purposeful interactions need to be conducted respectfully.

Scale of inquiry

Each of the layers of action described above contributes to understanding the process of inquiry adopted by this study. The locational scale indicates the sites of research activity; the contextual scale describes the scope and connectedness of the inquiry; the dialogic scale reveals the intimate nature of research engagement; and the collaborative scale shows the different kinds of relationships that contributed to shaping the cooperative inquiry venture.

The final layer of action, the scale of inquiry, conveys an understanding about this study which is based in the cognitive–creative dimension of action. Looking from this perspective shows that this study has created a place for asking the kind of questions that take you somewhere (Bruner, 1960), engaging in struggle and doubt (Cherednichenko *et al.*, 1998b) as well as taking chances to gain a deeper understanding (new knowledge) and bringing about change by connecting judgement and action (new beginnings).

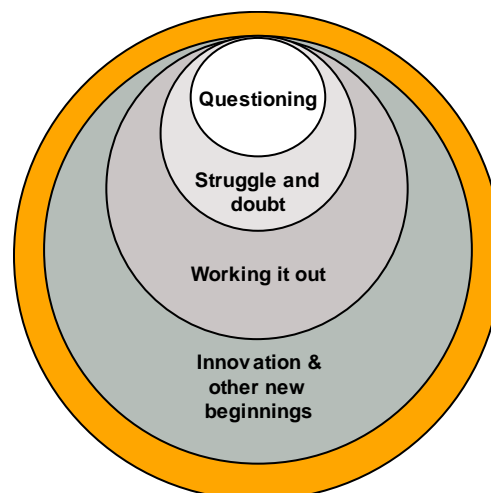


Figure 22: Scaling inquiry

Questioning

While this study was initially shaped by the identification of a set of key research questions this was only the beginning. Indeed, asking questions was a continuous

activity that happened at many levels throughout the study and which related to both content and process. Each research location—the researcher’s journal, the document analysis, the individual interviews and the group interviews—provided a different kind of opportunity for questioning. The researcher’s journal gives a particularly rich picture of the concerns and questions voiced by the researcher (Excerpts from researcher’s journal p515). By acknowledging and integrating the scale of interests discussed above it was possible to connect inquiry to the researcher’s questions as well as to those questions voiced by members of the Roundtable and the broader education industry. There were opportunities to connect local questions with the more distant questions and dilemmas associated with professional, national and international developments. In addition to this contextually situated questioning there were questions connected with the dialogic and collaborative plane of action.

Struggle and doubt

Struggle and doubt led to more questions. For instance, it had appeared that analysing the Roundtable documents would be easy; that it would involve reading the cases, commentaries and other documents then making connections and identifying themes. However, the document analysis gave rise to many procedural questions and it was a struggle to find a way to work respectfully and inclusively with the documents at the same time as maintaining the goal of privileging teachers’ voices. The task involved looking at the Roundtable documents and finding the connections that teachers made about themselves, their work and the world—connections between the emotional, technical, practical and critical aspects of their work.

...I kept feeling my way, trying ways of coding, thinking and writing which were true to the project. Drawing on the ideas of grounded theorists, ethnographers and others I prepared many methodological options...I felt I was getting closer but nothing felt exactly right...(Researcher’s journal, 21/7/01).

Throughout, it was important to make connections across the scale of interests, constantly asking: What connections are teachers making? Why do they think these connections are significant? How do these observations connect with the literature? What might be learned from these connections? How would a researcher make sense of these connections and what phenomena need to be understood and translated?

Later, the individual interviews started with an open-ended question: ‘What was significant about the Western Melbourne Roundtable? The group interviews, focused on the composite cases, were based around an implied question, ‘Is this your experience? Is this your story?’

Then there were questions which demonstrated the nature of struggle and doubt in the construction of the thesis:

I had to make a difficult decision about whether to put the school profiles and the mini biographies in an appendix⁷⁹. The university story was in the text...and given the nature of the Roundtable work it seemed inappropriate to put the university in the text and the schools in an appendix—If I don’t put them all on the text what does this say about the relative importance of the university and the school stories? What does it say about how I see things? What messages do I give to the reader? It is possible that not all readers might bother with the Appendix...is information in the Appendix less important than the text in chapters? How do I deal with this situation and send a message to the reader about these things? Does the story make sense without reading the Appendix? (Researcher’s Journal, January, 2003)

Within the research a form of self-reflexivity was achieved through the articulation of struggle and doubt in journal entries and pieces of case writing. Later these observations and dilemmas became the basis for discussions about ideology and methodology. This reflective and reflexive process made explicit the researcher stance as both actor and spectator (Coulter & Wiens, 2002).

Working it out—thinking, learning and judgement

It was crucial that whatever analytic strategies were adopted, the process, including the researcher’s train of thought and work, had to be traceable. A simple process was required, one which could be applied consistently and repeated while still honouring the complexity and fluidity of practice in the Roundtable. This was checked by

⁷⁹ In the first draft the school profiles and the mini biographies were placed in the Appendices but the contextual detail seemed missing from the text and so in the final version a new chapter (Chapter 4) was inserted so that the University, the schools, the team and the teachers could be introduced to the reader.

asking: In examining practice, how is it possible to capture processes, steps, stages and movement over time?

As mentioned earlier, the methodology from a longitudinal study (Kruger *et al.*, 2001) provided inspiration for making the analytic process transparent.

...I tried it out and yes it did seem to work. I could highlight key phrases to create a sketch and I could identify a thread of key phrases and words, all without taking the case apart and you could see the 'working out' ...here was my work able to be displayed and checked by anyone who was interested, and of course this included me. It wasn't a struggle to retrace my steps...I found that this approach to understanding the cases kept me focused, there was little chance that I would drift off into my own thinking or confuse the authors intentions with my ideas and priorities if I considered one paragraph at a time, repeating the language of the cases but translating it from the language of personal reflection to an authoritative genre expected in research propositions. (Researcher's journal, 21/7/01)

Trustworthiness was a primary concern for members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable both in terms of process and content. University researchers challenged the traditional divide between practitioner and academic researcher by seeking methodological solutions which valued collaboration and reflexivity. This concern and commitment could be seen in the multifaceted search for research outcomes that were accurate, useful and connected to local practice and the interests of practitioners and students. Therefore in seeking trustworthiness within this study it was important to plan for a collaborative verification process which involved the researcher and practitioners working together. Exploring and verifying the research propositions with the authors and members of school teams and then checking cross-site themes through group interviews achieved a level of trustworthiness and validity which was not possible for the researcher to achieve alone.

Innovation, creativity

At the other end of the inquiry process judgement was connected to action. Decisions emerged in action and led to new beginnings. Usually, the intent of academic research is conceived in terms of explanation and analysis (Yeatman & Sachs, 1995) yet this study makes a significant contribution to understanding the possibility of

incorporating explanation and analysis with the intention to improve practice, thereby connecting academic and practitioner research.

The opportunity to work in articulated cooperation also promoted creativity. The encouragement and challenge inherent in questioning and the possibility of sharing struggle and the search for meaning was achieved through cooperation. I would argue that democratising research involves understanding and connecting different aspects of the research process so that inclusivity, the dialogic flow and articulated cooperation come together in reflexivity with each connection contributing to the possibility of new beginnings.

The chance to engage in dialogue also extended the possibility of creative engagement. Each stage of the process was a challenge to think again and consider the best way of moving forward. Having an opportunity to tell the research story to members of the Roundtable, reading the collected cases and then listening again in interviews, learning how to translate stories in a respectful way and then having a chance to check were all dialogic experiences which contributed to reflexivity.

Inquiry validity

...An example might be the audience for the research findings: are the findings presented in a way which allows them to be tested and applied by the practitioners. Do the findings enable the practitioners to struggle for the kind of practices which they value—eg to argue against undemocratic imposition of technical solutions to socio cultural/historical and moral questions? (Steve commentary)

Inquiry validity can be associated with research that adopts a cognitive attitude to research where the range of concerns and questions is determined by looking across the contextual scale.

Validity in inquiry indicates research that is reflexive and based on connections between contextual inclusivity, the dialogic flow, articulated cooperation and the identification of new beginnings.

In addition, if the researcher is to be both actor and spectator then validity tests needed to respond to both aspects of the endeavour.

Inquiry validity can be recognised in

- process (Anderson & Herr, 1999) which supports learning through a search for meaning
- questioning, struggle and doubt associated with personal, cultural, and societal concerns
- reflexivity—cycles of collecting, translating, checking and gaining a deeper understanding
- judgement connected to action—aligning with catalytic and outcome validity (Anderson & Herr, 1999)

While validity is not a term I have ever seen used in connection with professional development it now seems, given the similarities that have emerged between professional development and research learning, that a validity framework might be applied in the consideration of democratic professional development.

Learning to find the future

...as I read the cases written by teachers about students and their own learning I realised that as a researcher I had a lot to learn from their stories. I had no idea as I began that the principles teachers in the Roundtable used to frame their practice were not only the same as those that lead to their professional growth but also when applied to my research practice meant that I became an active and reflective learner. (Researcher's journal, 21/7/01)

This chapter has shown that democratising research can be understood in a number of ways. I have come to conceptualise research activity as learning, and more than that have learned along the way that the principles and processes which have shaped my work have resulted in a quality of engagement which bears a remarkable similarity to that learning experienced by members of the Roundtable. This has encouraged me to make a clear connection between research and learning to find the future.

It was a revelation that such close ties could be drawn between learning and research and that the work of the Roundtable would ultimately lead me to learn about research.

As I was close to the end of his chapter, and discussing my ideas with a friend, she asked, half in jest: ‘What about the things that are outside the scale?’ More important than my answer was the realisation that this seemed a great way to make a connection between this work and the ongoing task of learning to find the future. In the true spirit of the work of the Roundtable and subsequently, this project, it was entirely appropriate for this question to signal a new beginning and the next step in learning to find the future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Document Register

Doc no	Date	Title/First line	Doc type	Source
E:01	Dec-94	Around the tables	article	Big Link 1
E:02	Apr-95	Time to Talk	article	Big Link 2
E:03	1996	A Case Study	article	Big Link 5:22
E:04	1996	Where we started from...where we're going	concept map	WMR records
E:05	1995	Table groups	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
E:06	1995	Team talk	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
E:07	1995	Group formation: better late than never	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
			commentary	
			commentary	
			commentary	
E:08	1995	The transition from year seven to eight ...	case	Teachers Write
E:09	1995	Table groups and teaching across teams	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
E:10	1995	Sad, mad and bad!	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
E:11	1995	Sports Centre	case	School report
			commentary	
E:12	1995	Negotiating in a team structure	case	School report
			commentary	
E:13	1995	A second person helps when it comes to reproduction	case	School report
E:14	1995	Anna	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
E:15	1995	Action research in teams...	case	School report
E:16	1995	Action Research in Teams—Moving On	case	School report
			commentary	
E:17	1995	The Administrative Team in the TSG School	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
E:18	1995	Lunch and Peace	case	School

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				report
E:19	1996	Collaborative Research Interview	interview transcript	WMR records
E:20	1996	Introduction	report	School report
E:21	Jul-94	Proposal Outline: The Link Project	planning	WMR records
E:22	Dec-95	School Report: Teams and Small Groups, The Grange Experience	report	School report
F:01	1994	Proposal Outline: The Link Project	planning	WMR records
F:02	1995	Extracting the meaning	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
F:03	1995	Comprehension: To Understand or Not OR What are they really learning?	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
F:04		Learning by discovery	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
F:05	1995	Challenging Learning Case 2	case	Personal records
			commentary	
			commentary	
F:06		Communicating	case	Personal records
F:07		Year 10 Business Maths	case	Personal records
			commentary	
F:08		Reading Aloud and the Second Language Learner	case	Personal records
F:09		Task Centre	case	Personal records
F:10	1994	Seeing the working out	case	WMR records
F:11	1995	The Links Program at W	case	Personal records
F:12	5-Aug-96	Case Discussion: questions	agenda and minutes	Personal records
F:13	Sep-96	Language in the Curriculum	evaluation	Partners in Research
F:14		Collaborative Research Interview	interview transcript	WMR records
F:15		Uncertainty and confusion: Concept map of change	concept map	Personal records
F:16	8-Aug-96	Case discussion: transcript and memo	case discussion transcript	Personal records
F:17	27-Aug-96	Go ahead and allow NSN to publish	correspondence	Personal records
H:01	11-Jun-96	Early Years of Schooling: Concept map of change (draft)	concept map	School report
H:02	1995	A Touch of Insecurity	case	School report
			commentary	

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H:03	1995	Vinli	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
H:04	1995	But Does it Make Sense?	case	School report
			commentary	
H:05	Dec-94	A Case study	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
			commentary	
H:05	1995	Mixed Ability Groups? (But that's Prep work!)	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
H:06	1995	A Second Chance (Sandra/Suzie approached me with tears in her eyes.)	case	Teachers Write
H:07	1996	Multi-Age Grade	case	School report
H:08	1996	Junior School—Thoughts/Feelings	case	School report
H:09	1996	But	case	School report
H:10	1996	Immediate Thoughts	case	School report
H:11	1996	Prep+One+Two= Junior	case	School report
H:12	1996	A Family Affair	case	School report
H:13	1996	Reflecting at Report Time	case	School report
H:14	1994	Proposal Outline: The Link Project	planning	WMR records
H:15		Collaborative Research Interview	Interview transcript	WMR records
H:16	1996	Take the NSN offer	correspondence	WMR records
K:01	1997	School reform through negotiating the curriculum including: School vision statement, School learning belief statement, NSN proposal for development in Grade 5 and 6 and, Change at Kingfisher Primary School: an introduction	report	School report
K:02	Apr-95	In early August I felt intimidated and powerless while working in a group...	case	School report
			commentary	
K:03	15-Aug-94	It's Monday morning 11.30am, right after playtime...	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
K:04	11-Sep-94	What a challenge for leaders in school development...	case	School report
K:05	Aug-94	We struggled at planning last night...	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
K:06	Sep-95	Learning is an active thing...	case	School report
K:07	Jul-95	Work Sample: Technology	case	School

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				report
			commentary	
K:08	Oct-95	The extended work sample as case writing OR Trialing Negotiation	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
K:09		Commentary on Case: K07	commentary	School report
K:10	May-95	After writing my first case study last year	case	School report
K:11		Implementation of the negotiated process in grade 1	report	School report
K:12	Oct-96	The children in grade 1 are doing negotiated curriculum	case	School report
K:13	Oct-96	In 1995 I worked with two teachers in initiating negotiated curriculum in the grade 6 level.	case	School report
			commentary	
K:14	Oct-96	As part of the negotiated curriculum the children had asked to learn about machines we use.	case	School report
			commentary	
K:15	Nov-95	We were into the second week of our theme on sport.	case	School report
K:16	Feb-96	We have come to the end of the first year of our negotiated curriculum program.	case	School report
K:17a	Oct-96	The negotiated curriculum has provided the children that I teach with ownership of their learning.	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
K:17b	Oct-96	This is my second year of working in a team that is using the negotiated curriculum approach	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
K:18	Oct-96	Negotiated curriculum	case	School report
K:19	Oct-96	This is the second year that the current grade six children have been working within the Negotiated Curriculum.	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
K:20	Oct-96	Having spent the past eight years in a secondary school...	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
K:21		Term 1 1996	report	School report
K:22	6-Jun-96	Ben raced up to me today with a book he had made...	case	School report
K:23	6-Jun-96	A new idea!	case	School report
K:24	1996?	Grade 5 and 6 evaluate the negotiated curriculum (responses and comments)	evaluation	School report

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K:25	1996?	Grade 5 and 6 students evaluate cooperative learning (responses and comment)	evaluation	School report
K:26	1996	Grade 6 students recall negotiation in grade 5 in 1995	evaluation	School report
K:26	Apr-96	As you know I have been working with Olga on the details of a visit by our BEd students	correspondence	WMR records
K:27	1996	Grade 6 evaluation of the 'Our Environment' topic (questions and comments)	evaluation	School report
K:28	23-Oct-96	Teachers evaluation of the 1994-1996 reforms at Kingfisher Primary School (minutes of meeting)	evaluation	School report
K:29	28-Mar-96	Lots of Links: Concept map of change	concept map	School report
K:30	Oct-96	Comment from a critical friend	commentary	School report
K:31		Kingfisher Primary School	article	NSN Snapshots #96/06
K:32		Report written for the NSN Key Competencies Research Project	report	School report
K:32	1996?	I approached my year of teaching in a primary school with a good deal of trepidation.	case	School report
K:33	26-Aug-96	Learning about learning: Case Study of Kingfisher Primary School for Portrayal evaluation	evaluation	Southern Cross Portrayal Evaluation
K:34		Collaborative Research Interview	interview transcript	WMR records
K:35	1994	Proposal Outline: The Link Project	planning	WMR records
K:35	Nov-93	Kingfisher Primary School Partners in Literacy An Action Research Project	report	WMR records
K:36	Oct-94	Hi Steve, These are some of the ideas and issues we think could be addressed on our school closure day on 25 Nov	correspondence	WMR records
K:36	Nov-94	Agenda for Staff Development Day	agenda	WMR records
K:36		Kingfisher Primary School Learning Policy	policy	WMR records
K:37	Mar-95	Kingfisher Primary School PD Program Collected evaluation comments	evaluation	WMR records
K:37	Mar-95	Kingfisher Primary School Staff Development Days: Timetable, Program goals	planning, agenda	WMR records
K:38		Dear John, I have prepared a paper for you concerning the work of teachers in Catholic Schools in relation to the ILP	correspondence	WMR records
K:39	Nov-95	I've had a go at putting together some ideas	correspondence	WMR records
K:40		Background information to submission to NEPS-DSC	planning	WMR records
K:41	Aug-95	In 1994 I began work as the teacher librarian	case	WMR records
K:42	Sep-95	What is democracy?	case	WMR records

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K:43		Authentic Assessment at Kingfisher Primary School: The extended work sample	case	WMR records
K:44		Change at Rosella Primary School	report	School Report
R:01	1995	Opening a can of worms (Scott/Andrew would undoubtedly win every prize for the best monitor)	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
			commentary	
			commentary	
R:02	1995	Self appraisal—not just for report time (One of the principles of personal development that I strongly believe in is self-assessment or self-appraisal...)	case	Teachers Write
			commentary	
			commentary	
			commentary	
R:03	1995	Student self assessment	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
			commentary	
R:04	1995	Self assessment—oral or written?	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
			commentary	
R:05	1995	Tick the box	case	School report
			commentary	
			commentary	
			commentary	
R:06	1995	Rhetoric or reality	case	School report
R:07	1995	Getting started	case	School report
			commentary	
R:08	1996	Rosella Primary School Link Project Development Map: Concept map of change	concept map	School report
R:09	1996	Introduction to Rosella Primary School report including: School profile, Stages in the development of the ILP, Activities which have followed involvement in the ILP	report	School report
R:10	1996	Linking and Learning	article	Teachers Write
R:11	1996-7	Collaborative Research Interview	interview transcript	WMR records
R:12	1994	Link Project Plan 1994-1995	planning	WMR records
R:12	1994	Link Project Plan: Indicators and projected use of funding	planning	WMR records
R:12	1994	Proposal Outline: The Link Project	planning	WMR records
V:01	1-Mar-94	Dear Steve, Your CRG proposal "Action research in schools' has been approved	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994

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V:01	1993	Collaborative Group Project: Department of Education	planning	Folder: CRG 1994
V:01	1994	Collaborative Research Scheme 1994: Proposal Outline: Action Research in Schools	planning	Folder: CRG 1994
V:02	20-Mar-94	CRG progress report No 1	report	Folder: CRG 1994
V:03	30-Mar-94	Dear CRG colleagues (News 1; Good new 2))	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:04	7-Apr-94	CRG progress report No 2	report	Folder: CRG 1994
V:05	2-May-94	CRG progress report No 3	report	Folder: CRG 1994
V:06	21-Jun-94	CRG: Case Writing as Action Research	agenda and minutes	Folder: CRG 1994
V:07	26-Jun-94	CRG progress report No 4	report	Folder: CRG 1994
V:07a	1994?	Teaching...learning: Deal with cases slowly...	notes	Folder: CRG 1994
V:08	Dec-93	Guidelines for CRG proposals	guidelines	Folder: CRG 1994
V:09	May-94	CRG Scheme Evaluation Plan	planning	Folder: CRG 1994
V:10	18-Aug-94	mentors meeting	agenda and minutes	Folder: CRG 1994
V:11	15-Mar-94	Dear colleagues, I suggest that the team which is planning...	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:12	2-May-94	Colleagues, Reminder NPDP/CRG meeting	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:13	1-Jul-94	CRG/NPDP 'link Project' Colleagues, I suggest that we...	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:14	1-Aug-94	CRG Colleagues, Congratulations on the successful commencement...	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:15	2-Sep-94	CRG: informal planning meeting	agenda and minutes	Folder: CRG 1994
V:15	21-Sep-94	Colleagues, Attached are the minutes of the last CRG planning meeting and the...	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:16	19-Oct-94	Dear CRG colleagues, Your mentor has not mentored much lately. He has been...	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:17	24-Oct-94	Dear CRG colleague, we held a brief CRG meeting on Fri 21 Oct...	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:18	?-Oct-94	The case studies! I forgot the case studies!	cases	Folder: CRG 1994
V:19	6-Nov-95	CRG: Misorganisation chronicle: VolXXIII	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:20	24-Nov-94	CRG colleagues, Sorry these documents are late arriving	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
V:21	1994	A question of language (When Tony said, 'and I want us all to use the language from the...')	case	Folder: CRG 1994
V:22	1996	'Jigsaw pieces': Concept map of change	concept map	WMR records
V:23	May-95	Michael, Sophie, Eve and Penny	case	Personal records

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V:24	Nov-94	Rhetoric or Reality?	case	Rosella Primary School doc 06
V:25	Jul-95	Case Writing and Action Research: The Western Melbourne Roundtable Experience	article	Big Link
V:26	27-Apr-95	ILP Evaluation 1994-5 Roundtable participating academics	evaluation	Personal records
V:27	5-Jul-97	Teachers' Voices and Reflections on Collaborative Case Writing	conference paper	
V:28	29-Jun-96	Developing New Relationships Between the School and University in the Preparation of Teachers: Implications for Research	conference paper	Personal records
V:28	1-Jul-96	Re: Faculty conference	correspondence	Personal records
V:28	1-Jul-96	Re: NSN	planning	Personal records
V:29	1998	Case Writing: Making Teachers' Knowledge Public	chapter	Reclaiming Professional Knowledge: New Ways of Thinking About Teachers' Learning
V:30		Clay Feet	case	Personal records
V:31		When access and success don't equal learning	case	Personal records
V:32		Onions	case	Personal records
V:33		The outsider looks in	case	Personal records
CRG	20-Dec-93	invitation to develop proposal	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	1995	various email address lists	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	25-Feb-94	mentors meeting	agenda and minutes	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	11-Apr-94	Account codes for CRG Scheme	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	26-Apr-94	mentors meeting	agenda and minutes	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	24-May-94	CRG information update	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	27-Jun-94	agenda for 1/7/94, minutes for 6/5/94	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	12-Jul-94	CRG Participant survey comments	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	14-Jul-94	mentors meeting	agenda and minutes	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	31-Aug-94	CRG conference information and agenda	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	7-Sep-94	Second survey of CRG participants	report	Folder: CRG 1994

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CRG	21-Oct-94	mentors meeting	agenda and minutes	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	28-Oct-94	several memos about the CRG conference	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	11-Nov-94	...approved the continuation of the AR in Schools CRG	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	9-Dec-94	Dear Tony, The account code for the AR in school CRG	correspondence	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	21-Jul-95	CRG embedding plan	planning	Folder: CRG 1994
CRG	Sep-94	CRG Scheme: Guidelines for Academic staff	guidelines	Folder: CRG 1994
ILP: 01	Sep-95	I think the forum was an exhausting but excellent experience	article, evaluation	Teachers Write
ILP: 02	Sep-95	The Logo Vote	article, report	Teachers Write
ILP: 03	Dec-94	On the genesis	article	Teachers Write
ILP: 04	Jan-97	Learning Together	article	Teachers Write
ILP: 05	Dec-95	The National Executive	article	Teachers Write
WMR: 01	Jan-97	Portfolio Development at WMR	report	BL7:23
WMR: 02	May-95	WMR Forum	report	BL3:14
WMR: 03	May-96	WMR 'Mapping Change' Forum	report	BL5:17-18
WMR: 04	Jan-97	Southern Forum	report	BL7:25
WMR: 05	Jun-94	Thankyou for agreeing to consider participation in The Link project	correspondence	WMR records
WMR: 06	Apr-95	WMR	article	Teachers Write
WMR: 07	Dec-94	First National Forum	article	Teachers Write
WMR: 08	Sep-94	ILP Evaluation	evaluation	Folder: CRG 1994
WMR: 09	Dec-94	Summary of Roundtables	article	Teachers Write
WMR: 10	Dec-94	School statement of acquittal (\$4500, \$3,500)	report	WMR records
WMR:11	Dec-93	Application for a Grant under the National Professional Development Program	submission	WMR records

Appendix 2: Case–sketch–thread–research proposition

Case–Team Talk

Case/Sketch	Thread	Research proposition
My case highlights the welfare and discipline approach taken by our team in the context of the team small group method.	welfare and discipline	Teachers develop approaches for dealing with student welfare and discipline.
As a teaching team, I believe we click very well. No-one is held up as an expert in the group: we are educators first and teachers of Science, Maths and English second. There's a mixture of backgrounds and experience on the team, and although there is only one female, the male teachers are perceived by students in a nurturing and counselling role. We also realise that the more the work is shared, the less work there is and the better the team functions.	teaching team clicks	Teams click and the work is reduced when teachers are seen as educators rather than experts or method teachers, where there is diversity of background and experience, where male and female teachers challenge stereotypical roles and where the work is shared.
When a problem arises, one teacher will usually elect to take on a particular student and have regular contact with the parents, if necessary. Yet, all teachers in the team have enough insight into each individual student to pick up a problem initially dealt with by someone else. Sometimes the situation won't wait for the right teacher to become available.	one-to-one student-teacher problem solving shared responsibility	Although it is preferable for one teacher to take responsibility for a specific problem involving one student and their family, working in a small team means that all teachers have enough insight to step in if the situation won't wait for the right teacher to become available.
We communicate regularly, both informally in the staffroom and through two formal meetings a week: Monday morning period one for team based issues and Monday after school for the wider school concerns. The Monday morning meetings do not have an agenda and so provide time for active planning. Individual students and their problems at home or at school will be mentioned and their current behaviours discussed, for example, whether they have improved, continued to improve, fallen off the track or been bringing books to class. We check whether our experiences of a student and their behaviour is consistent with other teachers. The result of such consultation is that all teachers in the team have fairly common approach towards discipline and are consistent in their dealings with individual students. Students are well aware of how we handle discipline and are consistent in their dealings with individual students. Students are well aware of how we handle discipline problems, and that we talk about them, albeit in a constructive, not disparaging way. Some, who would be invisible in other school structures, find themselves under the microscope in X Team, and occasionally this	formal and informal communication between teachers active planning student focused discussion for consistency check, common approach, constructive talk, students visible consistent dealings student awareness of process and expectations	Teachers regularly exchange information about students in informal situations such as the staffroom. Teachers engage in active planning based on formal discussions about student behaviour and needs. Discussions between teachers ensure that there is a common and consistent approach which is known to students. The talk is constructive, not disparaging. It is hard for students to be invisible in this structure.

Case/Sketch	Thread	Research proposition
can result in the student leaving the school.		
Chris was one such student we had in 1994. He was over the age of fifteen and came to the school in Year 8 to repeat. A fairly tall student, he was always looked up to in more ways than one. He knew the difference between right and wrong, but tended to push the limits. Although he was very protective of other students, girls in particular, he could bring the class down by his own behaviour.	Chris pushed the limits	Some student push the limits even though they know the difference between right and wrong.
His younger brother, Tom, was in the same year level and team, and both of them produced very little work throughout the year. If you wanted to classify them, they were probably low achievers. Chris' table group tried to be tolerant of him and sometimes he led the group to produce a good piece of work. He would only complete tasks provided they met with his abilities or interests. Generally he was never too much trouble in class. It's just that he didn't know where he was going and he'd got past that stage of being receptive towards learning.	low achiever leader worked within interest and ability comfort zone not receptive to learning	Low achievers, even though they can be unreceptive to learning and work only when they are interested and confident of their abilities, can nevertheless be successful in a leadership role. Teachers give these students lots of responsibility.
He was frequently absent and, as a team, we decided to give him a lot of responsibility and make him the best possible person in the time he had here. We were monitoring him regularly and wanted him to achieve something. So he was allowed to take time out of the classroom to work in the yard and after school, he was employed to take care of the school grounds, mowing, planting and sowing trees, for instance.	often absent given responsibility	Teachers are flexible in organising learning programs for students who are at risk of leaving. They monitor the situation regularly.
We had done a lot of work nurturing him and were quite patient about his absences. We continually talked to him about what was expected and tolerated his lack of submitted work. There would be phone calls made to home and times where we had to communicate with his parents, because of his misbehaviour between leaving school and arriving home. We made a deliberate effort to have a number of teachers telephoning, so it didn't look as if he was being picked on.	teachers nurturing and patient parent communication shared, by phone	Teachers are nurturing, patient and explicit about their expectations. Teachers think carefully about their communication patterns with parents.
However, towards the end of the year, a couple of characters came up to the school on their motor bikes distracting students. They were representative of the kids we didn't want ours to turn out like. They had dropped out of school and had problems of their own and seemed interested in co-opting others. We were also wary of the problem of drugs and continually warned students to stay away from the fence line, where a ten-foot boundary was off-limits. One day, a teacher in X Team happened to be on yard duty when	distractions punishment visibility	Teachers see past drop outs as possible distractions for students currently at risk of dropping out. These distractions can lead to behaviour which attracts small penalties which are very visible in small groups where the whole team is watching.

Case/Sketch	Thread	Research proposition
Chris approached the fence. He was told twice to stay away from the fence and not communicate with those on the other side. In the end he was dished out a penalty of some sort, a detention or something along those lines. Later on in the day, I came past him while he was sitting outside a classroom. He had obviously taken his bad mood from being reprimanded into another class and had been kicked out. I squatted down and spoke to him. I said that we were disappointed that after all the work we had done, he could throw it all out the window with such immature behaviour. Very quickly he realised his behaviour was being spotted by the whole team. Whatever he did, he was one of seventy-five students, not one of five hundred.		
Shortly after that, he left the school through osmosis. The family perceived us as nagging on the telephone and the final call we had with them was a real rebuff to the school. Chris' parents thought he wasn't being given a fair go and they also removed Tom, the younger brother. I think they were both given a fair go. Possibly we could have brought the parents in a bit more to speak to them directly. The disappointing thing was that they didn't come to talk to us about withdrawing the children. Ironically Chris was being castigated for a relatively minor incident carrying a small penalty. The trouble is our approach does require students to be quite adult in talking about their problems and to sit down and say to us, 'I feel I have been harshly done by.'	left school family dissatisfaction fairness student responsibility	What teachers perceive as fair treatment is not always seen in the same light by parents. More direct communication with parents might change this situation. Students are required to be quite adult in their talking about problems and sometimes this can lead to trouble.
The strength of our approach was that it was consistent. This enabled us to support each other, as well as the student, who received a clear and consistent message. Chris also knew that the conflict was not between himself and a particular teacher and that he had a responsibility to the team, who had given him so much support. In retrospect, I don't think we would have done anything differently. For most students the consistency of the team's approach to welfare and discipline is reassuring and effective. For students like Chris, it's hard to know whether our vigilance pushed him to leave or whether he would have left anyway.	consistent approach student support teacher support consistent message team responsibility	Our approach is effective and strong because it is consistent, it enables us to support each other and the student, and it gives a consistent message which is reassuring to students. The responsibility is to the group, not just an individual. It's hard to assess whether this strategy may have an opposite effect, causing a student to leave.
Should we have encouraged more face-to-face meetings with his parents? Would he have stuck school out a bit longer, if his parents had understood or appreciated our efforts, if they had supported our actions? Certainly that	consistency reassuring and effective for students	Parents may be more important members of the team than we realise. Students might stay at school longer if teachers and parents had a shared understanding and appreciated

Case/Sketch	Thread	Research proposition
may have helped.	questions about improving parent communication	understanding and appreciated each others efforts.
We spoke about Chris recently in a team meeting. He did find himself a job in a supermarket and we thought he could talk to our students about what it was like to leave school and have a job. It's not like we've written him off: he still has something to offer the school.	never give up connect past students with current students	Teachers concern for students is enduring, even after they have left the school.

Commentary	Research proposition
Well ,on reading this case ,my immediate response was the question: 'But does the school have something to offer him?'	
This is not to say that the writer would not have thought that too, but this case raises many issues about teaching and learning and the team approach to the organisation for teaching and learning. And still the question I have is, 'But does the school have something to offer the student?'	
Schools do have lots of things to offer students—without doubt, but are they the same things that the writer thought the school was offering or able to offer and are they the same things which the student wanted?	
I have read a couple of cases now which describe a student who has left the school. Is there an unusually high rate of students who leave the school and either transfer to another or drop-out altogether? Are these teachers more 'connected' to their students so that they feel more responsible? Does this impede objectivity? Is objectivity desirable/necessary? What factors are present in the school which encourage this behaviour? Most of the cases which describe this phenomenon question the teachers' actions, the role of parents and the structure of table groups and teaching teams. Yet this case poses a slightly different perspective. If the close nature of the school structure is such that it puts pressure on students to perform, there are, as a consequence, no places to hide which may be more readily found in a more traditional structure. Exposed, the student and the teacher have to find common ground on which to work and to relate. Obviously this worked well while the student remained on task and teachers remained flexible. Was the group so supportive that the student began to feel there would be no consequences? I am curious about the reasons the student may have for not wanting to return to the school?	Schools with traditional structures may have places to hide that are not readily found in a school where closeness between students and teachers puts pressure on students to perform. Exposed in this way, students and teachers have to find common ground on which to work and relate. This works well while the students remain on task and teachers remain flexible.
When a student chooses a course of action in their lives which we, as teachers may not recommend, it seems to question our own responsibility for the student's action. Some of the other cases we have read and discussed also explore these ideas and feelings. Does every student	When a student chooses a course of action in their lives which we, as teachers may not recommend, it seems to question our own responsibility for the student's action.

Commentary	Research proposition
<p>need to complete their schooling in the traditional way? Can teachers be seen to condone alternative ways of securing an education, ie. in the workforce? Is leaving school the end of education? Many students return to study after years away.</p>	

Combined research propositions

The TSG welfare and discipline approach is effective and strong because it is consistent, it enables teachers to support each other and the students, and it gives a consistent message which is reassuring to students. The responsibility is to the group, not just an individual. It's hard to assess whether this strategy may have an opposite effect, causing a student to leave. (E:06)⁸⁰

Teams click when teachers are seen as educators rather than experts or method teachers, where there is diversity of background and experience, where male and female teachers challenge stereotypical roles and where the work is shared. (E:06)

Although it is preferable for one teacher to take responsibility for a specific problem involving a student and their family, working in a small team means that all teachers have enough insight to step in if the situation won't wait for the right teacher to become available. Teachers regularly exchange information about students in informal situations such as the staffroom and formal discussions between teachers ensure that there is a common and consistent approach which is known to students. The talk is constructive, not disparaging. Teachers engage in active planning based on the formal and informal discussions about students' behaviour and needs. (E:06)

Teachers are flexible in organising learning programs for students who are at risk of leaving the school. They monitor the situation regularly. Low achievers, even though they can be unreceptive to learning, and work only when they are interested and confident of their abilities, can nevertheless be successful in a leadership role. Teachers give these students lots of responsibility. (E:06)

⁸⁰ Notes in brackets which stipulate a letter followed by a number indicate the source document as listed in the document register in Appendix 1.

It is hard for students to be invisible in the TSG structure. The close nature of the structure puts pressure on students to perform and removes hiding places which may be found in more traditional structures. Exposed, the student and the teacher have to find common ground on which to work and to relate. Obviously this works well while the student remains on task and teachers remain flexible. (E:06)

Students are required to be quite adult in their talking about problems and sometimes this can lead to trouble. Some students push the limits even though they know the difference between right and wrong. For instance, teachers see past drop outs as possible distractions for students currently at risk of dropping out. Such distractions can lead to behaviour which attracts small penalties which are very visible in small groups where the whole team is watching. (E:06)

Parents may be more important members of the team than we realise. Students might stay at school longer if teachers and parents had a shared understanding and appreciated each others efforts. Teachers think carefully about their communication patterns with parents. What teachers perceive as fair treatment is not always seen in the same light by parents. More direct communication with parents might change this situation. (E:06)

When a student chooses a course of action in their lives which teachers may not have recommended, it forces teachers to question their judgement and consider other perspectives for looking at the student's action. Teachers concern for students is enduring, even after they have left the school. (E:06)

Appendix 3: A portrait of ILP at Eagle Secondary College

A deeper understanding about teaching and learning

Background

On 20 July, 1994, Eagle Secondary College (Eagle Secondary College) submitted a proposal for their participation in the Link Project. It was prepared by Bill on behalf of three teaching teams and other individual staff members. At Eagle Secondary College the Links project was introduced to staff during a number of information sessions including a whole staff briefing, the Administration Advisory Committee, teaching team meetings and then a meeting with Steve from VU. The school management supported participation in the project. TE participated in a professional development session 'Case writing as Action Research' which was run by the CRG at VU. At this session TE identified that Eagle Secondary College would be interested to examine the idea of 'teaching teams as opposed to team teaching' (*CRG: Case Writing as Action Research*). (E21)⁸¹

Eagle Secondary College was a new school. Having opened in the previous year, 1993, it was located in a 'rapidly growing new residential area'. The 1994 enrolment was 336 (Year 7 and 8 only) with a projected enrolment of 1500 by the year 2000. (E21)

In describing the student demographics the Links proposal stated:

About a third of the students receive the educational maintenance allowance.
Sixty-four percent of the students come from two parent families.
Approximately 30% of the local households have an income in the \$30–40,000 bracket. Employed parents work equally in the trades, clerical and professional categories. English is spoken in the home of 77% of the community...Italian is the most common language other than English spoken in the home (7%).(E21)

⁸¹ Notes in brackets which stipulate a letter followed by a number indicate the source document as listed in the document register in Appendix 1.

At the time the Links proposal was written the School Council had already indicated their commitment to rethinking the traditional structures for secondary schooling by adopting the Team Small Group structure into the school charter as a priority for 1994–6.

“The college is co-educational, and has been established following a team/small group model. It aims to provide an environment in which excellence is achieved by cooperation between all members of the College community...students are grouped in student teams identified by colour. In classrooms, students work predominantly in table groups to accommodate cooperative activities and peer teaching. Teachers are in teaching teams, the majority of their allotments are with the same students. It is envisioned that the same students and teachers work together for two or three years.” (E21)

Eagle Secondary College in researching and ‘rethinking the basic pedagogical building block of the school’ was working in conjunction with the NSN ‘trialing and initiating innovative practices’. They saw the Links project as being complementary to both the NSN partnership and their Charter Priority Area One: *‘Development of the school curriculum, structures and professional development which supports excellence in teaching and learning.’* Within this charter priority Strategy 1 was to ‘develop the small group/team structure of school/staff organisational structure and the student/classroom organisation’ and Strategy 2 aimed to ‘provide professional development for teachers in meeting their own goals of improved teaching and improving their practice in implementing cooperative learning strategies, inquiry based learning and an integrated curriculum’. This strategy also aimed to ‘document and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning within the integrated curriculum at all year levels it is piloted’. (E21)

Proposal Outline: The Link Project (E21) describes how the Eagle Secondary College saw that the Links project provided them with an opportunity to produce ‘concrete documentation about the interface between teacher and table group and teacher and team...a structure for the process of research and renewal at the heart of the NSN project.’

In particular, Eagle Secondary College proposed that their participation in the Roundtable would provide an opportunity to examine the team/small group structure through the use of individual teacher case studies by focusing on:

- the table group (Are table groups an effective learning medium?)
- teaching teams (What does our work show about team formation, team building, team cohesion and present team operation?)
- teaching practice (Has teaching practice changed/remained the same within the TSG model?). (E21)

Eagle Secondary College saw the focus on researching teaching teams as being directly connected to the schools' bi-weekly professional development sessions. Eagle Secondary College also predicted that the research on teaching teams would inform the formation of new teams. (E21)

At Eagle Secondary College case and commentaries were written over the course of a year by the teachers and the university colleague. They believed that the cases and commentaries told stories deep enough to lend themselves to further discourse but were still easily accessible to the casual reader. By collecting them into a school report they wanted to open a window upon teaching and learning at Eagle Secondary College. In the school report the cases were grouped to allow the reader to focus easily upon an aspect of interest. The contributors to the school report wanted the document to be seen as open to continuing discourse and encouraged others to add commentaries and even cases because they thought that the more voices that were heard the deeper the vein of experience we could all benefit from. (E20)

In 14 cases and 11 associated commentaries the teachers at Eagle Secondary College attempted to 'open a window upon teaching and learning' at their school (E22). Within each case and commentary were explicit and implicit statements which, when collected and connected, form an authoritative picture of their understanding about teaching and learning in general and more specifically about their work within a TSG structure. An examination of the cases and commentaries authored by the members of the Roundtable sheds light on "the dynamic interaction between 'practice' (what

teachers do), ‘theory’ (how they understand what they do) and ‘ethics’ (why they do what they do)” (Dalmau & Guðjónsdóttir, 2002).

What follows are action researchers’ statements, the findings identified by teachers in their writing during the project.

Statements: teachers’ professional knowledge, practice and development

Teachers aim to make connections between school structures, teaching practice and subsequent learning. (E15) Teachers work involves making connections between learning structures, the special needs of students, relationships and students’ self perception. (E14) Teachers apply what they have learned in one situation to other similar situations. (E9)

Teachers draw on government documents to understand conditions for learning. When they read something they feel is important they may remember and use it to guide their practice for a long time. For example, the conditions for learning outlined in the old School Curriculum and Organisation Framework include starting with the kids, linking theory to practice, encouraging risk taking and learning from errors. (E14)

Teachers see difference as a strength and understand that meeting the needs of individuals requires flexibility of planning and delivery. Teachers are constantly making decisions about students’ learning needs and sometimes decisions are negotiated with students. (E9)

Teachers are conscious of creating positive learning environments and they organise classrooms to facilitate learning outcomes for students. Teachers are explicit about their expectations of students. Teachers expect students to take responsibility for their learning. (E9)

Teachers are anxious about the degree of student learning in some classes. The reasons why some classes are difficult are complex. In the face of students’ inadequate social and learning skills teachers have a genuine concern for students and their physical, social, emotional and psychological needs. At the same time, the teacher must also maintain self pride and self esteem based on the belief that what they do is valued and valuable. (E15)

Teachers monitor classroom activity taking action to remedy unproductive situations. They give priority to supporting learning although they are sometimes required to take a mediation role in relation to disputes between students. Teachers watch for signs that indicate engagement and disengagement. Teachers draw on detailed knowledge about patterns of behaviour and individual students when they are attempting to understand a critical incident. Teachers initiate conversations with students in order to resolve possible problems. Teachers adjust their practice to facilitate constructive outcomes for uncooperative students but they still aim for cooperation in the future. (E9)

Teachers introduce cooperative skills systematically. (E9) Teachers guide students in their acceptance of others' opinions and their respect for difference. Teachers believe that racism and cruelty are due to ignorance and that it is possible to build tolerance through awareness raising in school programs. (E10)

Teachers are flexible in organising learning programs for students who are at risk of leaving the school. They monitor the situation regularly. On the basis of extended observations and thought teachers draw conclusions about students' problems and the possible causes. In examining student behaviour patterns teachers also notice student attitude. Addressing learning problems may involve personal issues such as building self esteem. Teachers work one step at a time to unravel negative learning experiences in order to build self esteem and positive relationships between students and between students and teachers. Teachers provide opportunities to experience success, sometimes by designing small tasks that are more likely to be completed. (E14) Low achievers, even though they can be unreceptive to learning, and work only when they are interested and confident of their abilities, can nevertheless be successful in a leadership role. Teachers give these students lots of responsibility. (E6)

Sometimes the plans are unsuccessful and teachers need to observe and note current behaviour patterns. (E14)

Learning about other teachers' practice can be inspiration to try new ideas. Secondary teachers can learn from primary teachers. Unlike primary schools, team teaching is not common in secondary schools and therefore requires some organisation and

planning. Trying new ideas requires re-organising students. Sometimes successful approaches are repeated and sometimes not. (E13)

There is a connection between teachers having an opportunity to talk about their feelings, ideas and attempts to change classroom dynamics and their ability to influence the teaching and learning program of a class successfully. Through such opportunities teachers learn a great deal about themselves, the students and the school. Teachers are concerned, they care, they have courage, they are committed and they cry a little too. They reveal personal and professional challenges in their practice and in the stories they tell about their experiences. (E16)

Teachers can struggle and despair over classroom interactions as they plan for teaching and prepare for the unpleasant experiences which may be a regular part of their work. While it is not always easy, teachers achieve change by looking at their own practice, challenging themselves to discard old habits, looking for solutions, recognising them when they see them and then giving them a try. Teachers learn some things by chance. Teachers learn about how they might change their practice by watching other teachers. Teachers replicate the successful strategies of their colleagues. (E16)

Teachers know that wanting to be in control does not lead to good student teacher relationships. Teachers who are quiet, patient and unfazed can develop relationships with students which are focused on thinking and challenge. Teachers are pleased when they are able to chat with students in a friendly way, create curiosity and explain in a low voice. They notice that achieving this kind of relationship with students means the students settle quickly, there are fewer arguments, there is a studious environment and teachers can show the students that they like them. (E16)

Teachers know that the morning is a good time for working. Students are orderly and teachers give clear instructions and are not frustrated by lost time. In the first session of the day, students are cooperative, interested, busy, on task, quick to respond, enjoying and learning from the work, asking good questions, maintaining interest even when things do not proceed well and talking in a calm and respectful tone. In the first session of the day, interruptions are taken in their stride. Towards the end of sessions students drift away from tasks. There is a possibility that even when students

experience disruptions such as visitors and having to move rooms that having the same teacher means that the group will settle quickly. (E15)

Even if a new topic is introduced, a group who has been together for several hours may begin to engage in teasing, sarcastic retorts, and show a diminishing respect for each other. Informality may be an issue but factors beyond the classroom (eg junk food) may also impact on the classroom climate. (E15)

There are some activities, such as a science experiment involving growing seeds, which are busy, new, different which raise the interest and curiosity of students. Teachers try to engage students in self-directed project type work where students are free to move around the room, to talk to each other and the teacher. The work is activity based and requires little writing, no reports, paragraphs or long prose. (E15)

After two sessions, even in the morning, students can ‘drift off’ to the extent that they are unaware that a class has finished. By sixth period (with no helicopter rides on offer) it seems close to impossible to maintain a respectful and cooperative learning environment. (E15)

There is so much going on and teachers are frantically trying to make their content stimulating, interesting and meaningful for the students. But questions re-emerge about the conditions which support learning. Should there be a focus on gender dynamics, nutrition, sleep, recreation and television, group familiarity and/or options for creating variety in working groups? (E15)

Statements: the team small group structure

Aims of the TSG

The TSG structure is designed to support students academically, socially and behaviourally. TSG may not suit all students. Not all students are able to work cooperatively in table groups. (E10)

Having a school structure which allows for group decision-making, informal arrangements and flexibility in curriculum delivery facilitates things such as excursions and team events which are valued by everyone. (E11)

Commitment to the structure

Unless all teachers experience a sense of belonging and commitment to this model then discussion about curriculum and school structure will move in more traditional ways. (E9) For teachers, when structures are imposed, they are faced with several problems: they have to work within a structure which is unfamiliar; they have no sense of ownership because they have not been part of the decision-making process for implementation of the structure; and they may not have the professional skills and experience to implement the structure successfully. (E5)

Teachers question whether school reform means restructuring and whether this implies better learning. (E7)

Similar situations are faced by teachers and students. (E5) It is possible that students and teachers experience similar feelings of exclusion when they are not part of the group or have not been involved in decision-making. (E9)

Students have opinions about the value of TSG and make comparisons with the way other schools are organised. (E5)

There is often a dominant culture in schools and therefore a possibility that some will feel left out. (E9)

In a TSG structure the staff trust others to make decisions. Even if they may have decided otherwise they are prepared to wear the decisions or to genuinely negotiate a change. Giving authority and then taking it back serves to reinforce that the authority does not really exist. A principal takes a professional risk but also demonstrates professional trust when they hand over authority and responsibility for teaching and learning to a teaching team. Trust is accompanied by support when all staff have a vested interest. In a collaborative and consultative process trust is established and accepted by all parties and there is little benefit in taking authority back. If consultation is not possible discomfort is experienced by those forced to act outside the process but each individual proceeds based on their best judgement and responsibility is resumed easily. No matter who is formally responsible, everyone would take responsibility if required and would work with others to deal with the incident in the most appropriate way. The principal may or may not be consulted during the process. (E17)

Teachers in teams and students in table groups share responsibility through an individual commitment to the group. The goal of the table groups and the teaching team is to successfully take leadership and contribute around personal strengths; work collaboratively to develop team projects; share responsibility and stimulate personal thinking and that of others by rigorously questioning, analysing and reflecting upon the issues which are generated by their experiences. Members of teaching teams and table groups are aware of intellectual struggle in their work. (E17)

In a TSG school the principal is responsible for communicating with parents and coordinating school-community communication. The teams have responsibility for student management and the principal is used as a consultant/sounding board. Within a context of shared responsibility principals anticipate possible problems and suggest strategies. (E17)

Learning teams

Learning is the focus of teachers' work with students and with each other. Teachers wonder about the distinction between teaching and learning in their own practice. (E7)

Teachers have questions about learning to work together and they identify a number of issues which need to be considered:

- the role of teachers as team facilitators or team members
- the skills and attitudes needed for effective team work
- the recognition and development of skills and attitudes which support team work
- the establishment of effective teams in classrooms and staffrooms
- the place of consensus decision-making
- the role of teachers, education and schooling in imposing teaching, learning and social structures. (E7)

Learning is an ongoing, often lengthy process. It is evident in many ways. Sometimes it is evident in a specific situation, sometimes teachers notice the change and sometimes students express the development of learning or strengthening of

understanding. But very often it takes a long time to realise that learning has occurred. (E12)

Teachers feel success when students are challenged and produce high quality work, when students work cooperatively and when their achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. Students are not entirely satisfied by the successes identified by teachers and they sometimes yearn for learning that takes place beyond the four walls of the classroom. Groups work through stormy times. When students are critical of class activity teachers pay attention and assess the justice of their criticisms. (E12)

Effective learning teams present in many formats and reflect many attributes. Structures can be judged by the success of the people who comprise the teams. This might apply to effective group work or learning outcomes. The table group principles, when applied to all levels of the teaching and learning structure, provide a model which in many ways may empower both students and teachers to participate more fully in the schooling processes; they are not something to do away with. (E5)

Working cooperatively does not necessarily come automatically, you need to learn to work cooperatively. Working cooperatively requires familiarity with and competence in negotiating and working together. (E5)

When teachers identify a skill that needs to be taught to two classes they may decide to team teach. Team teaching may also be a supportive approach when teachers are faced with teaching difficult topics. Collaboration needs to be equitable and workable. There are questions about what creates a successful collaboration between teachers or between students. Does it depend on personalities or established social connections? What happens when people are forced to work together, can they still achieve a productive teaching and learning environment? (E13)

The first ground rule for team teachers is to communicate with each other, which can be hard as teachers are so used to working in isolation. The second is to plan together in more detail. Preparation needs to include anticipation of possible complications with the explanation of the topic and the materials; students get confused when teachers give contradictory explanations and instructions. The needs and abilities of all students need to be taken into consideration when designing activities. Some tasks

provide an opportunity for all students to experience success. Successful student interaction is an important outcome. Having visitors is an added incentive for planning even more carefully. Getting feedback from an observer is valuable for reflecting. (E13)

The advantages of team teaching include: support from second teacher; two styles of teaching; more time for follow up (student, parents, admin); student more focused; and less attention seeking behaviour. Difficulties with team teaching include: the need for more thorough planning, catering for more students, time for communication between teachers and checking with each other to avoid mixed messages. While working in teams provides identifiable advantages and disadvantages there are also unanswered questions about student learning outcomes and the impact on individuals. Some students may be intimidated by working in large groups. (E13)

Stability within home groups creates home group cohesion. This cohesion may act to reduce interactions with other home groups in the team. It is unclear whether it is important to extend the connections between home groups or whether the same outcomes can be achieved by a home group that creates connections between table groups. Factors which might be considered include team priorities, home group stability, level of empowerment, outcomes beyond the dominant curriculum. (E11)

TSG, welfare and discipline

The team approach empowers teachers, students and parents to resolve discipline problems together; they are the people most likely to feel passionate about resolution of the problem. Because teachers, students, parents and teams are familiar with students' strengths and weakness and know their history they are the best people to handle welfare and discipline. This process removes the participation of a time-pushed or uninterested outside party. Being part of a team which follows agreed protocols and subsequently reaches a successful resolution of a discipline problem enhances commitment to a consistent process. Promoting team resolution to support student welfare is also appropriate because it facilitates talking issues through, trying different strategies, building problem solving relationships, developing a greater understanding of each other and an interest in reaching agreements and compromises. All of these changes may lead to different reactions in similar situations in the future. (E18)

When serious problems emerge (for example boys sexually harassing girls in the yard), the principal identifies all the people involved and talks with them. When the stories are verified the principal discusses possible consequences with other staff. Vice principals are responsible for the paperwork connected to student discipline and principals contact the parents of all students to describe the incident and the consequences. Principals brief team leaders immediately. (E17)

Parents who are concerned about their children feel free to discuss issues with principals. They sometimes pass on information which they assume is known by the school. Principals clarify the information they obtain from students. As a problem situation is clarified it is sometimes necessary to re-evaluate the consequences because inappropriate consequences give the wrong message to students. Consequences are negotiated between the principal and team members. Principals then discuss the consequences with parents to seek their support. Only when everyone is agreed is the decision final. (E17)

Principals make recommendations to students about getting support from a counsellor. They check with parents and they make appointments. (E17)

The TSG welfare and discipline approach is effective and strong because it is consistent, it enables teachers to support each other and the students, and it gives a consistent message which is reassuring to students. The responsibility is to the group, not just an individual. It's hard to assess whether this strategy may have an opposite effect, causing a student to leave. (E6)

Teachers meet with students and their parents to discuss identified learning problems and plan strategies which address those problems. If the problem seems to shift, the teachers and parents continue their discussions to try and reach a deeper understanding of the underlying issues and not just the obvious problems. Teachers sometimes team up when meeting with parents. (E14)

Parents may be more important members of the team than we realise. Students might stay at school longer if teachers and parents had a shared understanding and appreciated each others efforts. Teachers think carefully about their communication patterns with parents. What teachers perceive as fair treatment is not always seen in

the same light by parents. More direct communication with parents might change this situation. (E6)

Learning and behaviour are connected and critical incidents may be a catalyst for attending to problems which have been ignored in the past. Knowledge and previous experience can effect decisions but the connections are not always clear. Looking back at an incident after a period of time can reveal associated information that was not evident or known at the time. Encouraging students to confront issues may also lead to more explicit connections. Principals, when reflecting on school demographics, are aware that if a group has a majority of male students this could create a threatening environment for girls. (E17)

Teaching teams

Teachers work in teams planning, sharing, evaluating and problem solving. They teach fewer student and often teach the same students for several subjects which means they have an opportunity to get to know the students. This structure builds on the strength of the primary school model which seems sound and potentially effective. (E15)

Building and maintaining teaching teams

One dilemma for senior staff is how to promote and maintain consistent procedures. They know that if the collaborative process is to work it needs to be seen in the context of building teams, not distribution of work load; however responsibility given to teachers and teams can create time consuming demands for teachers, who may instead argue that those with authority and/or experience should do the work. (E18)

Team cohesion

Teams click when teachers are seen as educators rather than experts or method teachers, where there is diversity of background and experience, where male and female teachers challenge stereotypical roles and where the work is shared. (E6)

Teaching in the TSG structure requires a team commitment which involves teaching multiple methods, sometimes with a lack of qualifications. There is a question about whether this practice is ethical or fair to students. (E8)

In the TSG structure, teachers know and respect each other personally and professionally. In teams teachers talk about many things. Sharing with teachers outside the team would never have the same impact as it does with those who ‘know’. Teachers talk about personal and student frustration and achievement and other things such as family details and histories. The structure helps teachers to better understand children and their families but they wonder whether the increased knowledge leads the students to be more dependent. Teachers know that through this process there is comfort in sharing and caring but they still wonder if they are doing a good job with the students educationally or whether students’ education benefits from these practices. (E8)

Threats to established team processes can result from personality clashes, stress and workload demands. Senior staff know that different personal combinations and dynamics lead to different situations which in turn require different solutions. While these differences need to be taken into consideration, solutions which are outside agreed procedures can attract the attention (possibly critical) of others and also create difficulties in assessing possible responses. When teachers handball a problem to senior staff it puts them on the spot—with thoughts and feelings whizzing, senior staff sense the tension between the individual demand, the established team processes and their belief that they share the responsibility for students with individual teachers and teams. They also know that when teachers handball problems they lose interest in the outcomes. (E18)

Team practices

Team ownership of problems has a strong influence on teachers’ ability to see a problem clearly and tackle difficult issues with resolve and support. Teaching seems to be constantly problematic and there is the capacity for problems to heighten our awareness and also destroy professional confidence. While there is team ownership of problems teachers may still be alone in their classrooms. This raises the question about how partnerships, whether they be between staff, students or visitors, can have a positive effect in changing practice and enhancing teaching and learning. (E15)

Teaching teams, welfare and discipline

When a team of teachers takes responsibility for a particular group of students in the TSG structure, the discipline process is characterised by consideration of and support

for all people involved. When a problem arises there is a commitment to working as a team, and open discussion includes examining mitigating factors, listening to the range of opinions and considering all options available. This process draws on teachers' knowledge about each student and puts the discussion in the context of current circumstances. Even when a decision is proposed all the possibilities are considered including the length of suspension, counselling and support and the likelihood of improvement. (E18)

Although it is preferable for one teacher to take responsibility for a specific problem involving a student and their family, working in a small team means that all teachers have enough insight to step in if the situation won't wait for the right teacher to become available. Teachers regularly exchange information about students in informal situations such as the staffroom, and formal discussions between teachers ensure that there is a common and consistent approach which is known to students. The talk is constructive, not disparaging. Teachers engage in active planning based on the formal and informal discussions about students' behaviour and needs. (E6)

Teachers welcome breaks in their busy day and at an informal level they pass on information and seek opinions about discipline problems when they have staffroom conversations with senior staff. Sometimes these conversations relate to ongoing problems. In these conversations senior staff reassure and support teachers. Even though they may be aware of possible contradictions between actions aimed at stopping bad behaviour and the advice given by external agencies (to avoid suspension for example), they know that the decision will ultimately be made by the team. (E18)

If senior staff do engage with specific discipline problems they gain an understanding of the situation by gathering information from teachers, who reciprocate with supportive action. They also talk to students in order to reach an agreed understanding about the behaviour and the consequences. As an outside party it can be hard for senior staff to determine on what basis decisions might be made, because they are removed from the clarity and accuracy of the words and actions under consideration, and are also privy to experiences and information only tangentially connected to identified problems, which could possibly influence their thinking. For these reasons

they believe their participation is best kept to advice, support and sometimes implementation—but only in the most serious cases. (E18)

Table groups

TSG is based on grouping students in set table groups. These operate on the principle of cooperative learning with students encouraged to attempt the work task on their own, then ask the table group and then the teacher. There is an emphasis on shared responsibility for task and learning—the individual, the table group and the teacher. (E15)

Teachers and the formation of student table groups

Table groups and teams provide a structure for learning to occur. It is easy to physically group students but to form effective teaching and learning groups requires attention to a number of steps. Characteristics of effective groups include:

- involving students in their own learning
- allowing students to take responsibility for their learning
- allowing students to take risks
- allowing teachers taking risks
- seeing teachers and students as learners
- consideration of students background and experience
- utilising real life learning experiences
- focusing on successes
- building on and learning from errors. (E7)

There are questions about whether the characteristics of successful groups are specific to table groups or whether they may be found in other group formations. Are table groups necessary for learning or is it effective to have any kind of group partnered with good teaching? Teachers have extended their questioning about group

composition and mixed ability classes to encompass consideration of multi-age classes. (E7)

Teachers, through discussion, asking questions and exploring principles make decisions about the way they will organise and facilitate teaching and learning in table groups. Based on previous experiences teachers make judgements about what makes a successful group. For instance, some groups may need variety to create a feasible working environment. Teachers collect information from students in order to check that structures are functioning well and to listen for discontent. Teachers talk with each other about student relationships. Teachers consider factors such as gender, student input, skill level and social relationships. Teachers consider the needs, actions and feelings of individual students and also of table groups. Based on sound educational reasoning, teachers decide which new table groups will be in the best interests of students. (E5, 9)

Students in successful groups work together planning and generating ideas. Teachers need to have an understanding of the different stages in group formation in order to provide a framework for group development. Teachers begin to build groups by providing opportunities for students to talk about their previous experiences and current expectations. Teachers know that starting with talk can enhance individual and group creativity and productivity. They question the degree to which this is applied in a range of situations. Students, when recalling their experiences of team building, have clear memories about the importance of talk in getting to know other students. Students know that talking about personal experiences contributes to group understanding and achievement. (E7)

Gradually, teachers experiment with physically regrouping, checking for feelings and working towards the removal of barriers and the discovery of commonalities. A process involving moving from two-person to four-person and then to bigger group activities leads to the formation of new mixed groups. Ideas are checked with the whole group before being accepted. (E7)

Even when teachers have the knowledge, experience and skills to support the formation of effective groups they wonder whether they sometimes neglect to lay the appropriate foundations. (E7)

Sometimes cultural differences get in the way of groups operating effectively. Teachers wonder about the implications of groups developing distinctive and different cultures. In these and other circumstances it is important to begin with a focus on team building. When teachers identify a dysfunctional group they need to reveal the problem to the group and start again with a focus on forming a group. (E7)

Students and the formation of table groups

Teachers know that students need to participate in decision-making processes which affect them and that unless they feel ownership there is a chance they will not cooperate. While teachers know that collaborative decision-making is not always possible and that students' objections are sometimes justified, it is a shock when students refuse to comply. Students appreciate the opportunity to engage in genuine dialogue and negotiation with teachers about the organisation of table groups. Even when teachers are keen to get on with the work they have prepared for the students they provide reasoned explanations for their decisions about the re-organisation of table groups. Teachers reinforce the importance of school policies and team decision-making when structures are challenged. Teachers expect that students will understand their explanations and reasoning and respond positively. Students do not always respond to reasoning and can continue to resist teachers requests. When students grumble and complain about new group arrangements which they don't like, they are not particularly receptive to work. Teachers know that when problems are raised by the students they need to find a solution or productive time will be wasted. (E5, 9)

When students are given a say about group composition, friendship groups result. Teachers selected this option in exchange for a commitment to stability. When teachers select the 'tough it out' option and students are unwillingly seated as the teachers direct them, students do not work well in their new groups. (E5)

When new table groups are imposed by teachers, students respond with questions, indignation, disapproval and non-acceptance. Teachers detect non-acceptance. Students feel able to reject the planned changes based on knowledge of their rights, which they have learned through the table group structure. Teachers interpret student disapproval as a demand for a higher level application of table group principles such as: listening to all the voices; including everyone in the decision-making process; and

negotiating decisions. The belief is that when there is equal contribution to the work it results in group ownership. (E5)

Table groups and student relationships

Table groups do not suit all students. In some instances they have the effect of alienating students rather than facilitating cooperative working relationships. Students are aware of complex relations within class groups. They understand their position within the group, especially when no one wants to work with them. (E9)

Teachers know that difficult student relationships can get in the way of learning and students need to develop skills for working with others in a range of situations. While teachers expect students to be able to work individually and in groups they also know that some students work well independently but do not work and share well in groups. Teachers are aware of variations in students' emotional patterns and they notice that social isolates can end up working together. (E9)

Students believe they have developed skills which mean they can work independently. (E7)

Students know that team work requires compromise. Students know that reaching agreement in teams takes time. (E7)

Student leaders are not automatically accepted by other students. Student leaders have questions about common interests and skills. (E7)

Groups can be affected by structural arrangements. For instance, students already grouped for one class are unlikely to regroup if the next class is in the same room. Opening the room dividers before a combined class can shift this inclination. The two groups may develop a group identity during the combined talk time. Working with large groups seems to reduce the noise made by individuals but increases the noise made by the group. This might have an impact on other groups in the vicinity and also closer monitoring to check on quieter students. Using rooms other than home rooms reduces the ownership students feel for their working space. (E13)

Students as learners

Teachers are committed to giving the best to each student and attempting to provide an appropriate learning environment, but not all learning is the responsibility of the teacher. Students, even ones as young as 12 or 13, have to be able to take a little responsibility for their actions and the consequences of their actions. (E10)

Students are more likely to take a lead when they feel the power of working in a group. When students work together in table groups they are able to take initiatives, foreshadow their ideas and discuss them with the teaching team in order to get the go ahead. Table groups that are working well can identify and divide up the tasks that are needed to meet their goals and they support each other in achieving them. (E11)

When students take control of their learning and the results are successful, they are happy, their self esteem is boosted, they gain respect from their peers, they experience being focused and achieving completion, they gain confidence in relating with others and they gain an understanding of the benefits of working cooperatively with peers. Groups that work well together welcome the prospect of staying together. (E11)

When students are engaged in projects they incorporate their initiatives into subject related work requirements. For instance, in the context of implementing a project students might undertake complex organisational tasks and in doing so develop numeracy skills. (E11)

Students gain confidence when they have a say in the curriculum and there is a structure that supports this. In this environment they plan and implement projects which are valued by the whole team. In this scenario skills development is not an aim but an outcome. When students take a lead both teachers and students appreciate the results. (E11)

When students act, they in turn inspire others. When one group of students is successful in taking responsibility for their own learning they provide a model for others who in turn take initiatives. (E11)

Students can provide important support for their peers. Provided with an opportunity to discuss the possibilities, they develop specific strategies as well as a general understanding of behaviours and structures which might make a difference. (E14)

Working in table groups reduces the amount of teacher talk, increases the assistance that students give each other and changes the teacher's role to that of monitoring progress. (E13)

Attention seeking students know how to attract attention; they can be rude and disrespectful of themselves and others. They demand a response. It is sometimes possible to get past the attention seeking behaviour of a student and see a glimpse of the person with interests, visions and opinions, yet the engagement can end as quickly as it began. Students make judgements about what they do and don't need for the future and in some cases they will see no need to learn anything that a school offers. Trying to reason with students who see no purpose in developing skills such as literacy results in the student returning to their attention seeking behaviour. (E15)

Teacher-student relationships

In the TSG structure students get to know teachers well: their strengths, weaknesses and moods. Over time students grow to like their teachers, respect their reasoning and sometimes trust them with their secrets, knowing that the secret will only be broken if the teacher believes there is some benefit for the student. (E8)

Comfortable and long term relationships with a small team of teachers supports student-initiated group work. (E11)

It takes time for students to develop the trust which is necessary for them to speak out in the classroom. Regular talk in table groups facilitates tolerance, care and regard through understanding each others' disparate abilities and needs. Students begin to recognise the less obvious causes of frustration, anger and withdrawal. This awareness leads to different solutions to arguments. (E12)

Teachers insist that students share the responsibility of planning for learning. Teachers contribute ideas and discuss possibilities with students. Decisions are reached by consensus. Planning is a shared responsibility and table groups are assigned research tasks. Decision-making is supported by research. In this context, possible disappointment is balanced by understanding the circumstances. Research supports formulating a compromise. Successful activities lead to leaps in self esteem and open the door to possibilities for the future. (E12)

Teachers, by their actions, tell students what is valued. This way of working lets the students know that it is important to have fun and foster team togetherness and that teachers value a broad range of experiences. Teachers play an important role sowing seeds of inspiration. When students take a lead teachers act more as resource people. Teachers learned that we should put trust in kids and not underestimate their abilities. The more responsibility you give to students the more they will accept. We also learned there is power in working together, because tasks that otherwise seem impossible can be achieved. Such projects tell a lot about team effectiveness and cohesion. (E11)

Within the TSG structure transition from one year to the next is easy. There is warm, comfortable familiarity between the teacher and table groups and through team building and re-acquainting activities it is possible to welcome new members, re-establish friendships and re-form a strong, cohesive team fairly quickly. (E8)

In the TSG structure the pressure on the teacher is minimised because expectations are clear, relationships are established, and the members of table groups are responsible for and accountable to each other. This is evident in their care for new members. During transition teachers can focus on discovering the new students because they are already familiar with the academic strengths and weakness of the students they have worked with in previous years. (E8)

While teachers want the students to know that they are real people too, there is a personal-professional overlap where safe distance is reduced; it is possible for teachers to feel they are enmeshed in their students' family lives. While parents are comforted by knowing someone to contact at the school there is a question about whether this closeness puts teachers at risk. (E8)

Teachers are aware of students' experiences, feelings and capacities. Students who engage in successful learning activities are keen to repeat the experience. In this situation they may take on a leadership role. (E7)

When beginning a new activity teachers outline their plans and check for student agreement. In some circumstances, teachers hand over responsibility to students. The responsibility may be as a leader or as an active group member. (E7)

Students respond positively to some teachers yet others attract their wrath. In difficult situations, teachers aim for reconciliation with students and while some teachers give up because they suffer abuse or sense defeat others will persevere on the basis of commitment to the team. In team situations the chances of a successful teacher-student relationship seem to be increased because there are more options. However, teachers seeking reconciliation when other teachers have given up might inadvertently undermine their colleagues' self esteem and through tolerance suggest support for unacceptable behaviour. When teachers do not achieve reconciliation with students they can feel hurt by the lost effort, dented pride, fear of peer judgment and worry for the student. (E10)

While teachers aim for stability they are flexible when trying to accommodate students' needs. They draw on informal conversations with professionals to construct frameworks for understanding students and are watchful when they begin working with students whose reputation precedes them. Teachers also recognise their own feelings when they are anticipating the needs of sad/mad/bad students. Having assessed the situation they employ a wide range of approaches for dealing with difficult situations, including turning a blind eye, contracts, modified work programs, friendship, cajoling, allocating responsibility, principal meetings, team meetings, psychologist meetings, detentions, peer support structures, class changes, and parent meetings. Teachers communicate frequently with parents when they are faced with difficult situations. Even in difficult circumstances teachers will try to sort things out and provide a positive learning experience. (E10)

It is hard for students to be invisible in the TSG structure. The close nature of the structure puts pressure on students to perform and removes hiding places which may be found in more traditional structures. Exposed, the student and the teacher have to find common ground on which to work and to relate. Obviously this works well while the student remains on task and teachers remain flexible. (E6)

Students are required to be quite adult in their talking about problems and sometimes this can lead to trouble. Some students push the limits even though they know the difference between right and wrong. For instance, teachers see past drop outs as possible distractions for students currently at risk of dropping out. Such distractions

can lead to behaviour which attracts small penalties which are very visible in small groups where the whole team is watching. (E6)

Teachers recognise students' patterns of behaviour when they 'blow up' and students recognise teachers' patterns of forgiveness. But sometimes when teachers feel they have tried everything and failed they withdraw any special treatment and refuse to allow exceptions to the rules. Even though teachers understand that different schools suit different students, they feel good when they make progress in meeting the needs of particular students and they feel defeated when they fail to achieve a fit and realise that another option or school may be preferable. Teachers do not feel relieved or happy when students are moved to another school and while principals are reluctant to move students to other schools they respect the judgement and advice of their teaching staff. It is difficult for teachers to admit they have been unable to make a difference, especially when they have persevered and made numerous compromises; however teachers say it is the losses which make them try harder, think more and change their practice. (E10)

When a student chooses a course of action in their life which teachers may not have recommended, it forces teachers to question their judgement and consider other perspectives for looking at the student's action. Teachers' concern for students is enduring, even after they have left the school. (E6)

Looking back on the work of the Western Melbourne Roundtable

The project

Teachers willingly and energetically participated in projects focused on their work. They considered their contribution seriously and depending on their knowledge of the project they prepared by putting their ideas on paper. Teachers started with what they knew and what they want to do. (E15)

Teachers did not always have a clear idea about how they would achieve their hopes. (E3)

The Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable engendered many questions. (E3)

Teachers wondered, because of the infancy of the project, whether it would survive the removal of government funding and how new teachers might be brought into the group. (E3)

Teachers noted that finding the time to accumulate information, insights and circumstances in a journal or similar document was obviated by having the cushion of a grant to help. (E3)

Action Research

Research needed to serve the researchers and those being researched and to provide an opportunity for both learning and problem solving. Teachers identified problems and endorsed the exploration of common problems. After identification of a problem teachers discussed the details of the situation and considered possible influences, identified difficulties and teaching challenges. When teachers resolved to focus on identified problems their commitment was high. In this context academic colleagues were encouraging and noticed when there was a connection between the demands of the project and a useful piece of action research. Teachers explored their experiences in team discussions and wrote notes to share with the group. At the same time as remembering, talking and writing, teachers made changes to the way they worked and observed the impact of the changes. For example, teachers tried various team teaching approaches in order to change and observe classroom dynamics. As the work progressed teachers became increasingly focused and determined. (E15)

Focused team meetings provided an opportunity for teachers to pool concerns and suggestions, and to report on strategies trialed and the resulting achievements. In this context, improvement was clear. The university colleague wondered about the distinctions and connections between problem solving and research and resolved that problem solving and research were connected but not the same. They noticed that problem solving seeks but does not always achieve a solution and it does not always include research. Research implies inquiry which may be a way of solving a problem but not all problem solving involves research. In trying to describe the team activity the researcher looked for evidence of inquiry in the search for a solution to the problem. The team process involved a developing inquiry which was parallel to and closely related to planned adventures aimed at problem solving. (E15)

As teachers engaged in sustained journal writing which focused on both teaching and meetings they identified possibilities for research and inquiry. (E15)

Teachers saw the Links project as an opportunity to learn about the TSG and its impact at Eagle Secondary College and to understand the concept of a different type of integrated curriculum. (E4)

Questions which underpinned the documents produced during the ILP included: Does it work for individual? for teams? (E4)

The links coordinators saw themselves as making connections between theory and practice. (E4)

Case writing and reflective practice

Reflection on small incidents prompted teachers to think about bigger issues. (E9)

Teachers saw cases as being about specific questions such as the implications of the table group structure on teaching and learning. They also saw cases as raising questions about wider issues such the nature of our decision-making about teaching and learning structures. (E5)

Teachers placed their descriptions of practice in the context of their own experience and the circumstances in which they worked. (E9)

There was a link between teachers identifying a dilemma and their subsequent learning. (E5)

Cases led to new plans for action and a model strong teaching and learning practice. (E9)

Doing something different was exciting because in attempting to achieve improvement it really made the teacher examine outcomes in terms of teaching and learning. Teachers were strongly committed to professional inquiry when grappling with new ideas. Being involved in something new, somewhat experimental and in the initial phases put pressure on the experimenters to critically analyse their practice and its effects, more so than for the person working within a well established framework. Teachers constantly questioned the value of innovation. There seemed to be a common thread of concern for what innovation might achieve. Their concern included

questions about learning and connections between the arrangement of learning teams, personality, personal need, work based criteria, personal preference and individual learning styles. (E9)

Some teachers had big difficulties trying to identify a suitable case. (E4)

Case studies were compiled for publication and used in orientation programs for new teachers. Time was a barrier to implementing plans. (E4)

By using case writing teachers documented curriculum, integrated programs, the development of team bonding and structures such as TSG and kids in small groups. (E4)

Teachers saw case writing as an extension of natural journal writing with a work focus. They made a distinction between long-winded writing and shorter, focused writing of cases which encapsulated issues. Teachers also engaged in personal writing which had no definite direction but focused on coping in classrooms, coping with individual students and a personal journey with the university partner. (E4)

Some teachers observed different perceptions about whether the professional development focus through the case writing was for the participants or for others. (E4)

Teachers saw case and commentary writing, based on real problems which needed real solutions, as a tool for their own professional development. (E3)

Teachers believed at the beginning, as they still do, that for an educational community to consciously craft pieces of writing based upon reflection of all facets of their work and to then seek written responses from others within this community had the potential to powerfully make teachers their own researchers and agents for change. (E3)

It was at the first meeting of the roundtable that most teachers first became aware of the case writing approach to action research. (E3)

Some of the university colleagues had already begun to develop their case writing skills. (E3)

Some schools held case and commentary writing workshops. (E3)

Teachers found that selecting the appropriate window to illuminate practice was difficult and that crafting it so that its insights and questions resonated loudly enough so as to demand a response was hardest of all. (E3)

Teachers observed that the university colleague was critical in this process, asking pertinent questions in team meetings, helping individuals select potential material for case writing from journals, and writing commentaries to draft cases. At significant times they would also feed in the most recent case writing they had come across. (E3)

In 14 cases and 11 associated commentaries the teachers at Eagle Secondary College attempted to 'open a window upon teaching and learning' at their school (E22). At Eagle Secondary College case and commentaries were written over the course of a year by the teachers and the university colleague from VUT. They believed that the cases and commentaries told stories deep enough to lend themselves to further discourse but were still easily accessible to the casual reader. By collecting them into a school report they wanted to open a window upon teaching and learning at Eagle Secondary College. In the school report the cases were grouped to allow the reader to focus easily upon an aspect of interest. The contributors to the school report wanted the document to be seen as open to continuing discourse and encouraged others to add commentaries and even cases because they thought that the more voices that were heard the deeper the vein of experience we could all benefit from. (E20)

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Partnerships

Teachers saw the project as an opportunity to liaise with other teachers, to get involved in reading and learning about case writing and to connect with university colleagues to further understand the classroom teachers' role in education reform. (E4)

The project provided the opportunity of a journey which connected the inside and outside of the classroom. (E4)

Teachers trying to make a new team used the project to create enthusiasm in teachers who were overworked and had a lot on their plates. (E4)

Through links established with the university colleague the school took on 15 student teachers who became involved at the school in some ongoing capacity. (E4)

Roundtable meetings provided members of the roundtable with an opportunity to associate with other schools and to learn about their interests and the projects they were developing. (E4)

At the first meeting of the roundtable teachers were nervous and worried about hidden agendas. However, they noticed an openness and a lack of artifice from all participants. Steve convened this meeting; he talked frankly about the ownership of the project and showed a willingness not just to talk partnership, but to establish a methodology which would go a long way to ensure that this would happen. At this meeting the schools identified their teams, outlined their projects and university colleagues and schools were matched. (E3)

The role of the university colleague was critical. The university colleague worked closely with all of the Innovative Links participants, conferencing with them both

individually and in teams and, probably most importantly, modelling both case and commentary writing herself. (E3)

While teachers saw the university colleagues as guides, mentors and critical friends they wondered whether they were also learners and agents for change within their own educational community. (E3)

Teachers noticed that as the trust grew between the school and university colleagues so too did the potential for real collaboration. This included team teaching both in schools and at the university. In one school the teaching practicum structures became less rigid, reflecting the teaching and learning structure of the school. This meant that mutually beneficial arrangements were made to help the school overcome difficulties with teacher/student ratios for camps and for student teachers to accumulate sufficient outdoor education experience. Workshops and conferences were attended together. (E3)

Teachers felt that there was a knitting together of a whole lot of disparate strands so that the educational community was not just the school or the university in isolation, but another entity which had grown from respect and knowledge of each of its partner's goals. (E3)

Professional development

Teachers' key memories of the forum at Moonee Valley were the wine and food, watching colleagues' bad acting skills when they role played a case, a sense that when the cases were critiqued it was unfair to the writer who was in the room and questions were raised. (E4)

Members of the administrative team provided variety by holding extra meetings with a professional development focus. (E4)

Teachers felt like they had taken the first steps to reclaiming their own profession. (E3)

Teachers wondered whether the discourses could be opened up for a wider educational constituency to participate in, or whether they were specific to their own contexts. (E3)

Learning from others

Learning about other teachers' practice inspired others to try new ideas. Secondary teachers found they could learn from primary teachers. (E13)

Learning with others

There was a connection between teachers having an opportunity to talk about their feelings, ideas and attempts to change classroom dynamics and their ability to influence the teaching and learning program of a class successfully. Through such opportunities teachers learned a great deal about themselves, the students and the school. Teachers were concerned, they cared, they had courage, they were committed and they cried a little too. They revealed personal and professional challenges in their practice and in the stories they told about their experiences. (E16)

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Inside and outside the classroom

The project provided the opportunity of a journey which connected the inside and outside of the classroom. (E4)

University colleagues

Teachers described the university colleague as a lively, vibrant critical friend who was patient and recognised the school's constraints. They observed that she jollied, bullied and shamed the work out of the teachers. (E4)

Equal relationships between university and school educators

At the beginning of the project teachers were sceptical about the possibility of working together with academics in an equal, mutually productive partnership for school change. Their previous experiences involved academics who wanted to use their practice for research so that they could get doctorates and maybe tenure, or the method lecturers who were always rushing around from student teacher to student

teacher. Teachers felt they saw the first lot far too much and were lucky to see the second lot at all. (E3)

At the beginning of the roundtable teachers wondered whether it was really possible to forge open, dynamic partnerships which would be equally productive. They wondered who would be setting the agenda; whether they would all speak the same language; and whether everyone, not just the school teachers, would be open to change. (E3)

Teachers hoped that the project would provide an opportunity to build some bridges to the university. They sought an honest foundation for a partnership that would continue beyond the project funding. (E3)

Role of university colleague

The role of the university colleague was critical. The university colleague worked closely with all of the Innovative Links participants, conferencing with them both individually and in teams and, probably most importantly, modelling both case and commentary writing herself. (E3)

While teachers saw the university colleagues as guides, mentors and critical friends they wondered whether they were also learners and agents for change within their own educational community. (E3)

Teachers met with academic colleagues—they were associates who brought some ignorance but also distance and professional development experience to the group. Academic associates were not 100% clear about their role but wanted to assist in any way they could. University colleagues referred back to the starting points as they engaged in their work with groups of teachers. University colleagues acknowledged that their ideas may not be accurate representations of what actually occurs and that teacher–insiders with varying amounts of experience within the structure would have different perceptions of the pedagogical ideology and its implementation, both in theory and in practice. The role of the academic colleague included listening; asking questions; offering ideas, materials and information about theories and approaches; and sharing time with classes. They also encouraged teachers to document both their specific action research activities and their teaching practice generally. Academic colleagues felt it was difficult to feel part of the group when they were only in the

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school once every fortnight. Academic colleagues questioned whether they were really part of the team and wonder whether they really made a worthwhile contribution to the group. Academic colleagues were excited and challenged by teachers' work and by the discussions they had with teachers about the conflicting need for subject based curriculum and learning how to work together; the connection between learning and working together; the importance of teaching space, the value of team teaching for improving learning; the importance of stability in table group arrangements and threats to teachers' self esteem. For the university colleagues being part of this problem solving group was interesting and challenging. They were concerned about the issues and felt hopeful that they would learn more about the effective organisation of teaching and learning. (E15)

The teams noticed that a visitor in a difficult class could observe the dynamics and as an additional adult could back up, support and ease the struggle for the teacher. University colleagues were curious about the role of the teacher and the issues which were faced by the teacher of a difficult class. They were interested in the varying levels of concern. While teams of teachers were aware of difficulties and dilemmas it was hard to really understand what was going on in a teacher's mind. When a university colleague tried to map this practice and then overlay their own concerns and reactions they recognised the great differences which they brought to the class. When visiting a class, a university colleague, in comparison to the teacher, had no commitment to or accountability to the students, only to the research project. Yet the university colleague was potentially non-threatening to students in a classroom. There was no demand for communication between them. Students' responses ranged from rudeness to interesting discussions. On the other hand the teacher had to meet with the students every day and cover planned content and assessment. They had little idea of the students' performance during the day. They experienced frustration around pedagogical issues such as wasted planning; learning which was seldom readily identifiable; finding time for rewarding achievement; and designing appropriate tasks which would capture the imagination and allow a positive learning experience for all students. (E15)

Roundtable meetings as an opportunity to associate

Roundtable meetings provided members of the roundtable with an opportunity to associate with other schools and to learn about their interests and the projects they were developing. (E4)

ILP as a natural extension of the NSN

The ILP coordinator worked with the school and the ILP was a natural extension of the NSN work. (E4)

Teacher education

Through links established with the university colleague the school took on 15 student teachers who became involved at the school in some ongoing capacity. (E4)

Spreading the word to student teachers

Innovations, when reported to student teachers and university colleagues, provided a focus for lively debate about values, choices and the role and responsibility of teacher. Such forums also provided an opportunity to critique the innovation in question. It was not easy to speak out against enthusiastic reporting of innovation but some teachers were equally passionate about more traditional ideas regarding the role of teachers. Debate contrasting tradition and innovation swayed the perspective of some but for others, strongly held opinions remained even after an exchange of views. During debates which challenged innovative practice, supporters of the innovation found their values and knowledge seriously challenged and they wondered whether they had become a bit glib in promoting innovation. (E9)

Connection between NSN and ILP

Eagle Secondary College saw that the Links project provided them with an opportunity to produce 'concrete documentation about the interface between teacher and table group and teacher and team as well as a structure for the process of research and renewal at the heart of the NSN project.' (E21)

Questions identified

In particular they proposed that their participation in the Roundtable would provide an opportunity to examine the team/small group structure through the use of individual teacher case studies by focusing on:

- the table group (Are table groups an effective learning medium?)
- teaching teams (What does our work show about team formation, team building, team cohesion and present team operation?)
- teaching practice (Has teaching practice changed/remained the same within the TSG model?). (E21)

Connection between research and pd

Eagle Secondary College saw the focus on researching teaching teams as being directly connected to the school's biweekly professional development sessions. Eagle Secondary College also predicted that the research on teaching teams would inform the formation of new teams. (E21)

Focusing on teaching and learning

Teachers willingly and energetically participated in projects focused on their work. They considered their contribution seriously and at the beginning, depending on their knowledge of the project, they prepared by putting their ideas on paper. Teachers started with what they knew and what they wanted to do. (E15) At this point they did not have a clear idea about how they would achieve their hopes. (E3) The project engendered many questions. (E3) Teachers found that finding the time to accumulate information, insights and circumstances in a journal or similar document was obviated by having the cushion of a grant to help. (E3)

Eagle Secondary College believed that the research needed to serve the researchers and those being researched, providing an opportunity for both learning and problem solving. Teachers identified and explored common problems. (E15)

Teachers struggled and despaired over classroom interactions as they planned for teaching and prepared for the unpleasant experiences which were a regular part of one team's work. While it was not always easy, teachers achieved change by looking at their own practice, challenging themselves to discard old habits, looking for solutions, recognising them when they saw them and then giving them a try. Teachers learned some things by chance and they learned about how they might change their practice by watching other teachers. Teachers replicated the successful strategies of their colleagues. (E16)

Unlike primary schools, team teaching was not common in secondary schools and therefore required some organisation and planning. Trying new ideas required re-organising students. Sometimes successful approaches were repeated and sometimes not. (E13)

Exploring problems together

After identification of a problem teachers discussed the details of the situation and considered possible influences, identified difficulties and teaching challenges. Because they focused on identified problems their commitment was high. In this context academic colleagues were encouraged, and noticed when there was a connection between the demands of the project and a useful piece of action research. Teachers explored their experiences in team discussions and by writing notes to share with the group. At the same time as remembering, talking and writing teachers made changes to the way they worked and observed the impact of the changes. For example teachers tried various team teaching approaches in order to change and observe classroom dynamics. As the work progressed teachers become increasingly focused and determined. (E15)

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Change

Some teachers saw the project as an opportunity to document changes that were already occurring, with the further possibility of using the documentation as a springboard for reflection and further change. (E3)

Teachers believed that eventually a shift could be effected from what they had always encountered—the top down driving of curriculum, with teachers the passive recipients of received wisdom and its concomitant hierarchical, non-inclusive structures of school organisation. (E3)

Integrated curriculum

Teachers saw the Links project as an opportunity to learn about the TSG and its impact on Eagle Secondary College and to understand the concept of a different type of integrated curriculum. (E4)

Appendix 4: Case writing: statements and looking back

Statements

Getting started

Teachers notice that it feels different when they leave school to spend a whole morning writing cases. When teachers have the time to write they don't know where to start, what to write about or whether references are needed. (D7)

Teachers go over existing materials before they begin. As teachers review case writing literature they interject with stories and experiences, indicating there are many stories to be told; but when it is time to write they seem to dry up. Teachers are nervous about sharing their writing. Teachers reflect on their experiences with case writing and wonder whether students feel the same during silent writing time at school. Like students, a group of teachers becomes quiet as the writing begins. (D7)

The language of cases

Teachers engaged in writing discuss the language that is used, comparing the use of jargon in education with plainer language. There is a view that plainer language will appeal to a broader audience. (W14)

When teachers overcome their resistance to writing cases they really enjoy it. (W14)

In writing cases teachers revalue what they do, become self critics and are sent in positive directions. (W14)

Teachers think cases are interesting to read because they are so practical with suggestions about successes and things to avoid. They assist teachers to build experience beyond their years of teaching. They make you value where you are and gives you an awareness of areas where you might grow. (W14)

Writing and reading cases gives you a sense of being within a profession that really wants to do things better. (W14)

Teachers involved in case writing, commentaries and discussion realise that they value information from their colleagues. (W14)

Teachers involved in case writing, commentaries and discussion realise that they value information from their colleagues. (W14)

When teachers read cases about new approaches introduced by their colleagues they are excited as they can see other applications. Having discussed the experience of using cooperative retelling for long division, teachers explore the idea that smaller steps might also be used in English. Teachers identify one of the problems for students when they note they are daunted by the length of extended responses to texts or their own personal writing. They know the ingredients but they struggle with the core idea, something they think is worth writing about. (W16)

What's in the cases?

When teachers write stories they write about well remembered, traumatic events and when they share them with colleagues it is clear that teachers identify with each others' experiences. (D7)

Teachers wonder whether voicing concern about their practice leads them to refine their approaches. Case writing enables teachers to write vivid and honest portrayals of the process of implementing innovative strategies in classrooms: the apprehension, frustration and difficulties of the task as well as the satisfaction of having achieved a measure of success. When teachers read cases they can be more intrigued by what is not said than the actual account and as a result, they ask themselves a lot of questions. Teachers agree with Robert Walker's observation that "Like works of art case studies are never finished only left." (D3)

Cases provide interesting descriptions of teachers' attempts to introduce new processes. They raise issues and questions and provide a useful starting point for debate about learning. (D4)

In cases, teachers describe more about students than they do about themselves and readers would like to know more. (D1)

Teachers know that it is advisable to try out an idea with a small group, then modify and build until they are satisfied. Teachers know that examining or changing practice is a long process whichever way they go. (D5)

Work samples

When university colleagues are in schools to support case writing focused on negotiating the curriculum, teachers run to get student work samples because they are so pleased about students' enthusiasm. Students who rarely put pen to paper or who have difficulty concentrating and completing work have produced pages of readable, colourful printing and an illustrated book. The book was produced by a student who spent two hours working on it at home without any assistance from parents. Teachers connect significant learning achievements and the improved quality of work to children's enthusiasm about topics which are an outcome of a negotiated curriculum. (H23)

Teachers know there is a national trend and commitment to outcomes focused teaching. Teachers know that outcomes are precise statements of students' learning and that outcome learning statements are the basis for the National Profiles and the Curriculum and Standards Framework in Victoria. Teachers wonder whether cases can be outcomes focused. There is scepticism about employing the formal language of learning outcomes to cases because of possible hindrance to descriptions of practice. (H8)

When teachers read the National Profiles they are interested in the illustrative value of work samples. Teachers see work samples as cases of teaching and learning, describing teachers' intentions, and practices and student learning. Teachers know that the work samples in the National Profiles are concise, demonstrating a technique of assessment rather than an incident in classroom practice. (H8)

Teachers think that annotated work samples provide the reader with a practical appreciation of the application of outcome statements. Teachers think annotated work samples resemble the rhythm of teachers' conversations when discussing practice, similar to case writing. (H8)

Teachers are impressed with the possible use of work samples as a basis for collaborative and outcomes focused professional development. Teachers know that the collaborative dialogue which case writing promotes is one in which teachers harmoniously converse by describing how their actions connect with students' responses. (H8)

Teachers wonder whether an extended work sample might form an outcomes focused case which responds to their intuition concerning the pattern of teachers collaborative dialogue and overcomes the inhibitions reported by some colleagues. (H8)

Teachers trial the idea of an extended work sample in the context of one teacher's insight into the problematic nature of assessment. They present it to the NSN group at the school. When teachers present work samples to their colleagues they prepare notes about their aims, procedures and classroom observations and they copy work samples. Colleagues ask questions, raise points of interest and assess the work using the outcome statements in the Curriculum and Standards Framework. Teachers notice that work samples demonstrate rich learning across the curriculum. Teachers combine their notes with notes generated during collaborative discussions to form an extended work sample. They revise and edit their draft. They wonder about taping conversation and using the transcripts. (H8)

Teachers publicise their experiment with work samples and seek evaluation and suggestions for enhancement from their network colleagues. They admit when their fellow teachers do not share their interests and they wonder whether this is a result of antipathy about writing through lack of time or whether they see the idea as misguided and inappropriate. (H8)

Teachers think that if they were asked to name an extended work sample as a case of something they would describe it as a case of authentic learning experience or a case of the social construction of learning. Teachers recognise the complexity of the sophisticated knowledge and understanding required of a teacher inducting young people into the modern world. (H9)

In work samples learning is presented as active achievement observed by the teacher as a pre-requisite for assessment and future teaching. When teachers observe children's learning they derive reflective insights about teaching and identify concerns about the way groups are set up and how children work within groups. When teachers see learning as an active accomplishment of the learner then teaching is considered to be the construction of an authentic context for that learning. (H9)

Teachers wonder whether the feminist literature about differences in girls' and boys' learning in science and technology may offer understanding about success in group work. Teachers are not convinced with the explanation of cooperative girls and individualist, competitive boys and wonder about the results of gender inclusive strategies in teaching science and technology. Teachers think that the answers to questions which emerge in work samples are located in action research. (H9)

Teachers know they have to work in an action research way with their colleagues and the school executive, to find acceptable ways of including initiatives within the agreed school curriculum and time organisation. Teachers know that if they are to convince others of the merit of an inquiry based approach to teaching then they need to present convincing evidence such as extended work samples. (H9)

The significance of case writing in the Roundtable...many uses for cases

An alternative to report writing

The idea of cases is an interesting way of putting across information from the charter priority group and from other projects, rather than reports. (W14)

Writing cases gives teachers a chance to step back and look at their teaching practice. Personal experiences make teachers look more closely at how children's learning is affected by the other children they work with. Teachers observe patterns in their own experience repeating in their classrooms and reflective writing enables them to change their approach. (H2)

Teachers use case writing to reflect on and document their practice. (K1)

By providing whole staff professional development the Link team members have shared their cases and familiarised the whole staff with action research. As a result the school has developed more consistent and effective student self assessment strategies in the classroom and developed a student self assessment format for mid year reports. (D10)

Teachers know that there is volatility and change in education, sometimes politically motivated and often beyond their control. They know that experiences such as participating in the Roundtable empower them to regain some of the control that they feel they have lost. Teachers know that by understanding and accepting the cyclical,

ongoing nature of action research and its capacity to be a positive force in education that it can be used to advantage to avoid the feeling that some teachers have that teaching is never ending. (D10)

The evidence that negotiation is powerful in enhancing learning appears to be overwhelming. The strongest conclusion to be drawn from the teachers' case writing and students' evaluations is the existence of a perceived logical connection between students' participation in the selection of topics to be investigated, their resultant interest in studying these topics in group inquiry, and improved learning. (H30)

University colleagues are struck by the way in which case writing provides rich descriptions of students and their learning practices. Commonly, cases are teacher centred, whereas case writing at Kingfisher Primary School points to the possibility that teachers who negotiate the curriculum are oriented to students' interests as the starting point for teaching, and are less concerned with demonstrating their own practical sophistication...the challenge of responding to the complexity of students' inquiry may be enough of a sophisticated demand. (H30)

When teachers trial new approaches in their classrooms they record their experiences in reflective journals. Teachers discuss their observations and reflections and when they are exposed to the case writing approach they develop an understanding of its potential as a vehicle for professional development and for action research. When teachers determine to adopt a case writing methodology cases are written, discussed and refined and common issues are teased out in meetings. Teachers write commentaries on cases and these are used as a basis for sharing and reflection in professional forums beyond the school. Published cases can be used as a resource for professional development. Cases can facilitate connections within and beyond schools. Reflecting on cases and commentaries can lead to ideas for structural change. Structural change might include assessment, language skills across the curriculum or an examination of resource deployment. Teachers plan to compile and publish cases and commentaries for distribution within school and beyond. Teachers provide case and commentary training for new group members. (W11)

Professional development and case writing

Teachers relate to other teachers cases. (K2)

When teachers are given an opportunity such as being part of a Link team in the Roundtable they participate in a whirlwind of amazing, interesting and motivating learning experiences. They become leaders of what they consider to be unique groups where they write cases and commentaries, organise and present professional development for their whole staff, lead discussions at forums, present cases to national professional development schools and develop friends from all over Australia. Teachers observe that in this context it is like a domino effect where one thing leads to another. (D10)

Link teams use cases from other schools to familiarise new members of the team with case writing and action research and to initiate whole school discussion around common interests. As a result they plan and initiate new structures and arrangements, strengthen professional ties with neighbouring schools, and provide feedback to them through written commentaries. Teachers know that this process makes them more clear about classroom goals and they work on becoming more organised, improving teaching strategies and working hard to maximise each child's learning. (D10)

Professional development of university colleagues

Teachers believe that when university colleagues read cases, talk to classroom teachers, and visit schools and classrooms that the exchange will do much to enhance teacher training. (D10)

Identifying common dilemmas

Teachers identify with case writers' dilemmas and experiences. They share similar questions and recognise their own learning as they develop strategies to suit student diversity. (D2)

Looking back

How was it introduced?

To support the establishment of harmonious and professional relationships between the university researchers, teacher researchers and consultants Inge compiled a list of publications on the case study methodology and the CRG purchased multiple copies of relevant publications and provided catering for the workshops. (V1, 4)

Workshops

Professional development was also part of the plan. In 1994 they anticipated professional development linked with case writing, commentary writing, ethics, crafting and editing. In 1995 they predicted case writing professional development for new Link team members and the use of the first group of cases for a whole staff seminar. They also anticipated professional development on integrating self assessment into their ongoing program and other external activities. (D12)

Frank and Inge, the university colleague, shared the tasks of facilitating the case writing workshops. (K1)

Finding time to write

Frank had a key role in organising team meetings and communicating with school, university and teacher union colleagues. A difficult task was finding enough casual replacement teachers to release the five teachers from classroom duties in order to attend workshops, roundtable meetings or to write their cases. (K1)

The individual experience

After participating in the trialing process the Link team members wrote individual cases reflecting on aspects of self assessment they had encountered. Each of the seven team members wrote a case. Link team members worked together to assist each other to craft cases. During this process the Link team participated in professional development sessions about action research and case writing. (D9)

Members of staff including members of the Link team wrote commentaries for cases that other team members had written. Colleagues and experts in other fields were also invited to write commentaries. At least 13 commentaries were written. (D8, 9)

Collaboration: What was the group experience of case writing?

Collaboration involved all of the team members in writing cases, resolving questions about the style of case writing and establishing relationships between colleagues from the school, university and teachers' union. During the initial case writing workshops, published cases were discussed, topics were chosen and the first draft of cases was written. The drafting stage involved reading each others' cases and providing written comments as feedback for the writer. This process aroused much discussion about using a style of writing that included personal thoughts and feelings, that raised

questions about the experiences of implementing Junior School and used a vocabulary that captured the immediacy of classroom life. Talking about issues was an important process as individuals were able to express their anxiety about the academic requirements of case writing, the difficulty of choosing a topic, and the ethical issues of recording personal information about children and experiences from the classroom. Gradually, consensual decisions were that cases would be written in a conversational style of language, events would be dramatic but not the 'Mills and Boon' style and questions about teaching and learning would be raised. There was collaboration with the Rosella Primary School team who wrote a commentary on each case, while Anne wrote a general commentary on all the cases from a teacher union perspective. (K1)

Action Research and case writing...Reflecting, revealing, anticipating

Reflection on practice took place informally through group discussion and individually through writing. The initial meetings were a forum for telling personal anecdotes and general discussion of issues arising from the changes in introducing Junior (Prep/1) School. Personal anecdotes and expression of feelings were a catalyst for general discussion of broader issues about teaching and learning in junior, mixed ability classrooms. Likewise, case writing was an opportunity to record the sequence of events in introducing a new form of classroom organisation and to reflect on the effects of these changes on teaching and on learning; and on parents, teachers and children. (K1)

In publications

Teachers published their cases so they were available in other schools. (W14)

Cases produced by teachers in one school were used by other schools for professional development. They were also used at the university in lectures for student teachers. Cases from Honeyeater Primary School were published in *Teachers Write* and also in the *Big Link* the journal of the national Innovative Links Project. (K)

Completed cases became part of school based and network collections and publications. (K1)

One staff member combined case writing with post graduate studies and another had a case published in the NSN Middle Years Kit. (H31)

University colleagues suggested possibilities for publishing a collection of cases as they believed they were an interesting account of school reform. (H26)

NSN and ILP national events

The cases were presented at the National ILP Forum in Sydney, published in the teachers' union (FTUV) newspaper and some in the Western Melbourne Roundtable publication, *Teachers Write*. They were also used by Link team members including university colleagues for pre service teacher education and in research presentations. Student teachers also visited the school. (D9)

By other schools in the roundtable considering change

Rosella Primary School also used the cases from another Link team (Honeyeater Primary School) to develop discussion regarding multi age classes. As part of this exchange they also wrote commentaries for the Honeyeater Primary School cases. (D9) This was an activity which facilitated reflection on the organisation of the junior school and led to the development of an action plan and the identification of issues which could be addressed with professional development. Teachers connected to government initiatives such as the Early Years of Schooling Conference and Keys to Life professional development. (D)

School wide professional development activities

At the beginning of the second year (1995) the Link coordinator liaised with the coordinator of the Assessment and Reporting Committee regarding the case writing approach and the reflective process the Link team had been through.. As a result, the Link team conducted professional development at staff meetings using the cases as a springboard for dialogue about student self assessment. They discussed the purpose, timing, procedures and implementation. Staff ideas and feedback regarding the report were collated and shared and a summary was passed on to the Assessment and Reporting Committee. The link team thought the quality of the feedback was very good and it led to the refinement and development of new student self assessment formats to trial in 1995. (D9)

Change and case writing

Cases were a catalyst for change in individual classes and across the whole school. This was particularly evident in regard to curriculum development, student groupings and decision-making. (H29)

Teachers wondered whether issues raised in cases were simply issues to work through during the implementation and consolidation of innovation. (K5)

Change in school organisation was not explicitly described in cases although docs 31-33 refer directly to organisational change. (H30)

The NSN had an impact on change and restructuring in the school. This influenced case writing which in turn influenced change. (H29)

Dialogue and the value of cases

Teachers used cases as a focus for discussion in meetings. (W14) When teachers began to think and write about their experiences they decided to discuss their questions with other staff. (H3)

Teachers wrote cases to develop ways to talk about teachers' work and how it affects children's learning. As a result of conversations between the teachers and Steve (the academic colleague) and subsequent writing, change occurred. The case writing led teachers to identify, discuss, reflect on and investigate structural and organisational impediments to practice such as time and timetables, decision-making structures, student groupings and inappropriate curriculum. (H31)

Collaborative Conversations

Case writing was a basis/focus for

- professional dialogue including discussions between teachers, teacher educators and student teachers; between a whole staff; between schools
- sharing stories and having discussions about teaching and learning
- forum presentations and articles about teachers' work
- commentary

- educational change such as the development of consistent and effective classroom strategies (eg assessment), school-wide innovations (eg reporting formats), change-focused professional development. (D)

In case discussions teachers talked about learning, teaching, organisation and improvement. The conversations portray a clear picture of what the group sees as important and fascinating questions emerge. (W16)

Transcripts of case discussions were used to identify issues and questions for future conversations. These conversations may take place between the same group or with others outside the original group. Beginning new discussions by referring to previous conversations facilitates taking the next step rather than beginning from scratch. This leads to the development of a deeper understanding about the issues under discussion. (W16)

Partnerships and case writing

Making links with the roundtable was important to understand the whole project, to set timelines for completing cases and commentaries, to evaluate the quality of our cases and to communicate with other school teams. This process was facilitated by everyone's attendance at least one meeting while Frank, Inge and Zelda were regular participants. (K1)

Appendix 5: Schedule of questions for individual interviews

Perceptions of the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable

What significance, if any, do you attach to the Innovative Links Project and/or the Western Melbourne Roundtable? Why?

How would you describe the Innovative Links Project and/or the Western Melbourne Roundtable in relation to:

- Professional development?
- Teacher research?
- School change?
- People: Teachers? Students? Parents? The principal? Partnerships and networks?
- Structures and procedures: Roundtables? Teams? Schools? Universities?
- Activities: Roundtable? School? University?
- Other outcomes: Policy? Practice? Philosophy?

What evidence supports these observations about the Innovative Links Project and/or the Western Melbourne Roundtable?

What aspects of your current practice, if any, would you link to your experience with the Innovative Links Project and/or the Western Melbourne Roundtable?

Do you have any other comments or observations about the Innovative Links Project or the Western Melbourne Roundtable?

Personal and Professional Data

It will be optional for participants to provide this information about: Age (2001), Gender, Qualifications (1994–2001, note any new qualifications), Year level and subjects taught (1994–1997), Years of experience (1994 and 2001, note any periods of leave or alternate work), and Promotion position/s held (1994–2001 note any promotions or positions of responsibility during this period).

Appendix 6: Interview with Laila

The regular text is Laila. *The text in italics is the interviewer.*

...What I was thinking after our conversation was that it was quite interesting because we actually had to learn to write in that narrative style in the first place, that wasn't first nature to us. In a way, some of this next kind of meta level around what we know and think is foreign as well, or the articulation of it, it doesn't mean the thinking of it is foreign, but we actually had to learn to tell the stories first.

So how did you learn to tell the stories?

It took me a long time. I was writing the commentaries before I was writing the stories. I actually discounted the story, didn't think it was that important. I remember having a cup of coffee with Anna in Puckle St not long into the process and showing her what I'd written and she said 'this is a fabulous commentary, you've done a whole lot of theorising about what is going on, but I don't really know the story, the story is still in your head. Tell me what made you start thinking like this'. And that was really hard for me because it seemed really mundane, too ordinary, *the description?* yeah. It took me a long time just to do that.

Laila spends a minute or two thinking about issues (as Anne shuffles papers)...

...it's really nice going back over it and remembering it, the things that were happening and you get a nice warm feeling thinking 'oh my goodness, we did do a lot'. But it wasn't so easy to do it and I also think that it has not been fantastically sustained.

One of the questions I have in mind is about the durability, the lastingness of some of the changes. (Anne talks about themes, questions, and the picture)...would you add anything, is there anything that you really want to talk about?

It was just a really significant time of learning for me. Personally, I learned an enormous amount. I felt like I was catapulted really. That was how steep the learning curve was. I think in the initial phase it was just so big and wide and we didn't know, really the parameters just seemed to be enormous. We didn't know what we were getting into. Anything we had been involved in, in the past, had been project work,

top down, you apply, this is what you do, this is a very neat little package. Neither the NSN or the ILP were like that at all. We had an enormous amount of scope to do our own thinking and people weren't telling us. We (*the teachers*) kept asking questions (*of our university colleague*) like, 'is this what you want'. They said, 'Don't ask what we want. What do you want?' We didn't really have a clue. We didn't really have a sense, I guess, of this idea that we could start asking our own questions.

I felt like I was making lots of links between different things at that stage because there was a whole lot of things going on for me. I was reading some of that early work by Fullan and Hargreaves, 'What's worth fighting for?'—that first monograph they had written. We'd been involved, probably one of the last schools that had been involved in the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) in the last round. We'd waited a long time to be eligible. Probably been eligible for a long time but at the time, all those criteria, we never got onto the program. It must have been 1990, we had been invited to apply and I remember...the DSP coordinator. She had links to ... through the DSP, which I didn't know at the time. She really started asking those questions about 'What is it that is happening here. What are proving to be barriers to kids so they can't access their world and their society as full participants?' The whole idea of democracy and participation. And all those kinds of things started to emerge for me and it was a really different way of thinking about school and curriculum and kids and access and all those things. Things that I hadn't really had any strong background in at all. So for me it was the emergence of the themes around social justice.

So that's pretty significant personally, was that connected to the school culture in any way?

Well, I think we started connecting through the NSN when we started working around this idea of 'well, we know that literacy is a really big issue for these kids here, what are we going to do to make a difference for them?' And if that's a key area for us, we'd done things like camps and stuff like that through the DSP but they just seemed project based. I think what the NSN, initially the DSP, and then the ILP in a way helped us to get a broader view of what it meant for these kids to more fully participate and through a curriculum approach. So that's from a fair distance away too. I'm not sure that we were that clear about those kinds of things then but those

kinds of connections through those three arms helped us to think, ‘Well what are we going to actually do that is going to help us?’

So you’ve made connections between the DSP, the NSN and the ILP. Do you have any sense of the different contributions or support that each contributed to that growth?

Well I think probably for the NSN the clear articulation of the principles that the network, what it was set up for and what it was set up to do. It was about trying to make education better for all Australian kids. It had this really big equity focus and that tuned me, and I think us, into ‘OK it’s just this group of kids that we are working with here now that that is most important for’, and also the principles around a collaborative approach to decision-making for us as teachers and also the part about engaging kids more actively in their learning. So those three principles that the Network had worked long and hard on and had clearly stated. They were significant ones, I think they really made a contribution to helping raise awareness around those things. Helping us to build our responses that we were doing it at the school level in relation to those things. Coming to understandings of that, like we had people go to, like we’d never heard of some of this stuff, some of our people went to the Equity School that the NSN ran. Van and Bob Lingard were keynotes. I didn’t go to it but it broadened our understandings at a social, cultural, political level around these kinds of things. We had been pretty closed in, pretty insular, you know. We were the first group of Catholic teachers that had ever gone on strike. We were not political people at all and it was a bit of a political awakening of people who could participate in that kind of way, make differences.

I noticed in the school report, that you put together to represent your work, that there is a really strong professional development thing, strong connections with NSN professional development, the Equity School, the season schools, workshops like Beane, with the ILP running along side it. So if the principles and the professional development were NSN focused how would you connect that to the ILP work?

The way I saw it, and the way we were kind of thinking about it at the time...I was in two spots at the same time. I was in the NSN in a kind of an organising role and in the school in a kind of organising role. So the idea for me, and that I was understanding was that we were motivating and extending people’s ideas through the professional

development that was offered in the NSN and we were offering in-school support for that kind of thing to happen without the coordination that we had going in the state at that time. And then we had the ILP, it was like the research arm. It was the place that we as teachers could develop the culture of the reflective practitioner in school with academic colleagues alongside to help us work out what our own questions were, their hard questions of us and what we were doing. So here we are, we've got new and different ideas that we hadn't thought of before. We were thinking, 'OK this is making some really good links and connections, filling in some gaps for us. Lets have a go at some of this stuff', and then the ILP was sitting over here helping us question what we were doing. 'Is this doing what we want it to do? What is it doing? What is happening with the kids? Is it actually improving their learning?' So I think that's what the ILP helped us to do. It had its own set of professional development as well. The conversations around the roundtable and also the professional development activities that the roundtable organised for broader participation enabled substantive conversations around issues, pedagogical issues I think. We didn't have language or opportunity for this. I feel like those experiences have significantly influenced the kinds of things that I have tried to do, even in this place where I am now. It has significantly changed the way I've thought about what professional development was and how thinking, you know, pushing forward, like having something that actually extends people, makes them think beyond the spot where they are now, gives them opportunities to have a go at things in a way that is supported and gives them opportunities to talk, create spaces in real time to talk about what's happening. To use those opportunities to push things further forward. That's been a really important thing for me, a real important learning that I think the jewel, the relationship between the NSN and the ILP, and the ILP to a certain extent on its own, created. It's a big shift in the way we think about professional development.

There is a tension between that way of thinking about professional development and the way the systems...

Well even the way teachers in schools think. It is a regular battle now, it was worse then, but even now, 'we don't want to have a talkfest'. This idea that substantive conversation about pedagogy is just a 'talkfest' is still the battle that we come up against. That idea of finding a way to put kids' work and ideas about teaching and

learning in the middle of the table and be able to talk about them in ways that actually pushes our thinking and influences our practice as relevant and useful. People think that it is not practical and they haven't got a grab bag of things to take away. And that is tragic about the quality of professional development...

(Tape 1, Side 2)

You know I think you need both. I think people like both. They like to go and get ideas and things they can have a go at and that's OK. But the difference between what we try to do now, and we've been influenced by the ILP work, is that we actually try to put a critical edge on it. We actually try to say 'well you've had a go at that, come back and let's get some feedback'. We want to know what is good but we also want to know: 'What are your questions? What are your concerns? What worries you about doing this or having a go at this?' Then we can come to some kind of consensus around, if these are the things that concern us what new information do we need? What else might we need to try? To keep asking questions, keep interrogating what we are doing.

That makes your work hard...

It does, and not everybody likes to work like that. Not everyone likes to think that hard. I think I have colleagues, not always more experienced some of the younger ones too, who think that they would prefer teaching to be a more technical kind of thing that they didn't have to think about. Just tell me what to do and I'll do it and that will be good, and I can go home at the end of the day and I don't have to think about it any more. It's the thinking about it, the working out how can I make this better all the time, and how can I do it in a way that keeps responding. We find it more and more, all the time now, with the kinds of skills and multi literacies and all of these kinds of things that we need to be aware of for kids in a different environment for learning and a different environment for work and socialisation and relationships that we have to be more aware of, and we have to be more competent and skilful of and we also have to be more critical of.

So, making connections between getting ideas, trying them out, but actually being critical about them

That was the space that we had around the roundtable. We could actually talk about those things and in the kind of groups that we had when we would meet with Steve at the school, that was the beginning of the emergence of that kind of circle, that we could sit around a talk about what was happening, what was good, what was bad. It was a bit dangerous at times. What I'm doing in my mind is making comparisons between say the use of the protocols that we've got now, that have emerged, and the kinds of discussions. People may have been unhappy about things that were happening in leadership, decision-making all of those kinds of things. Suddenly they felt like they had a little forum to be able to say, to talk about those things. There was potential for them to be places for the whingers to accumulate but on the other hand it helped, it was a bit of a safe spot to be able to say 'OK, I am really concerned about this, I've got some questions'.

I remember ...'s case, the one about 'We struggled at planning last night...'. Well that was really interesting. It was like we keep getting told what to do and how to do it, and we don't want to do it and the kids aren't interested...you know. It was not a bad reality check for the leadership to read some of that stuff, but it put some teachers in some vulnerable spots. And perhaps the university colleague in a spot too, because how are they viewed. Especially when the leadership is sometimes at arms length on some of these things, it's like 'OK, you're the curriculum coordinator, you run with this stuff, I'm the school manager, I'm the business manager now'. (That might be something you need to be careful of!)

Who do you include in leadership?

I'm talking about the positional leadership, the principal, the vice principal, the curriculum coordinator those kinds of people.

You worked as the curriculum coordinator and the research coordinator in connection with the ILP and NSN, what were the issues for you?

There were tensions, lots of tensions. There is a relationship between me and the principal and vice principal, there's me and the teachers. Like this triangle. You are wanting to, being asked by the principal to lead this stuff. This is good stuff. And the union, we've got links to the union here, the union thinks this is good for us to

participate in, I want you to go and find out about it and we'll talk about it, we'll get involved in this, it's got dollars attached to it. OK. And then when you do investigate and you think this is fantastic stuff, this is a huge opportunity. I don't know what this is going to be but I can see this is really good and you want to go down that track because you can see what it can do. But you also want to have the confidence of the teachers to be able to ...OK, NSN set up to give you a safe space to try new things and you'll be able to do that, and we are assuring you of that and then the principal starts to get nervous because things are happening and the status quo is being challenged and you're in the middle. That's very tense. Very difficult.

What did you have to do, how did you have to act?

Oh. I can think of a time when we went down this track of doing a professional development activity over a couple of days, I can't even remember the topic, but it turned into the teachers wanting to talk to the principal about a whole range of issues that they were really unhappy about. Like it just turned. The principal and the vice principal had handed over the organisation of it, they had sort of been there at some of the meetings and done all the nodding, but hadn't really engaged intellectually. They chose to be outside. But then when it came to what was happening on the days and how it was to be handled it was like, OK, I'm being challenged, I'm being confronted, we're not in the NSN any more, I'm pulling the pin, if this is what happens when you're in the NS then we're not going to be in it any more.

And you were seen as implicated?

Well yes, absolutely. In retrospect, I was probably very inexperienced in the role, no support, no leadership for me in the situation. Relying on my university colleagues, who also got implicated in it, they were there pedalling really hard to salvage the situation and work out where we went in different situations. And they turned into complex political kinds of issues, or industrial issues for the school ... we thought what was going to be a professional development around teaching and learning turned into well we've got too many meetings. You make us go to too many meetings and we should be doing...we've got too much work to do and how come we're going to go into this new project and all of these kinds of things...they had a space to do it. Very dangerous, very nerve racking, very tense...

What happened after that?

I think we probably settled down a bit. It didn't really lead to change and I think that goes back to the issue of sustainability. I think we had to continue to try and work, I don't think we were subversive, but we had to try and continue, probably lie low for a while, just try and move along slowly without causing too much, *that's kind of a change*, there was definitely some backing off on both sides. There had to be some kind of renewing of confidence in the fact that this wasn't a subversive kind of movement within the school, trying to create problems. But if you sign up to something that is about working more collaboratively, more democratic decision-making, you've got to put some processes in place that enable that to happen or else you can get chaos.

I'm interested in the similarities in the changes for staff and kids...

I remember the Yr 5 teachers I was probably closest to because of physical proximity. I was in the library and they were next door. So I used to connect with them quite a bit just in 'How's it going? What's happening? What stage are you up to now?' That kind of thing. I followed it pretty closely and I remember them feeling pretty disappointed about when they did their first round of negotiation with the kids around the questions. They said the kids asked these really ridiculous questions. They gave them back the questions and said now read these questions over and see if this is what you really want to know about because we are really going to learn about this. The kids went 'oh, you're serious.' They didn't trust them and they felt that when the yr 5 kids went into yr 6 the questions they generated were far better than the questions they generated in yr 5 because after a year of experience, they trusted that they were really going to be taken seriously. They just didn't believe it in the first place.

So the relationship is really important when you are doing something new?

Yes that's right. And I know they worked really hard doing that. Over the first two years they spent a month, their work was on, they took their kids down to the local reserve and played a whole lot of games mixed up between them, really focused hard on getting to know each other, the kids getting to know the teachers really well. They did really work hard. They did focus hard on the relationship building and I guess in

those years 5 and 6, it is obvious that the relationship between kids and teachers starts to change and can become more authoritarian. Kids will say the teachers in gr 5 and 6 are stricter. They don't let you get away with things and they actually were I think more democratic kinds of relationships. The kids had far more decision-making but then they had far more understanding of what the consequences would be and they had to wear them. They were clear about that kind of stuff and it was less about doing things because they would be punished and more about they were doing it because it was the right thing to do.

So there is a theme of democracy in the classroom and for teachers too?

Yes. I'm not sure how clearly articulated that might have been but just by the nature of what they were doing there had to be a move towards those kinds of things. More trust in the kids, as much as the kids had to see that they could trust the teachers to be able to do it, the teachers actually put more trust in the kids. I remember them talking about, I think it might have been the second year they did it, the kids organised their camp. They gave the camp over to the kids, they said 'we trust you, these are the things we need to do, this is the purpose of the camp, we've got to come up with what we are going to do'.

You were given responsibility for the professional development and they were given experience for the camp...

But I think the difference between what happened with me and the kids was that the kids were really supported. They had the leadership, they had the teachers who were really clear about what it is that they were doing, the purpose of what they were doing. They felt like they could take risks, have a go at doing those kinds of things. I mean they were really enthusiastic. I don't know that the kids felt the risk, the teachers would have felt the risk. But they were really clear, 'OK if the kids need to be able to do this we have to actually teach them these skills. We have to teach them how to do time management, we have to teach them how to do a timetable, we have to teach them how to do these things'. So they were clear and that was really something that they learned out of that Beane model that it wasn't just activities for activities sake any more, they knew here's the big project, the camp's the big project. Let's

work backwards from there. Find out the skills and activities that we will have to design to enable the kids to be successful in designing their camp.

For students, the learning was connected to real life. The teachers were thinking about the skills students would need to do that. You were expected to engage in real planning for staff development but there wasn't anybody thinking about the skills you might need to do that. You were learning on the go?

And sometimes making some really big errors.

What would have worked better?

I think things like understanding how decisions are made and that the processes are really transparent and everybody knows how we come to a decision. And then if we talk about consensus decision-making that we actually understand what that means. That we agree that consensus is the way to go because it builds relationships rather than...you know, the rationale for why you would do it and agree that's the way we want to do it. Aligning principles with the kind of school you want to have in the first place. If we want to have a cooperative, democratic kind of school then we also have to make sure that in terms of the decision-making processes that we have that those things are aligned. I think that idea of alignment all the way through is one of the things that we don't do very well and that we need to be more aware of. You know, walking the talk. This is the kind of school we are. How do we keep making sure that in every action, in every word, every activity that happens within the school, as much as we possibly can we match it up. I think that in that last experience (at Kingfisher Primary School) there would have been enormous unaligned practices. I think the stuff around the values of the place were not clearly articulated and were not valued.

From the documents it seemed that they were articulated...

I think perhaps they were in the documents. But you could see what people valued in the practices, but they didn't match up in terms of the decision-making and those kinds of things that happened up here and impacted on teachers at this stage.

People believed one thing but acted differently...

I think in a lot of instances the actions were really quite aligned but we came to them not in any kind of planned way. I think that if you had a good school development model and one that was aimed at maintaining and sustaining the development of a culture. I don't think we had had any clear understanding at the highest levels of the school that that was what we were trying to do. There may have been some understanding from my point of view in the work with the teachers, that this was the kind of place that we wanted to have but I don't think that was really clearly articulated or clearly understood across the board. That's from a fair distance and reflection. Maybe it was what we wanted to happen but I don't think it was happening.

So you can build personal change with cultural connections in a small group of teachers...

Yes

But it gets more difficult as it gets bigger?

Unless you put the structures in place that enable it to occur. For comparison, I don't think we ever embedded any of those kinds of things as a whole school approach at Kingfisher Primary School. They were happening with a small group of people at the yr 5 and 6 level. A couple of people at different year levels liked the ideas and tried to implement them there but there was never anything clearly said like 'at Kingfisher Primary School we believe that negotiation is how we manage the curriculum and that we will all in various ways and forms do it.' At the yr 5 and 6 level, it never translated to policy as far as I could see. Do you know what I mean? If you develop policy out of good practice and you want to create a whole school approach to change then I don't think that's what we ever got to and those kinds of things don't sustain. You know, policy is just a dead piece of paper on the shelf unless it's talked about and debated and acted on and challenged as a regular kind of thing. For example at this school (*Laila's current school*) we've got learning circles at every area of the school. We might all be looking at different areas of development but we have a common way of working that says this school will value a collaborative approach to professional development. Teams are really important and we should be learning together, by discussing and trialing new things. That's common across the whole school.

That's up there, that's talked about, it's spoken of in a regular kind of way and it is part of your work...

Yep, you just do it. And it is similar in every instance. The way that we induct our new teachers into our school is in a similar way. We have a regular meeting, we talk about issues in certain ways, people have opportunities to input into the agendas. All of those kinds of things. I wouldn't say it is where we want it to be but we have a common direction and that's in some ways because the principal, or the leadership team talks about those things. It is directly involved in those things, sets most things up, enables those things to happen. The involvement of the principal in issues around professional development and teaching and learning is critical to sustaining really.

It's not so much what the principal lets happen it's what the principal enables to happen, and supports and talks up and all of those kinds of things. Shows interest in, shows understanding of, is able to be part of the conversation. That's really important. So I don't really know whether that's another one of your circles...

Leadership

It might go in 'people'...

Well it certainly seems as though it has been significant for you all the way through, an issue of democracy...

At the level too of the roundtable in leadership and democracy in the person of Steve and probably Anna too as her leadership emerged more in the roundtable. It was obvious to me from the beginning that he had a particular view of democracy and that it was a participative view. There were things that his leadership of the roundtable enabled. It enabled teachers' voice to emerge really strongly. I think from having that role at the national executive too, which gave me a bit of understanding about what was going on at other roundtables. There were other roundtables doing it but not to the extent that this one was. I think this had an exceptional view about democracy and an exceptional view about teachers' voice being critical. The example that I can think of was when we were looking at the ILP logo. We were able, Steve enabled that, to have the discussion around the table which enabled us as a roundtable to say 'we don't like this logo, it doesn't capture for us what the relationship is that we want to

develop at this roundtable and we would like you to consider changing it'. Now I had people from other roundtables ring me and say you are obviously not doing a good job at your roundtable because you are having these kind of discussions. Trying to intimidate me.

Having read all the documents this incident is clearly, as you say, very indicative of a voice emerging and other people feeling as though it was insignificant, or irrelevant or as you say inappropriate...

Yes. But for me personally, I can't speak for anyone else, I thought it was just the best symbolic gesture that I could ever hope for that said 'well, if you think this is important, then it's important'. And it's kind of the same thing with the kids. That same mirror image with the negotiation process. If you think it is important, then we are going to do it. And it gave us the confidence, it may well be one small thing, but it gave us the confidence to tackle other bigger more significant things. Confidence in the people that were in positions of power and authority in the group.

So you are saying that having identified that issue about the logo, and doing something about it together built a relationship in the group?

Yes, well I think it built a relationship in the group and it also built a trust in that the university colleagues in the group, I think you could...there was...you couldn't...because of the kind of relationships we've had, you know it was a power relationship and that had to be recognised. I think in that instance and in a number of other instances the behaviour, the way that Steve handled that really gave us confidence that we were equal members of the roundtable.

(Tape 2)

So, maybe before the ILP, but certainly at the Roundtable there was a pre-existing tension in the relationship between teachers and university colleagues. This incident represented for you, this was a signal to you that things could shift, and that gave you some strength to go on...

Yes, they got fantastic credibility out of that, that we actually have some kind of social equality in the relationship that we were building around the table.

Are there other things that you can think of that gave you that same kind of message?

Things like organisation in meetings and things like that, which were really difficult for us in schools, we were happy to give over. The university supported us in that, they did all the running around, and that was really helpful for us. But when it came to important stuff like when we did any professional development work or any of that kind of thing where we set up like our evening seminars, we always had committees that included both teachers and university colleagues together to put the agenda together and we were up on the podium speaking.

I remember when the first meeting that formed the national executive was called and each of the roundtables was asked to send people to Sydney. I don't know whether I was petulant about that or not but I really wanted to go and it came down to myself and Ivan and I think we just flipped a coin and he was to go. But you know, 'I really want to go'. Well Steve found a way for us both to go, and we both spoke. We stood up in the hall at Sydney University and we spoke and at the end of that meeting I was on the national executive. It was like 'far out, I don't know what's going on here.' It was huge.

Like a big door...amazing isn't it when you get those opportunities...

I know. I just felt, well I don't know what it was but I just felt, I really need to go to this meeting, it is really important. I didn't know there were going to be any opportunities offered. I was totally shocked, to finish up, oh my god.

What do you think about those situations where some people get those opportunities and others don't...say in your team, dynamics, opportunities, roles

I think in the first instance, all the kinds of things we tried to do were by invitation. Like membership of the ILP team was by invitation. We just set up meetings, come and hear about it if you want to. participate if you want to and we got about a third and different people came in and out as it happened. For instance, how did those people go to Lismore to hear James Beane. That was a funny story in itself. ... was at the school one day and she said 'there's this stuff around negotiated curriculum and James Beane is out here. You didn't send anyone, how come?' Whoever was organising the thing hadn't sent us the information and we hadn't sent anyone. She

said “Get on the phone to ... at VIEU and say can VIEU give us some airfares because it is really important that we send a few people up to hear him.’ ... said oh well if ‘the Catholics’ give us one we’ll provide the other. So it was like, we never knew those things were available, and it’s a bit like well nobody else in Catholic education got offered those kinds of things either, but we asked, and we got it. And I’m not sure whether it was because of the connections or whether they thought it was really important for one of our schools to be up there hearing this stuff and we really want to make sure that it happens. I don’t really know, but the fact is that .. said ring him and if ... told you to do something, you did it.

But you felt you could...

Yes. it was nerve racking to ring the general secretary of the union and say give me an airfare. You wouldn’t think of it in a million years. And for him get back on the phone the next day and say ‘yes, OK, here it is, book them’. Then there was the thing, who will we ask to go. And it was like ‘I would love to go’ but it was really important for me to think these ideas won’t go if they belong to me, they have to belong to the people. At that stage nobody even knew what year level they were in. So there were all these tensions, you are announcing things before time, they didn’t know why they were chosen to go, it was just like here’s this big opportunity, go for it. Probably not a fantastic process...

So you targeted some people, those who were going to be in the 5/6 area because it had a kind of middle years flavour...

Probably a better process would have been to call everybody together and make it far more democratic, who would like to go, names in a hat. But I actually picked the people who I thought would have the most influence, the most understanding and the most opportunity of having something happen when they got back. It was strategic.

In some way the selection of schools was as you said strategic too, it sits against the democracy stuff, how you can believe in democracy but you choose sometimes to do things that don’t look democratic...

Indeed. And I would say too that my level of awareness around what was democracy in the workplace, and what were good processes for decision-making were at a very

low level, then, in comparison to what they are know. The amount of learning that has happened around that kind of thing has been as a result of my experiences in the NSN and the ILP too.

So it's about building, from experience, trying things out, developing ideas...

Yes and coming to understand what the consequences are if you do behave in less than democratic ways. What kind of effect does it have on people? Morale? How people can become disaffected when they feel like they haven't got a voice in the situation. Just being able to keep transferring the reflections about how you feel personally in a situation to what it might be like for other people when you are working with them. Just continually trying to build your level of awareness around yourself and your practice, your influence on your colleagues. I think that is a really enormous thing for leaders to develop, that kind of awareness.

I guess teachers are kinds of leaders in their classrooms and in the groups that they work with, I'm constantly struck by the connections between the sorts of skills that kids need and teachers need and that leaders need and that researchers need...I keep thinking that if I can work the way teachers do in the classroom and in the roundtable then I will be a good researcher.

The stuff that the NSN did in terms of professional development for their leaders, with Graham Harvey, is one of the key things that I think helped raise that level of awareness for me, and I think probably for lots of us, in terms of understanding group behaviour and being able to manage change, the kind of interpersonal skills that you need to be able to do this. A lot of the training that he did was very helpful in that regard, and continues to be.

It's interesting whether you hang on to those things or whether you lose them when you move into new contexts. What makes the difference between things that stick and things that fall by the wayside.

We had a substantial amount of time. Over three years we had 16 days of training with him, like a week at a time out of the school. And I was working in the school at that time. And we did practice the stuff, we listened, but we role played. We tried it.

Then you went back to the work place and it became part of your work?

Yep. We didn't come alone, we Victorians we really had a lot of people that we could talk to about 'what does that mean to you?'. We used to have lots of big discussions, ... and I particularly and ... and we'd try to nut out 'What's this rocket mean and how do we apply it?' Then, when I was working in the coordinator's role 'How do we build our own training here in managing change around some of that stuff? How can we put it into place so that teachers can have some tools to understand what's going on?'

So you created a space like there had been in the ILP to continue to explore and try out and to build the ideas until they were part of what you did...

Because, we kind of opened Pandora's box in a way. We'd been involved with the NSN and the ILP and you open up the possibilities for change but you haven't got a whole lot of skills or processes to be able to manage it. Sometimes you don't even know where it is going. So going back to that idea about chaos, if the people who are in charge of the leadership haven't got a clear idea about how you manage the process in ways that are respectful of people and give people confidence that we actually know what we are doing here then you take some big risks and I think that is probably where we started. No doubt we've made big mistakes and people got quite hurt in the process. There was potential for it to end. because it was too risky, too dangerous.

Are there other things you've thought about but haven't had a chance to talk about, any other comments that you'd like to make about the picture, things that are significant...

I guess teacher research and partnerships. The relationship that we built with VU and about participation in the Roundtable I think was really extraordinary. I think it also resides in the relationships we built with the people and probably Anna and Steve particularly. The confidence that we had in them and the fact that they kept inviting us to participate in their work outside the roundtable. So we got invited into membership of things like the Teacher Education Reference Group, one of the credentialling boards. Whole ranges of different opportunities to participate. We got opportunities to understand their work, they would come and work in our places and understood our

work, and we got opportunities to go and work in their places too, to work along side them and understand their work. So we actually developed stronger ties from the partnerships around the idea of teacher education which hadn't been in place before. So the idea of partnership has really been important and ongoing. We've actually been able to sustain really strong relationships and while we would like to find ways of being able to continue to work with the university colleagues in schools, the way that seems to happen at the moment is by having student teachers in our schools. Having the ILP colleague coming to your school weekly, fortnightly, how ever often it was, was fantastic. Wonderful. Just to have that person to talk to, listen to you, motivate and extend your ideas about thinking, asking some hard questions. I really like the idea of having the critical friend, working with like a leadership team or something like that. I think, I just understand the constraints around the work of university folk but I wish there was some way of us being able to do that. That was something that the ILP gave us to do and we haven't been able to sustain it but we have been able to find ways of keeping working together in different ways and that's been great and I think we keep being able to enrich each other's work by doing that. But not to the same degree, not the same depth.

Because there is not the time?

Not because there's not the time, it doesn't seem to be the time or the resources from the university end anyway, because that was pretty intensive. Our experiences were with Steve mostly and with Anna. I'm not sure to what extent the other university colleagues like to work in that, wanted to work in that way, or continue to work in that way and how difficult it would be for them to be able to do it. From my point of view, in a school, it was wonderful, really helpful in helping us think about our work. Helping us go in some different directions that we might not have even thought about by ourselves.

You indicated the connection with the research process...that support for reflection, being critical, writing...

The idea of using cases, I haven't always been convinced, I've seen the value of them in some ways. But say in a new context where people haven't had an opportunity or don't know about cases the idea of getting people to write when they are not sort of

connected to anything outside that would give them the impulse to write. It's really hard, too hard, and I haven't been able to get that shift. It is hard enough to get people to talk, to move to the idea of writing as a next step is really hard. I haven't done many cases but I continue to write them sporadically and they've been good, they've been helpful.

When do you choose to write them?

Very infrequently. Usually when there has been something that has happened in one of the learning circles that's just so encouraging that if I don't write it down I'll lose it, usually a good story. Sometimes they are ones because work is just really hard and I don't know how I'm going to manage things. But mostly they are celebrating that this work is working. This way of working is being really helpful. It's where I've had some evidence of that that it is enabling to move forward.

Just a final comment. I loved going to the roundtable. The people that I loved to listen to most were...from Eagle Secondary College and I used to come and think 'What the hell am I doing here? I've got no ideas. I can't talk the way that these people talk. I've got nothing to contribute.' But I loved listening to it because they were really eloquent and they had some big ideas and they were really good at saying what they were saying. My mind got so stretched. That was like, 'wow'.

And the other thing I remember was sitting at the first meeting of the roundtable listening to people talking around the table and listening to the university colleagues talking and thinking 'no I don't want to work with you, I don't want to work with you, oh I think I could work with you, yeah you'd be alright' and being fairly proactive in making an approach to the person that I thought I could work with.

When I've been reading the cases I've noticed how the students want to work with the people they like, where there is some connection. And why would teachers be any different to kids in this regard?

I remember, I wish we still had it, I know it got destroyed but really early on in the process, I took a group of Olga's kids into the library office. I set the video tape up and talked to them about what it was like doing this negotiation process. They just talked back at me, at the camera. 'What's it Like? How's it different? How do you

feel when you do it?' The responses that they gave, totally unscripted, I just said 'I'm going to have a conversation with you about this, and we're going to have the camera, and you're just going to talk to the camera, or to me but the camera is going to be on you, can you do that?' They were so good. I just wish we still had it. What I recall about those conversations with the kids was that they were really clear in their approval for this kind of curriculum, and really clear about the differences. How much better it was like this and what they were learning by doing it this way. They were making the connections totally unprompted. They were given the opportunity to speak and they were able to say that really clearly. That's it.

Thankyou so much!

Appendix 7: Chris' reflections on working together

Chris had many memories of the school Links team. He remembered being invited to join the school Links team and making the decision to participate because it would give him time to work with his colleagues and friends. He remembered being excited by the link with his National Schools Network project and the added possibility that the project might make a good connection with teacher education. Chris noticed that some teachers chose not to participate and he wondered whether this was because they doubted the value of their experience and expertise, whether they thought they already had enough on their plates or whether there was another explanation. Chris also remembered wondering what was in it for the university colleagues.

Chris remembered how the team changed over time. In the beginning teachers had been nervous and a bit suspicious about working collaboratively with the university people. He was aware that their previous experiences coloured their expectations but noticed that the discomfort slowly dissolved as they worked together discussing their work (covering issues from the massive to the mundane), identifying problems and questions, learning about case writing and beginning to write and share their stories without being judged. Everyone was focused on improving learning outcomes for students and a new kind of relationship seemed to grow—it felt more equal.

Chris believed people had shown great courage by revealing the detail of their work and feelings in the case writing. But, by taking a risk they had gained a level of intimacy with each other that built trusting relationships. They felt comfortable enough to say what they meant and the professional connections supported learning and change. Chris felt as though the Links team had brought him out of his isolation and he recalled how he worked hard both individually and as part of the team; there was a personal and a collective enthusiasm which he felt helped him to reclaim his profession.

One of the interesting things that Chris noticed was that there seemed to be a connection between the changing relationships in the Links team and changes in his classroom. It seemed logical to think of everyone as learners, to build team skills, to ensure that all voices were heard and valued and to involve everyone in negotiations

and decision-making. Everyone was encouraged to step out of their comfort zone, but never on their own, there was always support and guidance when it was needed.

While some teachers thought the roundtable meetings were a waste of time, too formal and removed from the practicalities of teaching and other demands back at school, Chris remembered looking forward to roundtable meetings, hearing about what was happening in other Link schools and participating in the fascinating conversations. He recalled that even though people came from many different teaching situations many common interests and issues emerged in the discussions and decisions were made together. In the beginning Chris remembered naming the roundtable, deciding to hold the meetings in schools and arguing for an ILP logo which represented an equal partnership between schools and the university. Later, decisions were made about choosing representatives for national forums and publishing cases. It seemed very democratic although Chris did remember that sometimes there was a feeling of 'them' and 'us' and he wondered whether this was connected to the different levels of participation in the roundtable and the team.

For Chris, the opportunity to participate in state and national forums also opened new doors. He thought it was fantastic to meet all sorts of people from around Australia, to share ideas and he noticed that while there were differences here too there were also lots of connections. He thought the meetings, conferences and the NSN professional development schools were a springboard for increased self awareness, new friendships and new ideas. He compared these opportunities where everyone worked towards achieving an educational community with the usual professional development activities.

Anne Davies 18.4.02

Appendix 8: Chris' reflections on case writing

Chris thought case writing was a very significant aspect of the Western Melbourne Roundtable. As Chris recalled it was the university teachers who brought the idea of case writing to the roundtable and while they thought it might be a useful strategy had little experience in this kind of writing. Everyone in the roundtable had to learn about case writing together. Chris attended a case writing workshop while other colleagues read books written by case writing experts and cases written by people beyond the roundtable. Chris remembered that in the beginning there was a lot of confusion and discussion about how to write a case and distinctions were made between the demands of case writing and other kinds of writing required in teachers' work.

One of Chris' first memories was the luxury of having time to sit around the table telling stories about work. Over time many of these stories were transformed into cases. For Chris the writing came easily but others struggled. They needed time and support but once they began they found the writing and the ideas flowed. On reflection Chris felt sad that the case writing stopped when the roundtable ended.

Chris felt that case writing gave you a chance to get things 'out of your head', to clarify your ideas and to focus on issues of personal and school concern. Across the roundtable Chris noticed that cases covered a wide range of dilemmas about learning as well as teaching and that in many instances cases examined relationships between and among teachers and students. The cases explored things like team work, negotiation, students' engagement in curriculum and assessment and school reorganisation. Several teams compiled cases around a common theme and Chris felt this gave a great depth to the experience and ideas presented. Chris was interested to note that teachers across teams shared a number of common concerns such as meeting the learning needs of different students.

The language of cases went beyond simple description and Chris' colleagues found they had to develop a language to convey the intensely personal stories and the range of incidents and emotions they faced in their work with students and colleagues.

Chris knew that the cases were being written for an audience and assumed that many cases would make the transition from private to public documents. At the beginning Chris imagined the audience would be the team, the roundtable and possibly student

teachers. Surprisingly, by the end of the roundtable cases had been presented, discussed and published in a range of situations ranging from the Links team to national conferences and journals. Chris' team was creative in its use of cases, also seeking an audience with the principal and parents, while a neighbouring school used them with applicants for new teaching positions. Chris noticed that teachers enjoyed reading cases, appreciating the practical nature of the tales and often empathising with the authors. Chris found the stories stimulated thinking and promoted commentary writing. Some of Chris' colleagues said they learned as much from reading, thinking and writing about other people's cases as they did from their own writing.

Many cases became the basis for professional conversations within Chris' team. They were thankful for the protocols which had been negotiated and refined over time. Chris felt the protocols ensured that the group focused on exploring ideas rather than trying to solve problems. Chris noticed that a number of teams and schools used cases to support decision-making about school organisation and programs. On reflection, Chris felt that the stimulation of writing, reading, talking and thinking together had led to learning and change both in terms of ideas and work practices, and not just in her classroom, but with colleagues and the wider education community.

Anne Davies 21.3.02

Appendix 9: Chris' recollections about action and reflection

Chris and her Links team colleagues were dissatisfied with student participation and the quality of student work in Grade 5 and 6 but couldn't quite put their finger on the problem. Like other teams in the roundtable they were concerned about improving student learning outcomes. When a solution could not be found within existing structures they decided to look further afield to find a better way of improving student learning. As a first step they sought NSN support to re-organise existing structures. During this period they also developed policies outlining their vision and learning beliefs and formed a Links team to explore their concern about the relationship between classroom organisation, teaching practice and student learning. They had embarked on a journey of personal inquiry, discovery and excitement.

When Mary, the Links coordinator, suggested that Chris might attend a seminar she was initially shocked but thought 'Why not?'. Chris later realised that this had been the impetus for developing collaborative teams in classes and amongst colleagues and recalled that it was great when the Links team showed a willingness to engage in innovation together. At this time Mary was also prompted by education writers Fullan and Hargreaves to ponder about strategies that would sustain and motivate good teachers throughout their careers. This precipitated a staff development/team building program which was highly valued by the staff because it focused on participation, dialogue and building relationships. Spurred on by the staff development, the seminar and Innovative Links funding Chris' team met regularly to share dilemmas, knowledge and skills in order to build on their existing experience. Their aim was to plan, implement and monitor change in terms of a negotiated curriculum and student learning. Despite the excitement they experienced quite a few moments of panic and nervousness with questions racing through their mind...Can we...? What if...? When teachers reflected on this time they knew they had worked very hard as a team, learning to change as the need arose.

During the first year of the Links project Chris and others wrote cases about their teaching; the process of telling and reflecting resulted in planning for a negotiated curriculum in Grades 5 and 6. They enjoyed informal and formal discussions with their colleagues and were fully committed to the approach. Looking back Chris remembered becoming enthused by the emergence of discoveries and new

possibilities. Even though she didn't see herself as expert at this point she knew that she was learning and that her energy sparked learning for her peers too. In this way the knowledge quickly shifted from individual ownership to ownership which was shared by the team. They refocused their curriculum attention so that skills and process came before content, aiming for a situation where students became responsible for their own learning. They thought their success in negotiating the curriculum with students was connected to the planning and work they had done together from day one as well as their openness to new ideas and their willingness to experiment.

The process of introducing a negotiated curriculum was characterised by trial and error, experimentation, hesitation, triumph, questioning, listening, discussing, collaboration and evaluation. As Chris began to change her practice she noticed a number of things: it was difficult not to impose long held beliefs; she needed professional and self discipline to follow the approach; and conflicting ideas could be overcome with team planning and support. By the end of the first year of negotiating the curriculum Chris felt like they had run a marathon, but as the team looked back they knew that both they and the children had achieved so much. Chris began to wonder about the challenges for the next year. Would they would run out of questions and ideas? Would it work as well? Could the enthusiasm be maintained?

Chris thought the evidence that negotiation was powerful in enhancing learning appeared to be overwhelming. The university colleague also believed there was a logical connection between students' participation in the selection of topics for investigation, their resultant interest in studying these topics through group inquiry and improved learning outcomes. The process seemed to be a key for unlocking students' active learning and providing a classroom environment which valued student thinking and not just compliant activity. The negotiated curriculum promoted a positive attitude and gave students ownership of their learning by enabling and encouraging them to raise concerns about themselves and the world. Teachers knew that they had become learning partners rather than teachers and students and there had been a change from 'my classroom' to 'our classroom'. When the Grade 1 teachers realised that the negotiated curriculum led to improved learning outcomes they decided to give it a go too. Anne Davies 2 May 2002

Appendix 10: Case writing interview transcript

Recorded 21/3/02

Tape 1: Side 2

AD gives an introduction to the group interview based on the handout “Introduction to group interview on case writing”. Time allocated to read and make notes on “Chris’ reflections on case writing in the roundtable”.

AD What was it about the characteristics of case writing that made it such a significant aspect of the Western Melbourne Roundtable?

OB In here it says it started off with confusion. Well it did. I remember the first day when Tony came and everyone went away thinking ‘What are we supposed to do?’ Slowly, not slowly a bit faster than that, the confusion led to amazement that someone wanted to read what we had to write. I think that was the main thing that we were amazed at, at our school, that we had anything of value that someone else would want to read or hear about. That was the amazing part about it all.

It led to us knowing a lot of other people, it brought us into contact with a lot of other schools of different kinds. Now that’s all stopped and I can say that was a really major part the case writing. You started with the cases which led you to listen to your own school and then to others and the circle got wider. So it wasn’t just primary schools or Catholic schools, it was all schools and anyone who had something to do with education, it wasn’t just teachers it was people from universities, people that wanted to visit and listen, all that kind of thing. And it sort of spread pretty rapidly, and we thought that was the really great thing about it all.

The network that was built up between all of those different places of learning, whether it be kids in school, high school or whatever we felt really positive and supported and even stimulated by having something else to do besides write your work program. It was harking back to your old days where you had to do assignments, but you didn’t really have to do them unless you wanted to. So that was the difference. It could also be individual, then it spread to your group, or you could keep it individual if you really wanted to. There was leeway there for you to write just for yourself, but if you wanted to share that was also there.

And it also did shape policies and programs. I know within my school it led to a lot of different changes and writing about those changes as they were happening was part of the case writing too. It gave you an outlet to argue with yourself, whether you were doing the right thing or not.

AD You talked about some people writing just for themselves and others...can you say some more about that?

OB Well we had about 12 people, out of 21 grade teachers, writing in the end. At first they had the cases, and I was the Link person in the school at the time, and they would show it to me and say 'Do you think this is worthwhile taking to the group?' and I'd say 'Well anything you want to tell us is worthwhile'. And that gave them a little bit more confidence. It was only that I felt the same way as that person when I showed my first case to Steve, and that was the response that I got and so I passed it on. But some people were just happy to keep it in the group at school when we had the discussion nights at the school and they put it into the little book we published with cases and they were happy to leave it at that. And so were we. It wasn't that you felt that you needed to do it for anybody else but for yourself. I know that a lot of people saw that as a good outlet, and they were a lot of quiet people that probably wouldn't say something at a staff meeting or in a big discussion group whereas this way they could. Yeah.

JL In reviewing case writing my first question is how does it impact on professional practice and on student learning. And I guess there's that transference of self reflection and sharing of our concerns and our uncertainties. I was curious about how the case writing would change practice in the classroom, if it did, I mean that's an assumption about whether it did or it didn't. The case writing itself I thought was interesting and I think we were all over the place too. But I think that individuals are anyway. But I think it actually provided, personally, it challenged some of the decision-making values that we had reflected. Was I, personally, really reflecting that process that we were supporting. So it was actually really interesting and in fact two of us writing on the same issue was actually very powerful insight into us just tracking how we were feeling about it. Are we being true to what we'd established? So in that regard I think it was a really valuable tool for checking your mission and values component. Certainly I found it, even though I was wrong. No! It actually influenced

my practice and I don't know how much that influenced practice actually rolls on, that ripple effect that you have across a school or a classroom. I think it was really challenging personally. At the time I was a principal and it was very challenging to expose my work to others.

I was actually really sad that we didn't pick it up as an ongoing piece, I think it would have been really interesting to be able to take the cases we'd written and revisit them in 3 or 4 years to say 'What did we learn from this?' Picking it up again, whatever. And that I don't think was ever even foreshadowed in any of our discussions I think we had actually looked at putting a moratorium on them in essence, for a period of time. One of them I still remember, one of the team's writing, it just brought tears to my eyes every time I read it, and still does, it's that powerful of a piece. I don't know if it's changed anything. I hope that is what your research is doing.

AD Could you say anything about your perceptions of what changed?

JL My impression was that the people who chose to go into it, because it was a voluntary thing, were probably those who were what I would call questioning practitioners anyway, people who felt there was always something to be learning or doing. To me this was one tool that people could use to do that. To me it actually reaffirmed a lot of ideas and maybe that's important because we are always questioning what we do. To say that, I think this was a tool to provide that but I don't think it was the only tool. I guess sometimes I was really aware, my impression was that it took an amazing amount of time. Since I have left that school my impression has been again that the school was under an immense pressure on growth, on the new programs that were initiated and I think doing new things with practice were all so very, very challenging. I don't know in hindsight if it was a very wise decision to participate. Just I think sometimes you can cause too many demands on people for the outcomes, the energy level, I worry about the burnout. So, I'm not sure if that was the question to be honest.

But I do think it provided people with a greater professional confidence. And I think that is a really important issue in the profession because we always see our faults. I think a lot of people started showing some strength and being recognised by their colleagues for that.

I think the other thing is, just as aside, and I'm sure that it was what everybody thought, was that our critical friend, or whatever the term is, was outstanding. I think it would place a lot of pressure on the university colleague to be very, very sensitive at all times to a variety of people with pressing needs and emotions.

So I don't know how much we inform practice or learn from it but I think I did personally, confirmed some of the practice. It was a good way to open ones eyes critically. When you write you often have 400 different ideas coming in at one time and you've got, like Steve's sheet, like that. So it's sometimes good because it's hard to extrapolate or identify the single issue because there are so many things that affect our decision and our practice. I think that was good. And actually sometimes in the raw form it was very informative because you see the complexity of the job.

AD In the raw form?

JL Of our writing. We often worked through the writing process itself, that was me personally. There were three of us who were particularly writing on administration, but to get things on paper in an articulate manner is as hard for me speaking as it is writing. That process was actually very interesting as well. I would love to be a fly on the wall in those sessions too. But I actually think the process is important and the process of people working together thorough it was a nice process as well.

ZL You know the more I think about it, the more I consider it was almost a kind of luxury, that we kind of had that little window where you were allowed to kind of take this moment in your day-to-day teaching life where you really could reflect and then structure writing. You could talk about it with others and you could work that through with people...

Tape 1: Side 2

ZL...with me in that intervening period of time. I've not written any more cases but I've continued to reflect. I was reflecting before case writing, I mean it's wrong to say that I wasn't, but I've continued to reflect more about teaching and not just life in general...(laughter) on paper, with a pen. And I reckon that's really good. So I wrote down this, you can use it if you want Anne: 'In the carousel of teaching life the case becomes the anchor upon which meaning can be moored.' Do you want that?

AD *Yes, that's beautiful!*

JL You make me sick ZL. (plenty of laughter)

ZL I reckon that it was that opportunity, like you were saying Peta, to be able to sit together with folk and talk things through, and write stuff down. You know I was one of the people who tried to coordinate the program with 12 or 13 people and we had a guy there who was a metalwork teacher and basically I don't think since college time that he'd actually put pen to paper and just to facilitate, it was Charles actually who did this, but we actually got in somebody who took his words and wrote. So he did the tape and he got the transcript. And how he valued that was really enormous, it was just a very important celebration of his teaching, in being a teacher and I think really being able to say well here is this stuff that we're really thinking about, what we're doing here is about small group and this school and this issue, this problem, this what we do with kids and teachers and parents and you're really able to think about this and write about it and talk about it and something's coming from it. And the coming from it was, OK you take it back into your teams. So it was a way of thinking and acting and working it through and then taking it on. Ever since I learned about action research stuff I reckon that that's the best way to go.

OG I think it's interesting the word 'luxury' which is being used and I take your point Zig, I mean it was a luxury but I'm kind of sad on reflection that that is a term that hovers around the importance of reflection and evaluation because if you're not doing that what are you learning. I really liked the roundtable because it took you out of the flurry for a little while and you could see that there was a lot of change occurring around you and I felt the cases made you a part of that change and gave some degree of empowering rather than it happening from above with anonymous agents and all of a sudden there's a circular and then all of a sudden you've got to do something. And whether you really have the background or the understanding of where those ideas have come from or not can vary enormously. That can be another, well maybe, destabilising change that can occur. I felt the cases showed people actively dealing with a desire to change rather than that occasional fearful or resentful reaction to change. It seemed that people were empowering themselves, the whole roundtable, so what we do has a high degree of legitimacy, and our willingness to reflect was certainly a sign of a willingness to improve overall. So I thought the

positives in all of that, cushioned you when you came to deal with change, in a way, rather than feeling as if you're going to get yourself painted into a corner, and yes you can do it or you can jump off, or something or other, I'm not too sure. I just felt like you were contributing to something meaningful, you were getting an awful lot out of it as well as the experiences of other people in other contexts and I really believe that the reflection and evaluation isn't, shouldn't even be conceived of as a luxury. I know it is in the terms of our work but without that, or without case writing I think you don't formalise the worth of that reflection and evaluation. It doesn't seem to be recognised or understood. Certainly not built into your timetable along the way and I really think, especially with a number of other issues that affect schools along the way, typically going back to those change dynamics that are everywhere, yeah, it does give you an anchor. Mind you, you can swing 380 degrees on an anchor. (Laughter) I think what it says is that what every one of us did, or are still doing in some cases at least, is worthwhile, and it's happening, and it's real and it deserves a bit more attention than things which abstract and theorise and generalise and all the rest of it. I mean, each of those cases had enormous potential for every one of the readers. And that's the other thing I noticed out of this account here is that the audience grew so rapidly, and I think probably beyond, would I be fair saying, even beyond people here's expectations, in terms of it getting to a broader number of and being valued by a much larger number of people. I don't know, perhaps I'm too isolated or something, but I don't think there are all that many opportunities whereby you get that positive feeling out of that sort of contribution. Like Janine's question, all this that goes on, all these changes, does it really amount to improved student learning along the way. I suppose that's a really difficult thing to quantify. But without that time for reflection and making that time legitimate for yourself and for other people and to encourage other people to do that, you don't even get a chance to pause and to judge that I guess. So, it was a lot of extra time but I never felt, like I do with a number of other things, that it is was a burden and you've got to do this because there is an expectation. I don't think we ever got to the point where it was a drudgery. Would you agree?

LV No I don't think so...we had difficulty juggling meeting times, without a doubt...

OG But importantly, whereas other things where people were a little bit half-hearted about secretively, they go on the timetable board and you come, you can't

help it, but the willingness of people, especially on Neil's part, to be flexible, to be able to come down and have a chat about certain issues, especially launching the case writing with people trying to decide 'Is that really something, is it really interesting?' You know that belittling aspect that happens quite a bit in teachers work...I think the case writing redirects that a little bit and I think gives you a greater sense of the potential at least to be more in control. You don't always have to see it as something extra, making you do something whether you like it or not. and I think it stimulated an awful lot of diverse positive attitudes and lot of positive awareness of what was going on elsewhere. There were a lot of common threads and some great variety, a steep learning curve, that was the way I thought about it because in all dimensions of education there was room in those case studies for you, if you wanted to be selfish and just work out what's wrong and what's right, yes sure, for people who were new into education, rather than reinvent wheels, to go through some miserable periods, it could perhaps alleviate a little bit of stress knowing that 'Oh, someone else feels that way.' that sort of thing. So I think it is something that I would like to see reactivated and I'd like to see whether it could be adapted to some even more deep seated concerns, morale, that sort of stuff.

JL Do you think it would work like in staff meeting time? I mean, What length of time? I can't even remember...

OG No, I think it is important to have that critical friend, I really think that is the important dynamic in it all, because I think it reduces the likelihood of people diluting their thinking, I really do. I don't know whether people felt the same way in their teams along the way, but I really felt it was important to participate, to have a go and look at it very much with an open mind to see. I don't think the time factor nor it being foisted upon people, say in the staff situation, would work. It was purely voluntary and I think the people we had were fairly diverse and even just within the team, some schools are fairly large, you might be in the same building as a person but you might not know much more about them than their name in some cases. I think it brought a diverse group of people within the school together, there was a bit more empathy and a bit more understanding, a bit more of a realisation of some of the strengths that other people carry. You can learn a lot just in those very informal chats along the way. It was good.

FS Perhaps I'll butt in. When you came out last year, after you came, I didn't do it before you came, I had to dig out all our paperwork and all our cases studies and it's all still, God, I hadn't thrown any of it away and I'm retiring this year (laughter)...so anyway, it was just marked when I looked through them again, and none of mine are in there, just that the indication that all the people who wrote, just their professionalism and the way they were concerned about children's learning needs. It wasn't anything they had to do, they were given carte blanche. Of course Tony came in and conned my principal into doing it, and then she conned me, so I had to go around and persuade, cajole, whatever to get people to join this group and the common thread I used was that the student teachers at Footscray would really like to know what we are doing in the field and how they could get some pre-knowledge of what was going on in schools. And that was the link that I used. But it just grew so much. I think one of the teachers had something published in one of the National Schools Network publications and everyone sat up and took notice then. She was just one of the ordinary teachers and she got it in. But my thoughts about the newness of this process and the fact that it was seen as a professional process really hooked a few of the people in our school on. As I said to start with, just the professionalism of the teachers who wrote something because they were all concerned about the kids they were working with, where they were going with their lives, how they were learning in our school environment.

Our group has gone to the seven winds, I think there are only three left at the school now, but maybe all those twelve graduates we've got over the last two years might have had something they could look up.

Steve I think what you've got here really does tell the truth about the start. We were all confused, we were all, who said 'have a go' it might have been Maurice I think. That was one of the key themes of the conversation and I think that was the invitation, 'Let's have a go, see what it's like and see where it goes'. We've done so much with it since that I have difficulty taking myself back to that time so that I can remember what those first case were like. Even the first time I wrote a case which was about getting into KPS. Now we hadn't written cases before so we were all giving it a go. The second key theme was 'Is this what you want?' And our colleagues in schools said to us 'Is this what you want?' We knew nothing. So I think that's right. There's

exploration, confusion. Anne, what I've done here is really my response to what you've written and it's that middle paragraph that I've got joined in as the key.

AD *'The language of cases...'*

Steve Yes. Yes. What case have done for us, and for me is that it's enabled the colleagues we work with in schools to use their language to describe teaching and learning which in all the cases I've read contain assertions, conclusions, observations about how schooling affects the teacher and the students and not a just in a procedural way but in the way you said here, emotion way and personal way, you know a practical way. And I saw it in cases that they were an untapped resource. I mean we've now developed a protocol for a school review where cases are potentially the core of the review process. I wonder, because it is so emotional, there's potential for a great deal of disclosure, personal disclosure and it must be very hard for people who are in organisational situations to be invited to disclose, when disclosing might affect employment, ongoing employment or promotion. So perhaps cases were a strategy for a particular school, at a particular time, maybe not for schools where there are lots of contract teachers around, people are going for promotion. All those kinds of things where there's a public process for that and that cases may not, because they do require a certain disclosure. So I just think that maybe case writing is only for a particular kind of teacher in a particular kind of organisational environment, maybe it's not for all.

I've just written down here, 'I wonder what case writing would show us now if we went into schools and did case writing now, whether we would have the same response and whether we'd get that *Teachers Write* book up so quickly.' After a year we had a collection of cases that we had to cull to be able to get it published. I mean it happened really quickly. Had we the knowledge that we've got now about case writing and representing the wording in case writing, I think we would have offered our colleagues in schools an even a more powerful an experience than they experienced. Because I can remember a number of powerful times at KPS. But the one that I remember most is one of those days when you get there, and I'm sitting down having a cup of coffee because there is a meeting coming and Janine rushed into the staff room, and she's looked at me, and said 'Wait there', and rushed back and got a kid's work and shown me this kid's work and excitedly told me about how this kid

had actually put pen to paper for the first time and had made this leap, this learning leap. I said would you like to write a case and she just sat there and then and wrote a case. Fifteen minutes and she had a page of writing. Done. And it was a very powerful time, and it described an important moment in this teacher's life. I think if we'd known then what we know now we would have put that kids work and the learning next to the case and had a conversation around it. 'How has my teaching contributed to this? How has the school organisation contributed to this? and because the parents were involved 'How is the school relating to the parents?' and all that kind of thing. You know we would have had that conversation

JL That's what we missed, I think you should try to pick that up

Steve Anna's doing that in Tasmania at the moment, in a trial at one school.

JL It would be better if you did it in Victoria...

AD *So when you say 'Pick that up' what are you thinking*

JL I think there are opportunities for further partnerships to be developed on that construct because it's an unknown. The question is 'How does this impact?' 'What do we actually talk about to actually learn that would influence school wide practice?' is the thing. Because we know, or there is an assumption and I believe it, that teachers learn best from each other and we learn best from our practice, and so it's actually taking that learning to another level almost. That I to me is very, very exciting.

OB With all the case writing that was happening at our school, which was quite an enormous amount actually, we ended up with a book about this big, we didn't publish it, it's with us still, and we actually put the drawing in with it, with the case in our book. And we did that with a lot of them too, with something a child did we put in the drawing or the piece of work.

JL Because to me, that then structures and helps provide the process, the thinking of 'What it is that we do that contributes to this?'. Because we do a lot of ready-fire-aim stuff because we try to get a breadth of learning, a breadth of opportunity for kids and sometimes we might have done something we didn't know was important. There are strategies we all try it some time, and I like the concept of instead of having protocols around some of our writing and work that actually allows us the professional discussion that is sensitive and yet we can actually gain from it because

we've been such a sterile profession and yet it is such a humanist profession that we've gone away from the emotions and I don't think we can afford, we have to recognise that, to recognise when teachers are excited or distressed because it is a really powerful learning time and we actually haven't taken the conversation to investigate those feelings, 'What is it about this? Where did we get it? How did we do it?'

OB The big question that the National Schools Network always posed to us, the National Schools Network and the Innovative Links Project did come at the same time and it seemed like they were both working at the same thing, and the big question was 'What is it about our teaching that affects our students' learning?' And that was part of our case writing too or that was the big focus, 'What are we doing that affects the kids?' and it sort of rolled onto another case. 'What are we going to do about what happened at the end of this case. I'll write another one to work out the ideas and bring it to the group and see if someone else has got an idea on what we can do here.' I think that is a very big question, 'What is it about how we work that affects the kids learning?'

OG I thought the commentaries took us in the direction that you were suggesting there Janine—I noticed there were a few cases where there were multiple commentaries whereas on others they were just one to one. I think as a professional development exercise just looking at one of those cases and asking that very question, 'What happened that made the learning so good?' and 'Why does this interest so many of us?' It's not necessarily too big a leap from what might have already happened with people's perceptions of a few years being gone and whether issues have moved on. I don't know really whether the issues have moved on dramatically to a point that the others are unrecognisable. I think that might be a good way of getting an understanding of our audience that I don't think any of us had any idea about to begin with. And in a way that made a kind of innocent writing, I don't think it was overly contrived and I remember, Steve, we had a discussion in one of the earlier meetings about how formal should this language be for case writing.

Steve I remember distinctly, I'm still bearing the scars. (laughter)

OG I didn't mean to be that mean or evil. But in terms of the plain speaking, that was my concern, that a lot of those things I thought could be easily over-

intellectualised and therefore their value becomes...Ooh. OK. Well if I need to write an essay on that topic I'll look at that reference at some stage. But if I want to translate something directly into my classroom, the rawness of the case, or people 'having a go' without any super-preconceived ideas about the writing, made for a lot of genuine writing and the commentaries seemed to begin the dialogue, the time for the roundtable to, as you say, put that on the table and say 'Right, what is it that this person has done? What is it that this student has done that's brought the two together and made everyone really how to feel?' Depending on the nature of the case of course. In a way I think there's a move towards that but there was also that the funding wasn't there, at the end of it all, inevitably I suppose it catches up with everyone, death, taxes and funding, they seem to be the three. I think commentaries might be a source of interest and stimulus for further work.

IV This was a long time ago for me.

AD *Another life.*

IV I think what you've written there Anne shows that there was a need within the profession and within schools for this type of activity and I guess my interest in it is probably from professional development perspective having left the school, walked out as professional development coordinator. To me, writing the cases and the reflection and discussion and sharing that went on before the cases were written meets the criteria that's often spouted that teachers learn best from other teachers and we talk about this but it rarely happens. Mainly we go to people who are the experts to give us whatever they think we need. This offered us a formalised, disciplined way of doing it. Now I know that we all reflect upon our practice as teachers but, I'm going to be honest, my reflection tended to be 'Why the hell did that lesson go wrong now?' as I'm running to my next class. Or after I've had an argument with a student after school, 'What did I do? How did it come to this?' But that's usually while I'm going to another meeting. The kind of sustained, disciplined reflection where you looked to identify problems, lacks, needs, solutions for them, that kind of reflection really didn't happen very often. Even curriculum days may have started some off but they died pretty quickly after that because you were just too busy doing other things. The fact that here you had to write a case, and I'm not saying it was drudgery, but the fact that you had to produce something at the end of it, kept you on task. I think in the way that

when you undertake a formal study at a tertiary institution, you commit yourself to a semester or whatever, it gives you that disciplined, ongoing, sustained sort of thinking about things and on top of that, this was fun. At the time I wouldn't necessarily have said that but looking back on it now it was a fun way to learn. And I'm really sorry now that we didn't try to involve the kids more. We certainly did, I know when we were tackling things on the reading angle at school and the maths people were tackling it with maths problems, I know that most of us went into our classes and told the kids we were undertaking this program and we were trying to find better ways of teaching them to read because we did ask them for critiques afterwards. But none of us ever thought of asking the kids to actually undertake a case and write one and there would have been kids who would have been quite willing and certainly articulate enough and thoughtful enough to do that and I'm sorry we didn't. Equally we could have brought the parents into it. I could go on and on and on and obviously we tackled only a certain aspect of our practice which was the maths angle and the reading angle. Now many other schools tackled different things, I mean, the possibilities within the case writing structure are almost boundless and that's really very exciting because case writing enables the shy, the reticent, the hesitant, the modest to do what they would never do in a public arena. They simply wouldn't do it so it gives everybody an opportunity to participate. I think kids as a rule are not prepared to stand up and talk to the public about how they feel about education but in an atmosphere such as case writing where it's treated with respect and treated seriously, where it may be published with confidentiality considerations being taken into account I think you could get them to participate too and you said Steve that only certain schools would do this. I think to start off with, yes, and only perhaps certain people in the school, but I think if a school could focus on this as a formalised, accepted method of offering professional development to students, to staff, to the wider community, parents and so forth, and it's treated with respect and there is product expected at the end I think that you may get a lot more people...

Tape 2: Side 1

...it was enjoyable. The fun came from the meetings that we had, the fun came from the delightful little titbits that you got out of cases at times and I think the fun came when we really hit something and it was successful and we could share that and we had the time to share that and very often we don't. I mean I know that if you have a

sympathetic soul on the staff that you might grab that person and say 'Look at this wonderful effort.' But this was a formalised sharing and there were a lot of other people there. I learned a lot more about what maths people do and I had a much greater respect for the maths faculty I think at the end of this. You only vaguely know what people do in their classrooms before that and I guess you tend to be fairly insular within your own faculty areas, not in your school Janine and Zig, but certainly in the traditional sort of structure in a high school, and I think this offered us opportunities to extend our boundaries and again had we continued with it we could have done a lot more than we did. I know it is easy to say in hindsight but it's just a shame it didn't go on, with perhaps a short break in the middle to reassess the whole thing and we could go back and look at it very differently and extend it and build on it I think. So, anyway, I thought it was fun.

Steve Maurice will be appalled ...

IV Sorry...(laughter followed by some other comments that I couldn't decipher)

NH I attended an initial seminar, I think, with Judith Shulman at Monash, probably in '94 or thereabouts, '93 was it? It was a reasonable day, I didn't know what to expect. And I well remember, we were sitting there busily doing something, and Judith Shulman came up, and I'm quite happy to repeat this, this is my impression. I said 'I'm interested in action research'. And this is my recollection, there was an expression that came over her face and she walked away. Now this is my memory of that incident. So I became a bit suspicious of case writing at that point because I had been imbued with the Stephen Kemmis 'change the world' some ten years before that happened. But then getting involved in the Western Melbourne Roundtable and the students here I did change my view about case writing. I think it's now terrific and still use it here in our classes and so on and it does, I think, work very well, for the fourth year students here. That's my experience anyhow. So, I did have that initial worry about case writing, as a fairly tame activity that wasn't going to lead very far, but I quickly saw that teachers seem to write, and I've never heard too many people complaining over my years, just from time to time. Basically, teachers write, they write cases, that's been my experience, students write them too. They write hundreds of them at VUT. So there has got to be something about the style of writing, it's not a long crafted essay. So I agree with all of those. I'd like to pick up on two points from Janine and Hilda about the long term nature. It seems to me that in education we

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usually work very short time frames and just being able to do what people were saying, review and write again and keep going and draw it together again over ten years, say, not being able to do that seems to be a great weakness in education. So I think the case writing didn't go far enough, or the process just never went far enough. I don't know how many cycles we went through but we could have gone through ten times more cycles. That sort of thing. And by that I mean drawing out some of the key ideas and taking them back to classrooms and bringing them back again and writing. Just doing this sort of thing over and over again. So that would be my main critique if you like. It didn't go far enough in the time we had.

AD So when you think about far enough, what does 'far' mean? The kind of thinking or the range of thinking or action or...?

NH Yes. All that. Taking the issues that come out of each school. Different schools, different sets of discussions, what the implications are, going back and investigating that. The English people taking notice of the science people, that sort of thing. I just think that is a very time consuming business, it takes a long time to do that. Out of that there might come some theories or generalisations or something, or may not, it just depends on what happens.

OB If I could say, I think it goes back to that word 'luxury'. Our luxury was that we had money to release teachers to do this. And that time was like a little golden apple. You had time to do something other than planning for your kids, you know, doing your work program, getting something on to the computer, getting these work sheets done. It was purely for you and your writing and that I think was the biggest luxury and the best thing about all of that. You were actually given the time to do it.

JL I wonder if that time, could you get that time with your professional development budget, you say that I'd like to use my year's professional development allocation for so many periods and in that time I'll do some writing. The thing is to have a link, I think Maurice used that critical friend thing, or not the critical friend, what do you call you guys?

ZL academic associates

Steve university colleagues

JL those in the ivory tower

OB I think it was good to have...

ZL You see I think that's a single problem, well not problem, I think it's an opportunity that, really. Really it would be a way, if we could somehow swing it that...see to me it's like being potentially part of a seminar where you research students and you guide, that's a fluid thing. So you can see people who are part of a cycle like this, they themselves become much more able and critical and self consciously reflective and so on and so forth. They begin to bring in the theory and the ideas. So gradually there should be a seamless way in which teachers, in whatever institutions, primaries and secondaries in particular, should be able to move in and back and through the teacher institutions using cases as one of their tools. And in a way, that's really what I was getting from Anna when she was coming consistently to us. She was challenging you in a critical, academic way, but an intellectual way. Now that's not an exclusive way, and that is a thing that seems to grow between the different elements of our profession. It is that when you're teaching I call it the mad carousel, it's sort of like this thing happening constantly to another. And like you were talking about, you don't have that opportunity to reflect or sit still or look at a particular thing. Whereas, I don't know if this is true actually, of the academic institutions now, but one still has this perception that you do have a chance to reflect and consider and think about and draw in the theoretical constructs that will inform these actual things that are happening. I mean sometimes I listen to Steve and I don't have a fucking idea of what he's saying

JL Oh good, me too (laughter)

Steve Aren't the cheap shots the best...unwarranted

ZL I mean I remember that discussion about language

OG I didn't mean to get feisty or anything Steve

Steve I brought it up, didn't I, in my interview. I told the story against myself and Anne's, I think Anne's set aside a whole chapter in her thesis about it

ZL But wouldn't it be great to be able to do that

JL And there should be an ability to do that, to actually have the flow that there is an ongoing link between practitioners and the university and we use them, this is one of the constructs. Sometimes it won't suit all people, and I think that is a point

because it is so demanding in the emotional dimension. The other thing I was actually thinking was that it...my mind's just going there, how to make this happen as an option. That just reminded me so much of *Horace's School* that you just go... *Horace's Compromise* wasn't it I think it was

ZL Written by Ted Sizer

JL Teachers' life is like that way, we try to do that one, you need to be there. To me, that's what some of the case writing allows you to do which means you could look at organisational structures, things that impede some of the stuff we would prefer to do.

IV I guess, I find case writing just a little bit stronger than that. I think that it demands that you do it. Once you have committed yourself to do it, you know you are going to have to write something. So it kind of keeps you on task, like you know you've got an exam to sit, or an assignment to turn in. It's not just an opportunity, it puts that, pressure would be the wrong word, it puts that demand on you that you keep it in mind.

OG It's being responsible to yourself. Devaluing that. Because a lot of the time teachers spend a lot of time compromising what might be their personal well-being for the sake of others. It seems to be a character flaw or trait, I don't know what you'd call it but, that again gives that extra value I think, taking pause. You know we did not stop talking from the moment I got in your car to wherever we were going for the discussion and the same thing on the way back and I'm sure we solved all the world's problems a dozen times over. It was the time, even just in a car trip to have a conversation about how you saw yourself, the place where you worked, the people where you were working. There's too little time and on occasion I really believe, given other opportunities, there's too little energy from people.

ZL That's Janine's point

OG Yeah. At the end of the day you are trying to work out 'Why was that was a disaster?' as you are walking into your next class and then the meeting, and there is something else you were meant to do, all that sort of stuff. There is no one who monitors your work other than yourself and if you can't turn around and say to yourself, 'I deserve the time for myself to get something clear in my head or to hear from another person to help clarify it for me' well it's only going to make stuff worse

in terms of its effectiveness with kids if you just run around like a head with its chook, no a chook with its head chopped off. You're too busy and it worries me because it seems very unproductive.

JL Interesting isn't it. We have teachers doing a lot of stuff lightly, we have kids learning a lot of stuff lightly.

AD Several people have talked about getting beyond the lightly. Mauricel talked about getting to more depth through commentaries, and Steve talked about having conversations which asked more questions...

JL The thing I liked about what Steve was saying, it seemed it would be ideal to have the teacher's dilemma, which sometimes the case writing actually shows, and the students' work. I was thinking wouldn't it have been wonderful to have Green Team writing about the integrated approach which was really quite sophisticated I thought, in a case that actually looked at kids' products. Gee, I mean, it just would have been powerful for the team, but also for other teams who are still going through some of the processes.

OB I think it was powerful going down to the children, but also going up from where I am as a classroom teacher and going up to the administration or the principal. I remember one time after writing cases you ask all your questions, you don't find an answer and then you think well, the answer's got to be with him or one in the office there. So I went up one day and I said, I was shaking in my boots but I thought no, I'm going to do this. And I said, 'Here's my problem, this is what I want to do about it.' And he said 'No.' And I said 'Well, why not? Do you have some good reason for why not?' And that was the first step for me to the process of change that we went through, that I actually questioned his answer about what we could and couldn't do. I remember that now and I still shake when I think about it. But it was good because from then on the process started, a lot of great things happened, a lot of writing happened, but it also reflected up to the boss too. You know, you've got to change too, not just us...and you can't just be the director, you've got to give us a hand or let us do what we can to try and do something better for the kids.

AD And was there a change?

OB Yep. There has been, slowly, like chipping away a little bit of wood you slowly get there.

IV I think one of the other problems with professional development, very, very quickly, is that people go into it being prepared to make a change but the change doesn't become intrinsic or integral to the method of operating because it's kind of a one off lesson and you go out terribly enthusiastic and then because of the pressure of other things you fall back into autopilot and you start doing things the old way again. Now I took a golf lesson at the start of this year, which I definitely regret, because my golf instructor told me that to change my grip would require me to practise 2000 times. And I said 'Why is that?' I thought maybe he thought I was a slow learner. But no. That's how long it takes to make something a habit, a new skill a habit. Now I don't know whether these figures are right or not but it did strike me that when we wrote a case we thought about the processes that we were writing about over a long period, again giving ourselves a chance to make that more integral to our whole method of operating. I do believe that my method of taking reading with the younger kids changed as a result of the cases. Now not as much as perhaps I'd probably have liked it to but it did change and I think that had I gone to an in-service where they gave me some of the ideas that we came up with and trialed in different ways and reported to each other, I think I would have gone out with good intentions and two weeks later I would have reverted to my original methods because you are under such pressure of time, all the time. I suppose we're not the only profession to claim that but I think it is probably true of all professions that you need the time to make those changes to become part of your normal level of operating. I think case writing forced us to think things for that longer period again, that disciplined way. And I think it allowed us to do that.

JL How long was the case writing project?

AD *It was funded for three years.*

JL Was it that long?

IV And most of us took quite a few, like months and months to write our cases

AD *Get started*

OG It wasn't until latter in the first year that things happened.

IV And we wrote for a long time too and we got commentaries for a long time. I think it was an ongoing sort of involvement process.

AD There is an interesting thing about time. It takes time to get started, and for lots it takes time to write and so I was interested when Steve said before, 'And very quickly we had a publication'. That gave me another way of looking at it. In fact while it took a long time to get started after a short time every school had a huge bundle of cases including a collection of cases grouped around a particular theme.

IV Perhaps that was because all schools went into it knowing what project they were going to focus on, but the actual process of learning to write cases and of learning to integrate with each other and learning to make use of our critical friend, that all took a long time I think and I certainly don't feel that I anticipated all the potential ways of using the case writing even when it folded. That only came slowly later when we talked and thought about it, that we could have utilised it in so many more areas of our practice and utilised it beneficially. So I don't think it was possible to see how good it could have been, in how many areas, until we had undergone the process in which we found ourselves.

AD It's actually 6.05pm. I said we'd be finished by six. Are there any things that people have written down, questions, comments that you would like to make in closing.

OB I'm just sad it's gone. I really miss it, there is a big hole there now.

NH Just trying to draw a few threads together Anne. This might be a classic roundtable discussion. Because this might be a classic roundtable discussion, 'Where do we go from here?' Perhaps just re-emphasising what I said. It may be, that for the reasons that have just been given, and what we've been talking about, that the roundtable was set up with a sort of a view that we were going to see where it led. Very democratic and tremendous things occur out of that. The question is along the way 'How do things sort of come together out of that?' So it may be that a more systematic approach to a case conference, for example, that could have either emerged quickly or could have been part of the process, and that might have helped to draw these ideas together, might have given the roundtable a bit more discipline perhaps. That right, that yes, we're going to try this with every half year, say, there is

something called a case conference that has this structure. Now attempts were made at that under various headings, and that sort of thing. But it maybe that if there was more direction, or more thought given to that, that this is where we were heading and this was the process, things would evolve as we go along, but as we go along, every so often, certain things will happen as well in a more systematic way of drawing things together so that people can learn from one another more, and then go back and try those ideas out. My view is that this was a weakness in the roundtable operation or structure.

OG Neil, is that like formalised reflection? A global...

NH Yes. I'd agree with that. The roundtable did attempt that on a number of different occasions, oh I use the word attempt, the roundtable did do that on a number of occasions. But I can well remember a number of discussions where I thought it was still a bit hazy. It never went far enough, it seemed to me, during those discussions.

AD *There was the forum at Moonee Valley and I can think of one case discussion you taped at WSC, there were little examples...*

Steve We didn't have the technical, sorry, we didn't have the analytical strategies which would put that process in the hands of school colleagues, and we do now.

JL What are they?

Steve Well, it's a way of reading cases, we call it 'threading a case', finding the thread out of the case and then putting the threads of cases together and saying 'Well, what does this tell us?' Anne's using it, 'What does this tell us about our school? What are these threads telling us?' And to pick out the key words and relate the key words to the key features of the school.

JL You indicated earlier that this might be a review process for a school. Have you put that submission to Standards and Accountability? I think it's a great idea and I think the western region RD would be interested in it as well. I mean somewhere you need backing to be able to do that.

Steve Well, we're trialing it at the moment and I think my response to DET taking it on is that it might be too extended, too long, too resource intensive for it to give the kind of results in the time frame that the Department might be interested in. Say charter reviews. This is done very quickly, get an outside expert in...

JL It's crazy, it should be done over a ten year frame, really

Steve The thing that I liked about case writing and I think despite one glitch, it really was, it transferred quickly, the control of the roundtable to the participants, the teachers. The success of the roundtable, when you look back, was really determined by the teachers having a go and producing accounts of their practice. And I take from this point that maybe it didn't go far enough but maybe for that moment in time that was as far as it could go, and even getting that going, getting accounts of practice written was an important step.

ZL I was just going to say that I really enjoyed those moments that we had where it was obvious that, I remember you Steve, but Anna did it, in fact all the people from the university did it, where you were struggling, obviously struggling at the edge of what you knew. And I thought that was really great. I had a little laugh about it before, but really, I'm really heartened to hear that that discussion is still strong in the mind about the language that we need to be able to discuss about these commonalities or these things. You were unable to find words to put it in and now you seem to have worked that through. I agree with you it would be wonderful if we could get this knowledge now and be able to take it back with some dough, and be able to bring it back in and embed it.

JL Because we were all in our schools, doing the 300 things that people do every day. Just out of curiosity Anne, could you identify groups, like groups of people who felt very uncomfortable? I know we had a couple who really, really found it extremely difficult, in fact my immediate colleague just couldn't get it on paper. But were there, I guess we know it's not for everybody, but was it identifiable? Any particular, it wasn't going to be sheet metal but...

AD I think you actually mentioned it before when you talked about questioning practitioners. I asked myself that question 'Were there particular schools and particular people who came to work in the roundtable? At one level the idea of a questioning practitioner, someone who feels comfortable or able to actually participate...I think, as others have said today, that the voluntariness of the participation was really significant but it also seems that those people who volunteer to do that work have an impact beyond themselves and beyond their teams in different ways in different schools. People showing other people that it was safe, lead other

people to fit in and they were able to present their work. There were tensions though between those who were in the group and those who were outside of the group...

IV I think the safety aspect impacted on our roundtable meetings too for a while. I think we spent a bit of time tip-toeing around each other, being very careful not to step on each others' toes. I think that took a while to settle down. I think we might have needed perhaps another year or two. The difficult bits have to be got through somehow and I think the trust needed to be developed. Being comfortable needed to be developed. I mean we didn't know each other when we came in like that.

AD *The cases were, in a way, a vehicle for people to get to know each other.*

IV Yes that's right.

AD *That's probably a good place to finish for today and a good place to start next time. You can see the ideas are connected case writing, working together and the process of action and reflection, it's hard to talk about one without talking about the other. So next time we'll talk about working together in the roundtable.*

Appendix 11: Information relating to a research project about the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable

We have initiated a research project about the Western Melbourne Roundtable and the Innovative Links Project and our aim is to develop a deeper understanding about partnerships and the links between practitioner research, effective professional development and school change. Our hypothesis is that roundtables provide an opportunity for teachers, both in schools and universities, to work together to:

- develop a deeper understanding about teaching, learning and student outcomes
- engage in authentic professional development
- build a culture of continuous reflection and improvement.

Research activities

To achieve this aim we plan to investigate the reported characteristics of an Innovative Links Project Roundtable through an in-depth examination of the Western Melbourne Roundtable from its inception in 1994, to the end of government funding in 1997, then into the post-funding period. The research activities will consist of:

1. An analysis of existing public documents such as records of meetings, published pieces of case writing, articles, conference proceedings and evaluation documents which are connected to the Western Melbourne Roundtable and Innovative Links Project.
2. An analysis of existing unpublished materials (as authorised). This will include:
 - unpublished pieces of case writing
 - existing transcripts of interviews conducted by and for the Western Melbourne Roundtable
 - other unpublished materials as suggested and authorised by participants.
3. Individual and group interviews with members of the Western Melbourne Roundtable based on the questions attached.

Nature of the project

In general terms this study aims to produce new knowledge and theories about:

- Using roundtables as a technology for achieving personal and organisational growth
- Contributing factors for effective professional development
- The characteristics of roundtables
- The development of a research culture in education settings
- Implementation issues such as collaborative and reflective inquiry, collegial support, initial teacher education, partnerships, ownership and control, and the link between research and professional development.

While the study will focus on the field of education, the Roundtable technology has the potential to be used in a wide range of situations and the findings will be of interest to individuals and organisations from diverse fields especially in situations where they seek to expand their understanding about professional growth, reflective practice and organisational change and improvement.

Consistent with the philosophy of the Innovative Links Project and the Western Melbourne Roundtable this research project also has the potential to provide another stage of reflection and an opportunity to maintain and extend professional partnerships and networks which were established in the Western Melbourne Roundtable.

Ethical considerations

As a research team we are committed to conducting a project which respects the personality, rights, wishes, beliefs, consent and freedom of each individual participant. The following procedures have been designed to reflect this commitment and to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and safe storage of the data collected.

Briefing and consent

- All participants will be fully briefed about the program of research.

- All participants will complete the “Consent Form”.
- Participation will be voluntary and participants will be free to withdraw from the study at any time.
- The use of all unpublished materials will be authorised by the appropriate participants prior to their use in the project.

Interviews

- All members of the six original teams in the Western Melbourne Roundtable will be invited to participate.
- All interviewees will be given a copy of the “Schedule of Questions for Interviews” prior to the individual interviews.
- All interviewees will be given transcripts of the interviews for verification prior to coding and analysis by the researchers.
- Interviewees will have the right to refuse to answer any questions or to terminate an interview at any time.
- All interviews will be scheduled at a time and place that suits the interviewee/s.

Anonymity and confidentiality

To ensure confidentiality and participant anonymity:

- A log of all materials used in the course of this research project will be kept.
- Any publications reporting this research project will use fictitious names unless otherwise negotiated with the participants.
- Tony Kruger, Brenda Cherednichenko and Anne Davies will be responsible for the security of all records pertaining to, and collected during the course of this research project. They will be stored in locked cabinets in the School of Education at the university.

- All Western Melbourne Roundtable records will be kept intact and archived at the completion of the project.
- All research project records will be kept and archived for a minimum of five years.
- Western Melbourne Roundtable records will be able to be accessed at any time by any member of the Roundtable in line with current practice.
- Materials that are collected during the course of this study will only be accessible to Tony Kruger (as supervisor), Brenda Cherednichenko (as co-supervisor) and Anne Davies (as research student).

Tony Kruger, Brenda Cherednichenko and Anne Davies

Appendix 12: Case questions

Some questions to consider about each case

What does this case have to say about...

- teachers, learning communities and school reform?
- students, learning communities and school reform?
- context, learning communities and school reform?

What is this a case of?

Some questions to consider about both cases

Taken together, do these cases have anything in common to say about...

- teachers, learning communities and school reform?
- students, learning communities and school reform?
- curriculum (subject matter), learning communities and school reform?
- context, learning communities and school reform?

What are these cases of?

Are they cases of the same thing or different things?

Cases

Case 1: A question of language

When Steve said, “And I want us all to use the language from the National Statements and Profiles in writing our case studies”, my heart sank as I looked across the table to the team of teachers from Honeyeater Primary School. All I could read from their faces was a sense of confusion.

This was a meeting of The Link Roundtable at which teachers from five schools and staff from the university were discussing the writing of case studies about teaching. The purpose was to share the experiences of each school team which comprised teachers and university lecturers and to clarify a common focus for case writing. As leader of The Link research project, Steve held a view of what he wanted to achieve but he also had to convince the group about his ideas. He was very well prepared for the meeting and had distributed readings which exemplified the language of national curriculum statements.

Up till that moment the meeting had given me a big buzz. There was lots of conversation around the table about progress in schools. One school had conducted a case writing workshop that morning and Ivan spoke enthusiastically about the experience and how his team was meeting again the next week to review their case writing. Bill also was totally committed to the project and dreamed aloud of partnerships involving his school team and university students. Carol, a teacher from the Honeyeater team with whom I was working as an academic associate, spoke of our first meeting when some of her concerns about the academic nature of case writing had been allayed.

And now Steve had overturned my assurances by suggesting that teachers not only write about the effect of change on their teaching, but they were to write in unfamiliar and complex language.

I felt that I had let down the teachers in my team. It was a real dilemma—I totally believed in what I had said that natural language was the essence of case writing because of its authenticity. On the other hand, Steve was the recipient of the

Innovative Link research grant and he clearly understood the rationale for the research. What was I to do in response to Steve's suggestion?

Team work however, has its strengths as Oliver, a secondary teacher spoke very forcibly about the value of teacher's talk as a way of reflecting on their practice. Furthermore he debunked the idea of lecturers being referred to as academic associates. Oliver clearly believed that we were all teachers and that lecturers or teachers were not more powerful than the other.

I then plucked up the courage to stress my belief in the use of natural language as a way of describing teachers' work and that the language of curriculum statements and profiles could be used in writing commentaries on the case studies. Was this a compromise situation?

At this stage I left the meeting. The conclusion was not clear to me. Were we all to write our cases in the academic language of national curriculum statements, or could we write in our natural conversational language? In the open situation of the meeting each person was free to express an opinion, yet I was quite confused about the decision. Were we bound by Steve's sociological perspective, or were we free to make democratic decisions in our teams? Can a large group of about 30 people agree on how they are going to conduct an action research project? Does it matter if some teams write different kinds of case studies than others? (V doc 21)

Case 2: Michael, Sophie, Eve and Penny

Michael

Michael was a teacher who graduated from a Dip.T. course in which I had taught. I do not think he will mind my writing that we had an up-and-down relationship during the course. He declined the invitation to be a part of the project, citing a number of professional and personal reasons. The details are not important. Two aspects of our meeting are relevant, however. The first is that I did not expect him to provide reasons. Did he feel the need to explain because of our former relationship? If yes, then good on him for protecting himself, and me. The second point that has occurred to me is more complex. As a teacher–educator guest of the school making a first visit, I had no means to ‘convince’ Michael to participate; at least no means which explained what the project looked like. We teacher educators are lucky if we can be closely related to even a handful of schools. Teachers take us on trust when they work with us; and trust does not appear to exist naturally between teachers and teacher educators.

Sophie

I made a mess of my introduction to Sophie. Briefly, Sophie came prepared with a proposal for her work in the project which I had difficulty in interpreting within my understanding of the project’s intentions. Being a devotee of ‘inquiry’ I asked, innocently enough I recall, a series of ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. By the end of our conversation, I must have come across to Sophie as an interrogator: Kruger PI! Sophie later told me that she took my questions to be an attack on her teaching competence. While, even now, I am not sure what Sophie wanted from me at our first meeting, I am aware that the ‘objective’ questions from a teacher educator offended because they were objective and invasive of Sophie’s practical interests. She risked a great deal in joining the project.

Eve

I don’t think that I made such a mess of my discussion with Eve, who described herself as ‘inexperienced’ and doubted the quality of the contribution she would make. Eve has been one of the enthusiastic contributors to the project’s work at the

school. She completed an interesting case study and has worked with colleagues in crafting their cases. The matter which concerned me was that lack of experience might be interpreted as a lack of expertise and thus might be a barrier to participation. Eve I think wanted to participate but gave me the impression that she needed me to convince her. What conception of practice have we teacher educators transmitted (and teachers too I suspect) that Eve diminishes the insights from her own practice because she claims not enough experiences.

Penny

Penny is a teacher with more than 25 years teaching experience. I am not certain why she started in the project, apart from Leanne's encouraging invitation. While our initial discussions were friendly, not until Penny commenced her discussion of her practice and the writing of her case did she give me the impression that she was 'in' the project. In most cases I have found that teachers commence the writing of a case only after intense description and analysis of a practical situation with colleagues. I found myself listening for what might be the first sentences of a case. I wrote down some of Penny's words and suggested she might start with them. What followed was a piece of writing which I found stunning: not in any literary or academic sense, but in its opening up of Penny's personal and professional thinking. She made logical connections between her involvement in a staff meeting, impressions of students in her classroom, the need for teachers to reflect on practice and the constraints of the timetable. The writing started Penny on a year long investigation of the possibilities of timetable change and its effect on teaching and learning. And the process commenced with the self-deprecating, 'Is this what you want?'

Case 3: Getting started

“Doesn’t it feel different, driving past the school on a school day to come somewhere else for a meeting?” It was almost as if one member of the group had voiced exactly what everyone else was thinking. “And isn’t it good,” said another. “To think that all we’ve got to think about for the whole morning is case writing?” “Remember though we have to go up to school, for the special morning tea; I’m giving the speech...The teacher leaving to have a baby is in my team” she explained for the two university members of the case writing team. “It’s a shame though we have to write, I don’t know where to start or what to write!” came a worried voice. “Do you have to include references and things like in a university essay?” she queried. “Let’s go back over some of the materials we’ve been given already” said the coordinator. ‘But first, all get tea, coffee or whatever. It’s all set up over there.’ And so, it was, on a table in the corner of the dining room in which the group was meeting, an array of tea bags, herbal and other, coffee, milk and even chocolate and marshmallows. The group sat around the table and worked through various readings, individually and in pairs, interjecting stories and past teaching experiences came to mind. There were clearly many stories in the group waiting to be told but when it came time to “have a go at writing something” it seemed for some that these dried up. “Do we have write on an overhead transparency really?” “Are we really going to have to show our stories to the group?” asked the most nervous writer. “It’s like silent writing time at school,” said another and so the thought of what teachers often expect of their students but not of themselves flowed across the group. At the same time the group stilled as a classroom does as students take to the task. It was interesting to note the nature of the stories as they were shared with the group. Overwhelmingly they were about “first times” and “starting again”. Clearly, these are very traumatic and well remembered experiences and just as clearly they are experiences with which colleagues identify. Lots of “That’s just like what happened to me!” “Oh I can remember something just like that,” echoed around the room. And then it was time to down tools and head for the school for morning tea and so we leapt into a couple of cars and headed off. Once there, the sense of it being a “strange day” was noted by several of the group. “It’s odd being at school when our replacement teachers are here too”. The table provided links through past and present with the hint of the future in the pregnant departing teacher. There was foccacia beside the chocolate ripple cake, the university lecturer

across the table from a former student, a member of the second intake into a teacher education program established a mere nine years ago. (The guest of honour delightfully was a member of the first cohort of students to enter the program) and so there was chat about friends, future study plans, speeches and cheers and lots of washing up and clearing of tables and sharing of tasks among the teachers, easily moving in and out of domestic, academic and practical teaching roles. And then it was back to the meeting but not before answering the few at the school, “We didn’t think you were supposed to be here this morning?” “You’re going to be back this afternoon aren’t you?” discriminating between those teachers in the group who had been allocated a whole day to give to the professional development activity and those who had only half a day. Back at the house, plans were framed for the next stages of the project and dates and deadlines determined and for some the day to day demands of school encroached as they had to excuse themselves to return to school. For others it was off to lunch on what was developing into the day of the movable feast. The two university associates and two of the teachers, the coordinator and one other, headed down the main road deeper into St. Albans for the Friday afternoon roundtable meeting with representatives from each of the other four school teams and their academic associates. It was eerie to walk into this very large school and to find the staffroom almost bare. It was clearly an occasion for special visitors and “family had been told to hold back”. Staff, other than those in the professional development team were eating their lunches elsewhere and arrangements had been made for the professional development team members’ classes to be covered for the afternoon. The food was in abundance and as the team members straggled in from the various schools, the conversation was light and friendly. “We always have great lunches at these meetings. I really look forward to them.” With a spirit of camaraderie in place the meeting began and what ensued did much to demonstrate the joy teachers feel in their work and in working together. There was also the sense of family in the sharing of food, the checking on whose doing what, the questioning of hierarchies, the shared experiences, the movement between the massive and the mundane and the two teachers who came into the staffroom as the meeting closed, grabbed a stubbie each from the fridge and marked their territory as clearly as any teenager pushed out of her bedroom by a visiting relative. (RPS doc 07)

Commentary

Team building is central to working collaboratively. A team that shares experiences, builds understandings together and has a ‘common vision’ of what they would like to achieve, are more likely to have successful outcomes in any project that they work on. In building a team, time needs to be allocated to: plan how the team will operate; to plan who will be responsible for tasks; for professional development; for getting to know each other; and developing trust and commitment to the common task. The author’s case ‘Getting Started’ reflects my vision of building a team. The atmosphere of the morning needed to be relaxed and conducive to achieving the purposes of the morning, without any interruptions. Time was the biggest factor. All people were educators with a variety of responsibilities. Releasing teachers gave importance to the project and created a feeling of the action research project being valued. As a result of the morning the team was forged.

Our rapidly changing world demands a re-thinking of our school to achieve authentic reforms. There is an ever increasing need to form strong partnerships amongst educators. If the partnerships do not exist then the necessary changes in the organisation and nature of teachers’ work will not occur.

The author writes “With a spirit of camaraderie in place the meeting began and what ensued did much to demonstrate the joy teachers feel in their work and working together. There was also the sense of family in the sharing of food, the checking on who’s doing what, the questioning of hierarchies, the shared experiences, the movement between the massive and the mundane.” The roundtable meeting demonstrates a real partnership. We have representatives of four different education sectors (university, primary and secondary schools, state and Catholic education). In forming this partnership the roundtable is ultimately engaged in beginning the reculturing of the teaching profession—the building of a community of lifelong learners.

The author’s case demonstrates beginnings—beginnings of partnerships, of teams, of friendships and networks. Why? Because teachers indeed all educators need to be working together to build the learning communities of the future.

Case 4: We struggled at planning last night

We struggled at planning last night.⁸² We were told what to do, we were not given any resources and no warning as to what was about to confront us. No-one in our planning group had done the topic before, so we were all in the same boat. If it had been a topic that interested me, or that I had knowledge about, the situation (perhaps my attitude) may have been different. The topic for fourth term, as given to us by the social education scope and sequence chart courtesy of “Tinkler” (Social Education for Australian Primary Schools. Don Tinkler 1989) was ‘Industry and Marketing’. This was to be planned for eight of the twelve weeks of fourth term.

This may not sound so bad, but as we came up with ideas we were told that the areas that appealed to us were being covered by other grade levels. From what I understood, we were to focus on the industries that exist to fulfil the children’s needs—housing, shelter, food, recreation. Of these, our focus was not to be on the food or clothing industry, as these were being covered, or had been covered by other grade levels. This seemed fine as I thought the housing industry would provide a worthwhile unit of work. I also felt that I would be able to use some of the children’s parents as resources. This was not to be! Grade 5 were to be covering this unit. Again we were left feeling despondent and frustrated as to how to plan our unit of work.

When I look back on this situation, I am uncertain as to whether the frustrations I have just vented are solely mine, or is this a feeling that is shared amongst a team who are required to work together?

My personal frustration may be partly due to the fact that I had not been part of the initial decision-making process in choosing to abide by the ‘Tinkler’ scope and sequence chart. When I queried this with other staff members, they seemed to give me the impression that it was something that had been done for a few years on recommendation from the Catholic Education Office. I wonder whether this had been a democratic process where all staff had been given the opportunity to express their opinions? Should a decision such as this be made and then carried out for consecutive

⁸² This case was published in *Teachers Write*.

years without evaluating the program, or asking for feedback from new staff members? The second part of this question applies to myself as I have only been at school since second term.

My feelings in regard to this matter have made me stop and consider how children must feel when confronted by topics that don't appeal to them. This situation has now provided me with the opportunity to involve my class in planning this unit of work. Perhaps the children will be able to fill the gaps that I was unable to fill.

Any decisions that we as a staff make in regard to curriculum issues, are inevitably going to affect the children's learning. This being the case, we should be providing the opportunities for children to become involved in 'negotiating their curriculum'. By introducing children to planning sessions, we are giving them an insight into how and why decisions are made.

This all sounds very grand, but on a practical level, I will simply ask my class the question 'What would you like to learn about in the factory/marketing industry?'

I'd put off doing this activity but found myself with a few minutes to spare. Probably not an ideal time to put this question to the class. (Why wasn't this activity incorporated into part of a planned activity?) I began by explaining to the children that we'd had trouble planning for fourth term and felt that we (the teachers or should this be I?) needed their help. The children took the task very seriously. I then gave them time to talk in groups about what they would like to learn about factories, marketing and industries.

The responses they came up with were great and were things that hadn't entered our minds. Some of their responses were:

'Service stations. How and where do they get petrol?'

'I want to know how come you can't have dry cleaning machines in your house, and why does it stink? Why can't clothes be clean in your own machines?'

'Do car factories make their own materials or do they get them from other companies?'

‘How do they make toys?’

These all seemed to be workable ideas and my enthusiasm for the topic had been found in a series of grade 2 children’s responses. The next step for me was to share the children’s ideas with the other teachers in my area to see how they felt about it.

As our next planning session was only two days away, I shared my experience of planning with the children with my team. Both hoped to attempt it with their classes before our next planning session. Hopefully we will arrive at this session with renewed enthusiasm and a bundle of ideas to work from.

Well we certainly now had something to start working with. At least we had some ideas about where the children’s interests lay (or my children’s interest, as other classes hadn’t done the activity). We began by looking at the ideas my class had come up with. The one that seemed to be of most interest was toys. Each teacher felt that this would be of interest to their class.

We then began to focus on the products that children have in their homes that are produced in factories, items such as toys, books, electrical goods, white goods, etc. While these all seemed highly relevant to the children, as well as being realistic ideas to plan from, I began to feel that we were slowly drifting away from my class’s ideas, and that my class would be a little disappointed not to see more of their ideas included in the unit.

Rather than disappoint them I decided to give the children the opportunity to do the activity again. This time I would specifically ask the children to consider the items they have in their homes that they would like to know about. We would then do some classifying of these goods. I feel fairly confident that the children will come up with ideas that will fall into the categories we (teachers) have chosen to study. I believe that it’s important for the children to see that their contributions are valued and can be used.

I’m probably partly responsible for not including more of the children’s contributions. This may be because I presented the question in a very broad way. I should have been more specific in what I wanted from them (but did I know myself?). Prior to this last planning session, we had not decided that our focus was going to be on household

items. Tinkler stated that we were not to focus on food or clothing, so maybe it was inevitable that we were to follow this path. This being my first attempt at involving the class in planning, I know that there is a great deal of room for improvement on my behalf.

In concluding our unit we have left a week for revision and evaluation of the topic. It will be important to allow the children to participate in this area, as evaluation is an integral component of planning. This will allow the children the opportunity to express how they saw their ideas being used and what they can recommend for improving the unit.

Although I began to feel that my attempt to involve the students had been less successful than I would have hoped, there has been a positive element from this exercise. Planning sessions throughout the school are being given the opportunity to trial and perhaps incorporate an aspect on ‘What do the children already know?’ and ‘What do the children want to learn about?’ The librarian also gave my class the opportunity to ask questions that they would like answered on our final topic for the term. These questions will be given back to the students to research. I believe that these are both examples of our practices heading in a positive direction.

Commentary

I’ve read this case many times since it was written in 1994 and indeed was part of the conversation from which the case was generated. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why I have found writing the commentary quite difficult; maybe I’m too close to the context in which it ‘sits’.

However after reading my previous attempts at commentary writing again recently I am reminded that the questions that this case raises for me have fundamentally not changed. This case seems to me to be of a young teacher finding her place within the culture of a school in which she has recently begun working.

It seems to me that the questions central to this case are ‘who decides?’ and ‘how are these decisions made?’ The questions in this case seem to be particularly related to decisions about curriculum. Who decides what is taught and learned? Where are the

students' voices in this process? Where indeed, as this case appears to indicate, are the teachers' voices?

Some are accepting of the constraints of a curriculum structure which makes no sense but is what the school 'does'. Some like those of this new teacher are asking critical questions about curriculum design and implementation. It seems that it is just this type of questioning that ensures curriculum relevance. How then does a school encourage the asking of these questions not in a way that promotes frustration and despair, but in a way that leads teachers to risk changing the structures, changing their practice in a way which leads to improvement of teaching and learning?

In the closing paragraph of this case the writer indicates that through the discussion of these issues with colleagues some things have changed and she indicates that she sees these changes as improvements. That the writer acted on the reflections that she had about her practice seems to be the key. By having 'a go' real change and improvement was actually affected.

Case 5: Left with many questions

After writing my first case last year, on grouping children and the different aspects of this, I was still left with many questions; in a word I was still dissatisfied by the way the children were participating in class discussions and concerned that the level of their work really could have been much better. I felt their work was lacking something that I could not put my finger on.

Was it me, the way I work?

Was it my teaching practice?

Was it the grouping of the children?

You could go on asking yourself these types of questions forever and get nowhere in the process. So the end of the year came and I was still putting myself through torture wondering what else I could have done to improve the children's learning and output of work. Looking back to then, at this point in time, I wonder why I didn't "go straight to the horses mouth", to coin a well-known phrase.

Why didn't I ask the children in my grade 3/4 class what was it that stopped them from learning?

But to be honest it never even crossed my mind to get their opinions at all.

Why do we do that?

Why do we feel that we cannot ask children how their learning could be enjoyable to them and therefore increase their learning potential and productivity of work?

The answer to why my grade 3/4 class was not working as well as what I knew they could was that they were NOT INTERESTED in what they were doing...as simple as that!!!! So many times I heard the children say:

"Miss, what about this ?" or

"How does this work?" or

"Why can't we?"

I can still hear myself saying, “We can’t go into that now because we have to do this...”

What has given me this great insight you ask? Well settle down in a comfortable place and I’ll tell you a tale of discovery and excitement...sounds like a fairy-tale but it’s all true.

In November of 1995 I was approached by a staff member to attend a seminar on the “Middle Years of Schooling”, in Lismore in northern NSW. My first reaction was “Why did they choose me? I don’t work in that age group.” I then found out that I was to be in grade five in 1996 and not in the 3/4 class I had requested. After the initial shock (I had never had a senior grade level before), I had more questions: “Why on earth go all that way to attend a seminar about something I didn’t know anything about?” After thinking about it, I thought, “Why not go?” I had nothing to lose and maybe it could be helpful and with a bit of luck....interesting.

I am so glad I decided to go. Apart from a few missing bags (ours) and trying to read (at 10.00pm) a small book called, “From Rhetoric to Reality” by James Beane and Barbara Brodhagen, which was really hard going, we thought there is no way that this curriculum model is going to work!

The next morning we arrived at the university (in the same clothes that we had arrived in) to listen to James and Barbara. We were still not sure we should be there, so we sat at the back of the room (we were 1/2 hour late because we were still waiting for our bags). As soon as we began to listen to Barbara and James, we forgot everything that had happened and listened with great interest to a very exciting, enthusiastic, dynamic duo, two people who by the end of the first part of the seminar, had us enthusiastic to try this way of working with our grades 5 and 6.

What was this wonderful answer to all our prayers hear you say? ...

The Negotiated Curriculum...or...

Student Planned Curriculum...

I had found “the missing link”...A curriculum that is negotiated, by the children and the teacher. They spoke about the need for children in years 5–8, the middle school, to

be involved in their learning. This is the time when the children are going through changes in body and mind. They begin to question things around them, ask questions about the changes they see in themselves and are beginning to think about the way they fit into their world. They need to know that they will be listened to and that their opinions and concerns are important to teachers, as well as themselves.

We couldn't wait to come back and convince our colleagues and our principal, that this would be an exciting and worthwhile way to work.

James and Barbara had us involved in actually going through the negotiating process ourselves. So we were not just sitting and listening...we were doing!

What does this tell us about how we teach and what we expect of the children. How many times a day do we find ourselves saying, "Will you sit down and listen?" when the kids should be doing (instead of listening).

Here was another factor to consider when I came to planning the activities for the children in my class. This curriculum model involves the children in being their own "teachers" in other words, learning from each other. I seriously doubted that the children had enough knowledge to be able to do this. But once again I was proven wrong. The children were quite capable of this, as I found out to my great pleasure, as long as I taught them the skills and processes that they needed to complete the tasks. These processes and skills became the basis of many of the activities

The children need to know that you, the teacher, have confidence in their abilities. The children themselves are a great resource in themselves.

So we returned to Melbourne with great enthusiasm (and our bags, at last!) raring to get started. The first step was to ask our principal, who agreed to allow us to prepare to implement the Negotiated Curriculum in Grade fives and six for the following year.

We couldn't believe that we were about to become "pioneers" of a new and innovative curriculum. This led to quite a few moments of panic and nervousness...Questions such as,

"Can we do this?"

"What if it doesn't work?"

“What if ..????????”

raced through our minds.

The next step was to approach the staff who would be in the senior level. They all agreed which was great, for if we did not have everyone’s commitment to the project it could not have worked at all. I thank our teams for their confidence in us and their willingness to become innovators.

A change like this can be overwhelming and very threatening. Any change can be! But the teachers and children took to the program with terrific enthusiasm and lots of hard work and that has made it a great success.

The children’s attitude to work has completely changed. They come each day wanting to know when and what we are going to do next. They are interested and completely involved in each new theme and even now at the end of the year the enthusiasm is still there.

The children also looked ahead and were bringing books and posters they had collected themselves for the themes. The change in the children has been enormous but the change for us as teachers was not great. We have already been working in an integrated way for many years and I have been working this way all my teaching life...so for us negotiating the curriculum was only a minor change which had “huge” results.

I am now ready to start all over again in 1996 with a new group of grade fives. I am looking forward to another exciting year of working with the children and assisting them with their learning rather than “teaching” them. The difference is that I now spend less time “up front” of the classroom and more time “with the children”. My teaching practice has changed. I have become an assistant to learning rather than someone who stands at the front of the class talking constantly to the children. The children have become responsible for their own learning and they feel that they “own” the learning because it is what they want to learn about. The children’s level of work has greatly increased along with presentation and the standard of work presented.

In conclusion I would like to say that I have found what I felt was missing from the curriculum and it has worked for these children. It's not often we can say that and I am glad I finally can!!!!

Commentary

Questions the case raises for me:

- Should this approach only be adopted/ suitable for the middle years?
- Is there a connection between the way the teachers in this case are behaving and the way the students have behaved in regard to negotiating their work?
- What is the role of personal inquiry in learning?
- What is Olga's next question?
- Why do so many of us feel a need to 'tell' when we know that this is not teaching? What influences this behaviour—teacher education programs, teacher educators, our own experiences of being taught or...?

I agree with Olga that teaching is not 'telling' but helping the student to learn.

Learning is personal but can be a shared experience. How do we know what has been learned or when learning has occurred?...

I am most interested in what I see as the connection between the students' reactions to negotiated curriculum and the way in which the teachers behaved in achieving this shift. It seems to me that the teacher in this case had a problem, dilemma or perhaps it was just a question. Her personal interest, her inquiry was driving her thinking about her work. Because of this and the fact that she felt she was unable to answer the question within the structure for operating in which she worked, she looked further afield.

Efforts to find a better way of assisting learning for students encouraged her to look at other structures, methods, pedagogy. In doing so, she became enthused and excited by what she discovered and its possibilities. Her enthusiasm and growing knowledge was more than sufficient to engage her colleagues to the point where they became learners with her. She didn't need to tell them all about negotiated curriculum, probably

because she felt she wasn't yet an expert, but she was able to use her energy to spark learning for her peers. At first she owned the knowledge for change and improvement in teaching and learning, but soon this ownership was shared with the teaching team. It was never mandated. It was, it seems from the case, always optional. Yet to the reader, other options were never going to be exercised.

Just like the student in the middle years classrooms whose curriculum is now integrated and negotiated, teachers can learn well, perhaps even better when the same principles are applied. Beane talks of 3 D's—Democracy, Dignity, Diversity and I've added Dialogue, the most important component of which is listening. This case demonstrates that with these principles and consequent shifts in power, both teachers and students can change, improve and learn. Perhaps the changes need to occur first in the teachers so that the changes for students are more effective.

Excerpts from researcher's journal

2 November 2000

...I was dragged screaming to making research statements. I wanted the Roundtable members to be making the statements and felt as though my clumsy writing was an intrusion on their work...

21 July 2001

Case: Wondering about ethics and analysis

I thought I knew what I had to do. I had read quite a bit about qualitative research and I knew that was what I wanted to do. I wanted to look at the cases written by members of the Roundtable. I knew many of the authors and I was familiar with a lot of their work. I thought I was a good person to be doing this work and that a few people I had spoken to seemed to support my intentions.

But it wasn't as easy as I thought it was going to be.

I was interested to use the computer software NVivo because I thought it would make my work easier and I thought it was an exciting new researcher's tool. I spent a lot of time setting up my work using the software. It assisted me to organise my documents and start to think about coding that connected to my research questions. I was also able in a grounded way to code documents based on the themes and issues raised by teachers.

I knew that I wanted to keep the cases whole, not to segment them and not to let the issues lose connection with the contexts in which they emerged. I wanted the Roundtable teachers' voices to remain central, to keep the intensity and the passion alive. I wanted to bring their work and ideas to life again in a new context, to pay my respects and to make connections that might have been made within the project if it had been funded for longer. I liked the idea of continuing and extending the thinking and talking that had been central to the work of the roundtable. But was I just fooling myself?

I knew that I wanted to be able to take my work back to the authors and to be proud that I had respected their work and the classroom, school and roundtable contexts in

which they had been produced and discussed. I wanted to be a researcher with the same ethical convictions and attention to process as the members of the Roundtable had been. But how would I talk about my work to the Roundtable members and would it seem like a sham, the nice ideas of a deluded researcher. Would I just have to face up to it that I was a researcher and that I was using other people's work for my own advantage.

My early attempts at coding were exciting. I was excited about learning to be a researcher of searching for patterns of practice using a framework of distinctions, connections and assumptions which I am learning about. But I sensed Patti Lather's 'angel on my shoulder' and still felt a nagging doubt about whether it was my place to be doing this work and whether indeed it would ever be possible to be true to the ideals I was pursuing.

I kept feeling my way, trying ways of coding, thinking and writing which were true to the project. Drawing on the ideas of grounded theorists, ethnographers and others I prepared many methodological options for examining cases and presented them in a research seminar at VU. I felt I was getting closer but nothing felt exactly right and I was a bit shocked when someone who had completed their PhD said they were glad they weren't in my position with so far still to go.

Then I had the chance to read the methodology from a longitudinal study which was being conducted by my colleagues and supervisors. They had devised a way of working collaboratively with teachers to reflect on their cases by creating a sketch and then a thread of practice. The sketch was like a thumbnail sketch, a precis of the key ideas and was achieved by the author highlighting the key phrases in the case. The sketch was again simplified to create a thread of practice, a string of key words and phrases that capture the flow of the case.

I was struck by the simplicity of the idea and wondered whether I, as a researcher could undertake a similar activity with the Roundtable cases. So I tried it out and yes it did seem to work. I could highlight key phrases to create a sketch and I could identify a thread of key phrases and words, all without taking the case apart and you could see the 'working out'. It was not like the computer program where your work was stored but only accessible to a determined researcher, here was my work able to

be displayed and checked by anyone who was interested, and of course this included me. It wasn't a struggle to retrace my steps.

My supervisor kept asking but how do you know whether you are highlighting the phrases that teachers would see as the key issues. How did I know indeed? What I can say is that I found that this approach to understanding the cases kept me focused, there was little chance that I would drift off into my own thinking or confuse the author's intentions with my ideas and priorities if I considered one paragraph at a time, repeating the language of the cases but translating it from the language of personal reflection to an authoritative genre expected in research propositions. I wanted to, and I think I have made some small steps towards reproducing teacher's voice as expert voice, the voice of authority.

As I embarked on my research project focused on exploring professional development, I thought that the cases were a means to an end but as I read the cases written by teachers about students and their own learning I realised that as a researcher I had a lot to learn from their stories. I had no idea as I began that those principles that teachers in the Roundtable used to frame their practice were not only the same as those that led to their professional growth but also when applied to my research practice meant that I became an active and reflective learner.

Commentary: Knowing your place : a researcher locates her time and space?

Anne, Thanks for sharing this thinking and writing. What is below are my disjointed first thoughts but I enjoyed the thinking and it helped me with my own concerns. I wondered if this was a case about place? Your place in the research and how that place is situated in connection to the place of others. It seems that once 'we know our place' as my good Catholic Mum says, we have a starting point. In research, the researcher needs to know their place.

Giddens talks about consciousness and this is part of knowing our place. The way in which we construct our awareness of others, of time and space, enables us to make decisions in which we are conscious or unconscious. I think the feminists would have a good time with this piece and I wonder what Habermas would say—I'll need to go back and check it out.

It seems that the methodological practices which you have developed are the foundations for your place and then the walls are built and it is situated in a time-space relationship with the practices you are examining. Waffle! Waffle! Post-modern waffle? Is your place determined by the best view of practice: Alice's looking glass perhaps?

I am interested in the last paragraph where you talk about the cases as a means to an end. Are they not both a means and an end in themselves—the teachers' words and actions which stand alone as we have always said? What are we doing as we analyse case writing I wonder—can we ever keep the integrity of the words true. I am curious about whether or not some intrinsic value is lost as we pursue truth. Mark would love this bit, but sometimes the more systematically we dig, the more we lose. What do the whole stand alone cases say—no dissection, no threading, what do they actually say. I am about to embark on another round of thinking about the ARC cases and find myself in a strange location.

In re-reading Morweena Griffiths's 'Educational Research for Social Justice: getting off the fence' on *truths and methods* I am thinking about the idea of insider-outsider research and researching communities and the kind of reciprocity that is present as a basis for establishing collaborative research. Perhaps this is what keeps driving the thinking—is it the question of reciprocal engagement, respect and authentic representation which justifies collaborative research and enables us to move on? Finding that place is a practical as well as an intellectual challenge for me.

Commentary: Would I just have to face up to it that I was a researcher and that I was using other people's work for my advantage?

Yup! That is research. Research and analysis are forms of exploitation—the same way as mining and farming are.

BC is correct in referring to Griffiths. Her work is typical of the agonising that progressive researchers go through in arguing why their research and methodologies may have avoided exploiting the work of teachers. Stronach and MacLure is another post-modern attack on conventional research, even action research.

I don't think there is a solution to the problem of the research done by a researcher **on** the work of others. There is a contradiction there: system goals confront democratic intentions. So what can be done?

One response is to work with ie some kind of participatory action research, but even that has problems when translated into a PhD program for THE researcher ie the uni researcher.

Another response is work from the perspective of the power relations involved. I think that means arguing each case on its practical merits. Some kind of collegial validity test is required. Does the research undertaken within the Ph D serve the interests of the research subjects who generated the data? How will you know? What steps have you undertaken to sort out the power problems in the research?

An example might be the audience for the research findings: are the findings presented in a way which allows them to be tested and applied by the practitioners? Do the findings enable the practitioners to struggle for the kind of practices which they value—eg to argue against undemocratic imposition of technical solutions to sociocultural/historical and moral questions?

29 August 2001

A case of nerves

I was very nervous. It's all very well to be excited about the work of the Roundtable in the safety of your research office. I'd been thinking and writing about the Roundtable documents for two, almost three years. Now it was time to talk to the teachers who had written the pieces of case writing I had been reading, the people who together had been the Roundtable. I had approval from the university ethics committee, DEET, the CEO, the head of the Department of Education. Now it was time to ask the principals if I could proceed to invite the teachers to participate in interviews. I wrote to the first three schools and none responded. Now what? Here I am, passionate about the work of the Roundtable but... What if they won't let me talk to the teachers? What if the teachers don't want to talk to me? What if the schools don't care any more? What if they don't like what I'm doing? What if they think I am the researcher they have always decried, using the work of teachers for their own advancement?

So, taking a very deep breath I rang the first school. I spoke to the acting principal. Yes they had received the materials... 'such a pile of information it all seemed too hard'... 'that's like ancient history, teachers have moved on to new jobs and new schools...' but yes it would be OK if I came to explain the project and work out the next step. Of course, why hadn't I thought of it before, seeing a face and talking to a person always makes a difference but how does this fit with the ethics of coercion?

Even though I had decided that I would ring the remaining four schools and propose a visit I still had a sense that my enthusiasm was not going to be shared by others. This was a bit of a challenge but I proceeded to ring the other schools. They all instantly and enthusiastically welcomed my proposed visit each making a positive comment about the Links project. Over two days the principals welcomed me, on time, making time. Each by their actions and their conversation let me know that without any doubt this had been an important project and they supported the work that we were doing. Phew!

I was so focused on my tasks, explaining, requesting, organising that I was completely unprepared for the conversations during each of the visits. I wished I could have taped the exchanges. While some made passing comments that I relished...Links was a great project...there was also a sense that each of the principals had prepared in their mind for our meeting. As they reflected they recalled and described the value of the project and they made connections with the present and the future. In each case I was able to respond based on what I have learned from the documents and I felt proud that I could discuss their school with them.

One principal described the staff as professional, the most professional staff he'd ever worked with and inferred that the Link project had contributed to this situation. He wondered whether they would agree to participate in a similar project now as the new literacy program takes so much of their time and has produced such incredible student outcomes. But he was quick to add that ideas from the Roundtable had continued as the students and teachers participated in talking circles each week, a structure for reflecting on learning. These observations made me think of changing contexts and the application of ideas in new contexts.

Another principal said that personal reflection was an integral part of current practice at the school. She noted that the Link teachers were such thinkers and reflectors on their practice, but noted that it wasn't just thinking as there were outcomes from the thinking. The innovations which were the focus for the Link project are still an integral part of teacher practice at this school. This principal also told two stories about continuing connections with key link people who had moved on to other schools. In one instance the principal was trying to woo the teacher back to the school and in the other both the principal and the teacher had lost brothers to cancer at around the same time and each year they remember their brothers together. I had a strong sense of close and continuing personal and professional relationships.

Another principal also referred to the thinking which occurred in the project. He described the project as serious and concerted and made connections with the significant planning at the year 7 level which had resulted from the thinking undertaken during the Link project.

Even in the school where Links was described as 'ancient history' seven of the thirteen teachers involved were still at the school. None of them were in the same roles now as they were then and I wondered what they thought when they looked back at the difficulties and assesses the lastingness/durability of the Links project. Had it all been too much, causing them to escape to new duties? What they might they have taken with them from the Link project into their new roles?

It was Friday afternoon when I visited the last school. For the fourth time I was offered coffee by a principal who was desperate for a break. I saw uneaten lunches sitting on desks. Here we talked about supporting innovation, about staying loyal to shared values and commitment in the face of persistent and newly emerging difficulties. We talked about ownership in finding a way for the future. We talked about the school portrait that I had been working on and agreed that it might be a point of departure for linking the past, present and the future and I wondered how I might continue my work in a way that met my needs and those of the school. A new cause for nervousness?

14 November 2001

Case: Talking about my work

I was preparing to interview members of the Roundtable and several people suggested that the Roundtable members I interviewed would be curious about my research: What had I been doing? What were my findings? What was I going to do with my work? What was in it about them? So I considered what I would take to show them, and what I would give each person to take away.

Firstly, I decided I would take a selection of the documents which would visually stimulate recollections of the ILP and the Roundtable. This collection included *Teachers Write*, the school reports, copies of the *Big Link* as well as various articles, reports and evaluations. As people looked over these documents you could see the flicker of recognition and the mental travelling back to the project, 'Oh, I remember that' ... 'That's on my shelf, I still use it' ... 'I had that whole report put onto computer disks'.

I also prepared a copy of the section of the document register that related to each person's team. This I left with each person at the end of the interview...I also took the relevant working folder to each interview. This contained all the documents and the work I had done on each document. People were surprised and interested in the number of documents and the scope of the project.

Finally, I wanted to show people some of the work I had been doing, the process of translating the cases into a thread and a series of authoritative statements. In each interview I demonstrated how I was doing this work by referring to a piece of their writing. Using a familiar example helped people to understand and I could see nods from people as I read examples of the authoritative statements 'Yes, that's right' they said. 'Now what are you going to do with them?'

I showed them the combined statements and the compiled school reports. In the first few interviews people expressed interest in reading the school profiles I had drafted. I thought about whether this would be a problem in any way and decided that it was OK. So I distributed the relevant cases...In a display of generosity I think I overdid it. People have been so generous with me, giving their documents and their time to participate in the project. I wanted to reciprocate this generosity by giving something

in return. What did I have to give? It seemed that my drafts did this in some way... I also wanted to demonstrate my trustworthiness as a researcher. I felt that being open about the work I was doing, open enough to pass it on for scrutiny was a demonstration that I could be trusted.

What is the purpose of handing out the case studies. To satisfy curiosity? To make explicit the process I was using? To provide feed back? As a gesture of goodwill? As Brenda's mother said, I need to be clear about where I stand. What are my intentions? What are the ethical obligations and responsibilities? What were the options and their associated advantages and disadvantages? I have an obligation to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. This is the most important thing. I gave this guarantee to all participants and it is my responsibility that my assurances are honoured. What does this mean for my data?...Ironically, distributing material may undermine this trustworthiness. (Case: Talking about my work, 14 November, 2001)

13 December 2001

My own history

...I have come with my own history and understanding and this has, of course, coloured the texts I have drawn on and the way I have framed ideas...I come with a background in education which, associated with a commitment to justice, diversity and equity, gives a particular flavour to the ideas I have pursued. As a trainee teacher in the early seventies I was introduced to the ideas of Dewey, Bruner, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers, Piaget and many others. These connections, made in formative times have influenced my work over the subsequent years. Then, through the eighties, as a feminist working in the area of equal opportunity, I came into contact with feminist educators and theorists; Dale Spender, Jan Harding, Anna Yeatman, Jane Kenway, Jill Blackmore, Patti Lather and many others who argued not only the importance of considering gender but of having a broad awareness of difference. Parallel to these developments, and connected to professional development and school improvement were the ideas emerging from Joyce and Showers and Hargreaves and Fullan. And extending through the seventies and eighties the important work of the Deakin University team who were promoting action research as a strategy for achieving educational change. I come as a committed learner and teacher educator, driven by a

desire to make things better in the world, wanting to work together in mutuality, reciprocity, trust and of course this too colours my selection of texts and ideas....

5 April 2002

Dear friends...

Dear friends, As many of you know, Eva Cox's 1995 Boyer Lectures struck a chord for me. In her lectures she drew on the work and thinking of Hannah Arendt using the ideas of *vita activa* which she associated with community engagement, reciprocity and mutuality. I was interested in these ideas, and remembered Arendt's name. Later, I exchanged emails with a friend and colleague in Canada. I sent him some of Stephen Kemmis's work and he wrote back saying: 'Arendt's concept of "islands of freedom" may be the best we can do in finding/developing democratic public space'. I immediately wondered whether the Western Melbourne Roundtable was an example of an 'island of freedom'. Indeed, I've since wondered how we might create "islands of freedom" in our lives? Another year later, talking to a friend and colleague from Alice Springs, the conversation turned to Arendt's ideas about voluntarism. When people/ideas come in circles like that, I think they are worth following up and so I got out the Boyer Lectures again and went to the library in search of more information about Hannah Arendt. I was wondering if Arendt's ideas might help me to better understand and describe the Western Melbourne Roundtable and how else her ideas might help to make sense of my world? (5/4/02)

March 2002

Talking about case writing

Excerpt from a transcript of conversation between the research team and two colleagues.

Steve...the person who is a case writer might be looking at the world in a different way...there is a structure of thinking which the roundtable enabled to bubble up to the surface and they are the ones who may have joined because they thought that way.

MD or did they come to think that way because of the process?

AD there was one teacher who was on the edge...

BC so there's a set of excluding things

MO'R It seems like there are visible and invisible structures that set the context and the visible ones are in, but today we've really talked about the invisible ones, and they are the ones that are very interesting...

BC a lot of that will be there in the interviews, what people brought with them, what the assumptions were, the connections they made, my three things...

MO'R maybe using that kind of structure to set the scene for case writing, the notion that a space was carved out for them in the roundtable, that there was this notion of legitimacy, a strong way of setting the scene, less of the professional development chronology

January, 2003

It was a difficult decision...

It was a difficult decision to put the school profiles and the mini biographies in an appendix. The university story was in the text...and given the nature of the Roundtable work it seemed inappropriate to put the university in the text and the schools in an appendix. I asked myself: What does this say about the place of the university and its relationship with schools? What does it say about how I see things? What messages do I give to the reader? It is possible that not all readers might bother with the Appendix...is information in the Appendix less important than the text in chapters? How do I deal with this situation and send a message to the reader about these things? Does the story make sense without reading the Appendix? (Postscript: In the final draft I shifted the profiles out of the appendices and into the text as a new Chapter 4.)

September, 2003

Different kinds of questions

Research questions

- Who stands to gain? Would there be any value for those who might participate?
Would there be a benefit for individual teachers or schools?

- What is the purpose of handing out the case studies? To satisfy curiosity? To make the process explicit? To provide feed back? As a gesture of goodwill? What are my intentions? What are the ethical obligations and responsibilities? What were the options and their associated advantages and disadvantages?

World questions

- Would Arendt's ideas help me to better understand and describe the Western Melbourne Roundtable?

Context

- Would members of the Roundtable identify with the story I was telling? Was I reporting the documents accurately? Would they feel I was exaggerating, fabricating or shifting ground?

Dialogue

- How would I talk about my work to Roundtable members and would it seem like a sham, the nice ideas of a distant researcher?
- Were there some things that were too hard to talk about?

Collaboration

- Was there anything in particular which distinguished the kind of interaction between the researcher and members of the Roundtable?
- What kind of relationship do I wanted to build. Will it be neutral, casual, friendly, directive or impersonal? How will I acknowledge existing relationships? Will I be an interested listener, rewarding responses and personal opinions? How will I know if responses are being given in order to please the interviewer?
- Seeing a face and talking to a person always makes a difference but how does this fit with the ethics of coercion?

Inquiry

- For those who participated, were some too polite? For those who did not participate were there people who did not feel positive about the Roundtable? Had some 'moved on' to new situations where it was no longer a priority to spend precious time involved in this research?

Self-questions

- Would I just have to face up to it that I was a researcher and that I was using other people's work for my own advantage?

Supervisors' questions

- But how do you know whether you are highlighting the phrases that teachers would see as the key issues?
- I wondered if this was a case about place? Your place in the research and how that place is situated in connection to the place of others... Is your place determined by the best view of practice: Alice's looking glass perhaps?
- There is a contradiction there: system goals confront democratic intentions. So what can be done? Does the research undertaken within the PhD serve the interests of the research subjects who generated the data? How will you know? What steps have you undertaken to sort out the power problems in the research? Do the findings enable the practitioners to struggle for the kind of practices which they value—eg to argue against undemocratic imposition of technical solutions to socio-cultural/historical and moral questions?

Roundtable members' questions

- I could see nods from people as I read examples of the authoritative statements 'Yes, that's right' they said. 'Now what are you going to do with them?'

Colleagues' questions

- Several people suggested that Roundtable members may be curious about my research: What had I been doing? What were my findings? What was I going to do with my work? What was in it about them?