

Lessons learned from a Queensland Example

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Paper presented at the
Australian Association for Research in Education
(AARE)

Newcastle, Nov 27-Dec 1, 1994

√Abstractf

This paper reports an ongoing study of the Social Sciences at an urban high school within a much larger study, funded by an ARC Collaborative Research Grant over a period of three years. The focus of this larger study is "Teaching for Effective Learning in Senior Schooling". This study is built around a model of collaborative action research.

The focus in this paper is not so much on the Social Sciences 'per se'; but rather on the collaborative action research approach used in this study. The paper seeks to examine to what extent collaboration was, in reality, a distinctive feature of the Social Sciences study and to identify useful lessons for those engaging in collaborative forms of research.

An overview of the Social Sciences study and reflections on the research approach during 1993 and 1994 are provided. A number of principles for collaborative action research develop from the reflections. These include open communication, avoidance of jargon, clarity and sense of purpose, frameworks for critical reflection, professional development and advocacy, and equity in decision-making.

It is from the reflections, both early and later in the study, that a number of lessons to be learned are suggested for those engaging in collaborative action research.

Introduction

The "Teaching for Effective Learning in Senior Schooling" (TELSS) project is a three year collaborative action research case study to facilitate change in teaching and learning practice and examines and documents the change process in terms of students, teachers, society and the state education system. It is not interested in a simple critique of circumstances but actively encourages participants to define their own problems and issues and to pursue solutions to them.

The aim of the project is to develop a senior school framework which takes into account recent policy documents (Finn, 1991; Mayer, 1992; Carmichael, 1990; Wiltshire, 1994), initiatives such as the Key Competencies, links with industry and the need to increase student autonomy, organisational flexibility and staff professional development. It is responding to the worldwide trend in developed industrial countries for industry and education authorities to collaborate to improve the quality of education and to develop a greater level of mutual understanding between these two sectors.

What we did in 1993

The Social Sciences subgroup is one of four investigations within the overall project. It began with the Social Sciences staff raising a number of issues about effective teaching and learning in the Social Sciences. Of particular concern were the decreasing numbers of students choosing the Social Sciences in the senior school in comparison to other subject

areas. The main purpose of these meetings was to discuss relevant issues and concerns more broadly and to define the nature and scope of the study in this curriculum area.

The five person research group which was formed developed a research focus and appropriate procedures over the ensuing months. The group decided that the study would focus on the place of the Social Sciences in the school curriculum by seeking perceptions from a range of persons in terms of the:

Significance of the Social Sciences in the school curriculum
Relevance of the Social Sciences in the school curriculum
Continuity in the Social Sciences from the primary to the lower secondary and the senior secondary school curriculum
Implementation of the Social Sciences curriculum at the primary, lower secondary and senior secondary levels

To provide some harmony of purpose, questions asked as discussion starters generally fell under one of the following categories:

- .Definition
- .Organisation
- .Teaching and Learning
- .Student Perceptions

Once these data were collected the teachers began to reflect and analyse the information in terms of what continuities, relevance and significance were perceived by teachers and students. The research team developed an analytical summary which focussed on the emerging issues and implications which was presented to the non-participating Social Sciences teachers at the school via a workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss and decide which of the suggested implications would form the focus of research for the following year. The agreement that was reached was that the major focus would be on teaching and learning in the Social Sciences classrooms and that this focus would also inform in an ongoing way a shared definition of the Social Sciences in the curriculum

generally and in the senior school particularly. The study would have three interconnecting components: research, professional development and advocacy.

At the 1993 workshop, the Social Sciences teachers were provided with the study's methodology, its limitations, a summary of the data collected and emergent implications under the following categories:

Definition

A range of definitions for the Social Sciences surfaced which pointed to some fragmentation in understanding the holistic nature of the Social Sciences. Issues to be addressed were:

- .Shared understating of the Social Sciences
- .Integration of the various disciplines
- .Linking the Social Sciences with the Key Competencies

Organisation

A number of organisational issues emerged from the interviews with teachers and administrators which could be grouped under the three categories of: organisation, management and restraints. Major concerns dealt with whether the Social Sciences should be compulsory, channels of communication within the school, the use of resources and timetabling restraints.

Teaching and Learning

There was almost unanimous agreement from teachers and students for the need for some improvement and variety in teaching strategies. Specific issues dealt with student motivation and creative teaching strategies.

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss and decide which of the

suggested implications would form the focus for research in 1994. The main outcome of the workshop was the development of an action plan to direct subsequent research on the identified focus of "teaching and learning".

Reflecting on the Process in 1993f

In early 1994, it was thought important that members of the group reflected individually on the project. A number of issues gleaned from experience and the literature, provided each member of the research team with a critical framework to reflect on the project. The reflections focus mainly on the process though there is some mention of the substantive side of the project. The commonalities in these reflections highlight the early frustrations and confusion in the beginning stages of the study. Over a period of time, however, a sense of community and common purpose emerged which allowed further frustrations and difficulties to be addressed more effectively. Together the reflections helped to focus our thinking and action in terms of the project as a credible example of collaborative Action Research. The principles of collaboration to guide the study were:

- .Open communication
- .Avoidance of jargon
- .Clarity and sense of purpose
- .Frameworks for critical reflection, professional development and advocacy
- .Appreciation of teachers' time constraints
- .Equity in decision-making

The reflections are presented in full as a series of vignettes in Appendix One.

What we did in 1994f

From the reflections and within the context of the principles identified above, we proceeded to focus our attention on classroom practices in the Social Sciences. Each teacher developed a vignette based on this focus with reference to her own classroom practice. The vignettes have no rigid structure and were developed through observations and discussions with students and colleagues. The teachers offered a personal reflection of their teaching practice using the insights of colleagues and students together with their own perceptions. These reflections raise questions about the implementation and support of teaching strategies which purport to promote effective learning. The three vignettes follow.

Teachers' Vignettesf

Observations and Reflections © Jill Shepherd

During 1994, I have utilised two very different types of strategies in the teaching of

Geography to a Year 12 (Senior) class and to assessing outcomes. While it is too early to compare quantitative results as they have yet to complete their final assessment task, student response to the different types of teaching strategies has been obvious to the observer and in student responses to surveys.

In Semester 1, the students generally expected to be spoon fed information and to pass tests well with content forming the major form of criteria. They had been used to this teacher™dependent approach during the previous year. So I used teacher@centred strategies and focussed on content and skills.

Student responses to a survey seeking their comments on this semester's unit of work indicated that they:

found some of the unit of value
found the most effective teaching strategy was the teacher writing information on the blackboard
saw the teacher's role as the provider of information and to assist understanding and achievement
found the work boring and could not get motivated
generally, did not put their best effort into this unit of work.

I found the class group uninspiring and difficult because the students lacked confidence in their ability to think for themselves; they expected all answers to be "right" or "wrong". They depended on me for all instructions and information, and were not easy to motivate.

From the first day of the Semester 2 unit of study, I established an informal atmosphere in the classroom to encourage students to be involved in discussions and decisions about course content, strategies, time management and assessment. Initially, students were very dependent on me, but as they realised their input was respected and

group decisions were determining their course, they began to participate with increased confidence and took more control of their course, and accepted me more as a guide/facilitator/negotiator, less as the authority.

The first two topics in this unit involved teacher input and guidance to develop skills and independence so students could manage a totally student directed third topic. For the final topic, very regular informal conferencing has ensured students stayed "on track", provided support and guidance, has improved student@teacher relationships, provided positive feed back to students and ensured they have developed the necessary skills for their chosen tasks.

Student comments when asked to write their reflections on this second unit three@quarters through it included:
"useful in the future"
"interesting"
"enjoyable"
"working independently enables me to have more control and to go at my own pace"
"a list of benefits including development of communication skills, learning to take the initiative"

Criticisms were mainly of the short amount of time available for research. However, for those who managed their time well, this has not been a problem.

I have observed growth in most of the students in a number of areas: affective, knowledge, research skills, self@confidence, maturity, awareness of community, local issues and people management.

The students and I are looking forward to completing this unit with their chosen means of presentation of the results of their research for assessment, though they feel a little anxious at this stage about peer assessment.

From observations and discussions with students and colleagues, and

my own reflections, I
must now ask:

Do students benefit more from some teaching strategies than
from others?
If so, why and how?
What is "effective learning"?
Did the attitudes and experiences of the previous year impact
on the attitudes,
learning and skills development this year?
What should be the teacher's role in a classroom for the most
effective learning?

Observations and Reflections © Roslyn Trost

During interviews conducted with my 1993 Year 12 class, a
significant number of students
revealed that they felt previous years had not prepared them
sufficiently for the study of
documents at the level I had set them. In particular, they felt
intimidated by the document
studies I had prepared for examination purposes. They expressed concern
that document
studies had been a minor part of their work in class, and from their
information, I came to
the conclusion that little or no skills development had been
experienced by them and the
level of critical thinking they were exposed to was fairly limited.
With this in mind, I
prepared a number of lessons which concentrated on identifying levels
of competency but at
the same time starting with short, single document studies designed to

boost confidence
rather than develop skills needed for more advanced critical analysis.
Students confidently
completed the task and expressed enthusiasm for this approach as they
understood the
categories of questions/responses and were aware of being extended into
the higher levels
of critical thinking through discussion in both small and large
group situations.

To prepare the students for the more demanding skills of
evaluating/comparing/contrasting
etc. several primary sources relating to a single topic, I have decided
to integrate original
sources with expository material over several lessons. My aim is to
build on skills

(acquired through study of single documents and understanding of the categories of questions/responses), to guide students towards competency in detecting bias through
(a) examination of sources by a number of authors (b) identification of purpose and audience (c) study of language (d) sequence/arrangement of information.

In this way, I hope that the problems of students who in the past have felt unprepared for Year 12 standards in classroom and examination use of documents will be overcome.

The topic chosen for an in depth study of a period of history exposed students to a wide range of opinions/evaluations by ancient sources. It also encouraged small group and class discussions which revealed a depth of understanding of the topic and clearly demonstrated that students reached this understanding because they felt confident and competent when applying developing skills of analysis, interpretation, evaluation, decision making and making value judgements.

I noted, however, a number of problems associated with my strategy of introducing a wider range of levels of thinking and applications skills.

Firstly, the process is by necessity, very time consuming if it is to be of any real value for students. Secondly, difficulties with continuity occurred because of the number of classes lost through internal timetabling factors.

Consequently, even though my perceptions of success or improvement were substantiated by the use and integration of original sources in the essay on the set topic, I was concerned by the need to "short circuit" processes when covering other topics. For me playing "catch up" meant lost opportunities to consolidate skill development and re-enforce confidence and competency in application of extended and more difficult levels of critical thinking to new areas of study. Furthermore, while I believe I have

addressed with some success the problems of students being or perceiving to be unprepared

in the use of document studies, I also believe that students will feel nervous about their impending document study because of the lack of time to adequately address the content of their study.

Conclusions

The conclusions arrived at raise the following questions

Is lack of time for preparation a problem for teachers?

If so it needs to be

addressed by the department eg, sharing\exchange of resources, smaller class sizes.

Is more inservice needed to meet the needs of both teachers and students.

Do large classes affect the range of teaching strategies?

If the recommendations for more effective teaching and learning in our schools are

to be remotely possible, how should convincing arguments be presented to policymakers?

How do we support teachers so that they, as well as the students will be interested

enough to extend themselves and find reward in providing a challenging program

and using teaching strategies which cater for all levels of ability?

Observations and Reflections © Sonya Gorman

I was pleased students found discussion such a useful part of their history lessons. This

class is quite mature (especially for Year 10) and they discuss at quite a sophisticated

level. I worried that the amount of discussion was too great, that there was too little

formal noting taking etc. Some students

also felt this. My fears regarding the amount of

discussion are reflected in my teaching by a panic reaction which leads me to use text

questions as a method of note taking. It is clear that students, at some level, recognise this

because there is considerable criticism of doing large numbers of questions at once and at

specific times, especially as revision for exams. This was one of the aspects they disliked

most and it stemmed from my lack of lesson variety.

In response to these criticisms I'd be inclined to substitute group work for the text questions and combine it with a jigsaw and judgement element so that students were using their discussion skills and refining them in small group work where there was no referee to ensure fairness. This method would also provide more formal and informal oral reporting opportunity to boost the confidence of those students who are intimidated by oral reports.

I'd use written group summaries made by students in the jigsaw activity and distributed to the other students to replace text questions. Text questions would be used for revision at students' own pace or for homework. I'd try to maintain the atmosphere of the class as it allowed most students to feel comfortable to offer and justify their opinions. At the same time, I'd need to be more aware of those few students who need encouragement to join discussion.

The criticisms of the time taken to return tests/assignments etc. are valid. That is personal organisation (or lack of it). I'm pleased assessment is seen as constructive for future work.

It was good to see some students reflecting critical thinking in their comments about textbooks and opinions. How do we keep this alive and encourage it to grow?

Questions for consideration (from observations, discussions with students and colleagues)f

How do we make the Social Sciences interactive?

How do we keep enthusiasm so that students continue to see the Social Sciences as relevant in the senior school?

How do we ensure, we, as a staff remain interested and enthusiastic so we promote the Social Sciences?

How do we find ways of sharing our strengths and improving our weaknesses?

How do we gain confidence?

Veryrecently, the research group arranged a workshop with other Social

Sciences teachers to share the results of its classroom research; to seek comment on its reflections; and to determine priority areas for investigation in 1995. The vignettes above formed the basis of sharing with other Social Sciences teachers as a means of involving additional teachers in the research, professional development and advocacy components of the study.

From the three teachers' reflections a number of major issues were identified and grouped under the following categories:

Professional Development

- .Sharing strengths
- .Improving weaknesses
- .Maintaining teacher interest
- .Teaching style

Teaching and Learning

- .Determinants of effective teaching
- .Interactive teaching
- .Student motivation
- .Teaching strategies to suit individual students

Resource Allocation

- Preparation time
- .Class sizes
- .Resources

Advocacy

Political action

Teachers were then given the opportunity to priorities the issues which were most important and to suggest possible actions to deal with them.

Issue One

Sharing Strengths and Improving Weaknesses

Workshop participants determined that there was an ongoing need to share teachers' strengths and improve identified weaknesses. A variety of possible actions were raised such as subject meetings which were called for the specific purpose of sharing ideas, debating strategies and calling for suggestions of how to teach a particular unit of work more effectively.

Teachers proposed not just observing each other's teaching but developing a number of team teaching events. It was thought that team teaching would be more informative and remove some of the anxiety that teachers may experience when colleagues wish to observe their teaching. It was understood that this initiative would need the support of the school's administration because it has implications for class allocation and the supervision of classes.

Other suggestions included developing a process for sharing lesson plans and regular evaluations of teaching effectiveness by generating more formalised procedures for eliciting student feedback.

Issue Two @Improving Resources

Teachers identified "resources" as an ongoing issue which needed consistent attention. They were concerned about both physical and human resources within the Social Sciences. Teachers explained that while there were a number of reasons which force teachers to take a variety of units within the academic year and at various year levels, this militated against continuity in the development of the teacher's skills in a particular area of content. Without continuity in year level and class allocation teachers moved from one unit to the next, never having the possibility of teaching the same area twice or in succession which would allow teachers to refine and improve their teaching strategies. Furthermore, the group implored school timetablers to take more notice of recognised and documented teacher expertise in certain academic fields. They revealed that some ineffective teaching was due to the fact that teachers were teaching outside of their area of training and interest.

Teachers identified physical resources as an ongoing area of concern. Suggestions included the acquisition of a wider variety of professional journals, improvement of a system for filing useful activities for future use, the development of focussed "learning centres" in the school and the allocation of teachers to the specific task of resource acquisition in a particular area of interest. A final suggestion was the development of a data bank of worksheets and ideas which could be

easily customised by teachers when preparing their classroom activities. This initiative will require a staff which is computer literate or at the very least a "data manager" who is willing to assist teachers in accessing the bank.

Issue Three © Interactive Teaching

This third issue generated some debate about the nature of interactive teaching and the perceived problems of students' passivity. The classroom investigations showed that teachers needed to be more demanding in the junior years in terms of critical thinking, research, interpretation of data and analysis. Whilst many teachers see this as a valid observation it may also be accurate to suggest that at times such activities are actually taught in the junior classes but not named as such. This would lead students to utter the common phrase "we never did that last year". It may be necessary then not only to increase the number of activities which require critical thinking skills but to label the endeavour as an exercise in "analysis", "synthesis" "evaluation" etc.

What we intend to negotiate as the agenda for 1995f

The agenda for 1995 will continue to focus on the three components of research, professional development and advocacy. Research will include further critical self-reflection and action upon teaching approaches and strategies for effective learning in Social Sciences classrooms. We envisage the identification of characteristics and indicators of effective teaching and learning, of critical thinking, independent learning and co-operative learning. From this, we could identify some of the competencies that effective teachers will possess, performance indicators that will demonstrate such competencies and learning outcomes which will illustrate effective student learning. This will become the basis for professional development which integrates teachers' work, their reflections on their work and departmental and administrative support for their work. In regards to advocacy, we will consider ways of politicising the role of the Social Sciences in a curriculum which is focussing more and more on workplace relevance.

What we have learned

about collaborative Action Researchf

The Social Sciences study

is an example of collaborative Action Research. Much has been written about collaborative research (e.g. Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Allan & Miller, 1990; Carson, 1990; Cornet, 1990; Dicker, 1990) and several questions and issues may be raised. These include:

How do you get started with Action Research?
How do you encourage collaboration?
Whose interests are being served?
What are the roles of those who are involved?
What sorts of critical frameworks are needed?

Information about collaborative forms of research drawn from a recent survey of literature, (e.g. McCutcheon & Jung, 1990; Tripp, 1990; Van Manen, 1990; Aspland, Macpherson & Proudford, 1993; Feldman, 1993; Johnson, 1993; Levin, 1993) has indicated a number of limitations and benefits of this sort of research. Some of the limitations include the problematics of collaborative research such as ethical concerns and sensitivities, the possible conflict of values and the vexing issues of power and authority. The main advantages of collaborative research are that it promotes critical thinking and practice, the generation of professional knowledge and the collective interpretation of and action upon data. These advantages may consequently lead to improved professional performance and a sense of empowerment for the practitioners.

We believe that credible examples of collaborative action research will include the principles of collaboration outlined earlier in the paper. These are:

- .Open communication
- .Avoidance of jargon (or at least a shared understanding of its meaning)
- .Clarity and sense of purpose
- .Frameworks for critical reflection, professional development and advocacy
- .Appreciation of teachers' time constraints
- .Equity in decision@making

As the members of the group reflected on progress made during 1994 (via a revisiting of these

principles), a number of "lessons" emerged. These lessons are by no means exhaustive, but they do reflect a grappling with the problematics and a building upon the advantages as outlined above.

The lessons seek to elaborate the principles which emerged from the earlier reflections, (documented as a series of vignettes in Appendix One).

The lessons are:

RE: OPEN COMMUNICATION

Do not expect open communication from the start.

Work towards open communication as relationships are developed among members of the group.

Recognise that building relationships and opening communication channels takes time.

Be objective, non-judgemental, open-minded and patient

Be aware of the range of interest in and opinions about teaching and learning and collaborative projects like this one.

RE: AVOIDANCE OF JARGON

Do not make assumptions that everyone understands the language and the discourse about the project.

Define terms, goals and approaches early in the project, even if the definitions are tentative.

RE: CLARITY AND SENSE OF PURPOSE

Do not make assumptions that everyone shares a common vision for the project at the beginning.

Be aware that the early stages of projects like this one have the potential to be breeding grounds of suspicion and cynicism.

Maintain honesty and openness in all discussions and meetings associated with the project.

Strike a balance between giving background information and theoretical frameworks and allowing the group to develop its own living educational theory and professional knowledge.

RE: FRAMEWORKS FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ADVOCACYf

Recognise the prior experience and expertise of all involved in the project.

Emphasise the notion that the research is being conducted within a "researching with" and not a "researching on" mindset.

Be aware that the project must be seen to be progressing and achieving something.
(Definition of terms may be developed, other persons may come on board, others in the school community are told what is happening, progress is made in terms of the project's having an impact on further policy development, etc.).

Retain an ongoing commitment to sharpening the focus of the project and ensuring that it is relevant, purposeful and effective.

Retain a critical perspective which is informed by an awareness of broader trends and a willingness to contest these trends in constructively critical ways.

Keep in focus an action orientation in terms of professional development and advocacy.
(Emancipatory notions of Action Research are helpful in maintaining a commitment to empowerment for teachers and learners.)

Avoid the problematics of collaborative action research by developing principles of procedures which are shared and understood by all participants and stakeholders.

RE: APPRECIATION OF TEACHERS' TIME CONSTRAINTS

Be prepared to share the multi@faceted nature of the roles of group members and associated pressures.

Talk about the intensification of teachers' work and implications for involvements in projects like this one.

Be creative in developing ways of integrating research, professional development and advocacy into teachers' work (recognising that a project like this one does not add critical reflection to the teacher's repertoire, rather it celebrates and formalises it).

Be patient and understand that timelines may have to be extended.

Celebrate the commitment that members of the group have to the project in both the short and long term.

Take stock of what is happening on a regular basis, and note the advances, however small, which are being made.

RE: EQUITY IN DECISIONMAKING

Value in everyone's contribution and maintain an upfront view that equality and diversity of input are essential ingredients in a project like this one.

Members of the group should encourage one another to work for the advancement of the group's agenda, and not to operate unilaterally as far as project matters are concerned.

Do not begin a project like this with one person who is dominant and overtly in control and who appears to have a predetermined agenda.

Achieve a balance in agenda-setting so that the project does not focus on esoteric criticism on the one hand or on technocratic practice on the other. Both facets are crucial and they must work together for a meaningful sense of empowerment for both

teachers and learners.

Conclusion

Thus far, the project has progressed substantively in terms of a continuing focus on effective

teaching and learning in Social Sciences classrooms; and procedurally in terms of an ongoing commitment by all team members to consolidating and strengthening our approaches and practices in relation to collaborative Action Research.

In a sense, then, this paper tells a story of the project, but very importantly for us, it documents the evolution of our own living educational theory (McNiff, 1993) about collaborative Action Research.

The project, the story and the theory WILL continue!

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¬_Xll_¬_personal growth as a teacher and my belief that the Social
Sciences was the key to

empowerment of students as learners for life rather than just in their
school years.Δû!ïΔ

¬_Xll_¬_However, my enthusiasm was severely dented by a feeling of
confusion, frustration and, Δû!ïΔ

¬_Xll_¬_at times, inadequacy, generated by a lack of communication of the
history of focus of Δû!ïΔ

¬_Xll_¬_the project by school administrators and inadequate understanding
of the roles and intentions of

the QUT researchers in the process of collaboration with me as a
teacher Δû!ïΔ

¬_Xll_¬_"at the coal face" of learning.Δû!ïΔ

¬_Xll_¬_In particular, I felt that a statement of intention in writing and
wider discussion and distribution

of relevant research material would have prevented:Δû!ïΔ

-_Xll_-.feelings of not knowing what I was there forΔû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.frustration that nothing positive was happeningΔû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.suspecting that the researchers had a hidden agendaΔû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.my inexperience might compromise outcomes of interviewsΔû!|Δ

-_Xll_-.the desire to walk away before it had a chance to get off the
groundΔû!|Δ

-_Xll_-.Also of concern to me at times was the language of academia with
its inherent Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.assumptions of shared understandings. This initially was a source
of irritation; Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.but given time and the building of a strong working partnership,
this problem was Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.easily resolved.Δû!|Δ

-_Xll_-.Consequently, time is of the essence in this project. Not only the
need to give it Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.sufficient time to resolve the initial uncertainties and
discomfort of someone new to Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.research processes, but also the need to fund/allocate sufficient
time and meetings to Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.resolve feelings of frustration at apparent lack of continuity and
progress towards Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.outcomes.Δû!|Δ

-_Xll_-.Finally, I believe that because we have over time as a group
developed friendship and Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.trust, I feel my contribution is valued and valuable and my
original reasons for Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.involvement and staying with the project have been more than
adequately addressed Δû!|Δ
-_Xll_-.and enriched. Δû!|Δ

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stafffff√√fffΔù!|Δ

~_Xll_~_At this stage I was enthusiastic. I saw the project as a
proactive way of addressing Δù!|Δ

~_Xll_~_some of the grave concerns I had (as a new teacher to KG) about
the state of social Δù!|Δ

~_Xll_~_science here. I liked the promise of professional co@operation I
felt was missing. I Δù!|Δ

~_Xll_~_didn't understand HOW it would be done and felt confused about the
idea of primary school
interviews.Δù!|Δ

√√~_Xll_~_Subsequent Meetings RE: Interview PhaseΔù!|Δ

ff~_Xll_~_I felt frustrated by what I felt to be a directionless and
purposeless exercise. What Δù!|Δ

~_Xll_~_would we do with this information in a √√practicalff sense and
WHEN? I resented the expectations
that we conduct interviews © I did not feel I had the necessary skills
to Δù!|Δ

~_Xll_~_ensure objective results and disliked the fact that we (KG staff)
seemed to be carrying Δù!|Δ

~_Xll_~_the burden of "research".Δù!|Δ

~_Xll_~_There was insecurity with QUT staff. A sense of there being a
hidden agenda © Key

Competencies etc. © existed. (Better information about the focus of the

project needed Δû!!Δ

~XII~at start). Irritation at the "bitty" nature of meetings due to lack of time meant I was becoming less committed\disinterested. There seemed little √√focusff beyond getting interviews conducted and transcribed.Δû!!Δ

√√~XII~November '93 Social Science Staff WorkshopΔû!!Δ

ff~XII~Here, things became clearer. Having to tell others what we'd done and why helped me understand and crystallise not only what we'd done but where we were going. Reading interview transcripts and discussing issues with staff pointed to broad but fairly clear Δû!!Δ
~XII~areas of concern.Δû!!Δ

~XII~I felt more comfortable with the "collaborative" nature of the project & QUT staff personally. I could see the ways to address my initial concerns, and those of others, Δû!!Δ
~XII~and get results.Δû!!Δ

√√~XII~Directions for '94Δû!!Δ

ff~XII~We do have them (from the November meeting) but don't seem to be working towards them. The paper (for Post@Compulsory Conference) is helping us fine tune. In some Δû!!Δ
~XII~ways it's a distraction from our main goals of professional development and inservice.Δû!!Δ

~XII~I still don't like the uncertain nature of our meetings. I've discovered I'm very task Δû!!Δ
~XII~oriented and feel as though I'm wasting time without an agenda. A true and complete understanding of the concept and purpose of vignettes still eludes me

to an extent. I Δû!!Δ

~XII~feel positive about the pilot as a whole and more secure after the April 16 meeting.Δû!!Δ

√√~XII~GeneralffΔû!!Δ

~XII~Short meetings only raised questions, not addressed them. Longer blocks of time needed Δû!!Δ
~XII~for meetings. Long term nature of project needs early explanation.~_j<<8_~Δû!<Δ

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_X||_Being involved in the collaborative research project with QUT
researchers and the Δû!Δ

_X||_other Social Sciences Department teachers at the school, has
provided me with a Δû!Δ

_X||_marvellous opportunity for professional development in association
with people of Δû!Δ

_X||_similar and supportive interests, and for improving the quality of
teaching and Δû!Δ

_X||_learning in the Social Sciences at our school. Thus, I hope we can
help increase Δû!Δ

-XII- student interest and numbers in the subjects offered by the Social

Sciences Δù!|Δ

-XII-Department.Δù!|Δ

-XII-I had expected the QUT members of our research group would take a leading role Δù!|Δ

-XII-in the project, guide us, tell us what to do, show where changes were needed and Δù!|Δ

-XII-complete the program as quickly as possible. But the process has been very Δù!|Δ

-XII-different.Δù!|Δ

-XII-At initial meetings there was much discussion, making (it seemed to me) little Δù!|Δ

-XII-headway. The teachers were waiting on the anticipated leadership of QUT members Δù!|Δ

-XII-and were having difficulty in understanding the technical terminology being used. Δù!|Δ

-XII-The problem was that the teachers did not understand the collaborative process in Δù!|Δ

-XII-research until we read some research papers on the subject. We then understood our problems

were common to collaborative work especially where group members Δù!|Δ

-XII-have a wide range of academic and work experience backgrounds.Δù!|Δ

-XII-With these new understandings, the next meeting was like an open confessional. From sharing

our misunderstandings, difficulties and frustrations, a new relationship Δù!|Δ

-XII-developed within the group that has allowed us to work together as equal members Δù!|Δ

-XII-within the group. The "them and us" barriers between QUT and school staff have been broken

down; technical jargon is less frequently used and explained when necessary; Δù!|Δ

-XII-we value the range of knowledge and skills that each member brings to the group; and members

are very supportive, encouraging and non@judgemental.Δù!|Δ

-XII-Thus, it seems, the primary steps in any collaborative research project must include Δù!|Δ

-XII-a very clear understanding of the collaborative process and development of collaborative group

dynamics. These steps could not be forced nor hurried, as they involve time and individual

effort.Δù!|Δ

-XII-The second stage involving research on teaching strategies is just

-XII- benefits to the Social Sciences of a collaborative study by the school and QUT provided Δù!!Δ

-XII- the impetus for me to attend initial meetings between members from the two institutions. Δù!!Δ

-XII- I found it difficult to be enthusiastic because of the "them & us" barriers and the hoped Δù!!Δ

-XII- for common purpose was not clearly obvious. Δù!!Δ

-XII- However, upon reflection, personal contributions of time, effort and a degree of stoicism have benefited me considerably, and the Social Sciences group is now working toward common goals. Δù!!Δ

-XII- I now appreciate more the difficulties of working in an action research group and the development of a comfortable working relationship in which all members feel valued is

essential. The collaborative approach to a task gives group members the opportunity Δù!!Δ

-XII- to be of equal value. Clarity of communication is another essential if all group members Δù!!Δ

-XII- are to share ideas and understandings and to develop common goals and strategies. Δù!!Δ

-XII- Collaborating as a group in which members come from a range of different academic backgrounds caused problems initially: what was the hidden agenda of the members from the QUT? Were we to be second class participants of an experiment from

which they had more to gain? Why did they use such technical language and not use terms we were more comfortable with? Δù!!Δ

-XII- From reading texts about collaborative research, we understood that the difficulties we Δù!!Δ

-XII- were facing were not ours alone. At the following meeting we shared our difficulties in understanding, scepticism and frustrations. The result has been more open and honest

communication, the development of trust and happier, more comfortable working relationships

in which the academic versus teaching staff barriers have mostly disappeared. We now value

the variety of knowledge and skills that each member brings to the group. Δù!!Δ

-XII-I believe the group will be able to work collaboratively to the benefit of each member and that we should be able to achieve our goals more effectively. But it will take time. Δû!|Δ

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-XII-I brought to this project an interest in teaching the Social Sciences more effectively Δû!|Δ

-XII-and a willingness to support practising teachers as they reflected on their teaching. Δû!|Δ

-XII-I had spent many years in the classroom teaching a variety of subjects within the Social Sciences

and I looked forward to the opportunity to allow our research to impact upon Δû!|Δ

-XII-and renew my own teaching practice. Δû!|Δ

-XII-One of the difficulties I experienced was that whilst I understood the underlying premise Δû!|Δ

-XII-of action research methodology, I had little practical experience of it. Other research Δû!|Δ

-XII-work I had been involved in was more straightforward (and therefore easier) as it involved the analysis of texts and policy documents. The other difficulty was that I was involved Δû!|Δ

-XII-with and trying to balance three other pilot studies as part of the overall project. Δû!|Δ

-XII- There is no doubt that whilst each of the studies is interesting and has the potential to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning, the Social Sciences study is the only curriculum based study which seems committed to collaborative research as described in

-XII- the literature.

-XII- One point that I have learned from the study so far is that it takes time to earn the

-XII- trust of teachers, to develop and verbalise communal goals and to motivate busy teachers

-XII- to give even more of their time to be involved with the study. As it became more obvious to the teachers that I had no "hidden" agenda, I felt less of an interruption to their

-XII- daily plans and I was able to defend the study and its "slow but careful" progress with more conviction.

-XII- Another frustrating aspect was that some of the teachers I spoke with were resigned to the fact that nothing could be done, or at least very little could be done without the support

-XII- of key school personnel. I was convinced and still am that whilst the involvement of others

-XII- is more than welcome and accepting fully that organisational structures and inflexible personnel do impede advancement, lasting teacher change occurs from within.

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-XII- Whilst *actionff* has been slow in coming, there *visff* action and it is directed as much by the teachers as it is by university personnel. When the study is completed and the university researchers have moved on to new enterprises, the teachers should be empowered with the knowledge, experience, but most of all the confidence to continue to "plan, act, observe

-XII- and reflect" on their teaching which is the very essence of action research.

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_X||_My interest in the project emerged from my earlier involvement in the Senior Δù!Δ

_X||_Schooling Curriculum Framework; from follow@up research studies which focussed Δù!Δ

_X||_on the process used to develop the framework; and from my continuing interest Δù!Δ

_X||_in collaborative research approaches using qualitative methodologies.Δù!Δ

_X||_In the initial stages of such a large project, I wondered what my involvement in Δù!Δ

_X||_the project would be and how truly collaborative the project was going to be. I Δù!Δ

_X||_was concerned at some of the "noise" which seemed to get in the way of communicating

the thrust of the project to the school community. I worried about the perceptions

(imagined or real@it didn't matter) of staff to one of the early projects.Δù!Δ

_X||_Initial meetings with social science teachers were difficult. I felt the project Δù!Δ

_X||_in a sense determined the agenda © quality teaching and learning

in the senior Δû!|Δ

~X||~school. However, I did not want to convey a sense of imposition.

While I had ideas Δû!|Δ

~X||~of the sort of things that could happen, I was determined not to impose an agenda.

Understandably, teachers were confused, frustrated and probably cynical to some Δû!|Δ

~X||~degree.Δû!|Δ

~X||~I had to learn tolerance and patience all the while contributing to an environment Δû!|Δ

~X||~in which teachers' voices were heard, listened to and used as the major reference Δû!|Δ

~X||~point in determining the agenda. I was endeavouring to make the Social Sciences pilot Δû!|Δ

~X||~project one that took seriously a collaborative research approach.Δû!|Δ

~X||~I saw some of the implications relating to:Δû!|Δ

~X||~* ~X'~equality of partnership amongst all members of the groupΔû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~shared understandings re the purposes, principles and procedures of the Δû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~projectΔû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~development of a collaborative working relationshipΔû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~awareness of the micropolitical contexts in which the project is situatedΔû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~the support of members in the group in terms of full participation in the Δû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~projectΔû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~the determination of realistic and achievable goals given the many factors Δû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~operating within the context and affecting the members of the group in diverse Δû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~waysΔû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~the communication to school and university personnel that collaborativeΔû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~approaches will lead to outcomes in the short term which focus on building

relationships and developing Action Plans, and in the long term to more Δû!'Δ

~X||~* ~X'~visible evidence relating to quality teaching and learning in Senior Schooling.Δû!'Δ

~X||~Thus far, the project has been a valuable learning experience more so in procedural Δû!|Δ

~X||~rather than substantive terms. This learning experience has included the micropolitics Δû!|Δ

—XII—of both the university based research team and the school
community; the working with
three teachers and a senior research assistant; and the evolving
research environment Δû!Δ

—XII—where understandings, agendas, procedures, analysis and outcomes
are being more
comfortably shared.Δû!Δ

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