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Collaborative Action Research for Social Justice: Politics, Challenges and Possibilities[1]

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Introduction: Mobilizing action research partnership to pursue strong social justice

Action research, as commonly defined, combines action and reflection with intent to change practice and theory (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Whether the intent foregrounds *socially just* change is, however, neither a common nor simple matter of definition, but depends on how social institutions are envisioned as ‘just’. The action research project portrayed in this chapter mobilized a ‘strong’ social justice conception, defined by commitments to: (1) inclusive *recognition* of diverse cultures and identities; (2) empowered *participation* of diverse individuals and groups in democratic decisions about wider social arrangements affecting their lives; and (3) decent *distribution* of material well-being to meet needs and life-chance aspirations (Fraser, 2003). In the project discussed below, these justice commitments underpinned efforts to redesign curricula and pedagogies in schools of a ‘disadvantaged’ region, with further implications for school leadership and cultural ethos.

Vigorous school-change efforts inevitably meet acute obstacles. As the societal system for credentialed access to unequal statuses and rewards, mainstream schooling is a high-stakes competition, infused with norms and codes that favor, and so reproduce, cultural capital advantages of power-elite groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Against such selective biases, social justice initiatives are necessarily tempered by ‘pragmatic’ reckoning with constraints (Boomer 1999). As such, one must avoid proclaiming emancipation in advance of practice , but rather let ethics-invested practice lead where it can. *Practice*-led change is a methodological virtue of action research; however, projects do not easily muster the degrees of freedom needed to contest deeply institutionalized obstacles in *ethically* strong ways. Educational action researchers typically gain limited funding, time and infrastructural supports, usually under warrants of system-endorsed professional development agendas that encourage single-teacher projects with single-classroom focus on modest ‘practical improvements’. Even when staff collaborate around whole-school change agendas, these tend to be captured within mainstream permissible limits.

School-university partnerships can bolster the ethical momentum of school-based projects. University sector norms of ‘independent research and scholarship’ allow greater relative autonomy for critical-ethical impulses (even in the currently unfavorable policy climate for social justice discourses). However, this often results in projects designed and driven largely by university partners who, work-loaded and time-constrained, typically do not undertake sufficient dialogue with school staff to negotiate situated differences in perception, language and imagination about needed change – which tends to alienate school-based 'co-researchers' rather than enlist their agency (Davies et al., 2007).

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[1] A version of this paper will appear in Noffke, S. & Someck, B. (Eds) (in press), *Handbook of Educational Action Research*. London, Sage.

Moreover, school-university projects still tend toward single-school 'case studies' that lack scale for tackling deeper systemic blocks to social justice: what Brennan (in this volume) calls the 'intractable problems of schooling'. Gaining critical mass to challenge such impediments, argues Brennan, requires wider ambit; for example, by networking across multiple sites in which local projects share rationale, methodology and professional development. And if seriously chasing *socially just* change, such efforts need freedom from system compliance – not easily 'won' if governments are primary funding sources. The approach taken in the project discussed below was to form partnership across multiple stakeholder organizations that are closer than governments to 'the ground of change': a principals' network, an education union and a university research centre. Each organization contributed funds as well as distinctive leverages within the educational field.

While pooling varied resources and political clout, such partnership also accumulates tensions across organizational elements that, within the complex relational ecology of an education system, each occupy distinctive positions, roles and functions, none 'purely' about justice, all incited by dynamics of power and pressure as well as by virtuous purposes. Each relates differently to local, national and global policy landscapes, with contingent vested interests and senses of constraint, often unexamined, that affect how each makes sense of ethical calls and methodological means to 'do justice' .

In addition, multiple organizations may put teachers at further remove. In their direct teaching-and-learning relation with students, teachers are central in action research efforts to change schooling's formal 'message systems' (Bernstein, 1990) – curriculum, pedagogy and assessment – and informal 'hidden curricula'. Yet teachers lack organized leverage: they interact with, but do not drive, principal and union associations, whose exertions in project designs and processes may distance teachers' voice and agency.

To maximize potentials for socially just change, the dynamic complexities and tensions of such multi-organization collaborations need sociologically reflexive clarification (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) among the partners. This chapter analyzes the complex inter-dynamics of one such action research project, Redesigning Pedagogies in the North (RPiN), in which the authors were involved as university researchers. We thus narrate partnership dynamics from the standpoint of one element in the partnership. At the same time, we seek to place our 'university researcher' standpoint under critically reflexive examination.

Getting together around making a difference

RPiN was a three-year project (2005-2007) with a middle-years focus, located in the South Australian city of Adelaide's northern suburbs, among the most high-poverty regions in Australia, with a shifting demography involving increased itinerancy and cultural complexity. Secondary students, alienated by standardized curricula that lack resonance with their lives, typically leave school early or barely graduate, with uncertain future trajectories (Smyth & Hattam, 2004, Thomson 2002). RPiN facilitated action research projects across all ten secondary schools of this region, aimed at (1) engaging learners by designing intellectually challenging curriculum units around funds of knowledge from students' local lifeworlds (Moll et al., 1992; Gonzalez et al., 2005); and (2) *enabling school achievement* through pedagogic scaffolds that bridge lifeworld-relevant curricula to learning of cultural capitals needed for mainstream academic success.

The RPiN partnership was primarily forged by a research team from the Centre for Studies in Literacy, Policy and Learning Cultures (LPLC), at the University of South Australia (UniSA), which won funding from the Australian Research Council as a Linkage project (LP0454869), matching funds committed by 'industry partners'. The latter comprised: (1) the Northern Adelaide Secondary School Principal's Network (NASSPN), through which each school contributed from professional development funds; (2) the South Australia branch of the Australian Education Union (AEU), which applied resources earmarked for their annual conference on middle schooling; and (3) the South Australian government's Social Inclusion Unit (SIU) as a 'silent partner' (providing some funds but with no hand in project operations). This partnership was novel in such Australian 'linkages', as the usual key 'industry' funding partner is a State education department that exerts considerable 'strings attached'.

The NASSPN principals also had a significant role in instigating RPiN, particularly through various conversations with LPLC members in which they raised attention to the *middle-years* as a crucial juncture when students begin self-selecting out of schooling as teaching-and-learning becomes more compartmentalized, content-driven and disengaged from students' lives – without 'compensation', as for 'more advantaged' learners, of a trajectory to decent life chances through academic success. RPiN thus aimed to *revitalize* middle-years curriculum and pedagogy by meaningful connection to students' *lifeworlds*.

In ensuing sections we gradually fold the RPiN partners into our narrative and problematize their interactions.

LPLC and teachers: a co-research interaction

A social justice methodo-logic for co-research

LPLC members have extensive track records of co-research collaboration with teachers (see website: http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cslplc/default.asp) in varied projects that share a 'critical' focus on redressing power inequalities in and through schooling. Ethical commitment to 'strong' social justice is coupled with methodological orientations associated with 'critical' versions of action research: developing *theory-in-practice*; problematizing theory/practice in specific contexts; ownership of professional development by school staff; teacher and university researchers studying together; teacher collection and analysis of data; teachers (and students) as knowledge producers; and more. Such orientations assume schools as sites not only where privilege is reproduced but also where practitioners can 'make a significant contribution to an egalitarian society' . LPLC projects contribute internationally to a research *methodo-logic* that emphasizes teachers as proactive, 'the most important actors in the technology called schools', able to act as socially just change agents when reflecting critically on how '[their] own identities … contend with the power relations that operate in schools and educational systems' .

In centralizing teachers as change agents, the RPiN project incorporated teacher capacity-building and professional renewal into its design , creating a *professional learning community* across the 13 LPLC investigators and 32 teacher-researchers (roughly three from each school). During the project's first two years, LPLC and teacher co-researchers met in regularly scheduled roundtables to study towards, plan and evaluate project work. The LPLC team facilitated the roundtables, which focused on developing teacher capacities to design and implement curriculum units, negotiated with students, that make meaningful connection with student's localities of place: in effect putting learners to work as 'researchers' of their own lifeworld *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 1992, and Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Professional learning in RPiN's first year, 2005, included activities to develop *ethnographic imagination* about students' lives beyond school. Teachers learned how to learn from students: for example, by asking students to select, bring to class and 'teach' about cultural artifacts that carried significant identity resonances in their lives. Teachers also focused on aspects of their pedagogy, reflecting on what they might change in order to 'turn around' (Comber & Kamler, 2005) from deficit to asset views of students, seeing students as experts in their lived domains who can thus contribute lifeworld knowledge to revitalized curriculum. As such professional development provocations took root, teachers worked with LPLC members on designing curriculum units that could (a) 'make community curricular' by locating student work in their lifeworlds; and (b) produce artifacts that could be analyzed for funds of knowledge that future curriculum units might incorporate. Along with roundtables, LPLC researchers visited schools to work with teachers on the curriculum units.

The units were implemented in the last quarter of the 2005 school year. Teachers were asked to be systematic in researching their units, formulating research questions and plans to collect various kinds of data: teacher journals; student journals; video, audio and/or observer records of significant teaching moments; interviews with students; evidence of student engagement and learning (attendance data, test results, student writing and other artifacts); and assessment plans (assignments, learning contracts, etc). At year's end, teachers presented on their units at the AEU middle schooling conference and were interviewed by LPLC assistants. Some wrote formal accounts within master degree programs. In these ways teacher-researchers reflected on their efforts, in preparation to redesign new curriculum units – either refining the 2005 unit or developing a new one – for the 2006 action research cycle.

For the 2006 units (implemented in the second half of the school year), LPLC investigators emphasized more rigorous intellectual challenge, stronger curricular connection to students' lifeworld knowledge, and assessments in which students perform their learning to school and local community audiences (thus giving knowledge 'back' to their communities). Efforts were also made to research how teaching-and-learning occurs in students' family/community sites (seeking lifeworld-based funds of *pedagogy* as well as *knowledge*). Teachers again presented at the year-end AEU conference, and were interviewed. In the third year, LPLC members worked with selected teachers from each school to develop accounts of their projects for a RPiN website-in-progress (http://www.ansn.edu.au/connecting_lives_and_learning).

Problematizing the LPLC-teacher interaction

As our account suggests, 'we' (the LPLC)[2] drove professional development throughout RPiN. If teachers were foremost *action* researchers, we designed and pressed the methodo-*logic* of this action. Teachers' agency of course kicked in, shifting the logic in various ways (both in the tacit 'privacy' of their work with students and in 'public' RPiN dialogue). Yet teachers did not all invest in the RPiN methodo-logic to equal degrees. While some self-selected into the project with an informed sense (including some who had worked with LPLC researchers prior to RPiN), others were 'pushed' in by principals. Some strove for substantial curriculum connection to student lifeworlds; but others adapted this key logic of the project in 'lifeworld-lite' ways. While generally committed to serving 'disadvantaged' regions, RPiN teachers did not easily obviate tacit institutional habits of deficit thinking about learners from such regions.

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[2] We hereafter use the 'we' voice to signify our LPLC standpoint.

Even when such ‘commonsense’ was opened to critical reflection, underlying senses of its powerful institutional ‘normality’ were inhibiting (Ovsienko & Zipin, 2007).

We could apply similar sociological scrutiny to ourselves. Complex power dynamics of university workworlds weaken our capacities to enact (or even stay mindful of) our justice values in the face of tacit institutional norms, and habits they reinforce. However, we met with RPiN teachers in venues abstracted from our institutional contexts, wherein we felt and presented ourselves as bearers of ‘strong justice’ logics for changing *their* institutional workworlds. With sociological reflection, we can imagine this was confronting to teachers' work-situated senses of constraint. We of course presupposed that teachers would face systemic obstacles. In ‘the thick of it’, however, we could tend to forget – to ‘personalize’ more than ‘sociologize’ – in desiring that teachers take up our invested social justice methodo-logics for ‘making a real difference’.

The key question, we suggest in hindsight, isn't whether lifeworld-connected curriculum and pedagogy can work if seriously practiced: we know of famous cases where learners from poverty and cultural minority positions ‘beat the institutional odds’ by such approaches (e.g. Wiggington, 1986; Gonzalez et al 2005, among others). The question is how to mobilize *situated, strategically practical* logics for cutting through institutional *ideo*-logics that stack heavy odds against seriously implementing *methodo*-logics for socially just change. This is a *theory-in-practice* question, not addressable ‘in theory alone’. Addressing it in an action research project, through the agency of all project actors, requires *sociologically reflexive* professional learning community built into the project design (we argue this point further in our conclusion).

Not that we didn't create worthwhile professional development: teachers generally enthused about the worth of the roundtables, where, like us, they were abstracted from workworld constraints. In an era of declining school time and space for professional dialogue, teachers are starved for it. We created four days yearly (some split into half-days) of Brigadoon-like occasions when teachers could talk seriously about their practice and how it could be otherwise. However, in returning from these sauna baths into their workworlds, teachers' insulated pores soon opened to cold institutional constraints. Robust engagement with RPiN methodo-logics could then appear ‘romantic’ and become difficult to keep in mind. Beyond ‘usual’ inhibitors – work-overload, system accountabilities and more – teachers encountered lack of sympathetic reinforcement from colleagues who signaled the stand-offish message: ‘I'm glad it's you and not me’. The *strong* social justice messages of their LPLC ‘professional developers’ could then be felt as ‘coming on too strong’ in the face of workworld ‘realities’.

The problematics analyzed above are typical, we suggest, of university-teacher collaborations in which university agents push strong social justice. It gets more complicated when the fray is joined by project partners who, unlike teachers, bear organizational and funding presence as leverages within their positional standpoints of expectation, hope and doubt.

NASSPN and LPLC: Mixing messages

If teachers are prime agents in changing practices and relations that directly shape learning, then principals are prime enablers of teacher agency to effect change. We hoped that, as an *organizational* partner, NASSPN might collectively reinforce principal leadership on behalf of RPiN within the schools. Yet our initial project design did not schedule any formal meetings between LPLC and NASSPN. Over the time of the project, we instigated two such meetings: one near the end of the second year to evaluate RPiN contributions to schools and consider ways to make them sustainable; the other at the end of the final year, with similar purpose. LPLC members occasionally visited NASSPN meetings to report on project developments. An oversight Management Team, which met four times yearly, comprised two NASSPN principals, three LPLC members and an AEU representative (no teachers, we must note). We also interviewed each principal once (before the first plenary meeting). Principals took no hand in RPiN roundtable or research processes. The interviews indicated that most were not greatly conversant with teachers' curriculum efforts and did little to create ways for RPiN teachers to make their project work known to colleagues.

In effect, we hesitated to 'ask too much' of NASSPN principals. Was this simply from a sense that principals, even more than teachers, are acutely timetabled and work-loaded? We offer a deeper sociological analysis: that we sensed in principals a *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) – subjective dispositions tacitly embodied in their school-system positions – of wariness to take on *ambitious* change agendas, especially in the current policy climate. NASSPN formed partly in response to intensified 'market' competition – structured through accountability criteria set by governments holding purse strings – that wedge collegial relations among neighboring schools. Moreover, 'new managerialism' positions principals as *middle* managers in a 'line-management' hierarchy, wherein they are subject to squeeze-play pressures from demands of government departments 'above', needs of teaching staff 'below', and interests of diverse community groups surrounding schools, with varying degrees of leverage. Topping this, NASSPN principals cope with 'disadvantaged school' challenges (Thomson 2002). Thus, complex synergies of plights induced collective association to communicate about them; and yet, some principals informally indicated to us that NASSPN 'professional community' was often a carefully guarded communication, since forming a network does not simply extricate principals from structural competition.

All these pressures, we argue, induced self-conserving (effectively 'conservative') reflexes regarding a project that, in its provocations toward *substantial* educational change, ran against principals' (dis)positional senses of *constraint*. If, among teachers, our 'strong justice' come-on evoked ambivalences, we gave them highly desired 'professional community' in the roundtables, which won us license to 'work our magic' on them – and some took up our prods to exceed constraints on behalf of 'justice'. By contrast, principals had their own NASSPN venue of peer colloquy; and their higher system-level status meant we were not positioned to offer to 'develop' their thinking about school 'leadership'.

Still, NASSPN *qua* organization, and its members *qua* principals, shared *ethical care* about 'less advantaged' learners; and in this they drew on their own 'social justice' impulses – albeit of more 'moderate' tilt than ours. As already discussed, the principals' main incentive for RPiN partnership was to redress middle-years student alienation and consequent momentum toward early school-leaving. Most of the schools had middle-years initiatives prior to RPiN. However, these tended less 'radically' than RPiN: we would locate them on the 'progressive' side of 'mainstream' – integrating some subject areas; team teaching; student exhibitions big on ICT display but small on curriculum innovation; and so on. 'Community' connection generally meant vocational or service placements with local or state businesses or governing agencies, rather than engaging students 'where they lived'.

Principals thus tended to deflect and dilute our pushes for strong curriculum connection with student lifeworld funds of knowledge, instead assimilating thematic bits of RPiN into what they were already doing. In the interviews, principals stressed real factors constraining middle-years curricular and pedagogic redesign: downward pressure from state-imposed standards for achieving the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) in senior years; time and resource limits; and much more. In their tones and accumulated emphases, however, we read subtexts less of pragmatism ('we need to find what works to make it happen') than skepticism ('we just can't do anything nearly as "radical" as you guys are after'). Variously expressed across interviews was an insistent 'defense' that RPiN is but one of many school initiatives; some are system-imposed; a school can only take up one or maybe two agendas demanding substantial effort; and, alas, RPiN cannot claim such priority.

And yet, in emergent interview moments some of the same principals voiced lyrical, even 'utopian' appreciations of RPiN ideas about engaging students through lifeworld-vitalized curriculum, wherein teachers learn from students, recognize their assets for learning, and so transform pedagogic relations. Such contradictions make the analytic point that it was not RPiN's *ethical* logic that principals did not 'get'. Rather, it is difficult to 'get around' latent *dispositional senses of constraint* associated with the structural positions of the various partners. It is *these* that need sociological reflexivity, applyied as much to LPLC as to teacher and principal standpoints. In perceiving principals' wariness and mixed messages, we tended to react with *psycho*-logical self-protectiveness, feeling that our ethical and methodo-logical hopes were 'let down' by partners who were 'not taking seriously' their crucial roles. From the LPLC standpoint, tensions registered particularly late in the project, when our focus was on sustainability and further extension of what we hoped RPiN had set in motion in the schools. In arranging plenary meetings with NASSPN principals, we hoped to provoke them to take up the sustainability ball – with the strong social justice spins we'd put on it. The principals tended to let our tosses bounce past. If prodded, they threw back with comments about lack of time, lack of staff readiness, lack of infrastructure, etc. If we coaxed further, suggesting that building readiness and infrastructure is part of 'leading', principals could throw back *hard*, suggesting that they were funding us, and it was our job to build.

Our analysis underscores that multi-organization partnership does not simply or automatically bolster strong pursuit of socially just change. Gaps and tensions are formidable when teacher and university co-researchers are the main inter-actors; they are compounded when multiple schools, and an organization of their principals, are added to the equation. Yet for a project to pursue substantive curricular and pedagogic changes, benefitting 'less advantaged' learners who face 'instractable' barriers of institutional schooling, significant principal leadership *is* vital (Lingard et al, 2003). We return to the question of how to enlist this vitality in our conclusion; but we first need to fold the union partner into our narrative.

The AEU: A 'bit partner' with complex subtexts

In Australia, education unions historically have been active in educational reform, arguing that teachers' work conditions are inextricably tied to good teaching and learning, and that curriculum and pedagogy are core specifications of the labor process of teaching (Reid, 1998). Union-led teacher activism has provoked significant reforms to secondary schooling policy and practice, especially in the 1980s . The AEU also offers professional development (PD), joining debates over whether PD is union or employer business (currently topical given federal and state government reductions of PD funds, devolving responsibility to schools under imperatives to 'manage within budget'). The South Australia branch (AEU/SA) involves itself at the progressive edge of PD, promoting teachers as change agents, with the view to fill a crucial gap in times of conservative government-driven reforms. AEU/SA thus funds a Training and Development (T&D) unit, offering PD that includes action research.

Most pertinent to this chapter, the T&D unit ran a two-year (2003-2004) *Community Capacity Building Project: Stronger Schools, Stronger Communities*, in which teacher teams from 'less advantaged' schools – some including a principal – conducted action research aimed at 'making local communities curricular' . This project, facilitated by the authors of this chapter and the T&D Coordinator, was a significant antecedent to RPiN.

Within the RPiN partnership, AEU/SA was a small player, represented solely by the T&D Coordinator, who did not participate in roundtable or action research processes. Her main role was, in running the middle school conference (an annual AEU/SA event that preceded RPiN), to provide platform for RPiN teachers as featured presenters in 2005 and 2006. She also attended RPiN Management Team meetings, where she championed the methodo-logic of community-invigorated curriculum and pedagogy, on a few occasions urging the two principals on the Team that NASSPN should lead in enabling RPiN social justice goals and methods in the schools, and in extending them to more teachers.

In our observation (as participants in the meetings), both NASSPN principles responded reservedly. Words and body language suggested the T&D Coordinator was respected, and her invocations acceptable to them as individual agents; however, in representing NASSPN they held cards close to their chest. We think it notable that one principal was doing doctoral research (with LPLC supervisors) in which he used a critical social justice framework to analyze and model school governance. In his interview he expressed strong appreciation of RPiN's approach (but a *mea culpa* about not leading in his school, given time constraints). Yet in the Management Team setting he wore a NASSPN hat (or *habitus*), stressing un-readiness of the principals 'as a whole' and advising patient tact. Our interpretation, again, is that NASSPN, as an association of principals coping with complex positional pressures, cultures contradictory consciousness: principals subscribe to RPiN in progressive response to challenges; yet their self-conserving impulses dampen RPiN provocations.

However the AEU, too, is a contradictory entity with which NASSPN principals engage in other venues than RPiN, where industrial issues can put them at odds. For example, the SA government is currently maneuvering to give more say to principals in hiring staff. Despite government motives to shift accountability for 'capable staff' to principals, many want this change for varied reasons. Northern suburb principals hope for more agency to attract staff suited to teach 'disadvantaged' clientele (they also want policy incentives for such teachers to work in 'less advantaged' schools). However, the AEU opposes the move, with their own 'justice' warrants: to protect teacher members from potentially narrow positional interests of principals. Such contestations could confound AEU-NASSPN relations within RPiN: while 'personally' respected', the T&D Coordinator still likely wears vestments of 'AEU' as a more complex signifier. This again speaks to relational power dynamics that call for critical sociological reflexivity across organizational elements of the RPiN partnership.

Conclusion: Reflexive sociology for complex partnership

Our analysis finds that multiple partners bring multiplied complexities for challenging structural inequality in pursuit of strong social justice. Different partners embody distinctive and sometimes discrepant senses of what's at stake, what's possible, within what constraints – associated with their different relational positions within educational systems, and within equations of educational change. We have made a *social-epistemological* argument: that systemic pressures and inducements, as experienced from different social-*positional* standpoints, become ***dis****-positionally* internalized, subconsciously self-inhabiting: what

Bourdieu (1990) calls *habitus*. Thus, agents from different partnership elements, when interacting and fielding each others' actions and perceived expectations, generate different tactics of self-protection and self-realization, different calculi of strategic possibility and constraint, which in some ways converge but in other ways clash.

This raises the need for what Bourdieu calls *reflexive sociology*: a 'reflexive vigilance' in which researchers critically analyze not just project data, but also project processes and interactions, unpacking the ways in which the researchers themselves 'are deeply invested' (Bourdieu in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 88). For action researchers, it means that, as they pursue an ethical logic of what they hope to change, and a methodo-logic of how to accomplish such change, they also sustain self-reflexive attention to 'the actual logic of practice … of practice as the product of a *practical sense*, of a socially constituted "sense of the game"' (ibid, pp. 120-121; original emphasis). In complex partnership collaborations like RPiN, it entails *socio*-logical scrutiny of the partial perspectives of the distinct partnership elements, through *relational analysis* that discerns their interactive synergies and dissonances. It requires 'deconstructing the self-interested partialities of [all the] distinctive positions within the field' (Zipin, 1999, p. 37) – and especially one's own.

Action research is crucially about *reflexivity*: about theory-in-practice aimed at changing social practices and relations, provoking reflection on how well the change effort is working, followed by rethinking/re-practicing. To this reflexivity about the *pragmatics* (finding 'what works') impulse of change efforts, we suggest that action research partners would do well to join a reflexivity regarding their partnership interactions and dynamics. We thus argue for building strong sociological reflexivity into the partnership, with the purpose of furthering 'pragmatic-radical' pursuit (Boomer 1999) – not abandoning the '*radical*' (furthering 'root values') impulse – of strong social justice. We suggest that reflexive sociology be built into a partnership's professional development, as something to which all partner agents commit, so as to raise their consciousness to their own situated, subconscious senses of possibility and constraint, their own strategic coping mechanisms, and how these interact with, and may sometimes counter and threaten, those of others in the partnership. Reflexive sociology could thus perform a kind of *pedagogic therapy* to strengthen understandings of self, other and relationships across partnership positions, and thus the viability of collaborative pursuit of the root-goal: social-educational *justice*. We advocate this 'therapy' when partnership is primarily among teacher and university co-researchers, and all the more when further players and organizations are involved.

We lack textual space to elaborate how sociological reflexivity for partnership action research might work. Given that this chapter's portrayal of the RPiN partnership is narrated from its authors' university-researcher standpoint, we conclude by suggesting that university agents should carry prime responsibility for seeing that the reflexive-sociological dimension of PD happens, both on pragmatic grounds – we are best positioned to do so; and on ethical grounds – we may be in most need of it. As our analytic narrative indicates, in partnerships aimed at changing *schools*, university agents in the partnership are abstracted – compared to teachers and principals – from their own work contexts. This remove makes it easier to press 'purely' and vigorously for strong justice and methodological pursuit, without contemplating the complexities and constraints that would inhibit our vigor if *our* institutional workworlds were the object of change-intending action research. Thus removed from our own contexts of 'the actual logic of practice', we can too readily rush to judge the cautions, dilutions, deflections and resistances that our partners strategically deploy. We thus need to take responsibility not only to encourage reflexivity across all partnership positions, but especially to scrutinize the partialities of our own positional exertions and 'blind spots' (Wagner, 1993).

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