

**WITHIN THE LABYRINTH:
FACILITATING TEACHER RESEARCH GROUPS**

by

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Within the Labyrinth: Facilitating Teacher Research Groups

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is to examine my four year role as a facilitator of twelve teacher research groups throughout British Columbia. This study focusses on my own inquiry into my practice as a facilitator; it is my lived experience as a teacher researcher. The study was driven by a desire to enhance my effectiveness as a facilitator, for the purpose of contributing to teacher change, to student learning, and to the restructuring of schools. My role as a facilitator was to engage groups of teachers in theoretical and practical discourse as they reconceptualized perspectives and critically examined their classroom practice.

I examined facilitated teacher research groups as one pathway to engendering educational reform. My thesis is that, without the external voice of the facilitator, contexts for pedagogical dialogue have the possibility of becoming nothing more than a retelling of incidents that occur consistently in the dailiness of teaching. Without the external facilitator, teacher research groups may become rooted in process at the expense of substance. The rigorous conversations and the rethinking of practice may be in jeopardy of being replaced by sessions in which teachers are emotionally and socially supported, yet changes in practice are not viewed as vital.

This research is a qualitative study of my work facilitating teacher research groups. Data were collected through participants' reflective writing, my own field notes and journal entries, participants' questionnaires, researching teachers' final reports, audio tapes of interviews, video tapes of teacher research group meetings, transcriptions, and teacher and student reflections.

This research study focusses on problematic aspects, tensions, and perplexing questions that emerged in my practice as a facilitator for teacher research groups. I closely examined these numerous dilemmas, as it was through these uncertainties that my most powerful learning evolved. These dilemmas included grappling with the colleague/expert dichotomy,

"contrived" collegiality, unexamined practitioner constructions of knowledge, and prodding practitioners to move beyond the seductive peril of retelling of their own stories to take action towards rethinking and subsequently changing their own practice.

Throughout this research study, I came to know that teachers viewed my role as facilitator as important because it contributed an external perspective which focussed practitioners on what made a difference to student learning. I discovered that as a facilitator I needed to create a framework for teacher research groups which provided teachers with time to talk and work collaboratively in a trusting environment and to ensure teachers' process of inquiry began in the action of their practice. I learned to value each teacher research group as a unique entity with its own distinctive qualities as I supported teachers in the process of social/political, pedagogical and personal change. I discovered the importance of making explicit connections between teachers' actions and student learning to support practitioners in making worthwhile changes in their practice. I realized the importance of developing a teacher research network to make connections between school districts, the Ministry of Education and the wider community, to effect educational change and school reform.

I have emerged thinking differently about the spaces I create for both practitioners and students as I am still in the process of unwinding the 'thread of spider's silk' to continue to explore the life-long pathways of self-inquiry. I learned that facilitating teacher research groups was more like being in a labyrinth with its vast, intricate corridors spiralling vertically like the chambers in a triton-shell. My experiences facilitating teacher research groups drew me in through a maze of mirrors, forcing me to look closely at my own reflection and therefore at myself. I have faced the dilemmas of my practice as I challenged the 'monsters' at the center of the maze. One of the important implications is that the facilitator ensures practitioners also face their 'monsters', their dilemmas of practice, otherwise the possibility exists that change may not be framed around the needs of learning and the learner. Without the external voice, provided by the facilitator, teacher research groups might not connect to educational reform, nor might they have any focussed impact on student learning.

Dedication

**To my children
Dustin, Carly and Brody
who have taught me to be
the keeper of dreams.**

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CHAPTER ONE

My Role as Facilitator of Teacher Research Groups: Discovering The Secrets of the Labyrinth

INTRODUCTION

Labyrinth: A vast underground palace, hundreds of rock-carved rooms linked by a spider's web of passages: a labyrinth, a maze . . . (McLeish, 1983, p. 143)

• • •

When I think about my own research I see it as a sort of 'spiralling in' process - I'm winding around in a sort of circle that includes many possibilities where I have many questions. I have some thoughts, some beliefs based on informal observations gathered from my time in the classroom. But I also have a few worries that perhaps that I won't find what I'm looking for, or that I might discover, instead, things that will make me question what I have been doing, what's been happening for kids in there. And I suppose that is the risk, the challenge, that investigating questions brings - you might find something unexpected on the way, maybe you're not looking at the thing you thought it was all along. (researching teacher, 1994)

• • •

Everyone imagined the labyrinth as a horizontal maze, a one-storey honeycomb of corridors . . . instead of being horizontal, the labyrinth was vertical, its tunnels spiralling downwards like the chambers in a triton-shell. To find the heart, therefore, you fastened one end of Ariadne's thread to the opening, put the

spindle down and let it roll. It would find its own level, unwinding downwards until it came to the bottom chamber where the Minotaur lurked. To reach the surface again . . . climb up the rock-passages, guiding your way by the dangling thread. (McLeish, 1983, p 147-148)

• • •

As I drove towards the airport on one of those never-ending winter days, I continued to grapple with my role as the "fly-in" consultant and the framework, implications and validity of the approaching teacher development sessions I had agreed to facilitate. The framework was based on demonstration lessons followed by debriefing sessions focussed on teachers' reflections, questions and issues. My role was to perform the demonstration lessons and facilitate the discussions. I asked myself many questions. Was I facilitating conversations or reinforcing a hierarchical "telling" model for teacher development? Have the teachers participated in a decision-making process to have me demonstrate lessons in their classrooms or was it imposed by administration without teacher consultation? Are these demonstration lessons inviting teachers into a mode of reflective inquiry or are they placing teachers into position of feeling coerced into thinking about themselves and their practice? Sometimes these lessons were scheduled back to back with no time for teachers to reflect on their observations or raise questions. I wondered if these sessions would quickly fade from the category of memorable learning experiences, if they ever existed there at all. Sometimes I felt there was an unspoken pressure for teachers to feel comfortable with my "fly-in" consultation when I sensed they were possibly hoping for my quick departure. How much of their anxiety had to do with who I am? How much of their anxiety or absence of it had to do with yet another professional development session designed by someone else without teacher consultation, decision-making and

therefore no ownership by participants? Is my role as a consultant one of authentically supporting teachers or is it permission for districts to add to their resume yet another claim to empowering teachers? And if so, am I contributing to the façade by agreeing to the performance? (excerpt from my journal, 1992)

• • •

Amidst this state of questioning whether my own values and beliefs about teacher development existed in my practice as a consultant, I was offered an opportunity to create, develop and facilitate teacher research groups. This new opportunity appeared to involve processes that were the antithesis of my role as consultant. As a consultant I was often transmitting information; as a facilitator, I was facilitating a process whereby practitioners constructed knowledge for themselves. Quite honestly, a major obstacle I had to overcome was my own ego. Within my school district and the Ministry of Education, I had developed a reputation as a theoretical practitioner, an educational leader. When I became involved with the teacher research groups, participants thought they were getting "this educational leader who had the answers". I had been competent at transmitting knowledge, giving advice and solving problems. I struggled with my reputation, my skills and their expectations.

I became intrigued with the notion of the role of the facilitator in teacher research groups as a locus for change. Out of these experiences as facilitator, a new set of questions arose for me which guided the inquiry into my own practice. How do I step out of the role of presenting and into the role

of facilitating? How do I resist problem-solving and facilitate problem-posing? How do I deconstruct my role as presenter in order to reconstruct my role as facilitator? Sometimes painful, sometimes joyous, I began a process of inquiry into my own practice as a facilitator of teacher research groups which provides the focus for this research study.

Prior to facilitating teacher research groups I had been a teacher for seventeen years, and most recently a consultant for the Burnaby School District and a Faculty Associate at Simon Fraser University. The consultant position involved presenting professional development sessions in over 68 School Districts, assisting with implementation of British Columbia's Primary Program and developing Ministry of Education resource kits for practitioners. I worked with teachers, parents, administrators, and superintendents, and had a variety of responsibilities, ranging from school-based inservice sessions to district crisis intervention. At times, I wondered about the effectiveness of this consultant model for teacher development. As I had defined my role as consultant it was linear: I transmitted information, I structured the sessions and I, as distinct from practitioners, owned the process of constructing knowledge. As I reflect on the many workshops I presented, I questioned what difference I made to teachers' practice and student learning. Perhaps practitioners left the workshop with one additional activity to add to their repertoire of strategies, however I believe these inservice sessions made few contributions to teachers' practice or to the restructuring of schools.

Though my lived experience of transformation from consultant to facilitator was messy and discontinuous, rather than seamless and chronological, it is possible to unravel some factors and influences which

contributed to my transformation. Through graduate coursework I became familiar with theory and literature on teacher development and teacher research. As I began to apply theory to my own practice in facilitating teacher research groups my assumptions were challenged and my thinking changed. I was encouraged by professors Ken Zeichner and Peter Grimmett to write in my own voice, to write myself into my research, which set in motion another change in my thinking, a move away from the assumption of the need to tell as the 'expert', rather than ask question or live with the dissonance of not knowing. Sharon Jeroski, a colleague in teacher research, taught me much about her processes and framework for facilitating teacher research groups. Over time, these experiences, my own questions and reflections all encouraged an evolution of both my beliefs of what facilitation "was about", and the action of my practice.

I am struck by the contrast between my linear, transmitting role as consultant and my mazy, searching role as facilitator. I wondered if I appreciated the diversity in the two roles or just simply longed for some sense of commonality. Initially facilitating research groups was simply another corridor in my professional career until I began to define my role as facilitator differently because of my doubts about my effectiveness as a consultant. Although facilitating conversations, rather than directing them was a new experience, I presumed the passageway would be straightforward. In reflection, facilitation was more like being a child entering a dark maze at an amusement park for the first time. I remember being that child as my eyes had first to adjust to the claustrophobic darkness of the maze in an effort to make sense of where I was going. It seemed as if the entrance doors were locked solidly behind me; I felt like there was no way out. I remember a sense

of bewilderment, frustration and confusion as each door that I opened created more anxiety with the trepidation of what minotaur might exist in the seductive silence behind each gateway. Any notion of fairy tale romanticism, the naive anticipation of a passage through a looking-glass house, dissipated with the fear of what was to come, through the maze passageways of this "five coupon" experience. I vividly recall hoping to find a way through the maze to reach the daylight, knowing that only then would the experience end.

Just as a child, my experiences facilitating teacher research groups drew me in through the maze of mirrors, forcing me to look closely at my own reflection and therefore at myself. I did not always like what I saw, as the distortions from the mirror were not always my authentic image; my role as a consultant had been a "performance" of sorts, now as a facilitator both my beliefs about working with groups of teachers and my self-perceptions were being challenged. I experienced confusion and frustration in not knowing where I was going in the maze, and in my fear of the minotaur "monsters" of the maze: these monsters were the dilemmas that were tangled in my practice, dealing with some of the participants' emotions and actions, my own misconceptions of knowledge, my own insecurities and self-doubts about the role of facilitation, and the very processes involved in teacher research. The metaphor of labyrinth with its difficult, winding passages and mythic minotaur, half human, half beast, encapsulates my experiences in facilitating teacher research groups. This research study is both an examination of what lies inside the maze of facilitating teacher research groups, the "monsters" lurking there, and an outside analysis of the labyrinth role of the facilitator.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There has to be a good facilitator, not necessarily the principal or team leader, but there has to be a good facilitator to help that process, and it's the process which is really important here - to make sure people are on task, and that each has their say and to draw people out . . . and to quietly and tactfully make sure that some people don't dominate . . . (researching teacher, 1993)

The purpose of this research study is to examine my role as a facilitator of teacher research groups. This study focusses on my own inquiry into my practice as a facilitator; it is my lived experience as a teacher researcher. The study was driven by a desire to enhance my effectiveness as a facilitator, for the purpose of contributing to teacher change, student learning, and the restructuring of schools. My role as a facilitator was to engage groups of teachers in theoretical and practical discourse as they reconceptualized perspectives and critically examined their classroom practice.

This research study will also focus on problematic aspects, tensions, and perplexing questions that emerged in my practice as a teacher research group facilitator. I will closely examine these numerous dilemmas, as it was through these uncertainties that my most powerful learning evolved. Some of the dilemmas I struggle with are as follows:

- How does a facilitator create conditions that minimize the colleague/expert dichotomy?

- How does a facilitator reframe information in a way that honors voices but does not validate unexamined practitioners' constructions of knowledge? What defines unexamined construction of knowledge?
- How can a facilitator work with people who believe they have all the answers and have co-opted the language of inquiry, but do not live it?
- When does a facilitator intervene with process and content to re-direct the conversations while at the same time respecting all practitioners?
- How does a facilitator defuse angry participants?
- How does a facilitator grasp opportunities to support participants in reframing and reshaping practice for the purpose of making positive changes for teachers and for student learning?
- How does a facilitator grapple with fallacious assumptions brought by some participants without being professionally unethical?
- How does a facilitator move teachers beyond the narrative indulgence of retelling their stories to connect with action in their practice?

Through inquiry into my own practice as a facilitator, I refined my practice and discovered ways of supporting reflective practitioners as they engaged in collaborative teacher research. As a researching teacher I was required to look beneath the rhetoric of effective teaching and restructuring schools to uncover and detail the issues and dilemmas I grappled with as a facilitator, a colleague and as a change agent. Through my role I examined uncertainties within the maze-like pathways of my practice as a facilitator of teacher research groups. Through reflection and writing I have gained understanding that has changed my practice as a facilitator within the labyrinth of teacher research groups. This has taught me more about myself,

forcing me to look in the multiple mirrors permanently secured on the vertical walls of each corridor spiralling downwards within the maze.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a notable absence of studies published on the role of the facilitator in teacher research groups. Although many scholars have described their work with teacher researchers, [see Lytle and Cochran-Smith, (1990), Cochran-Smith and Lytle, (1993), Bissex and Bullock (1987), McNiff (1988), Miller (1990), Connelly and Clandinin (1988), Lieberman (1994), Tabachnich and Zeichner (1991)], a discussion of the role as facilitator remains implicit rather than explicit, leaving the reader wondering about processes, frameworks, issues, and methodology. I have delimited the sources on action research methods, and instead I have relied on sources that deal specifically with the role of the external voice in teacher research.

Recently, much has been published that supports teacher research as one way for practitioners to become increasingly vocal, articulate and organized for the purpose of working collaboratively, through disciplined inquiry, to refine, reshape and restructure learning for both themselves and their students. As teachers engage in a process of "systematic, intentional inquiry" (Lytle and Cochran-Smith, 1990, p. 85) they begin to examine their own conceptions of knowledge and practice. However, very little has been published which describes and analyzes the process of facilitating this pedagogical, collaborative inquiry. For example, Connelly and Clandinin have examined the conditions for teacher conversations and the possible

relationship to changing teaching practice. They set forth a definition of teachers' personal practical knowledge as a "particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions for the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation . . . a term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons"(p. 25). Richardson(1990) suggests that "a strong focus should be placed on teachers' cognitions and personal practical knowledge in a teacher change project, and these should be considered in relation to actual or potential classroom activities"(p. 13). Although the importance of teacher dialogue to changing practice is discussed by each of these authors, there is no reference to the use of an external facilitator to support, guide or shape the process of change. Connelly and Clandinin appear to believe that teacher dialogue, or narrative, in and of itself, is enough to effect change in teachers' knowledge. I suggest this may create a situation in which teachers' emotional and social needs are being met, yet their practice may remain unchanged. I suggest conversations must go beyond the retelling of teachers' stories and be connected to the action of teaching practice.

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) include dialogue journal writing as one of their methods of reflection for teachers working with groups of colleagues. The authors ask teachers to be descriptive of actions and reactions in their writing, with the purpose of thinking differently about their teaching practice. Through these written conversations, teachers are engaged in reflective dialogue with other teachers. Teachers control the dialogue, the issues, the questions and the length of responses. Connelly and Clandinin claim that, through the ongoing dialogue, teachers make sense of new theories from the perspective of their personal practical knowledge and beliefs about teaching.

While the written reflections and the ongoing conversations involved in collaborative inquiry are illuminated as an important change agent for teachers, there is no reference to the authors' roles as external facilitators in structuring the processes they have described, or in providing external perspectives for change. There is no description of either the framework or the processes that Connelly and Clandinin have created for the purpose of collaborative inquiry. Further, there is an absence of issues or dilemmas which may have existed in their practice of working with groups of researching teachers, an "empty space" in the research.

Janet Miller's *Creating Spaces and Finding Voices* (1990), is a personal case study of a teacher research group. In her narrative of discussion, reflection and action, Miller describes a dialectical journey taken by six educators who explored and examined possibilities and dilemmas of teacher empowerment and collaborative inquiry through dialogue within their group. Their stories "centered on individual and collective struggles to explicate sources and effects of underlying assumptions that framed notions of teaching curriculum, research and collaboration" (p. x). Miller stresses the importance of the collaborative process as being a fluctuating one which includes questions, dialogue and writing. Teachers participated in ongoing conversations and continued to redefine conceptions of collaborative research, and of teaching and learning in order to view and review their work. Miller, playing a significant role in developing and framing a teacher research group, attempts to create the "kinds of spaces" where dialogue can take place. However, Miller fails to provide the reader with an explicit examination of her role as facilitator despite its centrality to this teacher research project.

In a similar voice to Miller, Kathy Short, in her article (1991), *Professional Development Through Collaborative Dialogue*, begins to frame a set of conditions for facilitating collaborative dialogue within teacher research groups. Whereas Miller's narrative focussed on six teachers' conversations about their individual and collective struggles, Short's research focusses on the collegial dialogue of nineteen participants within the context of a "study group". Short establishes a study group which met every two weeks throughout the school year to explore the potential of groups for supporting teacher learning. The focus of the study group was supporting professional growth through collaborative dialogue; and this group provided participants with an ongoing opportunity to step back from their practice and beliefs in order to critique them.

Short's research focusses on "how teachers and schools might transform themselves, why change is possible through this transformation, and the constraints operating to stifle or inhibit change" (p. 5). She explores the study group as a context for supporting transformation and collaborative dialogue as a condition for change. Her research methodology reflected the theoretical belief system of the study group which was "the need to hear all voices and to not prioritize the voice of the university researcher or facilitator"(p. 6). An integral part of her methodology was using teacher's voices, both as researchers and in shaping the data analysis.

Although both Miller and Short's research can be interpreted as substantiating the belief that there is a role for an external facilitator within the context of teacher research groups that effects change, the authors do not provide any examination of their roles as facilitators. This becomes

problematic in that it would be difficult to replicate their studies, as methodology, processes and the framework for their sessions are not explicit. Though one may gain a deeper understanding of the value of the collaborative dialogical process taking place within both teacher research groups, the specific details as to how this collaboration was encouraged and facilitated remains to be more fully elaborated. One is left with many questions about their work which have informed this study: What are the effects of collaborative inquiry with an external facilitator? What are the dilemmas in facilitating groups of researching teachers? Is facilitation necessary and if so why? How were these groups different because of the external voices provided by Miller and Short? What, essentially, do facilitators bring to the process?

I believe that facilitated teacher research groups are one pathway to engendering educational reform. Facilitated teacher research groups can have significant implications for teacher education programs, teacher evaluation, educational policy, and ultimately for student learning. Participants indicated that my role of facilitator was important because it contributed an external perspective for the purpose of focussing on what it is that makes a difference to student learning. Within the context of the classroom, each teacher has only a single perspective where practice conditions themselves may limit this perspective. It was my role as the facilitator to broaden the potential of each voice through structuring the environment so that teachers had opportunities for exploration and experience.

Although I believe practitioners are the central source of knowledge, my thesis is that without the external voice of the facilitator, contexts for

pedagogical dialogue have the possibility of becoming nothing more than a retelling of incidents that occur consistently in the dailiness of teaching. Without the external facilitator, teacher research groups may become rooted in process at the expense of substance. The rigorous conversations and the rethinking of practice may be in jeopardy of being replaced by sessions in which teachers are emotionally and socially supported, yet changes in practice are not viewed as vital.

CHAPTER TWO

Creating the Maze for Facilitating Teacher Research Groups

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

It is important that the reader have some understanding of the context in which this study occurred in order to distinguish clearly between the larger project, to be articulated in this chapter, and my role as facilitator of twelve teacher research groups within the larger project. To provide background information, I shall also include both an overview of my role as facilitator and of the framework of the teacher research meetings, as these are closely examined in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

In the spring of 1991 a colleague, Sharon Jeroski, and I initiated eleven teacher researcher groups which involved one hundred and twenty teachers throughout British Columbia. This project was funded by the Ministry of Education and contracted to Horizon Research and Evaluation Affiliates. This was a pilot study to examine the feasibility of establishing teacher research groups to assist in reviewing the implementation of Ministry mandated curriculum. My role was to establish five of the eleven teacher research groups, to facilitate the sessions and document the diverse processes which emerged.

As the pilot teacher research project was viewed as successful by the Ministry of Education, in December of 1991 the Program Evaluation and

Research Branch offered all British Columbia school districts the financial and educational opportunity to apply for a school-based research project to be initiated in their district. The Ministry's purpose for creating teacher research groups was to: "boost collaboration and co-operation among educational partners, while simultaneously providing reliable data concerning the *Year 2000* initiatives. The purpose of these research projects [was] to promote inquiry that [validated and created] understanding about teacher and learning" (Request for Expressions of Interest, Ministry of Education, 1991). The Ministry invited interested school districts to submit proposals or "Expressions of Interest" that included the following criteria (See Appendix A for a copy of the Expression of Interest):

1. All projects must be discussed with the Superintendent of Schools. Following such discussion and the endorsement of the Superintendent of Schools, the project should be submitted to the local association for endorsement.
2. Priority will be given to one proposal per school district.
3. Identification of up to 10 persons, the majority of whom have regular classroom responsibilities, to participate as the research group for the project.
4. Participants must indicate their commitment to working collaboratively.
5. A time commitment for release of up to 5 days for each participant. Such time to be used for meetings and other related research activities for the duration of the project.
6. No other Ministry-sponsored projects are to be undertaken by any of the participants at the same time.

7. Priority will be given to those projects which reflect geographic distribution, joint district submission, diversity of teaching population, and gender balance.

The request for "Expressions of Interest" established an additional fourteen teacher research groups throughout the province. Proposals were selected by a Ministry committee comprised of Ministry personnel, members of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, a professor from the University of Victoria, and the contractor from Horizon Research and Evaluation Affiliates, Sharon Jeroski. Subsequently, Sharon contracted with me to facilitate twelve of the twenty-five teacher research groups (the larger project) over the four year project. My role was to create, shape and facilitate these twelve teacher research groups which provide the context for this research study. In collaboration with Sharon, we designed the framework for the larger project, and I began to explore what it meant to facilitate and to create teacher research groups.

There were two networks of twelve and thirteen teacher research groups created throughout British Columbia for two distinct purposes:

1. As an integral part of the Primary Program Review Framework to gather "information on program implementation and program effects on student outcomes" (Bennett, 1992, p. 14), and
2. "To support research issues congruent with those of the Sullivan Royal Commission, *A Legacy for Learners*". (Bennett, 1992, p. 14).

The first teacher research network involved primary teachers in:

- 1. examin[ing] the feasibility of establishing teacher research groups to assist in reviewing the implementation of the Primary Program;**
- 2. explor[ing] the processes through which the Ministry might support locally-initiated teacher research groups; and**
- 3. involv[ing] teachers in collaborative, pedagogical dialogue related to issues, uncertainties or questions which emerged from their classroom practice (Dockendorf, 1992, p. 15).**

The second network of teacher research groups involved intermediate and high school teachers in locally developed research projects. Both networks provided participants with a context for engaging in classroom-based research to assist with reviewing the implementation of learner-focussed curricula and to involve teachers in collaborative inquiry.

This four year project included as many as three hundred educators who volunteered to engage in the process of creating teacher research groups for the purpose of making positive changes for themselves and for students in their classrooms. Many of these teachers were already asking themselves questions, struggling with dilemmas, and wrestling with the uncertainties woven throughout their teaching. They viewed this project as an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues who held similar beliefs about the value of engaging in the process of inquiry.

Despite the Ministry's purpose in establishing teacher research groups, I had three strong reasons of my own. First, there were my beliefs: that teachers are designers of learning and architects of knowledge, that teachers need to make sense of their personal, theoretical, pedagogical, and practical knowledge which ultimately designs teaching and learning, and that teachers need to have access to supportive, collaborative environments to think, talk and reflect. Secondly, I believed we needed to examine and explore research on teaching in light of questions that arise when we view teaching as research. This involved resisting the temptation to view theory and practice as separate processes. Rather, I believed we must view theory and practice as twisted threads interwoven throughout the tapestry of our profession. Thirdly, I believed a thorough examination of our own beliefs and values was a necessary prerequisite to reshaping and recreating classroom practice.

I found the initial stage of formulating teacher research groups to be agonizing, as I had little knowledge of what comprised teacher research groups and I was simultaneously struggling with what it meant to be a facilitator. I found the process of facilitating teacher research groups to be an arduous task of both personal and professional self-analysis. I thought I knew theoretically what I wanted to achieve yet I was continually wondering if I was caught in the consultative mode of transmitting knowledge. My self-initiated inquiry into my practice of facilitating teacher research groups eventually transformed into this research study.

I was overwhelmed as I observed the multiplicity of changes teachers were implementing in their classrooms as a result of participating in the teacher research groups. Within the context of the teacher research groups,

teachers articulated the values, beliefs and knowledge inherent in their own personal approach to teaching. In my prior role as consultant, the majority of teacher development or in-service sessions I had initiated were based on the model of presentation, not facilitation. This was the district model for delivering teacher development workshops, and initially I did not question it. As I began to define my role as a facilitator, I focussed on facilitating conversation, rather than solely transmitting information. Through many conversations with my colleague, Sharon, I learned to focus on building an atmosphere within the groups in which learning from situations that had been unsuccessful was valued, an atmosphere in which diversity and inconsistencies were accepted and understood, and in which the understanding that teachers have different theories about teaching and learning would be embraced.

Facilitating teacher research groups was not only a role of listening and hearing, it was also a role of challenging and provoking conversations. I interjected with a voice that, although supportive, nudged, pressed, challenged or critiqued conversations. I grappled continually with decisions as to the appropriate moment or context in which to ask questions or make comments. Throughout my many experiences, I continued to reflect on my feelings of insecurity and self-doubt that were paradoxically entangled with a passion for exploring my maze of facilitating. When I accepted the contract to facilitate teacher research groups, there was no going back. And this process felt like the disequilibrium I experienced as a child in the maze of the amusement park: I felt confused about the direction of the passageway as I often could not find my way caught in the corridors with doors I could never re-enter once I had passed through them.

My role as facilitator included developing a structure for teacher research groups which considered the following questions:

- How many participants would be most effective in a teacher research group?
- How often would the teacher research groups meet?
- Who would determine the location for teacher research meetings?
- What was the most effective length of time for the teacher research meetings?
- Who would organize the location, the coffee, and the dates for the teacher research meetings?
- How would release time be organized for participants?
- In what ways could the facilitator support teacher collaboration?
- What are the key components for a framework for teacher research group meetings?

An analysis of the structure for teacher research groups is included in Chapter Four. What follows is an overview of the framework, and the processes that I implemented for the teacher research meetings. This is distinct from the structure for teacher research groups, the model for all twenty-five groups in the larger project. The purpose of including this description is to provide the reader with background information. The components within the teacher research meetings were a central source for data collection and are detailed in Chapter Three, and are also a central focus for analyzing my role as facilitator which is detailed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE TEACHER RESEARCH MEETINGS

The framework was conceptualized by my colleague, Sharon. In developing the framework, she drew on her knowledge about focus groups, co-operative groups and professional development (Jeroski, 1990). The framework provided teachers with opportunities for group interaction and left the individual ownership with the each participant. The framework for teacher research meetings included reflective writing, conversations, developing a research question, working collaboratively, and consulting/work sessions. Each component will briefly be described, as they are detailed further in Chapter Four.

Reflective Writing

I asked participants to write during the initial ten to fifteen minutes of each teacher research meeting because I viewed writing as a useful tool for clarifying thinking and for sharing thoughts and ideas with others. The purpose of this reflective writing was to build in time for participants to write about issues, celebrations, uncertainties, or questions. Some teachers chose to keep a journal as a way of recording data, observations or reflections, which provided them with a form of documentation and a written record of their research. Following the ten minute writing session, participants were invited to talk about their writing within the context of the whole group. This reflective time was both an individual and a social process where teachers could think, talk and write about aspects of their practice, since their

reflections were usually based on real life experiences in communities, schools, and classrooms.

Reflection often perpetuated powerful social interactions within the teacher research groups because there was interconnectedness between thought and action. Reflection also seemed to support teachers in "not feeling alone in one's situation, one's classroom. Someone says something - others find a common ground. And we don't have those opportunities much in schools" (researching teacher). Tabachnick and Zeichner (1991) describe the importance of reflection:

It is through the shared experience and perspective of engaged participants in the reflective process, that teacher educators learn what reflection means for themselves and for their students, including some of the meanings of the action that reflection generates. (p.16)

Conversations

All sessions incorporated time for teachers to talk which often provided opportunities for teachers' thinking to be clarified and challenged in the social context of talking with one another. Pair, small group or whole group conversations provided a variety of arenas for reflection. Conversations were a meaningful forum for teacher research groups to examine their personal values and beliefs about teaching and learning. Teachers often spoke about the few opportunities that exist in school culture to discuss issues about which they were thinking, wondering or learning. I learned to become a

better listener and discovered that through these conversations teachers gained greater self-awareness, uncovered some of their assumptions and considered their teaching in a new light. Something occurred as teachers were living and dwelling in conversations, that often changed them and created a new whole.

Being part of a teacher researcher group has been a valuable exercise as an entity to itself. I feel that my teaching is recognized and valued and that my opinions are valued. It points out how infrequently that we have been asked to talk about education where colleagues have time to really listen and honor what you say. (researching teacher, 1994)

Developing a Research Question

Teachers commented on the importance of having a clear focus for their research question since that focus would provide them with an achievable purpose for their project and a sense of direction for what they were doing. Clarifying the focus question was sometimes a lengthy yet valuable process in itself and often required discussion and negotiation amongst participants. In the various teacher research groups teachers developed their own questions and determined their own focus for the research project in collaboration with their colleagues and therefore owned the process of constructing knowledge for themselves. Teachers stressed the value of pursuing their own queries, which were usually connected with a compelling reason for participating in the teacher research group.

Articulating their questions seemed to increase the clarity of thinking for many participants. Teachers' questions were explored without the

pressure of having to produce an immediate result or product, and often, the process for establishing the question was a lengthy one. As the project evolved, focus questions were frequently revised as new questions were generated and new issues arose. As teachers became involved in their research projects, their original assumptions about teaching and learning, and about what they valued in the classroom, often took on new meaning. Thus, their questions were often reshaped and clarified.

Asking good questions is becoming more and more important to me. I'm learning to listen more carefully to the questions that others are asking. I find myself hearing and reading information and at the same time wondering if that was the question that sparked the particular response. (researching teacher, 1994)

Teachers reflected on the importance of altering the focus question and of feeling justified in doing so. As a result of their own inquiry, many teachers began to invite their students to ask questions about the learning process.

Collaboration

I asked teachers to work collaboratively, either in pairs or in small groups. Participating in classroom inquiry together and presenting concerns or comments in partnerships to the whole group at the teacher research meetings appeared to feel safer for many participants. Through collaboration, teachers were able to support one another in taking risks and in learning. Because teachers had time together for planning and reflection, a climate for risk taking was developed.

Collaboration often required negotiating details for research projects. For some pairs there was a conflict between working together and at the same time retaining individuality. In some cases, partnerships dissolved and new relationships emerged. These tensions caused me moments of anxiety, as I was caught between my former consulting role of building bridges and controlling situations, and my present facilitating role of allowing people to work through that conflict amongst themselves and for themselves. Occasionally I gave in to the former, but most often I achieved the latter.

Consulting/Work Sessions

The consulting/work sessions were a designated block of time at the end of each teacher research meeting when participants worked collaboratively to develop their research plans. My role was to ask questions, provide resources or suggest alternatives for designing the research project. Teacher commitment to the project increased when teachers made their own decisions, not only in relation to the question, but also in relation to the research design. We discussed possibilities for data sources as well as ways to record the data which was being driven by participants' research question. We analyzed data by looking for patterns and categories, and refining the questions as new data were gathered. Teachers often noticed how analysis of new data reshaped the original question or raised new questions. On other occasions, professional literature was used as a resource both to discuss the questions in the research projects and to stimulate conversations. In the consulting/work sessions teachers frequently brought in articles they found interesting or controversial, and I also contributed readings that were often

determined by the discussions from previous sessions. As a facilitator, I began to develop an orientation to "listening", rather than the "telling" role of the consultant and I discovered that acts of research are acts of listening, a much more reciprocal way of relating than my previous consultative experiences which were deep-rooted in the "telling" stance.

CHAPTER THREE

DATA SOURCES

This chapter will describe the data sources and methods of analysis for this qualitative research study. I have used a qualitative approach because as the study requires an approach that provides an understanding of events in their natural setting and contextual "wholeness." In order to explore my role as facilitator of teacher research groups, I need to describe interpret events, constructs and changes that take place in the group context. I have chosen this qualitative approach because it:

. . . consists of detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, quotations, and excerpts are raw data from the empirical world, . . . data which provide depth and detail. The depth and detail of qualitative data can be obtained only by getting close, physically and psychologically, to the phenomenon under study. (Patton, 1980, p.43)

To provide a context for the reader, the chapter begins with relevant background information about the participants.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Over 300 practitioners participated in the twenty-five teacher research groups over the four year project. These were teachers who enrolled classes from Kindergarten to Grade 12; others were resource teachers, consultants, administrators or superintendents. Participants ranged in ages from twenty-two to sixty-three years of age. They had between one and thirty-three years of teaching experience. Despite the fact that most of the participants were female, there were male participants in all but six of the teacher research groups.

Many participants had never previously participated in a teacher research group, and for most, the notion of teacher research was relatively new and unexplored. Although the Ministry of Education selected the sites for the groups, they did not become involved in the selection of participants. Local teachers' associations, district committees and district staff shared the responsibility for inviting teachers or school and district administrators to participate. Often initial meetings were held in the districts for any teachers who might be interested in participating in a teacher research group. In some districts, a notice was sent to all teachers inviting them to apply to be part of the larger funded project. In other cases, the district contact invited specific teachers to join based on questions they were already pursuing. In all cases participants were self-selecting.

Groups of different sizes and from diverse contexts were formulated for various reasons. Some groups consisted of teachers who taught in the same school, while others constituted a combination of those who taught in

different schools. Each group had its own distinctive qualities, which largely determined how each group functioned and the processes that would be used. Some were established groups in which participants had a specific research project they pursued; for example, in one district there was a group of eleven grade seven, eight, and nine teachers who focussed on the implementation of a Writers' Workshop approach in their classrooms. At the initial meeting of these groups, teachers articulated questions they were interested in investigating as a result of their past discussions. Facilitating an established group that already had a central focus abbreviated the exploration process necessary for establishing a question. Teachers knew each other well and had developed a relatively high level of trust and openness. They were already committed to their topic and had compelling reasons for participating in the teacher research project.

Other groups came together because of a shared interest in a specific issue. In one district, a consultant invited twelve secondary teachers from different schools to be participants in the teacher research group. These teachers expressed a concern related to the increased drop-out rate in high school French Immersion programs. Through the teacher research group, they developed an action plan to investigate this issue.

Another group was formed as two small neighboring districts developed a joint district project which brought together ten teachers interested in investigating teacher and student collaboration. District staff invited anyone interested in the topic to become a participant in the teacher research group. Cross district sites in small school districts had two clear advantages: teachers benefited from working with colleagues from other

locations, and the total number of districts involved was increased without requiring a comparable increase in resources. Within this joint teacher research group, each participant kept a journal and logged collaborative incidents in their professional and personal lives. Some teachers focussed on collaborative planning at their school, while others interviewed colleagues who had expressed opinions about collaboration.

A whole staff became another teacher research group as they connected the process of teacher research with their professional development plan. This staff identified four questions related to areas of their practice they wanted to improve and teachers focussed on one area that was of interest to them. They met once a week before school in groups of two or three to discuss their research and once a month as a whole group with a facilitator. At this time they shared questions, concerns and dilemmas that emerged from their process of inquiry.

Many participants joined teacher research groups because of a shared interest in the concept of reflection tied to collegial research based in the action of their classroom practice. These were teachers who were actively looking for opportunities to participate in collaborative activities with their colleagues. Sometimes they were teachers who came from schools where the staff had been particularly active in the implementation of a learner-focussed curriculum (the Primary Program) and such teachers were often recognized in the district as thoughtful, effective teachers. Sometimes the participants came from schools where practitioners felt very isolated within the context of their particular school culture. These groups seldom had an initial common focus,

and most often, these participants did not come with one compelling issue they wanted to research.

Each group met approximately seven times, typically for three or four hours, over a seven month period, beginning in the fall and concluding in May. My role was to facilitate each session implementing the framework created for teacher research meetings, and to provide ongoing support to individual group members. I generally facilitated the meetings using the following sequence (as described in Chapter Two):

- Reflective Writing
- Conversations
- Research Questions
- Consulting/Work Sessions

Over the seven months, teachers generally used the plan created and described in *Field-based Research: A Working Guide* (1991). Initial meetings explored dilemmas, uncertainties or questions within teachers' practice. The facilitator supported participants in developing a research plan, collecting data, organizing, analyzing and interpreting data, and writing a final research report. Final reports were submitted to the Ministry of Education and local school district offices, and selected reports were summarized through a quarterly Primary Newsletter, *Reflective Practitioner*.

METHODOLOGICAL STANCE

This qualitative study uses interpretive, naturalistic methods of inquiry and will focus on both my and participants' interpretations of my role as facilitator within the context of teacher research groups. A noted limitation is that this research study relies on my interpretation as the researcher. All efforts have been made to provide detailed context in order to bring clarity for the reader; however, it is important to note that the bias of the researcher in selection and analysis of data is clearly another limitation (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). As much as it is possible to do so, it is also necessary to become aware of and to document the constraints that resulted from my role as the facilitator of the different groups.

DATA COLLECTION

The data sources and data collection are framed by the activities within the structure of the teacher research group meetings. Each research meeting involved teachers engaged in reflective writing, conversations about the writing, reporting on aspects of their collaborative inquiry, and a work session to continue to develop their research plans. The data sources and collection will reflect the activities in which participants engaged during the teacher research group meetings. Through the stories and "points of dissonance woven together by threads of similarities and differences" (Miller, 1990) embedded in teachers' reflective writing, transcriptions of small and large group conversations, video clips from teacher research group meetings, teacher interviews, my personal field notes and journal entries, and a

participants' questionnaire, I propose to unravel my role as facilitator of teacher research groups.

Data were collected throughout the year at the teacher research meetings, and at the end of every year as participants were asked to complete various questionnaires. In addition, I had access to data gathered in all twenty-five groups (12 of which I facilitated) for the purpose of evaluating the role of teacher research groups in implementing the new program. Data were collected through the following sources:

- my field notes
- my journal entries
- participants' reflective writing
- participants' questionnaires
- participants' final reports
- audio taped interviews, and transcripts from the audiotape
- video tape of teacher research group meetings, and transcripts from the video tape

As part of the additional data gathering for the larger project, I telephoned and interviewed twenty-four district personnel in sixteen school districts that were sites for teacher research groups. Although these individuals were not participants, they were aware of the existence of the teacher research group in their respective districts. Often these were people who had been the district contact, and had been pro-active in establishing the group. These telephone interviews were a way of amplifying existing conceptions, however these data were not central to my research findings.

Reflective writing

Each teacher research meeting began with ten or fifteen minutes of reflective writing. The reflective writing was collected at the end of every teacher research group meeting. The purpose was to collect some kind of record, as well as to build in focussed reflective talk about the writing. Participants' writing was anonymous, but I did ask them to develop a personal numerical code and to include it, as well as the date, on the top right hand corner of their submission. I was able to notice any changes that took place in a specific participant's writing because of the personal code.

Each piece of reflective writing varied in length from one to three pages. Sometimes the writing took the form of lists, webs, Venn diagrams, sketching, cartoons, or poetry. Participants were encouraged to write about uncertainties that existed in the dailiness of teaching and in their lives, and to explore compelling dilemmas as they unravelled their thoughts and ideas about teaching and learning. Over the four year project, approximately seventy writing samples per year, per group, were collected. This equalled a total collection of approximately 3,270 samples of participants' reflective writing. Initially, the writing was typed and included in the final reports submitted to the Ministry of Education at the end of every year (see Appendix B for participants' writing samples).

I analyzed both my journal and participants' writing by reading the various pieces and noting emerging themes, questions, dilemmas, and changes over time. I also used various quotes from teachers' writing in final reports, documents, or journal articles focussing on the project. During the

reflective writing time, I also wrote observations, comments, descriptions of conversations, or reflections in my journal. Selected excerpts have been woven throughout the text.

Journal and Field Notes

I kept field notes throughout the teacher research meetings as I recorded various observations, highlights from the conversations, emerging themes, new dilemmas, or any concerns expressed by participants. I recorded requests for readings on specific topics or questions which I needed, as sometimes I required clarification relating to various issues surrounding the research process. The field notes helped me to make sense of situations, conversations, questions, or issues that were often dilemmas in my own practice as a facilitator. In addition, they also helped me mentally to play back the meetings and reflect upon specific participants, interactions, conversations, my feelings, reactions or activities.

Participants' questionnaire

One source of data was the participants' questionnaire completed by participants at the end of the four year project. At the final meeting teachers were asked to complete the form anonymously and place it in a large brown envelope provided. This particular questionnaire asked participants to respond to five questions:

1. What do you see as the three most important roles/responsibilities of a facilitator?

2. What are the most important qualities/skills for a facilitator to have?
3. Overall, do you think teacher research groups should have facilitators? Please explain.
4. What would you expect to be the main differences between a group with a facilitator and one without a facilitator?
5. Please describe a time when the facilitator in your group made a significant difference to you and/or your work? (Or to someone else). Include as much detail as possible.

I compiled the data from all the participants' responses to the five questions, then as I sorted the data, categorized each individual response into emerging themes. Initially, I developed categories by reading each response searching for connections between ideas. I re-entered participants' responses under emerging categories and modified these categories throughout the analysis as the participants' responses provided the themes. The purpose of developing the categories was to examine my role as the facilitator from the participants' perspective. I developed five categories and a description of each follows:

1. Shaping a way to work together:
 - My role as facilitator in creating a cohesive group, building an environment of trust, refocussing ideas, validating work, and valuing all voices.
2. Making connections:
 - My role as facilitator in providing the links between the 'big picture', the Ministry, groups, teacher's work, students and research questions by using knowledge, resources, and expertise.

3. **Developing a focus for collaborative teacher research:**
 - The role of the facilitator in developing the framework for the teacher research meetings, and keeping the groups focussed on what they have researched, by using leadership and organizational skills.

4. **Provoking and clarifying the conversations:**
 - My role as facilitator in listening, clarifying, questioning, reframing thinking, reflecting and provoking conversations to support teachers in the process of inquiry.

5. **Creating and sustaining interpersonal relationships:**
 - My role as facilitator in creating and sustaining interpersonal relationships within the various groups by supporting, guiding, empathizing with and encouraging participants.

Data from the participants' responses to the questionnaire were used to determine participants' perspectives on my role as facilitator in teacher research groups. Excerpts of summaries of the data are interlaced throughout the text (see Appendix C for sample data).

Participants' final reports

Another data source was the participants' research reports submitted at the end of every year of the project. Over the four years of the project, there were over 250 final research reports submitted by the participants in the teacher research groups. Most final reports addressed the following:

- research question, why it was important

- context of the research
- values and beliefs of the researchers
- data collection and analysis
- findings
- implications, further questions

The collaborative partnerships and/or triads within the teacher research groups researched issues such as continuous progress, multi-age classes, reading, writing, inclusion, integration, metacognition, goal-setting, letter grades, reporting, self-evaluation, and self-reflection. The following are examples of specific research questions:

- Do our students apply the problem solving strategies they have learned in the classroom to situations outside this environment?
- How do we get students to take responsibility for their own learning?
- What are children's attitudes and understandings of science?
- Do visual art experiences foster the development of the characteristics of successful learners in students?
- Does creating student awareness of appropriate social interactions enhance the classroom learning environment?
- What are our perceptions, when implementing programs which promote reflective action?
- Can we involve the students in learning experiences that will increase our students' understanding of and ability to

communicate about the concept of inclusion and will this enable them to be more inclusive in their behavior?

- How can we help students become more actively involved in their own learning through goal-setting?
- Has writing math penpal letters helped my students to become better communicators of written mathematics?
- Do programs, such as Second Step, decrease violence and promote exceptional behaviour in our world; or address adult inability to express feelings in social conflicts and to a much greater degree in our lives?
- How will the language of a linguistically disadvantaged child be affected by positive verbal interaction with an adult on a daily basis? How can we, as classroom teachers, use our time with the children to the best advantage?

The final research reports provided another data source; often participants reflected on their experiences with me as a facilitator, teacher research, their learning, and the professional and personal impact that belonging to a teacher research group had upon their lives. Sometimes participants reflected on my role as facilitator, providing data from their perspective of the effectiveness or worthwhiledness of the position (see Appendix D for a sample of teacher researchers' final research report).

Audio-tape

I asked participants if they would tape conversations, outside of the context of the teacher research group, reflecting on my role as a facilitator.

Several participants either mailed me audio tapes or submitted them at subsequent meetings. Data were collected through two audio taped conversations of teacher researchers reflecting on specific critical incidents where there was a direct correlation between my facilitative role and changes they made in their teaching practice. The audio tapes have been transcribed and excerpts have been used in the text.

Videotape

Another source of data was videotapes taken by the Ministry of Education during seven separate meetings of two teacher research groups I facilitated. The videotapes documented what took place at the teacher research meetings and in classrooms of two of the teacher researchers. These videotapes also documented conversations between teacher researchers and students, focussing on the impact of belonging to the teacher research group on changing practice and on student learning. All videotapes were transcribed, providing a text for analysis.

I read the transcriptions and reviewed the tape in search of data that were relevant to my role as facilitator. Most of the data recorded conversations about participants' dilemmas, questions, or current status of their research project. The video tape also documented the process of the teacher research meetings. The final reflections, in the video, provide data about participants' perspectives on the teacher research project.

This study is exploratory in that I am examining my role as facilitator in creating teacher research groups. It requires an approach that provides an

understanding of experience and raises questions about the quality of my work as a facilitator, thus a qualitative, or naturalistic, approach to educational research is deemed most appropriate.

There is no burden of proof. There is only the world to experience and understand. Shed the burden of proof to lighten the load for the journey of experience.

Qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities -the capacity to learn from others. (Halcom's Evaluation Laws, cited in Patton, 1990, p. 7)

CHAPTER FOUR

Entering the Maze of Facilitating Teacher Research Groups

The facilitator has [made] a significant difference throughout the process. She always kept us on task, focussed on what was important, students and their learning. She has encouraged my inquiry every step along the way, while always honoring what I have accomplished and respecting me as a professional. She taught us all much about ourselves, each other and the tremendous differences both positive and negative that we can have on the lives we touch. (researching teacher, 1994)

The facilitator is the thread that keeps us together. She was a kindred spirit in my journey as a teacher researcher. (researching teacher, 1994)

This chapter focusses on my four year journey creating, shaping and supporting teacher research groups throughout British Columbia. These were communities of teachers with common goals and interests engaged in the process of "systematic intentional inquiry" (Lytle and Cochran-Smith, 1990) into the action of teaching. They were teacher research groups that functioned to reflect critically on their teaching and rethink their assumptions about schooling. The "larger mission" for participants was to radically but quietly make an impact on school reform and to contribute to the knowledge base on teaching and learning with the ultimate purpose of making a difference to students' learning.

Teacher research groups are important because they engage teachers in talk to describe, discuss and debate teaching. In the teacher research

groups, I observed teachers jointly reconstructing their knowledge about teaching and learning through talk. I witnessed teachers taking risks with their thinking, collaborating with one another, and developing a sense of efficacy through dialogue. Cochran-Smith and Lytle(1993) suggest that teachers make their tacit knowledge more explicit through talk. Time for teachers to talk to each other is especially important in our profession where teacher development is often characterized by the transmission of knowledge rather than joint construction of knowledge. Lieberman(1986) suggests that talking is a way for groups to "learn to struggle collectively", "a process that rarely aims at or ends in single or definitive conclusions" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, p. 96).

Teacher research groups are also significant because they can 'improve life chances for kids' (Cochran-Smith, 1994). What this term refers to is that race, class, gender and culture may all be inequitable, but if we are improving our practice as teachers, we are improving conditions for kids. Teacher research helps us raise questions about diversity, reform, and knowledge for the purpose of social justice and educational change. Cochran-Smith(1994) emphasizes the need for talk to begin with the people inside the community, where questions are raised about what counts as knowledge, whose interests are being served and how social justice is ensured for all children. Teacher research groups engage practitioners in exchanging and building upon one another's ideas in a way that cannot take place in isolation. Teaching is often an isolated activity, with little emphasis placed on working collaboratively with one another. The solo act of teaching is often part of what contributes to isolating students from further knowledge and rich ideas. Often the dailiness of teaching provides little time for teachers to talk about their work, to learn

from one another, to ask questions about their practice, to reflect, or interact professionally with their colleagues. Participants frequently expressed these feelings of isolation in schools, and they valued the conversations in the teacher research group meetings:

I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of this teacher research group. The most important part for me is the talk. I have learned so much from our discussions. It's also been reassuring to hear that others have experienced similar successes and frustrations. Discussions have given me new ideas to try in the classroom. Our conversations in our group have pushed me to think about my classroom practice much more reflectively and critically. It has provided me with an opportunity to observe children with clearer focus. I have found myself observing things about children that I am sure would have gone unnoticed had we not been focusing on how children learn. I didn't realize what little time we have for this different kind of talk in schools. And these are the conversations that make a difference to my teaching and my learning. (researching teacher, 1993)

Being part of a teacher research group has been a valuable exercise as an entity to itself. I feel that my teaching is recognized and valued and that my opinions are valued. It points out how infrequently we talk about education where colleagues have time to really listen and honor what you say.
(researching teacher, 1992)

I listened to teachers talk about the ways in which their participation in teacher research groups had impacted upon their interactions with students. Participants talked about their students becoming more motivated to learn, as they themselves became excited about their own inquiry process. Many participants thought that the nature of classroom discourse changed and

student motivation to learn increased as teachers and students collaborated to address relevant questions together. Teachers were excited about how their curriculum became much deeper and richer as they focussed deeply on their inquiry. They talked about looking "deeper into their practice" through the process of continually evaluating and re-evaluating (researching teacher, 1994). One teacher writes:

The process has been a useful one that has positively affected my teaching. For me, it has been refreshing and to a certain extent renewing, to feel valued. This "valuing" has in turn helped me focus on valuing the students in my class and to a broader extent, in my school. (researching teacher, 1992)

CREATING, SHAPING, AND SUPPORTING TEACHER RESEARCH

GROUPS: MY JOURNEY INTO THE LABYRINTH

Although I did not realize it at the time, creating teacher research groups was the process of making my own maze. The maze, for me, was my practice of facilitating teacher research groups. In the initial stages of this four year project I had minimal experience with the notion that research by teachers into their own practice could contribute to professional development and the knowledge base about teaching and learning. It was a relatively new concept for me to think about teacher knowledge as a significant way of knowing about teaching and learning, and academic knowledge as a way of informing practice rather than driving it. Through the processes of facilitating teacher research groups, I began to understand the potential for

powerful connections between teacher research and school reform. Through developing teacher research groups, I observed practice transforming and reshaping, and new questions emerging for both the researchers and myself.

In the fall of 1990, I began conversations with a colleague, Sharon Jeroski, to develop a process and a structure for implementing teacher research groups. We worked together as facilitators for the purpose of supporting teachers in scrutinizing and improving their practice through the implementation of a learner-focussed curriculum. My role as a facilitator involved designing a structure for the teacher research groups, shaping a way to work together, developing a framework for collaborative teacher research meetings, and facilitating teacher research. Each group developed into a unique culture woven together by twisted threads of individual and collective experiences as participants created their own story, continually redefining their relationships with knowledge about teaching and learning. To provide an example, recently a teacher who had taken part in one of the teacher research groups over four years said to me, "We all really miss the teacher research groups. Ours was so unique, we had such a close relationship, where everyone felt comfortable talking - were all the groups like that?" The uniqueness of each such community also created conditions that were uncertain for me as a facilitator, and which will be discussed later in this chapter. The processes and structure for the teacher research groups developed over time and through my "lived experiences" of facilitating teacher research groups (van Manen, 1986). They were invariably rethought, reshaped and recreated as I travelled through the passageways of the labyrinth.

The role of facilitator was much more complex, more mazy than I initially realized. I wondered how to develop trusting environments and interpersonal relationships to create spaces for teachers to find their own voices. How would I organize time, schedule meetings, determine the size of the groups or develop a framework for the teacher research meetings? How would I support researching teachers in developing a network to make connections and share their inquiry with their colleagues? How would I know when to direct the process subtly or when to provide intervention? Would these teacher research groups even need an outside facilitator to direct their process? Were these not self-directed professionals who take responsibility for their own learning? Would my role as the facilitator create a hierarchy that impedes conversations, rather than fostering them?

My role as a facilitator was in constant evolution. My recurrent obstacles, constant dilemmas, and numerous fears elicited anxious yet intriguing complexities as I lived in the dissonance of searching rather than in the comfort of findings. These issues are woven throughout the themes emerging from my role. The following four key aspects became evident through the process of developing teacher research communities:

1. Designing a structure for teacher research groups
2. Shaping a way to work together: creating a climate for teacher research
3. Developing a framework for teacher research meetings
4. Facilitating teacher research networks

Designing a structure for teacher research groups and shaping a way to work together, both refer to building a model for all the teacher research groups in

the larger project (which consisted of twenty-five teacher research groups). Developing a framework for teacher research meetings refers to the particular processes I used in facilitating twelve individual teacher research groups. The analysis of each facet of my role of facilitator will include both my reflections and participants' perceptions, as well as excerpts from my journal and participants informal writing. What is presented in this chapter is based on my written reflections, field notes, and journal entries, and participants' informal writing, interviews, and questionnaires. All the data and examples used in this research study came from my own teacher research groups, even though these were part of the larger project.

1. Designing a structure for teacher research groups

Designing a structure for researching teachers was an emerging process wherein a tentative structure evolved and fluctuated over time. I deliberately set out to implement some strategies such as informal writing, sharing sessions, and time for each voice to be heard; yet other strategies evolved as I began to understand the experience of facilitating teacher research groups. Within my own learning process, I continued to challenge the frames of reference or my thinking, in order to enlarge my vision of the role of facilitator. Many factors forced me to reshape and rethink the structure for teacher research groups as I was discovering the uniqueness of each group. I utilized the same framework within each meeting yet every teacher research group had its own distinctive qualities. Some of the factors that forced me to reconstruct the framework for teacher research meetings were: the individuality of each participant, the interpersonal dynamics of the group, the

specific issues teachers were researching and the impact of the most recent political mandates legislated by the Ministry of Education (and how these were being interpreted by various School Districts). Each group was engaged in a struggle with the lived experiences of their commonalities and differences. The quandaries embedded in those differences were often both dilemmas for me, and simultaneously contributed to my learning that facilitating research groups involved a labyrinth-like process of self-inquiry.

When I began to create teacher research communities, I had many questions. The budget and geographical locations of the teacher research groups had been previously determined, based on equitable distribution throughout the province, so these were constraints on creating a framework. Particularly in the first few months, I asked myself: What does a structure look like for developing twenty-five teacher research groups? How do I organize the release-time allotted to teachers within the budget? How many times and how frequently should I schedule the groups to meet? Where would they meet? Who would decide? How would I support teachers in working collaboratively? How many participants should be in each group? How do I support researchers in shaping questions that fit within the review of the Primary Program Framework yet would be compelling for them?

In my practice as a facilitator, there were six components of creating a structure for teacher research groups that emerged as dominant issues. They were: scheduling meetings, determining the size of the groups, physical location of meetings, organizing time, working collaboratively, and developing a focus for teacher research group meetings. What follows are my descriptions, reflections, and analysis of each component of creating a

structure for teacher research groups; and problematic dilemmas, issues, and questions which emerged from that structure.

Scheduling meetings

Each group would meet with a facilitator, approximately seven times throughout the year, for about three or four hours, once a month. Meetings began in October and ended with teacher research report writing in May. Monthly meetings appeared to be necessary to sustain the commitment of the group. Teachers had many priorities in their personal and professional lives and monthly meetings, preferably at a consistent time, helped to establish the research group as one of those priorities.

Teachers themselves decided on meeting dates and blocks of time; each group I worked with had very different needs and preferences, as each teacher research group had its own distinctive qualities and its own unique dynamic. In some cases, meetings were scheduled for full days, especially in locations that incurred a lengthy and costly flight for us as facilitators. For example, the cost to fly to Fort St. John was seven hundred dollars, and although the flying time was approximately two hours, it often involved leaving the day before the meeting because of airline schedules. Another site for a research group was Castlegar where the airport was constantly in fog, and often in the winter the airplanes were rerouted to another smaller town, resulting in passengers undertaking a seven hour bus journey. Transportation to the meetings for participants was also sometimes problematic. For example, the Prince Rupert teacher research group had participants who were teaching in an area

accessible by air only. To attend meetings, participants had to journey, weather permitting, by float plane.

At the initial meetings, participants made decisions about when they would like to meet, and most groups met after school or in the evening in order to minimize the disruptions in their classrooms. Teachers did not want to be out of their classrooms except when absolutely necessary. They felt the amount of preparation for a substitute teacher and being absent on a consistent basis from their classroom was a detriment to meeting during the day. Therefore, they preferred to meet after school or to schedule a dinner meeting.

The same scheduling time for meetings had different implications depending on the nature of the teacher research group. On one hand, after school meetings or dinner meetings could have their own set of challenges. They were not always as productive as teacher research meetings scheduled during the day. Fatigue was a definite issue, particularly after school. Teachers were tired from teaching all day or from the stress that may have resulted from a school-related incident. On the other hand, some teacher research groups thrived at being able to attend a dinner meeting at a participant's home. These groups felt the atmosphere created by being in someone's home, as opposed to meeting in a school or district office, was far more conducive to building a discourse community.

Determining the size of teacher research groups

In designing the structure for teacher research groups, I wrestled with how many participants could work together most effectively. During the initial stages of the project, I facilitated one teacher research group which combined two school districts and totalled twenty-four participants. In this size of group, participants appeared to be reluctant to openly and honestly voice their questions and dilemmas about their practice. It appeared to be difficult to create an atmosphere of trust or openness with so many participants. It became increasingly clear that I could not nurture explorations, interpersonal relationships, and conversations, nor provide the support which was required by these participants who were all new to the process of teacher research. The disabling silence which permeated those meetings provided evidence that the large group size muted the voices.

Participants' perspectives supported this notion as they wrote about the ideal size for a teacher research group. They believed that with groups of over twelve participants, the development of a supportive, trusting environment, the forming of interpersonal relationships, the amount of individualized support participants received, and the air time necessary for all voices to be heard were all critically impaired. As a result of this large group experience, in subsequent years, I maintained the group size at ten to twelve participants, a size which appeared optimum for fostering diversity of perspectives, stimulating conversations and having enough voices to create the dynamic interaction that made the groups effective. It was vital for the group to be small enough to create an atmosphere in which participants felt comfortable sharing their ideas, questions and uncertainties.

Physical location of the meetings

The physical location of the meetings appeared to influence the way groups worked together. Meeting locations were determined by the district contact person who was most often a district principal or consultant. The locations of the meetings varied depending on the availability of space in schools and district offices. They were held at teacher resource centres, school libraries, district staffrooms, vacant classrooms, fine arts theatres, hotel conference rooms, restaurants, or a participant's homes.

It seemed that a less institutionalized setting often created a more conducive atmosphere for working together; however at times it was also problematic as it sometimes contributed to a less productive session. For example, I recall a teacher research meeting in a small district in northern British Columbia. The flight to this beautiful west coast town was of major expense, thus I did not have the luxury of ever rescheduling meetings. In my role as facilitator, I was contracted to fulfill certain obligations and I also had certain expectations of what we might cover during our limited meeting times. As the consultant met me at the airport she explained all school district facilities were being used, so "fortunately we were able to secure a dining room at a waterfront restaurant" (District Consultant, 1993).

Although this particular location was therapeutically beautiful, I felt it impeded the productivity of the meetings. What I began to notice was my own anxiety combined with the realization that I did have a definite agenda that I wanted to cover. I reflected upon my need to control where the meetings were located, and therefore theoretically control more of what I

perceived needed to be accomplished. I felt a sense of helplessness as the on-site collective experiences of the group clearly dominated the meetings, and I outwardly posed no resistance. Inwardly, my apprehensiveness increased as I realized the discrepancies in our agendas. I began to question once again my role as facilitator, since my beliefs about collaborative teacher research and my apparent anxiety to cover my own agenda created overwhelming contradictions in myself. Did I have a right to an agenda? Was I trying to cover a body of knowledge, rather than uncover teachers evolving knowledge? Who owned these meetings?

Organizing time

Time is one of the most critical factors in the formation and maintenance of learning communities for teacher research. Unlike other professions, which are organized to support research activities, teaching is a profession in which it is extraordinarily difficult to find enough time to collect data and it is almost impossible to find time to reflect, reread, or share with colleagues. (Goodlad, 1984; Griffin, 1986; Zeichner, 1986, in Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, p. 91))

As the authors have indicated, teaching does not provide teachers with the flexibility of time to think about their practice or engage in ongoing discourse. As facilitators, we strongly believed that building teacher research groups entailed allocating teachers release time. Within the structure we provided teachers with five days of release time to support their collaborative inquiry. Individually and collectively teacher research groups made decisions about how to use that time. Approximately half of the allocated time was

used for meetings, either during the school day or at after school dinner sessions. The remainder of the allocated release time was utilized in a variety of ways such as in partnerships observing in each other's classrooms, videotaping each other teaching, collaborating on research plans, or writing final reports. If teachers chose to work on their own time rather than use release time, they received an honorarium equivalent to teacher on call wages.

An unexpected theme emerged for me as a facilitator. Teachers felt that their process of systematic inquiry into the action of teaching must be valued as a way of knowing about teaching and learning, because the Ministry of Education was supporting this project with release time. The release time or honorarium appeared to validate and enhance the worthiness of their inquiry. Interestingly, it was not the personnel in Ministry of Education who initiated the proposal for teacher release time but rather the contractor for the project. Some Ministry of Education staff struggled with the notion that government funds were being allocated to a project of this magnitude that focussed on developing teacher research groups as a way of reviewing the implementation of learner-focussed curricula, rather than producing a tangible product that would prove that time and money was spent profitably, thereby satisfying a need for a traditional form of accountability. Some of these bureaucrats raised the question: How do you prove that developing a network of teacher research groups has substantively contributed to change to education? As a facilitator, I was constantly aware of the threat of losing funding because this was a politically low-profile, grass-roots project. I wondered how important it was, both in my role as a facilitator and in my role as a teacher, to develop an awareness of the political agenda. I wondered how to profile this project to make an impact on policy-makers.

Throughout the four year process, I realized that the teacher research meetings required sustained blocks of uninterrupted time extending for at least three to four hours. Sometimes the meetings were scheduled for all day; however, this was not often possible due to the cost of releasing teachers. Sufficient chunks of time appeared to be necessary to ensure all participants' voices were heard, to build an atmosphere of trust, to talk about uncertainties of practice, and to implement a framework that was both flexible and based on the needs of the specific teacher research group, yet at the same time supported individual teachers in engaging in systematic inquiry.

Over time, many of the teacher research groups remained relatively intact, thus developing a rich local context for teacher research. Although some participants chose to leave their group for various reasons, most remained as members of these active learning communities for at least two and sometimes four years. In groups which had been meeting for more than one year with experienced teacher researchers as participants, the group members were more at ease with the uncertainties and complexities involved in the process of inquiry. Each group developed their own unique culture for change and owned their discomfort with that change.

Through the processes ingrained in the structure, participants began to look through a different lens at their work. They had met together consistently for months which nurtured relationships within the discourse community, and participants felt more comfortable with one another. Teachers who initially appeared reluctant to speak or share, now had voices in the teacher research meetings. For many participants, they gained confidence both personally and professionally, and appeared to develop a sense of

efficacy. Participants who had belonged to the group for more than one year appeared to be more comfortable with the dissonance of questions rather than the constraints of answers.

At the same time as there were benefits to having groups stay together over time, there were also challenges resulting from this longevity. For example, a new participant who came into a teacher research group where rituals, shared experiences and previous histories had contributed to building a unique culture, sometimes experienced discomfort and uncertainties. For example, one new participant in such an established group wrote:

When I first came into the group, it was like being a new student in a school. I didn't want to speak up because I wasn't sure what I said would fit with the group's experience. I wondered if I belonged in this group of people who knew what they were doing and why they were here. She [facilitator] had a way of making me feel all right about that and she had ideas to get me back on track. (researching teacher, 1993)

New participants often wrote about their feelings of isolation and intrusion as they grappled with the notion of teacher research while at the same time interacting with unknown colleagues. Understandably, for some new participants, this increased their feelings of insecurity and it often took longer for them to take risks and to feel safe in this environment which valued creating and sustaining interpersonal relationships. Interestingly, some seasoned participants also experienced anxiety when new participants entered the group, as they struggled to be inclusive in their conversations rather than exclusive. Experienced participants knew the framework for the teacher research meetings and possessed background knowledge and lived

experiences in teacher research. They often had no tolerance for the new participant who, for lack of experience with the process of inquiry in the teacher research group, sometimes tried to resolve colleague's dilemmas, or interrupted participant's stories with their solutions. I struggled with when to lead in those situations and when and how to enable new participants in the transition of belonging to a teacher research group. I wondered how many times I made assumptions about new participants' comfort level that actually increased their anxiety, uncertainty and insecurity in the very culture wherein I was trying to nurture a sense of belonging and trust. I often assumed that newcomers to the groups felt much more comfortable than they actually might have been. This is an issue that parallels the experience of new students in classrooms; and how often do we as teachers assume that we do not have to make any particular effort to welcome new members in our schools?

Working collaboratively

The teacher research project has enabled me to take a better look at my own practices in the classroom. It has been a valuable experience to meet with colleagues, and most importantly to have the gift of time to talk with colleagues. I valued working with a partner as I admit to a high level of trepidation upon beginning this project. My partner and I found that we had much in common and as a result were able to help each other to look at aspects of our teaching in a very different way. We were amazed with the common elements that kept coming up. (researching teacher, 1993)

In creating the framework for teacher research groups, we asked teachers to work in partnerships or triads for the purpose of increasing support to one another and creating a collaborative context in the discourse community. It appeared the most effective grouping in the early stages were ones in which teachers came with self-selected partners. Group interaction took place, between-meeting discussions among participants were more likely to occur, and individuals felt supported as they shared their ideas and questions with a partner they knew. However, teachers were not excluded because they did not have a partner and many participants were successful in establishing partnerships (or triads) within the research group. The critical factor seemed to be a willingness to become a partner where relationships did not exist prior to belonging to the group. The following is an excerpt from a participant's informal writing which illustrated the support one partner received from another:

Mixed feelings today. Change? Important idea for me this time. I enjoyed the process Brian and I went through and I have known Brian for 20 years to say 'hi' to, but now I feel I've got to know him better as my partner in the teacher research group. He stretches my thinking and opened my mind to different avenues. . . . After working with Brian on our teacher research project, I realized that the changes I made to my teaching style were exciting, stimulating and made me grow. Change? I'm sure I'm still capable of it without causing myself too much stress. The fascinating thing in talking with Brian was that our feelings about change and our thoughts were so similar. It really helped me to work with him. (researching teacher, 1992)

The dark side of collegiality sometimes emerged when I imposed the framework of collaboration and participants worked with someone they did

not necessarily choose, or when participants preferred to work alone. Sometimes the interpersonal dynamics between partners just did not work, especially for the participants who insisted they worked more effectively individually. These participants experienced difficulties because the nature of teacher research groups is one of collaboration rather than isolation. Furthermore, in partnerships in which the collegiality could be described as "contrived" (Hargreaves, 1994), the individual teachers were usually located at different schools. Hargreaves (1994, pp. 195-196) has appropriately characterized "contrived collegiality" as being administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable. That is, it is a combination of features that may be more compatible with the purposes of bureaucratic control than with the purposes of improved teaching and learning. However, I would maintain that this study demonstrates two additional features that Hargreaves has not taken into account; first, physical separation, i.e., being located in different schools, and second, when the habitual practice of working in isolation is valued in the minds of some teachers over the prospect of working collaboratively. Thus contrived collegiality is not simply imposed by a hierarchical system but comes about when bureaucratic imposition combines with physical separation and teachers' reticence to work collaboratively with one another. Thus, teachers who resist working together because they think it may create an awkward dissonance, because they perceive acting alone to be safer in that their work will not be challenged and they do not have to ask questions of themselves, may be as much part of the problem of contrived collegiality as any systemic dysfunctionality. Indeed, inasmuch as the administration contrives collegiality for its own systemic purposes (usually framed in terms of change and improvement), so teachers contrive collegiality in order to

frustrate these purposes and to protect their own sense of professional comfort.

Physical separation was a further disadvantage because it meant that the daily conversations where teachers exchange ideas, seek one another's advice or share classroom stories, in the hallways, between classrooms, or in staff rooms, simply did not exist, thereby denying them a common professional context. Scheduling problems arose in terms of determining when to meet for such activities as designing an interview or observation schedule, practicing specific research techniques (such as interviewing or recording), interpreting results, or drafting reports. These collaborative partner meetings were often longer than regular teacher research meetings and sometimes extended over several days when a great deal of information had been collected. Even self-selected partnerships at different schools found it more difficult to support one another than those located at the same school.

Another problematic situation sometimes occurred in partnerships that had a lengthy professional and/or personal relationship prior to belonging to the group. Often these partnerships had developed their own common discourse, a set of strongly held values and beliefs, and already defined personal, professional, and practical knowledge about teaching and learning. Their knowledge about the action of teaching was often reinforced daily by one another when they shared the same professional context and remained unchallenged by outside voices. These established partnerships became an issue when the participants became unreceptive to critique and change. They sometimes found difficulty in questioning their practices with the result that their current pedagogy became further ingrained through their conversations

and lived experiences of teaching and learning. These partnerships often appeared to prefer to be the givers of advice rather than the seekers of knowledge.

As a facilitator, these situations posed some ongoing tension, as I would subtly attempt to re-direct the process, extend thinking or provoke the conversations. Sometimes I felt it necessary to intervene even when it was not invited or possibly appropriate. These were situations in which I constantly questioned my role as facilitator. I asked myself: Is intervention part of my role? Surely these are professionals who are interacting in self-directed, self-actualized ways. Why do I think I need to re-direct the process of the teacher research meetings? Is my re-direction an effort to maintain equity in the group or to grasp control? Is this my role as facilitator or should I be removing myself to allow the group dynamics to evolve naturally? My responses, interactions and the questioning, searching perspective that was inherent in my role as a facilitator, produced tensions when I faced possibly locked doors within the labyrinth - how can you move people beyond the individual chambers in the maze? How do you deal with practitioners who are not willing to challenge their own practice?

2. Shaping a way to work together: creating a climate for teacher research

Another key aspect of my role as facilitator was my deliberate attempt to shape a way of working together as a group of researching teachers. We formulated teacher research groups to engage participants in the process of inquiry for the purpose of honing the craft of teaching and to promote student

learning in an intentional way through the implementation of a learner focussed curriculum. Three categories emerged as critical factors in shaping a way to work together. Within the context of developing teacher research groups, these factors were: building a trusting environment; creating and sustaining interpersonal relationships; and developing a framework for the teacher research meetings. Depending on specific incidents in the different groups, these factors either created possibilities or reflected difficulties in shaping a way to work together.

It was interesting to examine participants' responses specific to the theme of shaping a way to work together, as an unexpected finding emerged: most participants wanted the facilitator to have leadership qualities, and to provide a framework for teacher research groups as opposed to developing it themselves. Participants frequently wrote about the importance of the leadership the facilitator provided. Many felt it was a vital component which was essential to the "cohesion and validity of the research group". This included taking responsibility for managing the teacher research groups as well as making suggestions or "leading members to ideas that will facilitate their work". They commented on the importance of their facilitator "knowing when to lead, give direction, facilitate or just listen". For some participants, an effective leader implemented a framework for meetings, supported participants in working together, chaired meetings, managed time, organized materials, and provided information. (researching teachers, 1994)

Some participants indicated that one of the main differences between a group with and one without a facilitator was "a leader may emerge, and others in the group may not be comfortable with the dynamics, or the

emerging leader may or may not be favorable". They indicated this was particularly worrisome if participants worked in the same professional context wherein they did not feel comfortable challenging another participant. Participants talked about the advantage of having an outside voice who could ask questions, provoke conversations, and nudge participants in a way they felt was not possible if one were working in the same professional context. They believed the outside voice to be "more neutral and have a more balanced perspective" because they were not part of the daily school culture. Some participants feared that there could be "a lack of leadership which could result in the group going off track and losing a sense of purpose" without an outside facilitator. Others were concerned about the amount of time it would require to develop an organizational structure. "If a chair did not emerge or be chosen there would probably be a lot of time wasted talking around topics and being off topic". For some participants they believed "a successful team of researchers was contingent upon a skilled leader "(researching teachers, 1994).

Participants talked about the importance of the facilitator in offering a balance within the framework to keep discussions on track and focussed in teacher research meetings. Participants indicated that often in the teacher research meetings it was necessary for the facilitator to balance the need for individuals to vent their personal and professional experiences with the need to keep the group focussed on the topic or issue being discussed. Many participants appreciated a framework that was flexible enough to permit conversations and ideas to be spontaneously included as the focal point of the meetings.

Building a trusting environment

One of the significant factors that contributed to shaping a way to work together was building an environment of trust which fostered honest dialogue, valued uncertainty, respected diversity, and simultaneously challenged each persons' frames of reference and ways of knowing for the purpose of enlarging visions of teaching and learning. My role as facilitator was to emphasize and value the conversation, through the process of discussion and reflection. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) suggest that the willingness for teachers to "describe classroom experiences and analyze their own responses [was dependent] on the evolving trust of the group and individual participants' willingness to disclose their previously unexamined ways of categorizing and interpreting their observations" (p. 97).

Building a trusting environment in the teacher research groups was critical to the effectiveness of the learning community because trust building encouraged risk taking, honesty, accountability, and allowed participants to gain the confidence required in openly rethinking and reconsidering aspects of their practice. Participants were willing to ask open-ended questions of themselves and of others as I collectively worked at creating an environment of acceptance and support. Building an environment of trust appeared to contribute to the creation of these intellectual communities and supported voices which may have been marginalized in the past. This was expressed by the following three participants who write:

I entered the group four years ago with trepidation, feeling quite insecure but the facilitator gave me the confidence to speak out and share thoughts and opinions. (researching teacher, 1994)

She had a significant impact on my teaching career. She has given me the avenue to express my opinions and has helped me in developing a sense of belonging in the group. I was glad that a core group of teachers stayed throughout the years . . . As a result of walking away from the meetings with greater awareness and a positive feeling about myself, I feel that my students also had a different confidence about expressing their opinions. (researching teacher, 1994)

Belonging to this teacher research group has given me the confidence that what I am thinking is worth saying (most of the time). This experience of becoming a teacher researcher has supported me in expressing myself not just in this group, but in the coldness of my staffroom, and in the isolation of my school. For the first time in my lengthy teaching career, I am willing to risk hearing my own voice speaking with my own words to talk about what is important to me in my classroom, in my school and in my life. (researching teacher, 1992)

Participants indicated that they valued my role as facilitator in shaping a way to work together that created a climate for teacher research and established a group cohesiveness in an atmosphere where they took risks with their thinking. During teacher research group meetings, they wrote about the importance of a facilitator who created a "forgiving atmosphere where it was safe for people to open up and talk about real issues" in teaching and learning. Participants wanted a safe place as their "hearts [were] so often on the line in [the] teacher research group meetings". They valued the group atmosphere which was "conducive to inquiry in a collegial yet challenging forum". Establishing a collegial atmosphere allowed "teachers to grow professionally and personally" (researching teachers, 1994).

Participants expressed the importance of a facilitator who valued each person as a professional and as a contributor to the group. They expressed a need to have their thinking, their questions and their work validated both by each other and through the facilitator's positive feedback. Participants talked about the importance of the role of the facilitator in creating a safe environment for professional sharing and dialogue, something which often did not exist in their own school community. Participants felt it was imperative for me as a facilitator to ensure that every voice was heard and to "include and respect everyone's point of view - an enabler who [valued] all contributions to the group and [made] everyone feel that their ideas were valued and worthwhile" (researching teacher, 1994). When teachers feel valued and their voices are being heard, we might assume that having these needs met may transfer to their interactions with children in their classrooms. They also valued a facilitator who ensured equal air time for all teachers, enabling all voices to participate. This sentiment was expressed by a participant who writes:

Having a facilitator made sure that one person's views did not dominate and ensured that all people had their time in the spotlight. I don't think as much self-reflection would have happened if we were not guided by a facilitator. (researching teacher, 1993)

On my journey through the maze, I attempted to develop an atmosphere where "ambiguity [was] tolerated and even valued - no one [was] uncomfortable about not having a definitive question, an answer or a solution" (Field-Based research: A Working Guide, 1992, p. 51). I sometimes felt like there was a delicate balance in emphasizing a supportive atmosphere

while at the same time stimulating thought provoking conversation. The development of trust was not pre-determined nor written in the framework, but evolved through creating and sustaining relationships. The importance of a facilitator creating this atmosphere of trust is probably best described through a participants' writing as she reflected on her four years experience as a member of a discourse community:

This has been our fourth year together, and I think we produced our best work this year. We all seem to really know and like each other, although a stranger group of people you couldn't find. We are all so different. But there seems to be this energy that takes over us. I wonder where that comes from? I know we are all passionate about our work and our students, we definitely have that in common. But we are not just ten people working together. We are more than single individuals, we are a group. . . I think two factors that helped us were that many of us have been coming to this forum for four years and having an outside facilitator to keep us together, focused and enthusiastic about our explorations. I wonder if I would still be coming if we did not have a facilitator? I have never stayed with another committee this long. What helps is the way she honours and validates each and everyone of us. She has let everyone in the group know that this is a safe place to speak our individual truths. The climate, the tone of this group is so different than other groups I have worked in. We share our life stories and I think that's what helped to build this climate of trust, but it was the facilitator who got us started on that. I remember her telling us her stories. . . stories of frustration, of humour, of parts of her life, that let us get to know her and invited us to share parts of our life with her. She built that climate of trust, she practiced interpersonal skills, which is what I think helped us produce the work we have produced. She not only made it safe for us professionally, she made it safe for us personally. (researching teacher, 1994)

Another dilemma in creating a supportive, trusting atmosphere emerged for me. I had anticipated some anxiety, numerous questions and natural curiosity about the project at initial meetings. I knew that shaping a way to work together in teacher research groups was a process that could not be rushed. However, I had not anticipated or even speculated I might encounter an angry group of participants. Most of my experience was related to working with primary teachers with whom I had experienced a culture that was often trusting, accepting, and enthusiastic even though they were initially were not sure what it meant to belong to a teacher research group. The group in question were high school teachers who were enraged at the recent changes legislated by the Ministry of Education, and were skeptical that this project would in any way benefit them or their students.

This particular group was further distanced by my claim that the process we would be undertaking involved classroom-based research that would support them in implementing a learner-focussed curriculum by inquiring into the action of teaching. They rejected the notion this was authentic research as there was no talk of variables, statistics, base-line data or Q-sorts. How could a project which involved teachers talking, writing, and reflecting on their practice be seen as a source of knowledge? Building an environment of trust or supporting collaborative inquiry was distanced by participants' emotion. Defusing angry participants was a new and unexpected experience for me as a facilitator. This was one of those moments in the maze when I wished I had not entered this particular corridor, nor opened the door. I had no choice but to listen to their demands, complaints and accusations and knew that their feelings were honest emotion, and only time and the lived

experience of being researching teachers could possibly shift their anger and perception of the project.

I was grateful for the knowledge and expertise of my colleague, Sharon, in debriefing the experiences of facilitating this particular group. It was only through our conversations, the thinking outloud, that I was able to reflect deeply about the experience and once again, reshape my practice as facilitator. I wondered about the most recent legislated decisions from the Ministry of Education and on what basis were they made. I wondered if this particular skeptical, angry stance of the teachers affected their relationships with students. I wondered about the nature of teaching and learning in the culture of secondary school. I am not sure how much difference the teacher research project made to this group; however, all but two participants continued with the project the following year. Although I do not believe their skepticism ever completely dissipated, the participants talked about their perspectives on teaching and learning as they explored practical problems and dilemmas identified by themselves as teachers, thus engaging in the process of inquiry.

Creating and sustaining interpersonal relationships

My experiences as a facilitator taught me that creating and sustaining interpersonal relationships was essential to building a trusting environment and in shaping a way to work together. Positive personal and professional relationships within the teacher research groups fostered reflection and dialogue and focussed us on our evolving understandings that shaped our practice. Participants used words such as motivated, positive, inspired, encouraged, valued, nurtured, enthusiasm, affirmed, guided, supported,

cared, empathetic, sincere, tact, humor, patience, flexible and genuine to describe the qualities of the facilitator in the teacher research groups. According to participants, a facilitator required these qualities to support positive interactions within the group. Here is a sampling of the voices of the participants':

There was one session [teacher research meeting] where I felt very vulnerable. There was lots of upset in my personal life and it turned out that I felt challenged by some of the group members and felt defensive about what I was doing in my research. I stood up for myself but I also felt much better about being able to flag my distress. [I worried about] being able to come to [the facilitator] with this concern and it was a really important step. I could unload it without making myself further vulnerable to the group. I felt heard, reassured and supported and had that issue resurfaced, I felt sure that she would have dealt with it. There is some level of professionalism, structure, caring, formality, honor and basic jam that would go if the Ministry dispensed with this kind of leadership. (researching teacher, 1994)

I was increasingly impressed with the amount of respect and enthusiasm shown by her [facilitator]. I felt that we were well guided and supported. (researching teacher, 1994)

She was always supportive of individual's ideas. On several occasions she gave emotional support to a very frustrated individual in our group. For me, she made me feel very good and proud about my work and myself as a learner. It made me realize how important positive feedback is to learners of any age. It made me think about how important it probably is for the children in my classroom, if it is this important to me. (researching teacher, 1994)

There were, however, some problematic issues that evolved through the processes of creating interpersonal relationships in teacher research groups. One issue which emerged was that while the trust building environment continued to develop over time and the level of confidence also appeared to grow for many participants, thus encouraging critical discourse, the conversations sometimes became dominated by one participant which often impeded all voices from being heard, and threatened the overall trusting atmosphere.

Another problematic issue involved supportive, well-meaning participants who sometimes positioned themselves in the role of giving advice or who responded with over-simplified answers, rather than information seeking questions. In some cases, these were participants who were not presently teaching classes of students. Because of the nature of their role, (e.g. consultants, helping teachers, principals, superintendents), they sometimes struggled with the nature of the teacher research groups - one of engaging in the process of inquiry. They often placed themselves in a position of transmitting knowledge rather than constructing knowledge, giving an answer rather than exploring a question, as they attempted to fix a participant's dilemma rather than extend opportunities for sustained intellectual exchange. There appeared to be a struggle for some participants to view themselves as a colleague inquiring into the action of their own practice when their practice had a different form from that of the classroom teacher. Many questions arose for me in my role as facilitator in these situations: When do I re-direct the conversation? How do I value all voices at the same time as supporting the needs of the teacher research group? How do I develop interpersonal relationships without shutting this person out? The following

excerpt from my journal documented a particular critical incident that was illustrative of this specific dilemma in my role as a facilitator:

I am writing this journal entry on the Dash 8 after a research meeting that for me, was exasperating, exhausting, and confusing. It is at moments like this I am grateful for the sanctity of the jet's cabin as I wonder why I said I would facilitate research groups. As a facilitator, I often find it difficult to deal with individuals who interfere by offering advice or interjecting with such statements as: "That happened to me and this is how to fix it." I find my stomach tightening when other colleagues try to talk the speaker out of their authentic, honest feelings. My dilemmas as a facilitator once again emerged as Bob,¹ a Grade 11 and 12 chemistry teacher, was expressing his overwhelming feelings of isolation at the graduation level.

He is trying to incorporate aspects of student choice and active learning into his teaching and he is sometimes ridiculed by his colleagues who are often content driven and product oriented. Three participants, all of whom do not enroll a class of students, interjected with three advice ridden comments such as: "It used to be worse. Look how much better it is. Try and see the up side in that school."; and "The same thing happened when the Primary Program was introduced, you have to live through it, it will improve. Try not to feel that way or it will pull you down." and "In this district we are working towards collaboration and we need to mandate working together. I feel this would address your problem."

At this point, my shoulders are rising, my adrenalin is throbbing and my mind is racing. What should I do? My inexperience illuminates before me. How should I respond? How do I redirect participants from making such closing statements? Can I?

¹ Bob is the pseudonym given to protect anonymity and confidentiality of the participant.

Should I? What do I do at this point so that Bob feels valued for expressing his dilemma with such clarity and authenticity? What do I say so that others in the group do not retreat from talking about the realities of their teaching for fear of being judged, evaluated or counselled? This teacher is not only expressing real feelings, but he is probably not going to challenge the speakers because of a hierarchy that exists by the title of their district positions. Bob slumped back in his chair and appeared to have regretted speaking so honestly. He did not respond to any comments made.

I honestly did not know what to do. I responded by saying something like, "I think the most important thing for me is to try to listen and to understand Bob's perspective on this. I hear him talking about the isolation of teaching in his specific school culture and in his specific context. I believe his feelings are real and are important to talk about. I think we can learn by trying to understand what it must feel like to be struggling with beliefs and values about teaching and learning which differ greatly from some of the colleagues you work with everyday. Bob would you talk a little more about those feelings of isolation?"

I continue to struggle with what to do in these situations. I continue to search for more effective ways of facilitating, responding, engaging, and interacting with meaningful, authentic dialogue focussed on teacher inquiry. Will this encounter change Bob's voice in our group? Will he think deeply before he risks talking about real struggles in his practice? Is his reflective writing the only arena for honest reflection? Will the struggle in his voice continue to emerge as it has in the following sample of his writing that he wrote at the beginning of today's teacher research meeting?

Bob's informal writing:

The change that is occurring in me involves the values, standards and the effectiveness of my teaching styles. For many years my content based approach to education seemed the best. It is just recently in the last 3 - 5 years that this has come into serious question within me. Is what I was doing the way of the new student? Is it relevant, is it meaningful, is it important, is it learner-focussed, does it matter, does it have to be? Is it what students really need for our present world? I believe I've always had a change in me - that what I was teaching and how I was doing [it] was somehow not the way. But students were successful and they passed. Yet I plodded along always just feeling it was okay because that is the way I was taught. Now confusion, frustration, self-doubt, lots of work are my feelings. Are they learning better - how do I know? This active learning is new to them too. . . Does it all have to change at once for me to feel good about it? I am not comfortable with the change in me yet - I'm excited about it most of the time. I feel like I'm in a fish bowl in my school with everyone watching. That's tough. I truly feel all alone in this change. Can I make it work and not feel like a failure?

My journal writing continues:

I also began to think about the practice of the participants who gave Bob the advice. In their district positions, they engage in conversations with teachers through attempts to fix their dilemmas, definitively answer their questions and ultimately solve their problems. Is it not possible for them to be an authentic participant in this group because of the existence of a silent hierarchy? Is it far too risk-taking to talk about the uncertainties in their practice? Why is it so difficult for them to engage in self-inquiry in this forum? Why are their questions

consistently related to fixing others - never a closer look at their personal ways of knowing?

I continue to wonder about my role as facilitator. I continue to question my responses in many situations. I continue to grapple with the tension between the academic content and theories related to teacher research, and the emotional, organic processes which embrace practice and reality. (excerpt from my journal, 1992)

I wondered how we, as a learning community, could support these individuals in viewing themselves as teacher researchers? These participants, with district positions, professed strong beliefs in support of teacher research as a powerful form of professional development that appeared juxtaposed with the implicit belief that it was a process they did not value for themselves. This created an ongoing tension in building a trusting environment as these were educators that had earned a great deal of credibility with participants. As a result, teachers sometimes felt like their own work was not as important as that of these colleagues, nor did they feel as open to take risks with their thinking. How many times have we as teachers done this in schools with children? In groups in which non-classroom teacher participants viewed themselves as teacher researchers, this was not an issue. It solely depended on how they viewed themselves and their particular relationship with me and the discourse community.

3. Developing a framework for teacher research meetings

Developing the framework for the meetings was also an emerging process wherein a tentative framework evolved and fluctuated over time. Working collaboratively, a framework was developed for teacher research meetings which included reflective writing, individual/partner reports, summary discussion arising from the reports, work sessions, and a commitment for the next meeting. My purpose in designing the meeting framework was to provide a structure for professional conversations that was often not present in schools and to engage teachers in the process of inquiry through the implementation of a learner-focussed curriculum. My role as facilitator was to raise questions about knowledge, diversity and reform; to hear multiple voices, and to support teachers in engaging in collaborative inquiry. The framework for the teacher research meetings focussed on exploring the uncertainties that were part of daily practice, collaborative reflections about that practice, and defining action to reshape or refine practice

The teacher research meetings were the humanly created arenas which provided a rich local context for teacher research. I came to know that the various facets of the teacher research meetings produced an ever present paradoxical tension for me in my role as facilitator. This tension came from the very process we had created, a tension between the subjective, reflective process requiring active listening and collegial support and the objective action research which often required the demarcation of tasks. I often felt like a tight-rope walker as I struggled to balance two processes that required different emphases in my role as facilitator. Though theoretically, there was an absence of hierarchical power constraints in the teacher research groups, I

came to know in the role of the facilitator, the "collegial/expert dichotomy" (Goodman/Lieberman, 1985, p.8). I felt as though I came into many situations where I was viewed by participants as the resident expert, rather than seen as travelling the same intricate pathways that they were. This was expressed by one participant who wrote:

I noticed some people respond to facilitators in a way that seems to be putting them higher up on the hierarchical scale. I wonder if some people would be more open about their feelings or opinions without a facilitator. There always seems to be an element of 'pleasing the teacher' present. (researching teacher, 1994)

A further elaboration of this collegial/expert dichotomy is provided later, in Chapter Five.

What follows is the third component of my role as a facilitator which materialized through the process of developing a focus for collaborative teacher research in the context of the teacher research meetings. This is my analysis of each facet of the framework we created for the teacher research meetings and it is inclusive of uncertainties, dilemmas and issues that permeated the process.

Establishing a focus for collaborative teacher research

There are not many opportunities for us as teachers to come together to discuss issues on an ongoing basis in an unthreatening atmosphere without worrying about credits or critics. It keeps me alive. (researching teacher, 1994)

As participants established a focus for collaborative teacher research, it was my role to provoke, question, extend, and clarify the conversations in the context of the teacher research meetings. The purpose was to enlarge our personal visions of teaching and learning by continuing to challenge our own frames of references and those of our colleagues. Participants wrote about the importance of specific times when their facilitator made a significant difference by extending thinking in conversations. They described situations in which the facilitator: "[guided] us to think critically and reflectively"; "[listened] and [clarified] the big ideas when we [were] formulating our questions"; provided "perceptive listening, questioning and probing without being directive"; asked "questions that [clarified] thoughts and led the researchers to find their own answers:"; and "[stimulated] the group to think in new ways which might not [have happened] in a group without one [facilitator]" (researching teachers, 1994).

Through collaborative inquiry, we began to talk about the ways in which we supported and challenged one another in our searchings. Although there were definite constraints, uncertainties and questions, each teacher research group began to develop collaborative contexts which supported both the process of inquiry and the taking of risks in their research. We designed three components to the teacher research meeting framework to provide a structure and time for scaffolding conversations and thoughtful action. These components were reflective writing, creating research questions through collaboration, and reporting to a wider audience. Reporting will be discussed later, under the theme of supporting teacher research networks.

Reflective writing

At the beginning of meetings I asked participants to engage in informal writing for a brief period of time. The purpose of the reflective writing was to facilitate talk within the teacher research groups by providing teachers with opportunities to reflect on their experiences. Reflective writing provided a way for participants to focus and clarify their ideas. For some participants, writing within the session reduced the stress of finding time to write outside of the meeting. Writing appeared to be a way of clarifying our thinking; by building the process into the meetings, many of us were supported in clarifying our ideas, and the conversations that occurred subsequently were enhanced by this.

Participants' writing was framed by asking questions such as: What have you been wondering about? What's on your mind? What are you interested in? What have you found out since our last meeting? Sometimes participants wrote about critical events that had taken place in their classrooms, in their schools or in their lives. Their writing included insights they had gained from these experiences. The reflective writing at the beginning of each teacher research meeting often provided me with an uninterrupted block of time to write in my own journal and contemplate the meeting at hand.

The informal writing was often focussed on events or experiences which were significant because of what bothered us, excited us, or caused us to rethink our initial ideas, perspectives, goals or plans. The writing was also about initial ideas which were validated through the process of inquiry. The

process of reflecting upon significant events, whether the events reflected successes or failures, helped us identify both what we knew and what we did not know. It was important to relive the events and think about who or what contributed significantly to shaping the experience in order to think differently about them. Participants said that the "process of starting with personal writing and then sharing the writing helped [them] focus on [their] work and build a supportive, non-threatening atmosphere"(researching teacher, 1994).

The process of reflective writing . . . has helped me tremendously this year as I continue to critically examine my teaching practices in relation to current research in learning. (researching teacher, 1993)

When we had completed our writing, each person was invited to talk about their text with the whole group. This was a part of the meeting where I ensured that each participant had equal time to talk with without being challenged, offered advice, or provided solutions to the uncertainties or dilemmas which often emerged from their writing. There were many opportunities in the teacher research meetings to engage in pedagogical discourse when participants challenged and provoked their colleagues, or issues were clarified and resolved in free and open dialogue within a context of collegial supportiveness. I wrapped the time for participants to talk about their writing in an atmosphere that secured protected moments from the interference of other voices. Particularly in the initial meetings, when there seemed to be a higher level of anxiety, this space for talk appeared to encourage the 'silent' voice to risk speaking about their perplexities in their own way.

Ensuring opportunities for all participants to talk about their writing was sometimes problematic; two reoccurring dilemmas emerged for me in the role of facilitator. My first dilemma was balancing the talk time between individuals as some participants innocently extended their allotted time, thus shortening the amount of talk time for others or eliminating it unless I redirected the process or intervened. The second dilemma present during the talk after the reflective writing was the interjection or retelling of stories by well meaning participants in an effort to provide solutions or answers to the speaker's dilemma. This sometimes involved retelling a perceived similar situation which had happened to them, or advice on how to fix the situation, a practice which often ended conversations, rather than fostered them. My struggle focussed on redirecting the discussion as I attempted to ensure both that the dignity of the storyteller remained intact that the individual participant was empowered to speak in an atmosphere which invited talk about uncertainties was critical and valued active listening.

Many participants mentioned that they valued the talk time following the reflective writing. Their thoughts on the process of reflective writing focussed on the "rare opportunity afforded to teachers" (researching teacher, 1994) to talk about their quandaries, successes or responses without interruption, advice or solutions. This was a time to focus and to think in a different way. Participants described times when my role as facilitator made a significant difference to them or their work through the process of talking following their writing:

I think she [facilitator] made a difference every time. We would come to meetings often tired, discouraged, mad because of the fight for the acceptance of the Primary Program, and she would

listen to us and encourage us to get things off our chest through writing and then through talking. (researching teacher, 1994)

I wrote about feeling somewhat frustrated by the progress of my students, I thought I was sharing negative experiences. Her [facilitator] comments turned this around to make it a learning experience for me which led me to consider what I could do to better present the concepts and lessons to my students. I went back to my students feeling refreshed and keen to continue with the project after I wrote about it and talked about it. (researching teacher, 1994)

For some teachers, the process of writing at the meetings was an ongoing challenge. Although they came to the meetings knowing this was the initial activity, some teachers resisted participating. They found it difficult to attend a meeting and begin with writing. They struggled with what to write, with the format, or with whether what they had to say would be valued. Others thrived on the opportunity to have this reflection time built into the meetings, as they valued the process but could not find the reflection time in the dailiness of teaching.

As I became more experienced at facilitating, I realized there were some advantages to focussing the topic of writing depending on the perceived needs of the group. In one example I sensed anxiety building about the research project and asked participants to consider writing about it; the subsequent talk reflected their concerns. In another instance, when teachers were angry about a Ministry mandate to reverse a decision regarding eliminating letter grades in the Intermediate Program, a decision that teachers had prepared parents, students, and themselves towards implementing, I asked participants to elaborate, through the reflective writing, their thoughts, ideas, and feelings

concerning this situation. In doing so, their anger was dissipated, and though they still did not agree with this bureaucratic and political decision, they came to a point where they could focus on what was really important to them in their classrooms and move from their position of being in their own blind alley within their maze.

Through the reflective writing and the talk about the writing, participants began to develop specific research questions. "Most often, teachers [began] with general ideas and broad topics that [intrigued] them. Research groups often [took] two or three meetings just to explore and discuss emerging topics" (Field-Based Research: A Working Guide, 1992, p. 6) as they began to discover and focus on a research question that was compelling and pragmatic. Sometimes the writing had nothing to do with the research question, sometimes the process of writing and sharing was more about belonging, inclusion and validation:

Having the chance to [write] and discuss, openly, with colleagues has been great. Over the several sessions, we have developed an intimacy that allows free expression. Hearing other teachers voice the same concerns, frustrations and highs as me has helped me to feel that what I am doing is good - we too often are isolated from each other. (researching teacher, 1992)

Creating research questions through collaboration

Problems are not meant to be solved. They are ours to practice on, to explore the possibilities with, to help us study cause and

effect. Important issues can't be solved with one grand plan or in one school year. Some are worked at for a lifetime, returning in different disguises, requiring fresh insights. (Paley, 1991, p. 80)

Creating research questions was about living with the enigmas, the messiness, and the uncertainties of exploring the problematic issues in one's own practice. We often began with conversations that emerged from the reflective writing and explored the forces that framed and guided our lives in classrooms on a daily basis. It was through ongoing talk, which often extended to a second meeting, that participants began to formulate their research questions through explored possibilities and reflect with "fresh insights" before practicing with "different disguises" (Paley, 1991) that is, changing their practices.

In the initial stages of the project I purposefully framed participants' research questions to make definitive connections with the Primary Program Review Framework, as the original purpose for the teacher research groups was "to examine the feasibility of establishing teacher research groups to assist in reviewing the implementation of the Primary Program" (Dockendorf, 1992, p. 15). Initially, questions were driven by *The Primary Program Review Framework*, rather than being owned by the participants, because I did not understand how significant the ownership of the questions was. I saw that a door in the labyrinth was open; I came to know that if teacher research was to make a significant difference "to improve life chances for kids", it was necessary for teachers to own the questions.

Through critical reflection, I realized researching teachers' questions needed to revolve around an issue that was compelling and engaging, that they really cared about, that was important to them, and that was going to result in positive change for teachers and their students. Participants' questions had to be small, manageable, pragmatic and anchored in action. This significantly reshaped my practice, as teachers' questions drove their research plans and actions; my role was to uncover the connections between those actions and *The Primary Program Review Framework*.

In some cases, teachers began the year working as a group focussing on the same question and data collection processes. Often partners pursued particular aspects of the group topic that interested them. In other cases, the group chose a broad theme, but teachers worked with partners to shape and pursue specific questions. In still other groups, teachers worked individually or with partners to pursue a variety of issues. The following is an excerpt from a researching teacher's informal writing as she reflects on narrowing her focus for her research question:

I really enjoyed last week's research meeting. I'm always amazed at the variety and depth of people's ideas. When thinking about a research topic my thoughts keep coming back to different configurations of classrooms, the concept of expectations - teachers, administrators and parents and let's not forget the kids. But I'm also really interested in how, when and why kids learn from each other and wonder if that would be a good basis of a research question that might bring in the other topics. How do our expectations affect how students learn from one another and more particularly how does the way we configure our rooms affect how students learn from one another? (researching teacher, 1993)

Sometimes I facilitated the process of identifying and focussing on compelling uncertainties in practice by inviting participants informally to present their observations, questions, ideas, background reading, or plans that had been developed since the previous meeting. This included partnerships talking about what they had done or what they had been thinking about since the last meeting. Sometimes groups focussed on one partnership's research within the teacher research meeting, giving researchers a sustained block of time to talk about their questions, concerns or dilemmas and providing opportunities for all participants to support and learn from one another. Many participants found it helpful to end each meeting with a specific commitment for the next session. These self-imposed commitments included bringing various forms of data to the next meeting such as: observations, collections of student samples, video clips of classroom projects, interviews, photographs or writing. For many participants, this built in accountability to the group, which appeared to support them in focussing on the action of their research.

Through conversations, participants had opportunities to talk about teaching, learning, values, beliefs, assumptions, questions, successes, concerns and about "the lived experiences" in their day-to-day teaching. In many groups, one of my most important functions was to support participants in the process of developing questions, exploring possibilities and offering suggestions about ways of collecting or interpreting information. We spent time at our meetings supporting one another in articulating the engaging issues and questions, creating a research plan for gathering the data, and supporting one another in taking action as a result. What emerged from this talk was ownership of the process, practitioners who determined their own

focus for research and made decisions about looking more closely and systematically at an evolving question in their own practice.

Many participants stated that they valued the support in "[narrowing] down [their] research topic . . . [with the support of the facilitator] who posed careful, thoughtful questions for [them] to refine [their] thinking and come up with [their] focus question". Participants wrote about how I, as facilitator, suggested methods of "pursuing [their] topic while keeping [their] focus narrow enough to be possible . . . and always made sure that the topic was something for [teachers] to help [them] in their work". One participant wrote about the time that she and her partner became stuck on broad topics and the facilitator guided them to "refining their question"(researching teachers, 1994). Consistently participants seemed to value the support from the facilitator in helping them to narrowing their questions and shaping the framework for the project.

Some participants struggled with this fluctuating framework that focussed on process rather than on product. These participants often appeared exasperated with the often lengthy threads of "interwoven conversations" (Newman, 1991) and sometimes wrestled with the value of talk. They wanted a set framework, answers to their questions, and clear directions from me as the facilitator. Others wanted to define a question or dilemma immediately, when most questions which became research projects actually appeared to emerge after several sessions of conversations and a great deal of thought. Quite often, the questions participants raised in initial meetings subsequently looked and sounded very different as a result of talking with one another.

I struggled with the resistance from participants who attempted to eliminate or rush process in the teacher research groups. It was not always possible for me to rely on habitual ways of building interpersonal relationships, which valued process rather than product, because these people did not respond as I had expected. As a facilitator, the question of when to nudge someone to consider new ideas, beliefs and practices continued to be an ongoing tension. I continually asked myself questions: When do I extend the conversations and when do I bring them to closure? How much of the direction of the research group should depend on the group and how much on facilitator? Should I express my own personal values and beliefs and, if so, when or should my voice be silent?

Every time I've come to a meeting I've felt supported. That makes a significant difference to my work. Simply having someone listen and encourage helps a great deal. (researching teacher, 1994)

As research questions became more focussed, my role became one of focussed on listening to and encouraging participants in planning for action research. Within each teacher research meeting, time was allocated for participants to continue their collaborative work in progress with the expectation that ensuring action was embedded within their planning. I noticed that planning was often fluid and that it changed as teachers researched in their classrooms and reframed their plans based on what they had learned. They sometimes discussed data from their individual and collective journals, written observations, transcripts of classroom interviews, drafts of future plans or authentic student work samples. They deliberated over research articles, educational journals, or recently published writing.

Time to work collaboratively provided partnerships with time to work together or with other partnerships to continue to develop their research plan, analyze their data collection (which often included observations, work samples, video-taped classroom action, interviews, or conferences), and reflect on what they had noticed. The conversations resulting from this collaborative work contributed significantly to building the teacher research groups.

One of the areas of 'expertise' participants wrote about revolved around formulating research questions, creating research plans and interpreting the information gathered. The participants' descriptions of this action is best described through their own voices:

Every year she has suggested ways of pursuing our topic while keeping our focus narrow enough to be possible. I remember last year my partner and I had become so immersed in our topic we didn't feel we were objective enough to decide on a focus. We were bogged down in defining what our question was which was making it difficult to focus effectively. She and the group helped us sort it out. We immediately felt one hundred per cent better and I know we would have taken much longer. The interesting thing was we weren't told what our question should be, but it wouldn't have happened without her - very subtle! (researching teacher, 1994)

A time when the facilitator made a significant difference to my work was when I was having difficulty interpreting the information gathered from students: the facilitator helped me understand to take exactly what the kids had written and not try to read anything into it and to not make it more complicated than it was. She asked questions and helped me reshape my question and format. She changed my view point and redirected

my attention to what was important. I couldn't do that alone.
(researching teacher, 1994)

My role was to support participants in developing their research questions and plans, to consult on methods, and to edit the reports. Time spent with each partnership or triad varied as some participants required more support than others. Initially, spending time with each partnership was often a challenge, as balancing my time in order that all members felt they had received the support they required was not always possible. Sometimes quieter partnerships, who were the least demanding, could be inadvertently overlooked and therefore not receive the support they may have needed, a situation parallel to that of the classroom, where some teachers have a tendency to respond to those children where demands are more vocal. In these cases, I sensed participants often left the meetings frustrated and I sometimes received feedback from them through phone calls. These participants talked about the frustration of feeling their questions or issues had not been resolved. Unfortunately, in classrooms, students rarely, if ever, have a similar opportunity to call their teacher to address issues of support.

Participants wrote about the importance of the facilitator "know[ing] when and exactly what questions to ask to help [them] on their way". They valued their facilitator who "didn't pontificate or pretend to know all." They also value a facilitator for "listening to their concerns, paraphrasing and asking questions to help [them] become clear on [their] intent and by that time [they] were on [their] way" (researching teachers, 1994). I began to understand the importance of the outside voice to prevent a reification of existing practice whereby teacher research becomes a mask for narrative indulgence. The

facilitator thus makes teacher research 'critical'. Here is an excerpt from one participant's reflective writing which illustrates her perspective on the role of the facilitator in developing teacher research groups:

Yes: I needed her skills. She gave us a structure for our thinking and her wealth of experience with research helped us form our thoughts, our methods and our thinking. I have found a facilitator can help us see our assumptions and encourage us to test them. I have seen groups without facilitators start research with a preconceived notion and then prove themselves right but they already had the answers before they began. I feel she encouraged us to look beyond our beliefs, question them and led us in a voyage of self discovery.

(researching teacher, 1994)

One of the unexpected difficulties that became apparent for some participants in this aspect of teacher research meetings, was the question: Who and what defined research? Some participants appeared to require support to broaden and deepen their conceptions of research and thus of the possibilities open to them. Many of the teachers who came to the research groups had little previous research experience, therefore support such as information about developing a research plan, was critical. Support was particularly important during early meetings when a great deal of sensitivity and subtle guidance was required as many teachers volunteered to join the teacher research groups with initial trepidation. The following is an excerpt from a participant's informal writing during one of the first teacher research meetings in the fall:

I wondered what format this would take in terms of me as a researcher? I had been conducting my own research through

observations of my own classroom practice in the form of a double entry journal for the past year and a half. I hoped that it would be a continuation of the same type of thing, or to show me a way to pull my own research together. I continue to wonder how valid this type of research is? Will this research be seen as equally as important as the academic research? Will this research be of any value? Will my so-called research be seen as valid as the university researcher who presents findings rather than questions? Does it ultimately matter? (researching teacher, 1993)

For many, it was a process of demystifying research. We were collectively redefining the knowledge-base about research by placing the primary focus with teachers as generators of significant knowledge. In some cases, it was difficult for participants to grasp the notion that the telling stories from actual practice to produce "insider knowledge" (Cochran-Smith, 1994) of classrooms was valid research. The process of inquiry into their own practice did not match their traditional definition of research; some participants did not see this as an authentic form of research.

4. Facilitating teacher research networks

Although building teacher research networks was not one of the articulated goals of the project, it was one of the most positive unexpected outcomes that emerged as a the fourth key element of facilitating teacher research groups. In my role as facilitator I began to develop a local and provincial teacher research network. This occurred in two broad ways: a) I made connections between participants within and across groups through

discourse and b) I served as an avenue of communication to make connections between the twenty-five teacher research groups located throughout the province and between the groups and other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, Another factor that enhanced the building of teacher research networks was the reporting component of the meetings I embedded into the framework for teacher research groups. One of the most important ways of sharing searchings with a wider community seemed to be through the final reports that were prepared by each partnership in every discourse community. I encouraged teachers in the process of report writing and in making their work public by making report writing a part of the teacher research framework. As participants' work was shared in various ways throughout the province, teachers began a provincial conversation, inquiring into the action of their colleagues and responding to inquiries about their own teacher research project. These two factors, making connections, and sharing searchings with a larger community, supported the development of a province wide teacher research network.

Making connections

As a facilitator, I supported teacher researchers in networking with one another; I saw connections between participants' work as I continually acquired knowledge of various teacher research projects, through the groups I facilitated. This knowledge enabled me to establish points of contact make various connections both between participants in specific research groups and between participants in the wider community of research groups throughout the provinces. During our meetings, I talked about what other researchers were doing with similar topics in another teacher research groups. In each

meeting, there was time for participants to talk about their research and in many instances these sharing sessions provided ideas, methods and processes for other participants to use as they developed their project. Often, the researchers would contact other participants to talk about the similarities and differences in their approaches to questions, and this provided an opportunity for networking, both for participants within the group, and between and among groups throughout the province.

It was interesting to note the common themes which evolved across the province in yearly research projects. For example, in the 1993-1994 school year, goal setting, self-direction and self-assessment were research topics that emerged in many teacher research groups. The following quote is from a final report summarizing the findings from the teacher research groups:

Goal setting was the most frequently researched topic in 1993-94. The primary teachers [teacher researchers] who completed classroom research studies see goal setting as the most important and relevant aspect of personal planning during the primary grades. Teachers documented a number of specific outcomes they observed when students received instruction about how and why to set goals, how to direct their efforts towards achieving a goal, and how to assess their progress. (Personal Planning in the Primary Grades: School-based Research Findings, 1995, p. 2)

As a facilitator for many groups, I was able to talk about the diverse ways participants were inquiring into goal-setting with students. I was able to talk about other researching teachers' dilemmas, uncertainties, research plans, data collections, and the various ways they were making meaning of goal

setting. This talk appeared to expand some participants' frame of reference about goal-setting, because it often challenged their ways of thinking about research questions. Becoming aware of what other teachers were doing helped participants to anchor their research in action as they heard a variety of ways in which teachers were inquiring into similar issues, in their practice.

I found that the facilitator always offered support to everyone in the group. We were always made to feel that what we were doing in our classrooms was good for children. As a facilitator she had seen varieties of classrooms in operation, and knew about other researchers' questions. She could give us comparisons to what others are doing out there. I found this extremely reassuring. (researching teacher, 1994)

Making these connections between participants' topics enhanced the development of a teacher research network because they often contacted one another by telephone, fax or modem for the specific details of one another's projects. They shared strategies, dilemmas, ideas, concerns, and questions on an ongoing basis and many participants contacted other researchers for talk about the various successes and difficulties that materialized as they moved within the maze of inquiry.

Participants indicated they valued the connections with other researchers' work and often felt validated through the discussions. Participants talked about the importance of having the facilitator's "outside voice to help them remember and understand the big picture" (researching teacher, 1994). Participants wrote about the significance of the facilitator providing support through connecting them to a network of other researching teachers who were concerned with similar issues. They expressed

the importance of knowing the larger provincial context for implementing a learner-focussed curriculum and they viewed the facilitator as a conduit to that knowledge:

She [facilitator] gives us insights into the B.C. picture and she understands where the Primary Program has come from and where it is going. (researching teacher, 1994)

Researching teachers wrote about the importance of my role in providing an outside voice that afforded teachers opportunities to engage in professional discourse about the provincial and national 'big picture' in education, to make connections with other teacher research groups, and to enhance those connections by providing outside expertise and knowledge. I supported teachers in developing networks of researching teachers throughout the province, and, as the teacher research communities developed, provincial conversations were initiated by teachers connecting with one another to talk about their work and to share their reports outside the local group. Participants indicated that I often provided the outside voice, the outside process, and the outside knowledge and expertise to enhance those connections to the inside knowledge and the inside expertise of the voices in each learning community.

In numerous responses, participants talked about the importance of the outside voice which made connections, "kept perspective" and "kept us focussed on the big picture." They referred to the facilitator as one who brought "a wealth of background knowledge about what is going on out there in other classrooms. She [brought] insight that [we are] not always exposed to in our own little classrooms." Some researchers feared that, without an

outside voice, the group may "become insular with no new ideas or perspectives, it may be without new information in the form of personal experience from the outside world so progress might be minimal or predictable; no startling 'ahahs'". Participants also wrote about the importance that my outside voice was a teacher's voice and "one who modeled herself as a learner, part of the process" (researching teachers, 1994).

Participants indicated it was important to them that their facilitator make connections to the "big picture" of the most recent changes or mandates from the Ministry of Education which directly impacted on curriculum implementation and, therefore, classroom practice. They valued the "provincial frame of reference" that the facilitator provided as they wanted "to find out what was happening in other areas" in the province. Participants wrote about the significance of the facilitator acting as a "direct link between the Ministry and teachers to bring information and lead discussions" and "knowing the larger picture and then having the ability to help us fit our puzzle pieces in correctly (researching teachers, 1994). Hearing about the provincial 'big picture' often validated participants' work:

The facilitator told us about trends in education and made us feel our project was worthwhile when it often felt like old hat to us. It helped us to hear the larger context as she gave us insights into the B.C. picture. She understands where the Primary Program has come from and where it is going. . . When we were uncertain if the question we had chosen was important, the facilitator drew on her knowledge of teaching practice around the province to point out the ways our question might be interesting to other teachers. She has valued our work which is not only encouraging but opens new channels. Her questions are

inquiries not dead ends. She gives us lots of room to think, try, and make our own mistakes. (researching teacher, 1994)

The other 'big picture' participants referred to was a vision for their particular teacher research group. Participants valued the support teachers received from me in defining the vision for the group, and in keeping them "focussed on the vision," and, within that vision, to guide participants in knowing "there is a light at the end of the tunnel and to provide the encouragement to get there." Sometimes participants felt it was difficult to be involved in a group and maintain "an outside sense of direction." They felt that a facilitator "has the luxury of stepping back and getting the whole picture. This outside view probably helped the group because the facilitator could make connections that those immersed [in the group] might not see." Participants indicated that engaging in professional discourse was enhanced when the facilitator supported participants in connecting ideas both in the group, and between groups throughout the province. One participant wrote: "The facilitator was the person who kept the common thread visible and this helped to keep the motivation level in the group high" (researching teachers, 1994).

Repeatedly, participants talked about the significance of the connections to expertise, knowledge (both content and process) and interpersonal skills, which were provided by an effective facilitator. Participants valued a facilitator who provided resources and used her personal "knowledge and expertise" to establish points of contact which would support teachers in their collaborative inquiry of curriculum dilemmas. They valued the "expertise of a professional that is very knowledgeable and caring to guide [them] through

the process, someone with experience who could capture the salient point." Participants often wrote about the benefits of having a structure for their thinking and "a facilitator with experience with research that helped us form our thoughts, our methods and our thinking"(researching teachers, 1994).

Another network connection which sometimes developed was between the participant and their school. There was often a webbing effect which took place as school-based colleagues would ask participants: "What do you do at those research meetings? What are you trying to find out? How are you going to do that?" Participants often talked about their colleagues 'piggy-backing' on their research, that is non-participating school colleagues would often collaborate with teachers at their school for the purpose of replicating the process and addressing the question for inquiry.

When interviewed, many administrators talked about the collaboration between participants and other practitioners in their school as a teacher research 'domino effect.' This phenomenon took place when participants returned to their schools and quietly talked about their question and the processes they were engaging in through their involvement in the teacher research groups. Researching teachers also supported their schools in developing new strategies and processes by asking questions in a different way and by making connections between their schools and the research groups. An example of this would be the partnership which was investigating 'Learning as a Journey and Belonging' (researching teachers, 1994). Since their school community was focussing on social skills, these teacher researchers made a deliberate attempt connect their research with the school focus by including social skills as part of their inquiry. At staff meetings these

participants talked about their question and the processes, such as reflective writing and partner collaboration, they were using for exploration. Their staff colleagues often duplicated many of the processes and also talked about rethinking the possible connections between social skills and seeing learning as a journey.

Sometimes I supported district staff in making connections between the framework for teacher research meetings and their mandate to develop various aspects of curriculum. They used the teacher research meeting framework, and the processes within that framework, to enhance aspects of teacher development in their district. One district used the teacher research framework to develop their mentorship program. This particular discourse community had presented their work to the local school board whose members were became familiar with the teacher research framework and subsequently endorsed the process to be used to develop a new program in their district.

Networks also extended to professional growth for teachers and me. Inquiry into one's own practice in collaboration with others was a very powerful model for teacher development as, together we structured a process in which teachers generated and pursued their own important questions. Consequently, teachers experienced increased competence and confidence as classroom practitioners and educational leaders. Participants thus owned the process and made decisions about what it was they wanted to study as they engaged in intentional ways to examine and improve their practice. In one teacher research group, seven out of ten teachers enrolled in a Masters Program over the four year project. In another, teachers exercised their voices

to make and demonstrate their expertise upon the use of local professional development money by suggesting a process and a framework. At staff meetings, participants lobbied for time for both professional talk and time to ask questions about their practice. Administrators commented on the new confidence many participants of teacher research groups had to initiate major school-wide projects. For example, some participants initiated applications/proposals for grants or accreditation. District personnel commented on the enthusiasm and ownership for change they observed in teachers involved in the research groups.

Another role for me was to assume major responsibility for linking the individual and group projects to the Ministry of Education's mandate for systemic program change. I prepared summaries and compiled reports that made the connections explicit between the teacher research reports and the *Primary Program Review Framework*. Teachers' voices continued to be of utmost importance and at times, my role was to advocate for those voices by connecting between their voices to the political arena where policy and funding decisions are made.

As in every aspect of facilitation, the responsibility for developing these connections proved problematic. I sometimes struggled with when not to make connections for participants for fear of imposing my values and beliefs, rather than respecting theirs; for fear of imposing a process that I owned rather than the participants; for fear of putting myself at the center of the research, rather than the teachers themselves; for fear of thinking my 'expert' advice was more important than teachers constructing knowledge for themselves. The following is an excerpt from my journal which illustrates

the quandary I faced with a group of participants who had decided to focus their research on change but insisted on separating changes in their personal lives from changes in their professional lives. In my view, these are inseparable.

This is a teacher research group of seven, predominantly male, elementary and high school teachers. The group has focussed their inquiry on various dilemmas of change. At our last session, they decided to begin with themselves and closely examine a change that had been meaningful in their lives. We created an interview schedule to prompt thinking and responses. They decided to 'interview' themselves as well as their research partners within the group. One interesting group-determined stipulation was that the change should focus on their professional lives not their personal lives. Herein lies yet another dilemma for me. I wanted to tell them I didn't think you could separate the professional and the personal. I wanted to reshape their thinking because I thought it would make a more interesting research question. I wanted to reconstruct their assumptions that the personal and professional lives of teachers could be separated and should be separated. I wanted to make connections by opening up different possibilities, new perspectives and challenge their frames of reference as they began a process of making sense of a specific change they had made in their teaching. I just couldn't decide if I should be imposing my values and beliefs on them. I decided to resist and err on the side of not making the connections rather than possibly altering the dynamics of their research and their decision. (my journal, 1992)

Though I had made an assumption that participants were not making the connection, not making a link for personal and professional change, one participant recorded the following which challenged this assumption.

Well I think this change has changed me because I went through such a difficult time in my personal life together with this change in my professional life, it was a part of a whole change I think I feel myself. Very much . . . before, I saw teaching as part of my life but the person I am in teaching is also the person I am in my life. So I see it as a consolidation in that teaching is an expression of who I am and why I am on the earth and all those kinds of things, whereas before it was just a part of my life, and so I feel more complete. (researching teacher, 1992)

I was relieved that I had trusted in the process, trusted the participants and not imposed my own perception on this group.

Sharing searchings with the larger community

At the end of every year participants in all twenty-five teacher research groups shared their research projects with a larger community. This came about because report-writing had been built into the framework. I asked researching teachers to write a report which included documentation of their research and highlights of their synthesis and interpretation. Additionally, these reports detailed the context, rationale, their question, research activities, findings, and implications. The reports reflected teachers' questions, processes, and findings at that point in time. The reporting process affirmed the group's commitment to accountability and offered a means of advocating school reform, though this had not been an intentional plan.

The act of reporting to a larger community was important to me, for two reasons. First, I believed it was critical to publicize and disseminate the research projects beyond the local group because these researching teachers

had made significant contributions to implementing a learner-focussed curriculum and to the knowledge-base about teaching and learning. These teachers were committed to change in their own classrooms, schools and districts as they continued to seek ways to 'improve life chances' for students. The participants' voices were now heard in their schools, districts, and province as they widened the conversations about teaching and schooling. When teachers publish and present their work "at regional and national levels, they demonstrate the power of their texts to make the familiar strange, to link teachers' work, and to challenge the status quo"(Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, p. 100).

Secondly, the report writing also helped to validate the funding of the project. Each year, volumes of research reports were submitted to the Ministry of Education. As an example, in "1993-1994 over sixty teachers in sixteen districts throughout the province conducted classroom research into issues related to personal planning. They submitted 36 research reports focussed on topics such as goal setting, self-management, career awareness and respect for diversity" (Personal Planning in the Primary Grades: School-based Research Findings, 1995, p. 1). For some Ministry of Education bureaucrats, this was the 'product' which validated the funding allocated to this four year project. Selected reports were also summarized through a quarterly Newsletter, called *The Reflective Practitioner*, funded by the Ministry of Education and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation. School District offices also received a copy of the reports from their respective researchers, which were then accessible to educators within those districts.

My role as facilitator was to guide, encourage and support teachers in the process of report-writing. In many instances, this meant that I became an audience for teachers' research reports. Meeting time was devoted to work sessions with the purpose of supporting teachers in this process. Teachers frequently used the release time that was available to them to meet with their partners to write the reports. For many researching teachers, the report writing was an arduous, time-consuming, horrendous task. Some teachers were reluctant to synthesize what they had learned, were not confident about their skills as report writers, and had difficulty finding the time to complete the task effectively. The resistance to going public with their research in written form permeated most groups. However, the report-writing process subsequently enabled participants to come to know their classroom practice in a different way; they were supported in finding what they did not know as well as being confirmed in what they did know, such that when the report writing was completed they had a sense of pride and accomplishment. The reports also supported building a network of researching teachers and learners throughout the province as the reports were made available for others to read.

Participants indicated they valued my role in supporting them in sharing their searchings with a wider community. Even though many participants found the report writing an arduous task, they valued the framework, the editing, and the feedback. Participants wrote about the support teachers received from me in clarifying "ideas for readers trying to replicate the studies". One participant wrote: "When we were beginning to write our reports, she was able to give positive, constructive feedback so we knew how to improve our work and complete the task" (researching teacher, 1994). Another commented: . . . "in the editing of our project she was clear

and direct in her assistance and helped us so that we could proceed. Her involvement was meaningful because sometimes we just didn't know where to go. We were so immersed in what we were doing"(researching teacher, 1994).

It was critical that teachers communicate their work through report-writing because in the process, participants essentially became theorists of practice as they articulated their uncertainties, tested their assumptions and made connections. Many participants appeared to have gained a greater sense of efficacy from writing about the transformation of their practice. For some teachers, the process of writing about their research provided a vehicle for talking about their inquiry. In some cases, report writing created connections at schools with other colleagues who wanted to know more about the research and often replicated the questions and the research plan in their own classrooms. Some participants felt that they had affected local decision-making in their schools and influenced the processes for school and district professional development sessions through their involvement in teacher research.

Many of the reports have been and will continue to be presented in a variety of professional venues to audiences including School Boards, district parent groups, school staffs, teachers, students, and administrators. Teacher researchers from these groups have presented their work at provincial and national conferences such as The Provincial Primary and Intermediate Conference, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in San Francisco, Neighbourhood Schools Conference, The Whole Language Institute, and The Provincial Teachers of Mathematics Conference. Local

presentations in districts included district professional days, university courses and local associations. In smaller school districts, local school boards welcomed presentations from the various teacher research groups. Participants talked about their projects and reported their findings often using slides or video records taken as part of the research process. Teacher researchers from larger districts also lobbied to be put on the school board agenda but were sometimes denied time to present because of other priorities.

Teacher researchers from this project also made submissions and their work was published in such journals as *Research Forum: A Journal Devoted To Educational Practice And Theory* (Number Ten, Fall 1992). Another partnership submitted an article, which was published in the local paper, highlighting aspects of their research project. Another branch of the Ministry of Education provided funding for a teacher research group to be video taped over time. The video tape included excerpts from meetings and researchers' classrooms documenting teachers' and students' reflections about the process of inquiry and their involvement in the teacher research groups. The video was included in one of the Ministry of Education's implementation resources, called *Supporting Change* (1993).

LOOKING AT THE LABYRINTH: REFLECTIONS

Possibilities and dilemmas continually fueled my uncertainties about my role as facilitator. In my research, I questioned what I was not able to uncover of participant's beliefs and values about my role of the facilitator. What beliefs and values did they not write about? What dissonance, or angst did I create that impeded researching teachers in their process of inquiry? What did they honestly feel about my role as facilitator that they did not feel comfortable talking about with me? What are the implications of what I do not know about my practice? How would knowing the answers to the preceding questions change my knowledge, my thinking, and my practice? I continued to struggle to understand the basis of my own authority as a facilitator. Part of that struggle enabled me to see that my fear of disempowering teachers was stronger than my urge to empower them. I had concerns about imposing myself on the collaborative inquiry and therefore reinforcing the "expert" status in the process of guiding teachers' research activities. I worried about placing myself at the center of the research, rather than teachers. Had I overvalued my role as the leader of collaborative inquiry rather than as a participant in exploring the messiness of the maze? An excerpt from my journal is illustrative of that messiness:

I am beginning this journal submission with my reflections upon my reflections. I have written about the various perplexing differences in the teacher research groups I am currently facilitating. Out of the differences my dilemmas emerge. Out of those dilemmas powerful learning continues to evolve for me. I can utilize the same framework, the same structure, yet each group emerges as an entity unto itself. Are the dilemmas and the issues a function of the individuals in the

group? Or are they embedded in who I am as a facilitator, as a person? What would happen if a group did not have a facilitator? How would they deal with the unknown when it is not known? Should teachers' systematic inquiry into their own practice be dialectically based? Often I feel the richness of dialogue when there is a multiplicity of viewpoints, when there is something to compare and contrast, when there is a parallel argument, another body of information.

I continue to grapple with making sense of something mystical that appears to exist within the context of the teacher research groups. Is it about the inner relationships in the groups? Is it what happens in that dialectic over time? What is that tension that exists between the objective, verifiable question we want to unravel and the subjective unverifiable process of self inquiry? Whatever it is - I know it is not reducible to a step by step process.

The teacher research groups are not without struggle. Is this process I am trying to make sense of bound up in rituals? Is this part of the process that leads to transformation? Is this transformation a mystical, ritualistic, powerful mixture of the known yet rooted in the unknown and the ungoverned? My question continues in . . . the labyrinth of self-inquiry.

The flights home from the teacher research meetings provided uninterrupted silence for my personal reflection into my own practice as a facilitator. I thought about each part of the meeting, and of each individual participant as I wrote in my journal. The constant complexities, conflicts in values and beliefs and the instabilities were ingrained in my practice of facilitating. I understood the implicit value of collaborative inquiry as I awaited my next conversation with my colleague, to reflect upon my most recent experiences.

As I reflect upon the process of writing this research study, I realized I had procrastinated writing this chapter because of my insecurities about myself as a writer and as a facilitator of teacher research groups. The uncertainties in writing this chapter were further illuminated as I struggled to put my voice in the text when writing about the perplexities, issues and dilemmas of my role as facilitator over the past four years. The process I experienced writing this chapter likely parallels the process for many teachers and students as they engage in the process of asking questions and seeking new understandings.

I recall looking at an untouched computer screen in my quest for a point of entry, a way in, to write my exploration as a facilitator of teacher research groups. As my mind was clearly void of an entry to the labyrinth, I embarked upon the writing process with an analysis of participants' responses, as I felt less vulnerable beginning with their external data rather than my internal analysis. I anguished over the positive responses from the participants' questionnaire and deliberated over inclusion of their voices. I struggled with the dilemma of honoring the positive nature of participants' responses. I believed the nature of their writing to be true from their perspectives; however, I immediately sought to intrude upon their unequivocal silence. I am making an assumption here, that there is a piece I do not have, a piece they are not writing, a pathway I cannot enter.

The process of writing this research study paralleled the process in which I had supported many researching teachers, over the past five years. In fact, many of my dilemmas as a facilitator were also my dilemmas as a writer. What if some portion of my writing contradicted my actions in facilitating

teacher research groups? What if I have written unexamined constructions of some aspect of the framework or of knowledge about teaching and learning? What if I have overvalued my role as the facilitator and become the center of my writing, rather than as a researching practitioner inquiring into my own practice? What if my writing is not learner-focussed, but rather content based? What if my voice is one of transmitting information rather than a voice of searching to know more?

I began writing this chapter in the same way a presenter disseminates information, using the presenter's voice that articulates knowledge, assumptions and conclusions in a comparatively stark manner. As I re-read the chapter I realized I had crafted the writing bereft of my own voice. As my writing progressed, so deepened the authenticity of my uncertainties, my reflections and my voice. As I reshaped the writing in this chapter, I embroidered myself, and my action, back into the tapestry of the text, continuously struggling with the messiness of the maze in a quest to find the center of my labyrinth of self-inquiry.

CHAPTER FIVE

Looking at the Labyrinth: Findings, Implications and Conclusions

One person helps another learn to practice reflective teaching in the context of the doing. And one does so through a Hall of Mirrors: demonstrating reflective teaching in the very process of trying to help the other learn to do it. (Schön, 1987, p.19)

Schön's notion of learning from one another in the context of doing epitomizes the nature of this research study. I have documented and travelled a maze of self-inquiry into the pathways of my practice as a facilitator. I have examined uncertainties, dilemmas, tensions, and perplexities within the labyrinth passages in search of the center of the maze. The process of investigating, analyzing and refining my practice has enabled me to identify key components that contribute to the knowledge base in facilitating teacher research. What I have discovered has implications for other educators in the process of creating, shaping, facilitating, and supporting professional communities for teacher research. Further implications are noted in the area of student learning as the result of teachers' rigorous examination into their practice.

However, prior to discussing these, there are three factors that contributed significantly to my growth and effectiveness as a facilitator. These are: the participants who were involved in the teacher research groups, the

collaboration with a colleague, and the dilemmas that existed within my practice. As a result, I have come to new understandings that have changed my skills as a facilitator and as a teacher and these will be made explicit in this chapter.

PARTICIPANTS

To summarize the understandings I have gained from this study, it is important to begin by stating that participants in the teacher research groups were practitioners who chose to be part of this educational undertaking centered upon self-initiated inquiry into their practice. They were often teachers who were "teaching against the grain" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993) as they developed a sense of personal and institutional efficacy. They were teachers who recognized teacher research as intrinsic to their role and essential to student learning. They were teachers who abandoned the notion that teaching is just a matter of style, rather, they believed it is a process of continual inquiry into the substance of their practices and its consequences.

Through their participation in teacher research groups, teachers developed a familiarity with, and high regard for, principles and conclusions derived, not just from immediate classroom practice, but also from the thinking, experiences, and observations of their colleagues. They became systematic in their exploration of central issues in student learning. They considered teaching practices and the improvement of those practices. Teachers' inquiry was thoroughly integrated into daily work so it was associated with accomplishments for all who participated.

Within the context of the teacher research groups, these practitioners grappled intellectually with issues as they worked and learned with colleagues. Through the collective power of these groups, they added to the knowledge base in teaching and played an essential role in school reform as they developed theory through action and reshaped it through further action. The teacher research groups became knowledge generating communities that influenced school, district and provincial policies regarding curriculum, assessment and professional development. Most significantly, these were teachers who cultivated memorable learning experiences for their students and they cared deeply about improving 'life chances for kids'.

COLLABORATION WITH A COLLEAGUE

But when the full and complete meeting is to take place, the gates are united in one gateway of real life, and you no longer know through which you have entered. (Buber, 1958, p. 102)

The second key influence upon my learning was Sharon, with whom I worked; she contributed to my effectiveness in facilitating teacher research groups. Sharon was a teacher, a mentor, a reflective practitioner, and a friend who modeled for me the very conditions necessary for creating effective teacher research groups. She built my confidence as a facilitator and as a learner through ongoing encouragement and validation of my work, and through this process, I became comfortable with the dissonance of not knowing the role of the facilitator. I had the same needs as the participants for support, encouragement, and collaboration, but I could not use the teacher research groups to meet my needs, and I could not do this alone. I reflected

into and recreated my own practice, which changed me and how I worked with others. I learned to live with the vexing existence of tension and conflict that was part of the process of change.

DILEMMAS INGRAINED IN MY PRACTICE

These dilemmas are woven throughout Chapter Four; however I would like to highlight them here as they are the issues, the monsters in the maze, that I needed to confront as I wound through the chambers to find the centre. And, it was through "meeting the minotaur" that I then recognized and was able to deal with dilemmas in a way that effected my growth as a facilitator. With Duckworth(1987), I believe that the virtues involved in not knowing are the ones that really count in the long run. What I do about what I don't know is, in the final analysis, what determines what I will ultimately know.

Knowing the right answer requires no decision, carries no risks, and makes no demands. It is automatic. It is thoughtless. Moreover, and most to the point in this context, knowing the right answer is overrated. The virtues involved in not knowing are the ones that really count in the long run. What you do about what you don't know is, in the final analysis, what determines what you will ultimately know. (Duckworth, 1987, p. 47)

I found encouragement in the words of Eleanor Duckworth as I reflected upon the process of writing this chapter. I realized that I began by infiltrating the labyrinth pathways of the unknown and emerged knowing the

boundaries of what I do not know. I discovered that it is hard to know and to not know simultaneously. I began to cultivate a new repertoire of dilemmas, perplexities and tensions that emerged as consistencies in my practice, and constantly reframed my question. These dilemmas which became ingrained in my practice, can be framed by the following questions:

- How do I reframe information in a way that honors voices but does not validate unexamined practitioner constructions of knowledge?
- How do I grasp opportunities to support participants in reframing and reshaping practice for the purpose of making positive changes for teachers and for student learning?
- How do I decide what defines unexamined construction of knowledge about teaching and learning?
- How can I work effectively with people who seemingly have all the answers and have co-opted the language of inquiry, but do not live it?
- How do I resist the temptation to act on behalf of the silent voices, and to protect their right to be listened to in a way that supports building a discourse community?
- How do I intervene with process and content to re-direct the conversations at the same time as respecting all practitioners?
- How do I honor participants' construction of reality but challenge it at the same time?
- How do I challenge participants' pre-constructions in a way that simultaneously honors honest and legitimate feelings?
- How do I collect and defuse angry participants' venom and detoxify it?

- How do I grapple with 'the baggage' that needs to be removed from some participants without being professionally unethical?

Tensions threading through these dilemmas became more explicit for me with further exploration. One of those dilemmas emerged when my actions contradicted my beliefs and values about the nature of learning. Each group had its own distinctive qualities and I believed I needed to begin the process of building a discourse community based on an understanding of where individual participants were in the process of knowing about teaching and learning. Although I believed I needed to begin meetings at the place figuratively speaking, where participants were pedagogically, theoretically and emotionally, I sometimes experienced professional anguish when participants were not where I wanted them to be. An example of this was when I arrived at a small, west coast town and was greeted by the district consultant who informed me that our meeting location had been changed to a waterfront restaurant because of lack of availability of space in their school district. As the meeting began, I realized this location, with all its melodic sounds of the west coast shoreline, was interfering with my agenda. As participants casually engaged in conversations with one another, admiring the view, seemingly in no hurry to commence the meeting, temptations to direct the process and intervene with content raged from within me. How would the meeting be learner-focussed if I intervened with my desperate need to cover my agenda, my content and my curriculum? How was this placing teachers at the center of the process and not myself as the focus? This particular dilemma mirrored for me my experiences in the classroom where I believed I was a learner-focussed teacher and struggled with an external curriculum I sometimes felt I needed to cover.

A second recurring dilemma was the issue surrounding the colleague/expert dichotomy. In the teacher research groups I facilitated, many participants had attended workshops I had given as a provincial consultant. My previous incarnation, my previous "successes" as a consultant returned to haunt me. This monster held me captive to my own history as it put pressure on me to meet the participants' expectations of the consultative "telling" model. It seemed that I was locked into a narrow corridor, not permitted to move within the complex, tortuous, mazy pathways of teacher research because some participants' expectations were linear and narrowly based on their experiences with my "performance" as a consultant. As a result, these participants initially moved away from the more authentic experience of making meaning out of their own uncertainties, inseparable from their practice. They wanted the "right answer," the magical solution, the recipe for solving their own dilemmas without owning the process. This was the perspective of, "Tell me what to do . . . tell me which door to open and I will go through it." I was struggling to be 'within the labyrinth,' while some participants wanted me to provide a more comfortable, straightforward road map showing how to pass through the issues without having to live with their messiness.

The colleague/expert dichotomy appears to me to result, in part, from the socialization of teachers throughout the history of education. I believe that in the past, teachers' voices have been marginalized, expected to follow directions "from the top," to not concern themselves with questions of their own practice. A Ministry of Education 'official', administrator or other "expert" would decide for teachers what comprised effective teaching and learning. This stance of looking toward an expert "at the top" has become

habitual in the practices of many teachers. At the same time, part of my dilemma was that it was also necessary as a facilitator to have expertise. However, the expertise needed to facilitate processes and groups was different from being categorized inaccurately as being the 'expert with all the answers'. The role of facilitator is one of searching, listening, and questioning the actions of classroom practice, as opposed to a linear, formulaic model for producing effective teaching and learning.

Another dilemma worthy of unpacking (and previously mentioned in Chapter Four), arose when well-meaning participants positioned themselves in the role of giving advice or offering answers, rather than asking information seeking questions within the context of the teacher research meetings. Often these voices dominated conversations with personal stories that illustrated their similar experiences with another participant's dilemmas. The stories were often inclusive of solutions which the listening participant could or should apply in their own setting. These were participants who had decided to belong to the teacher research group and yet appeared to struggle with seeing themselves as researching teachers regardless of the nature of their practice.

In some cases, these were participants who were not presently teaching classes of students, but rather they were in administrative or district positions. Although they were philosophically and theoretically supportive of teacher research groups, they struggled with the notion of researching into their own practice. There appeared to be a clash of epistemologies, as they often talked for others, gave advice to others, and attempted to solve participants' perplexities or uncertainties by presenting solutions. The paradox for me lay

in my innate desire to direct these voices, just as they were directing others. I wanted to instruct these participants to rethink their actions, and to tell them this was not parallel to their district positions where the giving of advice, and addressing of teachers' concerns might be legitimate and appropriate. I had a strong desire to tell them this was a time to listen actively to other voices, and that they were interfering with the process of discourse. I wanted to tell them they were monopolizing time, controlling conversations, and possibly silencing voices.

I struggled to control those of my actions which were to replicate the very behaviour I sought to eradicate. How do I work with people who seemingly have all the answers and have co-opted the language of inquiry, but do not live it? Equally I had to resist the temptation, as a facilitator, to act on behalf of the silent voices, and to protect their right to be listened to in a way that I perceived would support building a discourse community. Speaking for silent voices could end up silencing them further. I contended with my craving to intervene with process and content to direct the participants the very way I am often tempted to direct and control student learning in my classroom. How far do I go in managing and directing before it impedes the process and disempowers teachers and students? Where is the line? Is there a line?

In the process of facilitating teacher research groups, I began to learn to withstand all kinds of tensions. Another tension producing dilemma emerged for me when collaborative partnerships pursued research questions that I perceived to be trivial. I believe that research questions should have a critical edge, that not any question will do. This is where an enormous level

of trust in the process of reflective practice, in people and in myself became a dominant factor in facilitating. I had to learn to trust that if participants looked closely at some compelling aspect of their practice, if they generated and owned that inquiry, if they cared passionately about their question, and if it was connected to action, through the very process of inquiry, new questions would emerge that would reshape and refine their practice. I developed an implicit trust in the process of reflective practice only through time, a multiplicity of experiences, and belief in the participants. I see here another parallel to student learning - if children are keen about a topic the teacher can use it to find a "hook" to discover further implications.

Similar tensions created professional anguish for me when I perceived participants had potentially unexamined constructions of some aspect of the framework of teacher research groups or of knowledge about teaching and learning. I referred to an example of this dilemma, when I described (in Chapter Four) the teacher research group which was legitimately incensed at the recent changes legislated by the Ministry of Education and skeptical of a project that claimed classroom-based research would support them in implementing a learner-focussed curriculum. They were firm in their beliefs that this process of action research was not a definition of 'real research' and they openly contested my claim that teacher research was authentic research. They voiced their disbelief that this project, which involved teachers talking, writing, and reflecting on their practice would be seriously accepted as a source of knowledge about implementing a learner-focussed curriculum. Further, if teacher research was taken seriously by the Ministry of Education, why did they send a practitioner who is not a university researcher to facilitate this

group? My credibility was further devalued even more because I was not a secondary teacher.

This group of participants was in disbelief that the project was an authentic opportunity that would provide them with release time, lunch and a mandate to engage in conversations about the craft of teaching. They were perplexed that the Ministry of Education would sponsor a project that involved teachers in self-initiated inquiry into their practice and they insisted there must be a hidden agenda or a silent mandate in order for the Ministry to fund such a project. From their particular stance, which they articulated fluently, I was not being completely honest in describing the intent of the project. I wondered how to challenge these preconstructions in a way that would simultaneously honor honest and legitimate feelings? I struggled with collecting their venom and detoxifying it. I wrestled with 'the baggage' that needed to be removed without being professionally unethical. I was willing to honor their voices, but not to validate the practitioners' constructions of reality from their perspectives.

A further example of what I perceived to be unexamined construction of knowledge about teaching and learning arose in a teacher research group, composed of ten teachers from the same elementary school. These practitioners had articulated their deeply held values and beliefs in a learner-focussed curriculum. They talked about the importance of students setting goals. They talked about the importance of focussing on where each student is on their 'learning journey'. They talked about the importance of students having opportunities to make wise choices in their learner-focussed

curriculum. They believed one of the ways of fostering a learner-focussed curriculum is by creating learning centers in their classrooms.

My dilemma arose when they demonstrated discrepancies between their beliefs that students should have choices, and their actions that dictated which center each student must attend everyday. In fact, teachers were proud of the cardboard necklaces they had created which boldly displayed the name of the learning center to which the children should go. Each student wore a cardboard necklace so that teachers could ensure that students were at the teacher-determined center and not one of their own choice. When this group of teachers identified 'centres' as an issue in their practice, that 'it just did not seem to be working', but they were not clear as to why, I had them list what it was that they valued and believed in terms of teaching and learning, and more specifically, during the portion of the day focussed on learning centres. These teachers listed such beliefs as the importance of children learning to make wise decisions regarding their own learning, that it was meaningful for students to have practice making choices because this was a life-long skill they needed, and that they valued trusting the children themselves to make decisions regarding their learning. I listened intently to what they were saying and then asked them simply, "How does what you have just identified as your values and beliefs about students having choices match your practice of telling children which centre they will attend? How does your belief in trusting children fit with your practice of having children wear necklaces so you know they are at the centre you assigned them?" Asking these information-seeking questions was like opening a door that was locked for this group of teachers; the teachers looked at one another and replied, "It

doesn't. That must be why it isn't working." The following is an excerpt from a transcript of the teachers reflecting on this process:

We want to talk about the impact on what happened with our centres in our school. The biggest impact for me was being questioned by our facilitator as to why we were doing what we were doing. ... But I remember it went back further than that when we decided to design learning centres. As everything became available to the children, all these struggling questions came up. What happens when there's so many [children] here and none there? And all these problems arose and we were getting a bit frustrated and we came up with necklaces, we came up with charts and we came up with a structure to make sure every child went everywhere and we controlled how many went to each centre.

And so we were struggling with these questions, at the same time we started our teacher research group. Our facilitator came along and it was just like this light at the end of the tunnel. She just asked a whole bunch of questions. She asked us what we valued and then asked us how that connected to what we were doing. She asked us why we were doing what we were doing or she would say, "Have you tried this?" And we would say..., "Well we were thinking about that but we were almost afraid to." It was like she gave us the, I don't know, I guess it was like the 'power' or the courage. She just gave you that permission, started to encourage.

And the interesting thing is that, I think that once you do it once you see, once that person had given you the nudge to get going again, I think you are more open to look at other things and to question other things. So it's not just the impact on the first time, but it's the impact forever after on your thinking. You think back and you say, "Well why do I do those things?" But the facilitator coming in and saying, an outsider coming in and

saying . . . Of course she didn't even suggest anything, she just said, "What are you doing and why." She just questioned what we were doing. And just for the record, we are continuing to do those centers, and kids are making their own choices about learning. And we are finding that we can, I think, give the children more and more freedom to make decisions, to set goals and to have control over their learning and we continue to ask questions about our own practices.

Without ever saying it, she [facilitator] taught us to teach from your beliefs and then you can defend anything you do as long as you know why you're doing something. And there you go, you don't need the administrators to protect and assure you. In fact, more and more as I become more professional, it has to be the teacher who says, "These are the things that I've chosen to do. These are the reasons why." And you know, rocks could fall and I would still continue to do this because this is what I believe. She got us to reflect and to look at what we're doing. And she gave us the feeling that we could climb mountains if we wanted to because she believed in us. (audio-taped transcript from a teacher research group, 1994)

Once again, I listened to and honored their voices, but I could not validate their actions. I wondered how to reframe information in a way that respected voices but did not support potential unexamined inconsistencies in their construction of knowledge. I wondered how I could grasp opportunities to support participants in reframing and reshaping practice for the purpose of making positive changes for them and for their students. Through the process of asking information seeking questions, participants rethought aspects of their practice. I asked questions such as : How do your actions of deciding which center each student will complete each day match your beliefs in a learner-focussed curriculum? Who owns the decisions about where the

students will be during learning center time? What are the grounds for you deciding which centers students must attend? How does this make a difference to your articulated goals for student learning? What would happen if students had the opportunities to make choices during this learning center time?

The information-seeking questions I asked, led to a thought-provoking conversation, and teachers began to examine closely their own assumptions about teaching and learning and connections they were making to the action in their own practice. Through the conversations, participants asked themselves: What are we afraid of? Why do we feel we need to control this when we have just said it is not what we believe? What would happen if we let the students decide where they went during learning center time? During the same meeting, teachers developed an action plan which reflected student choice and I agreed to return the next week to talk about what happened.

When I began as a facilitator for teacher research, I did not realize a maze existed, instead I expected to travel a linear path, as was true in my previous role of consultant where I transmitted information; there was very little interaction, and I left feeling satisfied that I had accomplished my task effectively. However, as dilemmas emerged in my practice as a facilitator, I began to realize there were complexities, and intricacies associated with the role and that, in fact, I was in the midst of a maze. Through confrontation of these dilemmas, I was able to navigate my way and make sense of the labyrinth. The following is a summary of the key findings, possible implications and conclusions.

Key Findings

Evolving out of my experiences facilitating teacher research groups over the past four years, I have come to know six key pieces that were of critical significance. Over time, these key pieces were assembled into my practice and have enhanced my skills as a facilitator, as I continued to make my way through the maze of facilitating teacher research groups. Upon reflection, my role as facilitator could be characterized as synonymous with good teaching:

- emphasizing the exploration of ideas rather than an end product**
- asking open-ended questions rather than looking for the right answer**
- sharing responsibility for the sessions rather than taking ownership of the process**
- supporting individual ownership for questions and projects rather than predetermining the research focus**
- providing time for professional dialogue rather than rushing through my agenda**
- designing sessions driven by their questions rather than my answers**
- reflecting on myself as a learner rather than fulfilling a preconceived image of a leader transmitting knowledge**
- selectively expressing my personal values and beliefs rather than portraying myself as neutral**
- establishing a climate of empowerment through shared ownership of decisions rather than making all the decisions**

- **facilitating critical analysis in discussions rather than making evaluative or judgmental comments**
- **raising fundamental questions rather than stating expected answers**
- **pushing or nudging thinking rather than encouraging only listening and hearing**
- **connecting theory and research with the day-to-day lives of teachers**
- **enabling teachers to define and redefine their classroom practice rather than offering them predetermined definitions**
- **questioning participants' essential beliefs and assumptions**

I discovered teacher research groups were most effective when:

- 1. there is a framework enabling teachers to have time to talk and work collaboratively in a trusting environment;**
- 2. teachers' process of inquiry begins in the action of their practice;**
- 3. connections between teachers' actions and student learning are made explicit;**
- 4. the facilitator values each teacher research group as a unique entity with its own distinctive qualities;**
- 5. the facilitator supports teachers in the process of social/political, pedagogical and personal change;**
- 6. the facilitator ensures that teacher research groups network and make connections between school districts, the Ministry of Education and the wider community, and thereby effect educational change and school reform.**

1. **Teacher research groups are most effective when there is a framework enabling teachers to have time to talk and work collaboratively in a trusting environment.**

The data demonstrated that teacher research groups worked effectively when the facilitator ensured that teachers had opportunities to work collaboratively with one another, which created a social context for talk. The framework, and the role of the facilitator within that framework, permitted a great number of opportunities for teacher collaboration. Teachers talked about the importance of having a colleague with whom to describe, discuss and debate teaching. Through collaboration, teachers built upon one another's ideas in ways that would not have taken place in isolation. This was not collaboration simply for the sake of collaborating, but a means to develop theory through the action of practitioners' research, theory which continued to be modified through actual classroom practice.

The collaborative partnerships were a significant factor in the development of a trusting environment wherein teachers took risks with their learning as they openly, honestly and critically reflected on their practice. Schön believes:

. . . both the reflective teacher and the reflective coach are researchers in and on practice whose work depends on their collaboration with each other. It is the nurturing of groups of researchers of this sort, at the core of the schools of education, that I believe holds greatest promise for healing the breach between educational research and practice, revitalizing the schools of education, and mobilizing their resources in support of reflective teaching in the schools. (1988, p. 29)

Building a collaborative atmosphere in teacher research groups involved sustaining large blocks of uninterrupted time for teachers to talk within the meetings. The nature of teacher research demands self-disclosure, and it took time to develop a trusting atmosphere where teachers felt safe to take risks to do so. Through my experiences as a facilitator, I became aware that conversations inclusive of critical dialogue were a locus for change in teaching practice. I came to know that meaningful talk occurred naturally when I created conditions (discussed in Chapter Four) in the teacher research meetings that were conducive to generating conversations between colleagues. In the context of teacher research groups teachers were supported in rethinking, reflecting and reshaping their practice. Participants' questionnaires indicated that my facilitative role enhanced the affective component in conversations, as well as nurturing dialogue to go beyond the retelling of narratives (discussed later in this chapter). The sustained blocks of time for teachers to talk with one another was reported to have made a significant difference in the way teachers worked together and translated their research plans into the action of their practice.

The importance of collaboration is reflected in my own practice as a facilitator, both through the relationships with researching teachers and with my colleague, Sharon. It was through many reflective conversations that I was able to make meaning of my practice and to challenge my frames of reference, thus transforming aspects of my role as a facilitator. I reconstructed, theorized, and interpreted problematic situations that challenged my fundamental beliefs about the nature of facilitating, teaching and learning, resulting in positive changes in my practice both as a facilitator and as a classroom teacher. For example, I became a better observer and listener and

was better able to trust that people would find meaning through the research process.

Collaboration enhanced collegiality and created professional communities which were built through talk, and caused us to think differently about our practice. Collaboration increased our collective capacity to make a difference in education. Teachers working with teachers often resulted in positive changes in teachers' practice, student learning, and school reform.

2. Teacher research groups are most effective when their inquiry begins in the action of their practice.

One of the ways teacher research groups impacted on student learning was through a focus on the action of teachers' practice. This focus facilitated a process that built shared meaning through action and reflection and ensured that student work, rather than teacher research in and of itself, was the agenda for the teachers' work. In the initial stages of the project, many teachers wanted to begin with questions that involved researching other practitioners, other classrooms or aspects of teaching and learning that would result in a product, such as teacher resource materials to help support their colleagues. My role was to ensure the teacher research started from teachers' own experiences and from their own frames of reference in the action of their practice. The closer teachers' research questions were to the action of their classroom, the more compelling their research. The data collected in this study provides evidence of participants valuing the emphasis on the process rather than on a final product. However, a tangible result did arise out of the

research process and this was that all participants emerged thinking differently about teaching and learning; therefore, we may assume that positive changes also occurred within the context of student learning.

Teachers gained new understandings from the perplexing events that occurred in day-to-day teaching. Findings also indicated that teachers were more likely to examine and test new ideas, methods and materials when the research was closely connected to their classroom practice. As a facilitator, I worked with teachers to support, enhance and initiate changes in aspects of practice as we experienced the messiness of working collaboratively.

3. Teacher research groups are most effective when connections between teachers' action and student learning are made explicit.

Researching teachers indicated the importance of the role of the facilitator in making explicit connections between teachers' actions and student learning as they engaged in a process of identifying issues, dilemmas or questions. This process was often initiated by focussing, re-directing, or provoking conversations that the action of teachers' research and student learning. I constantly asked: "Is what we are doing in our practice making a difference to student learning? If it is not, why are we doing it? How do we change the action in our practice so that it is? If this is making a difference, how do we reshape it to continue to improve it?"

I supported teachers as they worked with students to construct knowledge and curriculum through the process of inquiry, in ongoing examinations of the issues raised by teachers themselves. This process

enabled practitioners to accumulate, evaluate, and disseminate knowledge about teaching and learning. Collegially, we examined core ideas, principles and practices. We made sense of competing theoretical claims and conflicting evidence to develop practical applications to practically apply our questions.

My experience as a facilitator has also changed my own actions as a teacher and my beliefs about student learning. My classroom of six, seven and eight year old children resonates in a different way because of my learning. The classroom atmosphere is one which nurtures growth through the acceptance that uncertainty is valued in the process of learning. The voices are distinct, yet harmonious. I continually filter my classroom teaching with the question: How is my action as a teacher making a difference to classroom learning? I appreciate the importance of building a trusting environment wherein children feel comfortable to take risks, ask questions, and search for meaning. I know I must create and sustain interpersonal relationships with each child. I understand the importance of children working collaboratively within a sea of talk. I have discovered the significance of encouraging and extending the questions raised by children as they explore the passageways of learning. My values live within recognizing the virtue of not knowing, the virtue of seeking, as together we create meaningful and purposeful curriculum and explore the intricate network within our learning labyrinth.

4. **Teacher research groups are most effective when the facilitator values each teacher research group as a unique entity with its own distinctive qualities.**

Each teacher research group had different dynamics, with its own distinctive qualities. As facilitator, it was important to understand and value the uniqueness of each group, as this impacted upon my role as facilitator. I implemented a similar framework for teacher research groups, and their meetings, yet in every instance, and even within the same group, the various meetings looked and sounded different. I needed to be flexible, responsive and willing to change the agenda based on the needs of that particular group of practitioners at that particular point in time. I raised information seeking questions, specific to the individual participants, about fundamental beliefs, basic paradigms, different commitments, and various aspects of practice. Once again, this parallels my actions as a teacher within the context of classroom practice; each group of children has its own distinct personality and set of needs, and these are what influence the shaping of an effective curriculum.

Although each teacher research group was distinct, they required a similar set of conditions to be effective. It was important for all groups to have a trusting environment, to sustain interpersonal relationships and to focus on collaborative action as primary conditions for effective teacher research. Individually, researching teachers brought with them a deep reservoir of ideas and experiences and my role as facilitator was to tap into that. Another necessary condition was that participants felt comfortable expressing the uncertainties and questions inseparable from their daily practice. Without this comfort with discomfort, meaningful and compelling research questions rarely materialize. And one of the ways I nurtured this

condition was by continually modelling acceptance of tension and conflict as basic to my own practice.

5. **Teacher research groups are most effective when the facilitator supports teachers in the process of social/political, pedagogical, and personal change.**

I discovered that supporting the continuous investigation of classroom practices, the systematic exploration of central issues in student learning, and the reporting of research findings to a wider community, effected both social/political, pedagogical and personal change for teachers. Positive changes generally resulted for teachers in the research groups; for example, even when two thoughtful teachers researched the importance of their three reading groups, basal readers, and regular use of phonics worksheets, they emerged from the teacher research experiences thinking differently about best practice.

Fundamental changes in researching teachers' practice resulted from their involvement in teacher research groups. The publicizing of their work resulted in their becoming change agents. Teachers became more comfortable living with the dissonance of not knowing, and in seeking ways to make sense of some aspect of their practice; thus affective dimensions of teacher change were influenced through the teacher research groups. The final reports demonstrate how teachers experienced positive changes in student learning as a result of inquiry into their classroom practice.

There was also evidence that the teacher research groups brought about change in professional development in schools, in districts and in the province by providing an alternate model for professional growth. Data from the twenty-four telephone interviews of district personnel throughout British Columbia supported the claim, based on data collected from participants, which indicated that the groups had a significant influence on supporting change for student learning, for teachers, for schools, and for the wider community. District personnel utilized the teacher research framework for professional development sessions while some districts attempted to facilitate teacher research groups as a way of supporting teachers in the process of inquiry toward with the goal of improving in practice. I also implemented the teacher research framework in my work as a Faculty Associate in the education program at Simon Fraser University. In so doing, I provided a forum for student-teachers' invitation into inquiry as a way of critiquing and revising their classroom action.

6. **Teacher research groups are most effective when the facilitator ensures that teacher research groups network and make connections between school districts, the Ministry of Education and the wider community, and thereby effect educational change and school reform.**

Initiating teacher research networks generated both local "inside" knowledge developed and used by teachers and their immediate communities, and public "outside" knowledge which was shared with schools and the larger provincial community. For example, along with Simon Fraser University and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, we initiated a teacher research exchange in the winter of 1993 at which teacher researchers

from various districts in the province attended to exchange ideas, examine issues and talk about their work.

I facilitated the creation of these networks by linking practitioners' work to larger networks of reform. These larger networks of reform were inclusive of other teacher research groups, both within the province and beyond, such as connections made through international conferences on teacher research, and the American Educational Research Association. As the district and provincial networks developed, teachers both shared information and built knowledge that enlarged their vision of teaching and learning. As networks developed, the concept of teacher as researcher in schools, in communities and in the province, was elevated in status and viewed as a viable way to add to the knowledge base in teaching and learning.

Participants' responses indicated they appreciated and valued the network connections I created. These networks were important because the outside ideas of others were being worked through the inside knowledge of the various teacher research groups. It was also important to build networks between the various teacher research groups and the Ministry of Education whose policies supported the changes suggested by the researching teachers. Evidence of this emerged as policy makers used the final teacher research reports to make decisions about curriculum implementation or to utilize findings to impact curriculum development. An example of this is found in the Ministry's most current document entitled *Research Findings on Personal Planning in the Primary Years: Student Outcomes and Best Practices* (1995). This report "summarizes the findings of research projects [from the various teacher research groups referred to in this study] into student planning,

personal development and career awareness in the Primary years". An appendix within the aforementioned document (currently in press) includes a brief summary of the teacher research reports written by the participants. This report will be used "to provide an informed basis for implementation of personal planning in the Primary years where it is to be integrated throughout the existing program" (Research Findings on Personal Planning in the Primary Years, 1995, p.2).

MOVING BEYOND THE STORIES

Throughout my experience facilitating teacher research groups, I learned about the importance of having an external facilitator to move teachers beyond their stories, beyond the simple retelling of incidents in their lives as teachers. However cathartic this singular indulgence in the narrative may be, it has a seductive peril, in that teachers may remain stuck within their own corridor, not questioning or challenging their own beliefs or theoretical constructions, and thus taking no action towards rethinking and subsequently changing teaching practice. Thus, without the external voice, the "critical eye," provided by the facilitator, teacher research groups might not connect to educational reform, nor might they have any focussed impact on student learning.

As an outside facilitator I often posed the questions that participants might hesitate to ask within the culture of their own school or teacher research group. Sometimes teachers did not ask these questions of each other because they were uncomfortable questions; teachers were reluctant to

provoke controversy with their colleagues. For example, a group of teachers, who had a high profile within their district had been recounting their work on "setting criteria with young children" and expressed a belief that one part of this process involved weighting student work, that is, assigning numeric value to it. Because these teachers were highly regarded within their group, other members listened, acknowledged, and reinforced this group's conceptions; no one challenged their story from the learners' perspective. I feared that the others in the group would inflict the same process upon their students, rather than questioning what seemed to me to be an artificial and developmentally inappropriate model for setting criteria. I asked these teachers, "What is your purpose in 'weighting' the work of young children? How does this connect to learning? My questions provoked a deafening silence, as teachers resisted hearing challenges to ideas in which they had invested a great deal of their thinking, energy and time. My concern in this situation was that people in positions of power might have remained unchallenged in their teacher research group had there not been an external voice.

At other times it was evident that my questions or observations challenged their retellings in ways that never occurred to participants; I had the added advantage of being able to see their labyrinth from an outside perspective, while they were inside grappling with their own "monsters", their own uncertainties. Though I believe there is a real need for teachers to share their stories, in that this may bring new meaning to their experiences, I contend that teachers must move beyond their narratives to connect what they have learned through the retelling of their stories, to the authentic action

of practice; for without the action, there is a possibility that there will be little positive, deliberate change for student learning.

I contend that narrative in and of itself is narcissistic and encumbering; it barricades the unopened doors of practice sending teachers clambering for the comfort of the known, rather than confronting the "monsters" who lurk in the corridors of the unknown. Teachers who do not move beyond the stories, avoid contending with the "monsters" of their practice. And unless teachers wrestle with these "monsters", they do not effect changes for kids. The role of the facilitator is critical to teacher change because this external voice asks clarifying questions, provokes conversations, challenges unexamined conceptions of knowledge, and gently prods teachers to explore the mazes that are embedded within their practice, by which they create their own labyrinth of teaching and learning.

CONCLUSIONS

a labyrinth, a maze . . . When it was finished Minos locked Pasiphaë in the innermost room, far underground, and there she gave birth to her child: the Minotaur, a monster. . . (McLeish, 1983, p. 142)

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The monstrous Minotaur lived on, still howling and roaring underground, as if the earth itself was bellowing. The islanders devised a ceremony to appease it, in which acrobats danced and leapt. . . (McLeish, 1983, p. 143)

The monsters within the labyrinth of facilitating teacher research groups, for me, were multiple and took on different forms and incarnations, depending upon where I was within the maze. There were times when I was unaware I was amidst a crowd of monsters; at other times I wondered if what I was seeing really was a monster. Or was it just my own vivid imagination creating hallucinations of the minotaur, initially brought on by my apprehension, my sense of insecurity, bewilderment, confusion, with being inside the maze, with being new to facilitation. Sometimes, too, there were monsters of my own making. On my entry, I had no knowledge of the monsters that lurked within the labyrinth. Later, after experience and practice in facilitating teacher research groups, I knew the corners where monsters often dwelled, and learned how to subdue and dispel them, how to deal with them quickly, fearlessly, and effectively.

My "monsters" included the dilemmas of my practice as a facilitator, dealing with some of the participants' emotions and actions, holding onto my

own unexamined constructions of knowledge, my own insecurities and self-doubts, and the very processes involved in teacher research with its inherent messiness and uncertainty. Although I often longed for the monsters never to have existed within my labyrinth of facilitating teacher research groups, they served to challenge and provoke me, fulfilling a similar function to that which my external voice had provided to researching teachers; they forced me to examine my own practice critically and to change my beliefs and actions.

The process of creating, shaping, and supporting teacher research groups evolved through the discovery of the Daedalian pathways which emerged to shape and reshape my practice. Initially, there were many recurrent obstacles for me as I struggled to live with the messiness, the complexities and with what often appeared to be a lack of direction or one single answer to complex questions. Which corridor do I choose? Which door do I open, and do I really want to open it? Do I truly want to find the centre, encounter the monsters that lie waiting?

This was a collaborative framework to support teachers in changing their practice, often in uncertain circumstances which could be somewhat anxiety-producing. As facilitator I discovered that only the real life experiences of being a teacher researcher, within the context of teacher research groups, transformed my practices, and helped me to broaden my frame of references and thus enlarge my vision of teaching and learning. I became aware that through rich collegial conversations, inclusive of vision, beliefs and values, in synchronicity with practice, that teachers "... [built] up a shared language adequate to the complexity of teaching, capable of distinguishing one practice and its virtue from another" (Little, 1981, p. 12).

As I conclude, I have reflected upon my nebulous exploration into the labyrinth of my practice. I have entered the darkness of the passages to find a way through the maze. I have struggled both to hold onto and to follow the thread that led me downward into the intricate corridors of knowledge. I have faced the dilemmas of my practice as I challenged the mythical minotaur at the center of the maze. Writing this study has enabled me to go beyond the stories of teacher research, to understand the maze and its monsters. This was a maze of my own making and the writing of this study has brought me through the maze and provided me with the opportunity to view it holistically from the outside, rather than chamber by chamber from the inside. Through going beyond the retelling of my story, through its synthesis and analysis, I have emerged thinking differently about the spaces I create for both teachers and students. I am also left wondering how to support the children in my classroom in understanding their own learning labyrinth. And, although I do not know exactly where the next turn will be, I am beginning to understand what labyrinths are all about as I continue to explore the life-long pathways of self-inquiry. I am still in the process of discovering the secrets of the labyrinth, and I continue to unwind the "thread of spider's silk" (McLeish, 1983, p.143) to find my way.

I do know this, however: through facilitating teacher research groups I have created better places for kids to learn, I have worked at improving life chances for kids.

. . . She pushed me a bit, I think - made me stop and think about what I had been doing. Some of the things I'd held as true were being challenged. And it wasn't a comfortable place to be at all. But now I think that change will happen, that wouldn't have if

she'd said nothing about it, not asked those hard questions. Maybe out of all of this something positive can happen, something that affects my life, and the people I interact with day-to-day, the kids that I teach. (researching teacher, 1994)

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APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Request for Expressions of Interest

for the following two projects
sponsored by the Program Evaluation and Research Branch
of the Ministry of Education
and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism
and Human Rights:

Primary Program Review - School-Based Research Projects (6 new sites)
Field-Based Research - Locally Initiated Projects (8 new sites)

DESCRIPTION:

School-based and field-based research are terms that describe an approach to education research which recognizes the central role of teachers, education administrators and other educators in the process of gathering and interpreting information within an educational setting.

The Program Evaluation and Research Branch is the sponsor of the two projects which were piloted at ten sites in the 1990-91 school year. Each site was comprised of ten teacher researchers working in pairs. The groups met periodically to identify research questions and methodologies. Their work was managed, facilitated and reported on by an educational researcher. Examples of research topics explored by the groups are listed below.

In light of the success of the pilot projects, the Ministry is planning to again support these research efforts. The current project has the potential to boost collaboration and co-operation among educational partners, while simultaneously providing reliable data concerning *Year 2000* initiatives. The Purpose of these research projects is to promote enquiry that validates and creates understanding about teaching and learning.

* The first project, *Primary Program Review - School-Based Research Projects*, is intended to fulfill, in part, the detailed work plan of the *Framework for Primary Program Review*. Teachers as researchers have been described in this document as integral for gathering information on program implementation and program effects

on students. In the pilot project, groups focused on a variety of implementation issues, such as teacher values and multi-age groupings. This project will address additional implementation and effects on student issues.

The second project, *Field-Based Research - Locally Initiated Projects*, is more open-ended, in that researchers are able to identify their own interest in areas congruent with the *Year 2000* and the three programs. The pilot projects focused on issues such as french immersion retention and teacher collaboration. This project would provide the opportunity for research groups to research their own issues preferably within the Intermediate, Graduation and other *Year 2000* programs.

OTHER INFORMATION:

- Selection of the successful proposals will be made by February 10, 1992.
- Projects are to commence mid-February, 1992 and be completed no later than April 30, 1992.
- Funds will be available through a facilitator to support the research projects (i.e. release time, secretarial time, etc.). The facilitator will also provide organizational and research assistance.
- Expressions of Interest must include composition of research team and project contact person.
- In response to existing agreements between the Ministry and the BCTF the development of selection criteria has received input from the BCTF, and the Federation has also been invited to participate in the selection of proposals.
- Teachers interested in project proposal format ideas may contact Charlie Naylor at the BCTF, Toll-free: 1-800-663-9163; phone: 731-8121.
- For further information please call: Suzanne Moreau, Research Officer, or Tom Bennett or Mary Fedorchuk, Assistant Directors, at 356-2590.

SELECTION/APPLICATION CRITERIA:

1. All projects must be discussed with the Superintendent of Schools and the Administrative Officer for the school[s] involved. Following such discussion and the endorsement of the Superintendent of Schools, the project should be submitted to the local association for endorsement.
2. Priority will be given to one proposal per school district.

3. Identification of up to 10 persons, the majority of whom have regular classroom responsibilities, to participate as the research group for the project.
4. Participants must indicate their commitment to working collaboratively.
5. A time commitment for release of up to 5 days for each participant. Such time to be used for meetings and other related research activities for the duration of the project.
6. No other Ministry-sponsored projects are to be undertaken by any of the participants at the same time.
7. Priority will be given to those projects which reflect geographic distribution, joint district submission, diversity of teaching population, and gender balance.
8. Submit proposal by Thursday, February 6, 1992 by FAX or mail to:

Ministry of Education
and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism
and Human Rights
Program Evaluation and Research Branch
340-617 Government Street
Victoria, B.C.
V8V 2M4

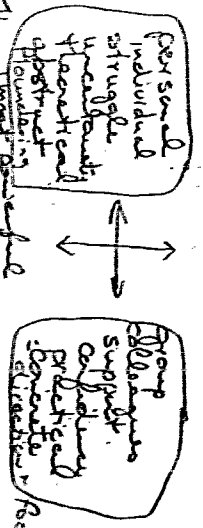
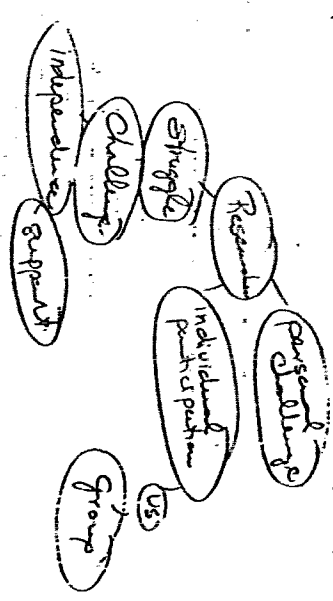
ATTENTION: Suzanne Moreau

FAX: 604-387-3682

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIVE WRITING

Experiences being part of the group



The biggest struggle aspect of the teacher and researcher group is how the opportunity to work is as meaningful way with colleagues from diverse background over time. There was no set agenda but rather a facilitating framework which set some parameters beyond that we functioned as individuals and as

a group to try to make sense of what was important to us. The agenda became our own and was not predetermined by a program. We've had the opportunity for the "same" to develop and evolve over time - we've had the luxury of time which is so often lacking in the one day or one hour pro-d. Although our interests may have been very different, we've discovered commonalities amongst ourselves which will continue to strengthen our professional regard for each other. So often we determine professional development based on preconceived commonalities. "High level professionalism essential for growth, development & performance."

01.04.01 I've been trying goal setting with my class. Lots of interest is building as well as a sense of power to control in the students themselves. But I'm feeling a little bit unfocused - where am I going and why? I know the power the students are feeling is really valuable, but I'm not sure if I'm sharing that knowledge with them effectively. It seems to all come back to what exactly is my question - so far it feels broad and vague to me. The other struggle for me is how to transfer what we do with goals to reporting to parents. For my primary students it is all right, but it is difficult to "mark" work towards achieving a goal for the intermediate reporting form.

01.04.03 My thoughts around learning this week have focused around the idea that you don't always find out what you thought you would. For example, when I talked with my group of children and asked "think of a time you learned something from a classmate" - their whole focus was on social issues. Every attempt on my part to bring it back to academic learning was not even acknowledged! They talked about modelling 'helpful', 'sharing ideas/equipment', 'get along'. At one point I even asked which they thought was more important 'learning about spelling, for example, or learning about working with others'. I got a strange look and was told getting along with others was more important (didn't I already know that?). In our staff discussion with the board office staff I had trouble understanding the reasoning for why some \$ went here or there when, it seems, that the children in my class have done without counselling, material, and other support.

01.04.02 Since our last meeting I've been thinking a lot about how things work and look in different schools. I guess I like to see how things work across ages too, but, for me, it's been a time of change - all secretarial staff and administration has changed at my school since Christmas. It's made me aware of processes working well (or so I thought) changing form. Why is that? Had other people at my school seen the same things I'd seen before? How do they see these adaptations? What about other schools? How do they do things like - recognize student birthdays, recognize student effort?

01.05.01 First week back to school after Xmas ... it seems like it's been a month long! Everyone is feeling tired. I'm really pleased with my morning group. The new full-timers (all three of them) have adjusted really well and are keen. I still haven't forgiven Michelle for totally hogging the whole Xmas concert. She pushed her way to the front row and proceeded to gyrate all over her square foot of riser. Oh well. I don't have to live with her. Sometimes I feel my whole group falls apart when the half-timers arrive - it's party time! Something I'd like to work at. Once they get busy on a task, things are OK. It's those inbetween times when they become bored and obnoxious. Teaching is such a great profession - the rewards and frustrations balance each other nicely and luckily the rewards are greater - gag! Working in this group is great!

The way the researcher group has affected my teaching practices has been in terms of quality and focus. It has ~~been~~ helped me to improve the quality of my relationship with my students, and has helped me to focus the educational program on my strengths and my students needs. That combination of my skills and their needs is important because what I do in special ed. is so affected by emotional connection between me and my students. I had sort of let that go for awhile, just to "get the job done" (imagine an elementary teacher being so content-driven!) more efficiently, I thought. This has been a valuable exercise for me because it has proven the importance of a strong emotional connection in the effective delivery of special services, which I had previously discounted. If I could say one thing about the effect of the researcher group on my present and future practice, I would say that I have learned to respect and value the personal aspect of teaching. You can't get the message through if no one is ^{trying to receive it?} listening, and if I wasn't making it easy for the kids to hear me and I wasn't listening so they would want to communicate. The intensely personal nature of this group has been the most different from other professional development experiences. The reflection component was the most powerful because it anchors the activity in relevant settings. Teacher educ. should look like how we teach (lecture vs. involvement)

March 27

Focus: My Participation in Teacher as Researcher Process

^{— sooner}
My hopes were that I would be able to be more active in this process. My project is centered on 8th grading and changes in my teaching style. The pods exist and, for the most part, I am dealing with them differently than others - my classroom is certainly noisier, the principal walks through that group more than any other I teach and so on.

Unfortunately, however, I haven't had the chance to document any of this in any real, concrete way yet. I know things are changed but these changes ~~aren't~~ aren't written down yet.

Being part of this group has helped me focus on what I'm doing. I am certainly more conscious of it. Also, it is exciting to hear what is/has gone on in other rooms, too.

Often times, I feel isolated from others ... we are in our rooms in our schools and we simply don't have the chances ^{occasions} to talk about things like this.

This group is different from others because here we are responsible for our own work - we get out what we put in. Other PD's seem to be more of the presentation mode - here we, as a group are our own presenters. This is where I wish I was able to be more active - what I am doing is miniscule in comparison to others, but that's the way it is. I won't be able to report real significances ... The results of my data-gathering will be significant to me and other "pod-teachers" and will likely impact on timetabling, however...

NO learning @ -
NO focus?

04.08.02 My goodness. It's time to start thinking about report cards again! Only four weeks before they have to be in the office ready to be read by Sheila. I feel uneasy about two major questions. Have I introduced, taught and reviewed all I predicted I would do in my preview and have I enough material to support my evaluation? Unfortunately my concern about these questions has over shadowed these past two days that I should be reflecting on. That is, am I providing emotional support for the needy students, preparing activities to teach specific skills and promoting higher level thinking in the students? Somehow this afternoon my students created an atmosphere of joyfulness and creativity while making plasticine model dragons and wooden block castle and wonderful stuffed paper sculpture dragons. They succeeded in making me feel comfortable with what I am doing and confident enough to carry on with the program.

04.08.03 Today I feel threatened by the problem of time. The primary program is so varied and so many activities are stimulating and worthwhile that I feel sometimes uncomfortable about the choices I make in relation to what to include and what to leave out. This past week we could have focused on Chinese New Year, Fire Prevention, White Cane Week and one Hundredth Day. How can we fit it all in? We can't so it is our choices that dictate what our program will be. The next restraint of time is after we have made program decisions is how do we hear children observe them during activities each day. That's only the problem of time management during the school day. I'll leave the problem of preparation time for another time.

04.09.01 Questions: What direction will we go, what area will be our focus, will it tie in with University research course that focuses on the Year 2000. Doing continued spelling research - data gathering, University course on Research Designs - somewhat frustrating because it strongly emphasizes quantitative research and standardized testing. The type of research we did last spring seemed more "real," "valid" and useful than the empirical, quantitative projects discussed and described in texts. I got into "discussions" about the validity of standardized testing upon which to base decisions and assessment. Thank goodness the Ministry seems to validate this type of research (qualitative) if the booklet we received is an indication.

04.09.02 In reflecting in the areas of interest we shared at the last meeting, it was difficult to separate the topics we discussed. Greater importance can't be placed on one. Self-esteem is at the core of all learning and growth, but in a school setting is it possible without a feeling of success in reading, writing and arithmetic and of course - thinking? This is in no way to over stress the importance of isolated skills or set levels of achievement but a combination of skills and strategies that facilitate academic development contribute greatly to a child's self-concept and feelings of success. An important goal would be to gain information on the effective development of

these skills within the success-oriented philosophy of the primary program, the accommodation of a wide variety of children in each class, and continuous progress. What teaching strategies are effective in promoting skill development yet remain context, interactive learning and accommodate all students? Do the 3 R's continue to develop adequately and metacognitively without direct isolated instruction and drill? Writing analysis and interview would give insight into these questions.

04.10.02 It amazes me how the children in my class come to school with so much "baggage" from home. As a result of this, some kids are relatively "normal" and others are just bouncing off the walls craving attention. WHY? As I meet some of the parents of these children, it certainly doesn't surprise me that some children are the way they are! So much is going on in their little lives! I know I'd have a difficult time coping with some of the "stuff" as an adult. Some of the children who I know are having home problems do not always talk about it. How can I get these kids to open out more? Approaching some of these parents is really difficult as they are on the "offensive" as soon as discussion begins.

04.10.01 A ten minute write, I draw a total blank! Frustration with writing I guess. I don't like picking up the pen but I think I'm getting a wee bit easier. It's great to have the team together again and now I have a new partner. This is really important! Since Ann left I've realized just how important collegial planning is to this project. I've really missed the opportunity to dialogue concerns/questions etc. and have felt rather at a loose end. Our discussion about how our language affects the children's language has kept me on my toes this term. Because of the results of the last project I have tried to expand my repertoire of thinking language with the children. It amazes me how the teacher's language often becomes such a big part of the child's and, how we, as teachers have so much power over those wonderful minds. Because of the opportunity to reflect on my own and with others I feel I continue to develop into a better teacher. Reflection is such an important part of the teaching process and our learning never ceases! Once again thanks for the opportunity.

04.11.02 What am I thinking about today? This week I've wondered about children's writing and spelling. I have my own theory about spelling - that part of a child's understanding of conventional spelling is developmental. As I've taught and watched my multi-grade classes I see a steady progression in the development of conventional spelling and so I haven't worried about it. I teach spelling skills but don't push it. But in the past couple of weeks comments from two grade 4 teachers and one parent cause me to question - am I doing enough? Will these children be terrible spellers forever? How do you balance the importance of kids loving to write, writing fluently with inventive spellings and enjoying this form of communication with "other people's" expectations? These children are better

APPENDIX C

DATA FROM PARTICIPANTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Question 1

What do you see as the three most important roles/responsibilities of a facilitator?

Category 1

Emerging theme: Shaping a way to working together

- respecting where everyone is coming from and going to
- using and encouraging others to use effective communication skills
- valued each person as a professional and listened intently and was sure to include and respect everyone's point of view
- value and respect everyone's point of view
- communications facilitator
- communication
- to explicitly value the contributions of every group member and make sure everyone is heard
- keep the group focussed
- to keep the group focussed so that important aspects of our work gets shared
- provide framework where people feel free and comfortable to speak and ask questions
- keep all group members focussed on the common goals
- to ensure the group remains focused
- establishing a group tone and focus
- to help the group stay focused on their topic
- offers balance by keeping discussions on track and focussed
- organizing of structure: keeping group on task, ensuring equal air time, providing processes for activities
- keeping the group focused

Question 2

What are the most important qualities/skills for a facilitator to have?

Category 2

Emerging Theme: Making connections

- knowledge in the direction the research could possible go
- has background knowledge and is well informed about the process as well as the content
- insight and ability to make connections
- good background knowledge of topic
- good analyzer and connection
- credibility... knowledge, intelligence
- knowledgeable of people and people skills
- a good knowledge of the material being researched
- to be able to see the important ideas and articulate them: helps wade through the fog
- to have the background and information to draw on
- knowledgeable
- teaching experience
- understanding of 'teacher as researcher'
- expertise in anecdotal reporting to help with suggestions
- vision and experience: the research, the process
- ability to see the larger picture and then able to help us fit our puzzle pieces in correctly
- knowledge in the direction the research could possible go
- a lot of knowledge (experience, reading, courses, in services)
- condensing information succinctly and intelligently
- knowledge of subject
- knowledge about child development and Primary Program

Question 3

Overall, do you think teacher research groups should have a facilitator? Please explain.

Category 4

Emerging Theme: Provoking and clarifying the conversation

- Yes: This keeps the group on focus and provides the wonderful model of listening which we all need.
- They provide feedback necessary to establish the value of your work.
- Yes: The group would not function as a group without the facilitator to co-ordinate, question, challenge, support, guide, and lead some discussions.
- Yes: I needed her skills. She gave us a structure for our thinking and her wealth of experience with research helped us form our thoughts, our methods and our thinking.
- Yes: I feel strongly that leadership as is provided in one who facilitates thinking and discussion, is essential in process learning.
- Yes: to lead the thinking and co-ordinate the process
- Yes: Other groups I have been in have floundered or lost focus and been unorganized and not probed as deeply.
- Yes: It gives the group an opportunity to clarify ideas and their own thoughts. The facilitator brings the group together, encourages, facilitates and often simplifies our ideas.
- Yes, I do. I have found a facilitator can help us see our assumptions and encourage us to test them. I have seen groups without facilitator start research with a preconceived notion and then prove themselves right but they already had the answers before they began. I feel a facilitator can encourage us to look beyond our beliefs, question them and lead us in a voyage of self discovery.

Question 5

Please describe a time when the facilitator in your group made a significant difference to your and/or your work? (Or to someone else).

Category 5

Emerging Theme: Creating and sustaining interpersonal relationships

- The facilitator was always positive and made everyone relaxed and eager to share.
- She was always supportive of individual's ideas. On several occasions she gave emotional support to a very frustrated individual. For me, she made me feel very good and proud about my work and myself as a learner. It made me realize how important positive feedback is to learners of any age.
- I was increasingly impressed with the amount of respect and enthusiasm shown by her. I felt that we were well guided and supported.
- Yes, there was that one session when I felt very vulnerable. There was lots of upset in my personal life and it turned out that I felt challenged by some of the group members and felt defensive about what I was doing in my research. I stood up for myself but I also felt much better about being able to flag my distress. My worry to the facilitator was being able to come to her with this concern and it was a really important step. I could unload it without making myself further vulnerable to the group. I felt heard, reassured and had that issue resurfaced, I felt sure that it would have been dealt with. Looking at the Ministry dispensing with this kind of leadership because it is expensive, I think that some energy and zip would be lost. Some level of professionalism, structure, formality, honor and basic jam would go. We

Question 5

Please describe a time when the facilitator in your group made a significant difference to your and/or your work? (Or to someone else).

Category 2

Emerging Theme: Making connections

- writing group overviews for a variety of research projects: being able to integrate the findings of the group members and being able to connect these findings to the Primary Program
- The facilitator helped to narrow and design my research question and helped brainstorm activities which were used as my action plan. Her help editing my first draft was very helpful.
- refining the question
- spending time to review the research when I thought it wasn't getting any results
- having difficulty interpreting the information gathered from students: the facilitator helped us understand to take exactly what the kids had written and not try to read anything into it and to not make it more complicated than it was
- Every year she has suggested ways of pursuing our topic while keeping our focus narrow enough to be possible. She has always made sure that the topic was something for us to help us in our work.
- The facilitator has helped us focus our question by keeping it manageable and more specific than I wanted to, but it made all the difference.
- helping to focus on one aspect of a much, much bigger question
- suggestions to questions, format, changing view point, redirection my attention

APPENDIX D

TEACHER RESEARCHERS' FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

Reflection and Self-evaluation in the Primary Program

In 1992-93, our research group decided to look at how we are implementing a key aspect of the Primary Program: student reflection and self-evaluation. The following excerpts from *The Primary Program Foundation Document* emphasize the importance of helping children develop self-awareness and self-direction.

Philosophy

The *Philosophy* section begins with the statement::

The Primary Program nurtures the continuing growth of children's knowledge and understanding of themselves and their world (p.15).

Teacher's role

The *Foundation Document* also describes the teacher's role in supporting goal-setting and reflection:

The teacher . . . provides encouragement, support and challenge, as appropriate, to help the child develop personal goals; . . . provides time, opportunity and a range of different experiences to stimulate children to interact, reflect, communicate and learn. (p. 21)

Position statements

The child is intended to be an *active participant* in the assessment process (p. 28) and the importance of self-evaluation is emphasized:

Self-evaluation assists children in becoming independent and autonomous learners. Teachers nurture the process of self-evaluation as they guide children to be reflective and as they help children recognize their accomplishments and identify their learning needs. With repeated opportunities to evaluate their work, children understand the significance of self-evaluation as a tool for lifelong learning. (p.30)

Goals

The program goals for social and emotional development reinforce the need for reflection, goal-setting and self-evaluation in specifying that experiences be provided which enable the child to *develop a positive, realistic self-concept* and to *set appropriate goals and feel satisfaction in accomplishments and efforts* (p.54). The goals for intellectual development also make clear the importance of reflection and self-awareness in the discussions about metacognition (p.,71) and becoming an independent lifelong learner (p.80-81).

The Review Issues

Our teaching and research on reflection and self-evaluation this year addresses a number of related issues in the *Primary Program Review: Framework*. In this summary, and in the five reports that accompany it, we have tried to provide insights into:

Implementation

What variations of the Program are apparent in B.C. schools ?

Our reports describe what the Primary Program looks like in our classrooms in terms of developing student reflection and self-evaluation.

Effects on students

What evidence of emotional and social development is apparent in children who are experiencing the Primary Program?

A number of our reports describe how experiences in reflection, goal-setting and self-evaluation are affecting the children's social and emotional development.

Effects on the education system

How has the Program affected roles and relationships among learners and teachers?

Specifically, we have considered how our roles and the children's roles are changing in terms of setting goals and evaluating their accomplishments.

How has the Program affected the nature of learning and teaching and the school and classroom environments that enable these processes?

In describing our research, we have provided evidence of how teaching, learning, and our classroom environments are changing as we focus on student reflection and self-evaluation.

Our Research Questions

While the review issues may appear discrete, in the reality of teaching and learning, they blend together and sometimes seem indistinguishable. The specific research questions that guided our work this year reflect more closely the ways in which we work with and think about the Primary Program in our classrooms.

How can we help young children to understand and set goals and to recognize their progress towards those goals?

What can we do to encourage risktaking and reflection? How can risktaking and reflection lead children to enhance their thinking, learning and self-esteem?

How can we help young children to self-evaluate their social behaviour? Does this process enhance self-esteem? How did this process change my teaching?

How can we help students to set goals and reflect on their progress? How can self-evaluation enhance self-esteem?

How does goal-setting help young children to focus and make their learning more personal? How can parents and teachers support children with their goal-setting?

Implementation: What do reflection and self-evaluation look like in our classrooms?

Members of our group are exploring a variety of ways of helping students to become more reflective, to set their own goals and evaluate their own accomplishments. Some of the strategies we used in implementing these aspects of the Primary Program included:

- **Continuing emphasis**

I am changing the emphasis in my classroom—the way I speak, what I focus on. I've added a component at the end of every lesson to help the children reflect and transfer. I focus my day around our class goals and the students' individual goals.

- **Modeling**

It was important for the students to know about my goal too—I was trying to cut down on the amount of coffee I drank. They watched how I chose my goal, what I did to work towards it, and they supported me.

- **Class goal setting**

We talked about what would make our classroom a nicer place to be—what bugged us about the way it was now, what we would like to change. We made a chart ("What bothers you?") and kept it up in the classroom, taking time to talk about the behaviors, why these were things that bothered us, how we felt when they happened to us. From these we developed specific classroom goals and brainstormed specific ways of attaining them.

- **Valuing risk taking**

We emphasize risk taking and recognize it when it happens in the classroom: "Look what you can do now!" "Look how . . . challenged herself when she did this. Isn't that great!" Through reflection, we help the children think about they need to do to grow. We believe that risktaking enhances learning by challenging children to take that one step further, to go beyond what they already can do.

- **Individual goal setting**

The class brainstormed which accomplishments made them feel proud; every day, each child reflected on and recorded an accomplishment. After two weeks, I decided to focus on the areas of reading, writing and social development. The children brainstormed and webbed specific components of these areas; then set individual goals. They periodically review their goals and decide when they have achieved them.

- **Setting goals with parents**

At our three-way conferences, we invited parents to set a goal for their child. We were able to talk through their expectations and renegotiate any inappropriate expectations. We worked together to develop an action plan to support the goals. Parents really felt included in the process.

Continuing Support

We use a variety of ways to support the children in their reflection, goal-setting and self-evaluation. These include:

- Keeping and reviewing portfolios
- Monitoring and modifying individual goals to ensure success
- Reflective writing
- Collecting personal evidence of change
- Peer observations, support and evaluations
- Working with 'big buddies' or learning partners
- Listening--really listening--and asking important questions
- Celebrating successes
- Collaborating with other teachers

The five reports we have attached to this summary provide details about these and other classroom activities that our projects involve.

Effects on Social and Emotional Development

As we initiate and support reflection and self-evaluation in our classrooms, we are noticing and documenting many changes in our students. These changes are not universal--students are as individually different in their approach and response to goal-setting and self-evaluation as to anything else. And these changes are not 'instant'--there are no miracles; just steady growth and development.

- **Students take pride in their goal-setting and self-evaluation.**

Students feel good that they are able to remember their goals and talk about their action plans.

- **Students are developing a better understanding of themselves.**

Talking about goals and goal-setting helps the students to know more about themselves. They are becoming more realistic and more specific about what they can do. Instead of saying, "I'm good" or "I'm not good" they have begun to talk about what they can already do and what they plan to do.

- **Students are experiencing and developing a better understanding of *success*.**

Because students set the focus and the steps for attaining their goals, success is becoming more personal and concrete for them. They think more about what they want and are more specific in their goals. They are beginning to recognize that success doesn't mean being "perfect."

- **Students are developing more responsibility.**

With practice and support, students are taking increasing responsibility for owning their goals and following through on their action plans. Goal-setting gives them a sense of power and control : *I can ask for help, but it is my goal.*

- **The social climate of our classrooms is improving.**

We are seeing some actual turn-arounds in group behaviour and classroom atmosphere. Some parents have made comments like, "I can't get over how well they work together." We are also noticing that the children are happier, and more in control. There is more community spirit in our classrooms--children often acknowledge each others' goals and efforts and recognize their accomplishments.

Changes in Teachers' and Children's' Roles

Our focus on reflection, goal-setting and self-evaluation is contributing to a number of changes in our roles and in our relationships with the children. We also notice changes in the children's roles and in their relationships with each other.

- **We are becoming facilitators.**

A commitment to having the children set their own goals, reflect and self-evaluate means that we have to become facilitators much more often than in the past.

- **We are learning to *teach* goal-setting and reflection.**

We are finding out how important it is to *model* and *teach* goal-setting and reflection. *In the past I zeroed in far too soon on independent goals and wondered why the students couldn't do what I wanted. Now I start with group goals. I teach them how to do it instead of expecting them to know.*

- **The children are becoming more self-directed.**

The children feel much more responsibility for their own learning. They are self-directed--they chose the goal; they own the goal.

- **The children support each other.**

The children don't just take more responsibility for themselves, they take more responsibility for each other. In many cases, they help each other monitor and work toward their goals; they offer feedback--especially praise. And it seems that as a result of this collaboration and support, they are becoming more skillful in dealing with each other to solve social and learning problems.

- **The children are able to give feedback to their teachers.**

Some of us set goals for ourselves and the children helped us monitor our goals--this allowed them to switch roles from the "supported" to the "supporters." Throughout the goal-setting and self-evaluation, we've noticed that some of the shyer children are becoming much more confident in talking to their teacher and/or other adults.

Changes in Teaching and Learning

This project has had a profound effect on teaching and learning in our classrooms.

- **We are becoming more thoughtful about our teaching practices.**

We did a lot of self-examination in the course of this project, and we believe that our experiences will continue to make us thoughtful and reflective about what we do. This may be the most important outcome of our research.

- **Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration.**

Our focus on reflection, goal-setting and self-evaluation has involved a level of collaboration that would have been unheard of in education just a few years ago. We collaborate with members of our research group. Teachers, parents and children collaborate to set and evaluate goals. Children collaborate with each other; and often administrators and other teachers in our schools collaborate with us and with the children.

- **We are becoming better kidwatchers and better listeners.**

We bring real purpose and focus to our observations and conferences. We are not as superficial as we were--we try to go 'deep' to really tease out what is happening for each child. We see children as unique individuals and believe that we know them better than we have in the past. We are more specific in our comments to the children and often more honest and direct.

- **Parents are involved differently.**

As well as informing parents about their children's progress, we are trying to involve them in shaping and supporting their children's development. For example, in many of our classrooms, parents are asked to specify what they will do to support their child's goal.

A Final Note . . .

Above all, we are learning that we should **never underestimate kids**. We find that they are extremely honest and perceptive and that they are capable of introspection. They are able to remember, self-monitor and self-evaluate in terms of their goals; to learn strategies to meet their goals; to change and adapt their goals; and to transfer their insights and experiences to new situations. And not least, they are able to value and support each other.