

# Issue Sixteen (Winter 2002)

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# TEACHER EDUCATION AS A SHARING CIRCLE

Betty Ash

Imagine.

Imagine teacher education as an aboriginal Sharing Circle. Seated in the Sharing Circle are teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, students, parents, professors, lead teachers, faculty advisors, school administrators and other interested members of our learning community. In the Sharing Circle all voices are equal. Each person who joins the Circle makes a commitment to listen to and to learn from all of the other members of the Circle.

As the talking stone or eagle feather is passed the participants take turns sharing their perceptions, reflections, questions and struggles. They draw from their lived experiences as people, as teachers and as researchers. Together they try to go beyond what is already known about teaching and learning, attempting to find ways to improve their practice.

In Seven Oaks School Division we describe our responsibility as one "to assist children in acquiring an education which will enable them to lead fulfilling lives within the world as moral people and contributing members of society" (Seven Oaks School Division Mission Statement). This is important work and none of us individually holds the key to the ways in which we might go about it in the most successful manner. We need to work together; we need to engage in a dialogue...to put our ideas on the table, to reflect upon them, to discuss them, to connect them, to learn from them.

In the Sharing Circle no one person has "the answer". Teacher candidates bring to the Circle fresh perceptions, recent theory and current knowledge of curriculum. Classroom teachers bring an understanding of their students, their communities, their school culture and their experiences linking theory to practice in the classroom. Lead teachers, administrators and faculty advisors have knowledge of other resources or voices within the school or community that might help to enrich the dialogue. Students provide valuable feedback about how they learn and articulate the bigger questions in which they are interested. Parents and community members remind us of the values that should be taken into consideration as we go about our work. The University plays an important role in helping us all to pause and reflect upon our work, linking it to the recent literature and research.

In Seven Oaks School Division teachers write an annual reflection on practice. Teachers who act as Cooperating Teachers often write about how the experience of working with a Teacher Candidate causes them to examine their own practice and to learn from the experience.

A wonderful educational philosopher, Maxine Greene, writes about the importance of sharing perspectives on personal experience as an opportunity for us:

...to envisage things as if they could be otherwise, or of posing alternatives to mere passivity. And it should remind us of the relationship between freedom and the consciousness of possibility, between freedom and the imagination – the ability to make present what is absent, to summon up a condition that is not yet (Greene, 1995, p.16).

In our Sharing Circle each person has an opportunity to bring a piece of the puzzle to the discussion. The puzzle pieces morph through the public dialogue. New understandings emerge.

Imagine.

# TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH: A JOURNEY TO UNKNOWN PLACES

**Beth Heimbecker and Carol Moar**

*Beth Heimbecker is a grade 7 teacher at Elwick School. She was part of the Seven Oaks Masters' Cohort Program and completed her degree in 2001. Her thesis is titled Stories of Teaching and Learning: A Memoir.*

*Carol Moar is a middle years teacher at Elwick School. She too, was part of the Seven Oaks Masters' Cohort Program and completed her degree in 2000. Her thesis is titled Professional Growth Through Journaling: A Resource Teacher's Perspective On Literacy Learning.*

Teacher action research and reflective practice involve coming to new understandings about ourselves as teachers and learners. Journaling and narrative writing are ways of making this more visible and concrete for ourselves as well as allowing us to make new connections in our thinking.

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As I walk into the computer lab at the University of Manitoba things seem in full swing. Classmates are busy at their computers and with a thought of dismay I realize that I have missed the opening instructions. I wind my way through the maze of computers, my briefcase, coat and purse dangling at odd angles from my body. I hate being late and my level of anxiety rises as I browse around for an unoccupied computer. Finally, locating one on the far side of the room I seat myself and stare stupidly at the screen. Realizing that I don't even know how to turn it on causes my anxiety to rise another notch. "Will it explode if I touch it?" I wonder, feeling sure that it will. After a few minutes a young man, sensing my helplessness, approaches me and clicks the necessary button. I smile my thanks but before I can utter another word he is gone again and I sit, and sit, and sit... Completely ignoring the directions which are placed conveniently beside me, I lean over to a fellow classmate. I don't want to appear stupid and I feel foolish about asking someone else, who seems so involved in her own endeavours, what to do. I ask a few questions, make a bit of progress, and then revert to sitting, not wanting to bother my neighbour and hoping that the nice young man will come back and tell me what I need to know. I am certain of one thing; I am the only person in the room who doesn't have a clue about what is going on but instead of finding out I prefer to sit, risk nothing and hope that someone will sense my discomfort and come to my aid. A few days later I am in my own classroom and I begin to think differently about Derek.

Derek sits in the front group of desks in the classroom. He is a quiet boy, who says little. He sits slumped in his chair, his cap pulled low over his eyes in order to avoid my gaze as I walk by or sit down to speak with him. He spends the majority of his time alone at his desk, an island amongst a sea of enthusiastic young people. Sometimes he is cutting an eraser into tiny pieces with his scissors, sometimes he is doodling on the front of his binder and sometimes he is just sitting motionless. When I approach him and offer my help he listens compliantly but the minute I am not at his side he withdraws back into himself. What is going on for Derek or the numerous others just like him? Is he afraid to take a risk? Is he uncertain about asking questions? Does he have any adults in his life whom he can trust? Does he believe that he is incapable of learning?

Both of these incidents occurred within the space of a few days yet they are linked in my mind and I recall them frequently when I encounter disengaged learners. That day in the computer lab I had pulled my own hat low over my eyes not wanting to let on to others that I felt insecure about my abilities. It is

through ongoing reflection of my feelings and strategies as a learner, through incidents such as these, that I understand not only myself differently, but also the learners with whom I interact on a daily basis. As a result, I am less likely to view students such as Derek as lazy or non-compliant and am more likely to look beyond the behaviour to the underlying feelings and needs motivating him. But it is more than just knowing this intellectually. By reflecting on myself as a learner I am also able to remember my own feelings and in this way I am able to know Derek's struggles from my heart as well as my head. In this way I am able to be a more caring and nurturing teacher. (*Journal entry, Beth Heimbecker, October, 1996*)

\* \* \*

Cory almost ripped his entire Halloween book! Why would he do that? He was so proud of his "published-looking" book complete with a fabric cover just a few minutes ago. Now he wants to tear his book to pieces. I took the book away from Cory. He yelled at me, put his head down and refused to look at me or say anything. Part of me wanted to insist Cory look at me and explain his behaviour. Why was he being so rude? Instead of confronting Cory I left him alone while I worked with other children. Finally Cory was ready to talk with me. Cory told me that he did not want to draw pictures in his book because he "can't draw good." My ugly drawings will ruin my book." Cory helped me to challenge a myth I held. I assumed that most students who were reluctant readers and writers, like Cory, enjoyed drawing. However, as soon as I asked Cory to illustrate his book, a task I thought he would enjoy, he got frustrated. Cory was able to suggest a solution for himself. "How about if I find pictures from magazines and other books and trace or glue them into my book?" I tell Cory that this is a good idea. I'm glad I took the time to listen. (*Journal entry Carol Moar, October, 1996*)

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Each day teachers make a myriad of decisions some of which include curricular and assessment issues, behaviour management dilemmas as well as decisions regarding the social and emotional needs of the learners in our care. Considering the sheer volume and hectic pace of our lives it is easy to move through our days without stopping to reflect about our own motivations and values which underlie these decisions. In fact, we cannot reflect on every decision we make as educators in the course of a day, but journaling and narrative writing are tools which are useful because in setting aside time to write we are making time for reflection. Through reflection we are able to view issues from different perspectives, understand a particular student differently, or engage in more creative problem solving. Karen Hale Hankins (1998) describes her journal writing as:

*Her observations about her class, her teaching, and her memoirs of her own past as they are sparked by present events, feelings, and challenges in her classroom. When carefully reflected on, writing can help you better understand, and thus reach and teach your students (p. 80).*

Often times, it is the seemingly insignificant events in classroom life which provide us with the most profound insights. Judith Newman refers to these as "critical incidents" and describes them accordingly:

*Our learning opportunities come from comments made in passing, from a statement overheard, from something a student might write in a journal, from something we might read or hear because it confirms our experiences or because we disagree and have to consider what we believe instead, or because it opens possibilities we haven't thought about before (p. 736).*

Looking in the reflective practice mirror can be unpleasant because we might not always like what we see. We have to be willing to come face to face with the teaching decisions we make on a daily basis and admit that, as teachers, we make mistakes. We realize that we, as teachers, do not need to know all the answers, but rather, we need to be willing to reflect thoughtfully on the decisions and choices we make in the classroom. The journey of a critically reflective teacher is not a linear progression. There is no beginning and no end. Critical reflection becomes a part of who we are teachers and citizens. As Karen Gallas (1994) states, "...ultimately the process of inquiry begins with a question or with confusion. The journey I take to answer that question or see that confusion often leads to places I never intended to go" (p.11).

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## CURRICULUM INQUIRY, ACTION RESEARCH, AND EDUCATIONAL DIALOGUE PART ONE: FINDING A WAY

**Matthias Meiers**

During my final year as an undergraduate student in Education taking curriculum and instruction courses in second-language methodology, my teachers and faculty supervisors engaged me in a series of prescriptive conversations about teaching practices in second-language instruction. These conversations followed a similar pattern. The first step involved showing me how to draw up purposeful and strategic lesson plans. The second step entailed some form of clinical observation and corrective feedback which identified strategic errors in my practice and offered suggestions for dealing more effectively with classroom contingencies. The third step consisted of further classroom observations to see how I was able to act on these suggestions. In this conversation, I limited my role to listening carefully to my mentors and practising the strategic moves expected of classroom teachers to maintain order in the class and to allow students to develop skills in the second language.

This prescriptive conversation continued for the first three years of my teaching career in the form of clinical supervision. One of the administrators described the ongoing and formalized clinical supervision of all the teachers in his school as a necessary form of quality control. "Teachers are like tomatoes, you have to watch them or they'll spoil," he told me. In most cases, his classroom visitations were unannounced and they usually occurred three times in a school year. Within a week or two of these "merry pop-ins" I received two copies of an evaluation typed on a form in my mailbox, one copy to be returned signed. A sentence at the bottom of the form encouraged me to arrange an appointment with the principal, if any points in the evaluation required clarification. I never responded to this invitation because these evaluations consistently described me as competent teacher: "The daybook shows evidence of careful planning. The students participated actively in the language lesson. The lesson proceeded quickly without awkward pauses. Student notebooks are continuously and meticulously verified by the teacher." However, it was not all praise. Usually, these evaluations problematized housekeeping issues: "Make sure the light bulb in the overhead projector is working before you start the lesson" or "Always have extra photocopies of worksheets on hand in case some students wish to redo their work." After taking notice of the directions, I discarded most of these evaluations within a day or two of receiving them.

The critical other in these prescriptive conversations believes that the apprentice needs to be told what to do in order to improve aspects of his or her teaching practice. When I was a student teacher, these prescriptions helped me attain a degree of technical competence. The clinical supervision I received in the first three years of my teaching

career continued to certify my professional competence. However, I began to feel that I was swimming in a stagnant pool because the prescriptive conversation always moved within a pre- understanding of teaching as a set of strategic manoeuvres developed by researchers for the use of classroom teachers. I found it particularly disheartening that even teachers with ten or twenty years of classroom experience continued to be treated as mere technicians. I resigned and moved to Seven Oaks School Division where I would participate in a very different professional conversation.

I noticed a difference in the professional identity of teachers at my new school. The principal and the vice-principal consistently described themselves as teachers and not as the local agents of quality control. Shirley, the principal who supervised my probationary year in the division, visited my classroom regularly. These visits were not formalized events, like the “merry pop-ins” I had grown used to. Shirley never walked into the room to sit silently at an empty desk and to start writing her notes for a formal evaluation. Instead, she observed the activity in the room and spoke with the children and later with me about their projects.

To me, the word project means activity with forethought and purpose. As a teacher, I have purposes in mind when I set tasks and activities for the children. However, the teacher is not the only person acting intentionally and purposefully in the classroom. Teaching means allowing the children to find personal and educational purposes within classroom activity and allowing them a hand in planning it. Shirley’s visits and my conversations with her allowed me to recognize the importance of observing and speaking with kids about their work in the classroom. This would help me think about the first question she raised:

### **1. What is happening for the kids in the class?**

To me this question meant thinking about the pedagogical problems I was trying to resolve in my own practice. These problems shifted and evolved throughout the three years she and I worked together. Initially, there were two areas of concern to me. First, as a beginning teacher in grade one, I needed to learn appropriate housekeeping skills. The classroom space needed to be organized to better accommodate the activities of a group of five and six-year old children. They also needed to be taught how to use and maintain their space. Many of the children’s belongings were scattered all over the classroom and this disorder was getting in the way of our activities. Second, I was searching for meaningful ways of teaching five-year olds literacy skills. I believed that opportunities for reading and writing needed to be an extension of the children’s oral language use. But I was not sure how to go about making the connection between oral and written language. I found that the assigned reading and writing tasks which I contrived with deference to narrow and decontextualized instructional objectives were often disconnected from each other, as well as from the children’s life experiences and, therefore, staged within a vacuum. The following example will illustrate what I mean.

On one morning, I spent five minutes holding up and naming colorful objects in the target language and having the children repeat my descriptive sentences. Then as a follow-up testing activity, I asked them to take out their crayons and issued instructions in the target language such as, “Draw a green line.” The children ended up with lines, circles, and triangles of different colours on a white sheet of paper. Some of the children had listened and followed my instructions correctly. Others copied what their neighbours were drawing. A handful of children started drawing their own pictures. My purpose in this activity was to teach and test listening comprehension of ten colour words in French. I realized that this purpose was not apparent or important enough to the children when Bryant shouted, “We’re drawing stupid pictures! I’ll draw you rainbow water!” I rethought the situation and told them: “All right! We’ll draw our own pictures and then talk about the colours in them.” That sounded acceptable to everyone and the conversations about colours began. However, the conversation was richer because it was also about the ideas which the children brought to their drawings.

Teaching is a reflective conversation with the children and the situations we create for each other. Paying attention to Bryant’s signal allowed me to rethink my instructions to make room for his and my purposes in the activity. Shirley suggested thinking about such practical problems in the framework of a second question:

## 2. What am I doing and why am I doing it?

We agreed that good teaching required recognizing the abilities and the potential strengths of individual children and planning activities which would further these strengths. The class as a social grouping can be the stage where individual children work together to allow each other to develop these strengths, as well as, new skills. Of course, as the teacher, I did not form haphazard or purely subjective judgements about my students' strengths and potential abilities. First, I believed that literacy was within all the children's grasp. However, there was a wide range of individual differences in the ways children used written text. My instruction needed to respect and respond to these differences.

During our daily reading and storytelling period, six-year-old Allison picked up my copy of *The Complete Tales of the Brothers Grimm* and started reading "Hansel and Gretel" aloud to a group of three classmates. Her friend, Keith listened with interest. When Allison asked him to continue reading, he answered, "I can't. I only read picture books." Afterwards he drew a detailed picture of the witch's hut in his journal and wrote: "TODA ALLN RED A SOR ABT A WT." During the conference with him, I asked, "What did you write here?" Keith replied, "Today Allison read a story about a witch." I scribed what he said below his text and told him, "This is how grown-ups spell what you have written." He copied my sentence very carefully. When I met with Allison a few minutes later, she showed me a letter she was writing to "Hansel and Gretel" congratulating them on killing the witch. The text contained about fifty words, most of them in standard spelling. I asked her, "Are you going to draw a picture to go along with this letter?" To which she replied, "Letters don't have pictures. And I don't like drawing." Keith and Allison exemplify the plurality of any class and its inherent range of individual differences in abilities and interests. I started keeping these differences in mind, as I planned a picture book project. I asked Keith and Allison to collaborate on an illustrated book about one of the four tales I had read to the class during the week. They chose "Hansel and Gretel."

My intention as their teacher was to have these two students draw on each other's skills in the acts of writing and illustrating the book. I did not want them to simply exercise their own strengths. At first, Keith wanted to draw all the illustrations and have Allison write the story – exactly the economical division of labor I was trying to avoid. Therefore, during the first conference in which we talked about the project I asked them to draw and write together:

1. Draw five or six pictures which tell your story. Talk about the words that will go with each drawing.
2. Then say each sentence before writing it. When you write, take turns writing.

During the first stage of the activity, Allison did most of the talking as they drew simultaneously on a sheet of paper. Keith responded to her suggestions with his ideas and he began musing about the witch's reasons for wanting to eat children. Thinking about a character's intentions might not have occurred to Keith outside of this conversation. Suddenly, Keith suggested they should take turns drawing when Allison started scribbling blue lines across the top of the page. He started giving her advice about how to use the whole sheet instead of filling it up with a scribbled blue sky. The following day, during the writing phase, something surprising happened. I had expected Keith to be taking dictation from Allison who had always shown herself to be more articulate. However, the conversation of the previous day had prepared them both for writing the text. Keith wrote fluently. Allison merely told him which vowels needed to be added to his words. Their talk focussed mostly on phrasing the sentences and on correctly spelling individual words.

There were twenty other children reading, speaking, drawing, and writing at the same time. I realized that some of the students did not have a clear idea of what should be happening at this time. Christine and Joan had quietly gotten out glue, sparkles, and pencil shavings and were mixing these in a plastic cup. They were silently observing the mixture when I approached.

"What are you doing?" I asked them suspecting that their activity had absolutely nothing to do with my goals. They had apparently found something more interesting than writing about one of the folk tales I had read to the class. I decided to find out, if their activity would lend itself to writing.

They replied, "We are doing an experiment."

"What's an experiment?"

"You do something and then you see what happens."

"All right, before you go on with this I want you to write down what you have done and seen so far. Then write down what you think is going to happen next in your experiment." I was not sure whether I had made the right decision. Had I given them a stern and disapproving look, Christine and Joan would likely have thrown their experiment into the garbage bin and chosen a tale to write about. However, this lesson was about writing and not obedience. The two seemed genuinely interested in their experiment and started writing. Later during this writing time, I was able to engage Christine and Joan in a conversation about their story grammar – more specifically, their sequential ordering of the experience in a first person narrative and their predictions of what would happen next.

In our conversations about these incidents, Shirley and I described my teaching role and the children's activities in the classroom. These descriptions gave us starting points for:

1. clarifying my pedagogical intentions and actions,
2. interpreting the children's intentions and actions,
3. planning pedagogical responses to our interpretation(s) of the evolving classroom situation.

These are also three essential moments in an action research cycle. The foregoing narratives of classroom practice show how these moments inform each other. Most importantly, however, these narratives were constructed in the course of an ongoing educational dialogue about actual teaching practices and classroom experiences. I believe that educational dialogue supports reflective teaching when the perspectives of critical friends allow teachers to rethink practical problems in light of the two-fold question: What am I doing and why?

I e-mailed drafts of this text to a group of critical friends. A lively e-mail conversation followed. I believe that the following excerpts of this conversation may help us understand the role of critical friends in an action research project.

**Date: Sun, 06 Jan 2002**

**From: Judith Newman** [jnewman@hfx.andara.com](mailto:jnewman@hfx.andara.com)

**To: Matthias Meiers** [meiers@merlin.mb.ca](mailto:meiers@merlin.mb.ca)

Matt,

Your writing flows. Definitely readable. A nice blend of explanation and incidents.

As far as I can tell, you've got the piece about half done -- that is you've got to where you've taken on a reflective stance but I think you need to show the rest of the journey to understanding the underlying principles of AR and how that has affected your teaching. Hope this helps.

Cheers

**Judith**

Judith knows that the piece refers to events which occurred more than ten years ago. Up to this point, the text hides this from the reader. This narrative is about coming to a reflective stance and does not lend itself to exploring the theoretical dynamics of action research in depth. It situates the origins of my reflective practice in a series of conversations with another teacher. For this reason, I believe that the narrative is an appropriate starting point for a series of articles on my action research. Judith is right in saying that this piece is a beginning. Jack makes a similar point in his response.

**Date: Tue, 8 Jan 2002**

**From: Jack Whitehead** [edsajw@bath.ac.uk](mailto:edsajw@bath.ac.uk)

I did want to know more about what you are doing now to improve your practice - and I can see that this could be a most engaging follow-up to this paper. In your last paragraph, I felt that there might be some significant omissions and just wanted to check my intuitions with you. When you say that when you speak with another teacher you draw on understanding, critical examination and the communication of insights I felt the omission of some of your embodied values that I intuitively feel may be sustaining your own passion for education. I found myself wondering about your own love/desire for enquiry and learning through dialogue. I found myself thinking of your embodied value of pleasure in your educative relationships when you feel the creative spirit of your students engaged in their own enquiries. In other words, I found myself interested in the question as to whether you had communicated your most profoundly held embodied educational values to your reader. I've used the value-words, pleasure, creative spirit, enquiry learning, love/desire to communicate something of the meanings of the embodied values I intuitively feel help to constitute your own educational standards of judgement - do let me know how you relate to these intuitions about your own educative relations and influence.

I'm wondering if Matt has opened up an educational dialogue that contains the possibility of transforming what counts as educational theorising. Matt has offered his drafts 'How I came to teacher action research' and 'educational dialogue is a condition for the possibility of reflective teaching' with the intention of working in some of our responses into his paper. If Matt could find an appropriate dialogical form for engaging with our responses as part of his own educational development/learning, I think it likely that he could show us a dialogical/dialectical basis for the growth of educational knowledge.

My own feeling is that through the inclusion of the voices of others in your text your paper could develop into an answer to a question of the kind: How has educational dialogue enhanced the growth of my educational knowledge as a teacher-researcher?

**Warm regards. Jack.**

**Date: Tue, 08 Jan 2002**

**From: JMN** [jnewman@hfx.andara.com](mailto:jnewman@hfx.andara.com)

I'm going to respond to Matt through Jack's response.

Jack Whitehead wrote:

*I'm wondering if Matt has opened up an educational dialogue that contains the possibility of transforming what counts as educational theorising.*

Of course, Jack, he has, but to use this dialogue he's got to come up with some original way of formatting his writing to allow the 'conversation' to emerge. That was one of the problems I struggled with in *Interwoven Conversations* (Canadian Scholars Press) and in the piece on *Validity in Action Research*.

<http://www.cchs.usyd.edu.au/arow/reader/newman.htm>

I'm sure if he's interested in creating a dialogical piece Matt could find a way of incorporating the discussion to show his thinking changing as he writes.

Jack writes:

*My own feeling is that through the inclusion of the voices of others in your text your paper could develop into an answer to a question of the kind: How has educational dialogue enhanced the growth of my educational knowledge as a teacher-researcher?*

And if you were to work on that question, I think you'd want to take the current version much further to show more of your personal evolution. Where the piece now stands, I have no idea that these incidents which you relate occurred more than a decade ago nor do they give me any sense of how you continue to grow and change.

Cheers

## Judith

My readers are telling me explicitly that the term “action research” raises certain expectations in their minds. Most importantly, the text needs to show how the action researcher comes to a better understanding of his or her capacity for transformative action in a particular situation. For this reason, Brenda also asks me to describe and explore the relationships between my educational decisions and the children’s learning.

**Date: Wed, 9 Jan 2002**

**Brenda St.Hilaire** [brendast@mts.net](mailto:brendast@mts.net)

I was very pleased to have the opportunity to read your article. I also read the comments that Jack and Judith made. Here are my own thoughts on it.

Firstly, I really liked the tone of the piece, and found it very engaging to read your accounts of experiences in the classroom. I was totally drawn in, and wanted to know more about the students, especially the two girls conducting the experiment. What did they end up writing???

I also liked the first title you had, the one referring to action research, but if you wish to use that one, I think you need to expand the article to include more about action research itself, and how your descriptions of your conversations with Shirley led you to a mode of action research. Not all readers are familiar with action research to recognize what you were doing as a precursor to this type of research. I loved your comparison of the two types of conversations you had with the two different administrators. This speaks volumes about the inadequacies of the clinical view of evaluation, and about the value of recognizing teachers as more than technicians who require monitoring and checking.

What is your primary goal in writing this piece? Perhaps answering this question will help to determine what else needs to be included in the article.

**Brenda**

Sarah shared the piece with a group of novice teachers at the University of Bath and included their voices in her e-mail. Her note reminds me about the importance of writing in a manner that invites and engages teachers at different stages in their professional development.

**Date: Wed, 23 Jan 2002**

**From: Sarah Fletcher** [edssjf@bath.ac.uk](mailto:edssjf@bath.ac.uk)

Dear Matt,

I like the points that Jack is making here about dialogical engagement and it raises possibilities in my imagination for your paper as a heuristic to reflection on professional values and the role of action research within teacher education programs.

My novice teachers have responded warmly to your writing and in particular in the way that you 'write about your interactions with pupils'. One of them wrote, “*I shall be more reflective and ensure that I take possession of my action research projects, taking care not to freeze out those fellow professionals (and of course the pupils) who can offer so much support and so many ideas!*” Another observed, “*... almost from the first lesson you teach you have to start 'working it out for yourself' as your principal allowed you to do which I suppose is part of what action research is.*” Where you wrote “the apprentice needs to be told what to do in order to improve aspects of his or her teaching practice” a third novice has commented “*This can help but I think that a teacher must evaluate his/her own teaching practice in order to identify the areas that need improving.*” Here, here! I am sure you can sense my delight in seeing how your paper has evoked so much reflection and explication of professional values.

Warm regards

**Sarah**

Here is a tentative response to my readers. In the second installment of this project, I will attempt to create a dialogic text that foregrounds the values and beliefs underlying my current practice. I will read “the learning reflections” of my grade-nine English Language Arts students with the intention of comparing my stated educational beliefs and values with their learning experiences in my classroom. At the same time, I will also invite colleagues to help me construct a public text which shows how educational knowledge develops and evolves for teachers as they engage in dialogue with each other.

## THE IRONIC SENSE OF TEACHER REFLECTION

John R. Wiens

A final-year student, a potential teacher, said to me early in the fall term when I asked him how he was enjoying his teacher education, “I’m so tired of writing reflections on everything – we’re even writing reflections on our reflections.” He explained further that “recording” reflections had become part of his daily assignments in virtually every course he was taking. I got the sense that reflections to him were just another assignment to be produced on demand by a set deadline. I got the further sense that the very term “reflection” was leaving a bitter taste in his mouth, and I wondered whether we teacher-educators were allowing the sought-after values and meanings in “reflection” to be lost in our demands. I wondered whether we ourselves thought carefully and critically about what the purposes of reflection on education, schooling and teaching were and how we might be compromising those purposes by our very treatment of the term.

I thought back to my own time as superintendent and how I might help this young teacher were he to come to the division with a huge aversion to any conversation which required him to “reflect.” I might say to him, “if you don’t want to reflect, you nevertheless have no choice but to think about what you’re doing and why. It is absolutely essential if you want to be a teacher to be thoughtful, meaning not accepting uncritically and unproblematically all of the system’s requests and thinking continuously about ways you can educate your students better. It certainly is about a lot more than doing lesson plans, giving and marking assignments, and keeping order.” I would equally have to say to him that he was not likely to get much credit for being reflective – it’s just expected of him; that he was unlikely to receive any time to practice reflection and that it was as likely to get him into trouble as keep him out of it. I could go on to tell him that thinking might, in fact, make things more complex than simple but that thinking was more enjoyable than just doing without thinking. Finally, I might say that his conscience needed to be his guide but, at the same time, reassure him that unlike Socrates, he was not expected to die for his reflections.

If I did all that I would mostly be sharing one particularly strong bias of Western culture, the same biases he was wondering about when he questioned the value of reflection. This bias – with philosophical and religious roots – is that thought which does not result in direct action is not worth much. Western political philosophy has a great deal to say about the thinking-doing opposition, one that exposes, or relies on, the maintenance of other polarities. The early Greeks talked about the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*, the life of contemplation versus the life of action or the life of philosophy versus the life of politics. They kept the distinctions sharp and the territories rigid – Plato’s philosopher-kings were supposed to be thinkers more than doers. The guardians, as political enforcers, were lower in rank and would do the bidding of the rulers. Teacher educators in universities today are still guided by the same dichotomy and hierarchy – in their eyes, and in the eyes of many others – they are the researcher-spectator-interpreters (theoreticians) and teachers are student-actor-workers (practitioners).

In schools, our tendency is to consider the principals the thinkers and the teachers the doers, and in classrooms the teachers the thinkers and the students the doers. While there is some validity to these distinctions, they are obviously not nearly as sharp as we tend to make them, partly because we, as humans, are potentially both doers and thinkers. There is nothing in our understanding about thinking

which suggests that hierarchy has anything to do with the ability to think or with better thinking. I would be so bold as to suggest that we do both at some time or other no matter what the proscribed relationships between us. However, when we do think and act we tend to threaten or undermine those prior arrangements. In other words, the guardian becomes the philosopher, the teacher the teacher educator, the student the teacher, and so on. Some organizations and institutions find this quite threatening, the consequence being a reinforcing of the bias against thought.

These biases against thought and for action are manifest in a variety of ways which might be explicated by rhetorical questions. Why do we say we want our children to think and then so often interrupt them, or even punish them, when they are engaged in just that? Why do our students, when asked to take time to reflect on their lives, often consider it to be a waste of time or just another assignment to be completed like any other or an assignment which prevents them from doing their real work? Why do teachers not wish to use time set aside – preparation time or time provided – to sit and think? Why would we characterize such activity as just sitting and thinking? Why would we at university on one hand decry the absence of time to sit and think and, at the same time, keep ourselves so busy and expect others to be so busy as to prevent time for thinking, even though that's what the public is paying us to do? Why do all of us from a very young age feel guilty if we're not doing something all the time and, if someone asks what we're doing always describe some activity other than thinking? Why do school boards or parents, when told that superintendents, teachers or others are taking some time to read or think, ask when those people are going to do their real work? I could go on, but the point is made – we are betrayed by our language and our actions – we do not place a lot of stock in thinking as compared to action. We are heirs to a long history of anti-thought bias, perhaps because of what it requires of our institutions and ourselves.

Reflection, in fact, requires and is characterized by the classic conditions that distinguish thinking from acting. The first is a predisposition toward the mind as opposed to the body. If one is singularly predisposed to one's physical well-being then doing not thinking takes priority. Healthy body, healthy mind is today's common adage. The ancient Greeks scorned the Spartans for this same anti-intellectual attitude. Classical thinking required one to ignore one's body to the extent that one was inactive, unconcerned about physical movement, literally "lost" in thought. To be safely lost in thought requires a certain non-movement, an inertness, of the body. The second is a predisposition to the private realm as opposed to the public world. Thinking was a private matter that did not take place in the hustle and bustle, push and pull, give and take of the public world, characterized by the market place or the legislature. That is why schools and universities, sometimes staff meetings, board meetings and the like, have a somewhat private (as in shutting others out) structure and attitude. In some ways what is fit for public action or consideration must first be refined in a somewhat private setting. We would not disagree that we need the protection and safety of privacy to get our thoughts in order before we express them or put them into action. The third classic disposition is toward thinking as an individual as opposed to collective activity. Although we sometimes today talk about thinking together analytical philosophers would have deemed this a category mistake; philosophy is done individually, politics is done collectively. Fourth, the ancients deemed there to be no possibility that thinking would have a predetermined outcome – there was a predisposition to uncertainty and unreliability – questions rather than answers resulted from thinking. When one engages in thinking, while one may think about something in particular, one could not know ahead of time what conclusion or judgment would result from such thinking, however focussed. Finally, related to all of the above, classical thinking was done in silence. It was the ultimate inactivity, privacy, individuality and uncertainty.

Speaking and writing were deemed attempts to act in the world ethically or politically. They were attempts to bring order and reliability into the world. Thinking was a prerequisite to political action in which ideas and words were to be refined before they were fit to enter the public realm. It seems inevitable that this is where classical concepts of thinking and the sharp distinctions they proposed would run aground. It was because in its purest sense classical thinking was an amoral, a morally neutral, activity. That predisposition has been challenged by modern experience. It is not thought but rather the absence of thought that has dire human consequences. The problem is that until action occurs we cannot distinguish between thinking and not thinking. Nor do we automatically know that someone has been thinking if they do the right thing. Teachers often do the right things without prior thought. It is exactly what the Faculty is

trying to prevent – not thinking about what are the right things – when it asks teachers to reflect. Put another way, we want teachers to think about why they're doing the right things because it simply reduces the chances that they will fail to do them or, conversely, reduce the possibilities that they will do the wrong things in the name of education.

Thinking has a moral dimension and it is the denial or ignorance of moral dimensions that pervert our relationships and our activities. Education and life require more of us than merely attending to our own mortal souls and minds or, even as in Socratic terms, attending first to our own mortal souls. Thinking, while an individual activity, is not first about ourselves. Ironically, we might first have to think about ourselves in order to engage in thinking. For example, when we ask our children to “put on their thinking caps” we are not necessarily just asking them to think; we are asking that their thinking results in their reaching our conclusions. Existentially thinking, like learning, is also something we all do but thinking itself results in no concrete activity or product; we can't prove that we thought deeply about something even with the best evidence in writing. It is also not something we control – our minds are unruly and undisciplined, often thinking thoughts we don't want them to and at times we don't want them to. Surely, the same is true for our children and our students in university. On the other hand, it does appear that we can “train” our minds to focus with various degrees of intensity on particularities such as objects, ideas and activities. Thus, while reflection, or intensive and attentive thinking on some matter, may have no apparent outcome or concrete value in itself, lack of reflection or thinking can result in evil. Reflection's being of no existential value other than perhaps being part of an assignment, ironically, still may have great human value.

It was Hannah Arendt who first articulated the absence of thinking as the source of the evil that resulted in the Holocaust. She found Eichmann's real crime to be that of thoughtlessness, the unquestioning acceptance of his leaders' interpretations of the world and his responsibilities to it. In her terms, while thinking may in itself be a wholly useless and fundamentally futile activity, the lack of thinking can have dire consequences for humankind and humanity. This view reinforces the moral aspect of thinking, and points to why reflection is essential to being a teacher. Thinking allows a teacher to consider matters from an inclusively human perspective. For example, in addition to thinking what every child needs to know a teacher can consider what the consequences are for particular children if they do not learn some curricular matters. They can consider if some teaching practices result in the exclusion of certain children or their parents. Teachers can think about the justification for, and the justice in, continuing those practice as well as the consequences for society of continuing exclusion of some people like many in our aboriginal population. Teachers can imagine not only how they would feel if they found themselves in the circumstances of others but also how others feel in those circumstances. They can contemplate what education has come to mean in our society and what the mirror of history (reflecting on our past) has to say about situations where humans acted similarly before. They can think about the reaction of their colleagues to their activities and what the consequences are for their schools, their chosen profession and the public good. In fact, education and teaching demand that these types of questions are considered in depth by all teachers because of the responsible role teachers have in preparing children not only to perpetuate humanity but also improve the human condition. Arendt's suggestion is that if we don't engage in thoughtfulness we are capable of great evil by neglect of others, denial of the worth of others and overlooking the fact that the world is intended to be shared with all others currently alive.

When reflection becomes a catch-all rallying cry it can slip simply into an intellectual or moralizing exercise. The term reflection is used to describe a myriad of practices, actions, events, and phenomena. For example, many teachers and, I suspect, all aspiring teachers in teacher education programs now keep journals, reflect on their activities with their friends and/or professors, set aside time on Wednesdays for reflection, act reflectively or, having reflected upon their activities, repeat them or change them. We are even reflecting on our reflections or reflecting on our reflections of our reflections. On the other hand, when we reflect (or stop and think about the educational merit) on the human consequences of our activities, our practices, our relationships and our programs we are engaging in one of the two phenomena most characteristic of humans – thinking as opposed to acting. Thinking allows us to imagine possibilities that do not currently exist. It allows us to discard our ways of doing things and our ways of thinking – even if just in our minds – without actually doing these different things. Thinking allows a virtual reality that predates and precedes digital technologies. Therein lies its educational value – it permits

teachers and others to visit in their minds the lives and the minds of the children for whom they are responsible. Such visits are necessary and, if used honourably and responsibly, will result in better teaching and learning – better educational experiences for children – and therefore teachers as well. These visits can be made without experimenting with children, allowing us to discard potentially distasteful, hurtful or harmful practices having already considered potential consequences in our minds. Therefore, thinking and opportunities for thinking must be encouraged and supported – opportunities for reflection and reflection itself must be safeguarded and upheld. Ironically, as noted earlier, thinking is often feared and opportunities for thinking are considered a waste of resources or time to the point of resentment. The result is a neglect or devaluation of the conditions which permit thinking to even occur.

The conditions under which thinking can take place have not changed much since ancient times but they, like thinking, have fallen on hard times. Ironically, it is the institutionalizing of some of other classic dichotomies that actually make reflection even possible. School systems, even universities, place little value on providing the quiet, private, inactive places and spaces where thinking can and does occur. Furthermore, current ideologies have strengthened the notion if one is not engaged in continuous activity one is not productive or one is not doing one's job. Indeed, it is often suggested that preparation time and private workplaces and a kind of university immunity from the economic and political realm are somehow perverse and unethical. Schools and universities are now largely seen as an extension of the economic systems or governments rather than prerequisites, like thinking, to economic and political processes. Ironically, while their purposes are common, their activities cannot be except at risk to both society and to its institutions. It can be argued, and history would support the argument, that each of these realms must be protected somewhat from the other.

Politicians and business people (like teachers) must interrupt the endlessness of thinking to act sometimes on behalf of others, but they must also protect the provisions of our society to support opportunities for thought including thinking about the very notions of governments and economic systems themselves. The dominance and popularity of current ideologies with their human instrumentality dominated by self interest and self indulgence at the expense of so many others in our world suggest that we have some thinking and some learning to do about ways in which everyone can find a home in the world in which they find themselves. Education is about learning to live our lives better, not only individually and collectively. If we do not build into our systems the conditions and opportunities for reflection and enlarged world views we are quite likely to be implicated in a growing human evil.

This non-utilitarian, non-productive inactivity, unfettered by pre-conceived notions and from which no answers emerge, is reflection. For all its unreliability and frailty it is exactly what is fundamental and essential to education and living a good life. For it is from reflection that the calls to judgment and action emanate. Particularly in democracies which are always fragile, tenuous and dynamic human arrangements that require continuous re-visitation and renewal, opportunities for thinking about who we are, why we are here now, and how to enjoy everyone else and encourage them to make a better world with us are essential. Thinking teachers must resist attempts to establish pre-determined future worlds for which we only train or indoctrinate children. We educators are preparing children to create a better world – one we are unable to even imagine in our most cogent moments. True educators, in this final twist of irony, have the awesome responsibility of preparing future generations for something that they, as educators, are unlikely to ever see – and be happy about it!

# DIFFERENTIATING THE PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OF TEACHERS THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

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## Introduction:

Much has been written about action research and its value for individual teachers (see Ahar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001; Glanz, 1998; Hamilton & Zaretsky, 1997; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990; and Schmuck, 1997). Hamilton & Zaretsky (1997, p. 3) define action research as “a process of systematic inquiry into a self-identified teaching or learning problem to better understand its complex dynamics and to develop strategies geared towards the problem’s improvement.” This process of systematic inquiry can be beneficial in a number of ways. It can enhance an individual teacher’s professional growth and personal awareness, it can provide the empirical evidence needed to initiate educational change and it can result in improved teaching practices by teachers working alone or in small groups. But what happens when this approach to professional growth is taken a step further and a complete staff of teachers agrees to pursue action research to enhance their professional growth? Who can administrators and teachers turn to for help in facilitating such a school-wide initiative? This is the story of two administrators, their timely meeting with a university researcher, and their joint effort in coordinating a school-wide action research initiative.

## Background:

Leila North School has long used portfolio assessment as a way of encouraging students to take more of an active role in their own learning. During the 1999/2000 school year, the Leila North staff began to take a closer look at ways to harmonize their teaching strategies with their existing assessment practices. They began to examine how approaches such as inquiry-based learning and constructivism fit into the Leila North philosophy and the degree to which such practices were already evident in their classrooms and within the broader school culture. Throughout this period, special events such as *Constructivist Days* were held, the general emphasis on inquiry continued, and the administrators of the school, Alfred Wiebe and Verland Hicks, began to wonder if what they were doing with students could be transferred to their work with teachers. In other words, they began to question if a constructivist model could be used to guide the professional growth of teachers.

In the fall of 2000, the administration made some inquiries at the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Education and soon thereafter, met Dr. David Mandzuk. As their new professional relationship began to take root, they discovered that as a Middle Years teacher, their new colleague had conducted a number of action research projects based on his own practice. As luck would have it, he welcomed the opportunity to help facilitate the kind of school-wide action research initiative that the administration of Leila North had envisioned. For some time, he had wondered why teachers were expected to recognize and accommodate for the diverse needs of their students when rarely was there the same kind of recognition of *teacher* diversity. He had also wondered if teachers were systematically socialized to be dependent on divisional directives rather than being autonomous in charting their own paths for professional growth (see Mandzuk, 1997). He soon realized that the administrators of Leila North seemed

to share his interest in differentiating professional growth opportunities for teachers; therefore, the next task was to establish a working relationship and decide how they would introduce action research to the staff.

### **The Process:**

Later that fall, the university colleague made his initial presentation to teachers which focused on the basic steps of the action research process. He stressed that once teachers decide on a research question, they need to determine what the data will consist of and how it will be collected. Next, he stressed that teachers need to collect the data and then analyze and interpret it. Finally, he emphasized that teachers need to take some kind of action based on their findings. At this first session, David also shared two examples of his own action research projects that he had conducted as a Grade 7 teacher. One of these projects examined the effectiveness of using Socratic Seminars as a way of encouraging student “voice” in Middle Years classrooms (see Mandzuk, 2000).

Before the presentation, the administration had placed teachers into one of several general groups based on teachers’ self- described interest areas. These included such areas as Middle Years literacy, assessment and evaluation, community building and the technology integration. Regardless of their interest area, the administrators were committed to providing three basic things for the teachers—choice, support, and time. In other words, teachers were able to choose any question related to their teaching, they were promised support from their university colleague, and they were provided with the release time needed to make things happen.

As the year progressed, the administration and their university colleague met with small groups and individuals as they attempted to narrow the focus of their action research questions. One teacher examined the use of electronic portfolios as a way of better communicating with parents, another teacher created her own CD-Rom as a tutorial for her students, and two other teachers examined parent-student interactions during student- led conferences. Although all teachers were more knowledgeable about the action research process by the end of Year 1, their experiences varied; therefore, as a way of better understanding teachers’ perceptions of the process, the university colleague then conducted two focus group discussions with a random sample of teachers who were involved

Now that some time has passed and the administrators and their university colleague have read the transcripts of these discussions many times, they believe that they have a much better appreciation of the benefits and challenges of engaging teachers in such school-wide initiatives. The rest of this article summarizes the perspectives of these three stakeholders based on their journal entries, transcripts, and informal conversations since the project began.

### **Administrators’ Perspectives:**

Although the administrators have learned many things about encouraging teachers to engage in action research, the three most important things address:

- a) shifting roles,
- b) providing ongoing support, and
- c) striking a balance between self-direction and a shared vision.

**Shifting roles:** Just as teachers’ roles shift from being directors to being facilitators in constructivist classrooms, so do the roles of administrators within a self-directed model of teacher professional growth. In order to facilitate this kind of teacher development, administrators must be active participants and active listeners. Making time for ongoing conversations with teachers and providing time for them to share with one another are all essential parts of this role shift. As anyone who has stepped inside a middle school will attest, administrators and teachers have little time to meet about issues of professional growth

so creative approaches are often a necessity. Hallway conversations and impromptu discussions in the staff room become critical in maintaining teachers' interest in their topics long after the in-service days are over.

**Providing ongoing support:** Administrators must also continue to provide ongoing support to maintain momentum. As with any new endeavour, teachers will face challenges along the way. When this happens, administrators must support them by encouraging, listening, problem solving, sharing articles, directing them to colleagues and resources and of course, providing release time. Throughout this process, administrators must also be aware of the delicate balance they must strike between being actively involved and supportive and taking ownership away from their teachers. If the latter happens, teachers are no longer engaged in self-directed professional growth.

**Striking a balance between self-direction and a shared vision:** Finally, even though administrators will recognize the benefits of self-directed teacher professional growth, they cannot lose sight of the bigger picture. The school is a community with many stakeholders and therefore, teachers must try to work towards a common vision. This is not to suggest that teachers should follow lock-step with one another or even use the same approach, but they should at least be "travelling" in the same direction and not at cross purposes. Therefore, administrators need to occasionally ask teachers how their action research projects fit into the broader vision of the school.

### **A University Researcher's Perspective:**

Although the university researcher has had many thoughts about his role in the Leila North action research initiative, the three most important thoughts involve:

- a) establishing trust, acceptance, and credibility among teachers,
- b) checking out assumptions about the knowledge base of teachers, and
- c) being prepared to re-evaluate when teachers' plans change.

**Establishing trust, acceptance, and credibility:** The first thing that university researchers need to remember is that, in order for teachers to accept them, they need to prove that they know what they are talking about, that they have actually *done* what they are hoping teachers will do, and that they are willing to support teachers along the way. Teachers need to be able to work with people who appreciate how difficult it is to make time for one's own professional growth when there are so many other more pressing issues at hand. University researchers, like administrators, must remember that, although teachers need to work with people who have expertise, they also want to work with people who will *value* rather than dismiss the knowledge gained from teachers' own *lived* experiences. This valuing of teachers' collective wisdom gained through experience is critical in establishing trust, acceptance, and credibility.

**Checking out assumptions:** A second thing that university researchers need to remember is how easy it is to make assumptions about the kind of knowledge that teachers might have. For example, the word "*data*" sometimes has negative connotations for teachers who do not usually think in research terms; moreover, some teachers do not realize the different kinds of data that can be used to answer action research questions. Another example that illustrates the importance of checking out assumptions involves language. Whether the conversation is about literature circles, student-led conferences or electronic portfolios, it is critical that university researchers ensure that everyone is on the same page; in other words, collaborating partners need to be working from the same definition. If this important step is not taken, university researchers will find it difficult to move some groups ahead.

**Re-evaluating along the way:** A final thing that university researchers need to remember is the importance of being willing to re-evaluate and "shift gears" when teachers' plans change. Action research questions sometimes change when teachers come across articles that offer new perspectives or when they speak with colleagues who share their knowledge or hold different opinions. When this happens,

university researchers need to seize the moment and instead of holding fast to teachers' initial plans, they need to help them re-focus, revise, and imagine new possibilities as their projects move in different directions.

### **Teachers' Perspectives:**

As a way of better understanding teachers' experiences with action research, the university colleague conducted focus group discussions at the end of the first year of the project. Although many new insights were gained, three of the most interesting addressed the importance of:

- a) embracing collaboration,
- b) enhancing teacher autonomy and professionalism, and
- c) energizing rather than burning out teachers.

***Embracing collaboration:*** Traditionally, teaching has been seen as an isolated profession with relatively few opportunities for collaboration. Keeping this in mind, teachers at Leila North frequently mentioned that they saw their colleagues as a valuable resource for their own professional growth. Teachers collaborated on many different levels from working with one another on their action research topics to lending support and drawing on the expertise of other teachers. By doing this, they were able to work with colleagues that they may not have necessarily have had the opportunity to work with before. In fact, in some cases, teachers discovered common interests that they would not have known existed otherwise.

***Enhancing teacher autonomy and professionalism:*** Throughout the action research process, the teachers liked the idea of being given a choice on what they would examine as well as the responsibility for their own development. With this approach, however, came a very significant shift in thinking. Teachers needed to begin to look at their classrooms not only as workplaces but also as sources of knowledge and professional growth. For many teachers, the support of their university colleague became an important factor in making this shift in their thinking. Along with teachers' discussions of autonomy and professionalism also came the whole notion of accountability. Teachers agreed that they should be held accountable for accomplishing something substantive by the end of the year but they also expected some autonomy in deciding what the end product would look like. Some teachers preferred to write a brief report, others preferred to write an article, and still others preferred to present to their colleagues.

***Energizing rather than burning out teachers:*** Teachers in this project admitted that having a choice in what they were pursuing for their own professional growth led to a greater sense of ownership. Having said this, however, many teachers also felt overwhelmed with what they saw as the ever-increasing and often conflicting demands on their time and energy. For example, even though teachers appreciated the time to pursue their action research questions, they knew that any time that they took to work on their questions would be time away from their students in the classroom. Time spent working on their professional growth also meant time needed to prepare for substitutes. Therefore, the teachers who participated in the focus group discussions reminded the administrators and their university colleague that their perceptions of "time" were not always congruent.

### **Conclusion:**

This article has highlighted many of the realities that administrators, university researchers, and teachers face when they engage in school-wide professional growth opportunities such as the Leila North action research initiative. One reality is that teachers are at different points on the professional growth continuum and therefore, working with them requires some degree of individualization. Another reality is that keeping professional growth at the top of teachers' priority lists is a challenge given the myriad of other demands on their time and energy.

In spite of the challenges along the way, however, the administrators of Leila North, their university

colleague, and many teachers feel that the last year and a half has been encouraging and positive for a number of reasons. First, the school-university partnership has drawn the school and the university much closer than they would have been had the initiative not been started. Second, the partnership has also been important for new teachers and teacher candidates because they have learned that practicing teachers also engage in ongoing inquiry into their practice. Finally, the partnership has shown that differentiating teachers' professional growth opportunities through action research makes intuitive sense because it acknowledges that teachers *do* have questions about their practice and with a little support, they can learn to examine these questions in systematic ways. In other words, action research is one approach that treats teachers as autonomous professionals who can chart their *own* paths for professional growth!

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