

**WHEN STUDENTS NEGOTIATE:
AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY OF A YEAR 8
ENGLISH CLASS IN A CATHOLIC SECONDARY
COLLEGE IN REGIONAL VICTORIA**

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

Candidate's Signature

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Abstract

This action research study examines the learning experiences of Year 8 students and their teacher as they negotiate aspects of their English classes. The study takes place in a regional Catholic co-educational secondary college in Victoria, Australia.

The question of understanding the lived experience of ourselves and other is fundamental to this study, which is situated within an holistic, enactivist view of the world. From this perspective learning is a shared activity in which students participate in creating their own interpretation as they interact with others to bring forth understanding.

The study focuses on classroom practice which aims to include all participants, through negotiation, in the actions that take place in the classroom. I have used a narrative approach to describe the way in which three action research cycles were implemented in the English classroom during one academic year. A variety of data gathering techniques was used and these included: classroom questionnaires, classroom meetings, journals, partnership observation and interviews. The main sources of data were the interviews that I undertook with each of the twenty five students in the class.

The three action research cycles allowed both the students and me to reflect upon classroom activities and make appropriate changes as the cycles progressed. In addition, negotiating in this English class has helped me to better understand my students and, through reflection, to improve my teaching practice.

Analysis of the data suggests that students experience greater commitment and motivation when they are given opportunities to be actively involved in contributing to their own learning. The data also supports research that recognises the importance of collaboration, positive relationships within the classroom, the importance of metacognitive skills and student voice. In addition, the findings point to the value of action research as a method of improving teaching practice.

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CHAPTER 1

THE STORY BEGINS

Introduction

This study examines the lived experiences of students and teacher as they negotiated curriculum in their Year 8 English class. The thesis tells the story of the way in which three action research cycles, involving both teacher and students as researchers, were implemented in the classroom during one school year. I have used a narrative, chronological approach, in an attempt to give the reader a sense of the way in which the negotiated activities of the classroom unfolded.

In addition, the research component of the action research methodology is examined together with the method used in the study. I have provided definitions of key terms together with the three research questions that the study seeks to answer. The significance of the study is discussed and the limitations of the study are acknowledged. A wide range of literature that provided the background for the study, and the theoretical perspective is examined. The context of the study together with my personal background, which has contributed to and impacted upon the development of this thesis, is presented. In the next section I provide an outline of that background and show its connection to the study.

Personal Background

I have been interested in the development of an inclusive classroom for more than two decades. In the early 1980's I was teaching in a large city, co-educational

state school which had a multicultural student body. During that time I taught English to one class of middle level students, and at the same time occupied the position of Student Welfare Co-ordinator. In both my teaching and my welfare role I became very conscious of the way in which some students were alienated from the learning process, both in the classroom and school in general. My work as welfare co-ordinator also highlighted the conflict that some students experienced with their teachers. This led me to believe that the relationship between student and teacher was of fundamental importance. At that time, I intuitively felt that inviting students to have some input into, and ownership of, their learning would provide benefits to them. Consequently, I introduced collaborative and co-operative learning techniques into my classroom teaching at that time.

In the 1990's I moved to a regional centre in Victoria and began teaching in a Catholic co-educational college. Although much of my teaching was at the senior campus of the college, I was very conscious that changes to middle years education were being promoted by the Ministry of Education in Victoria. The Ministry of Education was encouraging schools to focus on the challenges that were identified in middle years education, which they defined as Years 5 – 9. The College in which I now taught was part of a Middle Years Project, which involved collaboration with the five feeder primary schools in the district. Much work that was introduced in the College was in the area of transition from primary to secondary school. Although I was not directly involved in this transition programme, I watched with interest the changes that were made to the Year 7 programme.

In 2000, as a result of the coursework component of my doctoral studies, I became more aware of the literature on middle years education. It was during this time that I came across research that identified the “Year 8 phenomenon”

(Doddington, Flutter & Rudduck, 1999). This research argued that there was a significant dip in the motivation of students at the Year 8 level. My reading led me to the conclusion that, while the transition from primary to secondary school was significant, there was also a need for change in the Year 8 area. At the same time, in my reading I encountered for the first time, literature on the emerging theory of enactivism. As I read in this area, I realised that the enactivist view of learning supported my view of learning as a collaborative enterprise.

In 2001 I requested and was given, a Year 8 English class. Since I had been teaching senior English classes for the previous ten years, I found the move to Year 8 challenging. Many of the challenges that I had read of in the literature, I now faced in teaching Year 8 English. Drawing on the insights from my reading, I chose to implement an action research study in my 2003 Year 8 English class, in an attempt to involve students in decision making and to improve my own teaching practice.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this action research study is to examine the learning experiences of both teacher and students when a negotiated approach is introduced in a Year 8 English class. The study examines those learning experiences during the course of three action research cycles in the English class. Much of the research that has been conducted into reform of middle years education, suggests that whilst many schools have introduced strategies to ensure success for students at this level those strategies have not resulted in changed teaching practices (Sumara & Davis, 1997; Williamson, 1996). This study aims to make some contribution to the challenge of introducing

teaching practice that provides an alternative to the transmission model that is still prevalent in many secondary classrooms. The study focuses on the introduction of a negotiated approach, and attempts to show its connection to motivation and curriculum ownership.

Significance of the Study

This study has five main areas of significance. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the study is that it provided me the opportunity to improve my teaching practice and to share learning with my students. This led to the second area of significance which was to enable students to be collaborators in their own learning. This study is also significant to teachers in the middle years of education because it presents an example of one way in which teaching practice may be changed to better meet the needs of students in the middle years. Enabling students to be actively involved in decision making in the classroom is also a significant aspect of this study. Such involvement, through a process of negotiation, is likely to result in students developing a greater sense of ownership of their learning. This, in turn, may result in their learning being more meaningful and engaging, and thus enhance the learning experiences of the students in this English class. A further area of significance is that this study demonstrates a well documented model of action research in practice which involves not only the teacher and her colleagues in the process of the research, but also includes the students as action researchers collaborating in the action research process.

There is much literature to support the view that developing positive relationships with students is likely to enhance their learning (Doddington et al., 1999; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Heron, 2003; MYRAD, 2002; Wright, Horn & Sanders,

1997). Thus it would seem that a study which focuses on teacher student collaboration is of value to both student and teacher.

While this student focused specifically upon my interaction with a particular class of students, it may speak to other teachers in other situations. In particular the study is of interest to educators of middle years students because it addresses the perceived challenges of educating young adolescents, particularly those at the Year 8 level. The findings of this study support much of the middle years literature (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Cumming, 1996; Dembo & Eaton, 2000; Doddington et al., Hill & Russell, 1999; Yair, 2000; Kiddey & Robson, 2001). Thus, these findings will add to the evidence that shows that involving students in decision making may help to meet their needs for autonomy and participation in their learning.

Much of the literature that promotes reform of education in the middle years recommends changes to whole school structures (Cumming, 1996; Hill & Russell, 1999; Kiddey & Robson, 2001). These recommendations include: creating teams of teachers who focus on a particular year level, integrating curriculum, team teaching, re-organisation of timetable, portfolio assessment (Kiddey & Robson, 2001).

At the same time, it has been recognised by Yair (2000) that whole school reform is slow and often difficult to implement. He argues that waiting for whole school reform to happen may deprive students of the opportunities that individual teachers can achieve. Thus, introducing this study affords me the opportunity to reform my classroom, and by doing so make a contribution to the understanding of the challenges of middle years education, while providing students with opportunities that are presently lacking. In this study, I propose that negotiating the curriculum, as one alternative for enhancing student learning, may be a method that will give students a

greater level of control and ownership of their learning, and as a result increased motivation to learn.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of this study is that it is not possible to generalise from it. The study is set within a particular time and place. Its context is unique, and cannot be reproduced to provide the same responses. The responses of these students were their interpretations of activities in a particular place and time. My interpretations of those responses do not provide verifiable facts. Rather, they provide a basis for and interpretations of my reflections on the words of the students. In a different place with a different group of students the words and meanings may be different. In spite of these limitations, it must be acknowledged that the findings of this study closely resemble the findings of other middle years research. Therefore, while generalisations cannot be drawn directly from this study there may be some general conclusions that can be applied to other learning contexts.

Context and Participants

This action research project took place in a Year 8 English class in a Catholic Co-educational college in a regional city in Victoria, Australia. Ethics approval was sought and gained for this study (Appendix A). The college consists of about 800 students from Year 7 to Year 12 level, situated on two campuses. There were 120 students at the Year 8 level and 25 students in the Year 8 class that was the focus of this study. The class was a mixed ability class and, of the 25 students, there were 12

boys and 13 girls. In second semester the number increased to 26, as a male student from a State Government College moved into the class.

The College has been involved in a Middle Years Project with the local Catholic primary schools for the past five years. This project aims to better facilitate transition of students into the secondary system, and involves the use of strategies that have been identified as supporting the learning of middle years students. These strategies include:

- Increased contact between the primary and secondary schools
- The development of teams of teachers at the Year 7 level
- Teachers teaching integrated subjects (e.g. Mathematics, Science and Technology).

This project has not been extended to include Year 8 students; rather they revert to the more usual classroom structure. This involves different teachers for core subjects, with no integrated teaching. Year 8 students do have some choice of elective subjects.

Definitions

- In this study negotiation is used to describe the way in which the students and teachers interacted in the classroom. Specifically, negotiation in the classroom occurs, as Wilson (1999) points out, “when ideas and opinions are sought by the teacher and expressed by the student; when students are encouraged to have input into decisions about what they learn and how they learn it; when

the decisions are acted upon, and when students participate in exercising choice” (Wilson, 1999, What is Negotiation, para. 1).

- For the purpose of this study I use Martin’s (2002) conceptualisation of motivation as “students’ energy and drive to learn, work effectively and achieve to their potential at school and the behaviours that follow from this energy and drive” (p. 35).
- In this study I define curriculum ownership as students’ accepting responsibility for and commitment to their learning.
- The middle years of schooling (or Middle Years Project) refers to Years 5 – 9, ages 11 15. In this study the specific focus is on Year 8 level.

Research Questions

The research questions grew out of the literature which demonstrated the need for reform in the middle years of schooling (Hill & Russell, 1999). In particular, I was interested in the challenges of the Year 8 level (Doddington et al., 1999). The literature indicated that there was a need for students to have more autonomy and control over their learning. The literature also indicated that for the most part this does not happen (Anderman and Maehr, 1994). My reading of the middle years literature, together with my personal experiences of teaching over the past 25 years, caused me agree with Boomer (1978), that active involvement of students in their own learning has the potential to increase their commitment and motivation. The use of negotiation which Boomer (1992) presented, seemed to be a way in which I could actively involve students in their learning. Other influences have been my co-workers, who have encouraged my interest. I was also influenced by the reform

movements that took place in the early 1980's in Victorian education. Through my reading I discovered the emerging theory of enactivism with its focus on learning as a shared activity (Sumara & Davis, 1997). At the same time I became aware of the theoretical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, with its focus on interpretation. All of this led me to the development of the following three questions, which form the basis of this study:

1. In terms of motivation and curriculum ownership, what is the learning experience of students when a negotiated approach is introduced into a Year 8 English curriculum?
2. What conclusions, if any, may be drawn from this study in regard to the advantages of introducing a negotiated approach and beyond this particular classroom?
3. What changes to my teaching practice may result from the introduction of a negotiated approach in a Year 8 English class?

Theoretical and Methodological Issues

As the main objective of this study was to examine the learning experiences of students and teacher when a negotiated approach was introduced in the classroom, it was necessary to use a method that allowed negotiation to take place. The second objective was to improve my teaching practice, and therefore the method chosen needed to allow for reflection and change to take place. Thus, it seemed that the study would be best placed within a non-positivist framework, where meaning is constructed in a social context (Davis, Sumara & Keiren, 1996). Such a perspective is in direct contrast to the positivist view, which argues that there is an objective truth

which can be studied scientifically (Crotty, 1998). The literature dealing with this perspective will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Thus, for the purpose of this study I chose to use an action research method and a negotiated approach. I also placed the study within an hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, which seeks to interpret the lived experiences of people and is closely connected with an holistically conceptualised understanding of action research (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xiii). It is this view of action research that supports this study. A detailed discussion of the action research method and the theoretical perspective used in the study will be provided in Chapter 3.

Gathering the Data

In this study data were gathered from classroom climate questionnaires, classroom meetings, and student journals, during, and at the end of, each action cycle. My research journal and participant observation notes also provided data during and at the end of the cycles. Semi-structured interviews of student participants were conducted during and after action cycles. Unstructured, conversational, interviews were conducted with 5 students and 5 parents after the study was completed. For the most part, this data was qualitative. The classroom climate questionnaires were quantitative, but were used in a qualitative way as the basis of classroom discussion during the first action cycle.

Analysis of the Data

The data were analysed in two ways. First, the data were analysed during and after each action cycle. I analysed and reflected on student journals, my own journal, and some semi-structured interviews. This information was used in the planning of the subsequent cycle. Second, all of the data were analysed at the end of the study, and my interpretations of them were used to answer the research questions.

Writing style

I have written this thesis as a first person narrative because it is more appropriate for the study. Since this study depends very much upon establishing relationships between the teacher and the students it is necessarily a personal story. As such, the more distanced third person writing style is inappropriate for providing a sense of the lived experiences of the participants. In Chapters 4 and 5, which deal with the story of the classroom, I have adopted a more informal style of writing in an attempt to capture the voices and experiences of the participants.

Structure of the Thesis

This study argues for the introduction of a collaborative, negotiated approach to the teaching of English at the Year 8 level. It draws upon a wide range of literature, that demonstrates the need for such an approach in the education of middle years students, to support this view. In this chapter I have attempted to show how my personal experiences, together with my reading of a range of literature, have resulted

in my embarking on this project. My concern for enhancing the learning experiences of my students through the improvement of my teaching practice, led me to choose an action research method for this study. The relationships that have developed between the students and me during this research have been significant in maintaining my motivation to complete the study.

In Chapter 2, I have drawn upon the considerable range of literature that relates to educating students in the middle years. This literature provided direction for the study. The examination of the literature began with a discussion of middle years education and motivation. This was followed by a discussion of literature that focused on Year 8 in particular. Literature in the area of negotiating the curriculum was examined and, in particular, the work of Boomer (1978, 1992) which was the negotiation model used in this study. The examination of the literature then moved to a discussion of learning theories which underpinned the study. Initially, constructivism was discussed, and this was followed by an examination of enactivism which was adopted as the epistemology for the study.

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the methodology, methods, epistemology and theoretical perspectives that support this study. In chapter 3, I explain the reasons for the choice of these elements, and the way in which they are interconnected. I also give an outline of action research and some of its varieties, and explain the approach that I used in the study. I then explain the negotiation process that was used in the classroom. This is followed by a discussion of the methods of data collection and analysis. The final section of Chapter 3 addresses the issue of validation.

In Chapter 4 I present a narrative account of the way in which the three action research cycles were implemented. The narrative uses a range of data to present students' perceptions of their English classes, before, during, and after the action

research cycles. The story is interspersed with my reflective comments. Chapter 5 continues the narrative with a more detailed account of the lived experiences of five students.

Chapter 6 concludes the story. Here I use the findings to answer the research questions. Question 1 is set out in two parts; I first examine the student responses prior to the introduction of the negotiated approach. I then examine the responses that were made during and after the introduction of negotiation. The responses are then used to answer Question 2. This is followed by an examination of my own learning as a teacher. I end the chapter with my final reflections, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

As indicated in chapter one, this action research study examines the effects of introducing a negotiated approach to learning in a Year 8 English class. The study draws upon a range of the considerable literature that focuses on educating and motivating young adolescents. In order to provide understanding of, and direction to the study, the results of research in the following areas will be discussed in the first section of this literature review:

- Adolescence and the Middle Years of Schooling – The Middle Years
- Adolescence and the Middle Years of Schooling – Development, Motivation and Resilience
- The Current Situation in the Middle Years - Context and Needs
- The Current Situation in the Middle Years - Possibilities for change
- The Importance of a Learner Centred Curriculum
- Challenges of Year 8
- The Importance of a Supportive Environment
- Giving Students Some Control Over Their Learning Through Negotiating.

The second section of this review will discuss the learning theories of constructivism and enactivism. The theory of constructivism was initially considered to be the most appropriate learning theory for this study. However, as I began to read the literature in the emerging theory of enactivism and the critique of the

constructivist approach (Begg 2000), I concluded that this study would be more appropriately placed within the enactivist epistemology.

Adolescence and the Middle Years of Schooling

The Middle Years

In Australia, as in other Western countries, the challenges associated with young people being alienated from the learning process are a major concern to governments and educators alike. The Commonwealth Government publication “From Alienation to Engagement: Opportunities for Reform in the Middle Years of Schooling” (Cumming 1996), the “Junior Secondary Review of South Australia” (Eyers, Cormack & Barratt, 1992, 1993) and the “Victorian Years 5-9 Project” (State of Victoria, 1999) are all evidence of attempts by governments, both Federal and State, to address the problems perceived in the middle years of schooling. Indeed, Barber (1999) has argued that the middle years of schooling is the key emerging challenge in the education debate. In the United States there are similar concerns that “too many students graduate or drop out of school without a single achievement for which they can feel uniquely responsible or justly proud” (Covington 1998, p. 4).

This is not a new situation, for in the 1930’s the United States was concerned with the lack of effective learning in high schools. An eight year study (Aikin, 1942), found many of the same symptoms that are still being discussed today (Jackson & Davis, 2000; MYRAD, 2002). Hill and Russell (1999) found there is evidence to indicate that there is a prevalence of symptoms, including under-achievement, disaffection, alienation and disengagement from learning, in early adolescence. They point out that in Australia the problem of ‘dropping out’ is a serious one. They

highlight the fact that it is not simply a matter of physical ‘dropping out’, but there is a passive disengagement by students who simply switch off and fail to learn. Barber (1999), writing of the British experience, supports the view that “too many pupils become disaffected during the middle years and many of the rest are bored most of the time” (p.3). These findings bear out the anecdotal evidence of teachers who frequently are faced with student comments that classroom activities are boring. According to Covington (1998), three out of ten students, in the United States, who enter Year 9 will not graduate. This evidence, from Britain, the United States of America and Australia, does much to explain the concern of educators and governments alike.

The seriousness with which educators and education departments view these challenges is evident in the initiatives that have been introduced in recent years by the Victorian State Government. In particular, the Middle Years Pedagogy Research and Development Project (MYPRD) has been introduced to provide direction and support for reforming pedagogical practice in the middle years, in Victorian government schools. In 2003, the MYPRD team worked with nine Schools for Innovation and Excellence clusters to refine a strategy for middle years reform. The materials that were developed by the MYPRD team, were made available in 2004 to support clusters that wish to implement changes in the way they deliver middle years education (MYPRD, 2003).

In considering ways in which the challenge of the middle years of schooling may be addressed it is important to gain some understanding of the young adolescents who are ‘in the middle’. The next section of this review will examine some aspects of adolescent development and its effect upon the motivation of these young people.

Development, Motivation and Resilience

There is considerable information on the way in which adolescents develop, and this is critical to the educator in understanding the issues of motivating young adolescents. Hill and Russell (1999) argue that whilst early adolescence is a physical, emotional and cognitive reality it is also, to some extent, shaped by the social context of the young person. Young adolescents, then, are at a stage in their lives when they are faced with intense changes, both physically and emotionally. The challenges which these changes bring to the young person are compounded by the rapid social change that has taken place in recent times. The social stability of earlier generations has given way to diverse social situations which have a considerable impact upon these young people. Thus, these diverse social contexts need to be taken into account by teachers when considering the way in which they structure the learning environment for young people in the middle years of school. The importance of social needs in the life and education of young adolescents has been widely acknowledged. Braggett (1997) presents an Australian perspective on the importance of considering the social needs of students in the years of schooling. He argues that the “social aspects of schooling are crucial for most youngsters, and teachers may benefit when they are aware of the issues involved” (p. 32). Marsh (1996) supports the view that social needs are a major consideration for all students, as does Vygotsky (1978) whose theory stresses the importance of social activity for all humans. Anderman and Maehr (1994) point out that declines in motivation during adolescence are associated with contextual and environmental factors, and motivation is not simply a result of pubertal changes. They also point out that “students beliefs, definitions and attributions concerning ability change substantially and significantly during late childhood and early adolescence; students increasingly distinguish role

and effort and ability in determining achievement” (pp. 288-290). They argue that students at this age tend to view ability more as a stable, internal trait, and less related to effort than they did earlier. Furthermore, they argue that adolescents are concerned about the possibility of failure, suggesting that this is a broad problem that has “pervasive effects on a wide range of students” (p. 291). These findings suggest the importance of presenting students with opportunities to engage in activities which meet their perceived needs, so that they can be engaged in learning that has meaning for them.

Martin (2002) extends the discussion of motivation to include the concept of academic resilience, which he defines as “students’ ability to deal effectively with academic setbacks, stress and study pressure” (p. 35). He argues that academic resilience is essential if students are to maintain the academic gains that they make in school. He also maintains that students are motivated to persist to achieve mastery when they have control over the outcomes they are aiming to perform. The concept of resilience is an area that has been the subject of some interest both overseas and in Australia (Benard, 1995; Edwards, 2000; Rigby, Cox & Black, 1997). Garmezy, who was foundational in the study of resiliency, defined resilience in an interview when he said, “I think ‘competence’ is really the term for a variety of adaptive behaviours and I think that resilience is manifest competence despite exposure to significant stressors” (Rolf & Glantz, 1999, p.7). Researchers in the area of resiliency generally agree that resilient young people have what are termed protective factors that promote positive social development (Battistich and Hom, 1997; Benard, 1995; Coe, 2003; Edwards, 2000; Howard & Johnson, 2000; Osterman, 2000; Rigby et al., 1997).

While the concept of resilience was not an initial focus of this study, it became apparent that the introduction of negotiation in the classroom made some contribution

to the protective factors that are identified in the literature. This led me to delve into some of the current literature on resilience. I will continue this discussion with some of the current thinking about resiliency in schools and discuss its connection to this study.

Edwards (2000) discusses the concept of moral classroom communities, which he sees as important in developing resiliency in young people. He defines these moral classroom communities as communities that value such things as membership of the group, the freedom to work out their own agendas, and a democratic classroom style. He goes further to argue that this type of community should not be confined to the classroom, but should operate throughout the school. In this study the students and I have collaborated to negotiate topics, activities and assessment procedures, in what I would view as a democratic classroom style.

Much of the current literature in the area of resiliency demonstrates the importance of connectedness in helping to promote resilience and protective behaviours (Battistich and Hom, 1997; Benard 1995; Coe, 2003; Osterman, 2000). This connectedness is evident when members of a community experience a sense of belonging within a community (Osterman, 2000). In this study students' involvement in classroom decision making gave them the opportunity to develop such a sense of connectedness and belonging to the class group. Howard and Johnson (1998) argue that schools can play a major role in helping students to develop resiliency. They agree with Benard (1995) that providing caring relationships, giving students opportunities to experience success in real-life situations and encouraging participation, can help students to become more resilient. Oddone (2002) also supports the view that schools can promote resiliency. She emphasises the need for providing meaningful participation that goes beyond the traditional measure of

success, which she defines as grades or test scores. She also emphasises the importance of setting high expectations, and giving students the confidence to believe that they can succeed.

Coe (2003), in her discussion of a Montessori high school, argues that there is a dissonance between the psychological needs of young people and what the curriculum provides. Osterman (2002) supports this view in her discussion of students' sense of community and belonging. She defines community as coming into existence when people experience a sense of belonging and relatedness that is reciprocated by others. Schools, she asserts, have generally been more concerned with individualism and competition than with developing collaboration and community. The importance of developing collaboration and community is of significance to this study, which focuses on developing these areas in the classroom.

The above literature clearly suggests that by increasing students' sense of community, belonging and connectedness, the alienation from the learning process, that has been identified as a challenge for educators, may be lessened. At the same time, by increasing these areas, the resilience of students may be increased.

It is clear, from the discussion of adolescence, motivation and the need to promote resilience, that challenges exist in providing for the needs of young adolescents in schools today. Some of these challenges will be discussed in the following section of this review.

The Current Situation in the Middle Years

Context and Needs

As noted earlier Anderman and Maehr (1994) argue that there may be a mismatch between the context of the school and the psychological needs of the student, and this may be partially responsible for the decline in motivation during this period. They point out that the middle years are a time when young people are beginning to be aware of their emerging adulthood, and it is a time when self-concept of ability and positive attitudes towards school decrease. They argue that a change in attitude is particularly evident during grades six and seven, when students are making the transition from primary to secondary school. I would suggest that this change in attitude continues into Year 8 and I will discuss Year 8 in more detail later in this review. Dembo and Eaton (2000) assert that for many individuals the “middle grades school transition represents the beginning of a general deterioration in academic performance, motivation, self-perceptions of ability, and relationships with peers and teachers” (p. 473).

In the Australian context, we can observe the same kind of challenges with the transition from primary to secondary schools (Hill & Russell, 1999). This is one of the arguments for change in the way that we organise schooling for this group of students. Yair (2000), writing of the United States experience, discusses the way in which the structure of instruction affects the learning experiences of students. He argues that the way in which schools and classrooms are organised results in students having little sense of involvement and control. Both of these factors, involvement and control, seem to be significant needs of young adolescents. Thus, according to Yair (2000), “the contrast between the requirements for significant learning and the

organisation of schools and classrooms may be one root cause of students' low achievement" (p. 192). The organisation of schools and classrooms, then, tends to exacerbate factors that may contribute to many of the motivational problems which are evident in the alienation that has been identified in Australia, and presented in the perspectives of young people about their experiences in school, especially during the middle years (Cumming, 1996). This supports the view that "the typical middle grade school environment is characterised by few opportunities for students to make important decisions, excessive rules and discipline, poor teacher-student relationships" (Anderman & Maehr, 1994, p. 293). This is a matter of concern when one considers that meeting the psychological and developmental needs of students is essential for motivation and learning, for, as Rogers and Renard (1999) assert, "if learning in school meets students' emotional needs, they will more likely engage in the learning" (p. 34).

Possibilities for Change

Hill and Russell (1999) present a general design for improving learning outcomes. They argue that the beliefs and understandings that teachers have about their professional efficacy are central in any attempt to reform the middle years of schooling. This view of the importance of teachers' professional efficacy underpins the collaborative action research that was fundamental to the Project for Enhancing Effective Learning (PEEL). The project, which aimed to help students to become more responsible for the control their own learning (Baird & Northfield 1992), also gave teachers the opportunity to reflect on their own practice to improve their teaching. It is, as McNiff (2002) points out, a way of extending professional knowledge and understanding. Through this increased understanding of the way in

which our actions affect the learning of both our students and ourselves we can increase our professional efficacy, which Hill and Russell (1999) see as so important in reforming the middle years of learning. Yair (2000) also argues for the importance of the teacher in the development of learning that meets the needs of students. He agrees with other research (Cumming, 1996; Schools Council, 1993) that a school-wide approach gives teachers the best opportunity to provide the kind of curriculum that meets the needs of students. He also argues, however, that waiting for whole-school reform may cause some students to be deprived of the learning opportunities that individual teachers can offer. Thus, although ideally a whole school approach is desirable, the introduction of small classroom approaches, such as the one in this study, can make a significant difference.

In their outline of areas that they see as being important in the process of reforming middle school education Hill and Russell (1999) make a number of other important points. They point out that the middle years are characterised by increasingly infrequent contact between the school and the home. They argue that there is an ongoing need for parents to be informed of what is going on, to be supportive of their child's learning, and to be a partner in the learning process. Hill and Russell (1999) also argue that there is a need for the teachers in the middle school to be organised as teaching teams that enable closer relationships between students and teachers. This view of the need for teams of teachers in the middle school is supported by other research (Boyd, 2000; Braggett, 1997).

Withall (1991), in his discussion of teacher-centred and learner-centred instruction, cites the work of Dewey (1963) and Rogers (1969) to support his view that attempts to meet the psychological and emotional needs of students might assist in their achievement and motivation in the classroom. He argues that giving learners

‘a say’ in their own learning is likely to enhance the probabilities of learning. He also asserts that “individuals need to have a sense of belonging, security and freedom to make choices” (Withall, 1991, p. 101). It is this area of giving students a ‘say’ in their learning that what will be addressed in this action research case study.

The Importance of a Learner-Centred Curriculum

There seems to be a general consensus that a learner-centred curriculum is necessary if negative student reactions to schooling are to be countered. At the same time, it is acknowledged that the cultivation of an intrinsic interest in learning is an acceptable and desirable aim for educators (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). Yair (2000) argues that intrinsic motivation, which emphasises learning for its own sake, is highly correlated with a sense of voluntary participation or choice. He asserts that “a sense of agency or efficacy is of prime importance learning” (Yair, 2000, p. 193). He also claims that the bureaucratic structure of instruction lowers intrinsic motivation and consequently reduces the achievement of students. Yair’s study highlights the importance of learning tasks that are authentic, which he defines as being connected to real life situations, as important in developing motivation in students. It seems, however, that for many students the reverse of this is the reality. They do not experience the degree of control over their own environment that researchers have seen as important in developing motivation (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). Yair (2000) argues that “the more students feel in command of their learning and feel active and excited by it, the more they fulfil their learning potential” (Yair, 2000, p. 193). In this study the introduction of negotiation aims to make some contribution to the important element of giving students some choice and control of their own learning. Dembo and Eaton (2000) point out that adolescents who do not, or feel that they do not, have

control over their lives may resist adult demands by procrastinating and needlessly postponing tasks that they are capable of completing. Thus, it is likely that giving students some real control over their learning in school may result in an increase in their achievement and their motivation. However, it seems that “the daily experiences of students are a long way from allowing them to be in control of their learning” (Yair, 2000 p. 193). Rather, as Withall (1991) claims, “there seems to be a myth that once individuals step into the classroom they are no longer affective beings. It appears that their basic human needs are to be left at the doorstep” (Withall, 1991, p. 106). This approach to young adolescents is unlikely to lead to increased interest and participation in their learning. It is becoming increasingly evident that creating an environment where relevance and connectedness are evident is an important factor in encouraging active participation and motivation (State of Victoria 2001).

In this action research study I encouraged students to participate actively in their learning, through negotiating learning opportunities with them. I have chosen to focus on Year 8 because it is in this year that dip in motivation has been identified (Doddington et al., 1999). The following section of this review examines the challenges that have been identified in the Year 8 level.

Challenges of Year 8

Doddington et al., (1999), in their research into motivation and performance in primary and secondary schooling, identify what they term the Year 8 phenomenon. They present results of their longitudinal study that focused on students’ experiences across five years of secondary schooling. The results of the study suggest that for many students engagement with school tends to peak in Year 7 and Year 11. They argue that for many students in Year 8 a clear understanding of learning is missing.

Furthermore, their data suggest that Year 8 has no clear and compelling identity, for “it has neither the novelty of Year 7 nor the promise of ownership through option choices of year 9” (Doddington et al., 1999, p. 30). The data from this study indicate that some students at this level believe that Year 8 is an unimportant year, a year when nothing much happens. The data also indicate that “teachers claim that the year is about consolidation” (Doddington et al., 1999, p30). Doddington et al., (1999) assert that “consolidation is not a particularly challenging experience – especially if it means for some pupils, revisiting work they did in year 7 or even year 6” (p. 30). The Doddington et al., (1999) data support the view that having some control over their learning will enhance student achievement. They point out that Year 8 students are at a point where they are conscious of ‘growing up’, and they are looking for opportunities to make decisions and to have some sense of control over their learning. The problem is that generally Year 8 fails to give the opportunity for students to have such a sense of control over their learning. Another important point made by the Doddington et al., study is “the importance of ‘investing effort’ at this stage because this is the time when patterns of achievement open up or close down pathways to careers” (p. 33). If this is the case, and there seems no reason to doubt that it is, then we can see the seriousness of making the middle years of schooling, and particularly the Year 8 level, more effective than they presently seem to be. In the Australian context similar concerns have been expressed, which indicate that there is a serious degree of underachieving in the middle years (Hill, 1993).

The Importance of a Supportive Environment

It is important, then, for educators in the middle school years, and throughout schooling for that matter, to structure classrooms so that students may develop a sense

of belonging, security, and freedom of choice. Withall (1991) refers to attribution theory, which is a theory that tries to explain the causes of people's behaviour. It assumes that people try to determine why others act as they do; that is, they attribute causes to behaviour. Heider (1958) was a foundational writer on the theory of attribution, but it was not until the seventies that Weiner (1974) and his colleagues (e.g. Jones, Kannouse, Kelley, Nisbett, Valins & Weiner, 1972) developed the theoretical framework that has become a major research paradigm of social psychology. Withall (1991) points out that attribution theorists hypothesise that human beings want to perceive themselves as authors of their own behaviours. He argues that, in the educational situation, the learners' perceptions of freedom, and opportunities to make choices, in terms of their particular needs and interests will have a large impact on the quality of their performance (p. 104). In his discussion of basic needs and motivation, Withall (1991) refers to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and points out that, within the boundaries of this model, no one can give, or augment, anyone's motivation other than his or her own. The educator, however, has a major impact on the environmental conditions, and thereby affects the internal conditions that influence learners (p. 105). It is, then, incumbent upon educators to provide the conditions that will help students to develop a positive attitude towards learning, and reduce their sense of alienation and isolation from the learning process. Negotiating the curriculum may be one way of achieving this.

Giving Students Some Control Over Their Learning Through Negotiating

Boomer (1978) is foundational in presenting the concept of negotiating the curriculum as a model for teaching and learning. He argues that students and teachers

can work collaboratively to build learning theories. The use of negotiation that Boomer (1978) presents, is built upon the premise that inviting students to become actively involved in contributing to their own learning will result in a greater degree of commitment and motivation for those students. Cook (1992) supports this view, and argues that out of negotiation students develop a sense of ownership for the work they are to do, and thus become more motivated and more committed to that work. This premise, that inviting students to be actively involved in negotiating their own learning leads to a greater sense of ownership, commitment and motivation, also underpins this study.

The importance of giving students a voice in decision making that affects them was recognised in 1989 by the United Nations. Since then, the issue of involving students and giving them a voice has been identified in the literature (Kordalewski, 1999; Onore, 1992; Passe, 1996; Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000).

Rudduck and Demetriou (2003) maintain that it is important to listen to students' voices. They argue that young people are able to make a valuable contribution to their learning, and that by including them in the decision making their learning will be enhanced. I believe that negotiating with students is one way of including, and giving them some voice in their classroom.

The use of negotiation in an English classroom is examined in a case study of a Year 9 English class in Western Australia (Reid, 1992). Reid's work differs from the present study, not only in the year level being examined but also in the fact that Reid was not the regular classroom teacher. However, whilst Reid's (1992) study does not correlate directly with the present study, it does have some relevance as it uses the same negotiation process. A further study, aimed at replicating Reid's study,

was carried out with a Year 8 class for learning-disabled, low and underachieving students, who were withdrawn from the mainstream programme (Reid & Thwaites 1992).

While this work differs from the present study in its participants, it has some relevance because it examines negotiation through an action research model. The study highlights the importance of critical reflection in action research, which “has the propensity to effect much wider and long-lasting change in education generally but returning to the teacher a felt understanding of her position as a powerful agent for her own development as a classroom practitioner” (Reid & Thwaites, 1992, p. 134). The present study is very much concerned with understanding the way in which my practice can be improved, through the use of critical reflection upon the actions taken in the classroom.

In another study, Hyde (1992) negotiated in a Year 8 mathematics class and found that students gained confidence, and that they were able to cover the required course, within the negotiation framework. This study is useful too in outlining the difficulties that negotiation raises for the teacher. Hyde (1992) also presented an outline of negotiation in a Year 10 science class, which is useful in demonstrating the ways in which negotiation can be implemented in the classroom. Hyde’s (1992) study gives a detailed account of the skills that need to be taught to students in order to manage a collaborative, student centred classroom.

The notion that students need to be taught specific skills to enable them to participate and accept responsibility for their learning is highlighted by Baird (1986) in his discussion of an action research study aimed at improving the learning of secondary school students. The study found that initially students were passive, dependent, uninformed and dissatisfied. After some training in meta-cognitive

behaviours, the students began to accept more responsibility and take some control of their learning. Baird's (1986) findings are of relevance to the introduction of negotiation in this study. In order for students to negotiate successfully they need to have some understanding of the process of negotiating, and of the way in which they can use negotiation to exercise some control of their learning. Students are not necessarily familiar with the concept of negotiation and do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully negotiate. Thus, it is important for the teacher to introduce and teach these metacognitive skills to students, if they are to fully participate in their learning.

Wilson (1999) presents a discussion of negotiation in a New South Wales Year 10 computer class. This research was concerned with outlining a rationale and a process for using classroom questionnaires as a basis for conducting negotiation. The study gives a rationale for using negotiation with students which may be of relevance to the present study (Wilson 1999). Wilson makes clear his view, that if students are participants in determining their learning they are more likely to see that learning as relevant.

Passe (1996), writing from the United States perspective, supports the view that students need to experience decision making in the classroom. He argues that "curricular decision-making power belongs in the hands of students because it is their lives that are being affected – their day-to-day school lives and also their future lives" (p. 9). In order to give students such power, Passe (1996) promotes the concept of 'negotiated curriculum', which he claims avoids the two extremes of total teacher control and total student control. He identifies the benefits of giving students the opportunity to have some control of curriculum decisions such as improving student performance in the areas of autonomy, student learning, motivation and classroom

behaviour. He also claims that when students have some control over the content of their classes they are less likely to develop the boredom that has been identified as a characteristic of students in the middle years of schooling (Hill & Russell, 1999).

Passe (1996) outlines some of the constraints that teachers face, and which may account for some of the reluctance to embrace the concept of negotiated curriculum. He points out that in the “1960’s and 70’s Dewey’s concept of child-centred education evolved into so-called ‘free schools’, many of which relied on the Summerhillian philosophy of allowing students to study whatever and whenever they wanted” (p.11). It was against this extreme that many teachers protested. Studies in Australia make very clear that negotiation does not mean that teachers allow students to do exactly as they please (Hyde, 1992). Rather, as Reid (1992) argues, negotiating with students needs to be done in an organised and controlled manner. Negotiation is not, as some educators believe, a way for students to avoid tasks which they dislike. Rather, it is a way in which teachers and students can work together to make learning meaningful and engaging. This is important because, in the words of Mitchell, Loughran and Mitchell (2001), “building a sense of shared ownership is an effective way of achieving high levels of student interest and engagement” (p.4).

Further studies from the United States’ perspective are presented by Whorter, Jarrard, Rhoades & Wiltcher (1996), in their descriptions of the way in which they introduced student generated curriculum into their high school classes. While they do not use the term negotiation, it is very clear that this is in fact what they are doing in their classes. Their belief in their students’ ability to participate in their own learning experiences connects strongly with the underlying belief of my research. In addition, although they do not use a formal action research process, their descriptions of their work show characteristics of the action research approach. The findings of this study

highlighted the importance of the following factors when providing opportunities for students to actively participate in their own learning. The study emphasizes the need for positive relationships in the classroom, trust between students and teacher, the necessity to teach students how to collaborate effectively, and the necessity of changing the role of teacher from that of instructor to that of facilitator. The study also addresses the issue of standards and required curriculum. The findings indicate that course content can be met when students are provided with a range of choices (Whorter et al. 1996, pp. 12-19).

Although these studies do not connect directly with my study of negotiating with Year 8 students, they are valuable in demonstrating the different ways in which action research can be used effectively in the classroom. The findings of this study also support the views provided in the literature (Baird 1986; Hyde 1992; Passe 1996).

Drawing the Threads Together

It seems, then, that the literature supports the view that students in the middle years of schooling need to be given some autonomy and control over their own learning. Furthermore, it appears that giving students in Year 8 some control may help to reduce the motivational ‘dip’ that has been identified in students at that year level. The literature indicates that, while the structure and organisation of the school is important, it is the classroom that has the most significant impact. It appears that there is a need for more work in the area of classroom learning, so that the prevalence of alienation and disengagement from learning might be reduced. This study will add to the literature on the middle years of schooling and, specifically, to the Year 8 level.

It will also contribute to the research which has identified the need to empower teachers to transform the middle years (Cumming 1996).

Moving to Learning Theories

In the next section of this literature review I will discuss the learning theories that have informed my understanding, and underpin this study. As I have said previously, I will focus on two theories, constructivism and enactivism. I will begin the section with an examination of the theory of constructivism. It will discuss the areas of radical constructivism, social constructivism and social constructionism. I will then move the discussion into the theory of enactivism.

Learning Theories

In my initial thinking about this action research study of negotiated curriculum, social constructivism seemed to be the learning theory into which the study should be placed, because negotiating in the classroom draws upon many of the aspects of this theory. The constructivist model views the teacher as facilitator rather than an imparter of knowledge, and emphasises collaboration in the learning environment (Bruce, McGee, Schwartz & Purcell, 2000). My initial view was supported by Boomer, Lester, Onore and Cook (1992), who maintain that negotiating the curriculum is set within the social constructivist view of the world. As my study progressed, I began to read in the area of the emerging theory of enactivism which, it is argued, has developed from constructivism (Begg 2000). I concluded that enactivism may be a more appropriate theory in which to place the present study.

Thus, this examination of the literature will also explore the theory of enactivism, and its implications for learning.

Constructivism

Constructivism is a broad term which is used to describe a theory of knowledge and learning. Indeed, as Phillips (1995) points out “there is an enormous number of authors spanning broad philosophical or theoretical spectrum, who can be considered as in some sense constructivist” (Phillips, 1995, p. 6). The fundamental premise upon which constructivism is based is that knowledge is constructed, or built, by the learner. This view is, according to Hinchey (1998), in direct opposition to the positivist, traditional view of learning which argues that ‘knowledge’ is factual and can be found out there in the world, if we just look for it. This positivist view sees knowledge as something which a person can possess, and can pass on to another person. It supports the transmission model of education which is prevalent in many areas of education today. Constructivism disputes this view, seeing knowledge, not as something that is separate from the individual and able to be transmitted from one person to another, but as something that the individual constructs from the experiences that he or she encounters. In this study, which will use a negotiated approach, it will be important for students to be given the opportunity to use their own experiences as the basis for learning.

Larochelle, Bednarz and Garrison (1998) argue that constructivism is an “umbrella term covering theorizations which are primarily centred on either the cognitive subject; the situated subject (or social actor) or the locus of knowledge” (p. vii). This view is supported by Phillips (1995), who argues that the constructivist model of learning does not represent one single view. It does, however, as Phillips

contends, have a common theme of learning as being active, social and creative. This theme of learning as active, social and creative is compatible with the concept of negotiation used in this study, which is also active and social. I would also expect that there would be a strong emphasis upon the creativity of students and teacher in this negotiated approach.

I will now discuss von Glasersfeld's (1995) Radical constructivism. Von Glasersfeld (1995) argues that knowledge is in the heads of people, and that the person has no option but to construct his or her knowledge on the basis of their own experience. This, according to Osborne (1996), is a problem with radical constructivism because, taken to its logical conclusion, it gives validity to any personal theory. Radical constructivism has also been criticised on the grounds that it disregards the role of society and social interaction (Ernst, 1994). It cannot be denied that radical constructivism, as its name suggests, is an unconventional approach to the question of how knowledge is obtained. It is an approach that causes a good deal of concern because it questions the traditional, accepted understanding and thus the authority of those who promote the positivist, traditionalist view of knowledge acquisition. In defence of his theory von Glasersfeld (1996) points out that he does not deny that there is an absolute reality but rather claims that we have no way of knowing such a reality. What von Glasersfeld argues is that constructivists define reality differently from the way in which the traditional western philosophical tradition defines it. Reality is, he argues, "made up of the network of things and relationships that we rely on in our living, and on which, we believe, others rely on too" (p. 7). Thus it is evident that, from the constructivists' view point, each person constructs their meaning within a social context, and bases their construction upon their prior experience.

Von Glasersfeld (1996) supports the Piagetian view of constructivism as an adaptive activity, and asserts that the idea of one absolute truth does not fit into this constructivist view of the world. Von Glasersfeld (1995) proposes a concept of viability rather than absolute truth. Within this concept, the experience of the person affects their perception of the world. This leads to the conclusion that there will be different ways of viewing any situation. Thus, it cannot be expected that there will be one correct way of solving a problem. The solution to a problem will depend upon this idea of viability. If a solution to a problem seems viable, then the person is likely to maintain their use of such a solution. Von Glasersfeld (1995) also maintains that this does not mean that all solutions are equally desirable. Rather, the question of the desirability of a solution is not based on the idea of there being an absolute truth, but may be justified by a different criteria. For instance, it may be that a different solution may be more easily understood, or that it may provide a quicker way of solving the problem that is being investigated. In this case the person may choose to select a different way of operating because it is more viable than the one they presently use.

In applying this theory to the school situation, it is important to recognise that for the student the way in which he or she sees an issue may be quite viable. If this is the case he or she is not likely to see a need to change his or her way of completing a task, even though the teacher may see their solution as incorrect. If the student perceives the solution as being viable it is likely to be difficult to change that perception. Duit (1995) supports this view, arguing that people do not give up their ideas easily, and in fact there is often considerable resistance to change. Any change to the student's perspective is, in von Glasersfeld's (1995) view, likely to occur only when the student can be shown that their view is inadequate. Glasser (1994) also

supports this view when he asserts that “*you cannot make anyone do what he or she does not want to do. You can only teach him a better way and encourage him to try it. If it works there is a good chance he will continue*” [Italics in original] (Glasser, 1994, p. 50).

This point of view can be reconciled with the enactivist view, that learning should “not be seen as a process of ‘taking things in’ but of adapting one’s actions to ever-changing circumstances” (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 25). The enactivist view of learning will be discussed in a later section of this review.

Social Constructionism

This discussion now moves into the area of social constructionism, and its connection with social constructivism. Gergen (1995) defines social constructionism as “achieving meaning through the efforts of two or more persons”. He asserts that social constructionism has much in common with radical constructivism, as it too questions and critiques the empiricist paradigm of knowledge acquisition. The two differ, however, in that the focus of radical constructivism, according to Gergen, is allied with the “dualistic formulations traditional to Western epistemology and the constructionist attempts to break with this tradition” (p. 28). This dualistic view of the world is based on assumptions that it is possible to separate the mind and the body, knower and known, self and non self (Begg 2000). This concept leads to the assumption that knowledge is something that can be seen as separate from the person who is seeking to acquire it.

Gergen (1995) argues that social constructionism is closely linked with the social constructivist views of Vygotsky (1978). Gergen (1995) maintains that both social constructionists and Vygotsky (1978) see learning as a social activity, and both

see cooperation and dialogue as central to the process of learning. However, he also asserts that there is an essential difference between the approach of Vygotsky(1978) and that of the social constructionists. Gergen (1995) argues that the social constructionist has a central concern with social interactions, whereas Vygotsky is primarily a psychologist and focuses on the mental processes and, in particular, the existence of the zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky (1978), an important aspect of learning is that it depends upon the developmental process together with interaction of the learner with another person. The zone of proximal development is described by Gergen (1995) as “essentially a mental space between actual and potential functioning” (Gergen, 1995, p. 25). Social constructionism is more concerned with social aspects such as “negotiation, cooperation, conflict, rhetoric, ritual, roles, social scenarios” (Gergen, 1995, p. 25), than with mental processes. The constructionist is primarily concerned with human relationships, and places them at the foreground, whereas Vygotsky (1978) recognises the social aspects of learning, but in his theory psychological processes are at the forefront (Gergen, 1995). These social aspects, and the importance of human relationships, are relevant to this study of negotiating the curriculum with Year 8 students.

While constructivism is an important theory for the educator, it has been the subject of critique. Begg (2000) raises a number of criticisms that he sees as making the theory of constructivism problematic, and offers the theory of enactivism for the educator’s consideration. In the following section I will discuss the theory of enactivism, and its importance in this study.

Enactivism

Begg (2000, 2001b) argues that enactivism is an emergent theory of learning that moves from constructivism to a more holistic view of knowledge. From this perspective, knowledge is viewed not as something separate from the learner but, as Davis, Sumara and Kieren (1996) assert, it is part of a complex system which includes the learner and all that the learner is associated with. In the present study the teacher and students worked together and thus they became, in the view of Davis et al (1996), a complex system. According to Davis et al., (1996) everything that takes place within the classroom, which includes both the negotiated approach and other aspects of the classroom activities, has an impact upon the learning of both the students and the teacher.

The predominant thinking of the Western world has been, for many years, based on the philosophy of Descartes, which viewed the world in terms of separation, in particular the separation of mind and body; and upon the mechanistic thinking of Newton, derived from his study of classical Greek writers such as Euclid and the later work of Galileo and Descartes. Descartes' dichotomies were also based on the earlier traditions of Aristotelian philosophy and Judaic and Christian religions which focus on the individual (Begg 2000). These dichotomies, which were developed in a specific historical context, are so embedded in our thinking that we find it difficult to see beyond them. This way of thinking, which presents the world in terms of distinct separation, mind and body, body and soul, self and non self, subject and object, is now being seen by some educators as problematic (Begg, 2000). The view of the world that these dichotomies promote is in direct opposition to the enactivist view, which sees the world as interconnected.

Enactivism is, as already pointed out, an emerging theory that is situated within an ecological paradigm. It is a paradigm that views the world as an

interconnected whole. The theory of enactivism is influenced by Merleau-Ponty's (1962) philosophy of phenomenology, which argues that phenomena are inseparable from the context in which they exist and from the person that observes them (Begg 2000). Enactivism makes the same point about learning and teaching, arguing that all aspects are related and complex. This notion of relatedness is a crucial aspect of the enactivist theory and applies to all aspects of life. Davis, Sumara & Simmt (2003) connect enactivism to complexity theory, arguing that the two overlap, with both seeing the human person as part of a complex holistic environment in which all aspects are related. Capra (1996) explains the idea of this relatedness through the metaphor of a web, which highlights the way in which all living things are connected. The notion of all aspects of life being connected is important in the school situation and in this study, because it highlights the fact that all aspects of the learner's life have an impact upon the learning situation.

Reid (1996), in his description of enactivism, gives an outline of some of the key concepts of the theory that was developed by Maturana and Varela (1980). Maturana & Varela (1980) describe complex living systems as autopoietic, or self-organising, a word that they coined in order to have a way of speaking about their theory. Such systems are, they assert, self-producing, dynamic and interactive. Reid (1996) outlines some of the features of these systems in his description of enactivism. He discusses the concept of complex systems as being systems that create themselves, and maintain themselves, through their own interactions. These systems are autopoietic systems, they are systems that maintain their organisation, the invariant features that define them, and at the same time modify their structure as they interact with their environments. Reid (1996) explains that the way in which they are able to do this is through a process of co-emergence; the interaction between a system and a

medium in which both change. Reid (1996) connects co-emergence with the term structural coupling, and explains this as applying when a system and the medium in which it exists interact. He goes on to point that such interaction does not necessarily mean that the system and the medium are fully adapted, but rather that their structures allow their interaction. Maturana (1987) argues that this concept of structure determined systems is of utmost significance. In discussing this concept, he asserts that living systems should be treated as a structure-determined system and thus “whatever happens to them is determined by their structure” (p. 73). Maturana (1987) also raises the question of how a system can change while keeping its identity. His answer to this question is complex, but an essential point that he makes is that:

A living system is in a medium with which it interacts. Its dynamics of state result in interactions with the medium, and the dynamics of state within the medium result in interactions with the living system...The medium triggers a change of state in the system, and the system triggers a change of state in the medium. What change of state? One of those which is permitted by the structure of the system (p. 75).

Maturana (1987) points out that in dealing with a structure-determined system, what happens to the system does not depend upon what you do to it. It is the structure of the system that determines what happens to the system. He concludes, then, that the structure of the system is able to change and operate adequately in its environment without destroying the identity of the system. In the present study this becomes important because, according to this theory, each student is a structure-determined system, and what happens to the student in the classroom is determined by his or her own structure in interaction with other systems in the classroom. This means that while responses can be triggered by the actions of the teacher, they cannot be caused by those actions. Furthermore, the classroom itself is an autopoietic system that acts to bring forth meaning.

Enactivism and Education

The literature that is concerned with examining the theory of enactivism in education has been largely situated in the mathematics subject area. It deals with teaching mathematics in schools, teaching mathematics to educators in tertiary institutions, and with curriculum development. Although this study is not in the mathematics discipline, the literature is relevant. The concept of enactivism argues against the separation of curriculum into distinct subject disciplines, and thus the literature speaks to all areas of the curriculum.

Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler (2000) contrast behaviourist theories of learning with what they term complex theories of learning. They do not dismiss behaviourism out of hand, but argue that behaviourism is based on the premise that the universe is a complicated mechanical system. Thus, behaviourist theories have been based on the assumption that human learning is also a complicated, mechanical process. This assumption underpins the behaviourist notion that learning is linear and able to be controlled. In spite of the fact that constructivist theories have challenged this view, Davis et al. (2000) claim that it still exists in the “commonsense of schooling practices” (p. 58). They acknowledge that behaviourism has made a contribution to our understanding of learning, in that it has demonstrated that all learning is not conscious and that unconscious learning does lead to changes in behaviour. Davis et al. (2000) also discuss the views of mentalists, who traditionally have viewed concepts as mental objects and understanding as a mental process (Lemke n.d). Davis et al. (2000) argue that mentalists cast learning as an attempt to internalise objective knowledge. The mentalist model has led to the use of computer metaphors in the framing of learning (Davis, et al., 1996; Sumara & Davis, 1997).

This perspective leads to the view that learning is about acquiring objective knowledge, and the idea that the brain is processing information in a similar way to the way in which computers processes data. Davis et al. (2000) argue that this view of learning is problematic, and they present a discussion of what they term complex learning theories as an alternative view of learning. While they do not use the term enactivism, their discussion of ecological theories is consistent with that theory. Davis et al. (2000) argue that there has been a change in our understanding of learning and that new theories, based on an ecological perspective, see learning as “a participation in the world, a co-evolution of knower and known that transforms both” (p. 64). From this perspective, teaching can be seen as triggering learning, but it cannot determine exactly what that learning will be. This notion has implications for the development of curriculum because it demonstrates that an understanding of curriculum which views all students as able to learn the same content at the same time, fails to take account of the individual experiences of the students. These experiences are essential aspects of the students’ life and, as such, must be considered important in the learning process. In fact, Davis et al. (2000) assert that learning is an aspect of life, not a deliberate act by a teacher that will bring about a desired behaviour. They argue that all of life is learning, and highlight this with their description of learning as “knowing is doing is being” (p. 69). Learning cannot be separated from living and, as such, all of the life experiences must be taken into account in the teaching situation. This study attempts to do this through the use of negotiation and action research, both of which seem to fit into this model of learning.

Davis et al. (1996), in their study of two classroom situations, challenge some of the underlying assumptions that are used in developing curriculum. They focus on two aspects that they see as particular problems in schools; the assumption that we

can know what knowledge and skills students will need in the future, and the idea that learning is controllable. Both of these factors are seen by Davis et al. (1996) in the everyday language that we use; language that presents learning as having an objective outcome which can be predetermined. This view also sees the teacher as having caused the learning to happen. Their study indicates that this is not the case, and they argue that we need to examine the dynamic of the learning system, which is not static. Their study of a primary school classroom indicated that the students' world of lived action was not determined by the teacher's action, nor strictly constrained by what was already provided. Rather, they argue that the students in their study were "participating in the creating or unfolding of the world" (p. 154). Davis et al. (1996) reached this conclusion because of the different ways in which the primary students they describe reached their answers to the mathematical problem with which they were faced. Although the teacher did not cause the learning, it must be acknowledged that the teacher did play a role in the action (Davis et al., 1996). The interaction between the teacher and the students became the occasion for the knowing to occur. In this study the interaction between the students and myself and the interaction between students and students was of critical importance. The introduction of an action research project in which the students and I collaborated to determine the way in which the curriculum was enacted in our classroom was very reliant upon the interaction that occurred. Through reflective interaction we were able to focus on the experiences of the students, and provide relevant occasions for learning.

Sumara and Davis (1997), in their discussion of an action research project, argue that in spite of the fact that there has been much classroom research it seems to have little impact on teaching practice, which continues to perpetuate what teachers see as commonsense. They accept that action research has become well understood,

but suggest that it is used with theories and practices that in fact contradict the action research process. In discussing constructivism they acknowledge that constructivism has made an important contribution to our understanding of learning, but one critique which they and others make (Begg 2000; Begg 2001a) is that constructivism is focused on the individual. In contrast, Sumara and Davis (1997) suggest that in an ecological theory such as enactivism, learning is a shared activity. Thus, as I became more aware of the enactivist theory I understood it to be more appropriate for my study, because it supports the collaborative nature of action research.

Gunn (2001), in her discussion of models for professional development, supports the view that the teacher does not cause students to learn but that, by interacting with students, the teacher may trigger a change in the student. She explores the implications of this for teacher educators, arguing that tutors cannot be told how to conduct their classes. In her view, professional development needs to create occasions for knowing that take account of the individual's personal experiences, accept that different people will have different understandings, and be prepared to value all responses. While Gunn (2001) is focusing on professional development, the principles that she presents are equally important in the school setting. The importance of taking account of all aspects of the individual's experiences is highlighted by the notion that all aspects of an individual's life are connected (Davis et al., 1996). The failure to take account of all aspects of human experience is one factor of constructivism that Begg (2000) criticises. He agrees with Davis et al. (1996) that unformulated knowledge or subconscious knowledge is important and must be taken into account. In disregarding unformulated knowledge constructivism is, to some extent, maintaining the dualistic view of learning.

The implications for the classroom, and for this study, are significant because the students and teacher who make up the system in the classroom will bring a wide range of experiences with them. Thus, from an enactivist perspective, these various experiences co-emerge to bring forth their knowing. Davis et al. (1996) use Varela's (1987) image of 'laying down a path in walking' to demonstrate that there are many possible ways, and that the individual will choose the path that best fits their determined structure.

The idea of there being a number of possible ways of 'bringing forth' leads me to a discussion of what Sfard (1998) describes as the dangers of taking an extreme position in understanding learning. Sfard discusses what she terms the acquisition metaphor and the participation metaphor of learning, and argues that it is difficult to consider the two metaphors separately, or as mutually exclusive. She asserts that both of these metaphors of learning have something to offer and that "it is essential that we try to live with both" (p. 10). Sfard emphasises the complexity of learning, and her view that the possibilities for learning differ from person to person resonates with the Davis et al. view (1996) that there are many possible ways that learning may emerge.

Sfard (1998) highlights the need to recognise that we rely on many metaphors, and argues that reliance on only one metaphor may lead to the development of theories that "serve the interests of certain groups to the disadvantage of others" (p. 11). She also points out that in the practice of teaching the move to an exclusive acceptance of one or other of the metaphors may lead to failure. She argues that "because no two students have the same needs and no two teachers arrive at their best performance in the same way, theoretical exclusivity and didactic single-mindedness can be trusted to make even the best educational ideas fail" (p. 11). Thus it behoves the educator to take account of the range of many possible ways of 'laying down a

path in walking', so that they may avoid the danger of taking an extreme and too simplistic view of learning.

Conclusion

The literature clearly indicates that there are challenges for educators of students in the middle years of schooling. At this stage of their life young people want and need to be actively involved in their own learning. The literature also recognises that students in the middle years of schooling need to be given some autonomy and control over their own learning. The literature that examines the process of negotiating with students, argues that students and teachers can collaborate to develop learning that is meaningful and engaging. The literature also demonstrates that presenting students with the opportunities to participate in activities that are relevant and authentic is important in helping them to develop a greater sense of ownership and motivation. Furthermore, the literature identifies the importance of recognising the diverse experiences of students' lives, and taking these into account when structuring learning opportunities for them. This is highlighted by the enactivist theorists (Begg, 2000; Davis et al., 1996; Davis et al., 2000; Varela, 1987), who argue that all of life is learning. Thus, in this study the teacher and students will work collaboratively, in an attempt to bring about meaningful learning that takes account of the diverse experiences of the complex system that is the classroom.

Moving to Chapter 3

In this chapter I examined a range of literature that focused on educating and motivating young adolescents. Specifically I explored the middle years of schooling, and the way in which students in the middle years may be assisted to gain some control over their learning. In Chapter 3, I move into a discussion of the research methodology, methods, epistemology and theoretical perspective that were used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Introduction

Chapter 2 examined literature that considered aspects of learning in the middle years of education. It also focused on the learning theories of constructivism and enactivism, and concluded that this action research study should be placed within the enactivist epistemology. As was pointed out in Chapter 1, the aim of this action research study is to examine the effects of introducing negotiation into a Year 8 classroom. Since this study is concerned with negotiation between teacher and students, and between student and students, the relationships that develop within the classroom are of critical importance, and positive relationships within the classroom are thought likely to assist in the process of negotiation. Furthermore, it is essential to understand that as broad a range as possible of aspects of the lives of students and teacher must be considered, as the teacher and students, together with all that is in the learning environment, become a complex system in which they are all connected (Davis et al., 1996). From this perspective the human person and the world in which they live, are part of an interconnected whole.

In Chapter 3 the methodology, methods, epistemology and theoretical perspectives that support this study, are discussed. It is important at the outset to understand that these four elements are related and that they inform each other (Crotty, 1998). In the same way, the researcher and the participants in this study are related in the complex social interactions that emerge in action research (Sumara &

Carson, 1997). As Crotty (1998) points out, the choice of methodology and method will be determined by the type of research question we are seeking to answer. His summary figure (p. 50) has been of considerable assistance in my development of this chapter. Figure 1 presents my interpretation of Crotty's model. As indicated in Chapter 1, the research in this study is concerned with the lived experience of participants in the classroom. Consequently, the methodology, theoretical perspective and methods used must be consistent with such a purpose.

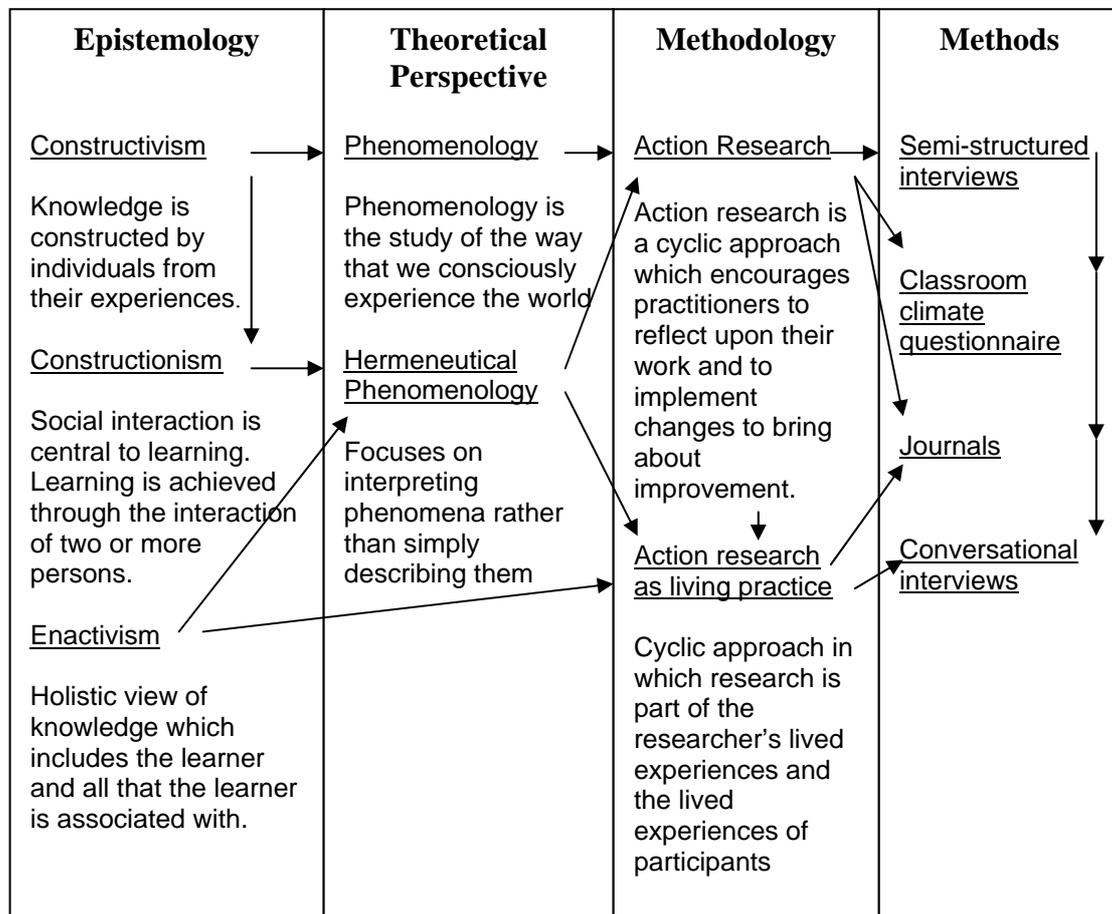


Figure 1. An Overview of the Research Structure. Adapted from Crotty, (1997).

Epistemology

The question that this study seeks to address is situated within a non-positivist view of the world. This view of the world sees coming to know as “an ever-evolving, complex joint action among persons and their environment” (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xix). Meaning, from this perspective, is constructed by people in social contact with each other; learning is, as pointed out in Chapter 2, seen as a “participation in the world, a co-evolution of knower and known that transforms both” (Davis et al., 2000, p. 64). This is in direct contrast to the positivist view which determines that there is an objective truth which is accurate and certain; a truth that may be discovered and studied scientifically (Crotty, 1998). In Chapter 2, enactivism as a theory of knowing was discussed, and this enactivist view of learning fits well with the concept, development and practise of negotiation that is investigated in this study, and with the action research process that the study employs.

As pointed out by Begg (2000), the enactivist concept of knowing was influenced by, and shares some of the characteristics of, phenomenology. Phenomenology, as its name suggests, is concerned with the study of phenomena which “are viewed as inseparable from the context in which they exist and the person that observes them” (p. 4). This phenomenological view is supported by the enactivist argument that the human person is part of a complex, holistic environment, in which all aspects are interrelated. Another connection between enactivism and phenomenology is the enactivist view that mind and body are inseparable, and must be considered together (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991). These connections will be developed further as the discussion moves to an examination of phenomenology and, more specifically of hermeneutic phenomenology, which underpins this study.

Theoretical Perspective

Phenomenology

Phenomenology as we know it today, developed from the philosophical writings of Edmund Husserl in the first part of the 20th century. Since then a range of varieties of phenomenology have developed and seven major types of phenomenology have been identified (Embree, 1997a). Phenomenology, at its base, is the study of phenomena or, in other words, the study of the way things appear to us in our conscious being. Phenomenology has, over the 20th century, developed and our understanding of phenomenology has developed too. Lavery (2003) points out that the way in which we understand phenomenology and its varieties is not fixed, but changing and evolving.

The ideas of Husserl (as cited in Lavery 2003) focus on the way in which phenomena are experienced through consciousness. Phenomenology, then, seeks to understand the world as it is lived, and it focuses on describing the ways in which meaning is given to life experiences (Lavery, 2003). Osborne (1994) argues that phenomenology opens the conscious experience to investigation. He points out that the particular way in which an object is viewed defines it as a phenomenon. He reveals that this particular way of looking at objects uses phenomenological reduction which, he explains, is a process of identifying and removing biases and trying to set them aside (called bracketing) so that the phenomenon can be seen as it is. This concept of reduction and bracketing was a major source of disagreement between Husserl and Heidegger. Heidegger argued against Husserl's idea of bracketing out biases, and asserted that we need to be aware of and interpret our experiences because

they are part of our being in the world (Osborne 1994). This idea of all aspects of consciousness being part of the human lived experience has connections to the enactivist ecological view of the world, which sees all as connected. A further source of disagreement between the two was that they disagreed on the way in which lived experience is examined. Husserl focuses on understanding the actual phenomena while Heidegger's emphasis is upon the way of being human in the world. Furthermore Heidegger's phenomenology differs from that of Husserl in its emphasis upon hermeneutics, which moves phenomenology from description to interpretation of experience (Smith 2003). For the purposes of this study, I have chosen hermeneutic phenomenology as the theoretical perspective because it allows for interpretation rather than being merely descriptive. As such, it is a more appropriate fit with an action research methodology. In the next section of this discussion I focus on hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomenology, as has already been pointed out, is a way of describing how the world operates, and is experienced through human consciousness. It is the study of essences; it attempts to understand the nature of the phenomena it describes. Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation, originally of scripture. Hermeneutic phenomenology, then, can be seen as an interpretive method which focuses on interpreting phenomena, rather than simply describing it. From the hermeneutic perspective, all human existence is interpretive (Embree 1997b).

According to Osborne (1994), phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology have more similarities than differences. In fact the terms are often used interchangeably, with little distinction being made between them (Laverty,

2003). While there are similarities between the two, it is the emphasis on interpretation that provides the major difference. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on human experience as it is lived (Lavery, 2003). From this perspective meaning is made as humans are constructed by the world and at the same time construct the world from their own background and experiences (Lavery, 2003). This view of making meaning is consistent with the structural determinism of Maturana and Varela (1980).

A further important aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology is its emphasis upon language as the means by which humans communicate. Gadamer (1975) explores the importance of language, which he says is “the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting” (p. 390). Language, then, is crucial because it is the only way that humans have of making meaning with others. We are “essentially languaged beings It is now language, the way we speak that is considered to shape what things we see and how we see them, and it is these things shaped for us by language that constitute reality for us” (Crotty 1998, pp. 87-88). It is to gain understanding of these experiences that are captured in language, that is the purpose of the phenomenological researcher.

Van Manen (1990) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as “a search for the fullness of living” (p. 12). His ‘human science’ approach is, he claims, “textual reflecting on the lived experience and practical actions of everyday life with the intent to increase one’s thoughtfulness and practical resourcefulness” (p. 4). This view supports the concept of action research, which aims to examine and improve practice through reflection (Elliott 1991). The human science approach of van Manen relates hermeneutic phenomenology to pedagogy. Van Manen asserts that research into pedagogy needs to be viewed through a hermeneutic framework. He maintains that

there is a need for interpretation of the lived experience of students so that the pedagogic significance of their experience may be understood. From van Manen's perspective, such research aims to interpret and present the depth and richness of these lived experiences (van Manen, 1990).

This approach is very different from positivism which focuses on empirical analysis. Human science is aimed at understanding the essential meaning of an experience which requires a reflective approach. In this hermeneutical approach the researcher is called to explore the lived experience from all aspects. This means that the researcher, rather than bracketing out his or her own experiences, needs to bring all of those experiences into the world of the research. In the case of this study, it is important that I meet and share with the students in their lived experience of the classroom. Indeed, van Manen (1990) argues that "human science research wishes to meet human beings there where they are naturally engaged in their worlds" (p. 18).

Reflection is an important aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology, and van Manen (1990) presents the view that phenomenological reflection is not introspective because it is not possible to reflect on experience while living through the experience. Reflection of lived experience, then, is always a reflection on an experience that a person has already lived through. Reflection from this perspective is retrospective rather than introspective (van Manen, 1990). In order to reflect on lived experience, then, it seems that the researcher needs to be able to examine from a distance the lived experiences that she or he is trying to understand. The researcher is attempting to gain insight into the essence of the phenomenon that is being studied. It is the ultimate aim of phenomenological reflection to achieve understanding of the essential meaning of the lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, it is the aim of the researcher to present this understanding in what van Manen (1990) describes as a

phenomenological text; a text which seeks to “capture life experience (action or event) in anecdote or story because the logic of story is precisely that story retrieves what is unique, particular and irreplaceable” (p. 152).

The importance of understanding lived experience, which is the fundamental aim of the hermeneutic phenomenologist or, as van Manen (1990) terms it, the human science researcher, is closely connected to the concept of action research. In both the human science research of van Manen and the action research of Sumara and Carson (1997), the question of how we understand the lived experience of ourselves and others, is of utmost importance. This question of understanding the lived experience of ourselves and others is fundamental to this action research study. In the next section of this chapter I will move into a discussion of action research. This discussion will review literature on action research, and show why action research is an appropriate method for this study.

Action Research

Background

It is generally accepted (Adelman, 1993; Elliott, 1991; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990; Sumara & Carson, 1997) that action research was developed by Kurt Lewin in the period immediately following the Second World War. Lewin developed a model which described action research as "proceeding in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990, p. 8). This model was taken up by educators and was introduced into the main stream of education in the United States of America by Stephen Corey in the early 1950's (Hopkins, 2002). In the 1970's and 80's in the

United Kingdom, action research emerged in the work of the Humanities Curriculum Project (Stenhouse, 1975). In the 1980's, the Ford Teaching Project promoted the action research process (Adelman, 1993). Further development of the concept of action research has taken place over the period since the concept was introduced, and there are now a number of different approaches to action research (McNiff, 2002). In Australia the work of Kemmis and McTaggart (1990), and Grundy (1982), have made significant contributions to the debate about action research. Whitehead (1989) focuses on the notion of developing a living educational theory through reflecting on practice. This notion of action research as living educational theory is consistent with the view of Sumara and Carson (1997), who argue for a reconceptualizing of action research. They argue for a concept of action research which becomes "more holistically conceptualized and interpreted" (p. xvii). From this perspective all aspects of educational action research are aspects of lived experience. This view of action research is closely connected to the enactivist theory of learning because, like enactivism, it views learning as an act of living. This view of action research is also consistent with the hermeneutical phenomenology, or human science, of van Manen, (1990) and is the model that I use in this study.

Characteristics of Action Research

Action research, then, is an approach which adopts methods that are compatible with the enactivist view of learning, and with the concept of negotiation in the classroom. According to Elliott (1991), "the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge" (p. 49). There is in the action research process a focus on a deliberate intention by the researchers to improve their own practice (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996). Indeed, the self-reflective aspect

of action research is crucial, and involves the researcher in questioning their own practice to find ways of improving that practice (McNiff, 2002). It can be argued that practitioners already reflect upon their practice, but the difference in using action research is that it is systematic, and any intervention is informed by theory (O'Brien, 1998).

Action research is a practical method which aims to allow all participants to be involved in the process of improving practice in the classroom. It provides the researcher and other participants with the opportunity to scrutinize existing practices, and modify them in the search for improvement of those practices (Reid, 1992). Thus, we can see the way in which action research connects with the enactivist view, which argues that the classroom is a dynamic system, where teacher and students share meanings and understandings (Davis, 1996).

Action research also relates to the concept of negotiating the curriculum, and the way in which teachers and students are encouraged to make deliberate evaluations of their work with the view to improving it (Boomer, 1992). Action research, like negotiation, is collaborative and vests power in the group (Grundy, 1982). It allows students and teachers to be actively involved, rather than being simply participant observers (Bryant, 1996). In recent times, however, it has been argued that action research may also be an individual meditative process which allows the researcher to ponder their own practice (Sumara & Carson, 1997).

Action research provides the teacher with a means to implement change in the classroom and analyse the impact of that change. It focuses on aspects such as relationships, participation, and inclusion, and has the potential to lead to benefits for all stakeholders involved in the process (Stringer, 1996). As such, it is most suitable

for this study of classroom practice which focuses on including all participants in the classroom, in the actions that take place in the classroom.

Action research is also a useful method for use in classroom research because it has the potential to be flexible and responsive to the context. The flexibility of action research allows the researcher and participants to react to the context and findings as they unfold (Macintyre, 2000). In addition, the cyclic nature of action research gives both teacher and student the opportunity to learn from these findings and experiences, as they reflect upon the outcomes of the action. Furthermore, the fact that action research is responsive means that classroom activities can be evaluated and modified throughout the action research cycle. Thus, we can see that the design of action research allows for a more flexible approach that is not available in a positivist research design (Masters, 2000). As this study takes place in the classroom, and involves the participation of the teacher as researcher and students as participants during normal subject based lessons, the action research model is most suitable for this situation. It is also appropriate because it fits into the theoretical framework upon which this study is based. The cyclic model of action, reflection, and modification provides the environment that enables negotiation to be more adequately facilitated and, as it is necessary to be responsive to the reactions of all participants during the study, the action research process is the most useful model. It allows those “who sincerely want to improve their practices...to reflect continuously about them in situ” (Elliott, 1991, p.50).

Models of Action Research

There is, according to McNiff (2000), no one correct way of doing action research. It is, however, generally accepted that the process of action research is one

that is cyclic (Dick, 2000; Elliott, 1991; Hopkins, 2002; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990; McNiff, 2000). Of the different models of action research, that of Kemmis and McTaggart is probably the best known in Australia (Dick, 2000). Kemmis' model focuses on four steps, which are shown in figure 2. They are plan, act, observe, reflect, and repeat the steps for each new cycle.

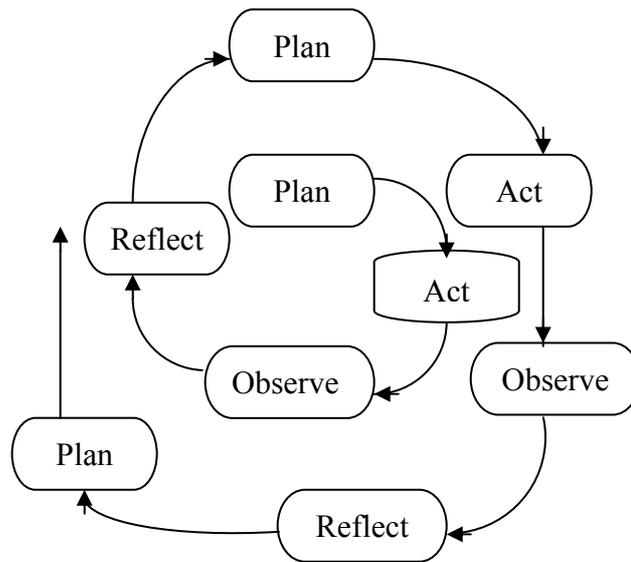


Figure 2. Action Research Cycles

Hopkins (2002) outlines four models of action research, those of Kemmis and McTaggart (1990), Elliott (1991), Ebuttt (1985), and McKernan (1996). Each of these models follow the basic cyclic process, but vary in the way they have built on Lewin's original model, or Kemmis' interpretation of it (Hopkins, 2002). Hopkins highlights three areas of these action research models that he believes are problematic. He argues that Lewin's concept of action research was "an externally initiated intervention designed to assist a client system, functionalist in orientation, and prescriptive in practice" (p.50). He goes on to argue that these features are not consistent with the concept of "classroom research which is characterised by

practitioner problem solving and eclectic orientation” (p. 50). Another concern that Hopkins (2000) has with action research is in its prescriptiveness, which he sees as contrary to the original purpose of teacher research which he claims, “was to free teachers from the constraints of prespecified research designs” (p. 50).

The third concern that Hopkins (2000) raises is that of semantics. He believes that the language of the action research model tends to suggest “that action research is a deficit model of professional development” (p. 51). It is this concern that has led Hopkins to adopt the phrase “classroom research by teachers” (p. 51) rather than action research. However, he does not dismiss action research, and acknowledges that it does have an important role to play in educational research. Rather, he warns of the need to be aware of the problems associated with taking a too prescriptive approach (Hopkins, 2002).

These models of action research are not the only models of action research that have been developed. McNiff (2002) explains that there are different approaches to action research, and outlines an action plan that may be used in an action research cycle. She, like Hopkins (2002), alerts us to the dangers of action plans becoming too prescriptive, and asserts that the action researcher must take responsibility for their own practice (McNiff, 2002). McNiff points out that while there may be a number of different models of action research, there are principles upon which such research is based. These principles are:

The need for justice and democracy, the right of all people to speak and be heard, the right of each individual to show how and why they have given extra attention to their leaning in order to improve their work, the deep need to experience truth and beauty in our personal and professional lives (McNiff, 2002, Introduction, para. 3).

The Specific Approach Taken for This Study

These principles are consistent with the holistically conceptualized understanding of action research, that views action research as research that requires “more of the researcher than the application of research methods” (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xiii). From this perspective action research is understood as “something that is inextricably tied to the complex relations that form various layers of communities. Understood this way “research is something that is included in the complexity of the researchers’ lived experiences” (p. xvi). This view of action research underpins my work in this study. In this study the lived experiences are the experiences that take place in the classroom as the teacher and students negotiate three units of writing. Boomer (1992) presents a model of action research that views curriculum as being jointly enacted, and developing and changing as it proceeds. This model of action research, which is shown in Figure 3, is consistent with Sumara and Carson’s (1997) concept of action research as a living practice.

Boomer’s model was chosen for this study because it supports the concept of negotiating the curriculum and is designed for use in the classroom. The way in which this model was used in the classroom is discussed in Chapter 4.

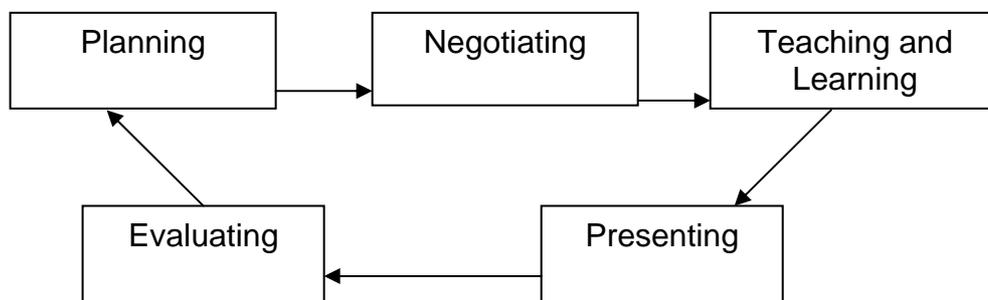


Figure 3. A Curriculum Process Consistent with the Learning Process (Boomer, 1990, p. 35).

Gathering the Data

In action research a variety of techniques may be used to gather the data derived from an action research approach (McNiff, 2002). These may be, and often are, qualitative, but they may also be quantitative (Dick & Swepson, 1997). In this study a range of data gathering techniques, that are consistent with the enactivist approach this study has taken, was used, and these are outlined below. The data were gathered, for the most part, from the 25 students (12 boys and 13 girls) in the English class who were collaborators in the action research process, from 5 parents who were willing to participate in interviews about their children's involvement, from anecdotal comments of other parents, and from the 3 colleagues who were involved in partnership observation with me. In this study I have used pseudonyms when referring to participants in order to maintain their privacy. My own journal was also a source of data. During the second semester of the year the number of students increased by one as a boy from another college joined the class. The participants in this study were what Berg (2001) calls a "convenient sample ... which relies on available subjects... who are easily accessible" (p. 32). A summary of the data gathering techniques and their uses is presented in Figure 4.

<u>Classroom climate questionnaires</u>	<p>Used to involve students in negotiation.</p> <p>Gives students opportunity to respond anonymously.</p> <p>Used to gain students perspectives about their experiences in English classes.</p>
<u>Classroom meetings</u>	<p>Used to discuss responses to questionnaires.</p> <p>Used to discuss topics.</p> <p>Used to facilitate negotiation of classroom activities.</p>
Journals	<p>Students invited to reflect on negotiated activities.</p> <p>Students were invited to use journal as a means of communicating with teacher.</p> <p>Teacher research journal used to record classroom activities.</p>
Partnership observation	<p>Teacher research journal used to reflect Classroom observer.</p> <p>Participate in classroom activities.</p> <p>Interact with students during classes.</p> <p>Discuss classes with teacher.</p> <p>Make suggestions for further cycles.</p>
Interviews	<p>Used to discuss cycles with students</p> <p>Used to discuss student responses with parents</p> <p>Used to discuss the three cycles with students at the end of the study</p>

Figure 4. Data gathering techniques and their uses

Answering the research questions asked in this study requires the examination of the lived experiences of teacher and students in the classroom. In order to adequately answer those questions it was necessary to use a wide range of data gathering techniques, as outlined in figure 4, to ensure that data from a variety of sources and perspectives was obtained. Furthermore, these multiple methods of data collection facilitated the validation of the collected data as they were used as triangulation which, as Lather (1991) argues, is “critical in establishing data trustworthiness” (p. 66).

The results of this examination, then, enable conclusions to be drawn about the advantages of using a negotiated approach beyond this classroom, as well as enabling and facilitating changes to my own teaching practice and, perhaps, to the teaching practise of others.

The action research processes or pathways that I followed, as I made use of the various data gathering techniques, are outlined in figures 5, 6 and 7. They are then explained in detail in the discussion that follows.

Term 1.

Week 1-3. Pre-Negotiation Phase

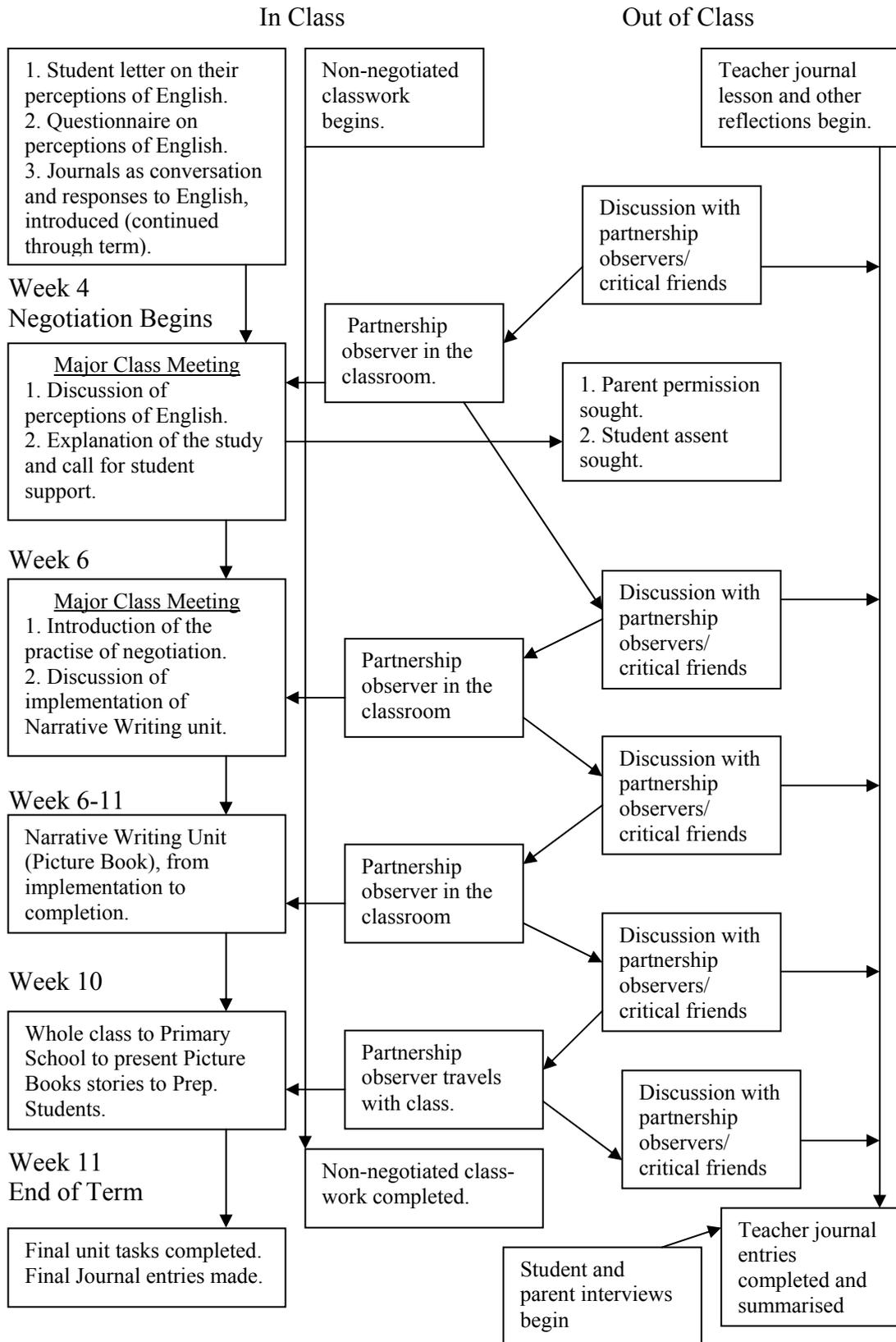


Figure 5. Action Research Pathway – Cycle 1.

Term 2.

Week 1- 2 Pre-Negotiation Phase

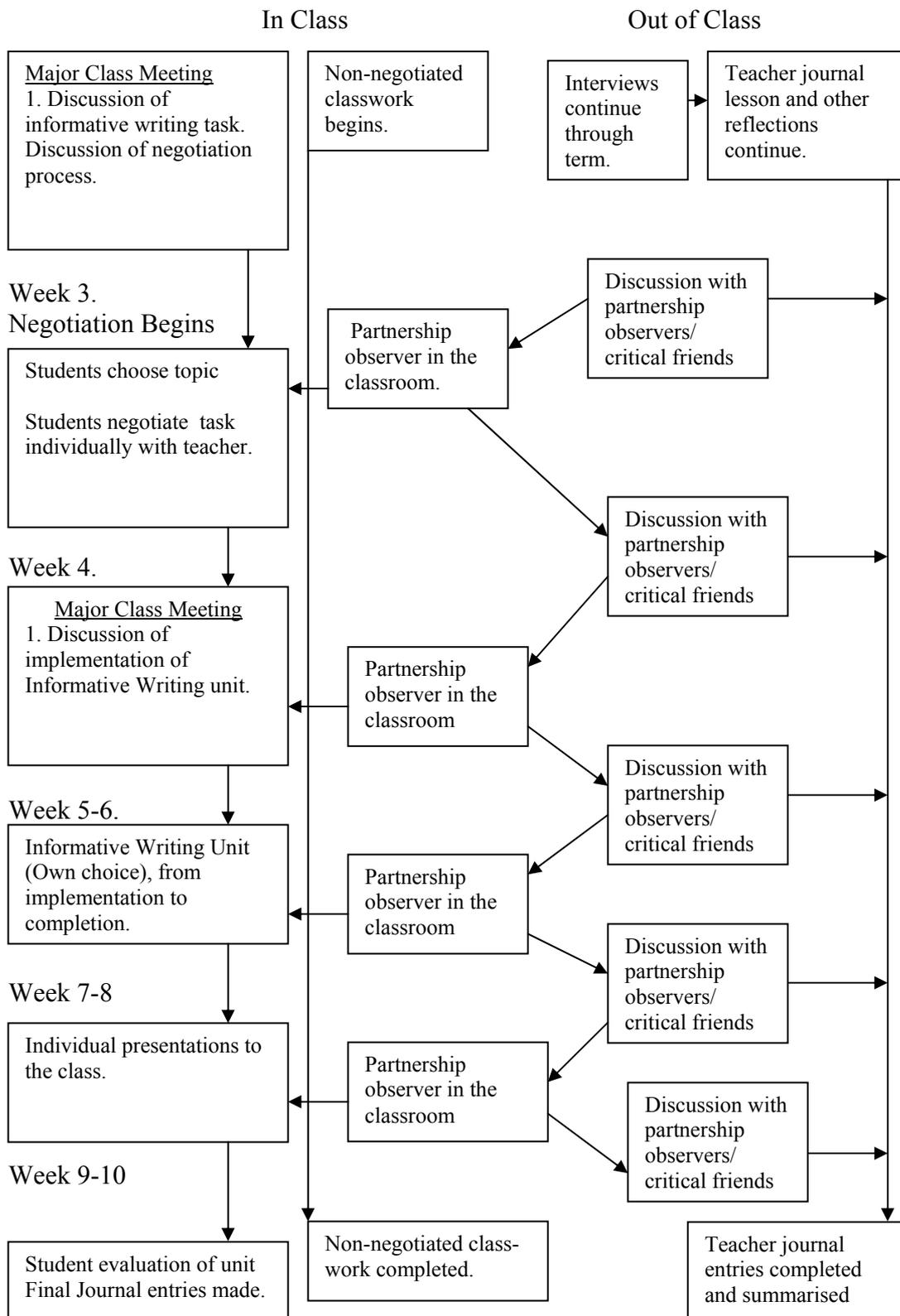


Figure 6. Action Research Pathway – Cycle 2.

Term 4.

Week 1 Pre-Negotiation Phase

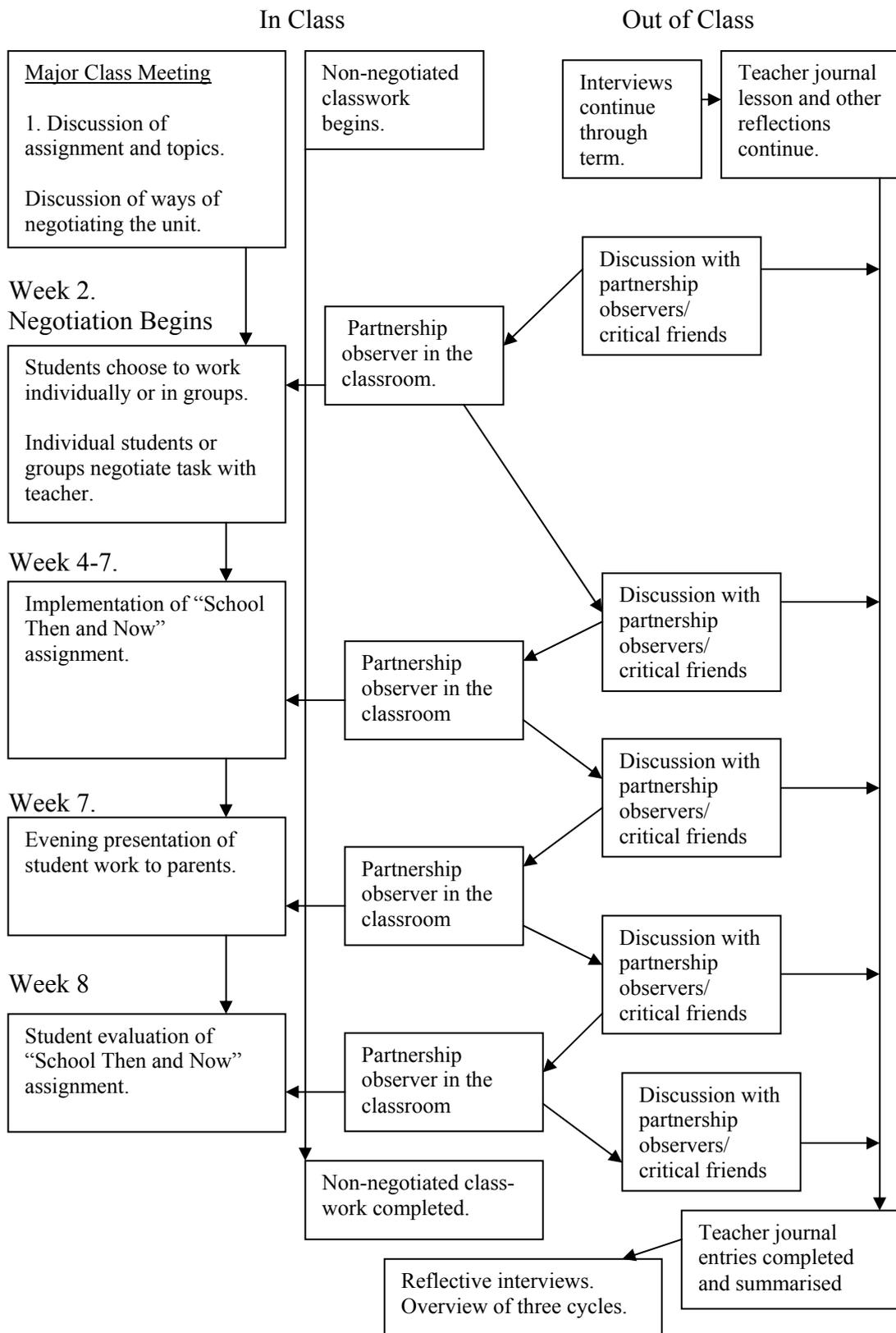


Figure 7. Action Research Pathway – Cycle 3.

Classroom Questionnaires

It has been argued that classroom questionnaires are useful for involving students in negotiating (Wilson, 1999). As students in this study did not have much experience of being asked for their opinions about the curriculum there was an initial need to give them some direction. The use of a classroom questionnaire allowed me to introduce the concept of negotiation. This gave students not only the opportunity to say anonymously what they thought about the various activities, but also allowed them to give a response about how they felt. Such responses were of utmost importance if students were to be engaged as collaborators in the process of action research in our English class.

As noted earlier, three units of writing using negotiation were used in my Year 8 English class. Prior to the introduction of the negotiated unit of work, I administered the Challenge Checklist (Baird, 1994) (Appendix B). The purpose of this questionnaire was to gain some understanding of the students' feelings about their previous English classes, before introducing the concept of negotiation to them. Results of three of the items from the questionnaire were taken to the class, and discussed in the first classroom meeting that I conducted with the class.

Classroom Meetings

Classroom meetings can be used effectively to discuss issues relating to the class. The topics for classroom meetings can be many and varied; they may be chosen by the teacher or by the students. It is important that decisions that are made in classroom meetings are followed through, if students are to see that their views are valued (Hittie, 2000). In this study, classroom meetings were used at the beginning of the study to discuss student responses to the classroom climate questionnaires. The

room was arranged so that students and teacher were seated in a circle, so that all could be involved in the discussion. This seating arrangement is important, because it symbolises the connection between all members of the class and the equality of each person's contribution. The circle attempts to reduce the power relationship between teacher and students. At the first meeting I explained the concept of classroom meetings, together with the rules for their operation. The rules for the conduct of classroom meetings are the same as for any discussion group. They are that each person has a right to be heard, and it is expected that other members of the group will listen and respond appropriately. A further rule for the operation of classroom meetings is that there are to be no 'put downs', and each person's contribution is welcomed. I made it clear to the students that the discussion was to be related to the class activities, and not to any personal criticisms that they might have of other students or teachers. It is important to have such rules for any group discussion to function effectively.

As students were not familiar with this type of activity, the first few meetings tended to be rather one-sided, with me talking to the students rather than with them. As the students became more comfortable with the process, they were more able to actively participate and present their views. However, it must be recognised that the extent of involvement varied, and students were not compelled to contribute if they did not wish to do so. Further classroom meetings were conducted as part of the negotiation process which I used for the negotiated units. Topics for discussion were drawn from class work, from the journal entries, and students were also able to introduce other topics for discussion. A summary of relevant decisions was written up on the white board. Students kept their own record of these decisions. I also kept a note in my journal, of the decisions that were made in the classroom meetings.

Journals

Journals fit into the category of what van Manen (1990) terms “protocol writing” (p. 63). Such writing is a way of developing original material upon which the researcher may work. He argues that such writing, while being a useful way of gaining information about human lived experience, does have some potential difficulties. These include the fact that for many people writing is a difficult task, and that the material that people are able to write may not provide the kind of material that the researcher hopes for. In particular, this may be true of children, and researchers may be disappointed with the amount of information that children are able to write (van Manen, 1990). Nonetheless journal writing can be a source of information for the researcher. In action research, journals can be used by all participants (Hughes, 2000). In particular, dialogue journals can provide students with a means of conversing with the teacher in a private way that allows the student to make, and respond to, suggestions for the classroom (Cobine, 1995).

The student participants in this study were invited to keep a journal throughout the year. The purpose of the journal was twofold. Firstly, it provided an opportunity for the student and me to converse privately. Secondly, it was a means of gathering student perceptions which could be reflected and acted upon during the action cycles. The amount of writing varied, according to the time of the year and the classroom work that was being completed. The students were asked to write about the classroom activities that were negotiated, and their reflections about the unit. They were given prompts to help them in this task. They were invited to write as much or as little as they wished, and it was made very clear that the journals were private, and would not be discussed with anyone unless they asked me to do so. I also made it very clear that

what they wrote in the journals would have no bearing on their assessment in this class. The following prompts, which were written on the board prior to the students writing in their journals, aimed to give students some direction for their journal writing; this was necessary because of their lack of experience in this area.

- What did you do in class?
- Briefly outline what you have learned.
- What did you enjoy most?
- What did you like least?
- Who helped you the most? How did they help?

In addition, students were invited to use the journal as a way of communicating with me, and through this I was able to respond to their concerns. This was an important part of developing an empathic relationship with the students.

Research journals

Research journals are useful for keeping “records of insights gained, for discerning patterns of the work in progress, for reflecting on previous reflections, for making the activities of research themselves topics for study, and so forth” (van Manen, 1990, p.73). The research journal is used to record the researcher’s involvement in the project, and may be used as data. It is different from other journals because it contains information about the practice of the researcher, and the way in which the research proceeds (Hughes, 2000). An action research journal, then, is a record of the way in which the action research proceeds, and the reflections of the researcher about their thoughts and actions through the project. In an action research journal, the reflective moments are an important part of the journal (Hughes, 2000).

Throughout the course of this project I kept a journal in which I recorded all activities that took place in the classroom. This included both the negotiated units and other activities that were not part of the research. I also read and re-read my entries, and made further reflective comments about them. The journal became a substantial and valuable part of the data. As collaboration is also an important aspect of action research, I discussed entries with a critical friend, in an attempt to ensure that my reading of them coincided with her interpretation. We compared them with the data that I gathered from the student journals and from the interviews with students that took place at various stages of the study. This information was then reflected and acted upon in the next cycle.

Critical Friends

A critical friend is someone who is able to assist you in seeing your work in different ways. It is important that a critical friend is someone whose opinion you value and respect (McNiff, 2002). A critical friend or friends are people that you can use as a sounding board. Critical friends must also be people that the researcher can trust to support the researcher's aim to improve practice. They can help the validation process by providing feedback on the various aspects of the research, including the data, and the findings (DeLong 1996). Since the critical friends in this study were also partnership observers, they became part of the lived experience of the classroom. Thus, it was appropriate to discuss and check their responses with them. In this study I had three critical friends with whom I discussed the project during the action cycles, and at the end of the cycles. Jane is a senior teacher, who teaches in the Technology faculty, Vanessa is the head of the English faculty, and David teaches Mathematics and Legal Studies; he also assists with the co-ordination of the Year 8 Level. I also

had regular informal conversations with other colleagues, where I talked with them about the work that I was conducting. In particular, I conversed with the principal about the activities that were taking place in the classroom, since it is important for the principal of a school to be aware of what is taking place. In addition, I was able to present my work to the staff of the English Faculty, at faculty meetings. All of these activities assisted me in gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the participants in the study.

Partnership Observation

Hopkins (2002) outlines a three-phase cycle, which he presents as a framework for collaboration in the classroom. In this type of observation the observer, who is a colleague with whom the teacher-researcher is comfortable, becomes a partner in the action of the classroom. The observer in this type of observation can take on a number of different roles, “he or she can observe a lesson in general, focus on specific aspects of the teaching and talk to pupils all during one observation period” (Hopkins, 2002, p.74). An important aspect of this type of observation is that both observer and teacher need to be committed to the task of improving classroom practice. The three-phase cycle, which is presented in Figure 8, shares characteristics of the action research cycle. The observer and teacher are required to plan, observe, reflect and plan again. In this study, four of my colleagues became partnership observers at various times through the action research process. Each of the four observers was known to the students, and students participated in a classroom meeting where discussion of the reason for the presence of the observers in the classroom was discussed. At the end of each observation I discussed the class with the observer. At the end of the action research cycle I was able to discuss the

observations with the observer and my critical friends. I compared the observations with other data and made relevant changes for the next cycle. The partnership observations were also an important part of the validation process.

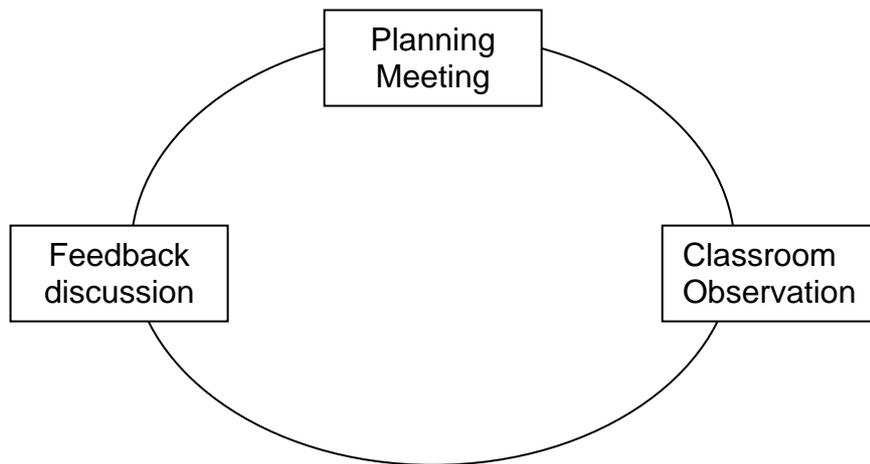


Figure 8. Three-Phase Observation Cycle (Hopkins, 2002, p. 73).

Interviews

Rationale for Using Interviews in This Study

Interviews were chosen as one of the methods of data collection in this study, to enable me to follow up points that were raised in student journals. They were also chosen because they appeared to offer a way of accessing the students' feelings about, and reactions to, the activities in which they were involved. Interviews with the parents were chosen because they seemed to be an effective way of gaining the parent's perspective about their child's response to their involvement in the study.

Types of Interviews

According to Gillham (2000) interviews may be defined as conversations that take place, usually between two people. In such a conversation there is, however, a need for one person, the interviewer, to gain information for a specific purpose from the other person (p. 1). Kvale (1996) supports this view, arguing that an “interview is a conversation that has a structure and purpose” (p. 6).

There is much literature on types of interviews, and they have been classified in different ways by different writers. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) differentiate between what they term “structured interviewing” and qualitative interviewing” (p. 88), while Berg (2001) talks of “standardized interviews,” semi-standardized interviews and unstandardized interviews” (p. 69-70). May (1997) uses the terms “structured, semi-structured, unstructured – or focused” (pp. 109 - 110) to describe types of interview studies. Gillham (2000) adds a fourth type that he calls the group interview. A further type of qualitative interview approach has been described as the “conversational interview” (van Manen, 1990, p. 63).

The structured, or standardized interview, is one that is highly organised and closely related to survey research (May, 1997). In this type of interview the interviewer uses a predetermined set of questions from which he or she does not deviate. The role of the interviewer is to present the questions in the same way to each of the people who are interviewed. In this type of interview there is no room for any improvisation by the researcher. The assumption that underlies structured or standardized interviews is that the same question will mean the same thing to each person. Furthermore, it is assumed that it is possible to gain comparable responses to the questions that are posed. Thus, in this type of interview, it is believed that the researcher has the questions and the research subject has the answers (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 88).

In semi-structured, or semi-standardized interviews, there are set questions, but the interviewer has more freedom to deviate from these questions. Semi-structured interviews “allow people to answer more on their own terms than the standardized interview permits, but still provide a greater structure for comparability over that of the focused interview” (May, 1997, p. 111).

The fundamental difference between unstructured, unstandardized or focused interviews and structured and semi-structured interviews is that they operate from different assumptions. In unstructured or unstandardized interviews:

Interviewers begin with the assumption that they do not know in advance what all the necessary questions are. Thus, they cannot predetermine fully a list of questions to ask. They also assume that not all subjects will necessarily find equal meaning in like-worded questions (Berg, 2001, p. 69-70).

Berg (2001) uses the term “in-depth interviewing” to describe qualitative interviewing which, he argues, is “flexible and dynamic” (Berg, 2001, p. 88). In this type of interview the interviewer attempts to build a rapport with the participants, as the interview is modelled after a conversation, rather than the more formal style of the structured interview of question and answer.

In a group interview “the researcher brings together groups of people...in open-ended discussions” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 113). Group interviews are often described as focus group interviews. “Focus group interviews are frequently used in market research and are designed to explore how and why people make the decisions they do” (p. 114).

The type of interview that a researcher chooses to use will be dependent upon the questions for which they seek answers, together with their commitment to a particular epistemology. In this study I used both semi-structured interviews and conversational interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used for interviews of students and parents during the study. Semi-structured interviews, or guided

interviews, were chosen to allow me the opportunity to respond to the participant's journal comments. These interviews also allowed me to divert as appropriate, during the interview. At the end of the study, conversational interviews were used with 5 students who were willing to reflect upon the action research projects. Conversational interviews seemed to be the most appropriate method for participants to reflect upon their experiences.

The Interview Process

In structured interviewing, the interview is conducted in a formal and impersonal manner. The interviewer is expected to conduct the interview with little variation from the scheduled questions. There is no place in this type of interview for probing or prompting, and the interviewer is expected to ask each question in exactly the same way in each interview. This is intended to allow for comparability of responses (May, 1997), and is not appropriate for this qualitative study.

This type of interview process is in direct contrast to the in-depth, semi-structured or semi-standardized, unstructured or conversational interview process, where the interviewer attempts to establish rapport with the person being interviewed. In these types of interviews the interviewer takes an approach which attempts to make the person being interviewed feel comfortable in the interview situation. The introduction to the interview plays an important part in helping to establish rapport. It is important that the interviewer explain purpose of the interview, and how the interview will proceed, prior to beginning the actual interview. If it is intended to use a tape recorder, the researcher must seek the participant's permission to do so. In this introductory phase, participants are invited to ask any questions they might have (Kvale, 1996). During the interview, it is important for the interviewer to show

genuine interest and respect for what the participant says. It is incumbent upon the interviewer to establish a sense of trust and cooperation with the participant (May, 1997, p. 119). Taylor & Bogdan (1998) suggest that such a sense of trust and cooperation may be gained by being “non-judgemental, letting people talk, paying attention, and being sensitive but not patronizing” (pp. 99-101).

In this study, I worked very hard to establish rapport with the participants who were interviewed. The parent interviews took place in their own homes, which helped to give them a sense of both comfort and control. Student interviews took place in a familiar room in the school, where they felt comfortable and at ease. As the students were members of the class that I had been teaching since the beginning of the school year we knew each other well, and this meant that, to some extent, rapport and trust were in place before the interviews took place.

Initially, I had intended to interview a selected number of students during the study, and at the end of the study. However, I changed this, and interviewed all 25 students at least once and some students twice. When I began the interviewing process all students in the class were anxious to be involved, and it seemed important to include them all so that they did not feel that they were being excluded. This was particularly important in this study, where I had expended much effort in developing a positive relationship with the students. The interviews were semi-structured, or guided, and I prepared a number of guide questions for each interview (Appendix C). These questions were based on student comments in their journals, and upon activities that had been undertaken in the class. While the interviews followed these questions, they were not adhered to rigidly. At the end of the study I conducted less structured, more informal, conversational, interviews with 5 students. The aim of these interviews was to reflect upon the action research units that had taken place over the

year. There were no prepared questions for these interviews, the students were simply asked to share their reflections on their year in the English class. In these interviews I began by asking students to talk about their overall impressions of English during the year. Interviews of the 5 parents were also conversational interviews, and no detailed questions were prepared. I began each interview by asking the parents how they felt the year had been for their child.

The interviews were recorded using a small, sensitive tape recorder that resulted in clear reproduction, which could readily be transcribed into text. The tapes were labelled with the pseudonyms of the participants and transcribed into printed text. I made sure that I tested the tape recorder prior to each interview to ensure that it was working effectively. I transcribed each interview myself, and I found this to be a very useful activity as I re-lived each interview as I transcribed it. This allowed me to gain an overview of the data, as I listened very carefully in order to transcribe the interviews.

Data analysis

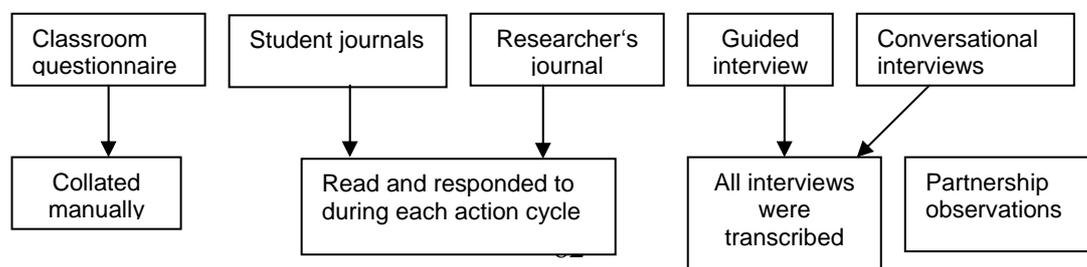
Prior to introducing the negotiated units I analysed the classroom climate questionnaire. I collated the responses manually, and then recorded them using Microsoft Excel to generate pie graphs for each question Appendix G. The responses are discussed in Chapter 4. At the end of the first action research cycle I analysed the data, which included my journal, student journals, and some semi-structured interviews, using a thematic approach. Such an approach involves searching through the data for emerging themes or patterns which stand out (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Van Manen (1990) talks of looking for themes as trying “to unearth something telling,

something meaningful in the various experiential accounts” (p. 79). He argues that themes are used as a means of giving order and control to research and writing, but points out that “the meaning of pedagogy can never be grasped in a single definition” (p. 78). In this study, I attempted to find meaning in the accounts of the students’ experiences. As I had read the journals after each entry, and responded to them, I was familiar with their content. I read each piece of the data in turn. I then read through the data again, highlighting substantive statements about students’ experiences of their previous experiences of English classes. The data were examined for patterns or themes that emerged during the action research cycles. I also looked for student responses about the negotiation process, and any connections that were implicitly or explicitly related to motivation and curriculum ownership. Following this, one of my critical friends and I read the data together. We looked for any substantive statements that I may have missed, or statements that were not really substantive. Following this, I began to construct categories which could be used to summarise the highlighted statements. My critical friend also read this list of categories to check on my judgements, and we made any necessary changes. The list of substantive statements was then read carefully, to ascertain whether some categories could be combined or, alternatively, split. The highlighted statements were then re-read and placed in appropriate categories (Gillham, 2000, pp. 63-64). During this placement of statements into categories I kept notes about ideas that were raised by the data (Berg, 2001). A final reading of the data was conducted to search for “counter-examples” (Knight, 2002, p. 183).

When this analysis was completed, the second action research cycle was commenced, and changes were implemented on the basis of the analysis of the data. The analysis of each of the three action research cycles followed this pattern.

Other data, which included the interviews of 5 parents and the conversational interviews of 5 students at the end of the study, were also analysed using this method. An overview of the data analysis process is presented in figure 9. The following is a list of themes that emerged from the data:

- The importance of giving students choice and involvement in their learning
- The importance of student voice
- The need for a variety of activities in learning
- The importance of relationships between teacher and students.
- The importance of a real or authentic audience for student work.
- The value of collaboration and teamwork.
- The need for activity in the classroom.



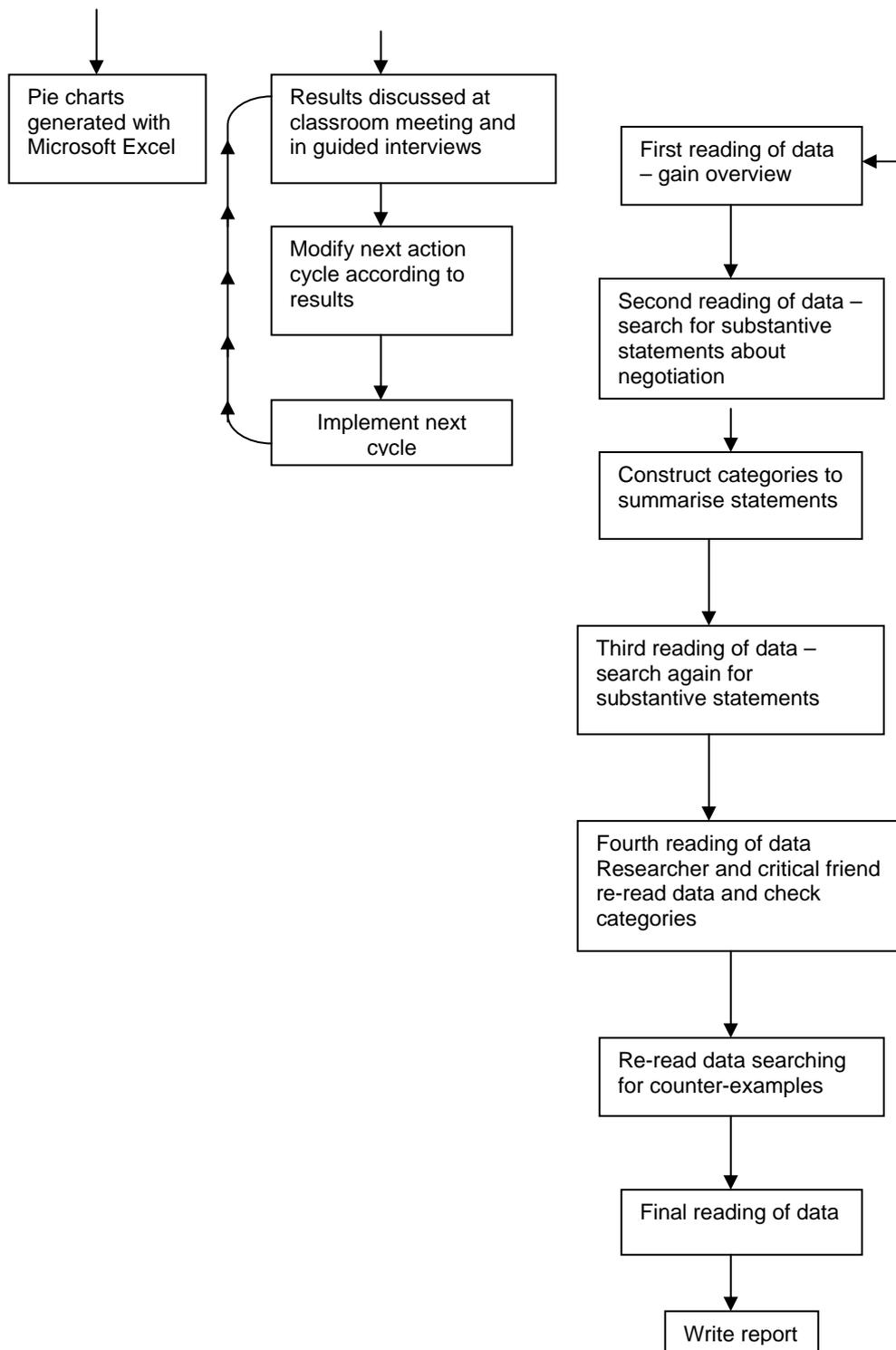


Figure 9. Data Analysis Process

Validation

While action research is promoted as a way of placing control into the hands of participants, it is not without its critics. It has been argued that “researching yourself simply does not work at a the micro-level, for no teacher is able to generate sufficiently objective data about her own on going activities that can be generalized to other classroom contexts” (Walford, 2001, p. 110). It should, however, be recognized that the action research approach is not concerned with objective data. Rather, it is an approach that critiques current practice, and modifies it in an attempt to make it more responsive to the needs of the situation (Dick, 2000).

A further criticism of action research is that researchers are too close to the subjects that they are researching. This results from the positivist view which argues the researcher needs to pursue objectivity by being detached from the topic which is being investigated (May, 2001). For the action researcher, however, developing a close participative relationship with participants is an important part of the process.

The extent of participation may simply be the participants being indirectly involved as subjects of observation or, at the other end of the spectrum, participants may be involved as co-researchers (Dick & Swepson, 1997).

Action research has also been criticised as lacking validation and as being liable to biased findings. Macintyre (2000) argues that validating the results of an action research project can be achieved by the researcher enlisting the help of other people, in order to reduce the subjectivity of the research process. Ways of gaining the help of others, to reduce the subjectivity of the research process, can be achieved using validation groups and critical friends (McNiff et al., 1996). This concern with reducing subjectivity results from the positivist view that “there is a world out there that we can record and we can analyse independently of people’s interpretations of it” (May, 1997, p. 11). It is also based on the positivist emphasis on the scientific

method that “utilizes methodologies borrowed from the natural sciences to investigate phenomena” (Berg, 2001, p. 10). This method has a “strong emphasis upon statistical testing of hypothesis” (p. 10). It suggests that if qualitative research does not provide results that are measurable and able to be expressed in numbers, it is invalid (Kvale, 1995). Wainwright (1997) argues that qualitative research has become more acceptable, but in doing so has accepted the positivist criteria of validity. He asserts that accepting the positivist criteria of validity is inappropriate for in depth qualitative studies. Such studies are not concerned with unbiased measuring and statistical analysis but rather they aim to “gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

Wainwright (1997) and others (Kvale, 1995; Lather, 1991) argue that validity needs to be reconceptualized, so that it is more appropriate for research that is concerned with the lived experiences of its participants (Kvale, 1995). Such a reconceptualizing of validity is appropriate for an interpretative study such as this one. Lather (1991) reconceptualizes validity, focusing on triangulation, construct validity, face validity, and catalytic validity. Each of these is now discussed.

Triangulation

Triangulation or, as Dick (1997) prefers to term it, dialectic, is a strategy that may be used to ensure validity by comparing various data sources. Usually three different techniques of data collection are used for such a comparison (Berg, 2001). Lather (1991) argues that triangulation is “critical in establishing data trustworthiness, a triangulation expanded beyond the psychometric definition of multiple measures to include multiple data sources, methods and theoretical schemes” (p. 66). In comparing the various sources of data, it is important to focus on both agreements and

disagreements in the data (Dick, 1997). In doing this, Dick (1997) points out that the researcher should look for exceptions to agreements, and explanations for disagreements. Lather (1991) supports Dick's view, arguing that the researcher should consciously search the data for "counter patterns as well as convergence if the data are to be credible" (p. 67).

In discussing triangulation in action research, it has been argued that action research may change the emphasis; that triangulation in action research is not concerned so much with providing "internal validity from other sources...but rather to expose for argumentation the various possible validity claims that might be in operation" (Brennan & Noffke, 1997, p. 39). From this perspective, Brennan and Noffke (1997) point out that it is possible to uncover different meanings within one set of data. They suggest that revisiting data may be "a more important approach to validity than cross-checking with other data sources" (Brennan & Noffke, 1997, p. 39).

In this study multiple methods of data collection were used, as data were collected from participants, participants' parents, observers, and the researcher. These data included participant journals, researcher journal, observations and interviews. In addition, I revisited the data, reading and re-reading them to gain as much insight as I could. The data were also read by a critical friend as an additional check. The aim of this triangulation was to strengthen "the findings and potentially enrich the eventual analysis and understandings" (Berg, 2001, p. 182).

Construct validity

Construct validity demands that we consciously place our research within a context of building theory. Lather (1991) points out that we need to “critique the theoretical tradition we are operating from within” (p. 67). While this study does not aim to provide such a critique, it does accept Lather’s argument that there is a need for a “self-critical attitude toward how one’s own preconceptions affect the research” (p. 67). In this study my use of the research journal, as I have described, assisted my development of a reflective and self-critical attitude to the research study.

Face validity

Face validity is, according to Lather (1991), complex and closely connected to construct validity. She maintains that “face validity is operationalized by recycling description, emerging analysis, and conclusions back through at least a subsample of the respondents” (p. 67). This is particularly relevant in an action research study where the action cycle requires the participants and researcher to reflect upon the action and modify it in the subsequent cycle. In this study, responses from student journals were taken back to the students, and discussed at classroom meetings. Parents and students who participated in interviews were given copies of the transcripts, and participants were interviewed a second time and, thus, were able to make comments that allowed the responses to be modified where appropriate. Furthermore, the three critical friends who supported me through the study were also able to reflect upon the action cycles and provide feedback. The concept of critical friends in action research was discussed earlier.

Catalytic Validity

Finally, Lather (1991) proposes catalytic validity as a way of establishing credibility of the research. She defines catalytic validity as representing “the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (p. 68). Action research, with its cyclic approach of action, reflection and modification, is consistent with the characteristics of catalytic validity. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their understanding of the action, and were able to make some contribution to the modification after each cycle. They were also encouraged to reflect on their participation in the study, during interviews, and in their journals.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show the interconnectedness of the methodology, methods, epistemology and theoretical perspective that support this study. I have discussed enactivism as the epistemology that underpins this study, and shown its connection to the theoretical perspectives of phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. The characteristics and process of action research have also been discussed in this chapter, and action research has been presented as the methodology for this research. The data gathering techniques of classroom questionnaires, classroom meetings, journals, partnership observation and interviews, and the process of analysing these data have been examined. I have also presented a process for analysing these data. The issue of validity has been considered, and an argument for reconceptualizing the concept of validity has been presented.

In the following chapter I will interpret the data, and describe the way in which the action research cycles were implemented. The narrative will rely upon my

interpretation of the data, which will be used to show the students' lived experience of negotiating in their English class. In Chapter 5, I will extend the discussion of the lived experiences as I present more detailed discussion of five selected students.

CHAPTER 4

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE CLASSROOM

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the theoretical perspectives underpinning this study, and showed the way in which methodology, methods, epistemology and theoretical perspective are interconnected. I also outlined the action research methodology that was used in the study, and I discussed the methods of data gathering and analysis that I used. I now move to present my interpretation of the data. I begin with an outline of the context in which the study took place, and a brief introduction of the participants. I have then used a narrative approach to describe the way in which the three action research cycles were implemented in the English classroom. These cycles were interspersed with other non-negotiated activities during the year. My use of comments from the student journals, and from interviews with students, has attempted to give voice to their experiences. In chapter 5, I re-examine the data to present studies of the experiences of selected students as they participated in negotiating in this English class. Chapter 6 focuses on the findings, in relation to the research questions.

The cyclic nature of the study has created some challenges as I have attempted to find a way to portray the complexity of the study. My decision to begin with a narrative chronological approach, using the action cycles as its base, results from a desire to provide the reader with a sense of the way in which the classroom operated. At the same time, such an approach allows me to give voice to the students' perceptions through the reporting of their comments; prior to, during, and after the

action cycles. It also allows me to draw upon my research journal to help provide a picture of the English classroom.

I have chosen to use a more informal style of writing in this chapter as I endeavour to give the reader a sense of the experiences of the students and of myself. Where possible, I have maintained the students' syntax and spelling when giving comments from their journals. However, I have corrected some spelling and expression where it seemed necessary for ease of understanding. As I pointed out in Chapter 3 when referring to participants, whether they are students, parents, teachers, or the class as a whole, I have used pseudonyms to protect their privacy. In my evaluative comments I have used a more formal writing style. In the next section of this chapter, I begin the story of English in 8XW.

The Story Begins

Although I have taught for more than 25 years, I still find that first day of the year quite stressful. I wonder about my classes as I prepare for the first meeting of the year. January 2003 was no exception, and as I walked to the classroom for my first class with 8XW I felt a mixture of anxiety and excitement. It was a double period English class, which meant preparing for two hours, and it was an afternoon, so I was conscious of the need to have a number of different activities to keep their interest. During this first class I asked the students to write a letter telling me about themselves, and about their experiences in English during Year 7. Much of the information in the letters was personal but there were some indications of negative experiences of school. I responded by writing comments on the letters and returning them to the students. The class consisted of 25 students, 12 boys and 13 girls. The

class had been grouped by the Year 7 Co-ordinators, and they had divided the year 7 classes so that, for the most part, the students in Year 8 had not been together in their Year 7 English class.

My initial thoughts were that this class was very different from the Year 8 class I had taught in the previous year. 8XW seemed to be keen and well behaved, and did everything I asked without question. I wrote in my journal after that first class, “what an amazing difference to last year’s group. All of the students were keen and well behaved, they did everything without question. I wonder how they will go with thinking for themselves, they are bit passive.” The first weeks of the term were spent in getting to know the students as we worked on activities related to their set novel. I was anxious to introduce them to the study, and in week 4 I conducted a class meeting where we all sat in a circle, and I explained the research project to them. The students were quite unused to class meetings, and I spent some time in explaining their purpose and how they operate. At first the students were very reluctant to make any comments, and I found that the meeting consisted mostly of my telling rather than discussion. I remembered reading that we sometimes tend to introduce approaches with students for the first time and they don’t work because the students have little experience of them (Wilson, 1999). Perhaps this is what happened in my initial forays into class meetings with 8XW. As the year progressed, students became more willing to participate and give their opinions in the class meetings. It should be noted, however, that for some students such participation continued to be confronting, as will be seen from some of the later journal and interview comments.

I explained the research project to the class and invited their responses. For the most part the students were very interested and seemed keen to be involved in the study. This was borne out at the end of the study when some students wrote their

thoughts about being involved. At this early stage, I had not yet contacted parents to seek permission for their children to be involved, and much of my free time in the first few weeks was concerned with completing this aspect of the study. I telephoned each parent to explain the study, and followed this with a formal letter and permission form (Appendix D). The student participants were also given a formal letter, and completed an assent form (Appendix E). When I spoke to some of the parents, I found that the students had already told them about the study, and the parents told me that their students were very keen to be involved. This keenness to be involved was also evident as students asked in almost every class when we would be able to begin the study.

The first two or three weeks were spent in working on the set text, *The Quicksand Pony* (Lester, 1997) and various language activities which were taken from the students' text book *Texts in Action* (Sadler & Hayllar, 2000). All of the activities were imposed, and students had no choice in what they did. At the same time, I introduced the idea of a student journal. In previous years, students have been familiar with this concept, but 8XW had not had the experience of a journal in Year 7. I asked the students to write about what they thought English classes should be about and, for the most part, students were able to say what they thought and felt about their previous English classes. I also asked my students what they enjoyed about English, and found that a number of students indicated that they didn't enjoy English at all. Some of their journal comments are presented in the next section of the story.

Student Perceptions of English Classes

The perceptions of students, which they recorded in their journals, were specifically related to previous classes. However, their experience of this English class, at this early stage of the year, was not dissimilar to their previous experiences.

In their journals students wrote:

I dislike the writing part about English and there isn't any practical hands-on stuff that I like [Charles].

I don't like writing all the time and learning about words [Lawrence].

I think English class is sometimes boring. I dislike spelling but I suppose you need to know how to spell [Julia].

I think English classes should be more fun and about English but not always writing [Brenda].

I dislike writing we do so much of it every day and not just in English class! Also the confusion of learning about nouns, verbs, pronouns all of those things [Rosemary].

I would like it to be more fun [Keith].

I dislike the novel assignments and questions [Frances].

What I dislike about English is that it is too classroom bound. I would like the class better if it was more outside oriented [Meredith].

We are always in the classroom so sitting there is boring. If I could change one thing it would be that we did activities outside the classroom [Heather].

I dislike that we have to stay in the class. If I could change one thing in English it would be that we get to go to more places rather than in the classroom all the time [Elizabeth].

Come to think of it...I don't really like English. It's a lot of writing, reading and hard work with minimal fun activities [Martin].

As can be seen from these comments, the students expressed very strongly their perception that English is a subject which is static and boring. These comments support the view of Barber (1999). They speak of their dislike of doing so much

writing, and of their feelings of boredom that are connected with inactivity. There is an expressed desire to want English to be more fun, although they do not say what they mean by fun. There is also an indication from one student that she understands the need for spelling but nonetheless dislikes the activity of spelling. There is also a negative feeling towards the learning of grammar.

Although there was a strong expression of boredom and dislike of many of the activities in the English classroom, some journal comments were positive:

I like reading interesting books in English [Colin].

I like English if you have a good fun teacher that teaches you by playing games [Malcolm].

I don't mind reading books [Julian].

The things that I like about English are that we get to say what we think about books [Heather].

I like the fact that you are allowed to use your imagination in a wide way [Charles].

These positive comments focus on reading, discussion, creativity, and active classes which include playing games. These perceptions were similar to those expressed in the results of a questionnaire which I asked the students to complete about their English classes in Year 7. The questionnaire, which was developed by John Baird and others (Baird 1994), asks students to rate on a 4 point scale, their perceptions of classroom environment, nature and difficulty of the work, the interest level of the work, their own effort and participation, their relationships with their fellow students and with their English teacher. The questionnaire also has a two point 'feeling' scale for each item. I used the results of three of the items as a basis for a class meeting, where we discussed the students' responses and related them to the comments from the journals. The items I chose for the discussion were those which I

felt were connected to the comments that students had made in their journals. They were:

- How interesting were the topics that I did?
- How often did I do different and unusual things in class?
- I enjoyed...

The results of the three items are presented in Appendix F using pie charts to indicate the student responses. Results of responses to all questions are presented in Appendix G. Many of these responses indicated dissatisfaction with their previous school experience. Significant numbers of students felt sad about various aspects of the work they were expected to complete. The most positive responses were in the area of teacher/student and student/student relationships. However, they also indicated that they had little input in the decision making process and this was an area of concern to them.

I presented the responses from the three selected questions, together with some of the journal comments, to the students in a class meeting. At the class meeting we spoke about the questionnaire, with particular reference to the number of students who found the previous work in English not interesting and not enjoyable. We also discussed the fact that some students did find some of the work interesting and enjoyable. We talked about how we might try to make it more interesting for everyone. The students had lots of ideas, which we summarised on the white board. Some of the ideas that the students had were:

- Work in groups
- Go to the computer room to do our work
- More discussion
- Play some English games
- Go on excursions

All of the suggestions that students made were for activities that were not writing related. These suggestions supported the comments that students had previously made in their journals, and indicated their desire for different ways of learning in their English class. However, the main thing that seemed to come out of the class meeting was that, from the students' perspectives, English classes were too static. Their perception was that they were bored because they had to sit and write all the time. This, then, was the situation prior to the introduction of the first action cycle. Before moving to a discussion of the first action cycle, I digress to give an account of my reflections during the first few weeks of classes with 8X.

My Reflections in the Early Weeks of 2003

After the first class with 8XW I read the letters that the students had written to me, and found that some of the comments about English were quite negative. Nonetheless the students were very compliant, and I wondered whether this was the result of it being early in the term. The assignment that the students were given for their set text was one that the other Year 8 classes were completing and gave them no choice at all. It was interesting to me to see that they seemed to work without difficulty, but there was very little thinking required. They just answered the questions that were set. In fact I was surprised at how quickly they got through the work. Though, when I looked at what was submitted, I realised that while some of the students were getting through the work quickly and submitting beautifully presented work, others were getting through the work quickly but completing very little. I was not sure at this early stage, whether the students who were completing very little were

unable or unwilling to do more than the minimum. I felt that I needed to get to know the students as quickly as I could, so that I might be better able to gauge their abilities and try to cater more adequately for all of the students.

I decided to use some of my free time to read through the previous English reports and the AIM tests, which the students had completed in Year 7.¹ What I read suggested to me that there were a number of students who were not achieving what was indicated by the AIM testing. I was very concerned about this, and spent a lot of time thinking about what I might do to encourage these students. The reading results indicated that some of the students were well above the state average, but their English reports for Year 7 did not demonstrate this. In my journal I wrote, “I’m thinking about how I can encourage students to work to their capacity and will be interesting to see how they respond to negotiation” [My Journal - prior to cycle 1].

Towards the end of the second week of term 1, I introduced the journal writing. Initially, I asked students to write about what they liked and disliked about English. In later journal entries I asked the students to write about what they had done in class, and what they had learned. I found that some students could tell me what they had learned, but I was really concerned when some students were writing that they had learned nothing. Lawrence wrote “I learnt nothing” [journal – prior to cycle 1] and Brenda’s comment was “nothing I didn’t already know” [journal – prior to cycle 1]. I conducted another class meeting where the idea was that we would discuss the comments from the journals, but again it was me talking and the students listening. It was really difficult in those first few meetings; whatever I did made little

¹ Statewide testing is conducted as part of the Victorian Government Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM). Testing is conducted for Years 3, 5 and 7 students in English and Mathematics. Retrieved 8th October from <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/assess/docs/aimintro.ppt>

difference. It was very hard to get any kind of discussion. A note in my journal highlights this

“today we had a class meeting, not much discussion, mostly me talking [My journal – prior to cycle 1].

I talked a lot with Jane, my critical friend, about those first few class meetings. At times I was ready to give up but after talking about it, I was able to continue, with the hope that given time the students would become more able to contribute to discussion. I also discussed with her the feelings that the students were expressing about English.

It was evident that writing was an issue and, as I intended for the first action cycle to be a narrative writing unit, I realized that I needed to find a way to make the writing task as interesting as I could. I spent a lot of time thinking about the unit and the way in which I would introduce it to the class, and include them in negotiating the way that the unit would progress.

The next class meeting that we held was more positive as I explained the research study to the students and invited them to be involved. My journal note after that meeting read “today I had a class meeting and explained the research to students. They seemed quite interested and asked lots of questions” [My journal – prior to cycle 1].

The next section returns to the story and discusses the first action cycle, narrative writing, and the student responses as the unit progressed. I also present student responses at the conclusion of the unit. Data from the student journals, and from interviews, are analysed.

Cycle 1 Narrative Writing – Children’s Stories

Content and Process of the Unit

As I began the first action cycle, I was very conscious of the need to respond to the student perception that English classes were boring because of all the writing. They were telling me that they disliked writing, and here was I providing a unit which required them to complete a writing task. I began planning, using Boomer’s process outlined in Figure 3 in the previous chapter (Boomer, 1992). A more detailed outline, of the process as it was used in this cycle, is presented in figure 10.

The questions were:

1. What do we know about children’s stories?
2. What else do we want, and need, to find out about children’s stories?
3. How will we go about finding the things we want to know about children’s stories?
4. How will we show what we have learnt about children’s stories?

I decided to put the questions onto a hand-out and use the think, share, discuss approach for the discussion. Figure 11 shows the process that we used to answer the four questions.

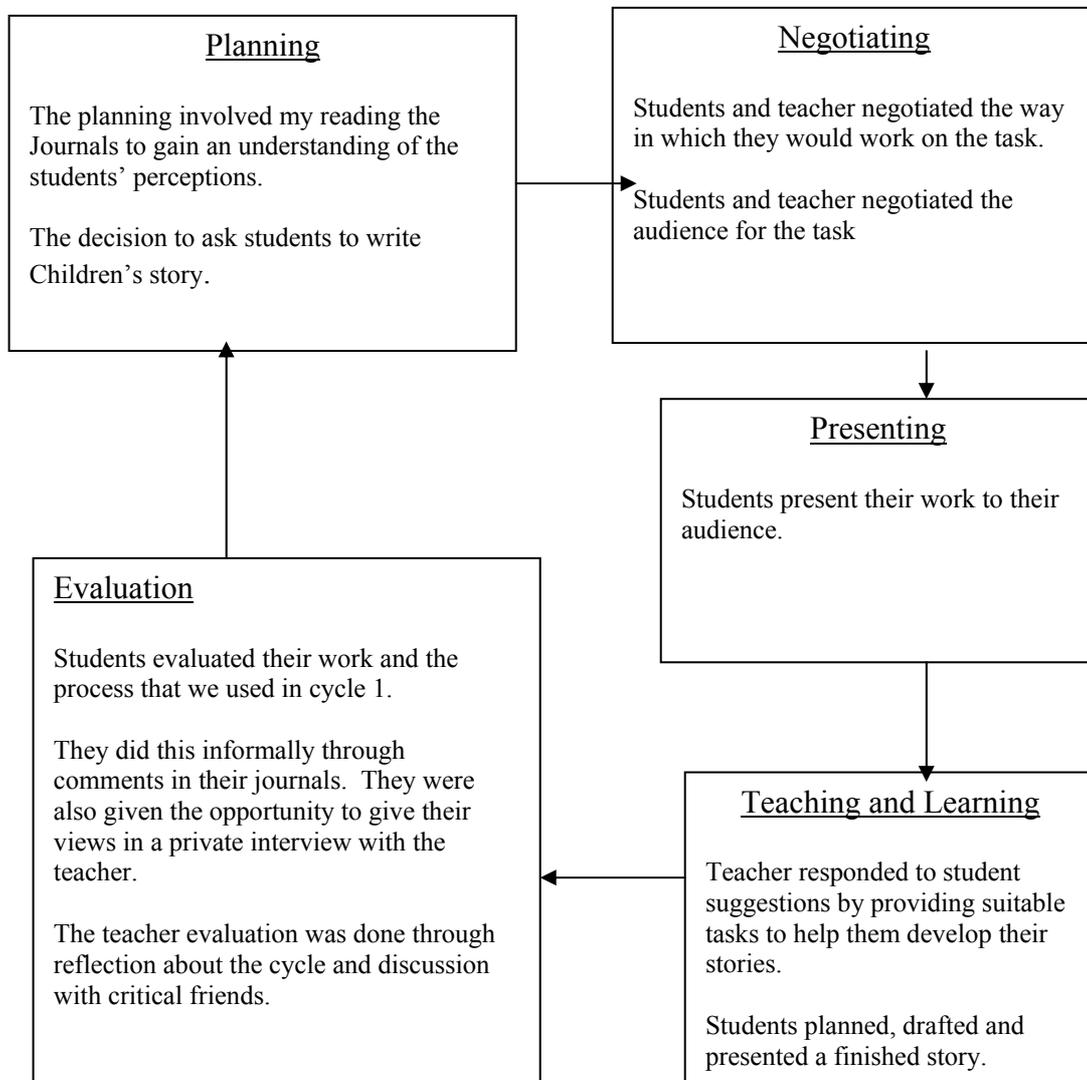


Figure 10. Negotiation process as used in cycle 1

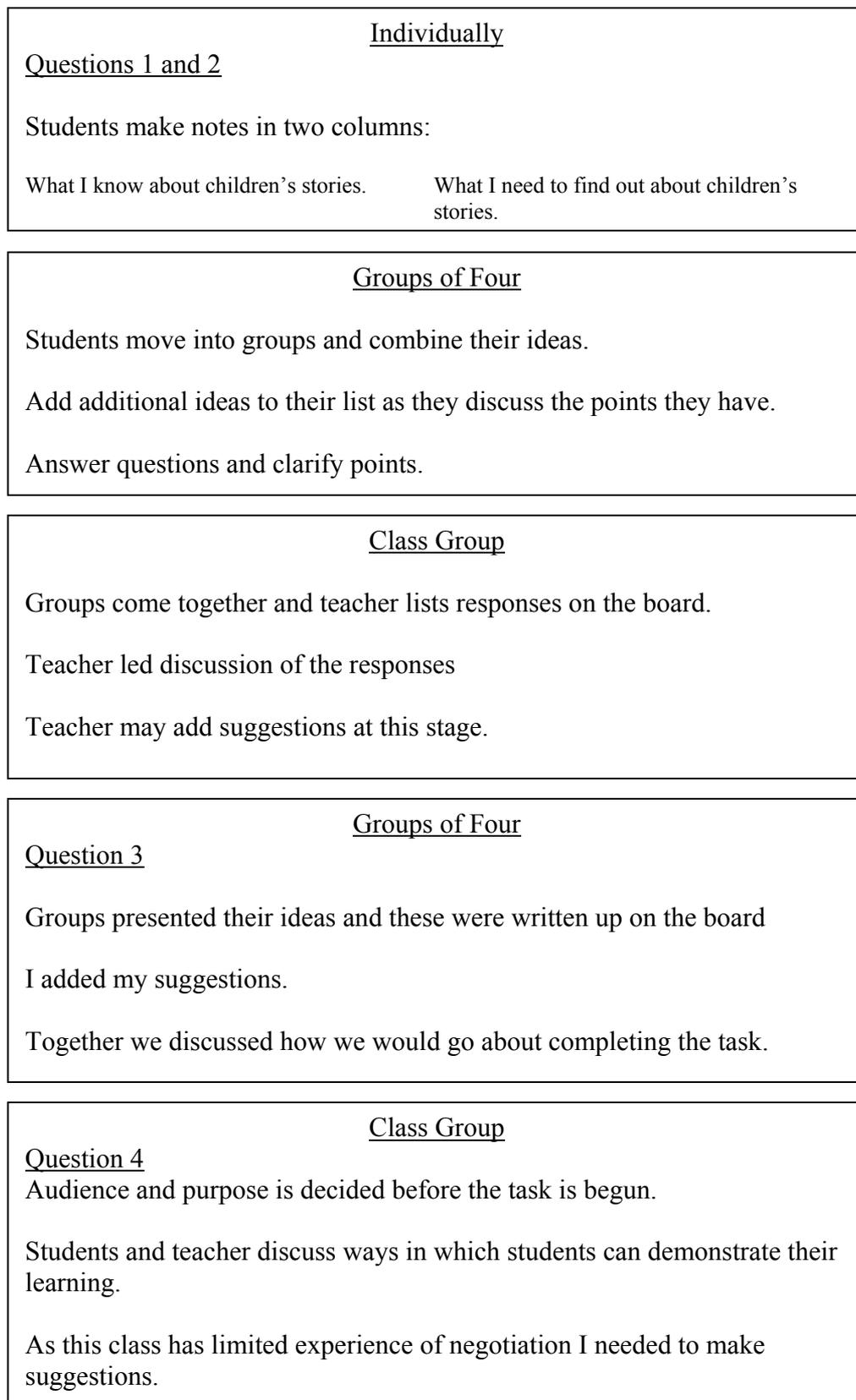


Figure 11. Negotiation process based on Cook's (1992) approach.

The process took a lot longer than I had anticipated, and some students' comments taken from the journals give an indication of the students' feelings:

Talking about the narratives it was really boring [Graham - cycle 1].

I didn't like writing everything we know about children's books
[Julian - cycle 1].

I didn't enjoy writing about what and how to write a kid's story
[Heather - cycle 1].

I didn't enjoy the discussion about narratives [Malcolm - cycle 1].

I didn't enjoy doing the things in groups like when we were writing about those children stories [Frances - cycle 1].

I **really** [student emphasis] didn't like making the lists on what we knew and what we needed to know about children's books [Brenda - cycle 1].

I don't think we should do these exercises they are a waste of time. What do we benefit from these? **NOTHING!** (student emphasis) [Ian - cycle 1].

All of these comments made clear that the students did not enjoy the process of negotiating in this way. Ian's comment was particularly strong, and his emphasis upon the word nothing, caused me some concern. However, there was one student who did not share this view and who wrote in her journal, "I enjoyed learning about narratives and talking about as a class about how to create your own children's story" [Frances - cycle 1].

Although there was some negative feeling about the process, it nonetheless generated some ideas for the way in which the unit could progress. Some of the suggestions they had about how to find out about children's stories were reasonable, but not always practical. One of their ideas was that they could visit a kindergarten to find out what kind of books the children liked. Another idea was that students with younger siblings could ask them what stories they liked, or bring them into the class. They also suggested that they could read some children's stories to see what they

were like. All of these ideas had merit, but I thought the logistics of visiting a kindergarten would be too difficult, and when we discussed the idea of siblings the students themselves realised that it may not be practical. A list of the suggestions that students made is presented below:

- Ask some kids what they like.
- Go to kindergartens and ask the children what they like.
- Ask the primary teachers what kind of books little children like.
- Bring little brothers or sisters to school and the class ask them what they like.
- Read some children's books to see what they are like.
- Remember what books we used to read.

These discussions took two one hour periods, and I followed them up with a period where I read a children's story to them, and we discussed some of the writing strategies that were employed in the story. The students' idea of reading some children's stories seemed to be one that we could use. Of course we do not have a lot of young children's books in the school library, although there are some, so I had to find books from elsewhere.

It was Friday afternoon and I visited the local city library to see what I could find. I had a talk with the librarian there, and found that it might be possible for me to take the class to the library for a talk about the children's books they have. In the meantime I was able to borrow 30 picture books, which I could use with my class. I spent the weekend thinking about how we might use these books, and trying to think of ways that would be interesting. I decided to construct a very simple sheet on which students would record information about the children's books (Appendix H). After reading the journal comments about the negotiation process, I was very conscious of trying to make the activity interesting and enjoyable. Monday afternoon arrived, and I

went to class early and set up the room before the students came in from lunch. It's great to have a class immediately after lunch because it gives me the opportunity to get in when they are not there. I set up the room for groups of four, and put a picture book and a handout at each place. As there were 25 students in the class, one of the groups was a group of 5. I also put a label on the table with the name of a category. The category and labels are outlined in Appendix I, but any categories could be used for this activity. As the students came in I gave them a label and they had to find which table they belonged to. This was a way of random grouping that I borrowed from the Project for Enhancing Effective Learning (PEEL, 2000). When the students arrived they were rather nonplussed, because the classroom was set up in a different way and they did not know what was happening. Once they were all seated, I explained that I wanted them to read the book and complete the sheet, then pass the book to the next person in their group and read the next book and so on, until they had read all the books on their table. When all of the books had been read each group presented what they had learned to the class. The responses to this activity were more positive than the previous comments, and included:

I enjoyed actually reading the children's books [Brenda - cycle 1].

I enjoyed reading the children's books the most [Heather - cycle 1].

I enjoyed the analysing of children's books that was fun [Veronica - cycle 1].

I enjoyed reading the children's books [Denise - cycle 1].

Prior to writing our stories we firstly had to study about children's books which was very enjoyable [Julia - cycle 1].

I enjoyed analysing the children's books [Graham - cycle 1].

I enjoyed the group children's book thing the most [Malcolm - cycle 1].

I and my group partners read five books which I thought was really fun and we had a discussion after it which I really liked [Trevor - cycle 1].

All of these comments indicated that the students enjoyed the task and, in particular, Julia's journal comment about analysing the picture books showed a real sense of engagement, as she wrote "I enjoyed reading the children's books because for me it was a walk down memory lane as I used to read some of the books we read as a kid" [Julia – cycle 1]. There were, however, some responses from students who did not enjoy analysing the picture books, as can be seen from Frances' comment when she wrote "I didn't enjoy the things in groups, like when we were writing about those children stories" [Frances - cycle 1], and Alice who said "The thing I liked the least was reading because the stories were long and I'm not a fast reader so I had to skip the end to keep up" [Alice - cycle 1].

These two comments highlight the difficulty that some students experience when they are working in a group.

Students were now almost ready to begin writing their own stories, but before we began I wanted to negotiate dates and assessment with them. Consequently the next period was spent in discussion of these aspects. Unfortunately this class did not work out as I had hoped. It was immediately after lunch on a very hot day, and students were quite uncooperative. On reflection I realised that it would have been better not to have tried to have a class meeting under these conditions. We were, however, able to negotiate dates, but we did not get very far with discussing how the task would be assessed. Frances summed up the feelings of the students when she wrote in her journal at the end of that week "The thing I enjoyed the least was the way we had to decide the marks on the assignment (I think because it was hot)" [Frances - cycle 1].

I decided that I would make the decision and discuss my thoughts with them, rather than trying to go through the process again. I was beginning to be concerned at

how much time we were spending on the negotiating process. A note in my journal reads “negotiation takes up so much time and I tend to worry that I won’t get through a sufficient amount of work” [My Journal – cycle 1]. I worked out an assessment sheet based on the English Faculty requirements for Year 8 writing.

Writing the story

Students drafted their first copy of their story, and they discussed their stories with other students before discussing them with me. The drafting was done using the computer for word processing. A major difficulty was in gaining access to a computer room. The two computer rooms on the junior campus were very heavily booked, and I took the class to the senior campus so that we could word process the drafts. This involved walking them to the senior campus at the beginning of the period and walking back at the end. Although the two campuses are fairly close it is inconvenient, but comments from students, and my own comments, indicated that it was worthwhile. The student journals indicated that students found using the computers satisfying and enjoyable. The following comments are representative of the views expressed:

I enjoyed working on the computers [Martin - cycle 1].

I especially liked when we got to go over to the senior campus library and use the computers in the computer room [Elizabeth - cycle 1].

I enjoyed the most going over to the senior campus and using the computers [Janine – cycle 1].

It was very clear to me that the students worked more efficiently when they were using computers to prepare their drafts. I wrote in my own journal “being in the computer room made a big difference” [My Journal – cycle 1]. A comment from Charles, at the end of the term, supported that when he wrote in his journal “we need

more frequent computer visits. I think I work better in the computer room. I seem to get work done faster in the computer room” [Charles - cycle 1].

During the next few lessons students worked on their drafts, and this was interspersed with other activities because of the difficulty of getting into a computer room. We were not able to continue with the drafts in all of the double periods as we had negotiated to do. When we were able to work in a computer room students worked really effectively and I felt that they were engaged with the task. I was kept very busy looking at individual drafts. I did have to take them to the senior campus quite often, because I was conscious of the need to meet our deadline. I had contacted the principal of one of the feeder primary schools and arranged for the students to read their books to the preps. This meant that we had to be ready by the due date, and some of the students were sceptical about whether we would actually go to the primary school. A note in my journal reads:

Students spent the double working on their stories. Again I had to take them to the senior campus because I couldn't get into a computer room on the junior campus. Thankfully one of the staff offered to drive us across in the bus which made it a lot quicker, it was also good because it looked like rain. It's really hard to get around to everyone they all want me to look at their work at the same time. Still I think they are engaged with what they are doing and looking forward to going to read their stories to the preps. In some cases I don't think they really believe it will happen [My Journal – cycle 1].

Finally the books were finished. Some students had drawn their own illustrations and some had used word art; this meant that we needed to print their work in colour. It was quite a drama to get the stories printed in colour. The library charges 50 cents a sheet for coloured printing, and was loath to let us print so many pages. The English Co-ordinator indicated that she was happy for the English department to pay for the colour printing but the librarian believed that it would necessitate using the printer for too long. It was finally agreed that I could send

students a few at a time, and the librarian would transfer their work on to the English folder and print them after school. The students found all this very frustrating, but it was the best that we could do with the limited resources that were available.

When all the books were completed the office staff bound them for us, and they looked very professional. We were almost ready to go and present the work to our audience, but before we did that we needed some direction on the best way to present the stories to the young children. Our senior campus librarian had previously been a children's librarian at the local city library and she was willing to talk to the children about how they might go about reading their books. This proved to be a very productive and worthwhile activity. Julia summed it up in her journal comment, "the thing I enjoyed most this week was learning how to read to children it was extremely interesting and I learnt a lot" [Julia – cycle 1].

The Primary School Visit

The day for the primary school visit arrived. Apart from two students who were absent, everyone was ready with their books at the appointed time. I was delighted to see that Malcolm had his book, because he hadn't completed it when I spoke to him the day before. I had explained that he wouldn't be able to come if he didn't have the book finished, because he wouldn't have anything to read to the preps. A note in my journal for that day reads "Malcolm had his book with him I was very pleased that I didn't have to leave him behind" [My Journal – cycle 1]. The campus co-ordinator told me I'd done really well to get work out of him. Apparently he's very difficult to motivate.

I had arranged for the English Co-ordinator, Vanessa, to come with us and observe the activity. Vanessa made notes on her observations of the students and the

way in which they participated in the activity. The following comments are taken from Vanessa's notes:

Students were very excited and very noisy during the 20 minute bus trip, there was lots of nervous energy. When we arrived at the primary school 4 or 5 Year 8 students were teamed up with 4 preps at tables or on the floor. The students chatted to preps and asked them questions as ice-breakers. The students read their own books to preps and asked questions. They used appropriate strategies to deal with the younger students who showed engagement through asking questions, smiling, making comments. At the end of the session the principal thanked 8XW students and asked the preps to show their thanks by putting stickers on the blazers of the students whose stories they liked [Vanessa – observation notes cycle 1].

After the activity was completed 8XW students were invited to show their books to the Grade 6 children, who were also making picture books. Apart from Ian, who showed very little interest or engagement, all of the students seemed very motivated by this activity. The following journal comments are an indication of the student reaction to the primary school visit:

We went to the primary school and read our books to prep children. It was good seeing how they reacted to the books and how they liked them [Julian - cycle 1].

I liked doing the children's book because we got to read it to some kids [Lawrence - cycle 1].

It was good fun going to the primary school and the kids were great. It was good showing the Yr 6's our stories too [Elizabeth – cycle 1].

I would enjoy it if we had more trips like when we went to the primary school [Susie – cycle 1].

I liked writing and reading the children's stories and going to the primary school [Graham – cycle 1].

Evaluating the Term

The final task that students completed was a letter to the primary school students. Each of the students wrote a letter to the primary school child that they worked with, and these were posted out to the children. I also asked the students to write a comment in their journal, giving their views on the whole term. This included both the narrative writing and other class work. I asked them to comment on what they'd enjoyed, what they had not enjoyed, and what things they would change.

The following responses are indicative of student responses:

I don't think we could have improved anything at all. I really enjoyed Term 1 of year 8 in English [Alan – end of Term 1].

The first term in English has been pretty good [Brenda – end of Term 1].

Maybe we could have more time on our good copies [Elizabeth – end of Term 1].

The best thing by far was the children's books as it taught us how to communicate with young children which was good [Julia – end of Term 1].

We did things like *The Quicksand Pony* which I didn't enjoy because it was boring [Charles – end of Term 1].

Sitting in the same seats is totally boring [Charles – end of Term 1].

Doing written work was very boring [Lawrence – end of Term 1].

I do not like *Texts in Action* because it is boring [Colin – end of Term 1].

I think learning about the verbs, nouns, pronouns etc...was boring [Brenda – end of Term 1].

As can be seen from these responses, students continued to perceive grammar exercises and inactivity as boring. It was also evident that the narrative writing was enjoyed by most of the students. Julian highlighted the importance of the activity being real when, in an interview at the end of first term, I asked him:

- Teacher: What did you enjoy most last term?
- Julian: Hm I suppose some of the practical work we did. The reading to children, reading books about children and making books.
- Teacher: What did you like about that? What was good about that?
- Julian: It was better than just sitting there and just writing a report on children's books. We actually wrote a children's book. Instead of writing about it we actually did it.
- Teacher: Right
- Julian: Instead of saying we could have done that, we could have done that, we did that.
- Teacher: Have you done anything like that before?
- Julian: No [Interview – cycle 1].

This positive reaction to the activity was also evident in a reflective interview with Brenda who, when asked for her opinion about the children's stories, said:

I thought that was good because we had a chance to read to the children and they got to acknowledge and say what they thought about it [Brenda - interview – cycle 1].

The acknowledgement from the primary school students was seen as important by the students of 8XW, who talked excitedly on the way home in the bus about how the children reacted to their stories. They were also very excited when we received a letter from the primary school teacher, with a list of comments from the prep children. I have re-typed the letter, and removed all names to ensure confidentiality (Appendix J).

Heather summed up the feelings of the students, when she reflected about the letter in an interview:

Yeah that was cool. It sounded as though they actually appreciated it 'cause they didn't have to do that [Interview – end of study].

These responses suggested to me that having a real audience was important to the students, and I realised that this is an area that we do not give enough attention in most of our English classes.

However, not all students were as positive about the narrative writing, as Martin's comment at the end of the cycle demonstrates. When asked in an interview what he had liked least he said:

Martin: Least? Well them writing things. The children's stories.

Teacher: Why?

Martin: Well personally I don't like small children.

Teacher: What did you think of the process?

Martin: I think the process was OK but I didn't really like the content. Children's stories are boring [Interview – cycle 1].

As I pointed out in Chapter 3, I had planned to interview 5 parents who had agreed to participate in the research. The aim of these interviews was to gain a different perspective and give a richer texture to the description of the experiences of the students. During the term holidays I conducted an interview with Trevor's mother, and her comments also indicated the importance to the students of having a real audience. They also highlighted the importance of a positive relationship between student and teacher, which is confirmed in the literature (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). This is evident in the following section of the interview:

Teacher: Has Trevor said much about English?

Mrs. Bellamy: Not a great deal so that is a good sign with him because he's going along fine and he doesn't feel threatened by it. Where English in the past, for him has not been easy. Thanks to you it's brought out the imagination side of him and it just seems to be progressing very well. Last year it was that work book,

that's all it seemed to him in English was filling in that workbook.

Teacher: Oh right.

Mrs. Bellamy: And his spelling test and this and that, and if he didn't learn them he'd be overwhelmed again.

Teacher: Yes

Mrs. Bellamy: Otherwise he's coming along really well. As shown by that little book that he wrote. I know he's got it in him.

Teacher: Did you see much of that at home?

Mrs Bellamy: Not a thing.

Teacher: No. We did a lot of that on the computer at school.

Mrs Bellamy: And he said, when I asked him what it was about, "Oh it's about a boy who got a dog for his birthday and he took it to the park." And that was it.

Teacher: Hmm.

Mrs. Bellamy: That's not like him. Usually he'll say "can you come and help me with this mom?" But he just went straight ahead. And I said did anyone correct your spelling? And he said, "Yes Mrs ...helped me with that." I said "Oh that's good" so he feels he can go to you.

Teacher: Did he talk about going to the primary school?

Mrs. Bellamy: Yes he did. He said a few of the little preppies didn't wait for him to finish the pages and he didn't get around to everybody. But I think he enjoyed it.

Teacher: That's good.

Mrs Bellamy: He saw some kids out there that he knew. I think what the kids found was that they're not used to dealing with the littlies and they expect them to sit there and of course they don't do they? That's right the little preps that have just started school. He did talk about going there. And he got a little sticker and that made it more worthwhile [Parent interview – cycle 1].

Summary

These responses to the first cycle indicated to me that the authenticity of the task was important in motivating students. The fact that it was real, that they were going to present their work to a real audience, seemed to be significant to the students. While I realised the importance of an authentic audience, I also understood that finding ways to make the work real in the school setting is very challenging. However, in spite of the challenge, it certainly seems worth trying to find ways to do this. This challenge was one of the things that I began to think about as I reflected on the first cycle and began planning the next cycle. I now come to discuss these reflections.

My Reflections at the End of Cycle 1

What have I learned from this activity? I ask myself. I have learned that students take a lot longer to do things than I anticipated. This supported the literature which argues that students need time think about tasks and develop deep learning (Kiddey & Robson; 2001; Russell, 2001). It is really hard to access computers when we need them. The problem of colour printing when there's only one printer and it's slow, is most frustrating. It's difficult keeping up with where everyone is, and the timetable doesn't help. I've learned that the class can do it and does it well – if they choose to. The following comments are taken from my journal and highlight some of these aspects. I wrote:

Students worked on their drafts and this was interspersed with other activities because of the difficulty of getting into a computer room. We were not able to continue with the drafts in all of the double periods as we had negotiated to

do' and 'students worked more efficiently when they were using computers to prepare their drafts [My Journal – end of cycle 1].

The difficulty associated with gaining access to a computer room when we needed it did have a considerable impact upon the way in which we were able to complete this unit of work. We had negotiated to work on the children's stories for two periods a week. Thus, when we were not able to access the computers it became necessary to re-negotiate the tasks, and students became frustrated because they could not continue with their books. As I have already said, the reaction to the negotiating process that I used was not as positive as I had hoped. Thus, I felt that I needed to reassess the process, and modify the way in which the negotiation would take place in the second cycle. A note in my journal at the end of cycle 1 reads:

While the general reaction to the first cycle (narrative writing) was positive there were some negative responses too. For the second cycle we will work on another writing task but this time we will do an informative piece. My original question focused on the effect of negotiation but I think that the negotiation did not have a great deal of positive impact on some students. [My Journal – end of cycle 1].

During the term holidays I met with Jane [23/04/03], my critical friend who had observed some of the early attempts at negotiation, and we discussed the difficulties that I encountered. Our discussion raised a number of questions, as we wondered whether I had attempted the process too early in the year. We also wondered whether the students had not had sufficient time to get to know each other well enough to risk involving themselves in discussion. We wondered what impact the time of day and weather conditions had on student behaviour. We also wondered whether it would be different if the students chose the topic. Perhaps it was because I made the choice of task and the students didn't have enough choice of activities. After further discussion Jane and I decided that the question for the second cycle

would be “Will it be different if I give more choice of content?” After our discussion I decided that for the second cycle I would specify informative writing, but give more choice on topic and ways of approaching the topic. The responses to the first cycle also indicated that the authenticity of the task seemed to be a motivating factor. The fact that it was real, that they were going to present their work to a real audience, seemed to be significant to the students. Thus, I believed that it was important for the students to have an audience for their second writing task. In this cycle the audience was the other students in the class.

As I continued to reflect on the first cycle, I re-read some of the student journal entries. It seemed to me that the majority of the students had no idea of what to write, they just wrote what I ask for. This confirms van Manen’s view that this type of writing is difficult for people, and may not provide the kind of material that the researcher is hoping for (van Manen, 1990). When asked for their opinions about the activities they wrote a word or a phrase and seemed to have no idea of how to evaluate their own work. However, when I interviewed students they were able to give me some opinions about the work, and what they thought about their own learning. This supports the view that teaching metacognitive skills is important (Baird, 1986). I discussed this with the English co-ordinator, Vanessa, and we decided that it would be valuable to build in some strategies to help the students to reflect on their own work. We also talked about changes for the next cycle. The students made it very clear that they did not find the four steps for negotiation very useful. In fact several students said they were boring. I found that they took too long and they did tend to be a bit tedious. Vanessa and I discussed alternative strategies for introducing the negotiation in the next cycle. We thought it might be worth directing them towards a group activity, rather than individual activities. This was largely

because we thought that it would be easier to organise. Vanessa and I talked about the possibility of giving students the opportunity to come up with their own questions. I had used this strategy in previous years and found that it was quite successful. I was also very conscious that the semester reports were looming on the horizon, and I felt that it was important for the students to see the connection between what we did in the classroom and the reports. I decided that we would have a class meeting to discuss the informative writing, and negotiate the way that we would organise the task. I was hesitant about doing this since the classroom meetings that I had in the first term had not been particularly successful. In fact after one class meeting early in the year I wrote in my journal:

I've been reading Carol Jones' chapter in the PEEL book. Her comments about students taking some control over their own learning resonate with me. She talks of the reaction of the students being contrary to what she expected and used the image of a battle field (Jones, 1986). I haven't quite felt that it's a battlefield but I can certainly see what she means. I have similar concerns about classroom control and my class has definitely become more rowdy and seemingly out of control. I can have a 'well controlled' class if I choose to keep a tight rein on what goes on and its very easy to justify doing that but I keep asking myself is this really the way to go? I feel very ambivalent about it but I think all in all I don't believe it's the most productive way of operating in the classroom [My Journal – cycle 1].

Consequently, I went ahead with the class meeting. I set up the room in a circle, and we had a discussion about the informative writing. The class came up with a range of suggestions for informative pieces, but not a lot of agreement. I spent a lot of time wondering about how to organise the activity. I'd been thinking about it, I didn't want to say they can have choice, but remove it when it didn't suit what I thought should happen. I needed to find a way to manage the activity if everyone chose their own topic. I didn't want to repeat the process that the students had found boring in the first cycle, but I needed some way of negotiating the way in which we would proceed. I decided to try negotiating individually with each student. I realised

that this would be difficult, but thought it would be worth trying. In the next section I will outline the way in which cycle 2 proceeded and the student reactions to it.

Cycle 2 Informative Writing

The introduction of the second cycle was delayed by a number of interruptions to class. I was involved with organising students to compete in the local eisteddfod, and this caused me to miss a number of classes, which made continuity a problem. It was really difficult when I had to leave work for a replacement teacher who did not know the class. Another interruption was caused by a student free day, when all the teaching staff was involved in a Professional Development day run by the local Catholic Education Office. The Professional Development day focused on teaching for a range of abilities and we discussed Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles. Quite a lot of what we spoke about was connected with what I was doing in my class. This professional development day re-focused my thoughts, and I began to wonder if I should be asking how I could cater for the different learning styles and abilities. I was thinking that negotiation was not sufficient in itself to increase motivation there was much more to it than that.

We eventually began the informative writing assignment, and at a class meeting decided that we would spend the double period each week working on this activity. The other two English periods would be used for other non-negotiated English tasks. We negotiated our dates for completion, and agreed that an evaluation of the activity would be included with the finished piece. I had expected that this activity would be a fairly short one, but the topics that the students chose meant that they had to do quite a lot of research and so it took longer than we originally

anticipated. Although I had some concerns about how I would manage the activity, it worked remarkably smoothly. As I have said, I did not want to use the negotiating process in the same way as I had in the first cycle, but I did want to continue to negotiate with the students. I decided to try using a handout which would allow students to write down their ideas (Appendix K). I organised the class so that I could speak to individual students or small groups, while other students were involved with their wide reading task. A note in my journal after that lesson reads:

I spent the lesson talking to individual students about their assignments. Although I had thought that this might be difficult to manage it actually worked quite well. They all seem very keen to get started on the research for their informative pieces. Some students have chosen to work alone while others have chosen to work in groups [My Journal – cycle 2].

The range of topics was quite varied and the students, for the most part, seemed really keen and interested. However, I do not want to give the impression that all was perfect. My journal notes highlighted both the positive aspects of this activity and my concerns:

Susie and Alice had a note to go to visit the local R.S.P.C.A. Susie's mother picked them up and took them. I'm really pleased with their progress. Alice, in particular, is showing a lot more interest than she has before. They organised this without any prompting from me which I think is a really good sign of their motivation to complete the project. Colin was away today but the other three in that group seemed to be interested and focused. I'm concerned about the groups that are doing profiles on their friends; they seem to be doing very little productive work. Lawrence and Ian are the other two who concern me. They don't seem to be able to organise themselves at all [My Journal – cycle 2].

The following lesson I noted:

The projects seem to be going fairly well. I'm still a bit concerned about Lawrence who is still finding it difficult to apply himself. We'll have to see what he comes up with. I spoke to Ian about his work and told him that I'd seen the DVD cover that he made in his Information Technology class and how impressed I was – he seemed to be quite motivated by that [My Journal – cycle 2].

A highlight of that lesson was when:

Frances and Brenda were looking at Pandas via a live camera on the internet it was great – everyone crowded around to have a look. The whole class was very excited and interested in what Alice and Brenda were doing. Working in the computer room seems to be very motivating [Journal – cycle 2].

For this activity our audience was the class, and students presented their informative pieces in various ways. Some students made a booklet, some gave a speech, and others prepared power point presentations. Susie and Alice presented their written information and photographs, which they had taken when they visited the RSPCA. Alice used the college dark room to process the photographs herself. I was really excited to see Alice showing initiative, particularly since her mother had told me that she had always found English difficult. Everyone, except for Lawrence, finished on time. Almost all had done a good job, and the evaluations indicated that they had thought about what they had done and, for the most part, seemed to be quite engaged with the task. It was really exciting to read the comments that the students made in their evaluations of their work. It was also encouraging to see students making constructive comments about how they had worked, and how they might improve. I gave the students five guide questions for their evaluation, and the following is Susie's written evaluation of her informative writing assignment:

What have you learned about the topic?

In this topic I have learnt that the R.SP.C.A does a terrific job for the community and animals. We found out when and where the animal shelters began in Australia. The different sorts of animals that go through the shelters and what work volunteers and inspectors have to do.

What have you learned about informative writing?

Informative writing has to be factual writing and we needed to do a lot of research to find interesting facts.

How well do you think you have worked?

I think that Alice and I worked well. We planned everything and it all went well.

What have you liked best about the topic?

The thing that I liked best about this topic was going to the R.S.P.C.A shelter and taking photos of the animals there. We talked to the owner and listened to the information she told us about the shelter.

How could you improve your work in this topic?

Alice and I could improve on this topic by improving on the presentation of our power point [Written evaluation – cycle 2].

It is interesting to note that the part of the assignment that Susie enjoyed the most involved activity, and the visit to the RSPCA shelter was clearly a highlight of the assignment. Comments from Susie's journal during the cycle, demonstrated the way in which she and her partner engaged actively in their project. She wrote:

So far on the assignment Alice and I have researched the RSPCA and have contacted them asking for help. We are working on a way to get to the RSPCA in Warrnambool so that we can take photos and get more information. Our ideas on that are that we go on the 22nd (Thursday) during the two periods of English. My mum is going to take us there [Susie – cycle 2].

Susie and Alice showed considerable initiative in organising their excursion to the local RSPCA shelter. They made use of the technology to send an e-mail to make an appointment, and organised with a parent to collect them from school and take them to conduct their research. When I interviewed Susie at the end of the informative writing cycle, she highlighted the aspects that she enjoyed about this task:

Teacher: What about the informative writing, what did you think about that?

Susie: Well it's fun because me and Alice went to the RSPCA. We got to talk to them to find out more stuff instead of just researching from books.

Teacher: Hmm

Susie: So that was good.

Teacher: Do you talk about it at home much, what you do?

Susie: A little bit, not heaps.

Teacher: You must have explained what you were doing because your mum came and took you. What did she think about it?

Susie: Yeah she thought it was different instead of just doing it at school.

Teacher: So if you were going to do another unit like that a narrative or an informative would you make any changes to the way it was done?

Susie: No I thought it was good the way we did it. It wasn't all in class we had to go out...

Teacher: Everyone didn't get to go out did they?

Susie: Oh in the narrative they did.

Teacher: What about the informative, everyone didn't get to go out?

Susie: I think everyone had fun though 'cause most people worked in partners.

Teacher: Is that a good idea, partners?

Susie: Yes. It's easier.

Teacher: Why is it easier?

Susie: 'Cause you don't have to like research all of it. You like split it in half and some research some and it looks better as well presentation 'cause you have different ideas [Interview – cycle 2].

Susie's comments highlight her belief that working with a partner is important, and she also emphasises the fact that she believed everyone had fun because they worked with a partner. This aspect of working with a partner supports the view that learning is a shared activity (Sumara & Davis, 1997).

Other students showed similar enthusiasm for the research that they were pursuing. Their journal comments during the activity indicated their interest and ability

to work collaboratively. They also indicated that working with others was important to them. Some of these comments are presented below:

I think we've worked well in our group because in our group we help each other [Trevor – cycle 2].

Our group has done a really good job and we are making progress [Elizabeth – cycle 2].

Everyone is contributing towards our project [Graham – cycle 2].

In my informative writing I've been collecting information and writing about snakes. It is very interesting [Geoffrey – cycle 2].

It will be really interesting to be able to present the project as a power point presentation on the computer. I really enjoy adding sounds, pictures, animations and a lot of different fonts and backgrounds [Colin – cycle 2].

I am enjoying this project. It is really interesting [Alice – cycle 2].

It has been annoying because we have not been able to get sounds. We will have to see if it works on the schools computers because there is a different version on my computer [Heather – cycle 2].

Student comments in their journals at the end of cycle 2 were also positive, and showed ability to reflect on what they had done. I had been encouraging them to use their journals to reflect on their work and think about how they might improve.

The following are some of the comments that were made:

I think I did good work this semester. I went pretty OK on my assignment but I could have put more effort into the presentation which was a little rushed [Colin – cycle 2].

I have worked well and productively [Brenda – cycle 2].

I think I'm doing pretty well with informative writing [Rosemary – cycle 2].

I took a lot of time and effort on my assignments. I think I could improve by making my essays more interesting [Frances – cycle 2].

At the end of the cycle I interviewed some students, and asked them for their views about the informative writing pieces they had completed. Most of the

responses were very positive about being able to choose their own topics, however there were some students who found having choice difficult. Denise and Heather both commented on the difficulty they found in choosing their own topics, and suggested that there is a need for some direction:

Sometimes it's good to have total choice but if you don't have an idea it's hard. I suppose like if the teacher said it's to be on TV shows that's still a choice but it's giving you a boundary [Heather - interview cycle 2].

I found it a bit hard when you gave us a choice. I thought that maybe you should have given us like we could have had animals or sport or something. Cause when you've got a big range it's hard to choose anything [Denise – interview cycle 2].

The more positive comments echoed those that were made during the first cycle when students expressed a desire to use computers. Graham voiced this when he said:

I enjoyed the informative writing because we could use the computers to make a power point presentation. We don't really use computers much in other subjects [Interview – cycle 2].

Meredith also commented on the use of computers:

The informative writing was pretty good. We went to use the computer and doing the presentation [Interview – cycle 2].

Other comments that students made indicated the importance that they attached to having some choice in what they did. I was particularly pleased when Ian, who had previously shown little interest, wrote:

I am happy with this task, very happy [Journal - cycle 2].

Colin gave more detailed information in his journal entry which read:

I like the fact that we get so much freedom in what we do for a project, how we go about researching information and also how we present the information as an informative piece [Journal – cycle 2].

While Julia spoke of choice giving her variety and interest:

It's good that we got to choose our subject because we have a larger variety to choose from and we can choose something we are interested in which is good [Journal – cycle 2].

Geoffrey's comment highlighted his view that having a say in what he did was important to him:

Teacher: Tell me about choice in English. Do you have choice?

Geoffrey: Yes. We get free speech and stuff and it's better than last year.

Teacher: In what way?

Geoffrey: Last year we had Mrsand she said do this and do it now. But now we can have a say in what we do instead of the teacher telling us constantly.

Teacher: Why do you think that's better?

Geoffrey: Because we get free speech in what we do and we craft it how we want to do it [Geoffrey – interview cycle 2].

My reflections at the end of cycle 2

At the end of the second cycle I re-read the journals and the interviews that I had conducted during, and at the end of, the cycle. I spoke to Jane about some of the issues that students were raising, and we talked about how I would address them in the third cycle. It was clear from the student responses that they appreciated the opportunity to have some choice in the task that they would complete. This supported the view that giving students some control will enhance their learning (Boomer, 1978; Doddington et al., 1999; Passe, 1996). It was also clear that some students found it difficult, and needed some boundaries within which to choose. I realised that I would need to address this aspect in the next cycle. Other things that the students indicated

were positives were the use of planning, and evaluating their work. The journal entries that I have just referred to also indicated that the students were developing the ability to evaluate their participation, and make suggestions about how they might improve their work. Other key factors that came from the journals and the interviews were the importance of activity, variety, and having some say in what they did. Once again the use of computers was valued by the students. I also found it interesting to see students writing about enjoying the work and being happy with it. This seemed to me to be significant, because their comments about English at the beginning of the year had been very negative about writing. Now, at the end of the second negotiated cycle, students were making very different comments about their writing tasks.

My concern now was to find ways to include these aspects of choice, that included variety, activity, planning and evaluation, into the framework of the next writing cycle. The final cycle was to be implemented towards the end of the second semester, so I had some time to think about what might be appropriate. The first part of the semester was spent in completing work on the set text (Appendix L), and other activities that were part of the Year 8 course work. During this time I thought a lot about the kinds of things the students were saying. I had intended for the next writing task to be a descriptive piece, but I was finding it difficult to think of descriptive writing tasks that would allow me to give students some choice, some variety and some activity. I was also conscious of the need for an authentic audience, which was also seen by the students as important. Furthermore, I needed to involve the students in negotiating the task. Towards the end of third term I had what could be described as a serendipitous moment. I went to class on a Monday afternoon and found that the students had been given course description booklets from which they were to choose their elective subjects for Year 9. They were very anxious to ask me about the various

subjects. This led to a conversation about the college, and what was offered at the upper levels. Since the college is on two campuses the junior students are not familiar with what happens in senior classes. A note in my journal for that day reads:

They are currently making course selections for next year so it's something that is at the front of their minds at the moment. I should be able to capitalise on this interest [My journal – pre cycle 3].

I realised that this could be a way into our next writing task. I had been re-reading Boomer's book (Boomer, 1992), and was interested in Jo-Anne Reid's (1992) article about negotiating education. She used the topic "Kids in Schools" with a group of Year 9 students. Reid's students researched various aspects of school life and presented their work to a group of students at a nearby primary school. I did not want to replicate Reid's (1992) study, but I believed that the idea of using school as a topic could be a possibility. As I thought about this I recalled that at the in-service that had delayed the introduction of cycle 2, we had been given an assignment that dealt with school. Fortunately I was able to find it, and it seemed to be an ideal starting point. I decided that I would modify the assignment and used it for cycle 3 (Appendix M).

I now move into a discussion of how we implemented cycle 3, which I called School - Then and Now.

Cycle 3 – School - Then and Now

Again, I needed to find a different way of implementing the negotiation process, and I had the idea of giving the students the task of writing a speech about the school and present it to the class. My thought was that it would give them the opportunity to write down what they already knew in a more interesting way than

simply listing points on the whiteboard. I decided that, as I had done in the previous cycle, I would negotiate with individual students about what they would choose to do, and how they would choose to work. I decided that we would negotiate our audience as a class, after students had negotiated their activities with me. My journal notes outlined the beginning of the process:

My plan for today is to start the next cycle of negotiation. What I'm going to do is remind them of what they wrote in their short speeches about school. I'll ask them to work in pairs or groups to brainstorm what they want to find out about education and their school.

After students had brainstormed in small groups they presented their ideas to the class. The things they said were different from what I had expected. It was interesting that they were concerned with how much money the college has. They questioned why the local state school has so many more facilities than we do. Other things they were interested in were the different subjects available to them. This was perhaps not surprising since they were in the process of choosing subjects for next year. Two girls want to know about V.C.E. and University. We don't usually talk about this in Year 8 but it seems from their questions that it's an area they want to know about. Another group want to know about work experience and another group were asking questions about what the principal does. They were also asking me about what I did at school and what I had to do to be a teacher [My Journal – cycle 3].

The following lesson I gave out the assignment sheet and we discussed the topics, and I gave students some time to talk with each other about what tasks they would like to do, and how they would like to work. The assignment was designed to cater for a range of abilities and interests. It also gave a number of points for each task. We negotiated that each student would gather 30 points. They would also choose whether they worked alone, or with partners, or in a group. It was agreed that they would make a plan, and that all work would be drafted. The class also agreed that it would be valuable to evaluate the work at the end. There were a number of suggestions about audience, and we finally agreed that the audience for this task would be the students' parents. We would organise an evening when the parents

would be invited to come to the college, and students would present their finished work to them.

To my surprise the students seemed quite keen about the idea of inviting their parents, and made suggestions in their journals about how we should organise the evening. The following three comments are an example of the kind of suggestions they made:

I think we could present our work in the library [Trevor – cycle 3].

We could have the presentation night in the Hall and use the overhead projector for the power points. Halfway through the night we could have an intermission and then eat the snacks [Graham – cycle 3].

My idea for the presentation night is that we have tables and then explain to the parents about our assignment [Julia cycle 3].

The following week was disrupted, with a number of students going off early for holidays. This created some difficulties with continuity, but we managed to get plans completed for most students. As I had done with the second cycle, I organised the class so that I was able to speak with individual students while the others were completing their wide reading activity. The student plans showed that students had chosen a wide variety of tasks, and most students had chosen to work with others, although some did choose to work alone.

Prior to the students beginning their assignments I introduced the topic through two pictures of school in the 1800's and read an extract from Jane Eyre. Both the pictures and the extract were taken from an old text book that I happened to find buried on a shelf, obviously very unused but perfect for this assignment (Jones, 1978). I also invited one of the teachers, who had been at a rural country school, to talk about his experiences. Both of these activities seemed to interest the students, as can be seen from some of the comments in their journals at the end of the year. Kevin

wrote, “Mr Frame’s speech was quite interesting. I think this assignment is very interesting itself” [Kevin’s journal – cycle 3]. My own journal note at this time also indicated the interest that students showed:

Today I read the class an extract from Jane Eyre. The purpose was to give them some background on schools of the past. I also found some photographs of schools at the end of the 19th century. We analysed the photographs and compared them with schools of today. I was amazed at the interest, particularly from Mary. She is usually very quiet and doesn’t talk, so the fact that she asked numerous questions was really exciting. At the end of the class I said to her “you’ve asked lots of questions today” she responded with “it’s interesting” [My Journal – cycle 3].

Initially it had been decided that the students would spend two of their four English periods each week working on the assignment tasks. However, it soon became clear that we needed more time, and the task spread into the other two periods. I had organised with David to come and observe the classes, but he was available only for two of the four periods. I found it really good to have someone observing, and David made suggestions that helped with the organisation. Since all of the students were working on different activities it became quite hectic. My journal indicates this as I wrote:

It’s really tiring!!!! It’s not hard to see why teachers resort to transmission it’s so much easier to manage. Having such a range of activities going on is really exhausting. It also means a lot of noise and it’s easy to feel out of control. But it seems worth it when you see the difference in some students. Ian is a case in point he has 3 interviews done and Mary is actually animated. [My Journal – cycle 3].

As the assignment progressed, it became increasingly busy, and the students seemed to have a real sense of purpose about what they were doing. They were very conscious of their audience, and of the need to complete the tasks in time for the presentation. David wrote his reflections on his observations of the class, and the

following comment indicates his view that the students were engaged in their work.

He also commented on their enthusiasm:

The students appeared to be very engaged with their topics. Their enthusiasm was obvious when speaking to them. They were also happy to show their work to me and obviously took great pride in what they were doing [David – written reflection, cycle 3].

As in the earlier cycles, we had difficulty in accessing the computers when we needed them. This was a source of frustration to some students because it meant that they couldn't complete pieces of work that they had planned. However, the tasks were finally finished on time, and the presentation night arrived. At the end of the assignment the students completed an evaluation, and one of the questions asked students to reflect on their time management. Brenda's comment highlighted the way in which many of the students worked on this assignment when she wrote:

Susie and I were determined to finish so each English lesson we used our time well in the computer room typing up and completing drafts and handing in final copies [Brenda written evaluation – cycle 3].

Heather's evaluation echoed the views of Brenda as she wrote:

We organised and used our time effectively throughout the course of making the video. We finished with one day to go, which meant we had extra practice time to learn our script [Heather written evaluation – cycle 3].

David also commented on the way in which the students worked on the assignment saying:

Overall, what I observed in this classroom was a vibrant, fully engaged, learning community. Even though there was the possibility of getting away with doing very little most of the students rose to the challenge, because what they were working on had some relevance to their lives and was meaningful to them [David – written reflection at end of cycle 3].

I was delighted that 22 of the 25 students in the class attended the presentation night with either one or both of their parents. Some of the students' siblings also attended. The students were impressed and happy that the principal and some of the

teachers came to see their work. We organised the evening so that each group set up their work on a table. Some students made presentations, and then the audience was able to walk around and look at the work, and talk to the students about it. At the end of the evening we provided supper, and people mingled and chatted.

When I asked the students to reflect on the effect of having an audience some of the comments were:

I had to make the presentation a priority as well as the content [Graham – written evaluation cycle 3].

I think the audience like my work because about 80 percent of the audience looked at my work [Trevor – written evaluation cycle 3].

Having an audience made everyone work harder because other people would be looking and reading our work [Julian – written evaluation cycle 3].

It made me do a better job because people would see and judge it [Martin – written evaluation cycle 3].

You felt more important rather than just giving Mrs Sproston some sheets [Veronica – written evaluation cycle 3].

Having an audience was good because then lots of people get to see your work, not just teachers and classmates [Rosemary - written evaluation cycle – 3].

David's notes sum up the presentation night very well. He wrote:

The 'Presentation Night' was a huge success with most of the students' parents attending on the night. The students took great pride in their presentations and the standard was very high. The parents I spoke to afterwards said they were 'pleasantly surprised' at what the students had achieved in a relatively short period of time. The fact that the students had an audience in mind for their work, and that audience was 'real', must have helped with their motivation [David – written reflection at the end of cycle 3].

As I reflected on the assignment and the presentation night, I wrote in my journal:

It was a very demanding exercise for us all but I believe it was well worth it. The work that students completed was of a really good quality and I believe they learned a lot [My journal – cycle 3].

I had wondered about the idea of the presentation night, and thought that the students might not be interested in coming to school in their own time. I also wondered about how they would react to the idea of having their parents come and see what they were doing, particularly, since adolescent students tend not to want their parents to know what is going on at school. However, I was pleasantly surprised at the response from the students, and a comment in my journal indicates this:

I had expected that the students might offer some resistance but they didn't. In fact they seemed really keen to show their work [My journal – cycle 3].

I also wrote about the presentation night:

The presentation night seemed to go really well twenty-three of the twenty-six in the class were present. The students did a really good job and everyone was happy. We videotaped the night and some of the shots during supper were very revealing. There was a lovely shot of a father tussling his son's hair after looking at his work.

The parents' comments were very positive and they seemed to appreciate the opportunity to see what their children had done. One parent commented that they "don't get to know what's going on like they did at primary school so this was good" [My Journal – cycle 3].

My Reflections at the End of Cycle 3

As I reflected on the ways in which the students responded to this assignment it was clear to me that for most of the students their experiences in this English class had been positive ones. It was rewarding to see the responses that students made in their journals, their evaluations of their work, and the interviews that they participated in. The differences between the responses at the beginning of the year when, for the most part, students were expressing dislike for English classes and perceiving them as

boring and inactive, to the end of the year, when students were showing interest and enjoyment in what they were achieving in the classroom, was really exciting for me.

A section of a reflective interview that I did with Heather is characteristic of the responses of the students:

Teacher: What was it like doing that last assignment?

Heather: The school one?

Teacher: Yes.

Heather: It was really good, yeah. I loved it so much cause I dunno we all got into it because we knew there was going to be a night at the end of it we all worked towards something. Instead of like just presenting it or giving it up to you and that's all really we had to work to make it the best we possibly could for our parents cause they had to see it. No, I really loved that so much....no I thought it was really good. We worked well together and yeah that was probably one of the best things I've enjoyed last year. And I think because we did a video it allowed us to explore kind of different ways of doing things. Like the whole class, some people went and interviewed people and they perhaps hadn't done that before and it just allowed us to kind of broaden our English skills and speaking to other people as well. It really helped.

Teacher: What was it like being allowed to go out of the classroom to conduct interviews?

Heather: I think it taught us responsibility because normally, you know, the teacher tells us you have to do this and do it now. And because we had the responsibility on our selves to get the work done and we had to turn up for the interview and make the arrangement for the interview or to go and see someone, do you know what I mean?

Teacher: Mmm.

Heather: It really was on our shoulders whether we wanted to commit to it or not. We did commit to it and...

Teacher: Do you think everyone committed to it?

Heather: Hmm I think pretty much everybody did. I can't really think ...cause even say perhaps even Malcolm or...do you know what I mean?

Teacher: Mmm

Heather: I think they even did you know, kind of got into it and everything. And it helps with a partner as well most of us did it in groups and we

all kind of say motivated each other like saying “come on we have to get it done”. No I think it helped [Interview – end of study].

Towards Chapter 5

In Chapter 4 I have presented the story of the way in which negotiation was introduced into my Year 8 English class. The three writing cycles were discussed and student responses were used to demonstrate their lived experience as they were involved in negotiating writing tasks. I also used my journal comments as a means of reflecting upon my experiences of the classroom as I negotiated with the students. As I pointed out in chapter 2, the research indicates that involvement and control seem to be significant needs of young adolescents (Yair, 2000). Student choice and giving students responsibility for their own learning was also shown to be important. These results confirm those of other Middle Years of Schooling studies (Cumming, 1996; Kiddey & Robson, 2001). The literature also suggests that inviting students to become actively involved in contributing to their own learning will result in a greater degree of commitment and motivation for those students (Boomer, 1978; Cumming, 1996). Many of the comments from students involved in this study support these assertions.

Further discussion of student comments will be the focus of Chapter 5, as I present in more detail the experiences of selected students. These case studies will give a richer, more detailed, account of the experiences of the classroom, and of their reflections about participation in the study. In Chapter 6 themes that emerge from the data will be examined in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER 5

FIVE LIVED EXPERIENCES

Introduction

Chapter 4 presented the story of the implementation of three action research cycles in a Year 8 English class. It gave a broad overview of the ways in which the class operated, and used a range of data to give the reader a picture of the students' perceptions of their English classes before, during, and after the action cycles. The data were used to demonstrate the way in which students responded to being involved in the negotiation process. In this chapter I re-examine the data through the lived experiences of five students who were members of the class.

All of the students in 8XW have valuable stories to tell and I would very much like to include them all. Word limits, however, do not allow this and thus a choice must be made. I have chosen the five students because I believe that they give a representative view of the class, as seen through their reflections on the action research cycles. Their five descriptions will provide a deeper and richer picture of the lived experiences of these five students. In the next section I begin the individual stories of Veronica, Heather, Trevor, Julian, and Malcolm.

Veronica

Initial Responses

Veronica is a cheerful, friendly student who has a history of high achievement in English. She is generally recognised by teachers as being a highly motivated

student. When I asked the class to write in their journals at the beginning of 2003, her comments about English were generally positive. However, she did make some comments that presented a negative response. She said that she liked reading and speaking in Year 7 English classes but disliked writing and making up stories. Veronica's reasons for her dislike of these aspects of English were that she believed she was really bad at creative writing. A comment in her first journal entry is indicative of her perceptions of her ability in this area. She wrote:

I dislike writing because I am really bad at it. If I could change one thing in English it would be writing stories I dislike them so much [Journal – cycle 1].

Veronica's perception of her ability, or lack of ability, creates for her a negative reaction to the task of creative writing. As a high achieving student Veronica is concerned about the possibility of failure and would, if she were able, avoid creative writing. Veronica's response supports the view that students in early adolescence are concerned about the possibility of failure. This is exacerbated by the fact that they also see their ability as something internal and less affected by effort than they did in their primary years (Anderman & Maehr, 1994).

The challenge for me as the teacher was to provide writing tasks that would help Veronica to believe that she was able to successfully complete creative writing tasks. As I explained in Chapter 4, the first action research cycle that we pursued in the class was the narrative writing cycle, where students created picture books which they read to the local primary school students.

Veronica's Responses during First Semester

Veronica's response to this task showed a change from her earlier comments.

The following is a section from an interview that I conducted with Veronica at the end of the first action research cycle:

Teacher: What did you think of the children's book?

Veronica: Yeah I thought that was fun. I liked writing and reading and drawing. I liked to see their faces.

Teacher: What did you think about the way we did that? Do you remember that process we used where we put down what we know, what we need to know, how do we find out? What did you think of that?

Veronica: That was good 'cause it taught me more about that I had to do and I understood it a lot easier than I would with other teachers. Like they just set out work and you helped us go through it and I understood it a bit better [Interview – cycle 1].

In this extract Veronica has changed her view of writing and now she tells us that she “liked writing”. This is in direct contrast to earlier, when she had said that she disliked writing. Here she speaks not only of writing, but connects the writing with the reading and drawing that formed part of the task. This connectedness of the various aspects of the task was obviously important to Veronica, and highlights the holistic nature of learning (Davis et al., 1996). Veronica also makes a point about the importance of audience; when talking of reading to the primary school children, she tell us that she “liked to see their faces” [Interview – cycle 1]. This comment not only indicates the importance of the relationships that developed during the visit to the primary school, but also shows the value of the interaction between Veronica and the children to whom she presented her work. As I talked more with Veronica about the activity [Interview - cycle 1] she indicated that having an audience not only affected her, but she felt that the whole class made more effort when they were writing for the children:

Teacher: What about the picture books do you think having an audience made a difference?

- Veronica: That was good because the little kids' faces light when you go out to the school.
- Teacher: And do you think people worked more on that than if they had just been writing a story for the teacher to read?
- Veronica: I think with the illustrations and stuff they would put in more time. But I thought everyone's stories were good [Interview – end of study].

The value of a real audience for this task was considerable, and confirms the view of Kruse, Maxwell & Spooner (1998), that “students particularly value their learning when the work they are doing is valued by others both within and beyond the classroom” (p. 74).

Veronica's response to the question about the process that was used in this cycle demonstrates her view that the process helped her to better understand the requirements of the task. She says “you helped us go through it and I understood it a bit better” [Interview – end of study]. The importance of the interaction between the student and the teacher is evident in this comment, and supports the enactivist view that the interaction between teacher and student becomes the occasion for learning to occur (Davis et al., 1996).

As the year progressed Veronica's journal entries became more of a conversation, and much of what she wrote was not school related. Through this conversation I learned much about her interests and concerns. I was able to respond to her entries and together we built a positive relationship. The importance of such a positive relationship between student and teacher has been identified in the literature (Kiddey & Robson, 2001; Russell, 2001). Veronica also made some comments about the informative writing piece. She talked about the way in which she worked in a group, saying “our group has done a really good job and we are making progress” [Journal cycle 2]. She also commented on the way in which the class participated in

the negotiation process, with “I like how in this class you let us have a bit of participation in what we want to do” [Journal cycle 2]. Veronica’s comments echo those of other students who, as I pointed out in Chapter 4, indicated that they enjoyed working with others. They also support the literature, which asserts that adolescent students benefit from working with their peers and that students, working together “become part of a community of learners” (Kiddey & Robson, 2001, p.30).

Veronica’s Reflections After the Year Ended

In January 2004 I conducted an interview with Veronica, in which I talked with her about her experiences in the English class in 2003. I conducted a further interview in August of 2004. Both of these interviews allowed Veronica to reflect on activities that had taken place in 2003, and her comments provide more insights into the effects of negotiation in this English class.

Teacher: So when you make suggestions in the class how important is it to you to have someone respond to that and do something about it?

Veronica: Hm. Yeah it’s good like if someone listens to what I think and then they go ahead and do it I know I’ve actually put something into the class that someone else wants to do.

Teacher: So for example if you made a suggestion and I responded to it by changing something in the classroom how would you feel about that?

Veronica: I’d feel good that you actually listened to me and didn’t think “Oh there she goes saying something else again”, that you listened to what I have to say.

Teacher: How well do you think I’ve responded to your suggestions this year?

Veronica: Very good. You’re a very good teacher and I enjoyed having you for my teacher. You listen to us you don’t just think I’m the teacher I’ll set everything down. You want to see what we have to say.

Teacher: And is that different to other teachers?

Veronica: Yeah most of the time it's "I'm the teacher you're the student do what I say" [Interview – end of study].

Veronica's comments here indicate the importance that she attaches to being heard in the classroom. She indicates that being able to voice an opinion, and have that opinion taken seriously and acted upon, gives her a feeling of being valued. Veronica sees her opinion as having value to others in the class, and she feels that she has made an active contribution to the group. She also values the teacher who is prepared to listen without judging her. Veronica's views confirm the findings of Rudduck and Demetriou (2003) that being allowed to voice an opinion is important to students. Furthermore, taking student experiences seriously and responding to them creates for the student a sense of self worth. Veronica's sense of self worth was reinforced by the teacher's listening and interest in what she had to say.

In this interview Veronica also expresses the opinion that the teacher was important to her learning, a view that is supported by Kiddey and Robson (2001). They argue that, while students need to be given the opportunity to make decisions, they continue to need some help from the teacher. Veronica also highlights the importance of collaboration, and the way in which she perceived the class as a group rather than a collection of individuals. The following section of the interview demonstrates this.

Teacher: What kind of things helped you learn in English last year?

Veronica: Hm..You explaining things well and I want to know something I can just ask and stuff like that. And you will go into and explain.

Teacher: Anything else?

Veronica: The whole class helps together.

Teacher: Tell me more about that.

- Veronica: Oh like if we're doing something that we need to get done then we'll get it done we won't just leave it to the last minute. It's like a whole class thing. We work as one not as individuals.
- Teacher: Is that true of all classes?
- Veronica: It depends what the class is. I know we all enjoy English but there's some classes that we don't enjoy and stuff.
- Teacher: So is there a difference in how you worked in those classes?
- Veronica: There isn't...I think it's sort of like...with you we're doing more written work and stuff and in science it's been practical work and stuff like that and we're in groups and stuff and even though we're in groups with you we always come together as a whole to discuss it [Interview – end of study].

In this extract Veronica provides her view of the way in which she perceived the class as working together as a team. Her comments highlight the point that while working in small groups was important, she believes that coming together as a whole group was also an important aspect in the development of a classroom community. In her words the class group “work as one not as individuals”.

Veronica's comments confirm the view of Kiddey and Robson (2001) that “collaboration and co-operation can be developed and refined through participation in small and large group activities” (p. 30).

Veronica's Reflections on Cycle 3

During the interviews I asked Veronica to reflect on the work that she did for the final negotiated cycle. In her reflections Veronica compares her experiences in English with her experiences in other subjects saying:

I think I've done more in English than in other subjects. We're always on an assessment task or something like that. Or you're telling us to do something about our books or we're going around to find information in the library or something like that...

You let us talk an [sic] stuff but we still get our work done but in other classes we've just got to sit down or our teacher will stand up the front and just read stuff to us and we have to sit there for a whole period and listen to what the teacher's saying and sometimes we've got to take notes or something ... If it's for a period of time I sort of float off [Interview – end of study].

In these two responses Veronica highlights the need for activity in her learning. As pointed out in Chapter 4, other students articulated the need for activity and the implication seemed to be that lack of activity was connected with boredom. The importance of activity for students in the Middle Years of education has been identified in the literature (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Kiddey & Robson, 2001; Kruse, 1998). This comment from Veronica also alludes to the need for variety of activities in the classroom, and Flutter & Rudduck (2004) identify “active lessons with a variety of learning tasks” as an aspect of what makes a good lesson (p. 79).

I asked Veronica how she felt about being given choices in the classroom.

The following section of the interview outlines her response:

Teacher: So what difference does it make to you when you have choices in English?

Veronica: I feel like I'm more important than just a student. It makes me feel good about myself and stuff like that [Interview – End of study].

This response from Veronica is significant and demonstrates the value of giving students some place in the decision making processes of the classroom. Veronica's feelings about having some choice in what she does is supported by Flutter and Rudduck (2004), who argue that “we should find ways of involving pupils more closely in decisions that affect their lives in school, whether at the level of the classroom or the institution” (p. 2).

As I pointed out at the beginning of Veronica's story, she is perceived by teachers as being a highly motivated and capable student. Nonetheless, her comments

indicate that giving her some choice and responsibility in the classroom had some impact upon her feelings of self worth. This suggests that even students who appear to be committed to learning can gain from being included in decision making in the classroom.

I invited Veronica to reflect on the effect of having parents as an audience for the assignment.

Teacher: With that “School then and Now” assignment, how did having parents as an audience affect the way you worked?

Veronica: I thought it was good because I know some students don’t go home and tell their parents what they’ve done at school and stuff, and it’s good that parents came and parents see what we’ve done in our class. And the teachers.

Teacher: what difference did you notice when the class prepared work that didn’t have a specific audience?

Veronica: They had to like put up a good show for the parents and show that they were actually good at the subject.

Teacher: How did you know that?

Veronica: They tried really, really hard to get it done and getting into detail about our school. Like Heather, Meredith and Alice spent heaps of time with that video clip...and Janine and I put in a lot of time with ours we spent a couple of weekends together.

Teacher: Would you have done as much if you’d just been doing it for the teacher?

Veronica: Probably not. I would have.

Teacher: Do you think other people would have?

Veronica: I don’t think some people in our class would have tried so hard [Interview – end of study].

Here, Veronica makes the point that while she believes that she would have made as much effort without the audience, other members of the class may not have done so. Although finding real audiences for student work is a challenge for teachers,

it seems, from Veronica's viewpoint, that it is a challenge that is worth pursuing. This view is evident in the literature, which suggests that teachers need to find ways to publish students' work (Cumming, 1996; Kiddey & Robson, 2001; Mitchell, Loughran & Mitchell, 2001).

Veronica also makes the point that students are often reluctant to involve their parents in school activities, and she sees the value in having parents see what students are doing in their classes. Veronica commented further, about the presentation evening.

Teacher: And what about the night we had the presentation, how did you feel about that?

Veronica: That was really good because we were showing our parents what we'd achieved in that year...yeah and like all the parents enjoyed it because of what, like they were proud of us [Interview – End of study].

The importance of involving parents in the activities of the school has been identified as "essential to maximise schooling outcomes" (Schools Council, 1993, p. 82). Many schools have taken initiatives to increase the participation of parents in the education of their children. There is, however, still a tendency to conduct parent teacher meetings that do not provide parents with the same level of contact that they had with their child's primary school (Schools Council, 1993).

Veronica's attitude to inviting the parents of her class to a presentation of the class's work, supports the argument that involving parents is valuable. Indeed, her comments also support the view of Cumming (1996) that students in the middle years "want their 'effort' recognised by the significant adults in their life" (p. 49). Thus, the presentation evening provided both a real audience for students work and an opportunity for students to show their parents what they had achieved in their English class.

Summing Up Veronica's Experiences

Veronica's perceptions of her English class raised many of the issues that are addressed in the literature. She talked of the importance of having a voice in the classroom, and of the need to have some response to her concerns. For Veronica, having a voice gave her a sense of self worth. Veronica discussed the way in which having a variety of activities helped in her learning, and reduced the boredom that she experienced in classes where transmission was the main teaching technique. She also highlighted the importance of a real audience for her work and, in particular, the value of involving parents as part of that audience.

In the final interview with Veronica I asked her what it was like for her in that English class. Her response sums up her experience of negotiating in her Year 8 English class.

Well I really enjoyed it 'cause like we were like left, we were given like, we were more mature like we had to think of our own...and we like.. that's where I think I grew to a more mature person because I had to think about things and organise things more...And I think it worked I think we're probably more organised than we were at the start of last year because we had to organise all our...like we were given our choices and then we chose our own things [Interview – end of study].

Trevor

Initial Responses

Trevor is a quiet, conscientious student who experienced some difficulties with English in Year 7. In an interview, Trevor's mother described him as "nervous little boy" she said "English in the past for him has not been easy" [Parent interview – cycle 1].

In his initial journal entries Trevor spoke of disliking writing and re-writing, and spelling. He expressed a desire for English to be fun, with hardly any written work. Trevor's journal entries were, for the most part, brief but one entry was particularly interesting because it indicated Trevor's desire for work that was relevant to him. When asked to comment in his journal about the week's work, he wrote:

Last week I and my group partners read five books which I thought was really fun and we had a discussion after it which I really liked. But I wish we had social talk about English instead of books! Please [Journal – cycle 1].

Here Trevor expressed a desire for “social talk . . . instead of books” which, when asked, he defined as “talk what's around now, not getting it out of an English book”. This desire for something other than reading books echoed the comments of Alice, who wrote in her journal “The thing I liked the least was reading because the stories were long and I'm not a fast reader so I had to skip the end to keep up.” Trevor's desire for ‘social talk’ also confirms the literature, which says “adolescent learners love to learn real things. They want to be part of life in the real world” (Kiddey & Robson, 2001, p. 33).

Trevor's Responses During First Semester

Trevor's responses to the first action cycle were generally positive. He wrote in his journal at the end of the cycle:

The thing I liked best was the children's book. We learnt how to write especially for children. I enjoyed writing the book [Journal – cycle 1].

Further comments about the children's story were made in a reflective interview, when Trevor looked back on the year. The following is an extract from that interview:

Trevor: The children's book was good.

- Teacher: What was the best thing about that?
- Trevor: Writing up about it and the pictures.
- Teacher: What about the audience? For the children's book we had the little preps. What did you think about that?
- Trevor: Yeah they were good cause we had a group of about four preps listening to our stories and they gave you a sticker [Interview – end of study].

These reflections demonstrate Trevor's view that the activity was a positive experience for him. When I spoke with Trevor's mother [Interview – cycle 1] she confirmed that Trevor had found writing the children's story, and presenting it to the preps, a positive experience. The relevant extract from my interview with her was presented in Chapter 4.

Like Veronica, Trevor's journal entries became very much a conversation, which allowed me to gain insight into his interests and concerns. He wrote of the way in which working in a group helped him to cope with the work. At the end of the first term he wrote:

We mainly done our work in groups that I really liked. My group partners helped me when I didn't know what to do [Journal – cycle 1].

And a later journal entry, during the second cycle, reiterated his views about working in groups:

I think I've worked well in our group because in our group we help each other [Journal – cycle 2].

Trevor's focus on the group is important, because it reinforces the view that learning is a shared activity (Sumara & Davis, 1997). For Trevor, the measure of working well in his group is that the group members help each other. This sharing of

expertise within a group results in students becoming part of a community of learners (Kiddey & Robson, 2001).

Trevor's Reflections After the Year Ended

I talked with Trevor, and asked him about his experiences in his English class in 2003. In that interview Trevor reflected upon the things that he remembered from the previous year. He again made the point that he enjoyed working in groups and choosing what tasks he would do.

Teacher: What I'm interested in is what you can tell me about English last year.

Trevor: We done a lot of fun activities. Like we got to choose what we wanted to do and we got to choose when to hand it in. Yeah we got to do oral work.

Teacher: What did you think about that?

Trevor: Yeah that's really fun.

Teacher: Why was it fun?

Trevor: 'Cause you get to work in pairs.

Teacher: And why did you find that fun?

Trevor: I like working in pairs [Interview – end of study].

This focus on shared learning was a recurring theme in Trevor's comments. It demonstrates the importance for him of having someone with whom he could work. For Trevor, working in pairs or groups helped to give him the support that he needed to complete tasks. This was evident in a journal entry at the end of the first semester; he wrote "I think that I made a big improvement in my English". The importance of providing support for student learning was referred to in Veronica's story. The way in which such support is provided will, according to Kiddey and

Robson (2001), vary according to the student. In Trevor's case it seems that he values, and benefits from, the support of peers in a small group situation.

During a reflective interview at the end of the study, I asked Trevor to comment on Cycle 2. Trevor had worked with a small group of boys, and the following section of the interview gives a picture of his experiences of this activity.

Teacher: What else do you remember?

Trevor: I remember we done the assignment on...I don't remember...we did it on fast food.

Teacher: So you had a choice?

Trevor: We had to go around to restaurants like McDonald's and comment on how the food was and the service.

Teacher: And how did you decide to do that?

Trevor: The group came up with the idea.

Teacher: Not the whole class?

Trevor: No just the group.

Teacher: And how did that work out?

Trevor: Yeah it worked out pretty good I think.

Teacher: What do you think you learned from doing that?

Trevor: Just how people work in different jobs that we don't usually notice.

Teacher: How about at school, what did you learn about yourself?

Trevor: I think there was just a lot easier, all the stuff we could do.

Teacher: Having a choice?

Trevor: Yeah the choice

Teacher: Why do you think that was easier?

Trevor: 'Cause you could enjoy to do and what you're interested in.

Teacher: And what do you think about that?

Trevor: Yeah you should keep doing that because a lot of people think it's kind of good [Interview – end of study].

Trevor's responses focus on working with his group, together with the importance of choice in his learning. He makes the point that interest is a factor in his learning and connects it with enjoyment. He also points out that other students feel the same way about choosing tasks which are of interest to them. Later in the interview, I asked Trevor to tell me about his experience of Cycle 3, "School Then and Now". The following section of this chapter presents his response.

Trevor's Reflections on Cycle 3

Trevor's responses to Cycle 3 demonstrate the way in which variety and activity contributed to his learning.

Teacher: Do you remember the last big unit we did at the end of the Year? The school one?

Trevor: Yeah

Teacher: Tell me about that.

Trevor: That was a lot of fun 'cause we got to do different things about our school. Our ancestors and all that. It was fun to do that as well because we got to learn about what it was like all those years ago.

Teacher: What was the best thing about that for you?

Trevor: I liked seeing about what the schools used to look like and how they used to learn.

Teacher: Did you talk to people about your work at all?

Trevor: Yeah I talked to...we interviewed some teachers.

Teacher: How did that go?

Trevor: Yeah that was good we asked them questions about the assignment we were doing.

Teacher: So you actually went out of the classroom.

Trevor: Yeah we went out of the classroom.

Teacher: And how did that work?

Trevor: Yeah it worked. It was really good 'cause a lot of people got a lot of different ideas and we got to know what other people thought about the assignment [Interview – end of study].

In this extract we see Trevor talking about the enjoyment he got from different activities and from learning about the history of his school. He talks of learning about his ancestors, something that is relevant to him. He also talks about moving out of the classroom to interview teachers, and perceives this as having 'worked' because students were able to gain different ideas. Trevor's responses support the findings of Flutter and Rudduck (2004), which identify activity and variety as aspects of a 'good' class.

In his reflections, Trevor, like Veronica, recognised the value of having a real audience for his work. When asked whether having an audience made any difference to the way he worked, he said "Yeah, I think it does cause you put more effort into it because there's more people to see it".

In the final section of the interview I invited Trevor to give his views on what he saw as the most important aspect of the English class. His responses were directed to his views of the student journals.

Teacher: What do you think was the most important thing in the English class?

Trevor: 'Cause you feel more comfortable it was easier than last year.

Teacher: Do you have any idea why?

Trevor: Because we got to write journal entries to you.

Teacher: How did you feel about that?

Trevor: That was good because we could tell you how we're going [Interview – end of study].

For Trevor, the journals provided an avenue for him to communicate with me in what he felt to be a safe environment. The journal was a private conversation between Trevor and me, and he was comfortable because he knew that he could express his views about his work, and also how he felt. As I pointed out in Chapter 4, the journal entries were not easy for many of the students and they tended to be fairly limited in their usefulness. For Trevor, however, the opportunity to voice his opinions about his work, and his feelings about the class, was clearly important to him.

In a final discussion with Trevor, I asked him to write about his participation in the research. He wrote the following comment:

When Mrs Sproston was taping me and my thoughts about how my English class was last year she took me to the interview room. I thought that it was a good idea that she did this because I got to tell her what I really did feel about my English class. She asked me questions like what did I think about the work? What I thought about the assignments and what I thought about the speeches we did? I think that she should do it with her future classes so they can tell her how good the English class was because I enjoyed it [Written reflection, End of Study 2004].

This reflection is significant because it demonstrates the importance of the relationship between teacher and student. Trevor is prepared to say what he ‘really’ thinks about the English class. Trevor’s willingness to say what he really feels, rather than what he believes the teacher wants him to say, indicates that he feels a certain sense of trust in the teacher. Trevor’s mother referred to this, when she talked about how Trevor coped with the narrative writing in the first cycle, saying “he feels he can go to you” [Interview – cycle 1]. There is much evidence to support the view that the teacher student relationships are fundamental to student learning (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; MYRAD, 2002; Wright, Horn & Sanders, 1997). In this study the close

listening to students, through the use of the journals and through the interviews, helped to establish positive relationships in the classroom.

Summing Up Trevor's Experiences

Trevor's experiences of English, prior to the year of the study, had been a source of some anxiety for him [Parent interview – cycle 1]. His initial journal responses indicated a dislike of written activities, and expressed a desire for relevant activities that focused on talk rather than writing. Trevor's responses focused strongly on his views of group work, which he believed assisted him in coping with the demands of the classroom. He emphasised his view that groups are effective when the group members assist each other. Trevor also spoke of his enjoyment of variety in the classroom, and of being given the opportunity to express his views. In his final comments Trevor's words emphasise the importance of a positive relationship between teacher and student.

Malcolm

Initial Responses

Malcolm is perceived by teachers as a capable student, whose behaviour is challenging and confronting. His initial journal response, when asked to write about his experience of English, was "I hated English last year". This was confirmed in an interview with Malcolm's mother in February 2004, when she said "In Year 7 he didn't like it at all but in Year 8 he did [Parent interview – end of study]].

Malcolm's initial journal comments gave his opinion about what English should be like. He, like Trevor, expressed a desire for English classes to be "fun and they should teach you in a fun way" [Journal – prior to negotiating].

Malcolm's Responses During First Semester

Malcolm's reactions to the first cycle were generally positive, although he did express dislike of the negotiation process that was used. During the narrative writing cycle, Malcolm recognised that he struggled to get the Children's book completed in time for the presentation to the primary school children. The following section of an interview that I conducted with Malcolm indicates this.

- Teacher: What about the children's book? You struggled a bit to get that done didn't you?
- Malcolm: Yeah
- Teacher: What was the problem with that?
- Malcolm: Oh, I dunno I think I just talked too much and didn't really get on with the work.
- Teacher: If we did that again what would you change?
- Malcolm: I'd get on with my work quicker and leave the talking till after.

In the same interview I asked Malcolm if he had liked anything in English in the first semester.

- Teacher: What sort of things have you enjoyed in English? What did you like best?
- Malcolm: Not sure. I liked that assignment where you got to choose topics. I liked that.
- Teacher: Why did you like that?
- Malcolm: It was just easier if you choose a topic you like. Some topics you're not interested in [Interview – cycle 1].

Malcolm's view, that choice and interest make the work easier for him, is significant when considered in the light of his mother's comment:

"In Year 7 he didn't have that belief. He thought that he couldn't do it he would say 'I'm dumb I can't do it' but in Year 8 he had that belief and he had that confidence back in himself" [Parent interview – end of study].

Malcolm's responses at the beginning of the year were fairly brief, but as the year progressed he was able to extend his responses. In an evaluation of his informative writing assignment for the Cycle 2 he wrote:

"I thought I worked the best I have worked all year because I finished all my projects before most the class finished but the main reason is that it wasn't a boring topic, it was a topic I enjoyed" [Written evaluation – cycle 2].

He also wrote in his journal, at the end of the first semester, "I thought I went good last semester I thought it was fun" [Journal – cycle 2].

In Chapter 4 I referred to students perceptions of the classroom as boring. For Malcolm, having some choice in the topic that he completed helped to reduce his sense of boredom, so that he enjoyed the task.

Malcolm's Reflections After the Year Ended

I asked Malcolm to reflect on his experiences of English in 2003. The following extract provides his views, which confirm the importance of the student teacher relationship that was referred to in Trevor's story:

Teacher: What kind of things helped you in English last year?

Malcolm: Oh just having a say. You could talk and do your work at the same time. I dunno you looked forward, you know it's Friday afternoon now I don't look forward to double English.²

² Here Malcolm compares his experiences in English classes in Year 8 with his current experiences of English in Year 9.

Teacher: And you looked forward to double English last year?

Malcolm: Yeah

Teacher: What's the difference?

Malcolm: Oh the teacher's a lot stricter and she growls at us for anything.

Teacher: So you think the teacher makes a difference.

Later in the interview Malcolm talked more about his feelings about the teacher student relationship:

Malcolm: Oh the teacher, some teachers you're comfortable around and some you aren't.

Teacher: And how does that affect you?

Malcolm: You work better with the ones you feel comfortable around 'cause the other ones they go and 'dob' to the bigger teacher and that.

Teacher: Did that happen to you?

Malcolm: Oh in Year 7 it did I had some teachers that...yeah [Interview – end of study].

Again, the importance of the teacher student relationship is shown to be of considerable significance. Malcolm acknowledges that he works better with teachers with whom he feels comfortable. His mother's comments, in the interview I conducted with her, confirmed Malcolm's view:

Mrs James: The teacher and he clashed in Year 7.

Teacher: In year 7.

Mrs James: Yes.

Teacher: Did he talk much about school?

Mrs James: About that?

Teacher: About English.

Mrs James Yes he did. He talked about it a lot he said he tried but no matter how hard he tried it just wasn't going to work [Interview – end of study].

These comments suggest that Malcolm believed that he could not change the negative relationship that he had with the teacher. This feeling is not unusual and has been identified in the literature (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004).

Malcolm's Reflections on Cycle 3

Malcolm's reflections on Cycle 3 were fairly limited in their response. He did, however, make some valuable comments about choice and audience. The following extract presents those comments:

Teacher: What did you think about the School Then and Now assignment?

Malcolm: It was pretty good but some of the topics weren't that interesting.

Teacher: What things were not interesting?

Malcolm: I'm not sure. I just remember thinking some of the things were alright but some weren't.

Teacher: The ones that you did were alright?

Malcolm: Yeah

Teacher: So you chose?

Malcolm: Yeah I chose what I wanted to do 'cause you had a wide range.

Teacher: So you had a wide range of choice. How was that?

Malcolm: That was good 'cause you just choose the things that would have like interest. You weren't just told and some were hard. I didn't choose those ones.

Teacher: You chose ones you felt comfortable with. What did you think about the audience?

Malcolm: It doesn't really worry me

Teacher: Does it make any difference to your work?

- Malcolm: Probably a bit better if parents are going to be there.
- Teacher: Why?
- Malcolm: Oh I dunno. Oh impress 'em a bit show them what you can do
[Interview – end of study].

Although Malcolm is perceived by teachers as being capable, this extract suggests that he does not share their view. He chooses tasks which he sees as being of interest, but also which he perceives as being easy. Malcolm also shares the view of other students, that having parents as an audience makes some difference to the effort they put into the work.

Summing Up Malcolm's Experiences

Malcolm's journal and interview responses were less detailed than those of other students. They did, nonetheless, give some insight into his lived experience of the Year 8 English class. It is very clear that Malcolm's relationship with some of his teachers is problematic. He perceives himself as being able to work better with teachers with whom he feels comfortable. His mother's comments reinforce this view. Malcolm also made the point that he felt that having interesting topics and choice made the work easier for him.

Although Malcolm's interview responses lacked detail, a final comment that he wrote when I asked him how he felt about being involved in the study, clearly demonstrated his feelings about learning. He wrote:

I felt important being involved in your research on how kids learn better. I hope it works because I think that people aged 10-18 learn better when they are having fun [Written reflection – end of study].

Malcolm's mother summed up the change in Malcolm when she reflected about his year:

[He had a better year last year. Oh much better, much better. More settled and he didn't have that negative response and he wasn't angry. I felt that in Year 7 he was really angry and it was probably a bit hard to sit down and talk to, whatever you said it was "no". But so much better, a lot calmer and he enjoyed it and came home and did his work. And I know because in Year 7 I had to keep on "come on sit down you've got to do that but last year "no" he would just sit down and do it [Interview – end of study].

Heather

Initial Responses

Heather is an articulate student, who is perceived by teachers as being highly motivated and capable. In her initial journal responses she indicated a strong interest in English, saying "the things that I like about English are that we get to say what we think about books" [Journal – prior to negotiating]. In pointing out her dislikes, she wrote:

The things I dislike about English are that we have to do things about the English language (e.g. verbs, nouns). We always are in the classroom so sitting there is boring. The one thing I would change would be that we did activities outside the classroom [Journal – prior to negotiating].

Heather's dislike of grammar activities was reinforced when she wrote in her journal "I didn't really enjoy doing the sheets about a book, I think it was called Mr. Fox" [Journal – Prior to negotiating]. This activity was basically a comprehension and grammar exercise, which I left for the students to complete during my absence at the Year 12 Retreat. Heather's views about this activity echoed those of other students which were reported in Chapter 4. It also echoes the perspective of students in other studies, "it's boring...take worksheets, the answers come ten minutes later anyway so why bother doing the worksheets?" (Cumming, 1996, p. 13).

Heather's Responses During First Semester

Heather's responses during first semester 2003 were fairly limited, but she did express enjoyment in reading the children's books at the beginning of the Narrative Writing unit. In her journal at the end of first term she wrote:

This term we have done many things. Our children's stories were done over a few weeks. When we finally finished our stories we got to go [to the primary school] which I think everyone enjoyed [Journal – cycle 1].

At the same time, Heather's journal comment indicated that she, like other students in the class, found the negotiating process that we used for the first cycle uninteresting. She wrote, "I didn't enjoy writing about what and how to write a kids story".

In an interview that I conducted with Heather, about her reactions to the first semester, I asked her what she thought about the informative assignment, where the students were given the opportunity to choose their own topics and the way in which they completed them. The following is her response:

It was pretty good. It was good that you could go in partners. It's good when you go in partners 'cause there's stuff that you have to do and you can kind of split in half and there's not so much you have to do and there's not the pressure. And, plus if one finishes early they can help you and you can get two people's opinions on something. It was pretty good. It was good that we got to use the computers 'cause we don't really do much computer stuff. Yeah that was pretty good and it was good that we got to read it out to the class and that [Interview – cycle 2].

In this extract, Heather covers a number of issues that were raised by other students (see Chapter 4). She presents positive views about working with her peers, and points to the value of having different opinions and being able to help each other. Kiddey and Robson (2001) make the point that "adolescent learners...learn best when they are able to clarify their thinking by bouncing ideas off each other" (p. 30).

Heather's views about working with her peers mirror the views of other students in the class, which were outlined in Chapter 4. She also talks about her liking for using computers, and of the importance she attaches to presenting her work to an audience, in this case the class.

Heather's Reflections After the Year Ended

In another interview I asked Heather to reflect upon her English class during Year 8. Her responses in this interview were detailed, and covered aspects of all three negotiated cycles. She began by talking generally about the class:

Heather: It was pretty I dunno easy going, but we seemed to always get our work done. Do you know what I mean? Like instead of just sitting writing all the time and we sort of did the same amount of work, did more work than other classes but it seemed that we had a lot more fun than other classes 'cause you were more easy to talk to, easy going. Then we got on as a class and we might all sit down together on the floor and discuss something. Do you know what I mean? [Interview – end of study].

In this extract Heather makes some pertinent points about the classroom environment and the way in which the class worked together. The indications here are that the class was able to sit down together and discuss some aspects of their learning. The implications of this are that the students felt that the environment was such that they could safely take risks. The importance of such an environment on learning has been identified by a number of writers (Boyd, 2000; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Kiddey & Robson, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2001). At the same time, Heather makes the point that as well as the class completing more work than other classes, it was fun. This emphasis upon fun is also evident in the responses of the other students in the class. Heather also made connections between discussion, interest, having a voice, and motivation. Following Heather's previous responses, I asked her what the

class discussion was like for her. The following extract from the interview gives her response:

Teacher: What was that like?

Heather: It was really good 'cause...you know I still remember it now. We don't do that this year we like listen to the teacher and I think it made it more interesting. 'Cause you kinda get bored just writing things down and sitting and reading a novel instead of actually discussing it. We don't discuss this year and last year you know we'd sit down and discuss it?

Teacher: Do you remember those meetings that we used to have where we'd sit down and talk about what we might do? All in the big group.

Heather: Oh yeah.

Teacher: What were they like?

Heather: Good because everybody got their point of view about what they wanted. And you know I think it helped motivate us because we were doing what we wanted to do rather than the teacher telling us what to do. And yeah we all like put in a bit [Interview – end of study].

In this extract, Heather confirms research that demonstrates the positive outcomes of negotiating with students (Braggett, 1997). It also reiterates the views of other students in the class, that writing and sitting tend to induce boredom, whereas involvement and choice help to motivate, so that, in Heather's words, "we all like put in" [Interview – end of study].

Heather's Reflections on Cycle 3

In the reflective interview that I conducted with Heather, I asked her to reflect upon how she felt about the presentation night that was held at the end of the School Then and Now assignment:

Teacher: What was the night like?

Heather: Yeah that was really good. I was thinking about that the other day actually. It was really good 'cause all kind of coming together as a class 'cause we've never really done that outside of school before. And with all our parents it was a really good social kind of things as well as presenting it. If you didn't feel like well you sort of knew you were in front of an audience but say you got up in front of the class and did public speaking sort of thing, we probably would have found it a bore. [It's] boring and you always do up in front of the class, a speech [but] this was kind of all different. A different environment, different people and it didn't feel like it was boring. You were still doing public speaking in front of people but it just didn't feel...like you weren't nervous.

Teacher: It was quite a big group.

Heather: Yeah. And it didn't feel...I dunno at school when the teacher says you've got to do a speech it's just so boring because we do it all the time. I dunno it was different then 'cause in our group especially 'cause we acted out parts and yeah I thought that was a really good idea [Interview – end of study].

Heather's comments here highlight the boredom that she feels when presented with repetitive activities. Her words support Cumming's (1996) views, which highlight the need for varied approaches in the classroom to "reduce adolescent criticism of the routine, boring and uninteresting aspects of schooling" (p. 43). Heather's enjoyment of the parent evening seems to be connected with doing something different.

Later in the same interview Heather talked about the issue of time, which had been raised by some students in their journal entries:

Teacher: You mentioned time, you had enough time. Somebody else mentioned time. Is time a problem in class?

Heather: Yeah I think so...in a way. Sometimes we do get enough time and we just don't use it to the best what we should. But like last year I always got things done...I dunno I mean I get things done now but last year I had enough time, it was good. Like when you gave us an assignment you gave us the due date or we worked together to find the due date whereas now, I dunno they don't necessarily give us a due date, the teachers or they say "it's due tomorrow or something?" And especially when we've got other homework and that. I think you gave us plenty

of time ‘cause say we had a double in the afternoon and you knew you had to get so much done [Interview – end of study].

The issue of giving students sufficient time to think about their work has been raised in the literature. Russell (2001) argues that:

“If students are to develop the qualities and characteristics of learning and thinking needed in the twenty-first century, they need time for sustained thinking and reflection, time for inquiry and discussion, time in which to construct deep understanding of ideas” (p. 8).

The fractured style of timetabling that is used in Secondary schools militates against giving students the time that is necessary for such deep learning to occur. Heather’s comments also allude to the difficulty she has in balancing the demands of a number of subjects.

Heather’s final comment sums up the way in which she believes that her 2003 English class has helped her in 2004:

What you taught us last year has definitely helped us this year. Just kind of planning and I dunno assessing what you’ve done. And going Oh well I can do that again. I often think back about the things that we’ve done. Like with the video, you allowed us to video tape something and that allowed me to see what film and television, and allowed me to see openings up to other subjects. Do you know what I mean? Like going off into different areas that’s helped me because I would never have the chance to use a video camera and now its kind of I can go and do like...[Interview – end of study].

Again, Heather raises many of the factors that the literature indicates are important in the middle years. She points to meta-cognitive skills, when she talks of planning and assessing what she has done, and connecting that to future learning. She also makes the connection between subjects, when she talks about choosing to make a video. She sees this as important because it gave her an opportunity was different from the usual English type activities that she had been used to. While she does not explicitly talk about variety and novelty, she is in fact implicitly alluding to such

factors. Such factors are, according to the literature, important, and should be developed during the middle years (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004).

Summing Up Heather's Experiences

Heather's lived experiences of her Year 8 English class seem to have been positive. She highlighted the importance of a supportive environment in which she felt that risks could be taken. Heather also valued having choice and varied activities, which she saw as giving interest and reducing boredom. Heather's comments indicated that involvement in decision making in the classroom, and choice of activities, helped to develop motivation. Her focus on the classroom meetings echoed Veronica's view that the class worked as a team rather than as individuals. Heather's final comment in this interview demonstrates her ability to reflect upon her own learning when she says "I think I learned a lot last year" [Interview – end of study].

Ian

Initial Responses

Ian is a quiet student who shows very little interest in any subjects, apart from computer technology and sport. His responses to classroom tasks are minimal, and demonstrate his lack of interest and enjoyment. In particular, Ian's initial journal responses indicated his dislike of English. When asked to write about his experiences of English during Year 7, he responded with the following three comments:

"I like nothing about English or when it finishes"

"I dislike almost everything"

"I would like to do nothing" [Journal – prior to negotiating].

Ian's Responses During First Semester

In an interview which I conducted with Ian in May 2003, he continued this theme with comments about his feelings towards school:

Teacher: Have you always disliked school?

Ian: Well when I was in Prep I suppose it was a bit of fun and then it started to [be] work and to get serious and I didn't like it.

Teacher: What do you not like?

Ian: Pretty much everything except sport [Interview – cycle 1].

Ian's responses were short, and it was apparent that he had little interest in the activities that were conducted in the class. Unlike the other students in the class, he did not give a positive response to the primary school visit that took place during cycle 1. At the end of first term he wrote in his journal:

What we did this term in English was mainly work. We wrote a story for preps and then we went to the primary school to read them [Journal – cycle 1.]

This response was in contrast to other students in the class who wrote in more detail about the visit to the primary school, and demonstrated their enthusiasm for the task.

Ian's Reflections After the Year Ended

As the year progressed, Ian's responses continued to be limited and fairly negative. He did, however, show some positive response to the final cycle, which was evident in the amount of work that he presented. In a second interview with Ian I asked him to reflect upon his experiences of English in the previous year. The following is a section of that interview:

Teacher: You didn't come to the parent night did you?

Ian: No. My mum was in Sydney.

Teacher: So that was why you didn't come. How did the fact that you were going to have an audience affect your preparation?

Ian: Nerves

Teacher: It made you nervous. Did it make any difference to the standard of your work?

Ian: No not really.

Teacher: I just want to show you this.
(Two pieces of Ian's work one from *The Outsiders* – non negotiated, and one from the *School Then and Now* assignment – negotiated are presented in Appendix N).

You don't think it made any difference?

Ian: No

Teacher: Have a look at this and have a look at that.

Ian: Oh. I didn't really like *The Outsiders* so it didn't catch my attention.

Teacher: So I'm just looking at the difference. Can you see a difference between them?

Ian: Well that I wasn't really interested in, put it that way.

Teacher: Tell me more about that.

Ian: This?

Teacher: Tell me more about the fact that this is different to that.

Ian: Well that was interesting because you always think that principals are men who sit in their office, drink coffee and read the paper but you find out there's a bit more to that.

Teacher: What about these two?

Ian: Oh well Mr. Davies is a nice person so that was good and I just did that one because I thought it would be pretty good to talk to a librarian [Interview –end of study].

Summing Up Ian's Experiences

Although Ian continued to articulate negative responses to school and to English classes, the difference in the work that was submitted for the two assignments suggested some positive response. Ian perceived this to be because of his interest in the School Then and Now assignment, where he chose the tasks that he completed. He maintains that the set text *The Outsiders* did not “catch his attention”, and he sees this as the reason for the difference in the two pieces of work. Ian's responses were not as positive as other students, overall, but the work that he submitted for the final assignment supported the view that interest and choice are important elements in motivating students. A further factor was the positive relationship that Ian had with Mr. Davies.

Summary

Chapter 5 has presented more detailed responses of the lived experiences of five students who were members of my English class in 2003. I have used student journals and interview responses to paint a picture of their experiences and perceptions. These responses further demonstrate the learning experiences that were perceived by other members of the class, and presented in Chapter 4. The students' responses in Chapter 4, and in this chapter, highlight the importance of negotiating with students to enable them to exercise choice and responsibility for their learning. They also emphasize the need for group involvement, variety, and activity in the classroom. In addition, the student teacher relationship, and the importance of having a voice, emerged as significant aspects in developing motivation.

Moving to Chapter 6

In the final chapter of this thesis, I discuss my interpretations of the responses, and use them to answer the research questions. Finally, I present my reflections on the value of the action research process

CHAPTER 6

THE STORY ENDS

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

This study has examined the experiences of students and teacher as they negotiated three action research cycles in their year 8 English class. Specifically the study focused on the connection between negotiated learning and motivation. The study used a model of action research, developed by Boomer (1992), which presents curriculum as developing and changing. This model of action research is consistent with the concept of action research as living practice (Sumara & Carson, 1997) which underpins this study.

As I indicated in Chapter 1, I have been interested in involving students in classroom decision making for many years. My choice of an action research model resulted from my desire to improve my teaching of English in my Year 8 class. The use of action research allowed me to reflect upon my teaching practice as the classes progressed. Furthermore, the cyclic model of action research allowed the process of negotiating with students to be facilitated. Since negotiation with students is the focus of this study, action research seemed to be a suitable method to adopt. It must be remembered, however, that action research has many variations. The specific approach taken for this study was outlined in Chapter 3, and is based on the model developed by Boomer (1992).

The first section of the literature review focused upon the middle years of learning and particularly on Year 8. The literature indicated that there is much

concern about the challenges associated with providing education for students in the middle years of learning. While it is acknowledged that adolescent development plays a significant role in reduced motivation, it is also recognised that adolescent development is not the only reason for such a reduction (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). Other factors have been identified as being connected with the reduction of motivation in the Year 8 level (Doddington Et al., 1999; Kiddey & Robson, 2001; Kruse et al., 2000). These factors include:

- The organisation of the school
- The teaching and learning activities in the classroom
- Lack of opportunity to exercise control over their learning
- The perception among students that Year 8 is an unimportant year
- The social needs of students and the importance of friendships

Hill and Russell (1999) argue for changes to the way in which we organise schooling for these students. Such changes, according to the literature, include the need to provide students with some control over their learning (Yair, 2000).

The specific challenges of Year 8 were discussed in Chapter 2. It was pointed out that Year 8 is a crucial year, because it is a time when “patterns of achievement open up or close down pathways to careers” (Doddington, et al., 1999, p. 33). Doddington et al (1999) maintain that, for the most part, Year 8 fails to give students the opportunity to exercise some sense of control over their learning. Their study supports Yair’s (2000) contention that changes need to be made in this area of schooling.

This literature enabled me to place this study within the framework of the current thinking about the middle years of learning. In the second section of the

literature, the learning theories of constructivism and enactivism were examined. In particular, the enactivist theory of learning, which is set within a holistic paradigm, informed my understanding of the learning process as complex, and interconnected with life experiences. This view of the learning process underpinned this study.

The research questions that this study seeks to answer resulted from my interest in improving my teaching practice. They were also informed by my belief in the importance of involving students in decision making in the classroom, and my understanding of learning as a shared process. The research questions are:

1. In terms of motivation and curriculum ownership, what is the learning experience of students when a negotiated approach is introduced into a Year 8 English curriculum?
2. What conclusions, if any, may be drawn from this study in regard to the advantages of introducing a negotiated approach within and beyond this particular classroom?
3. What changes to my teaching practice may result from the introduction of a negotiated approach in my Year 8 English class?

Answering the Research Questions

Answering Question 1

In answering this question I will discuss the student responses in two parts. Initially I will examine responses from students prior to the introduction of

negotiation. Following on from that, I will discuss the responses during and after the introduction of negotiation.

Student Responses Prior to the Introduction of Negotiation

The responses of students were discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. The early responses were focused upon student experiences prior to the introduction of the negotiated approach. These responses, for the most part, presented a negative attitude towards English classes. Students spoke of the boredom that they experienced when completing what they perceived as repetitive, boring exercises. These feelings were reported not only by students who were generally negative towards English but also by students who had a strong interest in English. Their perceptions of English as boring confirm the findings of other studies (Barber, 1999; Cumming, 1996). Student responses also confirmed the view that adolescent learners want their learning to be situated in the real world, rather than being taken from books (Kiddey & Robson, 2001). A further criticism that students made of English classes was of the inactivity that they experienced in those classes. They highlighted the static nature of English classes, where they spend much of their time engaged in writing activities; they expressed a desire for movement and activity. Students also spoke of desiring variety in their learning activities, and emphasised the boredom they experienced when classes lacked such variety. The feelings that the students expressed, support the research which highlights activity and variety as aspects of what makes a good lesson (Flutter and Rudduck 2004). The importance of activity for students in the middle years has also been identified in other literature (Kiddey & Robson, 2001; Kruse, 1998). Students also made a strong appeal for classes to be fun, which they identified with authenticity and variety in tasks, and the opportunity of working with others. It

was clear from student responses that, prior to the introduction of a negotiated approach in the English class, students' learning experiences of English were generally negative. Although the students were compliant, and completed set activities, these early responses showed little evidence of their experiencing the sense of ownership and control that has been shown to be important in maintaining motivation through the middle years (Dembo & Eaton, 2000; Doddington et al., 1999).

Student Responses During and After the Introduction of Negotiation

While the initial focus of this study was to examine the effects of negotiation on engagement and curriculum ownership, as the study progressed it became increasingly clear that there were additional factors that affected the learning of students. The responses of students, during and after the introduction of negotiation into the English class, indicated some change in perceptions of their English lessons. While students did not explicitly refer to negotiation or curriculum ownership, their responses showed that their learning experiences were connected to both of these factors. In contrast to their earlier responses, students reported increased interest and engagement with the negotiated activities that they completed. I now come to a discussion of the factors that students identified when reflecting about their learning experiences. While I have attempted to discuss each of these factors individually, it must be understood that they are interconnected and complex.

The Element of Choice

The element of choice was perceived by students as important in developing interest, reducing boredom, and increasing self-esteem. Having a sense of choice has

been identified as being highly correlated with intrinsic motivation (Yair, 2000). In this study, students have identified having choice in their learning activities as important, because they believed that it allowed them to follow their interests. Students also reported that having a choice motivated them to achieve academically. This supports the view that giving students a say in what they do is likely to enhance their learning (Withall, 1990; Passe, 1996). The responses also led to the conclusion that having choice created a sense of ownership for students.

In addition to interest and ownership, the perception of English as boring seemed to be negated when students were able to make some choices about the tasks they completed. Furthermore, as reported in Chapter 5, some students reported that having some choice in their English class increased their self-esteem.

While students were positive in their comments about choice in their learning, they made the point that such choices needed to be within boundaries. Closely connected to the element of choice was that of student voice, which will be discussed in the next section.

The Importance of Student Voice

In interviews, students spoke of the importance they attached to being heard in the classroom. The opportunity for everyone to present their point of view, and have a response, was reported as a significant, positive experience for them. This aspect of the student's experiences in their English class also seemed to be related to increased self-esteem. Students spoke of feeling happy and important, when they were able to voice an opinion and have it acted upon. They expressed appreciation of a teacher who listened to them. This aspect was one that I had not considered in the early stages of the study. Rather, it emerged as I began to analyse the data and I realised its

significance. This led me to search out and examine literature that focused on the importance of student voice in the classroom, and in school.

Kordalewski (1999) points out that having a voice means that the student is involved in decision-making in the classroom. The importance of such decision-making, or student voice, has been identified in the literature (Boomer, 1992; Passe, 1996; Rudduck and Demetriou, 2003). However, it should be pointed that simply paying ‘lip service’ to student voice needs to be avoided. Students want, and should have, their opinions taken seriously (Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003). Student responses in this study confirmed these findings.

The importance of listening by the teacher leads to the subject of student teacher relationships, which I will discuss in the next section of this chapter.

Student Teacher Relationships

As pointed out in Chapter 5, the fundamental importance of student teacher relationships has been identified in many sources (Doddington et al., 1999; Heron, 2003; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; MYRAD, 2002; Wright, Horn & Sanders, 1997). In particular, developing a safe environment which enables adolescent students to form positive relationships with teachers is necessary in the middle years (Kiddey & Robson, 2001). Students and parents, who were involved in this study, confirmed the importance of positive relationships between teacher and students.

As reported in chapters 4 and 5 students commented on the way in which their relationships with teachers impacted upon their learning. These reports from students, together with the findings of the literature, reinforce the view that establishing positive student teacher relationships is of utmost importance. In addition to positive relationships with teachers, students also highlighted the importance of positive

relationship with peers. Kiddey and Robson (2001) highlighted the necessity for developing an environment that fosters positive relationships with both teachers and peers. In this study, such positive relationships were evident in the views that students expressed about the value of working with peers.

Collaboration and Shared Learning

The reports of students in this study confirm the findings that collaboration is enjoyed, and that working in groups has a positive effect upon their learning experiences (Hill, 1993; Kiddey & Robson, 2001). Students indicated that they benefited from helping each other when working in groups. They also pointed out that collaborating in whole class discussion was important to their learning. Students reported their perceptions that teamwork increased as a result of being involved in decision making in the class. They also indicated that they believed that participation in decision making resulted in greater commitment to the class.

It must also be acknowledged, however, that for some students, collaboration is not their preferred way of working. Thus, as was pointed out in Chapter 2, it is important to take account of the various possible ways of learning, so that those who prefer a different way are not disadvantaged. Using a variety of learning activities was identified as an important aspect of the learning experiences of students in this English class. In the next section I will discuss the value of variety and activity which were raised by students.

Variety, Activity and Fun

In Chapter 4, I recorded responses of students who expressed their negativity towards English classes because they were perceived as inactive and boring (Kruse, Maxwell

and Spooner (1998). Students spoke of being classroom bound, and of the feeling of boredom associated with this. Many students talked of their desire for their classes to be fun.

As the year progressed, this sense of fun was identified by them as connected to variety and novelty in their classes. The number of students who referred to their desire for fun indicated that a sense of fun was an important aspect of the learning experiences of the students in this class. This sense of fun was very evident when students participated in activities that allowed them to present their work to a real audience.

The Value of a Real or Authentic Audience

The value of providing students with a real audience for their work was evident in the student responses. They expressed their enjoyment of the activities where they were able to interact with others, through the presentation of their work. It was evident from their responses that they believed that having a 'real' audience affected the way in which they completed the tasks. The discussion of the lived experiences, in both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, supported the view that students value their work when it is valued by others (Kruse et al., 1998). The value of finding real audiences for student work has also been identified in the literature (Kiddey & Robson, 2001; Rogers & Renard, 1999).

In this study students reflected very positively upon the primary school audience. Students also responded positively to having an evening when they could present their work to their parents. Many of them believed that they worked more efficiently when they knew that they would present their work to an authentic audience, rather than just to the teacher. The responses of students, then, added to

research that showed providing audiences other than the teacher increased levels of student engagement (The Middle Years, 2000).

Summing up Student Perceptions

Student responses to the introduction of a negotiated approach demonstrated the complex nature of learning. Their perceptions of English prior to the introduction of the negotiated approach were generally negative. Although most students were compliant and completed work as directed, they saw English as boring, repetitive, and static. Their early journal responses, and their responses in interviews, were critical of the lack of variety and activity in their classes. They strongly indicated their desire for their classes to be interesting and fun.

After the introduction of the negotiated approach, it became clear that there was a change in student perceptions. They identified the following elements as important in their learning experiences:

- Having a choice in learning activities
- Being involved and having a voice in the class
- Positive relationships with teacher and peers
- Variety and activity in their classes
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Having a real or authentic audience for their work
- Being committed to their work and to their class community
- Having fun!

The students believed that these elements resulted from the introduction of the negotiated approach. Thus, from the students' perspective, the introduction of a negotiated approach increased their motivation to be committed to tasks over which

they had some ownership. The combination of these elements also seems to be important in creating enjoyment or fun. The interconnections between these elements are shown in figure 9. The introduction of a negotiated approach into this Year 8 English class demonstrated positive learning experiences and increased motivation. The next section will be concerned with answering the second research question.

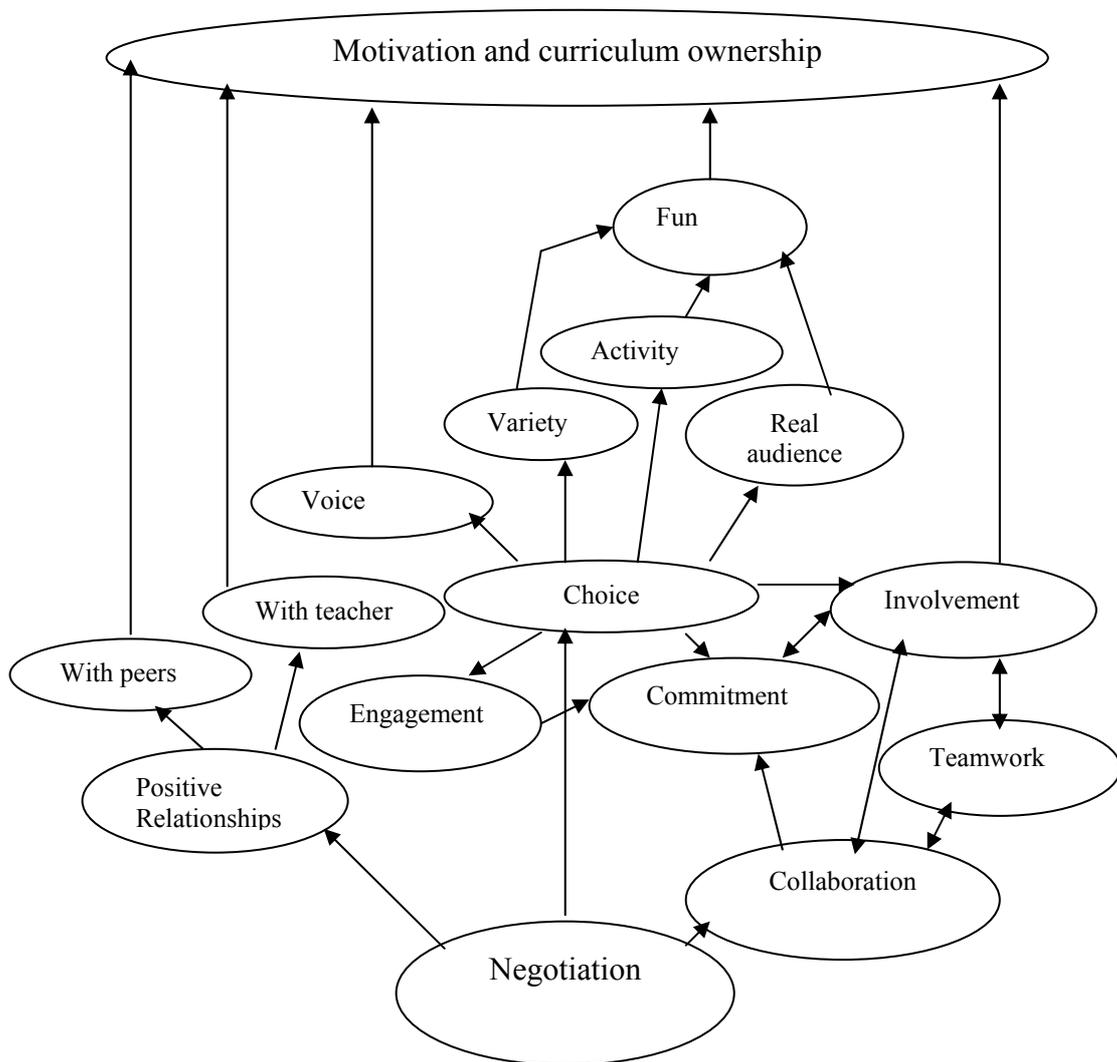


Figure 12. Interconnections of elements perceived by students to be important to their learning experiences.

Answering Question 2

It can be seen from the data in this study, that there were advantages in negotiating for both students and teacher in this classroom. Such advantages were not the result of negotiation only; rather negotiation was the catalyst that provided the opportunity for other elements to emerge. One advantage of introducing a negotiated approach was that it enabled students to have some choice about the tasks that they would complete. Through this element of choice, students were more motivated to achieve academically. Their choices involved activities that were relevant and meaningful to them, and thus led to engagement with their learning. Another advantage of students choosing activities was that it resulted in variety, rather than in all students completing identical tasks.

This aspect is important, because it allows students to focus on their strengths and reinforces academic success. Students also believed that negotiating allowed the class to be fun; this indicates that fun also resulted, in part, from having some voice in the learning process. This was a factor that they reported as a very real advantage to their learning. Furthermore, negotiating in this English class encouraged collaboration and commitment to each other. Students were enabled to accept responsibility for their learning, and developed a greater sense of their class as a community of learners.

Through negotiating, students developed a more positive relationship with their teacher, and they developed the ability to work with their peers in a positive way. As a result of positive relationships, the classroom became a happy place that students enjoyed.

Perhaps one of the more significant advantages of introducing this negotiated approach was the opportunity for students and teacher to collaborate, which allowed power to be shared in the classroom. Together, students and teacher were able to act and reflect upon the activities of the classroom. Through such reflection, all members of the class, teacher and students, were able to work together in the shared activity of learning (Davis & Sumara, 1997).

Advantages of Introducing a Negotiated Approach Beyond this Particular Classroom

As I have already said, one of the purposes of an action research study is to improve the practice of the researcher. Thus, to attempt to generalise beyond the study is not a central focus of this study. Nonetheless, the learning experiences of the students and teacher of 8XW may resonate with, and speak to, those in other Year 8 classrooms in both my own school and other schools. Indeed, this study provides a detailed model of an action research process that involved students as researchers, which could be implemented in other contexts. The data from this study may also speak to teachers at other year levels, of the advantages of negotiating with students in their classrooms. It may also speak to them of the value of action research as a useful method for self assessment of their performance in the classroom.

Much of the literature points out the challenges associated with educating young people in the middle years. In Chapter 2, I examined the research of Doddington et al., (1999), which discussed challenges that are particularly relevant to the Year 8 level. Their data indicated that students at this level need to feel that they have some control over their learning. Thus, it seems that involving students in sharing control is likely to enhance their learning experiences. Introducing a negotiated approach in other Year 8 classes may be useful in giving those students

some control over their learning, and thereby result in a greater degree of commitment and motivation. The introduction of a negotiated approach may also have advantages for other subjects and year levels.

It should not, however, be expected that the introduction of a negotiated approach in other classes will have the same results as it did in this study. Each classroom has its own unique context; students, teacher, physical environment, time, subject. This means that each class will participate in their own lived experiences which will impact upon their learning. Thus, the introduction of a negotiated approach in other classes may well result in similar responses to those in this study. Alternatively, it may have different and unexpected responses which may also provide advantages for students' learning experiences.

So, although it cannot be claimed that the responses from this data can be directly transferred to other situations, it can be suggested that the introduction of a negotiated approach may have similar advantages in other situations. The literature and this study, strongly support the introduction of strategies that invite students to be actively involved in their own learning, because such involvement leads to a greater sense of ownership, commitment, and motivation (Boomer, 1978; Cook, 1992; Withall, 1991; Yair, 2000). It is my view that introducing a negotiated approach through an action research method is one strategy that may be used to encourage students to be engaged with their learning.

For me, and for the students of 8XW, the advantages of introducing a negotiated approach were considerable, and I would encourage other practitioners to consider it for their own classes.

Answering Question 3

In this section I examine the changes that have resulted from the introduction of a negotiated approach in my Year 8 English class. Negotiating in this English class not only provided advantages to students, it also helped me to understand and improve my practice. Through negotiating with students I have been able to listen to their voice and respond to their concerns. Together we have shared the learning in this class, and I have learned to share power with them.

Reflecting on the action research cycles that took place during this study made me realize the importance of positive relationships in the classroom. It also caused me to think more deeply about the way in which I organized the teaching of English in this class. I learned that reflecting on classroom activities was valuable and led to improvements in my teaching techniques and strategies. Through my reading, I increased my understanding of the learning process, and was reminded that it is unrealistic to expect that simply providing information will result in learning for students. This caused me to look for techniques and strategies that would more adequately meet the needs of the young people in this class. Through negotiating with students, it became evident to me that students react very positively to being invited to share, and to share in, the power structure in the classroom. I was encouraged, and perhaps a little surprised, by the constructive and insightful comments that students made about how the learning process might be changed to improve the quality of their learning experiences. They made me realize that they do have much to give, if I am prepared to offer them the opportunity to be involved in the decision making.

The use of a negotiated approach has resulted in my English classroom becoming a place where conversation and collaboration is encouraged, a place where learning is an activity that is shared by all members of the classroom community.

Final Reflections

According to Sumara and Davis (1997) “enactivist theory reminds us that when interpreting practices we are, at the same time, interpreting the lived experiences of those who participate in them” (p. 420). Thus, as I reflect upon this study, I am reminded that I am interpreting not only my own reactions, but also the reactions of the students who participated with me in this study.

I found negotiating with students very satisfying, albeit very exhausting. I often came from a lesson feeling excited by a comment or an action that had indicated the engagement of the students in the activity in the classroom. I found myself talking excitedly about my class to anyone who happened to be in the staff room. It was also encouraging to see students showing interest, by writing about how they enjoyed their class work. This was reinforced when I reflected on these responses, and compared them with their responses at the beginning of the year.

I cannot deny that there have been times when the challenge has been difficult. There were times when it would have been easy to give up and revert to being a directive teacher. It would certainly have been a quieter class had I done so! There were times when I felt out of control, and questioned the wisdom of negotiating with young adolescents; of sharing the power. There were times when it would have been easy to have forgotten to write that journal entry or read another article. As I reflect

on those times I realise that through those experiences I have learned much about learning, both my students and my own.

When I first began thinking about this study, action research seemed to be a useful method to adopt. As I became more involved in the study I found myself wishing that I had chosen an easier method. As I continued, however, I realised that, although action research is complex, it creates a means of collaborating with both students and colleagues, who became critical friends. It seems to me that the inclusion of action research into teaching practice is valuable and worthwhile.

My use of action research has led to valuable discussions with colleagues, about the ways in which we teach young adolescents. It has also contributed to the development of positive relationships with my students. These positive relationships continue now that the study is completed and the students have moved on to their various Year 9 classes. For me, this development of positive relationships was the most significant aspect of the study.

The action research method also allowed for reflection on the way in which particular teaching techniques were implemented. It allowed me to make changes to activities when they seemed not to be effective. For example, I was able to modify the third cycle when students indicated that they needed their choices to be limited. Action research also gave me the opportunity to evaluate the cycles with my critical friends, and discuss the ways in which I could modify the activities. The reflection on the cycles led to further research as new issues emerged.

Action research is a difficult method and makes significant demands upon the practitioner. It is, however, worthwhile because it helps to improve practice, which results in better learning experiences for all members of the learning community. From my perspective, the value of action research can also be seen in its collaborative

nature. Through collaboration with colleagues, in this case critical friends, I was able to make them aware of the challenges that have been identified in the middle years of schooling. I have been delighted when colleagues have been interested in trying some of the activities in their classes. Doing this action research study has made me more conscious of the way in which my students feel about their classroom activities. As a result of this increased awareness I have chosen to make changes to my teaching strategies in all of my classes. I believe that these changes benefit the students that I teach.

The main focus of my action research cycles was on negotiating with my students. I found that negotiating was very time consuming, and I experienced some anxiety about getting through the work requirements that were part of the assessment process. I need not have worried. The students became so engaged with their work that they had no difficulty in completing all the assessment requirements of the college. I have come to understand and agree with the words of Mitchell et al., (2001) that “building a sense of shared ownership is an effective way of achieving high levels of student interest and engagement” (p. 4). A more difficult challenge to overcome was that of the timetable which placed considerable limitations on the continuity of activities. Both the students and I experienced frustration with the fragmented approach that the secondary timetable creates.

As I reflect on this research, I realise that my reading of the literature has introduced me to new ideas which have influenced my thinking about the nature of learning. In particular, I have been interested in the emerging concept of enactivism, although I still feel that my understanding of it is limited. As I read and re-read the middle years literature, my views about involving students in their learning were confirmed. In some instances I found myself following up information with authors

via the internet. I was amazed by their prompt responses to e-mails, and grateful for the support they provided for a person whom they did not know.

In my opening chapter, I spoke of my initial interest in developing an inclusive classroom, during the early 1980's. I indicated my belief that inviting students to have input into and ownership of the activities that made up their learning experiences was beneficial. At that time my belief in the benefits of involving students in decision making in the classroom was largely intuitive. Today, I continue to hold the same beliefs, but now they have a theoretical base. I am convinced of the value of a collaborative learning environment not only for Year 8 students, but for all students. I am equally convinced that a negotiated approach offers one way of providing such a collaborative learning environment. My belief in the importance of involving students in the decision making in the classroom continues. Today, I am more convinced than ever that the positive relationships that I build with my students are fundamental in the shared activity that is learning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Ethics Approval

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

Z9ACU National

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Caroline Smith Melbourne Campus

Co-Investigators: n/a

Student Researcher: Mrs Carlyn Sproston Melbourne Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

When Students Negotiate

for the period: 26/09/02 - 31/12/04

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: V2002.03-38

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)* apply:

(i) that Principal Investigators 1 Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:

- security of records
- compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
- compliance with special conditions, and

(5) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:

- proposed changes to the protocol
- unforeseen circumstances or events
- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed:

Date:

(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

(Committee Approval.dot @ 15110104)

Page 1 of 1

Appendix B

Classroom Climate Questionnaire

Challenge Checklist

MY FEELINGS ABOUT OUR CLASSWORK

This sheet has some questions about your class work last term.

Please put a circle around the answer that best describes your ideas

Nothing you write will be assessed, so be honest

PLEASE TICK

I am

Male

Female

In your class work:

WHAT I THINK	WHAT I FEEL
---------------------	--------------------

Q1. How **MUCH** work was there to do?

Lots	A fair bit	Not much	Very little		
------	------------	----------	-------------	---	---

Q2. How **DIFFICULT** was the work?

Really difficult	Fairly difficult	Not very difficult	Not difficult		
------------------	------------------	--------------------	---------------	---	---

Q3. How **IMPORTANT** was the work for me to know?

Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not important at all		
----------------	-----------------	--------------------	----------------------	---	---

Q4. How **INTERESTING** were the topics that I did?

Very interesting	Reasonably interesting	Not very interesting	Not interesting at all		
------------------	------------------------	----------------------	------------------------	---	---

Q5. How often did I do **DIFFERENT AND UNUSUAL** things in class?

A lot	Sometimes	Not much	Not at all		
-------	-----------	----------	------------	---	---

Q6. How often could I **DECIDE** what to do and how to do it?

A lot	Sometimes	Not much	Not at all		
-------	-----------	----------	------------	---	---

Q7. The teacher and I **GOT ON WELL** during the lessons

All of the	Most of the	Some of the	Not much of		
------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	---	---

Q8. The other students and I **GOT ON WELL** together during the lesson

All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not much of time		
-----------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	---	---

Q9. I **ACTIVELY TOOK PART** in the work:

All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not much of the time		
-----------------	------------------	------------------	----------------------	---	---

Q10. I **UNDERSTOOD**:

All of the work	Most of the work	Some of the work	Not much of the work		
-----------------	------------------	------------------	----------------------	---	---

Q11. I **ENJOYED**:

All of the work	Most of the work	Some of the the work	Not much of the work		
-----------------	------------------	----------------------	----------------------	---	---

Q12. I think I **WORKED WELL**:

All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not much of the time		
-----------------	------------------	------------------	----------------------	---	---

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

Appendix C

Interview guide questions

I just want to ask you a few questions about what we've been doing in English this term. Is that OK?

Can you tell me what you think about English?

What have you learned?

What did you think of the narrative writing unit that we did?

What did you think of the process, the way we did it?

What about the informative writing, what did you think about that?

What did you think about having a choice?

Do you talk about your work at home? To your friends?

Can you tell me if there is anything that you've enjoyed?

If you were the teacher of that class would you make any changes?

Tell me what you think about working in groups.

What do you think about planning?

What about the evaluation?

How important was it for you to have a say in what you did in class?

What kinds of things have helped you to learn in English last year?

What was least helpful for you in English last year?

How much of your own time have you spent on the English work?

How important is it to you to have topics that you are interested in?

How important is it to you to have variety?

In that School Then and Now assignment how did knowing you were having parents as an audience affect the way you worked?

Did you notice any differences when the class prepared work that didn't have a specific audience?

Appendix D

Letter to participants' parents and Consent Form



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANT'S PARENTS

TITLE OF PROJECT: WHEN STUDENTS NEGOTIATE
(block letters)

SUPERVISOR : Dr. CAROLINE SMITH
(block letters)

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER [if applicable]: MRS CARLYN SPROSTON
(block letters)

NAME OF PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED: Ed. D

Dear Parent,

The purpose of this study is to examine whether giving students some choice about the way in which they study the English course makes a difference to their learning in the classroom. The project will take place in the normal English class and will involve participants in discussing ways of learning the required material. Students will be invited to give their views about the way in which the units of work may be completed and at the end of the unit they will be asked to comment on how improvements might be made. To do this will involve the use of student journals, observation of activities in the classroom, some videotaping of classes, completion of short questionnaires and some interviews. The interviews will talk about points that have been made in the student journals and questionnaires.

Participants in this project will be asked to think about what has been completed in the English class and write about it in their journal entries at the end of each week. Participants will also be invited to complete a short interview during a lunch time or after school.

Apart from the short interviews participants will not be asked to give up any of their own time. All of the activities will take place within the normal English class time.

Parents will be invited to meet with the teacher/researcher to discuss the project at various times throughout the term.

It is hoped that through being involved in this project your child will learn skills of negotiation and improve his or her English skills. Students will also learn how to work cooperatively with other students and be able to present their ideas effectively. It is hoped that through this project your child will enjoy their English classes more. It is hoped that through this project other teachers at the college will be able to assess the value of negotiation and introduce it into their classes. The results of this project will be published as part of an Ed. D. thesis, a copy of which will be made available to the college as the host school. No identification of participants or the college will be published in the results of the project.

You may of course, choose not to allow your child to participate in this project and you do not have to give any reasons for your refusal. You may also discontinue your child's participation in the study at any time and withdraw consent for their contribution to be included in the study's findings. If you choose not to allow your child to participate in this project their work in this English class will not be affected in any way.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to

Dr. Caroline Smith on telephone number 99533281

At Australian Catholic University
St. Patrick's Campus
Locked Bag 4115
Fitzroy
Vic. 3065

Carlyn Sproston may be contacted through Dr. Caroline Smith

I will be happy to discuss with you at any time the ongoing developments of the study as well as the final results of the project.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. I have also obtained approval for this project from the Catholic Education Office, Ballarat and from the Principal of the college.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor or Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee. The address of that unit in Victoria is

Chair, HREC
C/o Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Melbourne Campus
Locked Bag 4115

FITZROY VIC 3065
Tel: 03 9953 3157
Fax: 03 0053 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be fully informed of the outcome.

If you agree to allow your child to participated in this project you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Student Researcher.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Smith

Carlyn Sproston

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: WHEN STUDENTS NEGOTIATE
(block letters)

SUPERVISOR : Dr. CAROLINE SMITH
(block letters)

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER [if applicable]: MRS CARLYN SPROSTON
(block letters)

I (the parent/guardian) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF
PARENT/GUARDIAN:.....
(block letters)

SIGNATURE..... DATE

NAME OF CHILD.....
(block letters)

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Or SUPERVISOR.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER [if applicable]:
.....DATE:.....

Australian Catholic University, St. Patrick's Campus
115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy 306 5
Ph: 61-3-9953 3000
ABN 15 050 192 660

Appendix E

Letter to student participants and assent form



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

INFORMATION LETTER TO STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT: WHEN STUDENTS NEGOTIATE

SUPERVISOR: Dr. CAROLINE SMITH

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: MRS CARLYN SPROSTON
(block letters)

AND NAME OF PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED: Ed. D

Dear Participants,

The purpose of this study is examine whether giving students some choice about the way in which they study the English course makes a difference to their learning in the classroom. The project will take place in your normal English class and will involve you in discussing different ways of learning the required material. If you agree to participate you will be invited to give you views about the way in which the units of work may be completed. At the end of the unit you will be asked to comment on how improvements might be made for our next unit of work. To do this will involve the use of your journals, observation of activities in the classroom, some videotaping of classes, completion of short questionnaires and some interviews. The interviews will talk about points that have been made in your student journal and questionnaires.

If you choose to participate in this project you will be asked to think about what has been completed in the English class and write about it in your journal entry at the end of each week. You will also be invited to complete short questionnaires at the beginning of the unit and at the end of the unit. You may be also be asked to complete a short interview during a lunch time or after school.

Apart from the short interviews you will not be asked to give up any of your own time. All of the activities will take place within the normal English class time.

It is hoped that through being involved in this project you will learn skills of negotiation and improve his or her English skills. You will also learn how to work cooperatively with other students and be able to present your ideas effectively. It is hoped that through this project you will enjoy their English classes more. It is hoped that through this project other teachers at the college will be able to assess the value of negotiation and introduce it into their classes. The results of this project will be published as part of an Ed. D. thesis, a copy of which will be made available to the college as the host school. You will not be identified in the thesis and no names will be published in the results of the project.

You may, of course, choose not to participate in this project and you do not have to give reasons for your refusal. You may also discontinue participation in the study and withdraw consent for your contribution to be included in the study's findings. If you choose not to participate in this project your work in this English class will not be affected in any way.

I will be happy to talk with you and explain anything that you do not understand about this project.

In this study I will be supervised by Dr. Caroline Smith at Australian Catholic University and if you have any concerns about the study your parents may contact Dr. Smith.

If you agree to participate in this project you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, keep one for yourself and return the other copy to me.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Smith

Carlyn Sproston

Australian Catholic University, St. Patrick's Campus
115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy 3065
Ph: 61-3-9953 3000
ABN 15 050 192 660

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I(the participant aged under 18 years) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the project, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18:

.....

(block letters)

SIGNATURE DATE

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR or SUPERVISOR.

..... DATE

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER [if applicable]

..... DATE:.....

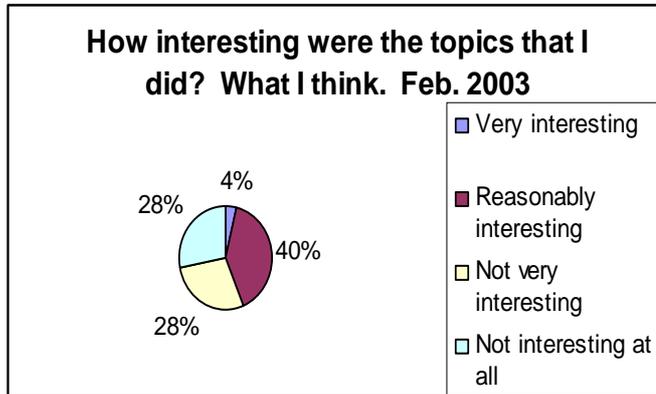
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Australian Catholic University, St. Patrick's Campus
115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy 3065
Ph: 61-3-9953 3000
ABN 15 050 192 660

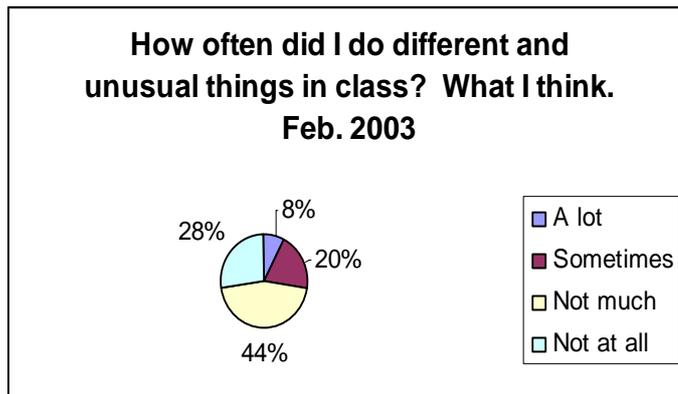
Appendix F

Results of questionnaire items discussed in a classroom meeting

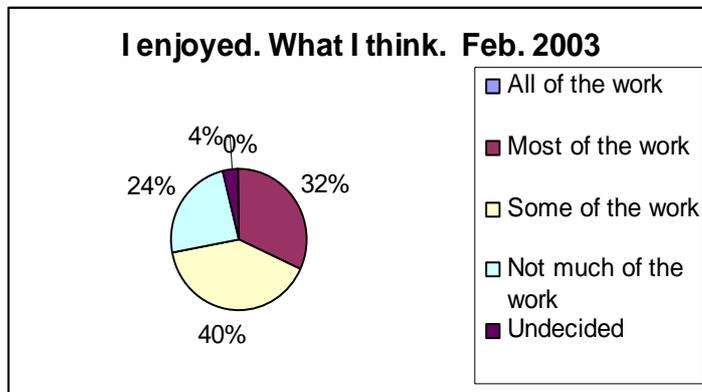
Questionnaire item 4: How interesting were the topics that I did?



Questionnaire item 5: How often did I do different and unusual things in class?

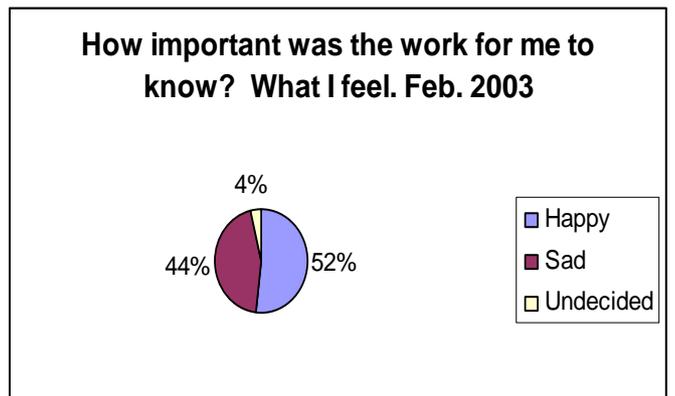
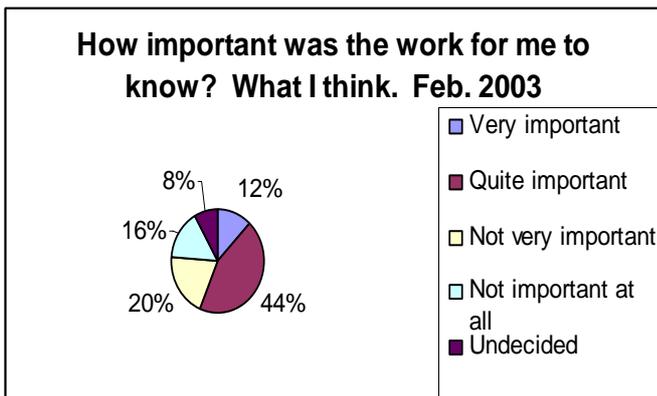
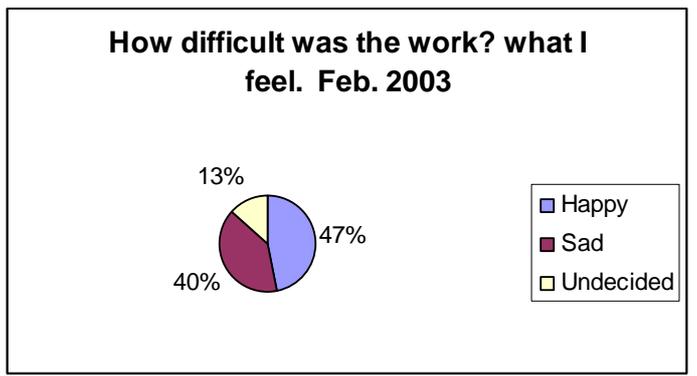
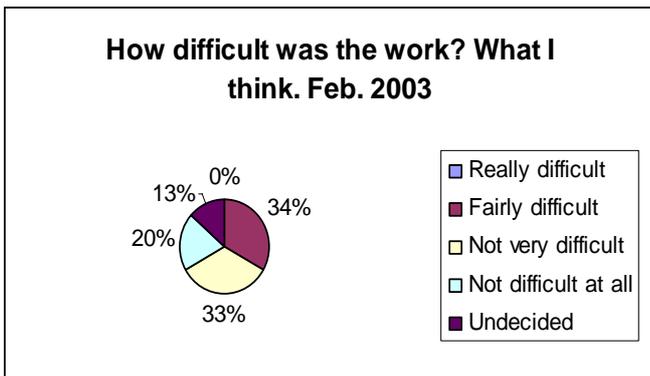
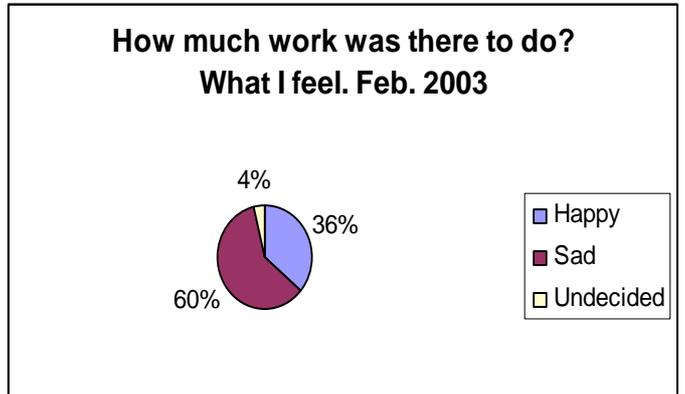
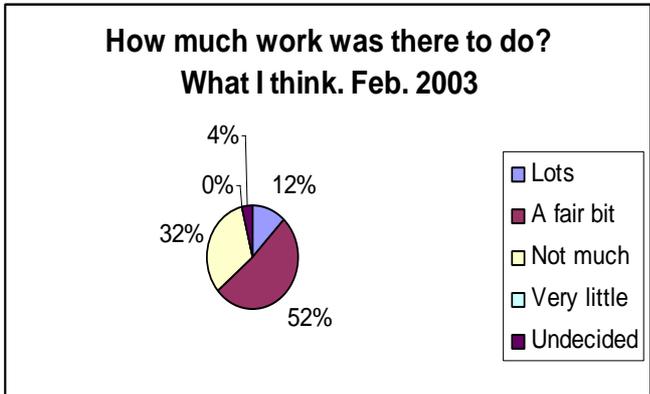


Questionnaire item 11: I enjoyed

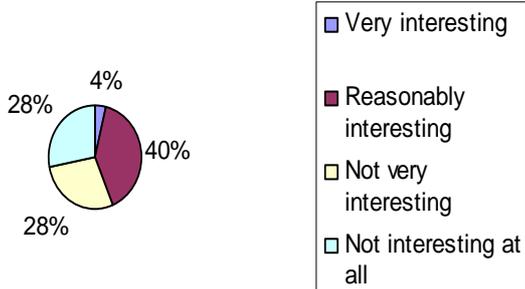


Appendix G

Questionnaire Results – February 2003



How interesting were the topics that I did? What I think. Feb. 2003



How interesting were the topics that I did? What I feel. Feb. 2003



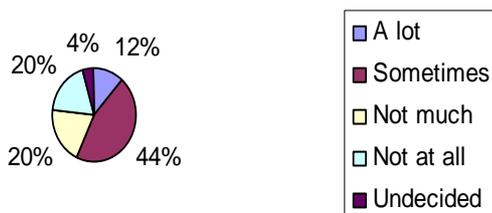
How often did I do different and unusual things in class? What I think. Feb. 2003



How often did I do different and unusual things in class? What I feel. Feb. 2003



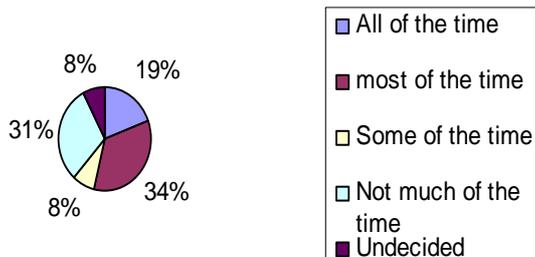
How often could I decide what to do and how to do it? What I think. Feb 2003



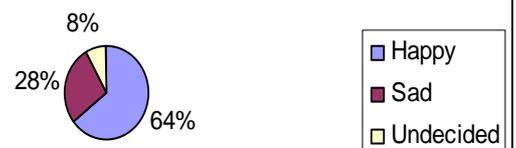
How often could I decide what to do and how to do it? What I feel. Feb. 2003



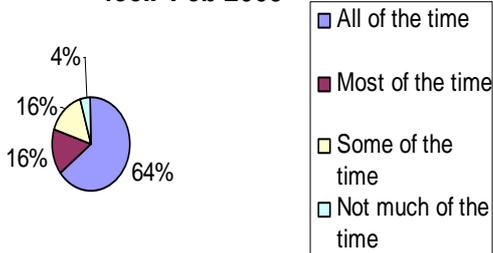
The teacher and I got on well during the lessons. What I think. Feb. 2003



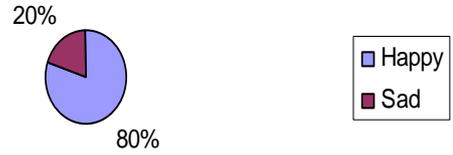
The teacher and I got on well together during the lessons. What I feel. Feb. 2003



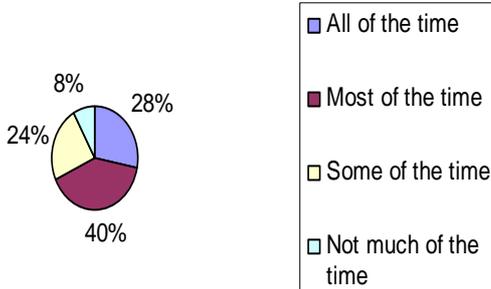
The other students and I got on well together during the lessons. What I feel. Feb 2003



The other students and I got on well together during the lessons. What I feel. Feb. 2003



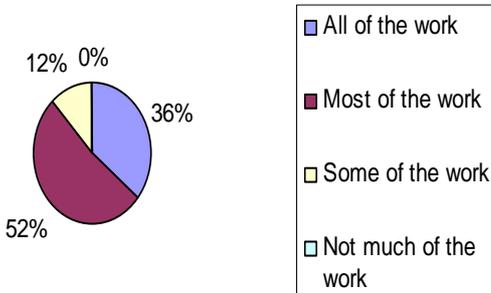
I actively took part in the work. What I think. Feb. 2003



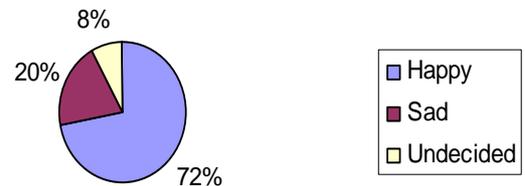
I actively took part in the work. What I feel. Feb. 2003



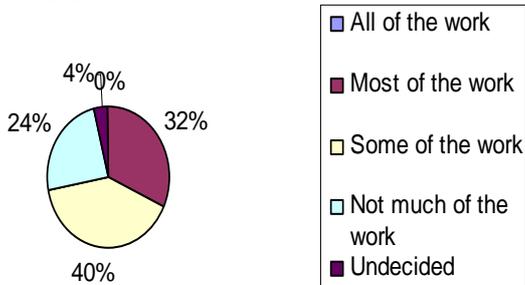
I understood. What I think. Feb. 2003



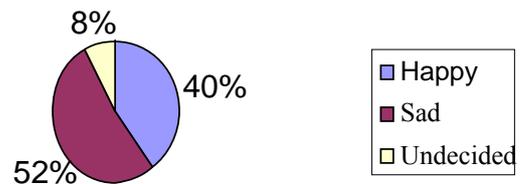
I understood. What I feel. Feb. 2003



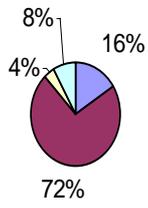
I enjoyed. What I think. Feb. 2003



I enjoyed. What I feel. Feb 2003

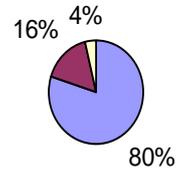


I think I worked well. What I think. Feb. 2003



- All of the time
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Not much of the time

I think I worked well. What I feel. Feb. 2003



- Happy
- Sad
- Undecided

Appendix H

Handout for analysing children's books

ANALYSING CHILDREN'S BOOKS

TITLE; _____

AUTHOR; _____

BRIEF OUTLINE OF STORY;-

CHARACTERISTICS:

ANALYSING CHILDREN'S BOOKS

TITLE; _____

AUTHOR; _____

BRIEF OUTLINE OF STORY;-

CHARACTERISTICS:

Appendix I

Random Grouping Categories

General category placed on group table.

WEATHER

Individual categories given to students as they arrive.

Sunshine
Wind
Rain
Snow

WILD ANIMALS

Lions
Elephants
Tigers
Giraffes

GAMES

Cricket
Football
Netball
Hockey
Badminton

COLOURS

Blue
Red
Orange
Yellow

DOMESTIC ANIMALS

Horses
Dogs
Cats
Goldfish

PEOPLE

Nurse
Builder
Lawyer
Fireman

Appendix J

Letter from Primary School

Tuesday 8th April 2003

Dear Mrs Sproston and Year 8 Students,

Thank-you all so very much for visiting and reading your wonderful stories to the Prep children. They did enjoy the session immensely. You should all feel very proud of your works. The children found these very interesting as was obvious by their attentiveness.

The following were the comments of the children -

"I enjoyed the reading." xxxxxxxxx

"Wonderful!" xxxxxx

"They could read real, real good." xxxxxxx

"They did pictures really good and words really good. " Mickey.

"I liked Dennis the Dog." xxxxx

"The stories were good." xxxxxxx

"I liked the stories." xxxxxxx

"when the lady read the animal book (Zoo)." Olivia.

I liked all of them ." xxxxxx.

"I liked the pictures." xxxxxxxxx

"I liked the Ballerina story." Xxxxx xxxxxx xxx xxxxxx

"I liked all of them." xxxxx

"I liked the Alien story." xxxxxx xxx xxxxxx

"I liked all of them and pictures and stories about them." Ricky.

"There's a Party In The Woods." xxxxx

"I liked all of them." xxxxxx

"I liked the Teddy Bears picnic." xxxx

"I liked the Tooth Fairy book." xxxxxxx

"I liked the Party In The Woods." xxxxxxx

Once again thank-you and if you ever have the time and need to share your reading with the Preps again we would be most willing participants.

Yours faithfully

Grade Prep and Karen Burnett

Appendix K

Negotiation Handout

INFORMATIVE WRITING

Please complete the following so that we can negotiate your informative writing piece.

Name: _____

Topic: _____

I would like to work: (please circle one)

By myself

With a partner

In a small group

Names of partner or group members:

What I already know about my topic:

What else I want to find out:

How I will find the new information:

How I/We will present out information to the class:

Appendix L

YEAR 8 ENGLISH ASSIGNMENT Semester 2 2003

THE OUTSIDERS S.E. Hinton

Choose **ONE** question from each section. You may do more if you wish.

If you wish to do something different from the options that are given you will need to negotiate it with me.

PLAN – Make a detailed plan (to be submitted before you begin)

Include – Your name

The topics you choose.

Time you will spend on each task (in class and at home).

Dates for the completion of each task.

How you will present your work?

Who will be your audience?

EVALUATION - Answer in detail. (To be submitted with your assignment.)

This evaluation includes all of the work we have done on the theme of outsiders. That means all the discussion in class, your paragraphs about outsiders, your poems, and this work on the book.

What have you learned about the book?

What have you learned about outsiders?

How well did you use your time?

What did you like best about this assignment?

How could you improve your work?

TOPICS

Section A

- Make a list of the main things that happened in the story.
- Make up chapter questions for another class to answer.

Section B

- Write character studies of two main characters
- give a talk about your favourite character

Section C

- Design a new cover for the book.
- Choose an important passage, read it to the class and tell them why you think it is important
- Make a collage to illustrate the book. You may draw your own pictures or cut out pictures from magazines.
- Present a talk about outsiders in our society.
- Write a biography of the author. **Write the information in your own words do not copy directly from the internet or books.** You should include information about: her family background, educational background, other books she has written.
- Role play a scene from the novel.
- “Grab Bags” - Instead of a traditional book report you are to produce a bag filled with clues about the novel.
For example 2 items that represent a main character
 2 items that represent a theme
 1 item that represents the setting
- Make up an assignment for the book..

Appendix M

Year 8 English Assignment

SCHOOL THEN AND NOW

Purpose - The purpose of this assignment is for you to find out things you don't already know.
To compare school life today with the school life of your parents or grandparents, or other adults that you know.

Audience - The audience for this assignment will be your parents. We will organise an evening to present the information that you collect.

In this assignment each person has to collect 30 points. Each task is worth the following points:

Red tasks	2 points	Green tasks	5 points
Orange tasks	3 points	Blue tasks	6 points
Yellow tasks	4 points	Purple tasks	7 points

You may choose how you wish to complete the assignment.

By yourself

With a partner

With a small group (groups should be kept small to work well)

You will have two periods of class time each week for this assignment. You will need to do some work at home. (e.g. interviewing parents, grandparents, other adults)

You may do any tasks you wish and in any order that you wish. Try to choose tasks that people are not doing. It would be good to have a variety for the presentation night.

You may present your information in any way that you wish.

EVERYONE MUST COMPLETE A PLAN AND AN EVALUATION

All work will need to be drafted.

HOW TO START:

1. Read through all the tasks
2. If you are working with a partner or a group, decide which questions each person will do.
3. Talk to other people in the class and find out what they are doing, you may have to negotiate so that you don't double up on questions.
4. Brainstorm ideas for questions and ways to present the information.
5. Write your plan. It should have:
 - Dates for completion of each draft.
 - Dates for completion of each final copy.
 - What you need to do to find the information you need.
 - How you will present your information.
 - Anything else you think is important.

The plan is to be checked with me before you start the questions.

Remember the plan can change as you work through the assignment. If something isn't working or you wanted to change something that's fine.

The tasks

Red tasks – 2 points

1. How many people work at the college?
2. Which teachers teach more than two different subjects?
3. How many different subjects are taught at the senior campus?
4. Who is the Senior Campus Co-ordinator?
5. Who are the teachers at the Junior Campus?
6. Who are the teachers at the Senior Campus?

Orange tasks – 3 points

1. What do the ladies in the canteen do?
2. Draw a map of the senior campus.
3. Draw a map of the junior campus.
4. Draw a map of the town showing both senior and junior campuses.
5. Who are the maintenance staff, and what do they do?

Yellow tasks – 4 points

1. Make a graph of the students at each year level.
2. Write a poem about school.
3. Write about your first day in prep.
4. How far do the students of 8CF travel to school? Make a graph of the information.
5. Write about your first day in Year 7

Green tasks – 5 points

1. What does the principal do?
2. What does a careers teacher do?
3. Interview a librarian and write about her job. (Senior or Junior Campus)
4. Choose a teacher and write a report on what they do.
5. What does the lab technician do?
6. What is your favourite subject? Why
7. What is involved in studying photography?
8. What was your favourite excursion? Why?
9. What does the office staff do?

Blue tasks – 6 points

1. Write a report on the Pantomime
2. Write a report on the Rock Eisteddfod
3. Interview a V.C.E. student. Describe what he or she does during a week at school.
4. Research a University Course and write about it.
5. If you had to organize an excursion where would you go and why? What subject would it be for? What would you have to do to organise the excursion? *
6. Find a poem or a story about a school. Is the school in the poem like our school? How is it similar/different?

Purple tasks – 7 points

1. What was school like for your parents? How was it similar/different to school today?
2. What was school like for your grandparents? How was it similar or different to school today? *
3. Why do we study Religion at our College?
4. If you worked in a school, what job would you like to have? Why?

Possible ways of presenting your information – add others that you can think of.

Speech

Power point presentation

A booklet

Recitation of a poem

Photographs

Pictures

Posters

Written reports

Group oral presentation

ASSESSMENT - We will negotiate the assessment.

DUE DATES – Each person will negotiate due dates with me.

Appendix N

Samples of Ian's work

PLAN

What 1 am doing

For my outsiders project 1 will be, making a list of things that happened in the story, writing a character study on two of the main characters and 1 will be designing a new cover for the book.

How long will 1 spend on this assessment
I will do most of this task at school, and some at home

Dates 1 wili hand in the work

1 will hand in all the pieces of work in on the same day, but 1 do not know what date that will be.

How will 1 present my work
1 will present my work in a informative piece.

Who will be my audience.
My audience will be the teacher, seeing that I will be handing up the work in a essay form.

EVALUATION

What 1 have learned about the book?
Nothing much

What 1 have learned about the outsiders?
Nothing much

1 used my time okay

What did 1 like best about the asingment?
????????????????????????????????????

How could 1 improve my work
Spend more time on the task at hand

By Ian

THE OUTSIDERS

Section A.

1. Two bit gets caught shoplifting
2. Johnny runs away from the cops
3. DaRy Gets arrested
4. Dally gets shot
5. Greasers had a fight with the socks
6. Johnny dies in a fire

Section B.

Ponyboy

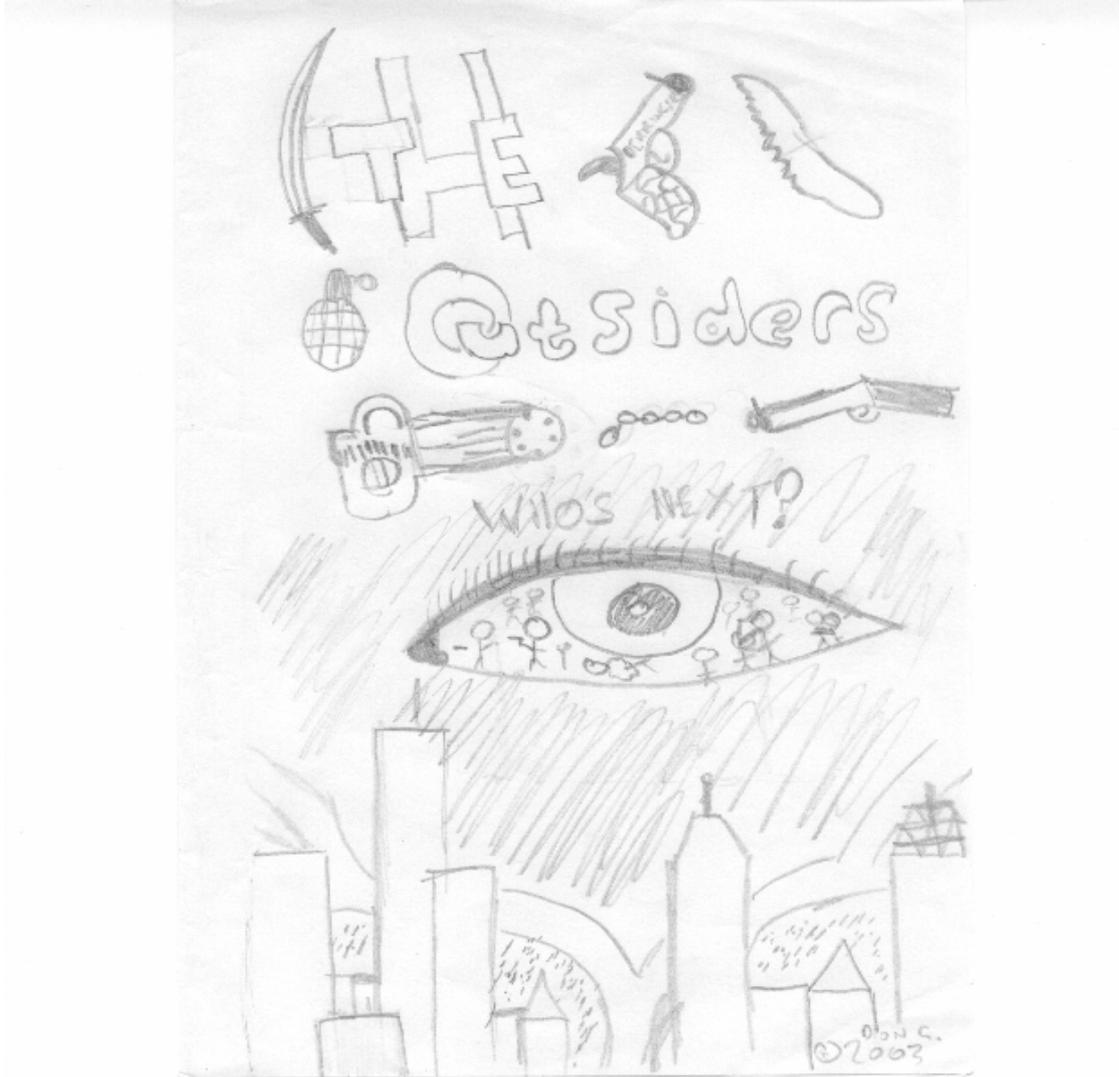
Ponyboy is a fourteen-year-old boy who is in a gang called the greasers that like to get up to a little mischief. Both his mum and his dad were killed in a car crash so all he has left is his two older brothers, Darry and Soda.

Johnny

Johnny is Pony's closest friend. Seeing Johnny is one of the smallest members of the greasers the rest of the gang is very protective over Johnny, for he is now very terrified to walk down the streets after a vicious attack from the socs. But in the end Johnny got barbecued in a tremendous fire leaving nothing but ash.

Section C is on a separate piece of paper.

Section C



MRS CLARK

For this following interview, I interviewed the senior campus librarian Mrs Clark.

Now librarians are mainly in the library, so they should know a lot about it. So I asked her how many books were in the library, and well she didn't know exactly. But said if she was to take a stab, she would say, over 30000.

Mrs Clark has been doing this occupation for a long time. She started working in the year 1965, and after all many jobs came to xxxxxxxx in 1996. So all over she has been working for 38 years, that's almost 3 times as old as me!

Jobs require work, and only people with qualifications normally work. So to be a librarian, what kind of training do you need? To do this job, you need a, Bachelor of Arts and library qualifications.

When someone mentions library to someone else, one thing pops to mind, books! And working in a library being surrounded by books in all of your work time, you should know a lot about them, which Dee does, she reads pretty much all the time. The reason why Mrs Clark chose this job is because of the books. I like to read" she says.

Being a bookworm herself, and knowing a lot about books, I thought I'd check to see how much she knew about students. And really she did know a fair bit. So then I asked her, "what kind of books do the students favoup." Her response was, If I had to say, I would say non-fiction, which would come under the title of, Human interest. But sometimes for leisure they read fiction.

Everyone thinks that a librarian's job is simple, scan books, sit back, and drink ,coffee. But there is, more to it than that. The responsibility of a librarian is to, catalogue the books, supervise the library and to be a source of information.

I asked Mrs Clark what she liked when she was a child. Her first ambition was to be a nurse or a journalist, but then when she was growing up she got into books and wanted to be involved in them. And by the sound of it, she made the right choice, because she likes her job.

Ian 8XW

MR WILLIAMS

I interviewed our school principal, Mr xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx, to find out a little bit about his life, and I have re-written the answers to my questions.

When Mr Williams was a student in secondary school he did not have the slightest ambition to be a principal. He actually wanted to become a psychiatrist. Midway through High school he got hooked on maths science and chemistry.

This response is very interesting, seeing that principals run schools and everything, Mr Williams wasn't very fond of school when he was a student, well who isn't, right. Well, Dave here didn't mind year 7,8 but 9, 10, 11, 12 he wasn't very fond of.

Most people just think that the principal just sits in the office, reads a paper and practically does nothing, well I can prove you wrong. Principals have a very sophisticated job. They have to arrange the financial management, family management, education and seeing this is a catholic school religious education of the school. And if you thought they did nothing, then you have some nerve.

Mr Williams doesn't think that his children will take after him in his career, but he still thinks that time will tell. I suppose kids will be kids.

Mr Williams came from a college in Melbourne called xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx And his job was deputy principal of operations. So he has made a big change from leaving a big city like Melbourne, and then transferring to a small country town like xxxxxxxxxxxx. Though this is a big change for him he likes it very much here in xxxxxxxxxxxx. A principal does more than organise education and all of the other stuff. They are also qualified teachers. Mr Williams teaches, chemistry, junior science, maths and R.E

Seeing that Principals have authority, they have the power to-expel students. Not this one, Mr Williams would not like to do that he says that he would prefer to stay out of everybody's private life.

That pretty much wraps this up except for one last thing, Mr Williams main objective here at xxxxxxxx College is to plan for the future.

MR STEVENSON

In the following interview, I interviewed our school councillor, Mr Stevenson. I found out about a bit of his career and his life.

Seeing That Stevey is getting close to being a pensioner, that must mean he is a veteran, a veteran of his illustrious career. Mr Stevenson has been doing psychology for a long time. He started in 1975, so he has been doing it for 28 years. He has been doing counselling at various places, but mostly at University. Then he ended up here at xxxxxxxx College.

psychology is a very difficult job, so you obviously need some qualifications Just like Jan has here. To do this job,,you need a masters degree in psychology, be a member of the Victorian masters board and a member of the Australian psychology. So Mr Stevenson was straight out a very heavy studier.

Now a counsellor's job is mainly to help people get their problems off their chests so they can feel better, and then he can feel better knowing that he has made a difference. So then I asked Mr Stevenson, how do you feel when you help out children?. His response was, I feel very privileged and feel my job is worth while. I see my role as a counsellor to help children.

Though Mr Stevenson has been at xxxxxxxx College a long time, he was at a lot more other schools before he even thought of coming here. He has been at four secondary schools as a teacher, then for five years he was a visiting counsellor and he spent 16 years at xxxxxx University.

Being a man of experience, Mr Stevenson has obviously had a lot of jobs. Mr Stevey was a private counsellor once, and he claims to have had a lot of cases. But being a man of his word he can't tell anyone of the cases he must keep them confidential.

Now, Mr Stevenson was at a lot of schools before he came to xxxxxxxx college, and to be at schools, not only must you be a counsellor but he also is a teacher. The subjects that Stevey teach are, economics and legal studies, But here at xxxxxxxx he does not teach any subjects.

I asked Mr Stevenson, when you were a child did you think you were going to be a psychiatrist, and the answer was no. It just proves how much people mature when they are growing up.

My final question was. What exactly does a psychologist do? "Well a role of a psychologist is to help people make their decisions".

Ian 8XW