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Research and Social Justice: lessons from a collaborative study

Jon Austin and Di Mayer

Faculty of Education,

University of Southern Queensland,

Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia

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...the role of science in sustaining social injustices is too significant to ignore.

(Allen, 1992)

There is nothing worse than being part of a project that someone is doing at arm's length, then you read it and you say 'that's not our school'

(Field-based researcher, Reform in Education project, 1997)

Researchers, in the end, always betray their subjects

(MacDonald, 1983)

## Research and Social Justice

The reasons for the conduct of forms of inquiry loosely captured within the term "research" are many, and the range of ideas about what constitutes "valid" or "important" or "significant" research is equally diverse and idiosyncratic. The literature on various means of categorizing research is vast, and the arguments contained within it too well-known and exhaustive to be rehearsed here. The purpose of this paper is to draw upon the experiences of a group of researchers - some university- and some school-based - to identify potentially

valuable ways of viewing and living forms of research that have as their underlying imperative a commitment to contributing to more socially-just forms of community.

Precise notions of social justice are notoriously elusive, as has been demonstrated by aspects of the other papers presented in this symposium, but, at root, there would seem to exist an amalgam of concepts of fairness, equality, respect, dignity, empowerment,

participation and agency. Those who feel compelled to contribute to the achievement of states of existence that give presence and actuality to these ideas in the lives of those for whom they are currently largely absent form part of a group or, in Alice's Restaurant Massacree style, a movement, working to achieve social justice. Again, the literature on the imperative for, the faces of and programmatic plans to achieve social justice is large and growing (see, for example, Young, 1990; Sleeter, 1996; Adams, Bell & Griffin, 1997).

The arena of socially-just practice to be foregrounded in this paper is that of research design and methodology. In particular, lessons from the field experience of inquiring into forms of social justice in educational settings will be drawn upon in order to expose some of the contradictions and difficulties begging resolution and defeat in the pursuit of social justice outcomes. The essential question that guides the preparation of this paper is: How might genuine activity in the project of social justice - in this case, illuminative research - avoid perpetuating forms of engagement that are, in themselves, generative and supportive of socially-unjust social relations?

The link between forms of and approaches to research and social justice has been of considerable interest in recent years. Most recently, for instance, McLaren (1997) has explored the notion of postmodern ethnographer as flaneur and, drawing upon the work of Frisby (1994) analyses the function, the activity of the researcher as both "consuming and producing texts detachedly and actively" (p 83). Frisby (1994) expands the conception of the activity of the researcher seen from the perspective of the flaneur , "the strolling sightseer", as being comprised of :

activities of observation (including listening), reading (of metropolitan life and of texts) and producing texts. Flanerie, in other words, can be associated with a form of looking, observing (of people, social types, social contexts and constellations); a form of reading the city and its population (its spatial images, its architecture, its human configurations); and a form of reading written texts....The flaneur, and the activity of flanerie, is also associated...not merely with observation and reading but also with production - the production of distinctive kinds of texts. The flaneur may therefore not merely be an observer or even a decipherer, the flaneur can also be a producer. (pp 82-83).

In recognizing the complexity of the positionality of the observer, the ethnographer, the researcher, McLaren asks the critical questions of the function of research in a postmodern milieu:

...is the best that we can do merely to accept the incommensurability of discourses and reject the search for some "interdiscursive form"

that can help us adjudicate among the wild plurality of discourses that we find...? Must we accept the fact that all truths are contingent and that we can judge based only upon the social effects of such truths ?" (1997, p 101)

In keeping with his long-espoused political commitments to those oppressed by extant social practices, McLaren responds to these questions by asserting the importance of retaining a firm hold on the epistemic reflexivity promoted by Bourdieu in order to emphasize that the "critical rationality that guides our practice as critical ethnographers of contemporary social texts and that assists us in engaging the narratives of those who have been marginalised and excluded must reject the historical logic in which their exclusion and marginality is inevitable" (1997, p 102). In other words, the researcher must be continually guarding against the subjugation of her or his work to the ends of furthering rather than resisting the leaching of justice from the social landscape. In McLaren's view, "we can never be sure who is really served by our words, or whom we fortify

with our criticisms", and thus researchers must recognize "the arrogance of speaking for others, and also the presumptuousness that feeds the notion that men and women can speak for themselves" (1997, p 111). The link between research, self-knowledge and social justice is clear: "We begin speaking for ourselves only when we step outside of ourselves - only by becoming other. It is in recognizing ourselves in the suffering of others that we become ourselves" (1997, pp 111-112).

Smith (1996) addresses the problem of many approaches to educational

research: "[r]ather than empowering teachers to reflect and change, educational research, in the main, serves other interests and other ends."(p 73). In trying to encapsulate a gradation of purpose and form in educational research, Smith identified a particular classification of research that he called "criticalist", and split this broad classification further into critical and post-structural. For the purposes of this paper, it is the critical form of research that captures the intention of the university-based researchers to not only find out about the enactment of socially-just practices in educational settings, but to do so in ways that were, in themselves, socially-just.

It is worth exploring Smith's notion of critical research from this perspective. The purposes of such forms of research are emancipatory - that is, the aim is to engage the social world through an epistemology that recognizes the distortion of perceptions of reality in the interests of hegemonic forces while at the same time exposing the obfuscations of and hindrances to more authentic forms of equity. Emancipatory-oriented research aims to "[uncover] and [change] what constrains equity and supports hegemony" (p.75). The "overt political intent of criticalist research...consciously orientates researchers to strive to connect their research methodologies to social justice goals" (p.75, emphasis added).

On a similar tack, Thomas (1993), argues that social research must serve a purpose, that it must grasp the opportunity resident within its scope for engaging critically with the world of the apparent so as to apply "a subversive worldview to the conventional logic of cultural inquiry" (vii). Using ethnography as an example, Thomas argues for a form of research that is not content with describing what is, insisting

instead upon pursuing the question of what could be:

Conventional ethnographers study culture for the purpose of describing it; critical ethnographers do so to change it. Conventional ethnographers recognize the impossibility, even undesirability, of research free of normative and other biases, but believe that these biases are to be repressed. Critical ethnographers instead celebrate their normative and political position as a means of invoking social consciousness and societal change (1993, p 4).

For Thomas, the only genuinely justice-oriented forms of research are those that are imbued with the spirit of collaboration and participation. In this form of endeavour, the pursuit of both "truth" and social problem-solving are merged:

participant researchers opt for relevance and identify closely with the needs and concerns of their subjects, using diverse perspectives that attempt to reconcile action with inquiry (Thomas, 1993, p 26, emphasis added)

The intention in this approach to research is, in Thomas' view, to remove the artificial barriers separating the researcher and the researched in order to draw upon the knowledge, the passion and the commitment to change of those most enveloped in the substance of the inquiry. Participatory approaches to research, then, offer ways to "redirect attention from those who wield power to those who bear its consequences" (Thomas, 1993, p 27)

In sum, then, the approach to research that was adopted and developed in the course of this inquiry into the illumination of meanings of social justice in educational settings set out to deliberately alter the more frequently encountered relationship between researcher and researched in much educational research - what Reinharz (1979) has called "rape research"<sup>1</sup> -so as to live what the university-based researchers were attempting to come to understand. In part, and with hindsight, this methodological concern to engage in socially-just practice in and through research might be seen as a journey on similar paths to those trodden by Patti Lather when she explored "what it means to do empirical research in an unjust world" (1986, p 257).

At the very least, the essence of a more acceptable form of research practice, would seem to involve notions of collaboration between university-based researchers and school-based researchers.

Collaboration, education and inquiry

Collaborative inquiry is a relatively recent feature of educational research. Catelli (1995) locates its origin in forms of action research emerging during the 1940s and 1950s, its appearance coming about as

a reaction to the inadequacies of the traditional experimental research paradigm and procedures pursued by the scientific community. The inadequacies included: (1) The long time lag between research conducted at the university and the implementation of its findings in school settings, (2) the lack of relevance to classroom concerns and



realities, and (3) the artificial features of experimental procedures imposed on practitioners. (p 27)

Schaefer (1967) exhorted teachers to look to themselves as sources of inquiry into their professional activity and encouraged collaborative research as means for "examining critically their craft and as a vital avenue for ensuring school improvement and renewal" (Catelli, 1995, 27).

Sirotnik (1988) extended the notion of educational research collaboration to the school-university partnership, where he viewed that partnership as a "complex, long-term, evolving, social experiment directed at social action, institutional and interinstitutional change and educational improvement" (p 169). Espousing a social activist view of the purpose of educational research akin in many ways to the critical perspectives currently found residing in the ideas of Kemmis, McTaggart and Fals Borda, Sirotnik conceptualized collaborative inquiry as :

a process of self-study - of generating and acting upon knowledge, in context, by and for the people who use it. (P 169, emphasis added).

Catelli (1995) summarizes this view of the nature and purpose of collaborative inquiry as action-oriented and "therefore essentially and fundamentally 'evaluative' - but not defined by or subject to the traditional theories and practices of program evaluation. Nor is the research necessarily committed to employing traditional research designs . (p 28, emphasis added)

Margaret Threadgold (1985) identifies a feature of distrust common to many contemporary workplaces: that of the gap between theory and practice. This feature derives from "suspicion on the part of practitioners that theorists are out of touch with the everyday reality of a situation and an assumption on the part of theorists that the practitioners are incapable of seeing general trends and patterns while immersed in the detail of specific events"(p 251). Whether seen from a neo-marxist perspective as being one of the inescapable outcomes of the process of increasingly narrow division of labour attendant upon late

industrialist and early post-industrialist capitalism or from the economies of scale and expertise perspective of the neo-rationalists, this phenomenon attaches to the mind-body binarism within which the production process is largely viewed, whether that duality is expressed in terms of management-worker, designer-maker, or theoretician-practitioner, the important effect from the point of interest of this paper is that of a forced, artificial separation of conception from execution in the pursuit of the educative role of teachers.

Troyna and Foster (1988), in an attempt to provide a "salutary reminder to those researchers and theorists intent on self-flagellation because of their failure to influence or change the routinised practices and processes of educational institutions and teachers" (p 289), discuss a number of factors which have both caused and exacerbated what they term the trend towards sectionalism within the education community. Amongst these factors is a perceived "over-reliance on quantitative methods and input and output characteristics with a concomitant neglect of

qualitative accounts or processes and interactions within classrooms"(p 289). While this imbalance has been righted to a large measure since the publication of their article, Troyna and Foster's point here is that research on schools, teaching and teachers has been largely conducted for the consumption of parties other than those involved directly in the educative process. The relative absence, until recently, of respected qualitative accounts of life in schools has, inter alia, contributed to the rejection of research and policy based upon largely meaningless reductions of complex social environments to sterile statistical shells.

Further adding to the almost derision with which the work of education researchers has been received by school and classroom-based educators is the trend Troyna and Foster describe as "the obfuscatory and elitist style in which research reports are often written and disseminated". Frequently couched in concepts and language accessible to a smallish percentage of the education profession, what for many teachers is describable, of necessity, in "everyday" language becomes something of a foreign landscape separated from the reality of classroom experience as many teachers know it through the intercession of a density of language.

A final contributing factor in this descent into sectionalism is that of the "asymmetrical relationship between researchers and practitioners in which the former both construct and conduct the inquiry and the latter constitute no more than the object of that enquiry." (289-290) Perhaps reflecting the masculinist power of the positivist research paradigm, such positioning of parties within the inquiry process perpetuates a series binarisms - researcher-researched, theory -

practice, and so on - that Patti Lather (1986) (links to hierarchical forms of professional engagement wherein the potentially influential and powerful role practitioners might play in the formulation and validation of the research process is largely dismissed. This is also a form of inquiry that is predicated upon an idea of research function as that of prediction and control, with models of representation and location containing serious issues of imposition and authority that more democratic forms of inquiry might more readily address.

Before leaving Troyna and Foster's article, it is important to raise a further point: that is, that the "gulf between researchers and practitioners is often paralleled by a gap between the imperatives of policy-makers and practitioners" (p 290). Based on their experience with policy and in-service / professional development work in the areas of multiculturalism and anti-racist pedagogy, Troyna and Foster identify a dismissal by teachers of in-service programs generated and conducted by those seen to be "theorists" or "policy-makers" similar to that given to the work of researchers: "[m]ost frequently, this arises from a perceived lack of relevance to the classroom" (p 291) In other

words, it is possible to view the so-called "theory-practice divide" as one with school- and classroom-based education workers securing one side of the professional credibility chasm with "the Rest" establishing their base on the other.

(As a side note, it is illuminating to analyze the language which those who decry this separation, such as Troyna and Foster, use to locate respective parties. The use of descriptors such as "practitioner",

"theorist" and the like clearly maintain and perpetuate this schism in the process of lamenting its existence.)

Collaborative activity in the pursuit of educational aims and objectives - and the social and political project and agendas attaching to these - is one means whereby this credibility gap might be bridged, and the respective strengths of all parties involved incorporated into a common or shared vision of something better or more desirable. In terms of collaborative inquiry, it is necessary to identify both the nature and purpose of such activity, and it is to these questions that this paper now turns.

Collaboration implies a sense of commonality, mutuality and sharedness in endeavour. In the context of this paper, it is the mutuality of activity between those educators based in schools - whether as classroom-based teachers or as other school-based professionals - and university-based educators that forms the specificity of focus. However, valuable insights into collaborative activity in general might be gained here, and might be applied broadly across the multiple possibilities for border-crossing partnerships in the area of education.

Collaborative research, from the perspective of this paper, is that approach to inquiry into the conduct of education with teachers that would partially and, in the first place, "address their concerns, involve them in the research process and be aimed, at least in part, at improving classroom practices" (Troyna and Foster, 1988, p 291). However, such a view of the determining role and influence of teachers in the conceptualization of inquiry is perhaps not exhaustive of the

intentions of the university-based participants in this study. As will be explored in more detail below, issues of power and authority pervade the collaborative research process, and it is not sufficient to merely reverse the tables of influence typical of "traditional" research projects and abdicate the moral responsibility of any party to such a research process to inject her or his perspectives, views and passions. That is, the view of collaborative research that, at least in the beginning, sustained the energy and determination to explore alternative ways of sharing the process of coming to know with those frequently (typically?) marginalised in the research endeavour was not one that necessarily asserted and respected the primacy or exclusivity of the needs of those "from the field". Rather, there was a consideration of what it was that all participants might bring to the inquiry process: skills, knowledge, experience and the like, certainly, but as importantly, the vision and the hopes that resided within each individual participant. That is, collaborative research was seen as being, ideally, driven by genuinely dialogic forms of engagement.

Janet Miller (1992)(, in an autobiographical piece, explores some of the dimensions of power and authority in collaborative research from the perspective of a university-based researcher working with a group of school-based researchers. In this article, she makes a number of extremely important points about the collaborative process. One of these is the observation that there is nothing necessarily inherent in the nature of collaborative, qualitative research that does away with the need to be vigilant against the intrusion of power and authority issues that might work to the detriment of the project. Her point is that one needs to view the presence of power in interpretive as well as in relational ways in qualitative research. That is, in the more

"objective" forms of data collection and analysis typical of quantitative research, issues of interpretation are far less likely to arise than in the highly (and, in some cases, openly and proudly) "subjective" forms of qualitative research process. It is in this area that power and authority seep in more insidious ways than in the more overt relational aspects of the hierarchy of research. In the latter, the positioning of researcher and researched creates and locates both dominance and docility in such ways as to render one powerful and authoritative while at the same time creating Other. Further, within the location of researcher, gradations of authority occur (principal researcher, research assistant, and the like) that again represent visible relations of power. Miller's concern is to address the more subtle aspects of authority that reside within the interpretive part of the inquiry process.

While obviously not intending to suggest that the two manifestations of power - interpretive and relational -are able to be separated or act independently of each other, Miller offers an autobiographical account of aspects of her journey through a five-year old collaborative research process as an example of some of the issues that arise in this form of endeavour.

McTaggart, Henry and Johnson (1997)(, reporting on follow-up research on the effects on teachers, both personal and professional, of having been engaged in collaborative professional activity in the form of a school review, are worth quoting at length on some of these outcomes:

Here we see teachers utilizing a modest attempt to articulate and improve their professional lives. They change the nature of the School Review, they change the curriculum, they change the politics of their relationships with children, with their colleagues, with their principal, and with a visiting professor. They change their view of their own agency, they become more reflective, and they change their professional biographies. In their own words and terms of reference, they contest the death of agency, the death of progress and the death of science. (P 137, emphasis added)

#### The Reform in Education Project

The Reform in Education Project commenced in 1996. It had evolved from a 1995 pilot study report based on two Focus Group workshops. The workshops brought together University researchers, teachers from several schools and members of a School Advisory Council to discuss notions of social justice and to work towards the development of a collaborative approach to inquiry into the topic. Four schools, two secondary and two primary, participated in the Reform in Education Project, the aim of which was to elucidate various meanings and practices of social justice in formal school settings.

Research in each of the four discrete sites led to specific points of focus and activity as the inquiry process developed. As part of the commitment to collaborative activity, the participants worked within a framework of a broad concern to interrogate the notion of social justice, but always with a view to informing an improved form of practice in the school settings. The four separate foci of the research activity became:



¥ school-based policy making - student and community perceptions of the influence of a School Advisory Council on socially just practices.

teacher networking - manifestations of social justice in different forms of school-based networking.

school-community relationships in a small, rural setting - the role of the principal in creating socially just school practice.

curriculum development in an 'intentional' independent school community - the impact of "social vision" on teachers' professional practices.

The project team adopted a set of principles to guide the next stage of the research, namely, that the research would aim to be:

Mutualistic, building trusting, collaborative relationships between university-based and school-based researcher / participants;

Evolutionary, with allowance for changes to research questions and procedures;

Exploratory, rather than scientific;

Values-based, with researcher / participants expected to use their experience with the research to enhance social justice in education;

Broadly focused, enabling researcher / participants to pursue individual research goals within the context of a common purpose.

As the Reform in Education project neared completion, it became apparent to the University researchers that the goal of achieving truly collaborative inquiry was a difficult and long process. Each of the four sites presented particular difficulties with regard to the development of genuinely collaborative inquiry, as well as containing spaces for the emergence of understandings and small gains towards the collaborative goal. The research process at one site seemed to move furthest towards this goal.

#### Networking and Professional Learning: Highton School

In this particular study, an invitation came from the principal of Highton school (a pseudonym) for a research team to work with the school in investigating the processes of professional networking within the school. An initial meeting was held to clarify the purposes of the proposed project, and the feasibility of a shared and mutually beneficial collaborative project was confirmed.

Highton school is a large state government school in a provincial city in Queensland. It is generally perceived as a traditional school, and many of the staff have been working there for in excess of ten years. The current management team consists of the principal (male) and two deputy principals (one female, one male). The principal has been in the position for eight years and in pursuing his interest in collaborative management structures, has been instrumental in trying to instigate momentum for a collegial approach to the professional tasks

that school personnel undertake as part of their work. This project aimed to provide for the school personnel, a picture of professional networking at Highton school. It was expected that this would be beneficial to the school in future planning and decision making.

Three of the original university research team (of seven) decided to pursue the invitation by Highton school, while others pursued projects which resulted from invitations from other schools.

The principal of Highton school reported that a number of networks, both informal and formal, which varied in size, composition and purpose, existed at Highton school. In early discussions it was decided that the purpose of the research would be to illuminate the networking process at Highton school mainly by accessing the perceptions of staff through interview. A tentative research problem and associated questions centring on the operations, forms, dynamics, goals, effects, challenges, and successes of networking were formulated, but in keeping with the evolutionary nature of the research it was expected that specific foci and associated questions would

emerge and possibly change over time.

#### Phase 1

The first phase of the study focused on the experiences of a group of seven staff members who, according to the principal, were explicitly and actively involved in professional networking within the school.

The intention of the research was to portray the experiences of these

people and to illuminate the ways in which membership of and participation in these professional networks contributed to their professional learning. The principal approached individual staff members he had identified as 'networkers' and asked them to participate in the study. Along with the principal, six others agreed to be involved: the principal (male), a deputy principal (female), three classroom teachers (one male, two females - one of which worked permanent part time), a pre-school teacher (female), and a learning support teacher (female).

A meeting was held at the school with all the participants and the university team to further clarify the purposes of the study, and to negotiate and achieve consensual agreement for a set of Principles of Procedure to govern the project. Timelines for data collection were also discussed and agreed upon. It was decided that each participant would be interviewed (40-45 minutes) by a member of the university team. The aim of this round of interviews was to develop for each participant a description of the networking in which s/he was involved.

The audiotaped interviews were analyzed and trends which emerged from the data were organized into statements about networking under three broad headings which the research team agreed were explicitly resident within the data:

i) Networking - What is it? What does it mean?

ii) Why people engage in it? and iii) How does it happen?

These statements were taken back to the participants for confirmation,

discussion and response. The discussion confirmed these initial analysis outcomes, and the group was asked to consider a direction for the project: a focus (or foci) that seemed to be emerging and how that focus might be pursued. They indicated that they wanted to further investigate networking at Highton school in relation to school based management, and also in relation to individual professional growth, practice and confidence, particularly in times of increasing change and devolution, and system accountability. They agreed that networking was a desirable thing, and in providing an ongoing direction for the project which would be valuable for the school, they expressed a desire to investigate how networking might be encouraged and how it might operate efficiently for the benefit of the school community. More specifically they directed the focus towards finding out how some staff could be stimulated to become 'networkers'.

In keeping with the ethos of the project that in the main the school and the interests of school personnel direct the project, it was agreed that the role of the university research team would be to gather additional data which could be used by the school to inform their future planning decisions, and to inform ongoing action research directions within the school. It was decided that the university team would interview a broader range of school personnel (approximately 12-15) to capture their responses and perceptions about networking.

## Phase 2

As described above, the intention of the second phase of the study was to broaden the base from which perceptions about networking at Highton could be canvassed. Since the Phase 1 participants had been selected

because they were perceived by the principal as networkers, it followed that they shared a view that networking was something that should be both promoted to and developed within the broader school community, making personal and professional life more satisfying and exciting.

This group did acknowledge though that they represented only a section of the total school staff and that if networking was to be promoted and developed within the broader school community, it would be appropriate to investigate wider perspectives on activities of 'networkers' and networking within the school in order to compile a more inclusive list of the roles, functions and purposes, such that valid decisions about future directions could be made. The principal agreed to help identify an expanded sample which would include some staff members who could be considered non-networkers or reluctant networkers. The university's role in this phase was to gather data for the purposes requested, provide preliminary analysis and critique, and then provide a final report for use by the school in their future planning and decision making.

As part of an ongoing interest in and commitment to collegiality in the workplace and the importance of the concept of collaborative individualism, the principal had been active in promoting team structures within the school. Therefore as well as a focus on illuminating the practical meanings of networking by this increased sample, phase 2 also aimed to position these meanings within the school context, particularly in relation to the principal's initiatives in encouraging a team approach to working.

The principal identified and approached a number of staff members for phase 2 of the project. Twelve classroom teachers agreed to be interviewed by members of the university team - nine females and three males. Each of the three members of the university research team conducted four interviews of 45 minutes and participants were asked for their permission to audiotape the interviews. One participant asked not to be audiotaped, but agreed to the interviewer taking notes during the interview. Each interviewer listened to the audiotapes of the interviews s/he had personally conducted, and a research assistant listened to all the interviews and prepared written interview summaries which included specific statements (verbatim) that were made in each interview as well as major points made or views offered (in summary). In research team meetings held after the individual analyses had been completed by each interviewer and the research assistant, six concepts were agreed upon as capturing the range of comments made in the interviews: empowerment; networking; autonomy; social justice; responding to change; and the Highton community.

By way of an ongoing verification, and prior to further analysis and conjecture, these themes were taken back to the participants for validation and discussion. This was done by presenting for each theme a selection of statements from the interviews which were seen by the research team as representative of the views contained in the interview data. At a group meeting, the participants agreed that the themes emerging from the preliminary analysis were valid and these were then used to guide further in-depth analysis of the data. Upon completion of this analysis, a comprehensive report was prepared and copies forwarded to all participants. At the time of writing the school is considering the findings and the implications for the ways in which

they plan to work in the future. A fuller report on the emerging understandings from and outcomes of this project have been reported elsewhere. See Mayer et.al. (1997).

From the experience with this particular study, and in league with a concern of the whole of the group of university-based researchers that methodological reflection and development be accorded importance in the deliberations over what our work was showing, the project team authorized a further study of the nature of the experience of the research process itself.

#### Collaborative Research: Methodology

The focus on collaborative inquiry was a qualitative study based upon the selection and interviewing of key informants who had been participants in at least one of the four research projects comprising the Reform in Education series of studies described above. Five members of the University based research team were interviewed along with seven participants from the four research sites. The research team decided to interview all available university-based participants (N=5) and the principals of each of the four school sites involved in the Reform in Education project. Three additional school-based informants were selected on the basis of the recommendation of the university-based participants. These recommendations were made on the perceived likelihood of the informant having sufficient experience with the project to be able to discuss the points of interest. Three such additional school-based informants were identified.



The interviews were conducted by a research assistant over a two week period.. Each interview was conducted in person and on-site, and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interviewer used a schedule of questions intended to assist informants to, firstly, recall their experience with the research projects and then to evaluate the collaborative nature of the project. The intention was to gather perspectives about university-field collaborative activity with a view to identifying those factors that either inhibited or facilitated genuinely collaborative inquiry. Informants were then asked to suggest changes to the research process for the further development of mutualistic inquiry. A copy of the research schedule is attached (see Appendix 1).

All participants agreed to have the interviews audiotape recorded and for the information to be used for the preparation of this report.

(iii) Each audiotaped interview was transcribed and analyzed using the NUD\*IST 4 qualitative data analysis program. The purpose of the analysis was to identify trends in both the reported experiences of the informants regarding the extent of collaboration in the conduct of the research projects and in suggestions for changes that would enhance the collaborative ethos in future research. The transcripts were not returned to informants for checking. The data was anonymized to minimize the likelihood of identification of informants and / or research sites.

What is collaborative research ?

Most informants were able to articulate some idea of the determining features of collaborative research in its ideal or desirable form, although one member of the university team expressed uncertainty about this:

I didn't have at all a clear concept of what was meant by collaborative on my part.(university 5, text unit 27)

Perhaps the most commonly identified feature of collaborative research was that of a shared or mutual interest in the topic of inquiry:

Where the researcher and the subjects of research have a mutual interest in researching and discovering information and where a good working relationship is developed between people in that process.

(Field 1, text unit 40)

Common purpose but outcomes looking for different, different way of using the outcomes. Common purpose and commitment to outcomes (Field 2, text units 66-67)

Really about addressing a problem in which all participants have a stake. (Field 4, text unit 43)

It is people with shared interests or common interests trying to find out more about those things. People who see problems in the world as it is trying to resolve and understand those problems where each participant brings different things, different but not necessarily

better or worse. (university 1, text units 115-116)

But if you are doing truly collaborative and mutualistic everyone has to be involved.( university 2, text unit 115)

Another important feature was that of difference within commonality.

This was expressed either as difference in input or as difference in expectation of outcomes. In relation to the former of these, it would seem that informants here considered it essential that different qualities, skills and the like be recognized and respected for what they could bring to the project, acknowledging the complexity of the research process and the importance of all participants working towards a common end. Illustrative of this point is the following extract:

So teachers will bring intimate knowledge of the context, kids and setting which we can't hope to know but which are essential elements in any inquiry. We bring maybe a greater sense of the bigger picture for some of these things because that is supposedly how we work. We bring some research techniques, strategies and skill and more importantly some time that teachers don't get necessarily to do stuff. We bring physical resources, access to machines and data bases that maybe schools don't have so while it's different they are equally important so that all of that stuff merges to pursue an inquiry. . (university 1, text units 117-120)

The second aspect of accepting and respecting difference within the common project relates to the anticipated outcomes of the project:

Shared purpose but with different outcomes.(Field 2, text unit 63)

Presumably, the point here refers to change in the school setting (leading to improved pedagogical practice, enhanced educative outcomes for students, and the like) and accretions to the academic work of the university personnel (academic papers, conference presentations, incorporation of the research into teaching and the like).

Importantly, the point was made that the expectations of all parties need to be clearly established for the collaborative process to work:

It's a joint exercise where both parties know exactly and clearly what is expected of them.(university 3, text unit 38).

A further defining characteristic of collaborative research identified by the participants in this study was that of two-way communication flows. For the collaborative nature of research projects to work, it would seem that there is a need for an understanding and expectation of dialogic modes of engagement. While one informant saw the matter quite differently:

[Collaborative research is a] group of people collecting evidence and then people who are experts drawing out of it relevant truths. (Field 6, text unit 12),

most other informants clearly emphasized the two-way flow dimension:

It's a two way process and there is a lot more to be said for it in that respect. There is give and take involved. (Field 1, Text units 61-62)

Information seeking, information giving between relevant parties working on the same project. (Field 3, text unit 17)

Tackling an issue as a group of people from a variety of angles and then coming together to thrash it out.(Field 7, text unit 47)

A sense of security and encouragement to engage in conjecture was also touted as a defining characteristic of genuinely collaborative research. It would seem that the protection offered to individuals engaged in the collaborative process is a significant spur to wonderment:

It is, or in this instance was a loose set of guiding principles in which people were able to give opinions and ideas to test those principles.( Field 5, text unit 41)

A final point about the nature of collaborative research was made in something of a caveat regarding any assumption that collaborative research of necessity implied a commitment to action or change:

Collaborative research in itself doesn't necessarily carry with it that action bit. You could engage in collaborative research with a school very effectively and have nothing change. It could just be a matter of finding out what is it that we currently do. (university 1, text units 135- 137)

In summary, it would seem from the experience of the informants in this project that for research to be considered genuinely collaborative, it must be constructed around shared ideas of the topic to be addressed and the outcomes expected from the process. It should be conducted on the grounds of mutual respect among all research parties involved, with dialogic forms of communication and engagement being essential.

How far was collaboration in the research process achieved?

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the acknowledged diversity of views of the nature of collaborative research, informants differed in their perceptions of whether the goal of collaboration had been achieved. It is important to note that none of the informants questioned the nature of the activity undertaken or engaged in -it was clearly research. No one disputed the idea that the particular methodologies themselves constituted forms of inquiry into selected practical aspects of the sites involved. The point of divergence, however, resided in the collaborative nature of the process.

Field-based informants perhaps saw the activity as coming closer to the collaborative end of the scale than did the university-based informants. Illustrative comments here include:

One had that feeling all the way through that it was 'our project' - collaborative.(Field 3, text unit 35)

It was collaborative in that it was a loose inquiry framework and the school community did have some input into which way the inquiry would proceed. And then with the little bit at the beginning of this year,

asking from input from interviews was collaborative as well, but basically only one person can write the paper. In so doing, is the end result a product of collaboration? (Field 5, text units 42-44)

Of the field-based informants, only one expressed a view that the collaboration was not all that it could or should have been:

[The collaborative research project worked ] very well in terms of reflection, discussion and interaction of ideas.(Field 1, text unit 43)

Quite useful in enhancing the reflectivity element but it was probably

more useful for the team studying the school than the school itself for the reasons I mentioned before (Field 1, text unit 37)

Despite these seeming reservations, the informant indicated that there was still a sense of shared engagement in the activity:

We got the sense that we were working together on something that was of mutual interest. (Field 1, text unit 54)

The university-based informants, though, were far more critical of the way in which the intention of developing collaborative forms of professional engagement with school-based colleagues panned out. In a sense, this might be explained by the underlying motivations of the university-based participants in joining the project in the first place.

I don't believe it was a collaborative project by the way. It was us coming in and doing things with people down there collaborating to the extent that they made the opportunities available for us or to us to get the information that we felt we needed. (university 1, text units 22-23)

Our view was: we will do what they want to do, but we are still doing it to them basically. (university 2, text unit 60)

Statements on the educative role that might have been played by the university participants in developing a more collaborative project are important. One informant in particular saw this as a necessarily major facet of the university contribution:

In the final analysis it would appear that we failed dismally to get across to some of the participants the collegial nature of the research (university 4, text unit 15)

It is important to view this statement critically, since it is possible that the sentiment contained within it, while obviously hitting at the crucial input - whether it be theoretical, interpersonal or practical - required in this project, might well be seen as sustaining the superiority and ascendancy of university-theory over school-practice.

This aspect of the views of the respective participant groups bears further exploration. A further comment from the same informant perhaps reinforces a view of the university-school relationship that sits uneasily across a divide separating mentoring from patronism:

They may not have understood completely what we were doing but I'm sure that they felt as if they were part of the project (university 4, text



unit 28)

For some of the university-based informants, at least, the opportunity to explore and develop collaborative or mutualistic forms of research was as strong an attraction as was the social justice focus of the proposed research:

When I first started off I think all of us were keen to have our research described as collaborative, mutualistic, evolving all of those sorts of things, driven by the school, I think we, or particularly me, were particular naive in thinking Yes, because it's coming from the school and they were identifying what we might look at and they were identifying who might be involved that it was collaborative, that it was driven by them. The reason I'm not sure what name to give to it anymore is neither Uni party or the school party really knew what our roles were. For example, [the school principal] would ring me and say "what are we doing next", and I would say "what do you want to do" and we would go backwards and forwards like that. It took a lot of playing around to actually get to where we are now. It's more collaborative but the different parties still not sure of our roles, of how we

contribute. I'm not sure that it is collaborative, it's perhaps shared.

(university 2, text units 18- 23)

We did set out to develop genuinely collaborative forms of inquiry - inquiry aimed at change or action with participants from school sites. I think to a small extent, and I don't know what happened in [the

other] projects, but in the [project] I was involved with I don't believe we did very much of that. So in terms of achieving collaborative research I don't think we have but we certainly learned a lot, well I learned a lot about how we might work more effectively in achieving that collaborative relationship in future times. It has not achieved the specific goal but it has taken us some way towards understanding why we didn't achieve it and how we might be able to do something next time. (university 1, text units 37-41)

Further dialogue between the university- and school-based participants on the nature of the research process itself might well go some way towards the development of a critical collaborative research praxis: that is, a recursive form of practice that is both informed by while at the same time informing and changing theory. The dynamics of this process would be interesting to observe.

This dialogic process would not, obviously, clearly divide into school - university sections. There would appear to be sufficiently wide-ranging views about the design and conduct of collaborative research within, for example, the university participants for there to be educative engagement to occur on a smaller scale. For instance, the following comment from one of the university participants would clearly spark intense debate and interrogation and, in all likelihood, lead to the development of deeper understandings on the part of the university personnel:

What has been missing is someone who went along with us as an impartial observer and then thought about it and collaborated with us. Needed someone non committal who can oversee it. (university 3, text units 74

- 75)

What are the advantages of working collaboratively?

The informants identified a number of positive experiences and outcomes of having participated in the research projects. The field-based participants clearly recognized the positive contribution made by the university-based participants to the processes of inquiry, reflection and change:

That outside perspective - makes us reflect on our own practice. (Field 4, Text units 62-63)

One participant described how the relationship of trust and closeness between the university-based research members and the field-based participants enabled the inquiry process to deepen for both parties:

It reinforced the reflection process. When you are asked questions about a vision and you have to articulate how it translates into practice that requires you to think it through yourselves. And I think particularly for the group that was most involved ,that is the profile group for teachers, I think some of the questions they were asked were things they had not yet considered. I know to a certain extent the [university research] group was just observing but they were sometimes active observers because they would throw in a question because of something that surprised them in the discussion or the direction that the discussion took...So it challenged people to reflect on our own practice, our own thinking (Field 1, Text units 14-19)

The same informant, however, qualified this very positive view of the

relationship:

Quite useful in enhancing the reflectivity element but it was probably more useful for the team studying the school than the school itself.(Field 1, text unit 37)

Another field-based informant reinforced the positive effect on reflection and self-critique provided by the collaborative nature of the inquiry:

Terrific to get some outside perspectives. [One of the university personnel] brought along some articles, and [another member] sat in on discussions and gave some very helpful feedback about the differences that he has found in approaches between schools.(Field 7, text units 22-23)

Another aspect of the attempt at collaboration was the accretion to self-image and confidence on the part of those participants who, in more "traditional" forms of research design would have been relegated to object instead of subject:

I think that the people who were involved felt that it was worthwhile for their community but were also pleased to have been asked and to have their opinions valued. (Field 5, text unit 16)

Importantly, this previous statement highlights a crucial aspect in the development of genuinely collaborative research - that of integrity and honesty. The informant here indicates that there must be an opportunity for the raising of multiple voices, but at the same time, that those voices must be truly heard and valued.

A further point of interest was the view of the attachment or commitment of the university-based researchers to the results and outcomes of the research:

[T]he outcomes either way for the researchers wouldn't matter but to the school the outcomes were very important (Field 2, text unit 65)

This comment would seem to indicate that the sense of collaboration underlying the intentions of the university-based researchers was not shared by at least some of the field participants. In other words, this type of comment can be read to imply a continuation of traditionalist approaches to research with its belief in the impartiality of the researcher. While this point was not put to the university-based researchers, it is highly probable that they would express strong disagreement with the sentiments contained here. The attachment, both professional and personal, to the focus and purpose of inquiry on the part of university-based researchers in collaborative inquiry would be an interesting aspect for further investigation.

Generally, then, field-based researchers indicated that the effects of working collaboratively with university personnel has led to positive concrete results for their particular school. This point is

illustrated by the following comments:

That project gave the S.A.C the direction that it was desperately seeking at the time. In a sense, it was a the catalyst that bought the S.A.C into being as a management structure within the school with integrity and purpose and so on.(Field 3, text units 36-37)

Report confirms some things we believed about [the topic of inquiry] but it also makes some very important statements about things we weren't aware of.(Field 4, text unit 96)

The university-based researchers similarly saw the outcomes of the

process in generally positive terms, and, again, largely from the point of view of contributing to the professional growth and understanding of the field-based researchers rather than in terms of their own. The position of one university-based researcher clearly contains the view that the process outcomes were heavily oriented towards the development of the field-based researchers, that the university personnel's role was one of assisting in this process and applauding the efforts:

Then stuff that we are coming out with, even if we haven't finalized the report it's been a growth process, involved people having to come to a position on things. They have had to look at their attitudes and values. Maybe not analyze them in any great depth and I think that a lot of them have gone away and thought about stuff further because the interpretations we got back go a little further.(university 4, text units 88-90)

This view, obviously, presents the risk of perpetuating the divide between researcher and practitioner insofar as it admits of little likelihood that the university-based researchers might come to learn something from their partners in collaboration. The elevation of the "collaborative" university-based researcher to a position of primacy in the process of knowing is something that warrants further investigation.

There was, though, some sense of two-way learning contained within the university-based researchers' experiences with the collaborative approach to research:

The... project highlight was getting inside an organization to see how somebody ....was able to again put into practice an ideal.(university 1, text unit 21)

Personal highlights- really interesting to have people elucidate their side of the story, their perception of how things were.(university 4, text unit 34)

From the point of view of the way in which the research was both designed and conducted, there are a number of important points to be raised. Firstly, it would appear that one of the most valued aspects of the process from the field-based researchers' point of view was the commitment to according them certain "rights" and responsibilities within the formal research process, in particular their right to veto or modify aspects of the process as they saw fit. Similarly, the

process of negotiating the terms of the research through to the use and control of any data emanating from the research seemed to instill a feeling of trust into the whole engagement. The following comment is illustrative:

Things explained clearly i.e. ownership of data etc. We had some discussions about that at the beginning and I think that was spelt out very clearly. We raised the concerns that we had and we received assurances and re-assurances about those concerns and we explored them thoroughly before we started.(Field 1, text units 70-72)

The same informant stressed the importance for successful collaborative research for commitments made at the beginning of the project to be adhered to throughout:

Collaboratively developed and a respectful approach was taken towards the concerns we expressed. Nothing happened in the project that I would feel uncomfortable about or that I felt breached those agreements at the beginning of the process.(Field 1, text units 75-76)

On-going interactions and referrals between and across the various parties to the projects was another aspect of the research project that

informants viewed very positively:

At one time in the project we had an interim report and had some intensive discussion with [one of the university-based researchers]. There was a confusion between [two terms used]. With the interactive



process we were able to say outcomes have to be written[one way and not the other] as there is no current legislation for [the term first used]. If there wasn't an interactive process then that one term could've skewed the whole report.(Field 2, text units 71-74)

A further essential element in the conduct of successful collaborative research would seem to be existing familiarity between and concomitant trust of specific individuals to be involved in the project. This aspect was mentioned more frequently by the field-based researchers, and its relative absence in the views of the university-based researchers might well reflect a heritage of university personnel entering educational sites as strangers on a more frequent basis than the field-based personnel. That is, the degree of previous experience with potential collaborators might not figure as prominently in the minds of university-based researchers because, particularly those researchers from the area of teacher education are often in schools in a number of capacities - practicum supervision, professional development work, and the like - and, presumably, are accustomed to working from scratch with field-based professionals.

Illustrative comments here include:

The relationship with [one of the university-based researchers] was there and when he suggested the project the informal linkages had been set up and we trust this fellow.(Field 2, text unit 21)

Getting back to the question of linkages, I think it's that informal,

trust linkage and working with somebody who has worked with the school before (Field 2, text unit 23)

At [this school] we have had quite a lot of contact with university and minor research projects with other Universities. .It is not something that teachers here are unaccustomed to. (Field 3, text units 14-15)

A similar view of this was expressed by one university-based participant:

None of us except [one member] had anything to do with the schools before we went so we were strangers in lots of ways and so we were outsiders. We weren't even marginalised insiders, people who are familiar faces on the school site. Apart from [that one member of the university-based researchers] and [that person] was only known to probably the administrative people in the schools. So there needs to be a greater familiarity, so we know who the people are. I didn't have a clue who half the people were in [that site]. I spoke to them once and we were out of there. (university 1, text units 50-55)

University-based informants agreed on the contribution of positive relationships based on trust and familiarity. Certainly the idea of more regular, long-term connection to schools was a clearly articulated one:

We need to be in the schools on a regular basis identifying with their concerns and helping them such that they feel comfortable to come to us and say we want to do some stuff on this topic, will you help us. (university 1, text unit 49).

More regular contact with and presence in schools may well go some way towards overcoming potential points for suspicion and distrust to

hinder the inquiry process. Two comments from university-based researchers exemplify this:

At [one of the school sites] in particular we were seen as agents of the principal so from the staff the relationship was one of probably a little bit of suspicion, a lot of guardedness and hesitancy because they weren't sure what was going to be reported back (university 1, text unit 87)

[The university-school site relationship was] changeable because of how the aspects of people's roles in other dimensions impacted. So, at times the project stalled while we dealt with those issues individually and in pairs. From an outsider's point of view I felt at times that we were getting nowhere. With the benefit of hindsight and the more distance we have from that time I think that was part of the whole process. (university 2, text units 72-75).

The effect of this variable nature of working relationship has led, in this informant's opinion to the perpetuation of traditional researcher-researched relationship:

I'm sure they still see us as a group of academics that came out sometime last year. (university 2, text unit 109)

The importance of establishing an appropriate relationship between the university and the field from the very beginning on a personal basis was suggested as a crucial aspect ensuring genuinely collaborative inquiry takes root:

Perhaps we should have gone out personally and met them face to face rather than do it with written material. People out there have a misconception of researchers as people [who] come in and do studies on them instead of with, and once again I don't think we were very clear. We mentioned collaborative research but we didn't clearly spell out what we intended their role to be and that was one of the limitations of our research. (university 3, text units 28 - 33)

The value of face-to-face meetings, though, might result in a number of unanticipated effects. As one university-based informant stated:

Some members of the community were ....some of the people who came to talk to them were not what they expected academics to look like.(Field 5, text unit 27).

This point was also raised by another of the field-based informants, and further emphasizes the importance of time being spent in establishing relationships based on comfort, ease, and personability:

In the [teacher research group],there may have some people who had been working in this institution for many years and have not had a lot to do with researchers for sometime, maybe 10 years, I think they may have found it strange in the first session but I think the way the first session was conducted, and the personalities of the people involved and

the way they put people at their ease and I think from then on it was a fairly relaxed atmosphere (Field 1, text unit 57)

Herein might well lay a positive effect in overcoming stereotypical images of what it means to engage in research, to be positioned as a researcher or researched, and the form of relationships that the "traditional" research discourse calls up.

What were some of the limitations of the collaborative research process?

While the experience of the informants in the four Reform in Education projects was reportedly quite positive, there were a number of problems

and limitations of the collaborative process identified. Many of these concerns attach to disappointments over expectations of the outcomes.

For example,

I felt that we really only scratched the surface. (Field 1, text unit 25)

I was hoping some more practical techniques that people could take away and really would use to enhance the function of those [aspects of the school life] and I'm not sure that that got followed through to the extent that it could've. (Field 1, text unit 28)

Another aspect of disappointment related to the entrenching of the collaborative process itself

We spent quite a bit of time, a couple of sessions, at [the school site] talking to participants before hand about how this was something we were not going to do on them. We went and spoke to the Principal first of all to establish a research project that she thought would be beneficial to the school. Spoke to participants at that stage about what they thought about research, what they thought it to be, how they felt about it, what the process might involve. Prior to each interview we made it clear to the interviewees that this was not about doing something on them it was doing something with them in a co-operative manner, and that we would bring back to them whatever we collected and collated and we would seek their opinions, not just come back to them with our opinions and interpretations. Finalizing the feedback on the interviews, one participant was upset that the interview information that had sent them, he/she felt misquoted and the whole exercise was a waste of time and money. I interpret that to mean we hadn't done our job sufficiently well to enable that person to feel part of it.

(university 3, text units 16-21)

This point was reiterated by another university-based researcher :

One of the restraints was that people have a perception of research that was not our perception of what we were doing. Many of the participants despite efforts to explain the process and demonstrate the collegiality of the stuff we were doing people still felt / perceived that research was still something that should be done upon them, not in conjunction with them. I think that stems from a feeling of not being qualified to do it, and if you become part of a research project as a

lay person it somehow demystifies it and becomes somehow not real research. (university 4, text units 41-43).

This comment also carries a perception of the views of a field-based participant of what research is. This is a point that should be further interrogated, insofar as it presents as a potentially major impediment to the development of "new" roles in the research process.

Another limitation or problem with the collaborative research process attaches to the situation of the reluctant collaborator. It seems that within any research group, there is a range of commitment to and involvement in collaboration. Some field-based participants in the projects were, apparently, less willing to be involved than might be considered desirable for any thought of genuine collaboration:

One person that I interviewed was not interested in being interviewed, it was an interruption but she had to be there, she was told she had to be there at this interview time.(university 1, text unit 85)

Then there were the teachers in the school that brought their role of following what the principal said into the project. They were asked, or directed (I think it was asked) to take part so that they bought that into it as well "the principal told me I should come and talk to

you but I'm not sure why I'm talking to you." (university 2, text units 40-44)

The obvious diversity of views and concerns within a research group becomes significantly magnified when the scope of the group positioned

as "researcher" is widened as happened in these attempts at collaborative inquiry. Inevitably, there will be conflict, clashes and impasses reached. While this phenomenon might well be productive in some settings, it also has the potential for tearing collaborative relationships apart:

A lot of fingers in the pot. Each of us comes to any research or any project with a cemented set of values, expectations, attitudes and it's very, very difficult to leave those out. I don't think you can leave it out, all of those values, attitudes those things you have yourself based on experience, based on philosophy based on a lot of things, and therefore perhaps the communication is not always good in that it is a bit like speaking to someone who has poor English. Communication among a wide variety of people from a wide variety of backgrounds will always pose a problem of interpretation and as a limitation I guess that happens in everything and I guess it gets back to what I was saying before about someone else looking in. (Field 5, text units 19 - 22)

Another problem that emerged from the research was the perceived need on the part of some university-based researchers to present data and interpretations of that data in an "acceptable" way to the field-based participants. This difficulty, alluded to in the following comment, indicates that a definite role separation was maintained within much of the Reform in Education research:

It probably occurred that the interview data had to be sanitized because we couldn't afford to have too many names and identifiers in the hard data that was sent back. The interviews were sanitized to make them as objective as possible and to remove any direct references to



individuals. (university 3, text units 22-23)

That is, while attempts at opening up the research process to involvement, influence and possibly control by field-based researchers were genuine in their orientation, there seems to have been a retrieval of "traditional" research roles when the time came for data analysis and interpretation in a number of the studies. It is likely that this rather more political part of the research process is a crucial point for the testing of the commitment to collaborative inquiry, for it is here that the field-based researchers should have at least equivalent input to the university-based researchers.

The field-based researchers did have considerable influence in the data gathering part of the process, and it is likely that this influence cut across the assumed expertise of university-based researchers in research design:

Some data gathering techniques were viewed as inappropriate, don't record this interview, don't take notes, don't even ask to record it, which is probably important stuff and was probably to save the project and keep it alive rather than have it ship wrecked on rocky shores of politics and whatever down there. (university 1, text unit 82)

Another difficulty in the conduct of collaborative inquiry related to the positioning of individuals as information and power sources in the projects. This occurred with both members of the field-based researcher groups and the university-based researchers

I was never certain of what was being communicated to schools by the

project co-ordinator, and I don't mean that in a critical way - I was just never certain of that because we would then talk to them and they would have a different idea of what was going to happen on a number of

occasions. (university 1, text unit 100)

As the principal he has ultimate responsibility [in the school] but that role came into the project. Similarly from this end, [the project co-ordinator] the first name on the research project, as the lecturer supervising [the principal] on another project so he bought all of that in. I feel that it created uncertainty.(university 2, text units 40-42)

What changes might make future research more collaborative ?

Most informants indicated their commitment to continuing to develop collaborative links between university and school, indeed, one participant went so far as to indicate that, in the emerging political and professional climate, such collaboration will be crucial:

I'd be happy to continue the relationship. It's essential for both our institutions that that does happen. Need to go with new model of school governance that we need to work with, as we move into a district model which we will soon, we need to find better ways of organizing and managing schools and there is a role for universities there. (Field 4, text units 102-104)

If we continue with the research it would get better and better over

time in the sense of being collaborative. The same site and a lot of work with the participants.(university 2, text units 79-80)

One of the university-based researchers disagreed with the perceived value of continuing to develop collaborative research relationships between the university and the schools:

I used to think it was a good idea but now I'm not so sure. It could skew the results. If people are aware of what you are doing they could change it to suit their own ends. Collaborative within the university and within faculties is a good idea. Collaborating with colleagues on research ideas and techniques probably more effective than involving the recipients.(university 3, text units 45-49)

Based on their experience with this attempt to engage in collaborative research, participants made a number of suggestions for change in the way in which the process worked out this time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the suggestions go some way towards addressing the problem of encouraging greater influence and input from field-based researchers.

Some informants suggested a process of developing a professional relationship between the university and the schools in the hope that the schools might well take more of the initiative in instigating collaborative activity:

Firstly, we would need to wait for schools to identify a problem that they want some help with. We have gone in and said we want to do some stuff on social justice are you interested and they've said yes. Doing it the other way, having schools saying we want to do some work on this

topic are you interested, to us, I suppose it is only just swapping roles but it seems to me that when the school site genuinely wants something done and they come to us for help that is when we will have a greater chance for collaborative work because the conception of research in schools is that it is something that gets done on them or two them or about them by people like us.(university 1, text units 44-46)

Another suggestion was that the university-based researchers be more assertive in emphasizing their commitment to "democratizing" the research process. This could involve an educative function:

And we have a view of what research is; so there is a long getting to

know you, educative period about what is research, what does it mean to do research. (university 2, text unit 51)

Maybe more tangible outcomes for them if it is a truly educative process where they are learning research skills and we could give them recognition. (university 2, text unit 69)

It is important to stress that this educative process is not one necessarily to be confined to the field-based researchers, but, of necessity, needs to be engaged in by all participants:

Even among the Uni based people we had different views about what research was and if we are going to have all different views than the people in schools are also going to have different views. Maybe that's

the first step. It's a long process involved and everyone has a similar understanding(university 2 ,text units 52-53)

As a basic starting point, one field-based informant emphasized the importance of locating the research endeavour clearly in the areas of interest and relevance to those they believed to be most affected by the outcomes of inquiry: the classroom teachers:

Try to ask teachers what their concerns are before they start the research. (Field 6, text unit 32)

A similar emphasis on the classroom-based participants, but for different reasons, was articulated by members of the university-based research team:

I think that we should work with grassroots people more than people in positions of authority because the agendas of people in the broad, unwashed masses of the school are probably less personally oriented than maybe the agendas of principals and administrators. Probably a greater likelihood that we would get honest feedback or unfiltered feedback from teachers as co-ordinators of projects than from principals who may be trying to soften the blow and maintain the relationship with the University and so on.(university 1, text units 67-68)

All decisions have to be made and agreed to by everyone in the project.

I am not sure that it is possible because of time and the other thing is if you are working with people in schools

If we were to do it again we need to have more structure and perhaps have them involved a little more in defining roles and as being part of it rather than being recipients.(university 3, text unit 35)

Bring everybody together and sit down and look at research as a topic and what it does, and what we are trying to achieve and if it has a collegial project people have to be quite clear that they are part and parcel of it they have a right to criticize, to analyze, to synthesize the data that has been collected. .(university 4, text unit 53)

The issues of contact people and project management responsibility also attracted comment from the university-based researchers :

I would not work through administrators or people who are in visible positions of authority in the school as the contact person.(university 1, text unit 57)

Have to do something about the contact person in the school. If it can't be everyone and it can't be all the time, you have to have a contact person on both times. It should probably be a person who doesn't have power and authority invested in them as a result of their position in the school that other people recognize already.(university

2, text units 52-57)

We probably needed to set up a management team for the research which we didn't do which included not just us but people from the field in

our decision making. Maybe that means that decision making isn't resident here in this office or in the Education conference room but it means that we go to the site to facilitate the co-ordination of the on going stuff, and not just as the one off thing but as a regular management thing.(university 1, text units 70-71)

A crucial element for ensuring the success of future collaborative research activity was seen by one informant as a determination to bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice:

We have to show the participants that we want their opinions, we want them to help us categorize stuff, their own interpretative power. We have to demonstrate that that is the case in some instances and not just say it.(university 4, text units 96-97)

A final suggestion was that of the choice of research topic. One university-based researcher suggested that the topic of inquiry in the Reform in Education projects was sufficiently complex to detract from efforts at developing collaborative research methodologies:

Addressing a less complex issue.(university 5, text unit 23)

## Recommendations

As a result of the analysis of the data reported on above, it is possible to identify a number of what might be seen to be critical

indicators of or precursors to collaborative inquiry. These are drawn from the reported experiences, views and perceptions of the group of informants involved in this study, and have been placed within collaborative and mutualistic frameworks of reference.

The following list of critical indicators has been distilled from the data collected for this project, and indicators have been included on the basis of the following selection criteria:

To be included in a list of critical indicators of appropriate conduct of collaborative inquiry, an idea from the data had to be :

1. articulated by one or more people from the informant group;
2. consistent with established conceptualizations of collaborative inquiry;
3. consistent with established Codes of Ethics, in particular:  
the Code of Ethics of the Australian Association of Research in Education (1993)

and

the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee's Guidelines for Responsible Practices in Research and Dealing with Problems of research Misconduct (1990)

4. legitimized by the informant group;



5. accepted by the full Reform in Education team (where possible); and

At the time of writing, points 4 and 5 of the above list of criteria

for inclusion were underway but incomplete. Relevant modifications to the list of critical indicators to reflect any required changes emerging from the completion of these steps will be made accordingly.

#### Critical Indicators of or Precursors to Collaborative Inquiry

##### Purpose

###### 1.1 site-based problem-solving

The focus of the inquiry is on a problem or phenomenon resident in the concrete practical experience of site-based participants.

###### 1.2 advancement of practical-theoretical understanding

The purpose of the inquiry is to contribute to understanding of the praxis of the area of inquiry

###### 1.3 improvement of practice

The aim of the inquiry is to contribute to changes in professional practice leading to improvements in outcomes.

## Initiation

### 2.1 site-based

The identification of a need for research into a particular problem or phenomenon arises at the site of the phenomenon.

## Design

### 3.1 emergent

The design of the research changes over the course of the inquiry to accommodate new ideas, information and problems.

### 3.2 negotiated

The design of the research is negotiated on an on-going basis by the participants

### 3.3 educative

A function of the research design process is to contribute to the understanding of all research participants of that process and the nature of inquiry generally.

### 3.4 informed

Negotiations of the research design are conducted on the basis of

informed discussion by all participants involved.

## Project Management

### 4.1 representative

The research project is managed by a project group that is representative of the full range of participants.

### 4.2 collegial

The deliberations and decision-making of the management group are

conducted on a collegial basis, with the aim of utilizing democratic and inclusive forms of engagement to promote the collaborative basis of the inquiry underway.

### 4.3 site-located

The management group convenes at the research site.

### 4.4 consultative

In reaching decisions, the management group consults with all participants likely to be effected by any decision, and communicates its decisions to all participants.

#### 4.5 accountable

The management group is fully accountable to the participants in the project.

#### Access to the Field

##### 5.1 informed consent

Access to relevant sources of information and data is gained by securing the informed consent of all those effected or likely to be effected by the data gathering process.

##### 5.2 right of refusal / restriction

Informants have a right to deny access or to restrict access to information.

#### Data Collection

##### 6.1 negotiated methodology

The process whereby data is collected for the project is negotiated with those informants or sources of such information

##### 6.2 informant control

Informants have the right to control the release, recording and copying of information.

## Data Analysis

### 7.1 joint

The analysis process is undertaken by all participants, or representatives of all groups of participants.

### 7.2 joint ownership

The outcomes of the analysis process are the property of the project, not individuals.

## Reporting

### 8.1 negotiated use

Individuals or groups negotiate with the project group for specific use of project property.

### 8.2 negotiated release

The release of material related to the project in the form of

conference presentations, publications, site-based reports and the like is negotiated between those wishing to secure the release and the project group.

### 8.3 multiple perspectives

The publication of material related to the research project contains the differing perspectives of the participants.

### 8.5 right of notification

Participants are informed of the places of and groups to whom publication of project-related material is made.

## 9. Inter-personal communication

### 9.1 Trust

Individuals involved in the project trust all other participants insofar as their commitment to the advancement of the aims of the project are concerned.

### 9.2 Honesty

Communication between participants is at all times open, honest and courteous, respectful of diversity and difference of opinion and perspective

The development of socially-just research practices in the course of attempting to uncover images of social justices in educational settings as exemplified in this study has revealed the difficulties of breaking down the positivistically-based binarisms of researcher - researched. This process must, of necessity, be on-going and reflective as those involved continue to develop that personal-professional relationship necessary for trust and mutual risk to be seen as parts of the dialogue between school-based and university-based researchers that leads to a communal sense of empowerment in the project of coming to know and, more importantly from a social justice perspective, of educational and social transformation.

1 Reinharz calls "rape research" that form of and approach to research which " takes rather than gives, describes rather than changes, transmits rather than transforms" (1979, p 95)

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