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A CASE STUDY OF ACTION RESEARCH AS STAFF DEVELOPMENT:

FACILITATING TEACHER REFLECTION

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Teacher Education

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Deborah M. Walker

December 1997

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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A CASE STUDY OF ACTION RESEARCH AS STAFF DEVELOPMENT:
FACILITATING TEACHER REFLECTION

Deborah M. Walker, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 1997

Advisor: Dr. Kenneth Smith

This ethnographic multi-case descriptive study looked at staff development for teachers in a child-care setting through the use of facilitated action research. The participants in the study chose an area of their practice to concentrate on, and their action research was facilitated by someone with expertise in their field of early childhood. This study examined the processes of reflection the participants underwent as they investigated an area of their practice.

Data was collected over a four month period and included journal entries kept by participants and researcher/facilitator, audiotaped initial and final interviews with participants, and classroom observations. Further data was collected over the course of the participants' own action research. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection by identifying coding categories and identifying themes and patterns in the interviews and journal entries. Two approaches were used to quantify the amount and nature of reflection undergone by participants. The first was a scheme, developed for this study, for coding levels of elaboration found in the initial and final interviews. The second was a way to look at categories of reflection in the participants' journals.

The study found that, as a result of the facilitated action research process, the participants showed an increase in reflective thought and made a number of changes to their practice. They also reported ownership of these changes and a sense of achievement at what they had accomplished. In order to replicate this type of staff development model elsewhere, those responsible for providing staff development need to be aware of its characteristics. Essential to the success of this model is that it originates from the participants' own concerns and interests, and that the role of facilitator is held by someone who is caring, impartial, non-judgmental, and above all authentic. While genuine impartiality on the behalf of the facilitator may be difficult to replicate, the use of peer-coaching could be a possible solution.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background

The present study is a multi-case study of staff development through the use of facilitated action research. The participants in the study chose an area of their practice to concentrate on, and their action research was facilitated by someone with expertise in their field of early childhood. This study looks at the processes of reflection the participants underwent as they investigated an area of their practice, collected evidence about it, reflected on that evidence, and developed new ideas.

Traditionally, staff development has been designed to impart specific information to teachers for the purpose of changing their behavior. Most teachers will have experienced staff development as a mechanism for introducing a specific program or curriculum into a school or district, or as a way to introduce or extend their skills with a particular set of teaching techniques or instructional packages (Anders and Richardson, 1994). This type of approach, although adopted almost universally, has not been popular among the teachers for whom it was intended (Guskey, 1986). Citing incompetent design (Corey, 1957; Davies, 1967), ineffectual programs (Howey and Vaughan, 1983) and minimal long-term change (Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1991), researchers have outlined the inadequacies of staff development typically available to teachers.

An alternative view of staff development is to see it as something we do to inquire into our own teaching, for the purpose of getting better at what one aspires to accomplish as a teacher. This version, called “practical inquiry” (Richardson, 1994), provides

teachers with the means to examine their own practices, to critically assess these practices and the consequences that follow from them, and to make choices about teaching differently or even becoming a different kind of teacher (Fenstermacher, 1994,).

Facilitated Reflection

Reflection, i.e. the ability to think about one's practice by standing away from the experience and considering it, is believed by many to be a crucial tool in improving one's performance as a teacher (Liston and Zeichner, 1991; Russell and Munby, 1992; Schon, 1983,1991). But reflection in itself is not sufficient. In order for reflection to open up new avenues of inquiry and practice, it needs to make a clear contribution to the intellectual and moral development of the learner. Furthermore, the person who is reflecting needs an understanding of how both her own knowledge, and the knowledge available to educators in general, have a bearing on her practice.

The presence of a facilitator can aid reflection through the use of "practical argument" with the person who is reflecting (Fenstermacher 1986). Facilitated reflection through practical argument can be used as a tool to provide perspective on the experiences of teaching, by offering a means to reconsider this experience, and by encouraging the reconstruction of this experience (Fenstermacher, 1994). In other words, facilitated reflection helps us to explore and reconsider our beliefs as they affect our practice.

Teachers' Beliefs

Our beliefs are our personal understandings of the world and the way it works, or should work. These beliefs serve as a sort of permeable lens through which all our conceptions pass. Each of us comes into teaching with beliefs about who and what we are as teachers. As we teach, we add to or subtract from this store of beliefs, taking our conceptions out of the experiences we have as teachers, as well as what we see and hear outside the classroom (Fenstermacher, 1994). Our beliefs are often formed without much consideration, beginning perhaps as impressions but over time, solidifying into major beliefs about teaching. As such, they may hinder or enhance improvement (Fenstermacher, 1994).

It is only very recently that teachers' beliefs and the relationships between these beliefs and teacher classroom actions have been given any attention. Studies such as those by Nespor, (1987) and Pajares, (1992) have led to the sense that teacher beliefs are an important consideration in understanding classroom practices, and therefore in conducting staff development programs designed to alter teacher's practices. "If beliefs are related to practices, and more importantly, if beliefs drive practices, staff development that focuses solely on teaching practices may not be successful in effecting change, unless the teacher's belief and the theories underlying the practices are also explored" (Richardson, 1994, p.90).

Whether our beliefs impede or enhance our advancement as teachers often depends on the relationship between what we believe and what it is proposed we consider

(Fenstermacher, 1994). For example, we may take part in a conventional staff development activity that wishes us to adopt a particular program that is in conflict with our existing set of beliefs or values about teaching. Our attitude toward that program will harden over time, until eventually we may dismiss it as irrelevant, or inappropriate. This is because no staff development program is likely to succeed if it ignores or tramples on the basic beliefs that teachers have about their work. But, not only must administrators and teachers of teachers be aware of teachers' beliefs for staff development to be successful, it is also necessary that teachers themselves be aware (Fenstermacher, 1994).

According to Green, (1971) we hold beliefs in clusters, and each cluster within a belief system is protected from other clusters; there is little cross- fertilization among them. As long as beliefs that may be incompatible are not set side by side and examined for inconsistency, the incompatibility will probably remain. It is therefore essential that we are aware of our basic beliefs about teaching so that we can consider the possibility that our beliefs may not be consistent with sound educational theory, with current views of effective practice, or even with each other (Fenstermacher, 1994). This awareness is aided to a considerable degree by the use of facilitated reflection.

Autonomy

Another advantage of facilitated reflection is that it places great stress on the setting forth of reasons, which in turn presses the persons engaged in discussion to think through the reasons they are putting forward. As such, it is a very useful device for promoting autonomy on the part of the teacher. It is designed to make the teacher think

about "his own choices, deliberations, decisions, reflections, judgments, plannings or reasonings" (Dearden, 1975, p.63). The growth of autonomy represents one of the most important and powerful possessions of an effective teacher.

The role of Action Research

As stated earlier, for staff development to be effective, we must take into consideration teachers' beliefs. In fact there is a strong consensus that if any change is to be positive and successful it must have the ownership of those who are expected to carry out the change (Imber and Duke, 1984). The difference between success and failure will be closely tied to the degree of involvement of teachers (Conway, 1984). This is why action research is an effective strategy for engaging educators in the change process (McKay 1992). Teachers involved in action research think about a specific problem in a particular setting with the main goal of finding better ways to do their job. The most common type of action research uses the collaborative model in which the teacher, in conjunction with the researcher, observes, questions and learns. Problems in the classroom are seen as questions to be investigated and everything in the classroom is considered data (Draper, 1994). In traditional educational research the teacher often has little influence or involvement in the study, while in action research the teacher has the dual role of researcher and teacher. The function of the research is to find answers to questions relevant to the teacher's immediate interests, with the primary goal of putting the findings immediately into practice (Oja and Smulyan, 1989). This process is an

empowering one; the teacher is in a position of influence because her ideas play a vital role in the research (Draper, 1994, Stenhouse, 1975).

Action research is a cyclical process that involves identifying a general idea or problem, gathering related information, developing an action plan, implementing the plan, evaluating the results, and starting over with a revised idea or problem. The process is greatly enhanced by the presence of a facilitator, who, through the use of practical argument, acts as both partner and catalyst. The facilitator helps the teacher review her current practice, collect evidence, evaluate observations, in general, assists in the total reflective process (Early Childhood Education Research Project, 1995).

Action research provides an opportunity for teachers to explore and experiment with different teaching methods in a positive and constructive manner. According to findings by Pine (1981), educators involved in action research become more flexible in their thinking, more open to new ideas, and more able to solve new problems. Simmons (1985) indicates that action research projects influence teachers' thinking skills, sense of autonomy, willingness to communicate with colleagues, and attitudes toward professional development and the process of change.

An important outcome of action research is the sense of accomplishment resulting from the completion of a project that one chooses to do oneself (Stenhouse, 1975). Besides the sense of autonomy and renewed respect from peers, supervisors, and students, action researchers report a higher level of self-esteem and career satisfaction

(Strickland, 1988) and, most importantly, action research also improves student achievement (McKay, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

As stated earlier, the history of staff development in schools has not always been bright. Incompetent design (Davies, 1967), ineffectual programs (Howey and Vaughan, 1983), and minimal long-term change (Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1991), have all been cited as reasons why externally driven, traditional approaches to staff development often fail. It appears that when staff development content is considered as a practice that someone outside the classroom thinks the teacher should adopt, it is unlikely to be successful (Anders and Richardson, 1994). An alternative is to consider other methods: methods that help teachers to examine their own beliefs and practices, to think about the consequences that follow from them, and to make informed decisions about thinking and teaching differently. The present study examined facilitated staff development as a vehicle to enhanced teacher reflection.

Purpose of the Study

Recent research has shown that teacher-initiated action research has helped teachers to become more flexible in their thinking (Groarke, Ovens and Hargreaves, 1986), and to become more reflective and aware of their own beliefs (Noffke and Zeichner, 1987). Furthermore, studies such as the one carried out by Tikunoff, Ward and Griffin (1979) show that undergoing the process of collaborative action research appears to lead to considerable changes in teachers' practices. The Tikunoff, Ward and Griffin

study and similar ones (Oja and Pine, 1987; Online Action Research Project, 1993; Shalaway, 1990) involved one or more researchers, a staff developer, and a group of teachers within a school. Very little research appears to have been done on the smaller-scale model of facilitated action research I propose to use: that of facilitator as ‘expert’, participant and observer, working with a small number of teachers who are also action researchers.

I observed the changes that occurred when two child-care teachers selected an area of their practice to investigate, collected evidence about it, reflected on the evidence, then developed new ideas and acted on those ideas.

My role was twofold. First, it was that of facilitator, a person with expertise in the field in which the teachers practiced acting as friend and advisor to the teacher and as a catalyst to the action research and facilitated reflection processes. Second my role was that of researcher, observing myself in the role of facilitator as well as observing the teacher in the role of reflector and action researcher.

The Grand Tour Question

- How does interaction with a facilitator affect two child-care teachers' reflection about their teaching?

Subquestion A

- How does interaction with a facilitator affect two child-care teachers' consideration of their classroom practice?

Subquestion B

- How does interaction with a facilitator help two child-care teachers' consideration of their personal beliefs?

Definitions

Qualitative study

A research process which describes and attempts to understand the observed regularities in what people do, say, and report as their experience, with the focus of attention on the perceptions and experiences of the participants in the study. In this study I undertook a qualitative, participant approach whereby I met with, observed and participated in classroom activities with teachers in their own classrooms, in order to observe and record their behavior in their natural setting.

Action research

The process by which a practitioner selects an area of her practice to investigate, collects evidence about it, reflects on the evidence, then develops new ideas and acts on these ideas.

Staff development

An activity that promotes the personal and/or professional growth of teachers. In this study the goal of staff development was to advance the knowledge, skills and understandings of teachers in ways that led to changes in their thinking and classroom behavior (Fenstermacher and Berliner, 1985).

Facilitator

A person with expertise in the field in which the teacher practices who acts as friend, advisor and catalyst, helping the teacher review her current practice, collect evidence, evaluate observations and aiding the general reflective process.

Reflection

Thinking about experiences and concepts, with a view to discovering and considering new relationships particularly between one's beliefs and one's practices in teaching.

Delimitations and Limitations

- This research confined itself to a multiple-case study consisting of interviewing, meeting with and observing two teachers in a Midwest child-care center sponsored by a public school district and funded by parent fees.
- The purpose of this study was to provide information on the processes that occur while teachers undergo facilitated change. The outcomes of this particular study were unique to this situation. However, if the study were to be replicated, the processes undergone by both researcher/facilitator and teachers should be similar.

Significance of the Study

This study should be of interest to anyone who wishes to know more about how to facilitate or bring about teacher change, and to anyone who has responsibility for the staff development program in a school, preschool or child-care setting. Considerable research has suggested that traditional externally driven methods of staff development often fail,

bringing about little change in teachers' practice, and often increasing their feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction.

Action research, however, may be an excellent tool for staff development. Action research is teacher-initiated and teacher-driven, facilitating reflection and the consideration of beliefs. It allows teachers to develop their understanding of children's learning, and deepen their insights into their own practice. Such experiences result in teachers taking ownership of their professional development. Action research involves continual processes. The present study will be of interest to any researcher or practitioner who wishes to look more closely at the way in which these processes develop, and to any staff developer or administrator who wants to bring about change in their teachers, particularly in a child-care setting.

CHAPTER II: PROCEDURE

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

There are a number of reasons why I decided to take a qualitative, ethnographic approach to this descriptive case study:

- Action research involves continual processes, and it is these processes, more than outcomes or products, with which I was primarily concerned (although outcomes were still important). Change was expected, and the reasons for this were important to chronicle. I did not wish to control, limit, or direct change, but to describe its flow. Such an approach made qualitative methods very appropriate for a study of facilitated staff development through action research.
- Qualitative methodology ascribes to the view that multiple realities exist. To determine these realities and their associated meanings requires flexible and evolving strategies (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1996). The process with which I was concerned was inductive in that I built abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories as the study progressed and unfolded rather than entering the study with preconceived theories to be validated. This made qualitative methodology very appropriate for this study.
- I was interested in meaning- how people in general, and the participants of the study in particular, made sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. Qualitative approaches provide access, through inductive processes, to the

examination of personal meaning. For that reason this was a good choice for the study.

- I used myself as the primary instrument for data collection, and as a filter for interpretation and analysis. This approach was particularly suited to the intensive and personal professional changes in belief and practice associated with facilitated staff development.
- Qualitative research takes a holistic perspective, considering the situation under study in its entirety. Such a consideration of situational complexity allowed for more of a total examination of perspectives.
- The outcomes of this kind of research are readily interpretable by practitioners (a characteristic often absent in much quantitative research).

Type of Design Used

The study I conducted was an ethnographic multi-case descriptive study.

Ethnographic research involves considerable interaction between the subjects and the researcher and can be conceptualized as descriptive anthropology, in which the researcher has an in-depth involvement in a culture for the purpose of fully portraying it. (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1996). In this ethnographic descriptive case study I was concerned with studying the participants in their cultural context and in providing a detailed account of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1988). Furthermore, I was interested in carrying out my research in a sustained context. To include all these elements, I went to the classroom where the teachers worked in order to meet with them, participate in class

activities and observe and record their behavior in its natural setting. This took place over a four month period. The perspectives of the participants, including myself, provided important data from both external behavior and statements, and internal values and attitudes, which I sought to observe, consider, and understand (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1996).

The Role of the Researcher

This research was conducted with two teachers in a Midwest child-care center. Both teachers taught in the same pre-kindergarten class and had volunteered to work with me on this study.

My role, as described earlier, was that of researcher-facilitator, acting as an expert in the field of early childhood. I participated in the research by acting as friend and advisor to the teachers and as a catalyst to the action research processes, and at the same time observing the teachers in the role of reflectors and action researchers, and myself as facilitator. Data was gathered from multiple sources over a four-month period.

Method of Subject Selection

The subjects selected were a sample of convenience. Through my thesis advisor, I contacted administrators in a number of preschools and child-care centers to see if they had any members of staff who would be interested in volunteering to take part in this research. One director responsible for a number of child-care centers allowed me to present my ideas for the study to a group of her staff. Two volunteers were self-selected, based on their interest and a willingness to commit to a long-term collaborative

relationship. Just before the study started one of the original volunteers moved elsewhere, so I returned to the child-care center to present my ideas to another group of staff, and another teacher volunteered to take her place.

Data Collection Procedures

After a meeting in which the purpose of the research was outlined, audiotaped initial interviews were held with both participants. These were semi-structured interviews from a prepared base, but further questions were asked to clarify or to dig deeper where appropriate. The purpose of these interviews was to learn more about the participants' background, training and interests.

The next step was a meeting in order to establish which area of their practice the participants wished to research, and for both facilitator and participants to begin to get to know each other. Next came the first of ten observations. Each of these took place during what the center determined as the preschool portion of the day, i.e. between 8.30 and 11.30 a.m.

Throughout the four month period of this research, I, as researcher-facilitator, kept a journal. This focused on my reflections and perceptions, how I felt the teachers responded to me, and the changes I saw taking place, in the teachers, in myself, and in our relationships with each other. Entries were made in this journal on every occasion that I visited the school, immediately after meeting with or observing the teachers, and also for further reflection.

Both participants also kept a journal in which they wrote entries three to five times a week. Like the researcher, they made entries immediately after a meeting concerning the study, and after they had undergone any activity pertaining to their action research (such as teaching or organizing the class in a different way, or undergoing a specific observation). Their journal entries showed some evidence of their reflection, and focused on how they thought their action research was progressing, and their perceptions of any changes that had taken place.

Further evidence was also collected in the form of artifacts that were outcomes of the research process. These consisted of teachers' lesson plans, student records, student writing, paintings and models, and a series of photographs.

Finally, audiotaped final interviews were conducted with both participants. Final interviews were also conducted with the site administrator and with the executive director with ultimate responsibility for this site and several others in the district.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection, data interpretation and narrative report writing. Data was analyzed through the process of de-contextualization and re-contextualization (Tesch 1990). This involved reading through all the raw data from journals, interview transcripts, and other sources, and coding it for topics of emphasis. Next the topics were clustered into categories (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992), and dominant themes were extracted. These themes were then reviewed and overall patterns noted.

In order to quantify the amount and nature of reflection, two approaches were used. The first was a scheme, which was developed for this study, for coding the levels of elaboration found in the initial and final interviews. The second was a way to look at categories of reflection in the participants' journals using "The Reflective Thought and Behavior Profile" (Lewison, 1995, 1996).

Methods for Verification

I sought to preserve internal validity by using a number of verification procedures.

- I used myself as the primary instrument for data gathering and analysis, acting as the prime filter and interpreter. However, I used a mentor (my Thesis Chair who is an expert in the field of early childhood) to act as secondary filter and as a 'reality check' (Creswell, 1994) to review findings and confirm the patterns that I saw emerging.
- Transcripts were made for the participants' journals and of the initial and final interviews. These transcripts, together with the themes identified from them were given to the participants for 'member checks' to seek their views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 1997; Ely et al., 1991; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).
- Data was collected during prolonged engagement in the field (Creswell, 1997; Ely et al., 1991, Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). During the four months of this study there were many observations and meetings, all of which took place in the setting in which the participants worked. This allowed time for a sense of trust to be

built between researcher and participants and for the researcher to become immersed in the culture of that setting (Creswell, 1997).

- ‘Thick description’ was used when reporting the findings of this study (Creswell, 1997; Erlandson et al., 1993; Merriam, 1988; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The detail in which both participants and setting were described allows the reader to decide whether the findings could be transferred to another setting.

CHAPTER III: FINDINGS

This facilitated action research study took place over a four month period in the West Omaha child-care center where both participants worked. The researcher conducted audiotaped initial and final interviews with both participants, classroom observations, and exit interviews with the Center Director and Executive Center Director who had given permission for the study to be conducted. Journals were kept on a regular basis (3 to 5 times a week and after each meeting) by both participants and by the researcher/facilitator. Further data was collected over the course of the participants' own action research. This included classroom plans by teachers and children, record-keeping systems, photographs, paintings, audiotaping and other artifacts. Data was gathered throughout the course of the study and analysis was conducted simultaneously by identifying coding categories and generating themes and patterns in the interviews and journal entries. The data was reduced by using myself, the researcher, as prime filter and using my Thesis Chair as a secondary filter and "reality check", as stated earlier. It was then passed back to the participants for verification.

"This (facilitated staff development process) brought the teacher right into the classroom... You were right there, muddling through the whole thing with us, and I think that's very powerful. I mean, I wish more learning could happen that way. I think it's an exciting opportunity for teachers to get to be in that kind of setting, you know." (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

“When I took this job I didn’t realize how much it was going to entail... which doesn’t mean I don’t love my job, I love my job dearly, but sometimes I feel really overwhelmed. I mean, I just assumed that... you played with the kids and you do playdough and you did art stuff and everything. And I didn’t know anything about this accreditation, with, you know, projects, with trying to get things for the room,... proper ways to discipline children, all this stuff. And I think it’s really neat, I’m glad I’m learning it... but on the other hand, I just get so overwhelmed.”
(Chantelle, Journal, 10/1).

The Participants

Ann

Ann is a caring, perceptive teacher with more than nine years of experience in elementary and preschool settings.

“Oh, I taught first grade for two years, and then my husband is a pastor and went to seminary, and so, when he was in seminary, I got into early childhood, and taught at a different place every year, because our circumstances changed every year, so I taught kindergarten one year there, I did preschool one year, and I was in a daycare center one year... Then I did just a regular preschool program two years, kind of a part-time two-day program, and now I’ve been here at Eastside... for two years.” (Ann, Initial Interview, 7/24).

She has a degree in elementary education and is continuing her education by taking graduate level classes to earn an endorsement in early childhood education. She is currently taking part in a management training program run by the Eastside Early Childhood Centers.

Ann began working in preschool when her own children were young.

“I just kind of fell into early childhood, and then as I started my own family, it was kind of nice, because I could do it part-time, and I could kind of arrange the hours, and so, it’s kind of fit with my life right now.

And then I found that I really liked this age group and got excited about the possibilities of early childhood.” (Ann, Initial Interview 7/24).

She enjoys relating to the children and seeing them become excited over new things, but finds her job consuming.

“I think it’s a job that consumes you a lot and it’s hard right now... to balance my whole world... individually, I love taking classes, I like my job, I... love my family. But trying to put it all together sometimes is hard” (Ann, Initial Interview, 7/24).

Ann sees herself as a good teacher because she cares about the relationships she has with children.

“I think I genuinely care about kids, and I think, especially at this level, a lot of it is the relationship, and especially in this kind of setting where it’s daycare, and they’re here long hours... I think that relationship is

really important, that they have, you know, a person who's consistent, who's there every day that they can count on, who's... going to care about them when their parents can't be around to care about them."

(Ann, Initial Interview, 7/24).

Ann pinpointed classroom control as something she would like to do better. "I've always struggled with... classroom control and how to do it positively, ... in ways that help kids grow and learn." (Ann, Initial Interview 7/24).

Chantelle

At the start of this research Chantelle had only been working at the childcare center for seven months, and had no prior experience working with children. She had also received no training before then.

"... The only training I had was when I started... I was required to take six classes, one on, you know, just different types of teaching and, I took... one on discipline vs. punishment, that kind of stuff just to help you."

(Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25).

She became interested in early childhood because she liked children and heard there was a lack of good teachers.

"Even when I was younger, kids always seemed to really like me,... and I've always heard that there was such a lack of good teachers. There's a lot of people out there that get their degrees and they... don't really like kids. So somebody told me (that) basically the only thing you really needed to

have to be a teacher... I mean you needed to have the training and stuff too... but to really like kids was the most important.” (Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25).

Chantelle enjoys her job because she likes seeing the children become excited about things

“I really like... just seeing the kids get excited about things... I’ve never worked somewhere before when you come in, and everybody’s happy to see you.” (Chantelle, Initial Interview” 7/25).

She also found it more rewarding than anywhere else she had worked.

“I’ve worked a lot of different places. I’ve worked in pet shops, flower shops, summertime ranch for two years. I’ve worked in... a grocery store for two years and this has been the most rewarding.” (Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25).

Chantelle named being involved with the children as her greatest strength.

“I think I’m really good at getting down and playing with the kids, not just sitting back and... teaching them. I... get down and play... dinosaurs with them or... if they’re finger painting, I’ll get in there and finger paint with them.” (Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25).

When asked what part of her practice she would like to do better she replied:

“I think I have a hard time being patient sometimes, or dealing with some of the conflicts in the classroom.” (Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25).

The researcher/Facilitator (Myself)

I am an early childhood teacher from England who moved to the U.S. because of my husband's job. I have a teaching degree and eight years experience in elementary education, much of it at kindergarten level, and three years experience with preschool. I am currently working on my master's degree in teacher education, with an emphasis on early childhood.

The Sequence of Events

“And the teacher becomes the learner... our project was projects” (Ann, Journal, 8/12).

After an initial meeting to explain what the research was about and give the participants some information on my background and expertise as researcher facilitator, initial interviews were held in order for me to find more about the participants. Meetings were then held to discuss the purpose and mechanics of journal writing and to enable the participants to decide on the focus for their research. Both participants were working in the same classroom and decided to look at the same area of practice, implementing a project on houses with their class. The next step was the first observation of the participants in their classroom. Feedback was given at the request of the participants and they made a number of changes to their classroom organization and layout as a result of this feedback. Both participants then began to experience some problems with journal writing. Chantelle said that she did not like writing and had problems with both the content of her journal and the actual mechanics of writing it: spelling, punctuation,

grammar. I gave her a number of different journal formats to try. Ann was an experienced journal-keeper who kept her own personal journal. Her difficulty was that she was trying to keep both personal journal and research journal simultaneously, and this resulted in editing of her research journal. She agreed to think of a way to combine the two and to do less editing. The participants then felt ready to begin their research.

They were eager to start right away, and had not anticipated how important and time-consuming the planning stage is. As facilitator I explained the importance of detailed preparation at this stage and the participants agreed to delay their start for a week in order to plan properly. In the event, two planning sessions were required. After a difficult first session where the participants lost their focus on their research, I provided the tools for them to step back and examine the larger picture at the second session. This worked well and the participants were able to complete their plans. The following week the research got underway.

Things got off to a good start. The children appeared interested and involved and there was a very positive response from parents. The participants continued to make changes to the classroom and discussed plans for some whole class reorganization. Further meetings and observations were conducted to assess the progress of their research. Both participants were still experiencing problems with their journals. Ann was continuing to struggle against overediting her journal, and Chantelle abandoned her written journal and decided to try using a hand-held tape recorder instead.

Interest in the participants' action research focus was still high from children, staff and parents and ended in a good culminating event: the class held an Open House which was enjoyed by all. Both participants reported a strong sense of achievement at the success of their research and at all the changes they had made. We held a session to evaluate their action research and then I held final interviews with each participant to discuss their reactions to the overall research process. Interviews were also held with the child-care center director and executive director for their views on the research.

Fig.1 shows a summary of the sequence of events for this research process.

The Process

Throughout this research I held a dual role as facilitator, supporting the participants with their action research, identifying their needs, stimulating their ideas and encouraging exploration and reflection. As researcher it was also necessary to take a step back and observe the progress of the research process as it unfolded. In effect I was watching a process within a process (see Fig. 2). The participants were, as part of their action research, facilitating the children in their class as they underwent the project cycle. As this cycle progressed the participants collected evidence about the children's progress and used it to inform their facilitation of the next step of this cycle. In turn, I was facilitating the teachers' implementation of their research and using their progress in order to inform my planning for the next stage of their research cycle. At the same time, as researcher, I was observing the overall process.

Fig. 1: A Timeline of the Facilitated Action Research Process

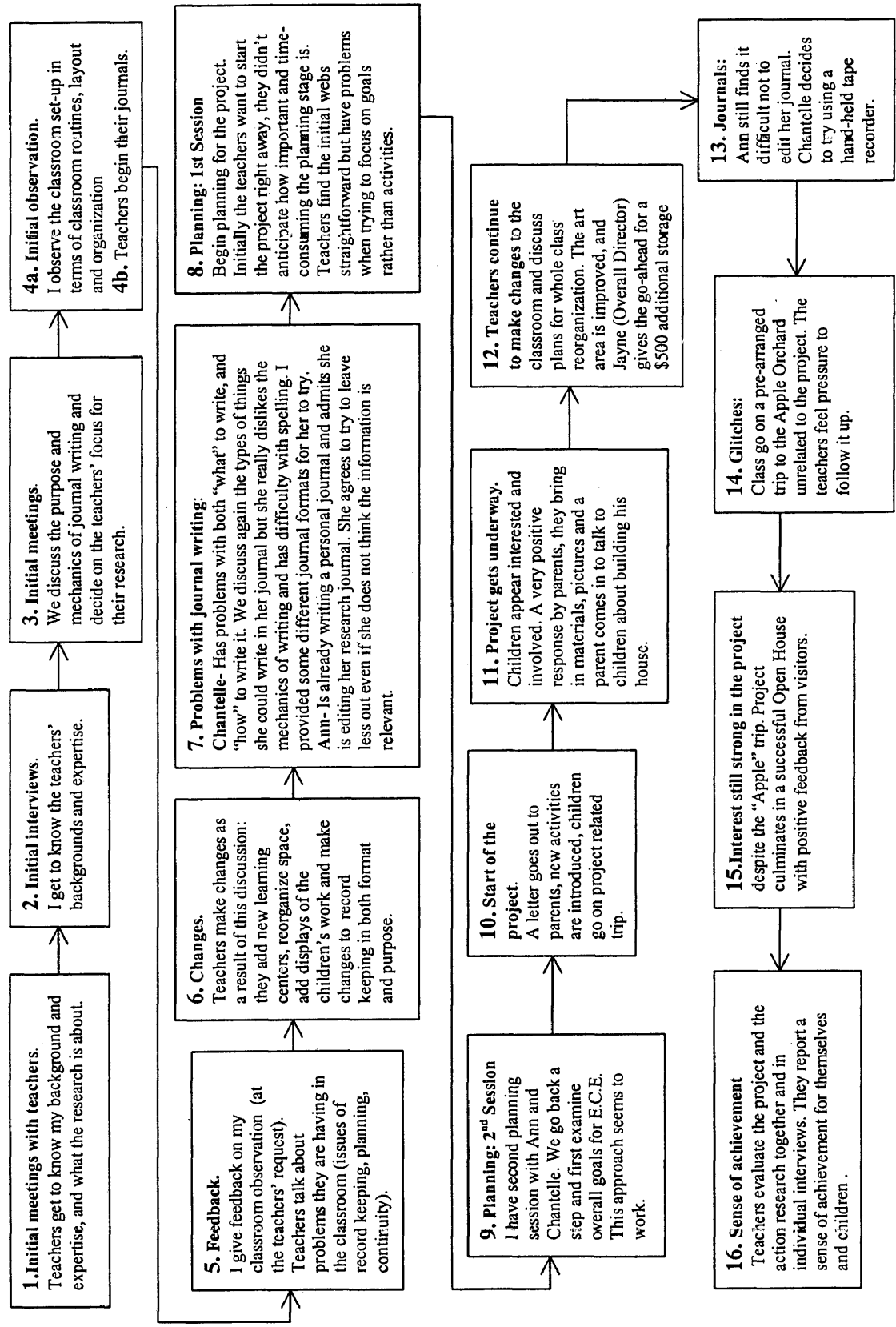
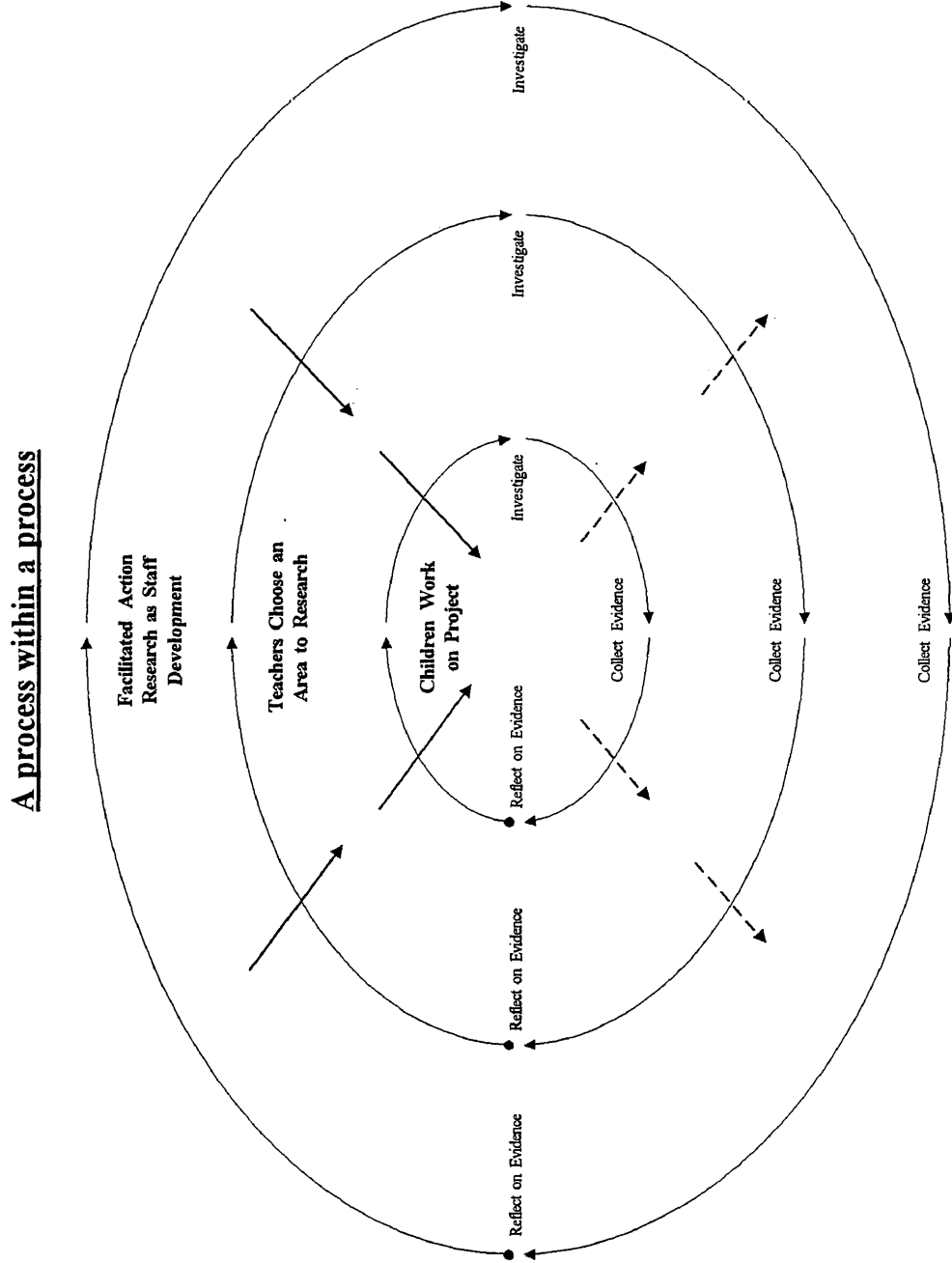


Fig. 2: Action Research as Staff Development: Facilitating Teacher Reflection



Emergent Themes

Data was analyzed by sorting it into categories and looking for the emergence of themes and patterns, and for evidence of reflection by the participants. As outlined earlier, I acted as primary filter and my Thesis Advisor acted as a secondary filter to review the findings and confirm the themes that I had identified. These themes were then presented to the participants for a member check (Creswell, 1997, Ely et al. 1993, Miles and Huberman, 1994) i.e. verification by the participants that my findings were credible and matched their perceptions of the process. Having received the participant's written agreement this data was then reduced in a number of ways in order to extract, compare, and quantify emerging themes from a number of different sources, and to examine levels of reflective thought. These themes could be divided into two broad categories, those that were evident prior to the research process, and those that became apparent during or as a result of the research process. Furthermore, although certain themes were common to both participants, two very distinct stories began to emerge.

Themes Related to Context

The following themes were related to the context in which the participants were operating and became evident from information gathered early on in the research. These themes were common to both participants.

Themes Related to Context: Similarities

Positive attitude to job. Both participants appeared to enjoy their job and find their relationships with the children rewarding.

“...Since I’m starting my third year, you know, there are kids that I’ve known for a couple of years, and I am enjoying that, getting to know kids over time and their families over time, and so we really are going to have a pretty big group of our kids that have either been here last year or came during the summer, and so we have a kind of prior relationship.” (Ann, Initial Interview, 7/24).

“It’s amazing that even though this job can be so stressful and so time-consuming and everything... that I still love this job and I love coming to school... Today, I was leaving and the kids were telling me “Bye Chantelle, bye Chantelle,” and there were five or six of them, and you know, even though you can have a really hard day, that just makes everything better, and when I go home, I feel like that I just love (it), you know, and I can’t wait to go to work the next day, because when I show up the kids are like “Oh Chantelle, read me a story,” and they want to tell me about what they did last night, and... sometimes I feel like I’m a mom with twenty five kids!” (Chantelle, journal, 10/14).

Both participants also found the children’s interest and enthusiasm exciting.

“(I enjoy) the on-going relationship with the kids and just the fun of working with this age group, where they’re still so excited about learning and, you know, everything’s kind of new. You know, fall comes and the colors, and it’s like you get to experience it yourself for the first time too,

because they're experiencing it for the first time, and so, it kind of makes you appreciate the world around you, because they're so enthusiastic about it" (Ann, Initial Interview, 7/24).

"I really like the, um, just seeing the kids get excited about things. I've never... worked somewhere before where you come in, and everybody's happy to see you.... or, you know, if you come up with an idea, and you're not sure if they're going to like it, and you do it, and they really like it and they want to do it again... that's really neat." (Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25)

Team Teaching. Both participants liked the fact that they team taught, and particularly liked working with each other.

"... I really like working with Ann. I asked specifically if I could possibly work preschool with her again, cause you can learn a lot from her." (Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25)

"Chantelle did a lot in the classroom when I was gone on Friday. She got a project table set up and made some changes in the house area. I appreciate her enthusiasm." (Ann, Journal, 9/15).

The participants felt that they worked well as a team because of their different strengths, which complemented one another.

"... I think it's interesting, because I'm an extrovert when she's an introvert, but we get along really (well)..."

“Ann... does really good... at keeping us on track. Like, I’ll say, ‘Oh, you know, it would be really neat to make this’ but then I forget to look at the time and say, ‘Oh but lunch is in twenty minutes.’... But I’m really good at getting down on the floor with the kids and playing with them, and, I think, you know, she always remembers to count all the kids before we go outside, and I always remember the emergency pack.” (Chantelle, Final Interview 10/28).

“Chantelle has a lot of enthusiasm,... so I think that’s one of her strengths... that she gets very enthusiastic and gets really excited about something.... And... she’s also good at, if we say we’re going to do something she’ll get it done. I’ll sometimes procrastinate, or I’ll get around to it... I mean, if we talk about, you know, we need to put... a sign up about this, she puts the sign up.”

“... I think sometimes I’m good at being able to see the bigger picture, and I’ve also had experience, you know, doing this for a long time, and so sometimes I can see... maybe a better way to do it,... or we might want to try it this way... And so, I think sometimes... I can draw on past experience that she doesn’t have yet.” (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

Feeling Overwhelmed. Although enjoying their job, the participants found it to be time-consuming and stressful on occasion, and reported feeling overwhelmed by the demands on their time and energy.

“Met with Debby, Kathy and Chantelle and worked on our group web and then came up with some goals. The process took a long time and we still have more to do... I am looking forward to doing this project especially to having someone working with us as a resource as Debby is. I am also feeling a bit overwhelmed with all there is to do.” (Ann, Journal, 9/8)

“I love my job dearly, but sometimes I feel really overwhelmed. I mean, I just assumed that... you played with the kids and you do playdough and you did art stuff and everything. And I didn't know anything about this accreditation... all that stuff. And I think it's really neat, I'm glad I'm learning it, I'm glad I'm taking the classes and stuff, but on the other hand, I just get so overwhelmed, because I did not think that the job would entail such stuff... Sometimes I feel that I've got more than I can handle at times...” (Chantelle, Journal, 10/1)

“I think it's a job that consumes you a lot, and it's hard right now, specifically, it's hard to balance my whole world, you know, to have a job that's really, takes a lot out of me and then go home to young children, and family life, and then trying to take classes, and they're all things, you know, individually, I love taking classes, I like my job, I like, I love my family. But trying to put it all together sometimes is hard.” (Ann, Initial Interview, 7/24).

Staffing and Continuity Issues. Both participants had concerns over the fact that no permanent third teacher had been appointed to work with them. Their concerns were lack of continuity for the children due to high staff turnover, their inability to give as much individual attention to the children as they would have liked due to a higher child-to-teacher ratio, and the added stress to themselves.

“I think a lot of times, I just get overwhelmed with all this other stuff because of the fact that I know there is a ten children per teacher ratio, but it doesn’t seem like it’s enough. I mean, when you have twenty kids and two teachers, it’s so hard to keep the room in order, and also do things like projects, or any other kind of art thing with the kids” (Chantelle, Journal, 10/1 to 10/5).

“The morning felt hectic. Kathy was doing director things and so it was just Chantelle and I. It really makes a difference having that third person in the room!” (Ann, Journal, 9/9).

“Met with Kathy and Jayne. It looks like we will be getting a few more children next week. We talked about the financial need to have higher ratios (1-10 instead of 1-8). How do you do that and not sacrifice quality? There are no easy answers.” (Ann, Journal, 9/10).

Planning. The participants both expressed their frustration over the lack of regular uninterrupted time for planning.

“Planning takes time. Projects take time. We need more time to do this!”
(Ann, Journal, 10/22).

“We’re supposed to actually meet (to plan) once a week, but it’s during nap time, and so that’s not real ideal... that’s hard” (Chantelle, Final Interview 10/28).

“I think in the past... we had met, you know, whenever we can, but just the way the nature of the setting and... our lives together here... for whatever reason you don’t end up meeting, or you end up meeting real quick, you know, before school, and I think this (research process) made me realize the importance of planning, how much the success of this project depended on the time that we put into it. And so if we don’t put that time into planning, then we’re not going to have the same outcomes.”

“...I think we have to really prioritize that and say it is important... We can’t just do it between doing everything else we’re doing, you know, with kids in the room and all that’s going on, there has to be time set aside for planning and for evaluation and for all these things, or it’s not going to be as good.” (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

Themes Related to Context: Differences

The following themes also emerged early on in the process, but in these instances the participants’ reactions or experiences differed considerably.

Experience and Training. Ann had more than nine years of experience in elementary and preschool settings. She had a degree in Elementary Education and was taking classes towards an endorsement in Early Childhood Education. She had worked in her current position for two years and was enrolled in a management-training program run by the Eastside Early Childhood Centers.

Ann saw her experience as a valuable teaching resource.

“I’ve had experience, you know, doing this for a long time, and so sometimes, I can see ... maybe a better way to do it, or... we might want to try it this way, or we might not want to do that, because this might happen. And so, I think sometimes, I can see the big picture and draw on past experience” (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30)

The classes Ann took and the reading she did as a result of these classes also had an effect on her classroom practice.

“As I’m taking classes...sometimes something jumps out, and, you know, there was stuff which we changed in our art area, nothing big, but, you know, we had too many stencils, and we pulled out our stencils, and... added some tape and some glue and things we didn’t have.” (Ann, Initial Interview, 7/24).

“I was reading the book Emergent Curriculum by Elizabeth Jones and John Nimmo. They gave an example of a brainstorming session. I feel re-inspired about what brainstorming can be.” (Ann, Journal 8/19).

Unlike Ann, Chantelle had only been working at the childcare center for seven months, and had no prior experience working with children. She had also received no training before then.

“... The only training I had was when I started,... I was required to take six classes, one on, you know, just different types of teaching and, I took... one on discipline vs. punishment, that kind of stuff just to help you.” (Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25).

Chantelle would like to take further training but has had problems gaining access to it.

“My hardest thing right now is I want to take classes, but most of them, I need to go to Elkhorn, ‘cause it’s the closest, but all the classes at Elkhorn are during the day. And... I have to work during the day. So right now, the only night class they have I can take is like one of the required classes I need to get a degree. And that’s out in Fort Omaha... so right now I’m kind of waiting until they rotate the classes around.” (Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25)

Teaching Strategies. Ann had developed a series of teaching strategies to use when dealing with her students’ needs. When asked how she would help a child who appeared slightly below the developmental norm she cited numerous strategies:

“Oh, maybe, start by kind of documenting things... And we try to do that, we’ve started using portfolios and are trying to move in that direction. And we also started last year doing a parent/teacher conference in the fall,

as well as in the spring, where as before, they always checked it in the spring. But it seems like it made sense to kind of touch base early on, too, and kind of start that relationship. And so, I guess if I had noticed it early on, I might mention, you know, talk to the parents at that point and just kind of see. I know we've had some times where, you know, we're seeing one thing at school, and they're seeing something totally different at home, so I would want to find out, you know, is this something we're seeing both places? Like we have a little boy who seemed a little bit speech delayed; I mean, he didn't talk very much, and you know, but his parents at home said he just talked a blue streak. And so, you have to kind of find out. I guess that would be where we would begin." (Ann, Initial Interview, 7/24)

Chantelle had not yet developed these sorts of strategies. When asked the same question she replied:

"Um, I'm not really sure. I guess if I had a concern, I would go to my director, and ask her, you know, what she thought we should do... I know that uh we do have one child in our class that has a really hard time with concepts, and, um, the most we can do is, I don't really know how to handle it. The best I've ever been able to do is I go to his special needs teachers, and I ask them, you know, which, you know, do you recommend to do in these situations." (Chantelle, Initial Interview, 7/25).

Table 1 summarizes the similarities and differences in themes related to context for each participant.

Themes Emerging from the Research Process

As the research process got underway, a new set of themes began to emerge as a result of this process. Again, there were some similarities of experience and perception for the participants, but there were also some clear distinctions.

Research Process Themes: Differences

Choice of Research Topic. Ann said that she chose projects for her research focus because she had heard about it from so many different sources.

“...Ever since I have been working here, I have been hearing about it, but it seems like everywhere I turn I hear about it... I pick up my early childhood magazines, and there’s articles in there, and then it come up in classes I’m taking, and so, it definitely seems like an area that’s intriguing and that I would like to do more with.” (Initial Interview 7/24).

The topic chosen was also an area of strong interest for the Executive Director, Jayne who had provided some in-service training on the subject for all Center staff and this no doubt influenced Ann’s decision.

“One of the reasons we chose to go the route we did was because of Jayne, and knowing that this is an area that she is very interested in, and I felt, ever since coming to Eastside... that she is so excited about this as a

Table 1: Similarities and Differences in Themes Related to Context

Themes related to context	Ann	Chantelle
<i>Differences</i>		
Experience	9 years in preschool and elementary, 2 years at Eastside	No prior experience working with children, 7 months at Eastside
Training	Highly trained: degree in teacher ed., taking endorsement in E.C.E.	Very little training. Learning "on the job", only has a few hours. Problems accessing training: times/courses offered/cost.
Teaching Strategies	Well-developed strategies for student differentiation	Few strategies for student differentiation apart from asking other teachers for help.
<i>Similarities</i>		
Attitude to job	Find job rewarding, are caring and see a consistent relationship with the children as important. Are excited by children's interest and enthusiasm.	
Team Teaching	Both enjoy working together, and say they have different strengths that complement each other. Chantelle is more creative and good at getting things done, Ann is good at "seeing the bigger picture". Both see themselves as equals in the classroom but Chantelle sees Ann as a mentor figure.	
Feeling Overwhelmed	Both find the job time-consuming and stressful on occasion, particularly Chantelle. Find it difficult to balance the demands of home-life, training and work.	
Staffing and Continuity	Both had concerns over lack of permanent 3 rd teacher in room, concerns of lack of continuity for children and higher child: teacher ratio.	
Planning	Both consider the planning process very important, and found the time spent on planning the most useful part of the research process. Have concerns over lack of time for planning: at present no release time is built in and they have to snatch a few minutes during nap time.	

real love of hers and a real direction she feels we should be moving (in)”

(Final interview, 10/30).

Chantelle had also come across the topic in in-service training and was aware of the Director’s interest, but although she never specifically admitted it, appeared to have been influenced by Ann’s thinking, following her lead as the more experienced, more highly trained teacher.

“I think in the beginning, it (the topic) was probably more my thing than Chantelle’s thing. I mean, she wasn’t as much a part of the initial part of it, but, I think that changed then over the course of it... I mean that maybe it started with me more in charge, or kind of, you know, spear-heading it, but I think that changed as it went on, and it became a group process.” (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

Journal Keeping. Ann was an experienced journal writer who already kept a personal journal on a regular basis, and appeared to have a very clear understanding of what type of journal keeping was required for the research. She kept her journal faithfully on an almost daily basis, but after the first few weeks her journal entries were becoming very brief and appeared to contain a highly edited account of her thoughts and events such as:

“Met with Debby this afternoon. We accomplished a lot. It is really good to have her involved with this process.” (Ann, Journal, 9/11).

This turned out to be because she was trying to keep a personal as well as a research journal on a daily basis. After discussing this with her, she agreed to try combining the two and to do less editing of the research journal. Ann's journal-keeping underwent a startling transformation right at the end of the research study, after she had been asked to do an evaluation of the whole research process from beginning to end. Ann decided to start by re-reading her journal and then wrote a series of reflections based on this such as:

“In my guidance class we are talking about the importance of the classroom being a community. Projects grow best in a community”

“Our community changes daily. A challenge- how to create community in this situation?”

“The Open House proved to be a good culminating event. Good kid involvement preparing for it. Good parent involvement. Lots of positive feedback for parents and teachers.” (Ann's Journal, 10/22).

Ann also pinpointed journal writing as the part of the research process she had most enjoyed.

“...I do journal writing on my own, but I haven't reflected as much about what was going on in the classroom, and so I found that very helpful, and very helpful at the end, to look back and have that kind of written account, even if it was a few sentences for that day.” (Final Interview, 10/30).

Chantelle also experienced problems with the journal writing, but of a very different nature. In a meeting at which the participants were invited to report their

progress with journal keeping, she said that she was having difficulty with both deciding what was appropriate for the content and with the physical act of writing it. The journal keeping she had done did not reflect the high level of participation she displayed in meetings, or the number of changes she had made to the classroom organization and to her practice.

After considering and rejecting a number of different journal formats Chantelle decided to change to using a hand-held tape recorder, which she found less intimidating, but identified the journal keeping as the part of the process she had found both least enjoyable and the least useful. In response to an interview question about whether journal keeping was useful, Chantelle answered:

“Not really, ‘cause I can look back and think about, I’m pretty good about thinking about what my feelings were at the time.” (Chantelle, Final Interview, 10/28).

When asked if she thought she could reflect just as well spending some time thinking as opposed to writing it down or recording it Chantelle replied:

“... Yeah, if I sit down and think about it. Yeah, because half the time, even if I wrote it down, I’d probably lose the journal ... it was easier when it was on the tape recorder, but half the time I... don’t remember what it was for, and I end up throwing it away.” (Chantelle, Final Interview, 10/28).

Perceptions of the Research Process. Ann saw the process as a chance to look at and reflect on a part of her practice.

“I think I understood, you know... how you explained the action research and what that was and the articles you gave us to read about that, so, you know, a chance to look at some portion of our practice...”

“... I think I’ve learned some things about planning, and how to do that in this setting with the goals that we have... and I think I... feel more confident about projects and more excited about projects as a direction we want to try to continue to go... I think... if it’s a learning continuum, I think... it moved me further down the continuum, in directions I wanted to go” (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

Chantelle saw the research process strictly in terms of improving her aptitude in the topic they chose (projects) so that she was better able to provide appropriate activities for the children.

“I think just because it gave us more ideas on stuff to do, versus just, o.k., what are we going to do, you know, everybody just brainstorming, and, I think it, was easier for us to come up with more things to do.... And then we found out what the kids really liked. ‘Cause some of them, you know, a lot of the kids we hadn’t done anything like that with.” (Chantelle, Final Interview, 10/28).

Perceptions of the Researcher/Facilitator Role. Ann perceived the role of the facilitator as being that of an experienced mentor, guiding the participants through the learning process.

“I think you served as a kind of mentor for us, someone who has experience that we don’t have, who was able to come in and guide us, as we worked through all this, and I guess it’s the same way we kind of guide the kids as you go through a process, you know, the planning process and the learning process with them, where you responded to where we were”

(Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

Ann observed that I, as facilitator, took time to get to know their background, concerns and interests and that I spent time with them in the classroom.

“You took time getting to know each of us, and so you didn’t come in and say, you know, this is my vision, and this is what we’re going to do, but you came in, and you got to know each of us, found out what our backgrounds were,... what were our concerns , what were our areas of interest and kind of went from there... I think you must have had a very good sense of where we were coming from and the kids and what... was happening, and then after knowing all that to be able to help us think about some new things and lead us in directions we might not have thought about going or been able to go, you know, had you not been there.” (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

Chantelle saw the researcher/facilitator role as far more concrete, someone to provide her with information and ideas on how to do it.

“I think you helped a lot coming in with how to figure out how to do a project. Because I would have had no idea... I think it really helped because you had all that information that, I mean I don’t know anything about that, so that really helped.” (Chantelle, Final Interview 10/28).

Research Process Themes: Similarities

A Sense of Achievement. As the research process got underway the teachers began to realize how far they had come. And as they thought about some of the changes they had made and the positive effects these had had on their students, they felt satisfaction at what they and the children had achieved.

“It was neat watching (the children) because... they seemed so excited and... it was neat watching them enjoy themselves and, I almost got the feeling, like they felt they were doing something really important and exciting... and... to me that was the whole goal for this was for them to see... how much they can do” (Chantelle, Journal, 10/1 to 10/5).

“... The more stuff I learn , the more stuff... I do towards my job, the better I feel about it... ‘cause it makes you a better teacher.” (Chantelle, Final Interview, 10/28).

“Open House this morning. Quite a few parents in, kids sharing and showing, visitors from the other end (of the center)... positive comments,

proud children and a snack that lasted all morning. We worked hard and we accomplished something very good!” (Ann, Journal, 10/15).

“We came a long way! Rereading the journal helped me to remember. Easel paint, play dough, art shelf, all the materials the kids have access to, kids creating daily, kids making choices about what to create, kids problem solving, and finally the house project.” (Ann, Journal, 10/22).

Perceptions of Facilitated Action Research as Staff Development. Both participants felt that this form of staff development was more meaningful than the training they usually experience.

“I think because you have more one-to-one contact, I think (this) is different. So I think... it’s deeper than if you take a class on it... It’s not just a one-night thing... They used to have... a teacher up... in front of a whole bunch of people, just talking about how to do stuff, versus someone sitting down and actually helping you.” (Chantelle, Final Interview, 10/28).

“It wasn’t just sitting in a classroom talking about it... this... in a sense, took the teacher, you know, you, in and put... you in the spot with us... You were right in there, muddling through the whole thing with us and I think that’s very powerful... I wish more learning could happen that way, I think it’s an exciting opportunity for teachers to get to be in that kind of setting” (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

Table 2 summarizes the similarities and differences in themes emerging from the research process for Ann and Chantelle.

Two Participants, Two Distinct Stories

The themes outlined above were common to both participants as stated earlier, but the participants' experiences of the process differed in many respects. A closer inspection of the themes in the light of each participant's individual experiences helped to answer the Grand Tour Question posed in Chapter One:

How does interaction with a facilitator affect two child-care teachers' reflections about their teaching?

Each participant's story i.e. their individual experience of the research process needed to be considered in order to answer this question.

Ann's Story

What emerged from the evidence was that Ann was an experienced, highly trained teacher who has made furthering her education a priority, and there is evidence from her journal to suggest that she has made occasional connections between her practice and what she has learned from her classes.

“Over the weekend I read an article for my guidance class about teacher/child interactions and also an article for Jayne about assessing children's prior knowledge. It got me thinking about my interactions with children, the quantity and quality of those interactions.” (Ann, Journal 9/7).

Table 2: Similarities and Differences in Themes Emerging from the Research Process

Themes	Ann	Chantelle
<i>Differences</i>		
Choice of Research Topic	Intrigued. Had come across Projects in classes, reading and influenced by Executive Director's keen interest.	Had come across Projects in In-service training and was aware of Director's interest, but mainly influenced by Ann's interest.
Journal Keeping	Had prior experience of keeping personal journal. Although sometimes seemed to edit journal she enjoyed writing and did so regularly. Considerable evidence of reflective thought.	No prior experience of journal writing. Had problems with both the content and the mechanics of writing. Wrote infrequently then switched to tape-recorder. Found it the least enjoyable part of the process. Mainly descriptive and concrete, some evidence of reflection.
Perceptions of Research Process	Saw it as a chance to look at and reflect on a portion of her practice. Feels she has moved further down the learning continuum.	Saw the focus as learning more about projects. Feels she has learned a lot about the project process and this has made her more confident as a teacher.
Perceptions of Researcher/Facilitator role	Saw me as a mentor who helped guide them through the planning and learning process, taking time to get to know their backgrounds, interests and concerns.	Saw me as an experienced, informed teacher who helped them through the project process.
<i>Similarities</i>		
Sense of Achievement	As the research got underway the teachers began to realize how far they had come and all the changes they had made. They felt satisfaction at what they and the children had achieved.	
Facilitated Action Research as Staff Development	Both felt this form of facilitated staff development was more meaningful than the training they usually experience because they had a facilitator working alongside them and guiding them through the process.	

She was a caring and perceptive teacher with strong skills in classroom organization and had well-developed strategies for providing for students' differing needs and abilities.

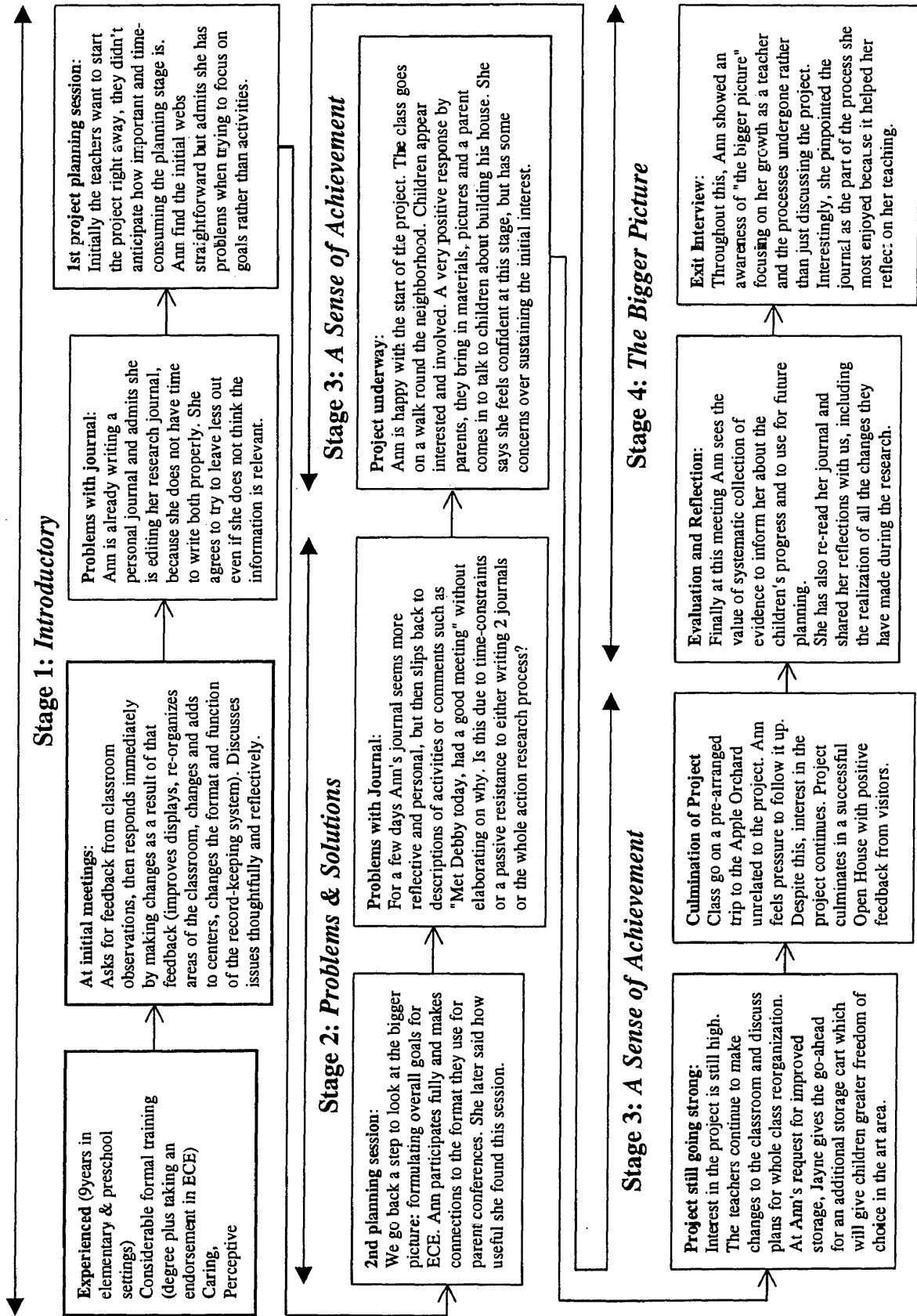
Ann was interested in undertaking her own action research but was not always confident of her ability to do so or how to take the next step.

“I always feel a bit anxious at this point of the project. I know where we are headed but I'm not sure how and sometimes if we'll get there.” (Ann, Journal 9/20).

Through the course of the facilitated action research process Ann appeared to go through four stages (see Fig. 3). Stage One, Introductory, was the period during which she as participant got to know me as researcher facilitator and to build up a sense of mutual trust and respect. This happened over the course of the initial interview, the first few meetings, the first observation and the first planning session for the teacher's research. Stage Two, Problems and Solutions, focused on coming to an agreement about what the problems were and how to deal with them. This stage began with the second planning session in which I as facilitator provided the participants with the tools to complete their planning (looking at goals rather than activities) which they were finding very difficult. A breakthrough point clearly occurred at which Ann made a connection between this process and her practice, looking at the bigger picture of overall goals for her students.

“...It was very helpful having that segment... on planning, because I think

Fig. 3: The Facilitated Action Research Process for Ann



that's a part that I've always had trouble getting going. I want to do this, I don't always know how to get it going... I think that will also be helpful in the future, to be able to pull that back out and say, O.K., how can we use this in another area...?" (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

Ann also experienced some problems with journal writing, previously documented in the section on journal-keeping, but found a solution to this by keeping one journal for both personal and research use.

Stage Three, A Sense of Achievement, emerged as the teachers' research got underway and they made changes to both centers and classroom organization. The children had opportunities for decision making, problem solving, creativity and making choices and were interested and involved in the process. The teachers organized a highly successful culminating event for children, parents and visitors, and Ann felt a strong sense of satisfaction at what she and the children had achieved.

"The Open House proved to be a good culminating event. Good kid involvement preparing for it. Good parent involvement. Lots of positive feedback for kids and teachers."

"This has been a good learning experience. The opportunity to work with Debby came at a good time for Chantelle and I. We have grown as individuals and we have grown as a teaching team. We are both looking forward to starting another project and will start the next one a little more confidently having had this experience" (Ann, Journal, 10/22)

Ann moved on to Stage 4, An Understanding of The Bigger Picture, near the end of the study, once she was asked to evaluate her action research and reflect on what had taken place during the entire research process. This caused her to re-read the whole of her journal for the first time and make reflections and connections. Throughout her final interview Ann showed an awareness of the bigger picture, focusing on her growth as a teacher and the processes undergone rather than just discussing her action research (as discussed previously in the section on perceptions of process and perceptions of the facilitator's role).

“I’m taking (a) discipline class, and so we’re... talking about classroom set-up and being proactive and making your class a community, and all this... feeds into each other and helps me... move in the direction of becoming a better teacher, because of... the learning that’s coming in. But this (facilitated research process) also gives us a real practical way to live that out. It’s not just sitting in a classroom taking it in,... it’s so practical, I mean you’re actually doing it.” (Ann, Final Interview, 10/30).

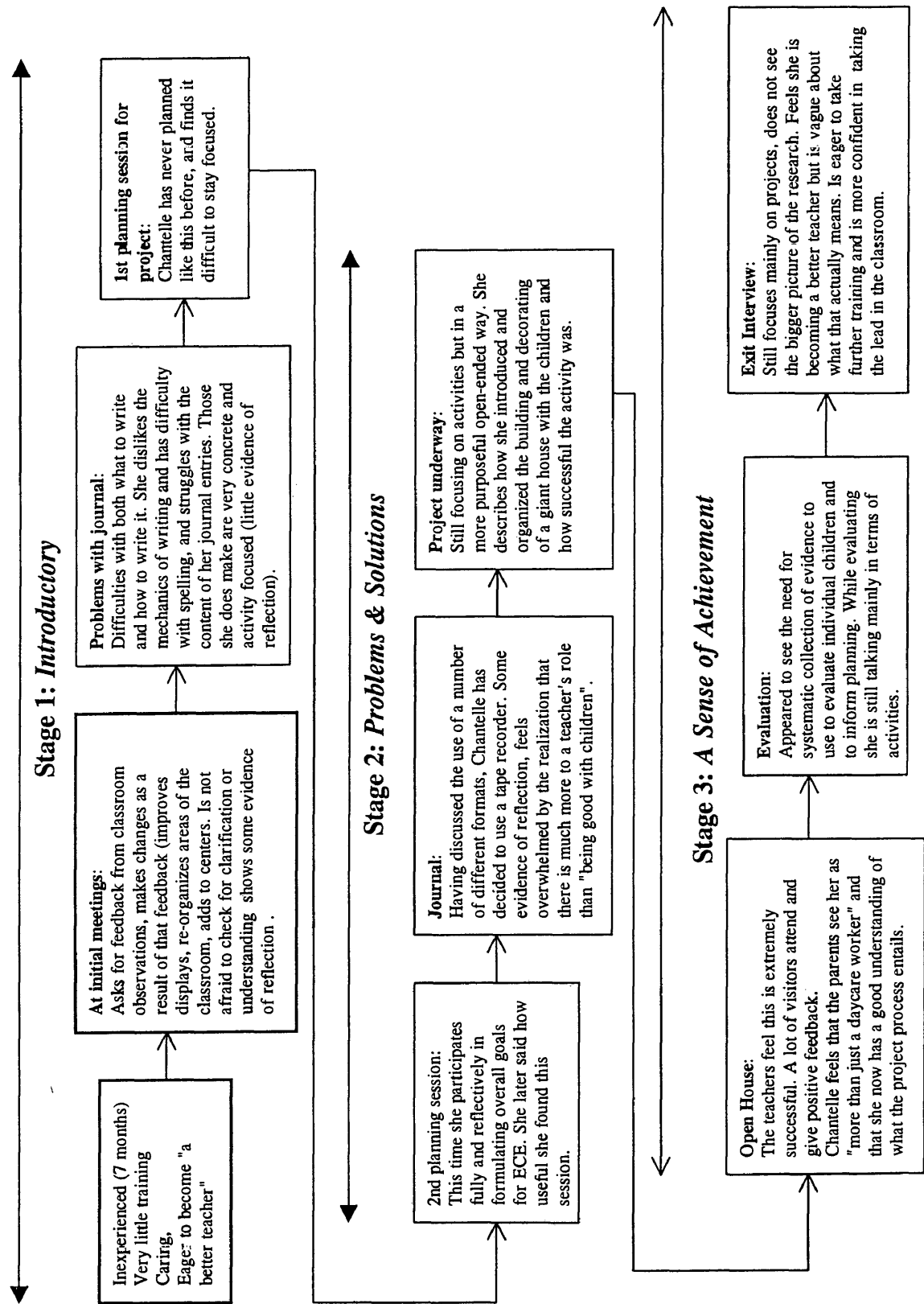
Chantelle’s Story

In contrast to Ann, Chantelle had only been working at the center for seven months at the start of this research, and this was her first teaching position. Not only had she very little experience, she had also little training apart from in-service training provided by the Childcare Center. She was eager to undergo further training but had problems gaining access to it at a convenient time and location.

Like Ann, Chantelle was a caring teacher who enjoyed her job and cared about her relationships with the children but she lacked much of the experience and strategies that Ann had acquired for dealing with her student's individual needs, as documented in the section on teaching strategies. Chantelle was enthusiastic about taking part in this research but had different facilitative needs to Ann. For Ann, the research process facilitated her ability to connect her reflections to her overall practice. For Chantelle, the process was an introduction to the idea of reflective thinking.

During the facilitated staff development process Chantelle also went through a number of stages (see Fig. 4). Like Ann the first stage she underwent was Stage One, Introductory. This was the introductory period which took place over the course of the initial interview, the first few meetings, the first observation and the first planning session for the teacher's research. During this time she as participant got to know me as researcher facilitator and developed trust in me as an individual and as an expert in her field. Stage Two, Problems and Solutions, focused, as with the other participant, on coming to an agreement about what the problems were and how to deal with them. Stage Two for Chantelle also began with the second planning session in which I as facilitator provided the participants with the tools to complete their planning. This was a breakthrough point for Chantelle because she had never planned this way before, and it was the first time she had considered moving from an immediate activity-based

Fig. 4: The Facilitated Action Research Process for Chantelle



standpoint to something more abstract.

“(The) goals really... helped because then instead of this thing, what are we going to do, you thought about... what do you want the kids to learn and how can we do that” (Chantelle, Final Interview 10/28).

Chantelle found the journal writing the most difficult part of the process, as documented, not only because she was unused to writing in this way, but also because she said that she had difficulty with writing in general, both in what to write and how to put it down, and had problems with spelling. She found it easier once she began to use a tape recorder, but felt that she could think about things in her head just as effectively, and her entries tended to be very descriptive and immediate.

At this point in the process, Chantelle seemed to become aware of how much her job entailed, and in her journal several entries report how overwhelmed and uncomfortable she feels at the realization of all that she doesn't know.

“I've felt overwhelmed a lot of times, because when I took this job I didn't realize how much it was going to entail... And I didn't know anything about this accreditation, (about) projects,... proper ways to discipline children, all this stuff... Sometimes I feel stupid because other people have been doing this for a while, and so I feel overwhelmed.” (Chantelle, Journal 10/1 to 10/5).

Stage Three, a Sense of Achievement, emerged as the teachers' research got underway. Chantelle was instrumental in making a number of changes to both the centers

and the classroom layout, and was responsible for preparing and organizing a number of highly successful activities.

" The kids had fun decorating the big house. Chantelle got excited about this part of the project. This is when it's good to be working as a team. Had I been on my own I might have missed this opportunity." (Ann, Journal, 10/22).

Chantelle, like Ann, felt very positive about the culminating event they had organized, but her focus stayed firmly on the activities that had taken place and how much fun it had been.

"It's just so exciting! I didn't... realize how much fun it was going to be to be creating this neighborhood with the kids" (Chantelle, Journal, 10/13).

"I think (the project approach) was more fun, because you felt like you were teaching them something, versus just sitting down and... what theme are we going to do this week?" (Chantelle, Final Interview, 10/28).

Chantelle had been introduced to a lot of new ideas, and had made a lot of changes, but from the evidence collected her thinking was still mainly focused on the immediate and the concrete, as it related to her and the children. This meant that unlike Ann, she remained at Stage Three at the end of this research study. There was no evidence to suggest that she had begun to make any connections between the overall process and her practice and very little evidence to show that she was reflecting about her beliefs or her practice, and so had not moved on to Stage Four, The Bigger Picture.

Further Data Reduction

Together with the themes and stages identified for each participant, an attempt was made to quantify evidence of reflective thinking to allow comparisons between the beginning and the end of the research process. This was an attempt to determine if there was any evidence to support an increase in reflection by the participants. However, this was not an externally validated procedure, but rather a way of organizing and quantifying the data collected in this qualitative research study. The following data analysis procedures, described below, were chosen in order to try and answer the questions:

- How does interaction with a facilitator affect two childcare teachers' consideration of their classroom practice?
- How does interaction with a facilitator affect two childcare teachers' consideration of their personal beliefs?

The Effect of Interaction with a Facilitator on the Participants' Reflection about Their Teaching

Tables 3 and 4 show the attempt to quantify the level of elaboration made by each participant in each question for the initial and final interviews. The verbs the participant used in response to each question were extracted and their response was coded according to its level of elaboration. Merely stating a response was coded as 0; stating and then restating or paraphrasing the response was coded as 1; stating, restating and then developing the idea was coded as 2; and stating, restating, developing an idea and then

Table 3: Level of Elaboration in Initial Interviews

Questions	Chantelle		Ann	
	Verb	Level of Elaboration	Verb	Level of Elaboration
1. How many years have you been teaching? What ages/ grade levels/ types of kids have you taught?	teach	0	Taught	1
2. What sort of training did you have? Where? Did you take any special programs for early childhood education?	Required, help, took, heard, needed, like, wanted	2	Fell, liked, excited, arrange	1
3. Are you taking any classes at the moment? What kind?	Work, wait, rotate	1	Makes, change, think, count, take, help, work, advance, seems	2
4. What made you go into early childhood teaching?	Wanted, interested, liked	1	Liked, excited, found	2
5. Tell me about your present job. What age group are you working with? How many children do you have in your classroom? Does anyone else work with you? Describe her role.	Work, amazed, talk, like, understand, believe, learn, ask	2	Changes, enables, prefer, feels, give and take, think, known, enjoy, starting, like, oppose, share, plan, moved, function, approach	3
6. What do you most enjoy about your job?	believe, learned, excited	1	Working, excited, learn, experience, appreciate	2
7. What do you least enjoy about your job?	Dealing, spoiled, need	1	Consumes, balance, trying, wanted, exhausted	3
8. Name one thing about your job that you think you do really well.	Getting down, playing, sitting, teaching, paint	1	Think, care, count, bring, approach	3
9. Name one thing about your job that you would like to do better.	Dealing, hate, teach,	2	Struggled, grow, learn, tired, complacent, react	2

Table 3: Level of Elaboration in Initial Interviews (cont'.)

10. Tell me about your classroom. Describe the physical layout. Are you responsible for its organization? What about the equipment? What are you happy with? What, if anything would you like to change?	<i>(didn't understand, answered by describing timetable)</i>	0	Set, divided, look, change, jumps, added, redo, anticipate, adjusted, open	3
11. Describe the timetable for a typical day for the children in your class. Explain the organization into centers, etc.	Do, play, find, count, decorate, set, prepare, clean, figure out, ask, matches, choose	1	Open, limited, play, begin, structure, try, changed, introduce, played, active, use, choose, take, leave, clean, monitor, notice	3
12. Describe the students in your class. Describe a student who is just slightly behind- not a real problem. How do you deal with that? Describe a student who is really doing well.	Not sure, ask, concerned, meet, handle, recommend, help, communicate	1	Document, use, try, move, started, checked, touch base, find out, delayed, begin, see, record	3
13. How do you plan? Alone/ with others? Do you plan on a daily/ weekly/ monthly basis? Who sees your plans? How are they recorded? Do you have a specific format? Are you satisfied with the way you plan? Is there a uniform way of planning in the center?	Discuss, decide, talking, meet, see, put, underline, write, leaves, plan, trade, tell, set, scheduled, close	2	Adapt, simplify, change, plan together, brainstorm, involve, pick, approach, guide, spend, moved forward	3
14. Do you evaluate your plans after you have worked with the children?	Talk, liked, keep	1	Enjoyed, worked, think, write	2
15. Do you know what the other teachers are doing? How do you know?	Know, worked	1	Posted, don't know,	1
16. Do you ever observe in other classrooms?	worked	0	Observe, help	2

Level of Elaboration Key:**0 – state (no elaboration)****1 – restate (paraphrase, no development)****2- restate and develop (development of idea)****3- restate, develop and apply (apply or connect to something else)**

Table 3: Level of Elaboration in Initial Interviews (cont'.)

17. Do you ever exchange materials, ideas, methods, or communicate with other teachers? How about with specialists?	Worked, moved, did, talking, having, made, brought, recreated	2	Discuss, rotate, enjoyed, exchange, offer, continue, encourage, required, realize	3
18. Do you have any ideas about an area of your practice that you would like to research? Tell me about it. Why are you interested in this area?	Trying, like, think, capable	1	Challenge, believe, offer, concentrate, excited, intrigued, realize, involved, started	3

Level of Elaboration Key:

0 – state (no elaboration)

1 – restate (paraphrase, no development)

2- restate and develop (development of idea)

3- restate, develop and apply (apply or connect to something else)

Table 4: Level of Elaboration in Final Interviews

Questions	Chantelle		Ann	
	Verb	Level of Elaboration	Verb	Level of Elaboration
1. Which part of the process do you think you found the most useful/learned the most from?	Guess, helped, think, found out, thought, wanted, learn	1	Consistent, look objectively, changes, get going, plan	3
2. Did you ever feel you were doing something, or asked to do something that you couldn't see the point of doing? If so, what was it?	(no)	0	Seemed, responded, struggling, feeling frustrated, helped, redo, stressing	3
3. Which part of the process did you enjoy doing the most?	Working, teaching sitting, learn, watching	1	Journal writing, reflected, helped, access, excited	3
4. Which part of the process did you find the least enjoyable?	(journal)	0	Changes, ended, happening, coming in, helping, examining, involved	3
5. How do you think this process was different from the usual staff training you have? Which way do you prefer? Why?	Working, think, talking, have, helping, sitting	1	Sitting, talking, encouraged, proactive, learning, brought, muddling, invites, gave attention	3

Table 4: Level of Elaboration in Final Interviews: (cont'.)

6. Let's talk about the journal keeping. Do you think it served a purpose? What? Will you continue with it now this research is finished?	Look back, liked, thinking, wrote, lose, see, throw away, keep, remember, clean, run errands	2	Encouraged, reflect, jot, evaluate, aids, in tune, working, editing, add, happening, feeling, continue, hand-write, type, attach, record,	3
7. What about the meetings we had? Did you find these useful? Why? Would you want to continue to meet in this way either alone, or with someone else?	Talk, feed back, helped, liked, take time, trying	2	Forced, planning, realize, able meeting, depended, benefited, open prioritize, need, set aside	3
8. What role do you think I played in the process?	Know, thought, talking, helped	2	Come in, guide, worked through, planning, learning, responded, took time, found out, in touch, listening, read, give feedback, knowing, lead	3
9. What about Kathy, do you think she had any impact on the process? What was it?	Didn't, walked around, planning, opening, wasn't involved, angry, change, doesn't fix it, consult, moved, redo	3	Figure out, changed, decided, open, encouraged, supported, help, upset, cluttered, evolving, talking, thinking, functioning	3

Level of Elaboration Key:

0 – state (no elaboration)

1 – restate (paraphrase, no development)

2- restate and develop (development of idea)

3- restate, develop and apply (apply or connect to something else)

Table 4: Level of Elaboration in Final Interviews: (cont'.)

10. What about Jayne, did she play any part in the process?	Talked, gave permission, makes decisions	1	Excited, move, should, feel, talked, recommended, supported, affirming, learning	3
11. What about your own role, what do you think it was? Do you see it differently now than from when we first started?	Think, knew, teaching	1	Understood, research, talked, interested, changed, worked, figure out, function, plan together	3
12. You have both said you enjoy working as a team together. Why do you think that is?	Get along, flexible, share, keeping on track, playing, teaching, asking, handle, help	3	Excited, draw on experience, caring, teach together, plan together, procrastinate,	3
13. Have you shared what you have been doing with other members of staff, anyone else? How much have you shared with Jayne and Kathy?	Asks, expect, mentioned, thought, able	2	Support, trying, shared, culminating, put out, knows, in touch with	3
14. Looking back on the whole process, what do you think you have learned? Have you changed in any way, as a teacher or as a person?	Learn, do, try, take, feel better, continuous learning, want,	3	Learned, feel, excited, confident, continue, re-inspired, listening, involved, choose	3
15. Where do you think you will go from here (in terms of Projects/as a teacher/personally)?	Interested, trying, assists, thought, talked	2	Moved along continuum, evaluating, asking, learning, tended, continue, assess, support	3

Level of Elaboration Key:

0 – state (no elaboration)

1 – restate (paraphrase, no development)

2- restate and develop (development of idea)

3- restate, develop and apply (apply or connect to something else)

applying that idea or connecting it to something else was coded as 3, the highest level of elaboration.

The level of elaboration in Ann's responses shows a clear leap from mainly restating and beginning to develop her ideas (Levels 1 and 2) in the initial interview to applying and connecting these ideas (Level 3) in every one of her answers in the final interview.

Chantelle also shows an improvement from the initial to final interviews although not such a marked one. Her level of elaboration ranges from stating to developing her ideas (Levels 0 to 2) in the initial interview to some evidence of applying these ideas (Levels 0 to 3) to some of her answers to the final interview questions.

This data supports the evidence discussed above in the consideration of the Stages of Development each participant went through during the course of this research process. Ann had moved from making occasional connections between her practice and what she had learned from her classes in the initial interview (Stage 1, Elaboration Levels 1 and 2) to an awareness of the bigger picture, focusing on her growth as a teacher and the processes undergone in her final interview (Stage 4, Elaboration Level 3).

Chantelle did not appear to have had any previous experience in making a conscious attempt to reflect about her beliefs or her practice in a considered, meaningful way. In the initial interview (Stage 1) her answers were generally statements or restatements of an idea, (Levels 0 to 1) and she only developed her ideas (Level 2) on 5 out of 18 occasions. By the final interview she had considered and made changes to her

practice in Stage Two, Problems and Solutions, and reached a sense of satisfaction about the success of these changes in Stage 3, A Sense of Achievement. By the final interview she had begun to develop and apply some of her ideas and achieved Elaboration Level 2 in five answers and Elaboration Level 3 in three out of fifteen responses. This data analysis therefore indicates an increase in reflective thought for both participants but particularly for Ann.

The analysis of levels of elaboration went some way toward indicating an increase in reflective thinking, but did not take into account much of the other data that had been gathered. Therefore another approach was also utilized : "The Reflective Thought and Behavior Profile" (Lewison, 1994, 1996: see Table 5) which was used to analyze the participant's journals for evidence of descriptive and reflective thought. In this profile Lewison categorizes journal entries written by teachers as either descriptive or reflective in nature. Lewison coded three different types of descriptive entries (descriptions of meetings and classroom activities, expressing feelings, and notes about children) and five categories of reflective entry (analyzing successes, self-talk, admitting problems, asking questions and expressing doubts). In using Lewison's coding scheme to analyze the journals of the participants in this research study there seemed to be yet another type of reflective entry not described by any of Lewison's categories. I called this category "analyzing problems" and added it to the other reflective categories, making six in all. An

Table 5: Different Types of Entries Found in Teachers' Journals

Type Of Entry	No. Of Entries		Examples From Teachers' Journals
	Chantelle	Ann	
Descriptive	(22)	(37)	
1a. Descriptions of Meetings and Classroom Activities	12	28	Tried having playdough out and did easel painting. The kids especially loved the painting and lined up in chairs to watch the painter. The room was a busy active place. (Ann, 8/27)
1b. Expressing Feelings	9	2	We have one little girl who just destroys everything and does not follow directions... and it's just driving me crazy! And we had a meeting, and... discussed that she hasn't had a lot of discipline, but it's really hard to deal with sometimes. (Chantelle, 10/14)
1c. Notes About Children	1	7	Keenan did some very creative constructing on his house today and then started work on a car made out of cardboard tubes. (Ann, 9/24)
Reflective	(23)	(57)	
2a. Analyzing Successes	4	13	Easel painting was just a choice in the art area today. It still took some teacher monitoring but it went well and it helped a lot that everyone had already had a turn. I didn't feel the same pressure to get everyone done as quickly as possible that I sometimes have felt in the past. (Ann, 9/5)
2b. Self-talk	9	13	We introduced Safety, Courtesy, Kindness in our small groups... The children were mostly enthusiastic about our discussion. I appreciate the way this approach is proactive and gives us all a common language to use when talking about our rules. (Ann, 8/14)
2c. Admitting Problems	4	12	Tried to have a group of children do their self-portraits after center time while the rest of the class went next door to play a game. It did not go well. The self-portrait group were quite sure they were missing the BIG fun and therefore had little interest in doing a self-portrait. (Ann, 9/4)
2d. Asking Questions	0	3	It looks like we will be getting a few more children next week. We talked about the financial need to have higher ratios (1-10 instead of 1-8). How do you do that and not sacrifice quality? There are no easy answers. (Ann, 9/10)

Table 5: Different Types of Entries Found in Teachers' Journals (cont'.)

2e. Expressing Doubts	6	4	I love my job dearly, but sometimes I feel really overwhelmed. I mean, I just assumed that... you played with the kids and you do playdough and you did art stuff and everything. And I didn't know anything about this accreditation... all that stuff. And I think it's really neat, I'm glad I'm learning it, I'm glad I'm taking the classes and stuff, but on the other hand, I just get so <i>overwhelmed</i> . (Chantelle, 10/1)
2f. Analyzing Problems	0	12	The apple activity in the middle of the House Project seemed to be a distraction. Ideally, I would not have planned the apple orchard field trip in the middle of the House Project. In hindsight it would have been better to just carry on with the project which was what we were all more interested in. (Ann, 10/22)
Total entries	45	94	
% Reflective entries (from total entries)	51%	61%	

example of each category is displayed in Table 5. Each paragraph in the teacher's journal was assigned to a particular category of reflective or descriptive thought and an overall percentage of reflection was calculated for each participant. This showed there was considerable evidence of reflective thought in both journals, 51% for Chantelle and 61% for Ann, but did not reflect a distinction between levels of reflection in the journal entries at the beginning and at the end of the research process.

In order to make this distinction, the evidence was then further analyzed to show levels of descriptive and reflective thought in the first three and last three differently dated entries of each participant's journal. Analysis of Ann's journal entries appeared to support the expectation that the facilitated action research process had brought about an increase in reflective thought. Out of her first three entries, 55% were reflective in nature and 45% descriptive. For Ann's final three entries, however, 84% were reflective in nature while only 16% were descriptive.

Analysis of Chantelle's journal, however, did not support the expectation that the number of reflective entries would increase. Fifty-five percent of Chantelle's first three journal entries were categorized as reflective entries, and 45% as descriptive. But out of her final three entries only 33% could be categorized as reflective and 67% were descriptive entries.

There seemed to be a conflict in evidence. Chantelle's level of reflection as measured by the level of elaboration in her final interview had increased, but the level of reflection measured in her journal entries had decreased. This is perhaps because each set

of data is actually measuring different things. The level of elaboration is measuring the ability to develop and apply an idea, the level of reflection in the journal entries is looking at the content of that idea. Another concern is the collection of data from the participants' journals as a means of collecting evidence. Chantelle had considerable difficulty with the journal keeping part of the research process. She said that she did not know what to say or how to say it, i.e. she had problems with content and with sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. She admitted she was not a natural writer, did not enjoy writing and could not really see the point of journal writing. Having considered a number of different format options, she chose to use a hand held tape recorder. She recorded her journal far more frequently than before but tended to focus more on activities and immediate events than she had when writing. This could also account for the apparent decrease in reflectiveness, which was not supported by the analysis of levels of elaboration in the initial and final interviews.

The Effect of Interaction with a Facilitator on the Participants' Consideration of Their Classroom Practice

The evidence from the data analysis methods discussed above as well as the content of the emerging themes all focus heavily on the participant's consideration of their practice (see Tables 1 and 2). This supports the contention that interaction with a facilitator affected the participants' consideration of their practice by stimulating an increase in reflection about that practice, (Tables 3, 4 and 5) and facilitating changes

made to that practice, as discussed in the Stages of Development each participant went through (as discussed previously in Ann's story and Chantelle's story).

The Effect of Interaction with a Facilitator on the Participants' Consideration of Their Personal Beliefs

It is less easy to show how interaction with a facilitator affected the participants' consideration of their beliefs about teaching. In the evidence that was collected (with the exception of one or two occasions) neither participant examined or discussed their beliefs. The beliefs that were discussed were the beliefs the participants held on what attributes they possessed that made them good teachers.

“A lot of (being a good teacher) is (about) the relationship... especially in this... setting where it's daycare and they're here long hours,... I think that relationship is really important, that (the children) have... a person who's consistent, who's there every day that they can count on, who's going to care about them when their parents can't be around to care for them” (Ann, Initial Interview, 7/24).

“You need to have the training and stuff (to be a good teacher) but to really like kids (is) the most important... I think I'm really good at getting down and playing with the kids, not just sitting back and... teaching them... (I) get involved” (Chantelle, Initial interview, 7/25).

Neither participant examined their personal beliefs in the final interview but focused firmly on their practice. Unsurprisingly, considering her dislike of and her

difficulty with the journal writing process, Chantelle did not use her journal as a forum for examining her beliefs. What was perhaps more surprising was that Ann, an experienced journal-keeper, did not examine her beliefs in her journal, either. On one or two occasions she mentioned thinking about her beliefs, but not what those beliefs actually were.

“Over the weekend I read an article for my guidance class about teacher/child interactions... It got me thinking about my interactions with children, the quantity and quality of those interactions.” (Ann, Journal 9/7).

Thus there is insufficient evidence to determine how or if this facilitated action research process affected the participants’ consideration of their beliefs.

Patterns from Emerging Themes

How the Themes Inform the Staff Development Process for these Participants

The first step in data analysis was to examine the evidence to identify emergent themes. On further consideration of the themes identified for the participants some wider patterns emerged. These patterns served to inform about the participants in this study, the constraints that they operated under, how this affected their staff development needs, and what these needs were.

Autonomy

It was evident throughout this research process that each participant was involved in a struggle for personal autonomy, not with each other but with the constraints of their

present situation. They struggled to find enough quality time to meet and plan, for time to collect evidence about their research, and to evaluate and reflect on its progress, for time to spend observing other members of staff and to exchange information and ideas, and for time to spend in quality interactions with the children. They struggled to control staffing issues: having to deal with the lack of reliable staff to provide for consistent relationships with the children, the realities of having a teacher-to-child ratio that is higher than desirable, and the difficulties of having to share classroom responsibilities with other staff with widely differing training, experience and expectations. In fact, two of the few areas in which the participants did have autonomy were the choice to participate in this research process, and the choice of which area of practice to research.

Dedication to Job

Despite the difficulties and frustrations described above and despite sometimes feeling overwhelmed by all the demands on their time and energy, both participants loved their job and found it very rewarding. They valued the relationships they have with the children, were excited by seeing the world through their eyes, and could not wait to go to work in the morning.

Desire to Make Changes

Both participants were keen to learn and grow. This was evident not only from the fact that they volunteered to do the research study in the first place, but also from their desire to learn in which areas they could do better in the classroom as shown by the speed with which they began to make changes and the quantity and quality of those changes.

A Sense of Achievement

The participants reported feeling a strong sense of achievement at the changes they had made, and at the positive effect of these changes on their teaching and on the children they taught. This was a strong motivator for continuing to learn and change.

An Appreciation of the Facilitated Staff Development Process

Both participants reported finding facilitated staff development a powerful tool because they felt that I, as facilitator got to know and care about their backgrounds, their interests and their concerns, and took the opportunity to meet with and observe them in their own setting. They felt this went far beyond the usual model of staff development of “just sitting in a classroom” (Ann, Final Interview 10/28) because I had a true understanding of their particular situation and how to help them examine their practice and make changes in a non-judgmental way.

Another issue, while not a specific theme, was that of prior training. There was a remarkable difference between the two participants in terms of their previous experience and training. One was highly trained with a degree in teaching and working towards an endorsement in early childhood. The other had received virtually no training at all. One had several years of experience, the other only seven months experience. While teaching experience is not considered to be a reliable predictor of teacher behavior (Whitebook et al., 1989), prior training is, (Powell and Stremmel, 1989) but with the proviso that this depends on the quality of that training (Snider and Fu, 1990). It may be then that Ann showed more evidence of reflective thought in this study because she had developed

better skills to aid reflection of her practice, skills that had been developed due to the quality of the prior training she had received.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS

Implications for staff development

The patterns examined in the last chapter, while true of these two participants, can also be generalized to inform thinking about staff development in other early childhood settings. Some researchers have suggested that the traditional staff development model based on passive reception of information, was not an effective method of staff development (Guskey, 1986, Richardson, 1994) because it does not take into account teachers' beliefs, concerns, and interests (Fenstermacher, 1994) nor allow for teacher autonomy (Dearden, 1975). The content for this traditional top-down model of staff development is generally chosen by someone outside the classroom, and is unlikely to result in ownership of the issues by the teachers for whom it is intended (Anders and Richardson, 1994). The facilitated staff development model as used in the present research was successful because it originated from the teachers' interests and concerns and took place in an atmosphere of respect and trust. In the traditional, top-down staff development model as described earlier, the content is decided by someone outside the classroom, generally an administrator. In a bottom-up model, the teacher decides what her needs are and chooses the content. What is so powerful about the facilitated staff development model is that the facilitator listens to what the teachers say they need, helps them understand what they actually need (if this is different), and then helps them to get what they need.

Role of Facilitator

The facilitator's role is multi-faceted, a crucial element of the entire facilitated staff development process. As facilitator I needed to bring a variety of resources to the project in terms of expertise in the area that the teachers wished to research, and needed to act as a sounding-board for the participants in trying out their ideas and talking about them (Oja and Smulyan, 1989). I played a double role as mutual participant by freely joining in the conversation and making associations and views known to the others, while at the same time acting as a watchful listener looking for moments to break into the conversation, inquire further into the participants' thoughts, and probe and reinforce germinating ideas (Bamberger, 1991).

But above all these characteristics, two truths emerged as fundamental to the success of the facilitated staff development process. First, the facilitator needs to be completely impartial, a true middle-man, neither a member of management or co-worker of the participants. Second, the facilitator has to be authentic, i.e. to be honest and trustworthy and to genuinely care about and be interested in the concerns of the participants. Without authenticity, without the facilitator truly caring about the participants and the process, it would be impossible to build an atmosphere of respect and trust in which reflective thought and an exchange of ideas can flourish.

The issue here, of course, is how to replicate this situation in other settings. It is obviously going to be very difficult to find truly impartial facilitators in most childcare or other educational settings. If a practitioner has been employed for the purposes of staff

development, he or she will show allegiance to whoever pays the check at the end of each month. However it may be that impartiality is less important than the issue of authenticity. If this is the case, a possible model for staff development would be the use of peer-coaching. Teachers could be given time to meet with peers and observe them in their own settings. Together they could set their own goals for research and change in an atmosphere of mutual trust and caring.

Implications for Future Research

Journal Writing

Journal writing has long been considered a useful tool for encouraging reflective thought (Eisner, 1982; Kottkamp, 1990; Lester and Onore, 1986; Yinger and Clark, 1981) but most of these studies were conducted with preservice teachers or with practicing teachers enrolled in university classes. Chantelle's background, i.e., high school education and very little experience or training, is probably typical of many child-care workers, so it would follow that many other early childhood teachers may also experience similar difficulties with or prejudices against the journal-keeping process. If I were to undergo this process again, I might have tried the use of a hand-held tape recorder at an earlier stage, but Chantelle's entries using this method were actually less reflective than her written entries. The meetings we held were often a rich source of reflective thought but I had taken a decision not to formally record them, in order not to impinge on the open trusting atmosphere that had developed between participants and facilitator. An alternative would have been to record some of the meetings we had, once we had got to

know each other, as another source of evidence of reflection. Future studies may want to increase the range of evidence they collect in this way.

Lack of Consideration of Beliefs

As discussed earlier, in this particular research study there was little evidence of consideration of personal beliefs. This should not be surprising in this type of childcare setting where teachers have so many more demands on their time and are far more used to focusing on the immediate and concrete than is true of the classrooms where most of the prior research on reflection has taken place. The participants were happy to focus on their practice because it was convenient, structured and immediately available. A consideration of beliefs was far less comfortable and less familiar to them. Opportunities for consideration of beliefs did arise from time to time during our meetings, and as facilitator I tried to foster an exploration of these beliefs through the practical argument process (Fenstermacher, 1994) by encouraging the participants to examine and critically assess their practices and to consider ways of teaching differently. Although I recorded these meetings in my journal they were not audiotaped and I did not consider them as primary sources of evidence. A suggestion for future research would be to record these meetings once a situation of trust had been established between facilitator and participants, but it is possible that the participants may speak less freely if their the conversation is being taped.

Verification of Data and Findings

In this study the prime filter for data gathering and analysis was myself, as researcher, with my Thesis Chair (an expert in the field of early childhood) acting as a secondary filter and as a “reality check” to review findings and confirm emerging themes and patterns. However, a more powerful method to use in future research would be to do an external audit (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles and Huberman, 1994). This involves the use of an external consultant, who has no connection to the study, as an auditor who examines both the process and the product of the account to assess whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data.

Length of Study

This research took place over a period of four months, during which the facilitator and participants came to know and trust each other, the participants chose an area of their practice to research, and completed their first action research cycle (collecting evidence about it, evaluating that evidence, deciding where to go next). The end point of the research was artificial due to time constraints on the researcher. Both participants and researcher would have liked to continue the process. It is possible, if not probable, that had the process carried on, the facilitator may have enabled the participants to examine their beliefs more publicly through the use of practical argument. Certainly, both participants found the meetings very valuable and freely exchanged their thoughts and ideas during meeting times. It would be interesting to do a follow-up study on the

participants in a year's time to see if they had continued to reflect on and make changes to their practice without the presence of the facilitator.

Conclusion

The goal of this research study was to determine whether facilitated action research would help the participants to become more reflective of their teaching and to see if this reflection would lead to changes being made to their practice. Not only did both participants show an increase in reflective thought and make a number of changes to their practice, they also reported ownership of these changes and a sense of achievement at what they had accomplished. Facilitated action research then, proved to be a powerful tool for staff development. In order to replicate this type of staff development model elsewhere, those responsible for providing staff development need to be aware of its characteristics. While genuine impartiality on the behalf of the facilitator may be difficult to provide, a staff developer who is caring, non-judgmental, and above all authentic is essential to the success of this model. The use of peer-coaching could be a possible solution, provided that all parties are given time to meet on a regular basis, that there is time for the facilitator to observe the participants in their own setting, and that they could set their own goals for research and change in an atmosphere of mutual trust and caring.

Most of the literature on educational staff development talks about classroom teachers rather than child-care workers. The differences are great enough that much of this literature does not apply as easily to child-care as it does to those other settings. Child-care workers tend to have less resources, less autonomy and less time (for

planning, classroom organization, meeting with colleagues etc.), and are far less likely to have received quality training. This being the case, much more research specific to staff development needs to be carried out in child-care settings.

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