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**The graduate-mentor project in visual arts education: Mentoring within the Western Australian curriculum framework: A study of the impact of mentoring on beginning-teachers' perception of their success in visual literacy education during the first year**

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**THE GRADUATE-MENTOR PROJECT  
IN VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION**

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**MENTORING WITHIN THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN  
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK:**

A study of the impact of mentoring on beginning-teachers' perception  
of their success in visual literacy education during the first year.

Lisa Francesca Paris

Submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy  
(Education)  
Edith Cowan University  
Perth Australia

**NOVEMBER 2008**

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Date: 30 March 2009

# **PREFACE**

## **THE RESEARCHER**

The journey of this degree seems, in so many ways to be something of a miracle. I reflect on the innocent girl who left school aged 15 on the advice of some well-intentioned Catholic nuns, studied at night school to become a secretary, and later secured entry to university to complete a Bachelor of Education and embarked on a career as a visual arts teacher. During my 25-year career I have been Head of Arts Learning Area; completed a Master of Education degree in visual arts education; as well as being a senior lecturer and course co-ordinator in visual arts education at Edith Cowan University in Perth (ECU). As I reflect, I wonder how on earth the 15-year-old girl managed to change from someone who was confronted by high school, to work in a university. I suspect the answer is contained in the premise that education can change our lives if we want it badly enough.

## **Multiple Intelligences**

The transformative dimension of education continues in my own life and I am delighted to have actualised my potential. Intelligence it seems is not quantifiable purely through reference to narrow IQ score cards of preferred literacy and numeracy tests, particularly if the domain of intelligence is also visual literacy or visuacy. As an academic with the responsibility for course coordination for the double degree in visual arts education at ECU, I make a point whenever possible of emphasising the importance of Gardner's (1983) model of multiple intelligences. I illustrate the theory using my own vignettes as exemplars ... the personal journey that I have taken from school leaver to university lecturer ... so that my students appreciate the different types of learners they will encounter in schools. I hope that they will question traditional descriptors of intelligence and recognise that quantitative measures tell only part of the story.

## **Workplace Experience**

As a visual arts educator with some twenty years' teaching experience in a variety of Non Government Western Australian schools, my tenure has encompassed work as a primary visual arts specialist; middle school visual arts specialist; senior school visual arts specialist; Head of Visual Arts Department; and Learning Area Coordinator for the Arts. In recent years I have worked as a School Moderator for the Curriculum Council of Western Australia (CC/WA), auditing standards of teaching and learning in Western Australian secondary schools. In addition, I have been extensively involved in the review and redesign of secondary school courses for years eleven and twelve students (Visual Arts Course of Study and Design Course of Study). In 2004, I accepted a lecturing position at ECU within the School of Education, and now I hold the position of Course Co-ordinator of secondary visual arts education within the

School. During the period 2000-2006 I held the position of President of the Art Education Association of Western Australia (**AEA/WA**), and the convergence of these two contexts (ECU and AEA/WA) made my research both possible and timely. Visual education of young Australians is highly relevant, at a time when more than for any generation preceding them, there is a critical need to become visually literate in order to navigate a visually saturated society. My research, like much of the international research before it, re-affirms the value of mentoring in the transition from pre-service teacher training through to full-time professional practice.

### **THE GRADUATE-MENTOR PROJECT IN VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION**

The Graduate-Mentor Project in Visual Arts Education (**GMP**) arose from my desire to complete my doctorate in an area that would have tangible and ongoing benefit to both visual arts in education professionals, as well as students who are recipients of that education.

Therefore:

- as Course Coordinator for secondary visual arts education at ECU I sought to improve the quality of teaching and learning for pre-service teachers within the Secondary Graduate Diploma in Visual Arts Education (**Graduate Diploma**). I also sought to enhance the quality of induction experience for our graduates in the beginning-teacher phase of their careers;
- as President of AEA/WA, I had a commitment to improving both the teaching and learning standards within the profession, and to facilitating a sense of ‘community’ shared by its members;
- as a senior teacher-scholar at ECU, I had a desire to undertake research, which would positively affect the calibre of visual education of students who would be taught by our graduates.

The GMP is the result of this convergence of three areas of responsibility. In many respects this narrative reflects my own personal journey, as much as that of the mentors and beginning-teachers. I am delighted to have reached the end of this first phase of inquiry into the area of mentoring of beginning-teachers.

A highlight of the process has been the emergence of an innovative, reciprocal mentoring model which re-frames the role of the Graduate Diploma pre-service teacher through their work as an Artist-in-Residence (**AiR**) during their final pre-service year at university. The model appears to have much to offer beginning-teachers following graduation and as they embark on their new career. It may be particularly beneficial through the induction phase for graduates to be in receipt of mentoring from the school-based teacher with whom they completed the AiR placement the preceding year.

## **STYLE: ACTIVE VOICE**

The active voice is becoming an increasingly popular vehicle in qualitative research. Amir (2005) argues that writing in the active voice from the position of the first person contributes to the authentic representation of qualitative phenomena. The active voice:

- invites the reader into the room and makes him/her feel more engaged in the process;
- more appropriately reflects the writer's world-views, beliefs and values as a human being, writer and researcher;
- acknowledges that case studies are often written as narratives, which lend themselves to the active voice and first person format. A narrative means reconstructing or building a story through a particular lens. This lens becomes the "basic shape of search for meaning" (Amir 2005, p.1);
- is consistent with the qualitative researcher's orientation.

Amir (2005) posits that qualitative research forms are ideally suited to the first person active voice because the third person voice is not seen as inherently more scholarly. He observes:

It is surprising that so many of us – journal editors, reviewers, writers and readers fail to notice the change that has been taking place in scholarly writing. During the past few years conventions have significantly changed in scholarly publishing to where the first person voice is not in and of itself considered unscholarly. It is allowed when it is in line with the focus and purpose of the article. I consciously and deliberately use an extensive use of first person in my writing style. Writing a case study article in a third person in order to make it more 'objective' will result in losing its authentic voice (p. 2).

Wuensch (2007) similarly argued that there was an increasing tendency within the international research community for qualitative researchers to employ the active, rather than the passive voice. He noted that the first person active voice was a persuasive, authentic literary form through which to express the reality of the research context and its inhabitants (p. 1). Following Amir (2005) and Wuensch (2007) I have elected to employ the first person active voice within this inquiry. The research takes the form of narrative vignettes, which present snapshots of the first year of teaching in the lives of beginning visual arts teachers. The vignettes are presented in the first person active voice, which seemed to me to be an appropriate and authentic device to convey the rich tapestry of anecdotes and experiences the participants shared with me over the course of the two-year study. The beginning-teachers and mentors shared stories were highly subjective accounts of what had occurred in the intervening periods since our last meeting. Some of these sessions were emotionally charged, characterised by 'venting' or 'letting off steam' rather than any kind of objective portrayal of the teaching and learning context.



## **SUBJECTIVITY AND THE PARTICIPANTS**

Many of the beginning-teacher participants in this study were navigating the reality of unemployment, relief work, or part-time work during a period in which they had expected to be employed on a full-time on-going basis. The financial realities of their circumstances created stress in their lives and when they finally were offered work, these merged with the stresses arising from the challenges of the unfamiliar school environment: poor induction procedures; the demands of programming; behaviour management; as well as pedagogical and curricular challenges or deficits. Some of the beginning-teachers believed they were being bullied by colleagues, were taken advantage of, or abandoned to navigate the relentless demands of timetables and deadlines without any internal support. Despite an intensive twelve-month preparation for teaching in their Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary), many felt they were simply ill equipped for the challenges of the new profession. Several beginning-teachers confided that at various times during the first year they had been on the verge of leaving teaching and returning to professions they had relinquished prior to teaching. Over time, the mentors in the study had a profound impact on the professional and personal wellbeing of the beginning-teachers. As we undertook the journey of the first year, I became aware that we all shared in the highs and lows of the beginning-teachers' induction experience. One mentor remarked:

When they were upset, I felt upset; when they were excited, I could not help but feel excited for them also. I had a personal stake in making it work for them and I felt their pain when this did not happen. I just wanted to fix it!  
(Mentor-Tess, 2006)

Other beginning-teachers in the research were employed in full-time positions and appeared not to experience any of these stresses. These beginning-teachers came to the meetings 'buzzing' with excitement and enthusiasm. They were eager to discuss their ideas for projects and themes with their mentors who generally responded with similar passion and enthusiasm for the work of their protégés. The excitement and responsiveness at these meetings was infectious and the mentors remarked that they often returned home with a renewed enthusiasm for their own teaching after these meetings. As the researcher, I became aware that despite a clear commitment to objective research practice and processes, I also shared the emotional journey of the participants, all of whom had been my students during the preceding year as they completed their Graduate Diploma. Accordingly, I acknowledge the subjective dimension in this narrative inquiry. Guba and Lincoln (1989) observed:

Inquirers are human, and cannot escape their humanness. That is, they cannot by an act of will set aside their own subjectivity, nor can they stand outside the arena of humanness created by other persons involved (p. 88).

## **PERCEPTION AND RESEARCH**

The research was 'perceptual' in nature, with two levels contextualising the findings. Firstly, the participants (mentors and beginning-teachers) conveyed their impressions and feelings about the first year of teaching (generally) and visual literacy education (specifically), and reconciliation of the research questions arose from this source material. Secondly, as the researcher I sat in on the many meetings of the various mentoring groups and both participated in, and recorded the discussions, which took place about the experience of the first year of teaching. In both instances it is the subjective perception of the respondent/researcher, which has been the focus of the inquiry rather than any independent objective analysis of student or beginning-teacher performance. Smith (1999) observed:

The simplest definition of objectivity is a directional one. Objectivity is the perception or experience of the external; subjectivity is the perception or experience of the internal. Subjectivity and objectivity are both necessary pathways to knowledge and are dependent on each other. Any form of looking or listening does to some extent preclude another, but to speak solely from a subjective or an objective perspective represents a regression in thinking to a form of naive objectivism or naive subjectivism (p. 465).

The limitations of this 'perceptual mode' within qualitative inquiry, as well as the importance of the repeating themes across the vignettes recorded over two years, have been considered at the time of analysing the data and presenting findings.

## **ABSTRACT**

Western Australian tertiary graduates who enter the visual arts education profession are often well acquainted with the theoretical underpinnings of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework. This knowledge base, in combination with their own visual arts training, typically enables them to enter teaching theoretically well equipped to support students in the development of arts ideas and studio works. The important outcome areas of visual arts history and visual arts criticism often present major challenges for graduates. In the absence of significant post-university support and more importantly, within the context of limited pre-service training where visual conceptual understandings and studio skills repertoires have priority, many beginning-teachers are often left to their own devices in sourcing visual arts history/criticism content and pedagogy. Uncertainty in either one or both of these key areas of visual literacy education tends to create unsustainable levels of stress for beginning-teachers and often results in attrition.

The Graduate-Mentor Project research examined the experience of 20 beginning-teachers as they moved from the pre-service phase of their career through to the end of the first year post graduation. The findings underscore the value of mentoring during the first year. Mentoring significantly impacted the induction experience of the beginning-teachers and in many instances made it possible for them to survive when they would otherwise have left teaching. The research reinforces the need for new approaches to initial teacher education and the essentialness of first year of teaching induction. In addition, there is a need for a partnership approach involving: universities, professional associations and school-based teachers, in establishing a reciprocal mentoring framework. The most valuable aspect of the research, was the development of an innovative 'reciprocal mentoring' Artist-in-Residence model, which reframed the status of the pre-service teachers from that novice to expert artist. The program answered one of the most troubling questions to emerge from the study, that of how best to ensure ongoing procurement of mentors for new graduates.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all the beginning-teachers and mentors who participated in the program with honesty and sincerity, 'bared their souls' with all of the attendant risks implicit in such sharing, I wish to say a heartfelt 'thank you'.

I gratefully acknowledge the support and guidance of my principal supervisor Dr Geoffrey Lummis whose patience, as I endlessly discussed various elements of the research over four years, must surely have been tested on many occasions. Despite the lengthy nature of the process, I never saw anything from him other than a great enthusiasm for my educational journey. Dr Jennifer Pearson and Dr Tony Fetherston, each brought a valued dimension to the design and implementation of the research in their capacity as associate supervisors and I am grateful for the wise counsel. I also acknowledge the 'critical friend' role played by my colleague and friend Mr Geoff Lowe on this educational journey. We completed our research at the same time and discussed various aspects of the process before raising them with our supervisors. His humour and irreverence at times when it felt as though the end would never come, introduced a nurturing dimension to the process of largely working alone. Geoffrey, Tony, Jen and Geoff – thank you!

To my dad who, despite never having been to university, is one of the wisest people I know, I extend my sincere appreciation. Repeating the support he offered at the time I completed my Master of Education, he again read and re-read the various incarnations of this thesis. His highly perceptive reflections on the structure of the document and the logic of the argument have been gratefully received. I love you, Dad.

I dedicate this achievement to my three daughters, Natasha, Kate and Sara, two of whom are currently studying to be teachers whilst the other is embarking on the journey toward being a social worker. I hope that in some small way I may have given each of them the gift of education and a love of learning.

Finally, for my little grandson Tyler at whose arrival on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2007 I was present, I paraphrase British 'education guru' Sir Ken Robinson, in that I hope in the years ahead we value and promote the benefits of visuacy and creativity. My wish for you Tyler is the total transformation implicit in that gift.

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## **LIST OF SIGNIFICANT ACRONYMS**

<b>AEA/WA</b>	<b>Art Education Association of Western Australia</b>
<b>A&amp;D</b>	<b>Art and Design</b>
<b>ADHD</b>	<b>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</b>
<b>AGWA</b>	<b>Art Gallery of Western Australia</b>
<b>AIS</b>	<b>Arts in Society Outcome (Art History)</b>
<b>AiR</b>	<b>Artist-in-Residence</b>
<b>AISWA</b>	<b>Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia</b>
<b>ARS</b>	<b>Arts Responses Outcome (Art Criticism)</b>
<b>ASP</b>	<b>Arts Skills and Processes Outcome (Studio Work)</b>
<b>ASTP</b>	<b>Australian Scholarship in Teaching Project</b>
<b>BT</b>	<b>Beginning-Teacher</b>
<b>CA</b>	<b>Conversation Analytic Research</b>
<b>CAI</b>	<b>Communicating Arts Ideas Outcome (Visual Inquiry)</b>
<b>CEO</b>	<b>Catholic Education Office</b>
<b>CEQ</b>	<b>Course Evaluation Questionnaire</b>
<b>CFG</b>	<b>Critical Friends' Group</b>
<b>CPET/CPE</b>	<b>Centre for Professional Excellence in Teaching</b>
<b>CU</b>	<b>Curtin University</b>
<b>DBAE</b>	<b>Discipline-Based Art Education</b>
<b>DECOS</b>	<b>Design Course of Study</b>
<b>DET</b>	<b>Department of Education and Training</b>
<b>ECU</b>	<b>Edith Cowan University</b>
<b>GMP</b>	<b>Graduate Mentor Project</b>
<b>K-7</b>	<b>Kindergarten to Year Seven</b>
<b>K-12</b>	<b>Kindergarten to Year Twelve</b>
<b>ICT</b>	<b>Information Communication Technologies</b>
<b>M-T</b>	<b>Mentor Teacher</b>
<b>NCTAF</b>	<b>National Commission on Teaching and America's Future</b>
<b>OBE</b>	<b>Outcomes-Based Education</b>

PD	Professional Development
PLATO	Persons Lobbying Against Teaching Outcomes
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEE	Tertiary Entrance Examination
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UTEI	Unit Teaching Evaluation Instrument
UWA	University of Western Australia
VACOS	Visual Arts Course of Study
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WA/ACCP	Western Australian Art and Craft Carrier Project
WACF	Western Australian Curriculum Framework
WACOT	Western Australian College of Teaching
WAUC	Western Australian Unit Curriculum

# CHAPTER ONE

---

## INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

---

### **Introduction**

Recent renewed focus on the visual education of young Australians (2008 National Review of Visual Education et al.) makes the focus of this doctoral inquiry most appropriate. This is particularly so at a time when, more than for any generation preceding them, there is a critical need for students to become visually literate in order to navigate a visually-saturated society. This research studied the impact professional mentoring had on Graduate Diploma in Education beginning-teachers during their first year of service as visual arts specialists in Western Australian secondary schools. The Graduate Mentor Project (GMP) in Visual Arts Education linked twenty recent graduates from Edith Cowan University (ECU) to ten experienced visual arts educators who were members of the Art Education Association of WA (AEA/WA). A particular focus of the research lay in the areas of visual literacy education and the emerging field of visuacy<sup>1</sup>. The importance of visual literacy and visuacy education is elaborated in theme three within Chapter Two. I monitored the impact mentoring had upon the professional success and sense of personal and professional well being of the beginning-teachers within the study. This study, like much of the international research before it, re-affirmed the value of mentoring for beginning-teachers.

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Several years ago I noted that an increasing number of university students who completed pre-service professional practice placements under my care, floundered when asked to take a visual arts historical and cultural lesson (Arts in Society – AIS), or a visual arts criticism lesson (Arts Responses – ARS) during the practicum. Generally, their capacity to work with students engaged in visual inquiry (Communicating Arts Ideas - CAI) was quite well developed. Similarly, practical studio work (Arts Skills & Processes - ASP) presented little if any problem since the majority of student teachers with whom I worked were completing a Graduate Diploma following a foundation visual arts degree. Having witnessed confident and skilful lessons from student teachers in these two domains, I was continually perplexed at their apparent inability to confidently deliver learning experiences incorporating AIS and ARS.

---

1. Visuacy: The term visuacy appeared in National Review of Visual Education report (2008) and is interchangeable with the term 'Visual Literacy' in respect of meaning.

At the time it seemed to me that there was a dramatic contrast between the student teachers' content knowledge in the areas of CAI and ASP and their repertoire of content knowledge, skills and pedagogy in respect of AIS and ARS. Over time it became apparent to me that a significant aspect of the problem was a deficit in these beginning-teachers' AIS/ARS subject discipline content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, as they simply did not know what to teach, or how to teach in a manner that would capture the imagination of their students. In most instances their repertoire extended no further than a 'one-dimensional' lecture-style delivery of historical facts, names and dates and they regressed to a 'teaching as telling' methodology. The concept that secondary school students might respond more enthusiastically to AIS games, team debates, drawing analyses, peer investigations, or whole-class interrogation of images through open discussion, either had not occurred to the student-teachers or may simply have been beyond their personal resources. Moreover, the logistics of playing a game whilst imparting critical visual analysis skills seemed insurmountable for many student teachers. One student teacher even went so far as to say to me that they regarded the concept of enjoyment and the study of AIS as being mutually exclusive. Importantly, I became aware that the pre-service training at a variety of universities had largely failed to meet the visual literacy content and pedagogy needs of these emerging teachers.

I reviewed the published Graduate Diploma course structures at ECU and Curtin University of Technology (the two main initial education providers for visual arts teachers in Western Australia) at the time the research commenced, and it appeared that little formal attention was paid to the area of pedagogical content knowledge in respect of teaching AIS and ARS. Similarly, analysis of the three-year undergraduate visual arts degrees (table one) that underpinned the Graduate Diploma in each institution, indicated that the study of AIS/ARS comprised only a small part of the degree. Whilst it is certainly true that the published description of units within Degree programs may not always comprehensively reflect the substance of tutorials or lecture presentations, this was nonetheless a cause for concern. This was particularly so when contextualised against the 50% weighting ascribed to these outcomes within the Western Australian Curriculum Framework (WACF) and the mandated expectation that visual arts teachers would competently deliver this critical foundation for visual literacy.

Clearly, the question of 'how' this 'duty of care' of the pre-service training providers to properly prepare beginning-teachers for the visual literacy education of their students, might possibly be fulfilled under the then current training regimes was sobering in its implications. Anecdotal evidence suggested that pre-service teachers needed themselves to be formally taught how to teach AIS/ARS in a manner that was engaging and affirming for secondary school students. Failure on the part of local universities to deliver critical skills in these domains had the potential to affect the professional lives of visual arts teachers long after graduation, thereby

contravening the implicit responsibility pre-service training providers have to produce beginning-teachers who are ‘work ready’.

**TABLE ONE: SAMPLE UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS - 2005**

Undergraduate program	Art history/Art criticism	Studio skills units	Conceptual skills units
Edith Cowan University Bachelor Creative Arts	6	12	6
Curtin University of Technology Bachelor Creative Arts	6	6	6

Curtin University of Technology (2005); Edith Cowan University (2005).  
*On-line handbook, Bachelor Arts (visual arts)*

**TABLE TWO: WACF THE ARTS OUTCOMES**

<p><b>OUTCOME ONE:</b>            Communicating Arts Ideas - <b>CAI</b></p> <p>Students generate arts works that communicate ideas</p>	<p><b>OUTCOME TWO:</b>            Arts skills and Processes - <b>ASP</b></p> <p>Students use the skills, techniques, processes, conventions and technologies of the arts</p>
<p><b>OUTCOME THREE:</b>            Arts Responses -<b>ARS</b></p> <p>Students use their aesthetic understanding to respond to, reflect on and evaluate the arts</p>	<p><b>OUTCOME FOUR:</b>            Arts in Society - <b>AIS</b></p> <p>Students understand the role of the arts in society</p>

In 1999, I completed a Master of Education research investigation into the application of AIS and ARS at middle school level in six Western Australian schools (Paris, 1999). The results of the study suggested that in the period before the full implementation of the WACF the teaching of AIS and ARS tended to be instrumental and pragmatic. The experienced teacher participants

in that study reported that in the limited time available they typically used AIS and ARS as a way of stimulating ideas for new visual arts projects or, if time permitted, as a way of building an historical knowledge base about famous artists for later school assessment purposes. The notion that such study might contribute invaluable life-skills to secondary students through visual literacy acquisition appeared largely not to factor in the practice of the experienced teacher participants. This pragmatic reality seemed at odds with the prevailing rhetoric and philosophy of visual arts education that promoted visuacy as critical in a visually saturated Australian society. Within such a cultural and societal context, students who failed to become visually literate were deemed to be vulnerable in ways akin to those besetting students who are illiterate in the traditional text/print-based literacy domains. The repeated failure of student teachers to confidently handle AIS/ARS in professional practice placements I supervised, ultimately led to my voicing concerns to colleagues in AEA/WA about this significant deficit in their pre-service training. Upon assuming the role of President of the AEA/WA in 2003, I suggested that the Association offer some form of mentoring to graduates in the post-university period. I was particularly keen to explore an essentialist perspective in the hope that graduates might see visual literacy 'life-skills' as having priority over instrumental applications.

Eisner (1972) distinguished between 'essentialist' and 'contextualist' (or instrumental) justifications for the study of the visual arts in schools. He elaborated that instrumental applications that utilised the study of the visual arts to serve the pragmatic needs of students were valid, yet limited in that they did not result in visual literacy acquisition. Eisner proposed the notion that the study of visual arts should be undertaken for its own sake and 'contextualised' such endeavour as being within the realm of life-skills acquisition. He maintained that visual literacy acquisition through concept attainment, studio production and aesthetic appreciation/response, enriched the lives of students by leading them to a deeper appreciation of the 'visionary' in human experience and facilitated access to our most sublime visions. Eisner says that:

Art serves [humanity] not only by making the ineffable and visionary available, it also functions as a means of activating our sensibilities; visual arts provides the subject matter through which our human potentialities can be exercised (p. 12).

My colleagues at AEA/WA generally embraced with enthusiasm, the notion of offering mentoring to graduates, despite themselves having to negotiate significant changes in the education landscape in the form of the WACF and the Post Compulsory Education Review (PCER).

In December 2003 I was appointed lecturer in visual arts education at ECU with responsibility

for coordinating units in which Graduate Diploma students were enrolled. Opportunity and motive combined and at the AEA/WA Annual General Meeting in early 2004 a proposal to link graduate teachers to experienced visual arts educators was tabled and endorsed. Similarly, informal discussions with staff at ECU about the value of formal mentoring for graduates in the induction period reinforced my belief that the idea was both timely and meritorious. The notion of a Graduate Mentor Research Project developed from these early discussions.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

The importance of the research lies in the unique opportunity to gather information about the impact mentoring on beginning-teachers' professional quality of life. It was significant that the project had a focus upon visuacy and subject discipline content knowledge. This was particularly the case at a time when both what is taught and how material is taught have undergone an outcomes-based education metamorphosis. The acquisition of invaluable information about graduates and mentors had the potential to both inform critical debate about pre-service training and post university support structures for graduates and highlight implications for future course development.

During 2005 the Graduate Diploma students at ECU, reported wide-ranging configurations in their foundation 'skills' and 'expertise'. What was clearly apparent was that there was no single profile to which students conformed. This was further compounded by the fact that both 'art major' students (visual arts education specialists) and 'art minor' students (those who have visual arts as their second teaching area) completed the course together, thus translating to tertiary classes comprised of students with extensively varying backgrounds, needs and strengths. These varying teacher profiles, in combination with a belief that many of them expressed about the study of AIS being intrinsically boring and ARS belonging in the realm of academia, often translated into marked self-doubt and an apparent retreat into the traditional (often boring) one dimensional lecture-style delivery of AIS/ARS, replete with names, dates and historical facts, as well as creating something of a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The inevitable failure of secondary school students to then respond positively to lecture style delivery of visual arts history/criticism constituted a threat to their acquisition of visuacy life-skills. This in turn presented an obstacle to their navigation of everyday life in a visually saturated Australian social and cultural context. Under current curriculum/funding/resource arrangements the one-year Graduate Diploma at ECU simply could not compensate for deficits that existed in students' subject discipline content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge bases. This study is therefore important because we needed to know whether the graduates themselves could compensate for these deficits and, if so, what role mentors might play in such knowledge acquisition.

## **THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The problem I sought to investigate was whether the intervention and support offered by trained mentors could beneficially impact visual arts beginning-teachers' confidence and perception of success with visual literacy or visuacy education.

## **THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

The purpose of the research was to study the operation of mentor-protégé/mentee partnerships. The research also explored the rationale that initial teacher education providers should facilitate routine mentoring support for all beginning-teachers. The inquiry was undertaken from the time the beginning-teachers completed their Graduate Diploma (the shortest and in many respects most challenging experience in visual arts teacher education) until the end of the first year. The need for provision of routine mentoring for beginning-teachers was clearly indicated by a survey of factors such as:

- attrition rates;
- deficits in beginning-teachers' subject discipline content knowledge at the point of graduation;
- deficits in beginning-teachers' pedagogical content knowledge at the point of graduation;
- the long-established tradition of critical intervention by mentors.

Finally, an alternative to traditional mentoring approaches was tested as a potentially superior model. Within the hybrid model described, the traditional 'buddy' role ascribed to mentors was relinquished in favour of one aligned to that of the 'critical friend' found in action research. Conversational-style interaction in informal environments away from the employment context of the school, characterised a contemporary and emotionally intelligent relational model for future mentoring practices.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This inquiry was designed to reveal the actual experience of beginning-teachers in receipt of mentoring within visual arts education. To this end, three related questions were asked.

1. How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?
2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?
3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?



# CHAPTER TWO

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

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### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature underpinning the critical themes of visual literacy education and mentoring of beginning-teachers. It surveys the factors that render beginning-teachers vulnerable to high rates of attrition within the first five years of service and suggests an alternative model of mentoring to those generally endorsed in teaching induction. The structure of this literature review comprises five related themes:

- teacher retention – the research context;
- experiences in mentoring;
- visual arts history/criticism teaching practices;
- contemporary directions in visual arts education;
- theoretical framework for the GMP.

### **RESEARCH ORIENTATION**

The GMP research was premised on the notion that initial teacher education providers have a duty of care to graduates that extends beyond the point of graduation until at least the end of the first year of teaching. This orientation is a departure from the dominant culture in initial teacher education, where most universities relinquish responsibility for graduates at the completion of the undergraduate or, in the case of the Graduate Diploma, the postgraduate qualification. The fate of teaching graduates is generally unknown and (expressed in cynical terms) appears only to matter to pre-service providers in respect of the funding implications of the federally administered Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ). The CEQ is administered mid-way through the year following course completion and invites graduates to rank university performance against indicators such as:

- good teaching;
- generic skills;
- graduate attributes;
- overall satisfaction’.

The data is important because it is used for the purpose of ranking university performance in course delivery and this in turn has implications for future student enrolments and funding of programs and courses. Few universities currently have the resources or the inclination to track

the fate of past graduates, other than through the generic and anonymous data gathered in the CEQ that sheds very little light on the actual experience of beginning-teachers. Those of us in the business of educating teachers proudly attend their graduation ceremonies and, after a brief interval, move on to the next group hoping all is well with those who have just left us. However, according to the 2007 House of Representatives Standing Committee inquiry into teacher training and induction, the majority of beginning-teachers find themselves on a roller coaster ride of relief teaching appointments, periods of unemployment or, worse still, employment in schools where colleagues have little interest or time to support them. Some even find themselves appointed to rural positions as the only teacher of their discipline, with responsibility for subjects for which they have not been prepared. The inevitable consequence of this kind of experience is stress and heightened vulnerability to attrition (p. 87). In an economic climate where many universities increasingly struggle to fill student quotas, a rethinking of the quality of care provided to students has been gaining momentum, with a number of reviews of teacher education courses in a variety of Australian states underscoring the need for continuing support from university faculties during the early years of teaching:

The committee received evidence that effective induction and mentoring of new teachers is essential to ensure successful transitions into teaching. The Committee is encouraged by new Department of Education and Training and Victorian Institute of Teaching initiatives that have improved graduate induction and mentoring over recent years. Nevertheless, this inquiry identified certain aspects that can be further improved. Notably the Committee found that education faculties should play a greater role in the first year induction process. The Committee considers this approach to have advantages for the pre-service teacher, as well as the teacher educators who would gain the opportunity to obtain valuable information regarding the effectiveness of their programs in producing 'teacher ready' graduates (Inquiry into the Suitability of Pre-Service Teacher Training in Victoria 2005, p. xxvi).

The recent Australian House of Representatives Senate Report into teacher training and induction (2007) also noted:

Although induction is primarily the responsibility of employing authorities, the committee considers that teacher education should be a shared responsibility with all major stakeholders having an increased role, as partners, in each of the stages of teacher education (p. 92).

The theme of an ongoing duty of care, owed by pre-service providers to teacher education graduates, has particular currency at a time when Teaching Australia (the regulatory body for the profession) is reviewing standards of teacher competency and accreditation of teacher training courses. The explicit acknowledgement of the important role universities can play during teacher induction seems extremely relevant in the case of the Graduate Diploma visual

arts education beginning-teachers. This is particularly so because many graduates enter the profession with gaps in their pre-service training. These gaps arise as a result of a series of educational and curriculum evolutions that have unfolded both inside and outside the university context, necessitating the need for ongoing support from initial teacher education providers in the period after graduation.

### **THE IMPLICATIONS OF POOR PRIMARY ART EDUCATION**

The vital area of visual education in Western Australian primary schools is increasingly the responsibility of generalist primary school teachers who have varying degrees of competence in the area of visual education:

As technology introduces new forms of visual expression and new understandings about constructions of knowledge, practice, meaning and aesthetics, the teacher faces a formidable task. There are new technological skills, epistemologies and paradigms to embrace. Further, visual education will need to be embedded in the primary school curriculum, where, for the most part, generalist primary teachers are required to address all areas of the curriculum (National Review of Visual Education, 2005, p. 13).

This reality, in combination with the transition to outcomes-based education in the middle years of schooling has increasingly seen the removal of prescribed content and syllabus documents through much of the visual education of Western Australian children. The varying quality of education experienced by students through the K-10 years is often then compounded during the senior school. Senior school teachers often struggle to maintain their existing professional responsibilities in respect of visuacy, whilst simultaneously contending with new directions in post-compulsory education. This is further compounded by the regulatory obligations imposed by WACOT in respect of teacher registration. The net result is that many children experience a visual education that qualitatively appears less effective in delivering visual literacy than might have been the case in the past:

This finding is substantiated by recent research findings that the arts experience of the majority of Early Childhood Studies (ECS) and Primary student-teachers, prior to their entry into their education degree, is both minimal and lacking in recency (National Review of Visual Education, 2005, p. 13).

In recent years an evolution in the structure and character of initial teacher education programs at a variety of universities has further compounded existing weaknesses in the visual education of secondary school students. The absence of subject discipline content knowledge, skills and expertise needed to deliver visual literacy education at the point they start teaching is not the fault of the graduates. In my experience they have more often than not dutifully completed four

years at university and attempted all tasks asked of them with diligence and enthusiasm. The problem lies elsewhere in:

- the evolving nature of university preparation programs;
- the evolving nature of curriculum structures in Western Australian Schools;
- the evolving absence of mentors who have the time or skill required helping fill the deficiencies in graduates' subject discipline knowledge bases.

In the last five years Western Australian universities have increasingly had to navigate reductions in student intake numbers (TISC report, 2008). These reductions arise partly as a consequence of a booming resources sector that has attracted school leavers to lucrative apprenticeship programs, but also as a response to newly-emerging post-school destination choices such as TAFE studies and a myriad of employment opportunities. Consequently, tertiary institutions face unparalleled periods of economic and academic reform as student numbers decline and responsible governance requires the review and restructuring of all tertiary programs to take account of the economic realities of contemporary life:

In-service teacher education is an area of concern. There has been a contraction and, in some cases, closure of support services to teachers. Advisory teachers, on-line support mechanisms, mentoring and networking are limited and many professional associations are faced with doing more with less (National Review of Visual Education, 2005, p. 13).

In recent years economic pressures have seen a reduction in the number of specialised visual arts education units within initial teacher education courses at several Western Australian universities. Furthermore, a decline in first-preference school-leaver applications has resulted in a lowering of the tertiary entrance examination score required for admission to university (2004-2007 TISC and ECU portfolio pathway admissions). Simultaneously, alternative pathways for entry to university have been developed in an attempt (among other things) to attract students who might not otherwise have previously considered tertiary education. It is an unpopular truth that students who performed less well at school (and may even have failed their tertiary entrance examinations) are increasingly accepted into undergraduate degree programs at university. These marginal students then require learning support in order to successfully make the transition to independent study. Whilst university preparation courses and learning support mechanisms (which are themselves under reduced funding or restructuring cloud) can remediate some deficits in terms of preparedness for tertiary study, the critical area of visual literacy proficiency in the case of visual arts applicants lies outside the bounds of what can be achieved through such intervention. Visual arts students who enter university through alternative pathways, or lower tertiary entrance ranking scores, may indeed develop sufficient conceptual understandings and studio expertise to be able to graduate as visual arts practitioners, however,

their visual literacy facility at the point of graduation varies. This presents as problematic for the frequent subsequent choice to seek admission to the Graduate Diploma. The responsibility such beginning-teachers then have for the visual literacy education of the secondary students they encounter in their first year of teaching is one for which many Graduate Diploma beginning-teachers are unprepared. The national review of visual education highlighted the need for an extensive re-evaluation of initial teacher education regimes in respect of visual education. The review advocated the need for an ongoing commitment by the profession to the acquisition of subject discipline content knowledge to support visual education of children:

Whilst teacher education institutions may be able to increase the allocation of time given to addressing visual education and reconfigure the content, this in itself is unlikely to overcome the poor levels of visual education that student teachers bring to their tertiary studies. Whilst technical and process skills can be easily taught the more pressing and complex matters concerning aesthetic sensibility, visual thinking, meaning-making and the like, require extended periods of engagement in the arts and design practices. Therefore a stronger link between pre-service and ongoing professional development needs to become a permanent feature of teacher education (National Review of Visual Education, 2005, p. 13).

Previously held notions that the transmission of subject discipline content knowledge to beginning-teachers might be the exclusive responsibility of the university has increasingly come under scrutiny. Such assumption has most recently been questioned by the National Review of Visual Education (NRVE) that is currently unfolding at a national level across all Australian states. There are many factors that combine to the challenge for initial teacher education producing highly visually literate beginning-teachers. The factors encompass:

- economic imperatives;
- university staff reduction;
- realignment of student services;
- lower entry requirements;
- varying, if not poor, levels of visuacy in tertiary students at the point where they commence university study.

The varying levels of visual literacy in beginning-teachers raises serious questions about the quality of visual education offered to students in schools, particularly during the first year of teaching. In combination with the removal of visual arts syllabus documents in schools in recent years that used to clearly articulate for beginning-teachers precisely what should be taught at various stages of schooling, as well as a lack of subject discipline content knowledge becomes problematic.

Pre-service education enables student-teachers to begin teaching. However, as professionals at the coalface of future-building, their ongoing professional development is integral to a vital education system... Teachers' ongoing education is an investment if it addresses the issues of keeping pace with change, maintaining educators' passion and enabling forms of advancement that support not only the individual but the growth of the profession. How then are emerging teachers supported as life-long learners – to grow as teachers, to maintain their passion and to advance to mentoring and/or senior positions in the profession? How is the issue of generational renewal being addressed? (NRVE, 2005, p. 14).

## **FOUNDATIONS FOR VISUAL LITERACY EDUCATION**

Visual arts history (AIS) and visual arts criticism (ARS) occupy central positions in visual arts curriculum statements in Western Australia. This status is sustained by the belief that the study of visual arts history and criticism actively contributes to the education of the student as a whole person. In reality, however, rather than attending to the holistic education of students, the application of AIS and ARS in Western Australian schools tends to be pragmatic and instrumental (Paris, 1999, p. 3). Teachers typically use visual arts works as 'learning aids' because they don't have time, interest or experience in dealing with them in any other way. While AIS and ARS offer valuable life-skills worth acquiring for the contribution they could make to the students' autonomy and personal welfare, this understanding often seems a foreign concept for classroom teachers. Eisner, (1972, p. 9), promoted the importance of visual arts in education noting:

The prime value of the arts in education lies, from my point of view, in the unique contributions it makes to the individual's experience with and understanding of the world. The visual arts deal with an aspect of human consciousness that no other field touches: the aesthetic contemplation of visual form.

Eisner continued:

The visual arts provide for our perception of form that vivifies life and that often makes an appraisal of it. In short, we can learn of the justification of visual arts in education by examining the functions of visual arts in human experience. We can ask, "What do visual arts do? The function of visual arts is that of providing a sense of the visionary in human experience. This function is achieved in at least two ways: first, art, especially the visual arts, has been used to give expression to man's most sublime visions. ... visual arts serves [humanity] not only by making the ineffable and visionary available, it also functions as a means of activating our sensibilities; visual arts provides the subject matter through which our human potentialities can be exercised (p. 12).

The difference between theorists' (Eisner 1972) and teachers' understanding of the place and purpose of visual arts generally and more particularly in the sphere of education, lead me inexorably toward visual literacy as an important area of inquiry that was the subject of my Master of Education thesis in 1999. As the project progressed it became apparent that teacher competence with AIS and ARS material, as opposed to studio practice and the development of arts ideas, varied significantly. Questions about pedagogy and professional practice, common purpose, uniform standards and accountability emerged from the research. Put simply, if a State commitment to the study of AIS and ARS had been mandated in the form of the WACF, but ordinary classroom teachers could not agree among themselves about the form and purpose such inquiry should take, what might the implications be for beginning-teachers entering such an educational landscape? Furthermore, if high rates of teacher attrition (up to a third of each cohort) occur during the first five years of teaching, what further impact might such disagreement and confusion have on younger colleagues in need of leadership and support? (Young teacher separations report, Education Department of Western Australia, 2003). The case for studying the impact of professional mentoring on beginning-teachers' success with visuacy in Western Australian secondary schools is multi-faceted.

The literature review supporting the research has necessarily been constructed in layers that combine to present a compelling picture of need and a possible solution during a period of extensive educational change and reform. The connecting thread running through each aspect of the literature review is the need to provide secondary school students with life-skills that are fundamental to navigating contemporary Australian life and visual culture. Despite significant gaps in their own knowledge bases, visual arts beginning-teachers are the conduits through which the next generation of secondary school students are to become visually literate. The misalignment of expectations about beginning-teachers' expertise with the educational realities of the classroom clearly constitutes a downward spiral to a deficit model (Paris, 2006, p. 29). Thus those responsible for facilitating visuacy in secondary school students often do not themselves possess the knowledge they need to pass on. The expectation that they will somehow acquire that knowledge in time to serve the needs of the students they encounter in the first year of their career seems ill founded and naive.

Visual literacy, like its popular twin language literacy, derives from engagement with important works (whether image-based or text-based) under the tutelage of an expert facilitator. Beginning-teachers inevitably have strengths and weaknesses in their repertoire of skills and whilst this may be accepted as a normal characteristic of professional life, the stakes for all participants are extremely high when deficiencies are encountered in the AIS/ARS domains.

# LITERATURE REVIEW THEMES

## **THEME ONE: TEACHER RETENTION – THE RESEARCH CONTEXT**

New visual arts education graduates and returning visual arts education teachers often encounter an unfamiliar classroom landscape that can be both alien and treacherous. Attrition rates are both ever increasing and frighteningly high and it is interesting to note that experience from the United States appears to mirror concerns raised in the local Western Australian/Australian context. This shared experience suggests that the problem can be viewed from a global perspective and lends credibility to anecdotal evidence that there are intrinsic structures in pre-service education which conflict with graduates' real needs. This would appear to be especially the case in the period of transition from study to work.

This shared experience gives credibility to local calls for a re-evaluation of the study/work nexus in respect of beginning-teachers and suggests that a review of procedure and protocols is needed as a matter of urgency. In both instances it is the period immediately following appointment to the teaching profession that presents as the greatest threat to beginning-teachers. The recent 2007 House of Representatives Senate Inquiry Report into teacher training and induction noted:

Despite the acknowledgement that beginning-teachers are in an intense developmental phase, much in current systems works against beginning-teachers being provided with an appropriate level of support as they move from being a provisionally registered teacher to a fully registered teacher (p. 84). ... (induction experience) is highly variable. Moreover, those teachers who begin their careers on a series of temporary and short term contracts often miss out on programs that do exist, at the time when they most need them (p. 85).

The report went on to recommend that beginning-teachers be provided with support both during the induction year and, importantly, throughout the early years of teaching. The high cost of induction failure was highlighted by the testimony of a variety of school principals who contributed to the 2007 Senate inquiry:

One of the problems we have with people when they come out of college is that they very rarely get a full-time position. What they end up doing is temporary relief work. You are really in a situation where many students will try and take advantage of you as the teacher and make things really difficult. You therefore revert to a very closed sort of style. You do not develop those skills ... what happens with some of those people is that they experience the TRT round for a year and then say "Hang on, teaching is not for me" because of how difficult it is to walk into a class and control it. If they had the opportunity to go out into either a mentoring situation or into a class, they would get a different perspective (p. 87).



### **Attrition rates in the Western Australian context**

Pre-service training within the Western Australian tertiary context often produces visual arts education graduates rich in studio-based or 'art making' expertise, but who simultaneously possess lesser expertise in the areas AIS and ARS and rudimentary skills in visual arts education pedagogy. Left to their own devices, many young teachers never quite manage to fill the gaps in their pre-service training and ultimately a crisis of confidence or the intervention of an experienced colleague resolves the dilemma in one way or another. This mirrors the observations of Urbanski and O'Connell:

New teachers receive little or no meaningful support at the time they need it – when problems occur in the classroom. We tolerate a sink or swim, survival of the fittest approach to entry into the profession (Urbanski & O'Connell, NCTAF, 2003, p. 2).

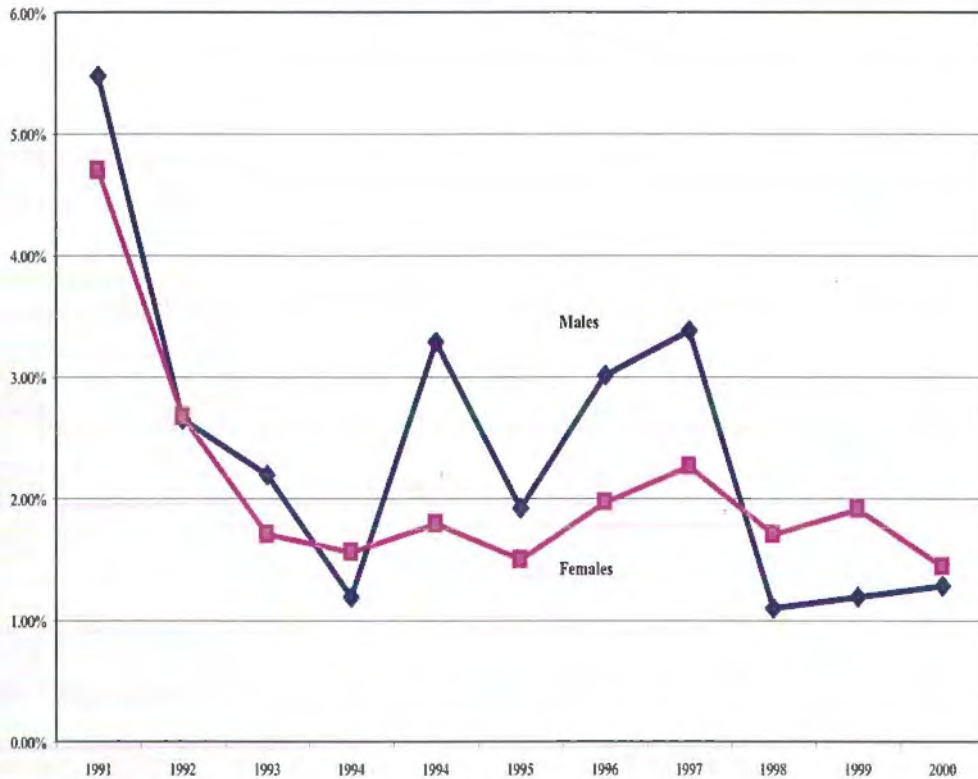
Past statistics concerning the attrition rates for young Western Australian teachers produced by the Department of Education and Training (**DET**), for teachers between the ages of 20-30 during the period 1990-2000, presented some cause for concern at the time of their release. According to the 2002 report 'Review of Ageing Trends in the teaching and administrator workforce', some 27% of young male teachers who had been in the 20 to 30 year old age group in 1990 had ceased employment with DET by 2002. 23% of female teachers in the same age bracket left teaching during the same period.

The report underscored the reality that, although the percentage of male teachers lost to the system was only slightly higher than the percentage of female teachers departing, the trend was significant because the study was conducted during a period when substantial loss of female teachers could be expected due to family commitments. Further analysis of data collected by the department indicated that the most substantial loss of teachers within the cohort occurred during the first five years of service. At the time of the completion of this thesis (November 2008), the most current figures available for Western Australian attrition rates were those released by the Department of Education and Training in 2002 (**Graph One**). The more recent statistics provided in the 2007 House of Representatives Senate Inquiry into teacher training and induction demonstrated an upward trend in Australia-wide attrition figures for new teachers and suggested further exacerbation of a long-standing problem. The report indicated that as many as 40% of new teachers will be lost to the profession within 5 years of induction:

It is well established in the Western world that between 25% and 40% of all newly recruited teachers resign or burnout in their first three to five years of teaching... in a recent survey of beginning-teachers by the Australian Education Union, 45.6% of respondents did not see themselves teaching in 10 years time (p. 9).

## GRAPH ONE: YOUNG TEACHER SEPARATIONS ACCORDING TO GENDER

Young teacher separations according to gender



The graph (above) shows the rate at which young teachers (aged 20 to 30) left the Department between 1990 and 2000. The careers of both male and female teachers in the 20 to 30 year old cohort in 1990 were tracked through the system until 2000. The numbers of teachers who left the Department in those years are presented as a percentage of the original cohort.

In addition to those teachers who are recorded as having left the system, a substantial number have also been employed only in an occasional capacity. Some of these have worked so infrequently that they have been lost to the Department ('Review of Ageing Trends in the teaching and administrator workforce report' Western Australian Department of Education and Training, 2002, p. 6).

**TABLE THREE: BASE DATA YOUNG TEACHER SEPARATIONS ACCORDING TO GENDER**

	Males		Females	
	Number leaving	%	Number leaving	%
1991	60	5.47%	160	4.69%
1992	29	2.64%	91	2.67%
1993	24	2.19%	58	1.70%
1994	13	1.19%	53	1.55%
1994	36	3.28%	61	1.79%
1995	21	1.91%	51	1.50%
1996	33	3.01%	67	1.96%
1997	37	3.37%	77	2.26%
1998	12	1.09%	58	1.70%
1999	13	1.19%	65	1.91%
2000	14	1.28%	49	1.44%
<b>Total cohort</b>	1097		3410	

(‘Review of Ageing Trends in the teaching and administrator workforce report’ Western Australian Department of Education and Training, 2002, p. 6).

Shown graphically, the base data gathered by DET indicated significant attrition rates during the first 12 months (1991) for the cohort being examined. Thereafter the decline is steady, suggesting the failure of induction processes/support structures to address teacher concerns.

**Attrition rates in the United States**

The United States ‘National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future’ was established in 1995 to focus on teacher quality, professionalism and training. By 1996 the Commission had undertaken extensive research into the teaching profession and returned a recommendation that, by 2006 “every child should have competent, caring, qualified teachers in schools organised for success” (Ingersoll, R. 2002, p. 16).

The grandiose rhetoric of the US Commission on teaching strongly echoed Australian Prime Minister Robert J. Hawke’s declaration that no Australian child would be living in poverty in

Australia by 2000. In both instances the pronouncements have been demonstrated to fail in substance and intent. For example, Australian Indigenous communities experience high levels of poverty and declining living standards:

Indigenous Australians face a far greater risk of poverty than other Australians and this is indicated in high levels of joblessness, low levels of formal education, poor health, inadequate housing and the experience of dispossession and racism (Senate, 2004a, 3: 342).

In the United States, education standards remain constant, with little discernable impact from the work of the Commission. The Commission's report identified a number of key elements that had traditionally limited the achievement of quality educational outcomes for students and highlighted high teacher turnover and attrition shortages as destabilizing. In the period 1999-2000 the number of new teachers entering the profession in the United States approached 230,000, whilst those departing reached an astonishing 280,000. Interestingly, statistical analysis of the raw data collected by the Commission indicated that beginning-teacher attrition rates increased from 14% in the first year of teaching to a staggering 46% in the fifth year of teaching (Ingersoll, 2002). The consequences of high rates of turn-over and attrition were identified as significant and included:

- loss of public teacher preparation investment;
- cost of hiring, preparation and replacement;
- loss of continuity and coherence;
- lost professional development investments;
- school reforms being undercut and destabilised.

Strategies for supporting beginning-teachers in the United States increasingly take the form of on-going partnerships between pre-service training providers and experienced mentors in the school setting. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 2003) concluded that a dedicated focus on teacher retention was of critical importance. Strategies for achieving this goal were identified as:

- re-organisation of every school in a manner designed to facilitate teaching and learning success;
- quality teacher preparation;
- program accreditation and licensure;
- development and maintenance of professionally rewarding career paths from mentored induction through accomplished teaching.

The notion that mentoring might serve in part to combat attrition rates of beginning-teachers is supported in both the international and Australian contexts. The Independent Education Union of Australia in its policy on beginning-teachers advocates structured induction programs where a combination of time release and effective mentoring are the cornerstones of policy (IEU, 2000). Quality induction coupled with mentoring for new teachers is also a common theme for many educational researchers, including Moir (2003) who identified the cycle of teacher attrition as a debilitating drain on an invaluable human resource. She identified mentor programs for beginning-teachers as an important tool in effectively countering the phenomenon that afflicts most developed nations. Moir noted:

Mentors have an impact on new teachers in ways that no amount of training can. The real-life classroom presents questions that only real-life experience can answer. Mentors help provide those answers. They give practical, concrete advice; pose important questions to prompt reflection; model teaching techniques in the classroom; observe and offer feedback; and offer another point of view at a time when it is easy to lose all perspective. Their experience helps the novice teacher balance professional development with day-to-day details (Moir, 2003, p. 3).

Moir went on to say that professional isolation for new graduates had a high cost and should be acknowledged as a major factor contributing to increasing teacher attrition in the early years of teaching. She highlighted the graduate-mentor relationship as being pivotal in addressing beginning-teacher isolation through emotional and professional support:

Mentors... decrease the isolation of the new teacher. Their emotional support is essential when the obstacles seem too great and allows the novice to take risks and grow while still keeping the classroom functioning. By developing a specific plan for each new teacher and setting specific performance goals to improve teaching practice, mentors create an environment based on collaboration, exchange of ideas, professionalism. By making them a part of a supportive community of educators, mentors help keep alive the enthusiasm and sense of mission that brought new teachers into the profession in the first place (Moir, 2003, p. 3).

According to Moir (2003), mentoring of beginning-teachers more often than not occurs in a haphazard and informal manner and is, therefore, fundamentally flawed. Often occurring whilst navigating the continuous stream of tasks that constitute duties other than teaching, most mentoring experiences take the form of advice about students, school policy and procedures. The navigation of school life through a buddy system, whilst congenial, is arguably inadequate. New teachers need support with a range of professional challenges extending from pedagogy to discipline content and buddy-style mentoring largely fails to meet these needs. Acquisition of a deeper knowledge base requires the investment of time, critical analysis of performance and

feedback to beginning-teachers. According to Moir (2003), where this does occur, beginning-teachers often sense that they are imposing on the goodwill of a colleague who may offer support (albeit unspoken) under sufferance. When such is not the case, mentor-teachers may nonetheless be ill prepared for the task they have been informally assigned.

Too often, mentoring programs are conceived as “buddy systems,” in which experienced educators are paired with new teachers on an informal basis. In the buddy system model, mentors are neither trained for their new role nor given time to carry out its demands. In other words, new mentors are treated pretty much as new teachers were, allowed to sink or swim, armed with only intuition and good intentions to keep them afloat (Moir, 2003, p. 3).

Anecdotal and research-based evidence reported in the United States indicates growing support for the notion of formally structured mentoring partnerships, where the mentor-teachers are themselves supported as they mentor beginning-teachers. Urbanski and O’Connell (2003) noted that mentors were a critical element in the building of a shared knowledge base that would ultimately sustain the teaching profession. They observed that good teachers know their subjects well and know how to teach them effectively to all students. Urbanski and O’Connell (in NCTAF, 2003) asserted that the acquisition of such skill takes time and modelling by experienced colleagues.

In both the Australian and American contexts the link between high attrition rates in the first year and the stress beginning-teachers report as a consequence of feeling ill-prepared for teaching is well documented. Some beginning-teachers who survive the first year may nonetheless have left the profession by the fifth year unless some critical intervention occurs to support the new practitioner. This loss of human resource capital is of concern and constitutes a rationale for intervention. Mentoring programs may constitute the first part of that ‘action plan’.



## **THEME TWO: EXPERIENCES IN MENTORING**

The pedagogical challenges associated with the reforms of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework (WACF) and Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) for senior schooling are extensive and incorporate:

- production of curriculum materials for the 2009 Visual Arts course (VACOS);
- production of curriculum materials for the 2009 Design course (De COS);
- preparation for Vocational Education and Training studies (VET);
- compliance with requirements of legislated Teacher Registration.

The resultant pressure on experienced teachers' time and professional resources increasingly limits their availability to mentor beginning-teachers. By contrast, staff of teacher-education institutions and professional associations is perfectly placed to work together to sustain the long-term health of the teaching profession through mentoring of beginning-teachers. Such personnel generally possess substantial personal and professional resources, making it possible for them to give something back to the profession. The GMP drew on the expertise of ten mentors from AEA/WA and was supported through my involvement as course coordinator for secondary visual arts education at ECU and also researcher for the project.

### **Critical reflection in professional practice – external mentors**

Martinez and Mackay (2002) investigated the role school-based mentor-teachers and critical reflection played in bridging the divide between education theories and professional practice in the pre-service training of Australian teachers. They found that in many instances the focus of student teachers' reflective processes tended to centre upon intuitive responses or technicalities. They observed that mentors could actively guide pre-service teachers in the analytical appraisal of their own development. Martinez and Mackay noted that theoretical concepts and the wider learning environment seldom informed beginning-teachers' appraisal of their own professional growth. In response to a perceived need for structured critical reflection, they developed a series of strategies for inclusion in pre-service training in collaboration with school-based teacher educators. These strategies shifted the focus of practicum supervision away from narrow attention upon the beginning-teachers' skills portfolio, to a holistic consideration of the learning environment. Such consideration focused on learning outcomes and student learners in an interactive cycle of engagement with the beginning-teacher.

Martinez and Mackay maintained that the school-based mentor-teacher was critical to the reflective dialogue that occurred between the student teacher, pre-service training provider and wider school context. The partnership between university and school contexts has much to offer beginning-teachers, according to Martinez and Mackay and they theorize that this kind of mentoring has a critical role to play in enhancing beginning-teachers' perception of their own

progress. Additionally, they observed that the three-way partnership formed between mentor-teacher, training provider and beginning-teacher constituted an invaluable support network that often endured beyond the period of the practicum.

The reflective strategies developed by Martinez & Mackay (2002) were tailored to match the desired outcomes of the learning programs in which the beginning-teachers were involved. The activities constituted a scaffold for a reconsideration of past teaching experience and informed future decision-making. This allowed student teachers to draw upon university-based, school-based and personal sources of knowledge and utilise these as support mechanisms for ongoing choices. Martinez & Mackay claim the value of mentoring is self-evident, however, questions remain about the ability of experienced school-based teachers to invest time in the task of supporting beginning-teachers. This is particularly the case during the present period of educational upheaval in the Western Australian context. Furthermore, Martinez & Mackay note that on occasion the pre-service practicum can, by its very nature, prohibit critical self-reflection on the part of the student teacher. Therefore they see a genuine need to structure activities that lead inevitably to this desirable outcome:

We were also aware that while the pre-service phase is crucially formative in teacher development, a range of contextual characteristics can lead to professional experience being anything but a positive occasion for learning to be a critically reflective teacher. With its high-stake assessment in final phase, professional practicum can be experienced by pre-service teachers as a highly regulatory set of discourses and values such as school work and assessment programs, normative criteria and supervising teachers' habituated routines (2002, p. 4).

For beginning-teachers, the experience of being mentored by a school-based colleague can often be strongly aligned to the practicum experience where an unequal relationship in the status of participants predominates. Subsequent to graduation the beginning-teacher may struggle to shake off the student-teacher tag and be recognised as an equal participant by their school-based mentor. According to Martinez & Mackay (2002) this is particularly so when the mentor has not been appropriately trained for the role they have assumed. In such instances the mentor may be unaware of the stressful status differential that the beginning-teacher experiences.

Martinez & Mackay acknowledge that external mentor-teachers have a role to play in induction processes. Martinez & Mackay (2002) acknowledge that the external mentor may be less constrained by the embedded structures of the school environment and may be in a position to offer an alternative support mechanism to beginning-teachers. The absence of a vested interest in maintaining the existing structures and power-relationships within the school may allow the external mentor to remain objective and responsive to the needs of the beginning-teacher. In



addition to advice and guidance in respect of pedagogy and subject-specific content knowledge, external mentors can facilitate critical debate about the beginning-teacher's self perception of their professional practice, precisely because the relationship exists outside the employment context. The GMP has been predicated on the notion that external mentors bring an enhanced dimension to the mentoring process and to this end, ten external mentors were accessed.

The initial period of teacher employment is often characterised by highly regulated sets of professional discourse and routines that Martinez & McKay (2002) assert makes beginning-teachers' survival an exercise in "staying beneath the professional radar". Beneath the line of sight the beginning-teacher attempts to bluff their way through unfamiliar challenges until critical knowledge gaps are filled by trial and error. During periods of extensive curriculum change the thin veneer of professional competence is increasingly insufficient to protect the beginning-teacher from both the high risk of professional stress and 'burn-out'. When appropriately trained, external mentors can help ameliorate stress experienced by the beginning-teacher. This occurs through the fostering of open and honest relationships, based on trust that affords the beginning-teacher the confidence to speak frankly about their practice.

In such relationships the beginning-teacher can safely share examples of poor classroom performance in the hope of securing remedial advice. Advice, guidance and suggestions from the experienced external mentor, can significantly reduce the stress the beginning-teacher may otherwise experience if left to their own devices. Consequently, new teachers may be less concerned that their standing within the school could be compromised through the admission of weaknesses in their professional skills/content- knowledge portfolio. Awareness of the critical importance of appropriate mentoring for beginning-teachers is gaining momentum with a number of recent reports highlighting the potential benefits mentors might bring to induction processes. The final report of the Education and Training Committee commissioned by the Victorian Government 2003-5 noted:

The committee received evidence that effective induction and mentoring of new teachers is essential to ensure successful transitions into teaching. The Committee is encouraged by new Department of Education and Training and Victorian Institute of Teaching initiatives that have improved graduate induction and mentoring over recent years. Nevertheless, this inquiry identified certain aspects that can be further improved. Notably the Committee found that education faculties should play a greater role in the first year induction process (2005, p. xxv).

The report concluded with a number of key recommendations for enhancing the quality of pre-service teacher preparation, including one which specifically embedded formalised mentoring into the graduation and induction process:

**Recommendation 8.1:**

That the Victorian Institute of Teaching work with universities and employing authorities to design and implement a structured professional development program for first year graduates to complement their pre-service teacher education program. Further, that the Institute, in consultation with education faculties and schools, incorporate this program into the requirements for full teacher registration (p. xxxvii).

The notion that routine mentoring of beginning-teachers during the first year might become the 'norm' has gained favour with a number of Western Australian agencies/regulatory bodies. Such institutions include DET and WACOT. WACOT advocated mentors as a critical support for beginning-teachers and legislated in 2004 that all Western Australian beginning-teachers needed to maintain a log of mentoring since the issue of their provisional registration in order to achieve ongoing registration at the end of their initial three years of employment. Regrettably WACOT has, to date, provided limited support to new teachers in securing such mentoring relationships. Consequently informal 'buddy-style' mentoring within school contexts emerges as the most common response to this regulatory requirement.

**The importance of training for mentor-teachers**

In the mid 1980s the AEA/WA attempted a rudimentary mentoring program to support the implementation of the then new Unit Curriculum by randomly matching a few experienced visual arts teachers to graduates/teachers (AEA/WA Journal, 1987). It appears that few of the partnerships continued beyond their first semester and no evaluation of the venture was attempted. According to anecdotal evidence provided by participants in the trial, training was not provided to the mentors and they were essentially left to make it up as they went along. In the absence of a formalised structure, responsibility for seeking assistance would inevitably have fallen to the beginning-teachers in the program that may have felt reluctant to impose on their mentor too frequently. Training in mentoring for the mentors themselves would have highlighted the critical importance of:

- a published meeting schedule;
- regular mentor-initiated contact;
- identification of areas in which beginning-teachers might require support;
- resources (human and other) critical to sustain the partnership;
- structured evaluation protocols.

The absence of training and support for mentors now seems a fatal flaw when viewing the tentative AEA/WA mentoring experience. Professional associations by their very nature tend to be comprised of committed professionals driven by altruistic concerns rather than those of self-interest. In most instances the professional association is a collective of voluntary participants

whose charter mandates the advancement and preferment of the association's membership. This is achieved through:

- professional development;
- collegial support and networking;
- advocacy of the subject specialisation;
- pursuit of excellence in teaching;
- mentoring of beginning-teachers as an investment in the human capital of the profession.

Notwithstanding the nobility of such intent, it is probably true to say that not all professional association members are capable of assuming the challenging role of mentor. According to Yeomans and Sampson (1994) 'training for the trainers' is of critical importance:

One of the established aims of teacher education is that beginning-teachers should be reflective practitioners. Essentially it was the mentor training that first brought home to mentors the importance and complexity of their role, the need for positive regular feedback to the students, how and with what frequency, this should be carried out, the purposes of feedback and the need to articulate practice. In addition to the mentor training course and support meetings, mentors were provided with support material. In short, in all the College's mentorship schemes the students and the mentors have clear written guidance as to what each can expect from the other (Yeomans & Sampson, pp. 191-3).

### **Training Providers: Mentor training and the Western Australian Centre for Excellence**

In 2003-2004 DET acknowledged the compelling case supporting the need for mentoring for new teachers and initiated case studies in mentoring. Importantly DET provided training for the mentors involved in the case studies, in the form of a one-day seminar for small groups of mentor-teachers. The mentor-teachers were 'level three' senior teachers within the Department who demonstrated outstanding teaching skills and were already providing leadership within their school community via informal mentoring of junior staff. The Department-sponsored training seminars were facilitated by the Western Australian Centre for Professional Excellence in Teaching (CPET) and adopted a problem-solving approach to identifying attributes that mentors needed to possess or cultivate in order to be successful. CPET structured the seminar in a manner that responded to the perceived and self-articulated needs of beginning-teachers and mentors. The one-day program comprised five learning modules and dealt with a range of professional issues:

- partnership-based mentoring;
- key attributes for effective mentor performance;
- the mentor's role – key functions;

- working with learning projects;
- mentoring teachers from specific target groups (Martin, G. 2003, p. 1).

By November 2004, DET had expanded its program for beginning-teachers and formalised training for mentors. The DET-stated rationale declared a commitment to the provision of ongoing and co-ordinated approach to building its workforce:

The Department of Education is dedicated to the provision of an ongoing and coordinated approach to building the capacity of its workforce. In order to achieve these aims the Department is seeking to establish a Professional Learning Institute that supports the Competency Framework for Teachers (2004). The intention ... is to support the overarching aims of the proposed Professional Learning Institute, with an emphasis on the provision of quality professional development that maximises the professional effectiveness of Beginning-teachers (Paioff, 2004, p. 1).

The structure of the initial workshop was built around four desired outcomes including:

- elucidation of definitions of the terms ‘mentor and beginning-teacher’;
- clarification of programs, procedures and participants’ expectations;
- support parameters for the mentoring partnerships; and
- synthesis of recommendations for effective support of beginning-teachers (Paioff, 2004).

A focus group was formed by DET comprising of:

- senior DET administrators/bureaucrats;
- beginning-teachers;
- experienced ‘level three’ teachers;
- union officials;
- WACOT representatives;
- professional associations representatives;
- Edith Cowan & Murdoch universities staff;
- representatives from a variety of sectors including Aboriginal education, Inclusive education, ICT, curriculum development, practicum and professional development.

The focus group was specifically to consider the demands that the requirements of the then impending WACOT teacher registration, performance management and permanency application processes might impose on beginning-teachers. Particular areas of interest included:

- performance management and probation requirements;
- the role of the mentor’s input in performance management;

- beginning-teachers' self assessment activities;
- strategies to recognise and reward competent beginning-teachers (particularly in view of 30% attrition rate in first 5 years);
- a culture of collegial support;
- career development;
- future professional development and growth (Paioff, 2004).

The work of the focus group expanded into the structure of the first DET beginning-teacher's workshop that was held in November 2004. Through a range of presentations and plenary sessions major issues confronting beginning-teachers were identified. Among other practical concerns, beginning-teachers expressed confusion about knowing what to teach; reported a sense of feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the task of beginning teaching; declared apprehension about the challenge of matching theory and practice; and expressed concern about access to good/practical feedback (reality check). At the conclusion of the daylong event a series of recommendations to support beginning-teachers emerged, including:

- the importance of links between the DET, WACOT and universities;
- development of a broad program of support for beginning-teachers;
- schools to articulate "what they expect from Beginning-teachers";
- building colleague, school and community networks;
- further beginning-teacher seminars to be staged by WACOT, thereby ensuring professional learning support (Paioff, 2004).

Other critical observations to emerge from the workshop included comments on both structured induction and mentoring for beginning-teachers. Support for the use of professional associations in the mentoring process and the concept that mentoring might occur both within and outside the school context, were also espoused.

### **Trained mentors as critical friends**

The pivotal role of the critical friend in action research is well recorded and often distinguished by the key qualities of versatility and diversity. Nixon (1981) noted that in addition to increasing understanding and informing the decisions of teachers, action research may also bring about a modification or elaboration of theories of teaching and learning. Nixon continued that within such self-reflective practice there existed the inevitable outcome of an evolving rationale for teachers' professional practice:

The study of what was happening in classrooms led almost inevitably to a reappraisal of what they (the teachers) felt ought to be happening. Intentions anticipated actions, just as an appraisal of those actions played back upon their intentions. The task of formulation a rationale was a continuing, developing one (Nixon, 1981, p. 197).

The function of the critical friend in action research is to support this process of self-reflective practice and professional development. Kember (1996) described the characteristics of the critical friend in educational action research through a series of complex archetypes. Among others, Kember noted these archetypes extended to:

- rapport builder;
- coffee maker;
- mirror;
- teaching consultant;
- evaluation advisor;
- resource provider;
- matchmaker (to other helpful colleagues);
- deadline enforcer (suggestions for how best to meet professional responsibilities on time and within budget).

Franzak (2002) similarly noted that the critical friend had a diverse role to play and became a catalyst for improvement of teachers' professional practice in a cyclical process of self-analysis, speculation, synthesis, proposition and action. The transference of the concept of critical friend into the arena of undergraduate training can be a particularly successful enterprise according to Franzak, who trialled a 'Critical Friends Group' approach in undergraduate teacher preparation:

Recent training as a Critical Friend Group coach prompted me to wonder further how the CFG experience might lend itself to the structure of the required student teaching seminar. My partner and I decided to use the CFG structure as the basis for the seminar and incorporate protocols into our curriculum, believing this would introduce pre-student teachers to meaningful professional development early in their careers. ... we found the student teachers responded positively to the CFG concept. I observed their change from passive, answer-oriented student behaviour to a professional stance of inquiry and thoughtful analysis as they conducted protocols looking at student work (p. 259).

In acknowledging the potential that exists, in formal mentoring, framed around the metaphor of the critical friend, I saw the need for a structured induction program for ECU graduates. The resulting model matched beginning-teachers who had completed a Graduate Diploma to the expertise of mentors from within the AEA/WA.

### **THEME THREE: VISUAL ARTS HISTORY/CRITICISM TEACHING PRACTICES AND PEDAGOGY**

Beginning visual arts teachers consistently emerge from tertiary institutions with an expectation that secondary students' studio work, visual inquiry and design development will take account of the work of both traditional and contemporary artists. A question emerges, however, about what artworks to use and where to find the resources required to enable students to learn from their visual arts heritage. The difficulty presented in this simple enquiry seems often to be solved by a tendency either to abandon the endeavour altogether and simply not bother with visual arts history. Alternatively, in a falsely acceptable guise, teachers elect to serve up tired recitations of established Western fine art, dominated by male artists, replete with the tried and true script of dates, places and descriptions (Reid, 1995, p. 7).

Over the last 15 years such a trend has been sufficiently disturbing to elicit a number of professional papers by researchers including McKeon (1994), Marsh (1994), Sowell (1993) and Szekely (1991). These writers reflected on the importance of appropriate visual arts history and visual arts criticism influences in both general and visual arts education. The importance of finding alternative and vibrant teaching techniques for the study of visual arts history materials has resulted in a number of strategies being trialled and promoted. Such strategies include:

- interactive games for visual arts history;
- software programs and Internet investigations;
- discovery experiences;
- learning cycle approaches;
- personal and critical response methodology;
- post-modernist deconstruction techniques designed to reveal hidden meanings.

All these strategies espouse a common value regarding the importance of embracing the visual arts of the past and the present. What differentiate the various approaches are the methods employed in the goal of understanding visual arts works and the acquisition of visual literacy, or 'visuacy as a life-skill'.

#### **Historical overview of approaches to visual arts history/criticism**

Historically, the place and use of visual arts works in education has been underpinned by four major paradigms. These comprised:

- the mimetic approach, where the copying of great works from European or Western tradition formed the basis of both visual arts and moral education (often termed the picture-making approach);

- the child-centred approach, where the use of visual arts images (and in fact the influence of adults) was limited or discouraged in a process in which the child was embarking on a journey of self-discovery;
- the discipline-based visual arts education approach, where the roles of adults involved in the arts were studied and emulated in a process designed to inculcate adult vocational attributes in young people;
- a variety of contextual frameworks, where meaning and context were given priority over formalist concerns.

Building on the international Anglo-American legacy of ‘mimetic’, ‘child-centred’, ‘discipline-based’ and ‘contextual approaches’ to visual arts education, a groundswell of contemporary approaches emerged during the 1990s. These approaches have continued to hold favour as discussed by Efland (1990).

#### **Discovery-learning activities in visual arts history/criticism**

Stinespring and Steele (1993) held that the formal study of visual arts history and visual arts criticism through discovery learning has both merit and importance in the education of young artists. They identified, in their review of the merits of contemporary practices in visual arts history criticism education, beneficial approaches to learning. Of these approaches discovery activities were deemed to be particularly valuable:

A visual arts history concept attainment model employing discovery activities, (the process of defining concepts by attending to those attributes that are absolutely essential to the meaning and disregarding those that are not), involves learning to discriminate between what is and is not, an example of the concept (1993, p. 13).

Stinespring and Steele (1993) noted that even where the study of visual arts was primarily a studio-based activity, process inquiry methods enabled teachers to inspire students to broaden their repertoire of ideas and to see student visual arts as part of a long tradition of visual arts expression. The process was seen to be most effective where visual arts history and visual arts criticism learning derived from activities related to the action of visual arts historians and critics:

In addition to standard historical questions of who, what, where and when, current visual arts historical practice often examines theoretical assumptions that govern investigation. Some techniques examine how a work of visual arts is put together to create a meaningful structure. Others relate the work to the psychology of the artist. Still others may down play chronology and even the idea of a work of visual arts in favour of placing the work within the social context in which it originated (1993, p. 8).



Stinespring and Steele (1993) held that as students acquired a better understanding of the factors surrounding the production of works of visual art, their own ability to intelligently and consciously construct meaningful works was amplified.

### **Bipolar or comparative approaches to visual arts history**

In a different approach to the teaching of visual arts history and visual arts criticism, Calabrese (1993) advocated a bipolar approach. Within such a framework Calabrese noted that many styles and tendencies in the history of visual arts might be viewed as polarities, that is, two completely opposing works, qualities, or formats. Calabrese maintained that as disparate works were analysed together, point by point, their contrasting qualities became easier to explain and hence easier to grasp. He commented that the simplicity and elasticity of the bipolar approach were its major assets:

Clear-cut general opposites such as Baroque and Neo-classicism can readily be utilised as foundations for an interdisciplinary course. However, elasticity permits the course concepts to range from such wide polar generalities as fantastic-realistic to more specific historical frameworks such as Classic-Romantic (1993, p. 1).

Similarly, Gooding-Brown (2000) noted that a 'disruptive model' of engagement offered students an opportunity to understand the meaning of artworks by assuming an alternative, often bipolar/opposing position:

The disruptive model of interpretation requires students to 'disrupt or resist where they are coming from' – their assumed discursive position with and interpretations of, the artwork. It requires that they explore the self and difference (42:1 p. 36).

A comparative approach to visual arts history and visual arts criticism necessarily requires that the teacher be well informed and knowledgeable about the periods being examined and is inherently dependent upon the teacher's knowledge. Reliance upon the teacher having an extensive knowledge base limits the effectiveness of the model in the treatment of works and movements with which the teacher is unfamiliar. As a counter to such criticism, it could be argued that teachers need only prepare themselves properly before attempting to use a bipolar approach. Issues like time constraints within an already hectic and full curriculum, however, act as obstacles to the long-term application of such an approach. The success or otherwise of the model sits squarely on the shoulders of the teacher.

### **A learning cycle approach to visual arts history**

Where a bipolar approach to visual arts history and visual arts criticism places much of the responsibility for success upon the teacher, a learning cycle approach as recommended by Sowell (1993) shifts the responsibility for success toward the students themselves:

Based on ideas that learning should be active, that concepts should be developed by students' exploration of concrete objects and that these are best accomplished through social interaction in small groups, the learning cycle makes use of collaborative small group work. Recent researchers have emphasised the social factor in learning and have stressed the importance of 'cognitive conflict' for the development of cognitive growth. This is most likely to occur when peers with differing viewpoints engage in cooperative discussion. While adults seem to be better at imparting specific skills and knowledge, free interchange among peers seems more likely to bring about a change in perspective (Sowell, 1993, p. 20).

Sowell identified three basic parts to the learning cycle approach. These comprised:

- exploration, where students work in small groups and discuss objects in a process designed to develop concepts;
- invention, where concepts being explored are expressed and expanded and during which a vocabulary is formulated;
- application, where the invented concepts are applied to new situations to confirm that they have validity outside the specific situation in which they were identified.

Whilst still requiring considerable preparation by the teacher, the learning cycle approach distributes some responsibility for the success of the model among the students of a group. Under the guidance of the teacher the students explore, invent and apply information and concepts in small group collaboration. In short, peers and the students themselves become co-teachers and colleagues in the education process.

### **The investigative craft of seeing**

Whilst Sowell (1993) and Calabrese (1993) would argue for contextual considerations in the study of visual arts history and visual arts criticism, some educationalists, including Bann (1986), considered that visual concerns warranted greater attention. Bann maintained that it is still difficult to determine the form that the teaching of visual arts history and visual arts criticism should assume. Where traditional practice concerned itself with analysis of technique and subject, many newer approaches opt for a contextual stance. Bann, however, considered the visual property of an artwork to be of greater importance. He provided the example of a 1984 conference on the Little Dutch Masters of the 17th Century, where visual arts historians and critics debated the work of the period. Later commentary on the conference proceedings by

American visual arts historian Svetlana Alpers, an authority on the topic, appeared as a stark contrast to the bickering that occurred during the event. Bann noted that Alpers' review of the issues and theoretical questions raised during the conference was couched in something approaching a mixture of contextual and formalist terms. Alpers not only explained the hidden meaning implicit in the structure of the images being examined, but highlighted the importance of these images by contextualising them in relation to the values and beliefs of the society which had produced them. More importantly, Bann noted that Alpers distilled the essence of the work of the period:

In her view, the irreducible property of Dutch seventeenth century paintings that exists prior to any interpretation in moralistic and cultural terms, is quite simply the visual effect of the paintings. What characterises the visual culture of the seventeenth century is a belief that reality is not given but has to be found out through what was considered to be the investigative craft of seeing - of which painting itself is an exponent (Bann, 1986, p. 25).

Bann considered the potential of the new visual arts history/criticism to be an approach to the study of visual arts based on the 'craft of seeing'. Visual arts historians, no less than students, must learn to see an image at its visual or pictorial level, within its cultural context, that is, the understanding of the social values that gave birth to the work. Therefore at the level of symbol systems the viewer must read its 'iconography' until meaning is revealed.

With so many varied and creative approaches to the teaching of visual arts history now being promoted, it is difficult to isolate any one as the most effective strategy for use in primary and secondary schools. In fact, each approach can be seen to have both positive and negative attributes. It is possible, however, to discern some elements that seem to be regarded as valuable within a number of approaches and this shared quality can therefore be considered meritorious. Examples of such shared approaches include:

- evoking students' first impressions (the personal response) to visual arts objects;
- teacher-directed analysis of the appearance of visual arts objects (which could be termed the analytical or critical response);
- exploration of formal qualities of visual arts works
- attempts to discern the context of the work through co-operative peer-supported discussion (critical response)

Finding a single approach which employs all of these and other shared qualities, however, is as problematic as identifying the elements in the first place. The notion of the student being able to

make two kinds of response to visual arts images and objects (personal and critical response) is of course a significant one.

### **Personal and critical response methods**

The polarities of personal response and critical response each have merit, but remain incomplete in terms of suitability as tools for the teaching and learning of visual arts history and visual arts criticism. In fact it could be argued that they each hold half of the necessary material for understanding the value and potential of works of art. The integration of the student's critical and personal responses in a process of reciprocal teaching in small group work was pioneered by Darby (1988). His Student Centred visual arts Appreciation model, was refined and applied by Marsh (1994) with some success. In discussing the Student Centred Approach, Darby (1988) stated:

Each student brings to the activity of viewing their own unique combination of past experiences which influence how they interpret what they see and what it means to them individually ... (this) reinforces the fact that each student's response to an artwork is critical if the work is to have personal meaning for them and to their own life (Darby, 1988, p. 21).

Marsh (1994) described personal response as an inquiry into the artwork with the intention of leading students to the making of informed personal decisions. She noted that Darby's use of Feldman's (1973) approach to visual arts criticism through description, analysis, interpretation and judgment processes encouraged the student to invest willingly in the time it takes to know an artwork. Feldman (1973) pioneered early methods of critical analysis for use in the 'interrogation' of visual arts works and images to discern the artist's intent. The process of engaging images at a superficial pictorial level before attempting any deeper analysis enables the viewer to respond at a personal level and enjoy the work. According to Marsh:

Personal response is interpretative. In the proposed program the deconstruction of the artwork via personal response is not a goal in itself. It provides a framework to interpret the meanings. Students however, may not be able to see beyond their own personal narcissistic view of the world. As part of a reflective reconstruction of meanings the information gathered in personal response needs to be extended to broader cultural contexts. This extension from the linear personal response model into social theory enables the student to understand the function of the artwork (1994, p. 34).

Personal response methodology does not require that the visual arts teacher possess an extensive knowledge of visual arts images and movements in history. Rather, it draws upon the philosophies espoused by Bann (1986) and Svetlana Alpers (1984), as it invites the student to absorb the visual effect of works before attempting to draw meaning or define context. Critical

response methodology is somewhat more structured and involves a process of directed inquiry. The teacher initially assumes responsibility for describing, analysing, interpreting and judging visual arts works. As students gain confidence with the model, the teacher relinquishes responsibility for sustaining and directing the course of the discussion about the works or objects being reviewed. Ultimately, students become skilled in formulating opinions about the impact and success of works of visual arts and are able to express views and defend judgments. Marsh (1994) explains:

In the visual arts classroom, the personal and critical response model can be used to provide a reciprocal teaching environment where the interaction is between artwork, the teacher and students. Eventually over time and with practice, the students can internalise the processes and respond to any artwork (p. 35).

Contemporary visual arts education necessarily includes exposure to visual arts history and visual arts criticism, as well as imagery (both traditional and modern) in eliciting the students' personal and critical responses. Once activated, each student can apply these skills to the bridging of life-world interests, as they exist outside the visual arts classroom. The embedded meanings of advertisements, photographic imagery and television programs can be discerned. At a philosophical level, visual literacy or visuacy assists in the pursuit of truth and the defence of personal integrity. The transmission of such a life-skill becomes a major contribution visual arts educators make to the development of students as whole people.

### **The use of response frames**

Israel (2002) noted the importance of personal and critical response in the decoding of visual text and recommended the use of 'frames' in this process. The response frames encompassed subjective, structural, cultural and post-modernist perspectives and could, cumulatively build to a sophisticated understanding of the importance and meaning of images. For example, simpler lower level subjective and structural responses could provide foundations for more complex analysis of works using a cultural lens or a post-modernist lens. Israel (2002) distinguished the character of the response frames as:

**Subjective frame:** the subjective frame is to do with an artist's emotions and imagination. It requires us to react to an artwork in a personal way, responding to our feelings. It shows us that we look at artworks in different ways according to our own life experiences and imagination

**Structural frame:** artists often create their own visual language using codes, symbols or signs to convey their meaning. We can interpret these works by analysing the elements of line, direction, shape, size, tone, texture and colour. The structural frame is where we discuss how an artwork is made.

Cultural frame: within the cultural frame we look at the influence of society or cultural background on an artwork. An artwork may reflect or comment on such aspects of culture as religion, politics, social status, race relations, gender concerns, influence of economics and technology. With this frame we ask ourselves why an artwork was made and what is its' purpose.

Post-modern frame: mass media and the popular culture of our time often use images and words from the past for new purposes, or they are given a new meaning. This idea of appropriating (copying and adapting) has influenced many contemporary arts. The idea of originality is questioned. Artists working within a post-modern frame challenge past ideas about what is art. They break the established conventions in a variety of ways; by the use of new media, questioning traditions, using new and often shocking subject matter, taking visual arts to the public in non visual arts spaces and appropriating (p. 10).

The efficacy of the frames in the decoding of visual text has gained favour and has been enshrined in the structure of new courses (years 11 - 12). Both VACOS and De COS for students in years 11 - 12 mandate the use of frames within the Arts Responses outcome area and all teachers are required to develop expertise in their use (VACOS, 2008).

### **Visual arts history/criticism as life-skills education**

Eisner (1972) identified two justifications for the inclusion of visual arts in general education. Eisner firstly posited the notion that in many developed countries the study of visual arts in education occurred for purely 'contextual' reasons. In such cases the study of visual arts was used as a location-specific solution for community need. Examples included enhancing educational success in low socioeconomic communities, or using visual arts as a mechanism for political propaganda as seen during the space race in the United States during the 1960s. Whilst acknowledging such uses as popular, Eisner argued that the study of visual arts in education should be undertaken for the intrinsically valuable contribution it could make to the autonomy of students. He explained this application for the visual arts as an 'essentialist perspective', arguing that the study of visual arts has the capacity to give to students qualities which were not available through any other subject or learning experience:

Through the ages visual arts has served as a means of making the spiritual, especially in religion, visual through the image. When the artist takes an idea such as the divine and transforms it into a visual metaphor, he or she creates not only a specific object worthy of attention in its own right, but also a form within which others may participate, thus the ideas of a culture can take on a corporate significance. visual arts not only functions as a vehicle for the articulation of sublime visions, it also takes those visions most characteristic of humanity, fears, dreams, recollections and provides these too with visual metaphors. visual arts serves humanity not only by making the ineffable and visionary available, it also functions as a means of activating our sensibilities; visual arts provides the subject matter through which our human potentialities can be exercised. A function of visual arts is its capacity to vivify the particular. It selects its essence, accentuates it

and holds it for our contemplation.

Artists through the ages have used visual arts to express the values they cherished and to provide pungent statements about the condition of humanity, the nation and the world. Works of arts serve to criticise the society in which they were made and thus present to our attention visual metaphors through which values are conveyed. Why then if visual arts can serve such diversified functions should its place in (American) education be so tenuous (Eisner, 1972, pp. 11-16)?

In an argument similar to the one espoused by Eisner, researchers Erickson and Addiss (1993) attempted both to define visual arts history and criticism and to offer a justification for its inclusion in contemporary curricula. They noted that the scope of visual arts history is broader than previously imagined, remarking that “the histories of advertising and of design are not peripheral but essential to understanding the history of art” (p. 110). A further observation is that during the last decades of the 20th century, American society (along with most other developed nations) became increasingly a ‘visual society’. This was especially so as the Internet and computer games infiltrated schooling and became core pedagogy outside the school experience. The implications of such a development are illustrated in the managed performances that the American presidential media campaigns assume in that country:

The image of a presidential candidate is as powerful as the candidate’s words. The importance and sophistication of image in politics has increased steadily since 1960, when analysts credited John F. Kennedy’s more appealing television image for his victory over Richard Nixon in their debate. The same powerful visual tactics are used by Madison Avenue to market everything from children’s designer athletic shoes to automobiles (Erickson and Addiss, 1993, p. 110).

Ultimately, the issue of the importance of visual arts history and visual arts criticism in a visual society becomes one of self-determination and self-actualisation. People who do not understand the symbol systems which surround them in everyday life become akin to a deaf person in a society where sound creates nuances of meaning, or to an illiterate person where an inability to read in an information-rich society imprisons them in a social vacuum. The notion that ‘knowledge is power’ equates with the potential for choice. People who have limited access to information have potential choices reduced by virtue of being unaware of their existence. According to Erickson and Addiss (1993), a limited understanding of the meaning of visual culture renders a person vulnerable to manipulation by those who are visually literate and skilled in the use of the medium.

Reid (1995) asserted that the imperative nature of the formal inclusion of the study of visual arts images in visual arts education lies precisely in this domain. Imagery assumes a fundamental

place in the world around us and these images are often loaded with meaning which pass almost subliminally into the cultural reservoir that sustains our thinking. She continued noting, “by revealing the power relations expressed in these works students will begin to see the hidden messages and meanings that tend to be overlooked” (p. 12). Reid was particularly concerned that the study of visual arts images should provide students with an ‘approach’ which will enable them to question both the values which underpin the works being examined and, more importantly, to question the place and status of both men and women in modern society, noting:

It is only by exploring how notions of male and female opposition evolved as a social construction rather than inherent characteristics of individuals that students will be empowered to challenge these theories as a means of determining who they are (1995, p. 12).

The study of visual arts images and their meanings empowers both adults and children by enabling them to peel back the layers of meaning so skilfully developed by the ‘picture makers’. Over time students can critically assess the validity of the hidden agenda within these images accommodating ‘visuacy’ and ‘visual intelligence’. This is of particular importance when issues raised by contextualists, including feminist and multi-cultural writers, question the stereotypes presented and reinforced through many visual arts images, especially those of the European fine arts. Duncum (2004), in his analysis of the impact of post-modernism on visual arts in education, articulated the notion that an awareness of the politics of visual arts and aesthetics was critical for students:

During the heyday of modern aesthetics it was commonplace to claim for it not so much political neutrality but a place above politics. There are echoes of this in the ‘elements and principles’ approach where form is divorced from content, media from ideas, visual arts from lived experience. By repeating the claim of political innocence ad nauseam, the actual, real politics of modernist aesthetics was masked. Post Modern thinking rejects the idea that one can ever be politically neutral, let alone transcend the exercise of power. The idea that everything (aesthetics included) is enmeshed in struggles over meaning, of the desire of competing interests to assert their authority in symbolic ways is as widely accepted today as was once the view of modernist aesthetics as transcendental (p. 4).

Duncum (2004), noted that Australian visual arts educators had begun to take account of the tenets of post-modernism and its impact on the study of AIS/ARS, however much work remained to be done in critical and informed interrogation of images. He went on to say that the challenge to visual arts educators lay in the realm of making accessible to students an aesthetic theory that is pluralist in terms of both classes and regions of the world. Such pluralism would acknowledge issues of power and the advantaging of one group over another. Duncum (2001) asserted that the shift in emphasis from the study of visual arts as a discipline to the study



artworks as visual culture constituted a fundamental and significant shift in Australian pedagogical paradigm:

The shift towards visual culture is occurring for many reasons, but principal among them is a recognition that, (whether economically developed) society is seen as a 'society of the spectacle' or a 'society of surveillance'; there is little doubting that the "cultural turn" society has taken is also a "visual turn".

Never before in human history has imagery been so central to the creation of identity or the gathering and distribution of knowledge. Never before has the aesthetic styling of products been so intense, image production and distribution so obvious and image technology so easily manipulable or so immersive. Never before have images been so self-referential, arguably so seductive, or the manipulation of people through imagery been so important to authority.

There is a clear need for a study of visual culture. As developed societies increase their reliance on visual imagery, so will the need for understanding it increase. Because of our particular knowledge of visual imagery, we visual arts educators are in a good position to contribute to the emerging field of visual culture by reconfiguring our own visual arts education culture (p. 109).

The challenge to visual arts educators is to ensure visuacy acquired by students (through the study of visual culture), does not become problematic. This is the case notwithstanding Duncum's admonishments, because visual arts educators continue to debate the legitimacy of such a focus in schooling.

### **Visual culture**

Tavin (2005) noted that the history of visual arts education's struggle with popular (visual) culture can be understood through a framework of aversion to change or the 'trope of spectrality' (p. 110):

The term "popular (visual) culture" denotes the convergences and discontinuities between popular culture and visual culture, while distinguishing that visual culture is both a field of study and an inclusive register of images and objects well beyond the popular.

Although visual culture and popular culture are not one and the same, arguments against the shift towards visual culture in visual arts education are often based on the same arguments against the inclusion of popular culture in visual arts education curricula. Sometimes these hauntingly familiar arguments intermingle in an un-fixed temporality fragmented by ideological dichotomies – through hauntological shift (2005, p. 110).

Tavin (2005) observed that when visual arts educators admonish popular culture and critique the shift towards visual culture, they usually base their arguments on theories of aesthetics,

autonomy, originality, creativity and cultural sophistication. The arguments against both popular culture and visual culture are inevitably based upon an ideological position that, in one way or another, revolves around the latter part of the term, 'culture' and it's absent or present 'other' – high culture (2005, p.102). Tavin noted:

As the Getty's grip on visual arts education started to slip in the late 1990's DBAE became less prominent and a growing number of visual arts educators called for a paradigm shift toward visual culture, that challenged canonicity, advocated for the study of an expansive range of objects and images including popular culture and raised issues about visibility and everyday life. And, like with any other call for a paradigm shift there are those that fear the unfamiliar and cling to the traditional. They (some visual arts educators) have expressed a gnawing discomfort with visual culture because of its apparent political character and its supposed lack of focus on visual arts production and its attention to the vernacular rather than (a particular notion of) aesthetics and fine arts (2005, p. 111).

Tavin continued that the "fear and loathing of popular culture erases the politics and history of aesthetic standards and disregards how aesthetic experiences have changed through the dynamics of image-making and image viewing in post-modern culture" (2005, p. 112). He noted that the speed with which visual culture has transformed Australian society necessitated engagement with the politics of visual culture. Tavin cautioned educators that students need to understand "where they sit in a world which is characterised by image manipulation and identity manipulation" and advanced the claim that responsibility for this task sat squarely at the feet of teachers (p. 111).

### **Visual literacy - visuacy**

The area of visual literacy or visuacy in schools has been the focus of sustained debate by a number of Australian educational researchers including Atkins (2003). Atkins maintained that when the construction of literacy is studied from a historical perspective it becomes clear that the uses a society has for employing written, visual and multimodal texts with their range of modalities, are dependent on changes in larger movements such as the world of work, technology, citizenship and private life-worlds:

Literacy acquisition is a social practice, one that is located in social situations and social contexts. Socio-cultural meaning is created through visual, auditory, gestural and spatial modes. Multiple literacies are inextricably linked to the practices in which they are embedded and the textural sites of these practices. Visual literacy comprises three specific abilities: to visualise internally; to create visual images and to read visual images. Thus a visually literate person in this broad sense of the term, displays competence in visual thinking, visualisation, visual learning styles plus the ability to engage in the decoding and encoding of visual texts (2002, p. 38).

There is a widespread commonsense belief that young people are already highly knowledgeable about visual culture simply as a result of their immersion in a constant stream of television shows, video games, computer images, movies and advertisements. This position is refuted by Atkins, who identifies three substantial arguments that challenge the notion that mere exposure to visual texts results in visuacy. The three arguments encompass the notions that:

- it should not be assumed that a preference for visual entertainment equates to a superior understanding of visual information;
- it should not be assumed that the consumption of visual images results in improving a person's creative abilities in the visual realm;
- it is arguable that consumption occurs predominantly at a passive, not a critical level. Few people make even the slightest attempt to understand the multi-layering of an advertisement unless they have had some previous experience or education that has attempted to show them how to do this (Atkins, 2002, p. 38).

Atkins posits the notion that the construction of young people's 'sense of self' demands that teachers should become proactive in their approach to teaching about visual texts:

Teachers need to encourage children to learn how to examine these cultural texts closely for the ideologies and values embedded in them. The responsibility for developing students' visually critical skills can be shared by both visual arts and literacy educators and should be exploited for the advancement of all stakeholders (p. 38).

Visual arts educators need to actively teach students to interrogate the imagery that bombards them every day as a natural by-product of Australian (visual) culture. Mere immersion in such imagery will not deliver the desired outcome of visuacy. Visual literacy must be learned, practised, honed and employed. Bolter and Grussin (2000) go further and claim that visual media messages help to shape children's identity. Moreover, he declared, that the responsibility of educationalists to formally teach the techniques of interrogating both images and other works of visual culture was of paramount importance in identity formation.

... the time students spend watching television, movies, films and playing video games – all of which are substantially visual forms of media – far outweighs the time they spend reading conventional texts and novels. Visual literacy activities help children to explore their emerging identities vicariously using non-print forms (p. 38).

### **Interrogating images**

Freedman (1997) and Foster (2000) also advanced the notion that students do not look at images critically unless they are taught to do so (Foster, p.26). Contemporary strategies that students can use in the interactive and interrogative process of decoding images, derive from an eclectic range of post-modern perspectives and interpretive frames including deconstruction, semiotics, psychoanalysis and feminism:

Post-modern frames presents the best and most promising theories of how a self that is simultaneously embodied, social, fictional and real comes to be, changes and persists over time. Psychoanalysis has much to teach us about the nature, constitution and limits of knowledge. Furthermore, often unintentionally, it reveals much about what Freud calls the 'riddle of sex' and the centrality of the riddle to the formation self, knowledge and culture as a whole (Foster, p. 30).

Reid (1995) identified post-modern principles of visual arts criticism that are essential to adequately interrogate social relations in images of figurative art. Reid observed:

- firstly, students need to have particular information before they can respond to questions raised about the impact of visual arts images in creating meaning in western culture (that is, knowledge of the patriarchal structure of society and the place and purpose of visual arts works in perpetuating class and sex stereotypes);
- secondly, critical questioning or deconstruction is the principle method by which interpretation and evaluation of visual arts works occur; and
- thirdly, the content of the visual arts curriculum and the formalist methodologies employed to teach it often serve to reinforce gender stereotypes that are harmful to students developing a sense of self.

Reid (1995) explained that:

The construction that men are the creators of culture is further perpetuated by the fact that the artists predominantly studied in schools are also male and their lives and works are interpreted through the eyes of male historians and critics. As the substance of the visual arts curriculum this knowledge reiterated hegemonic masculinity and is oppressive to female students who are subjected to it (p. 8).

Similarly, McKeon (1994) in writing about the purpose of visual arts education in school years stated that whilst it was difficult to quantify the contribution of AIS/ARS, several attributes were inherently valuable. These included:

- the opportunity for familiarization with alternative systems for communication and expression;

- exposure to culturally shared ideas, skills and values;
- opportunity to “reason with others about social problems in a systematic manner” (McKeon, 1994, p. 16).

A diverse community of educational theorists saw the acquisition of education, McKeon maintained, as marked by the shared disposition to advance and defend, claims for action rationally - “persuasion by argument rather than coercion by power” (p. 16). McKeon referred to the work of Broudy (1988) in which he identified the process of rational persuasion as the capacity to gain interpretive meaning from one’s surroundings and experiences. It is here that the importance of and the strongest argument for, the study of visual culture, AIS and ARS may lie. ‘Whilst studio work makes an essential contribution to the development of the student, the inclusion of the formal study of visual arts works provides the student with an understanding of the symbol systems that pervade visual culture:

Art making may be seen as the outcome of institutionalised activities. This is, defensibly an instructional outcome that is commensurable with general educational experiences. It contributes to the total development of the student as a personally autonomous, active, cultural participant; a participant able to make, interpret and critically assess the objects and images which originate in the visual arts world and subsequently impact on our social milieu (McKeon 1994, p. 24).

The support for the value of the art-making experience is clarified later in the same article by McKeon where the study of visual arts history and criticism is promoted as the completing element visual arts education offers to the development of the individual. McKeon (1994) explained that:

Historical and interpretive knowing becomes the active experience of the arts beyond the school years. In the context of present priorities it is the residual that survives long after completing school that is applied to interpreting the symbolism of the current commercial for Mitsubishi Corporation that alludes to the work of Christo. Knowledge which surfaces when standing before the fountains of the Piazza Navona, surveying the vista of Borobudur, or enjoying cinematic quotations in films such as *Beauty and the Beast* (p. 24).

McKeon maintains that ‘visual visual arts historical knowing’ offers considerable potential for bridging the life-world interests of the individual student. She maintains that the visual arts world atmosphere of history and theory “reintegrates and invigorates all aspects of artistic endeavour in terms of action, interpretation and finally reflection” (p. 24). The study of visual culture through AIS and ARS offers an opportunity for students to engage in discussion where

they can practise the skills of rational persuasion as opinions about artefacts are offered, explored and modified collaboratively. The desired outcome of producing visually literate members of society is thereafter within the grasp of the visual arts educator and visual arts curriculum.

Historically, there would appear to be both tradition and reason motivating the inclusion of visual arts history and visual arts criticism in general and visual arts education. Students are better served in the longer term by an education process that delivers literacy, visual or otherwise, than by one that does not. Along with the study of media, AIS/ARS are often regarded as essential vehicles for the delivery of such literacy as visuacy. It is also worthy of note that the visual arts and media have been subsumed from separate domains in past curriculum structures and now reside side-by-side as dual providers of visual/text-based literacy within the Arts Learning Area of the WACF.

The notion that people can function autonomously - separated from both community and personal culture - as propounded by advocates of child-centred and neo child-centred approaches, seems to have little or no currency in contemporary educational thought. What has been universally embraced in contemporary visual arts education is a commitment to delivering an experience that enables students to express their own creativity. Such practice occurs within a cultural framework that draws sustenance from traditions, beliefs and values. This position in combination with a commitment to the development of visual literacy provides students with the necessary tools to bridge the disparate sectors of their life-world in a contemporary and meaningful way. Finally, the notion that the study of visual arts history and visual criticism constitutes a form of cultural capital which should be accessible to all children, regardless of gender, race and socio-economic issues, provides a supporting framework for an inclusive contemporary education. Freedman (1991) notes that:

Arguments for visual arts history and criticism in school have not been to provide students with a fuller understanding of the visual arts community, but with a form of cultural capital. The idea behind the concept of cultural capital is that visual arts can be democratised and social differences reduced by making high culture accessible to all children (p. 23).

### **Holistic approaches to visual literacy acquisition**

Whilst Freedman (1991), McKeon (1994), Foster (2000) and Atkins (2003) all focus upon the decoding of visual texts as the critical vehicle for literacy acquisition, Flood (2004) considers this to be a limited assessment of what it is to be truly visually literate. She considers the character of the visually literate individual and after lengthy deliberation concludes that:

Often we draw upon our own experiences and practise to identify the characteristics of the visually literate person. The recent commandeering and ownership of visual literacy into areas other than the visual arts means that skills and performance are based upon a construct of practice that is in itself not primarily reliant on visual imagery and particularly, is not connected to the creating of visual images. I am suggesting that visual literacy, while inextricably linked to both understanding and critically evaluating the visual culture that the individual experiences, importantly is also about the individual's response to that culture through the making or creating of objects (2004, p. 72).

Flood expressed five broad statements expressed as core competencies of visual literacy that she claims help to identify the visually literate person. According to Flood (2004), these core competencies encompass:

- 1 a broad understanding of image viewing and making (knowledge comprehension and application);
- 2 the ability to access information through visual media (knowledge and comprehension);
- 3 the ability to deconstruct imagery (application and analysis);
- 4 the ability to reconstruct, to form new individual imagery (application and synthesis);
- 5 the ability to understand the purpose and meaning of imagery; to provide validity and verification of imagery (synthesis and evaluation (2004, p.27 & p.75).

The notion that the formal study of decoding and encoding of visual text might be equally important processes in rendering an individual visually literate formed a critical premise for the ECU Graduate-Mentor Project. This understanding returned attention to the age-old 'process versus product' debate that had unfolded within the field of visual arts education throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and raised questions about child-centred versus discipline-centred considerations (Efland, 1990).

Flood asserted that it was the entire process of the students' creative engagement (both practical and theoretical) that culminated in the acquisition of visual literacy. Such a position resonated with the fundamental tenets of visual arts education during recent decades and cast doubt on the efficacy of focusing only upon the theoretical domain (AIS/ARS) in the current research. Additionally, contemporary directions in the WACF Arts Learning Area similarly endorsed this holistic view.

Following Flood's (2004) assertion that visual arts making (encoding) was equally as important as the interpreting (decoding) in visual literacy acquisition, the ECU GMP was framed around notions that mentoring of beginning visual arts teachers would necessarily encompass:

- visual material to support the introduction of projects;
- visual research of phenomena arising from themes/contexts set by the beginning-teacher (encoding – arts ideas);
- conceptual development of ideas for visual arts works (encoding - arts ideas);
- formal visual arts history research into the priorities of specific artists and movements (decoding - arts in society);
- individual/collaborative visual arts criticism tasks to engage with artists' works and facilitate a constructivist approach to learning (decoding – arts responses);
- group and individual discussion and use of visual arts criticism frames for decoding of important artworks, including structural, subjective, cultural and post-modernist frames (decoding – arts responses);
- appropriation of important artists' stylistic, conceptual and technical influences in the development of the students' own work (encoding – arts ideas);
- strategies supporting design resolution of the students' own work (encoding – arts ideas);
- media selection and experimentation (encoding – arts skills and processes);
- skills, techniques and processes supporting the execution of studio works (encoding –arts skills and processes);
- response frameworks for the evaluation of the students' and others works (decoding – arts responses);
- display of students' work in a public forum (school library or public foyer) to engender an understanding of the importance of audience hierarchy (the community, the school, students, self) and artist's agendas (political and economic)and thus to allow the student to experience the kudos associated with visual arts practice.

The mentors and beginning-teachers independently expressed the view that visuacy could best be achieved through equal attention to the twin areas of visual arts making and visual arts interpretation, echoing the position espoused by Flood (2004) and others.



## **THEME FOUR: CONTEMPORARY DIRECTIONS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION**

The Western Australian educational landscape has undergone something of a scorched earth experience since 1997, resulting in an outcomes-based education (OBE) metamorphosis. Willis and Kissane (1995) observed that OBE was:

... an educational process which is based on trying to achieve certain specified outcomes in terms of individual student learning. Thus having decided what are the key things students should understand and be able to do or the qualities they should develop, both structures and curricula are designed to achieve those capabilities or qualities. Educational structures and curriculum are regarded as means not ends. If they do not do the job they are rethought (p1).

Put simply, OBE has facilitated a shift in the dominant teaching and learning paradigm from education as a product of what teachers do to one which focuses on what students have learned and can demonstrate as a result of schooling. It is worthy of note that some researchers including Berlach (2004) and Berlach & Power (2005) question the validity of OBE and argue that the approach has diluted educational 'content' at the expense of pedagogy. Berlach further claims that under the OBE regime the resulting outcomes of schooling are characterised by less rigour and represent the 'death of knowledge' ... "the death of knowledge occurs when evidence of learning becomes more important than the learning itself" (Berlach, 2004, p. 11).

OBE and the WACF were progressively implemented in all Western Australian schools during the period 1997-2004 and, predictably, debate about educational philosophy and pedagogy was both heated and continuous within the education community. Regardless of teachers' reservations, however, by 2004 all Western Australian schools were required to have implemented the new protocols of the WACF across all learning areas.

### **Outcomes-based education in Western Australia**

The Review of School Curriculum in Western Australia (1994) identified a number of priorities in curriculum development for Western Australia. The key recommendation to emerge from the review was the call for the creation of Curriculum Council that would have overall responsibility for the development of a unified curriculum framework for schooling K-12 (WACF p. 1). In response to the report the Minister of Education of the period (Mr Colin Barnett) established the inaugural Curriculum Council of Western Australia as an independent educational body overseeing the operation of both state-run and independent schools. During the same period the Education Department of Western Australia commissioned a review of the literature pertaining to OBE as part of the extensive review of education and training in Western Australia that had already begun.

The review of literature was undertaken by staff at the Murdoch University in Western Australia and culminated in a comprehensive analysis of the premises and principles of OBE including expected student outcomes, curriculum implications, assessment and key understandings. As a supporting structure for the later development of the WACF, the literature review drew heavily on international studies and presented a compelling case for the implementation of an 'outcomes-based' approach to education. Such an approach promised equity and justice for all students in a period when precisely the opposite appeared to predominate and the looming changes were considered long overdue. By 1997 the Interim Curriculum Council had been established and produced the draft version of the WACF document that was disseminated to all schools. A lengthy and extensive consultation process followed, however, confusion as to precisely what was intended in respect of OBE abounded. In order to facilitate shared understanding of the principles and practices of OBE a clear definition was written and disseminated. Willis & Kissane, (1995) articulated:

The expression 'student outcomes' is used in two distinct ways in education. Firstly, it may refer to a desired state in individual students by describing actual capabilities (knowledge, understanding, competencies, orientations) they should develop as a result of their school education. This is not the same as, for example, their score or degree of success or the content of the courses they have taken.

Secondly, 'student outcomes' may refer to class, institution or system-level performance indicators such as the distribution of test results, course completion rates, measures of student alienation, or post-course destination of students. In this usage, 'student outcomes' are performance indicators that either provide evidence of what has happened with respect to a group of students or define a desired state (or target) with respect to that group of students.

Whilst the latter usage has been more common, it is not the way the term is used in this review. It is the use of 'student outcome' interchangeably with 'learning outcome' or 'learner outcome', to describe the actual learning students are to exhibit which is of relevance here because it is this usage that is intended in 'outcomes-based education' (p. 1).

Issues relating to professionalism of teachers were touched upon in the Willis & Kissane report/literature review and this early foray into ensuring a more equitable education system for all children flagged the later development of the WACOT some ten years on. WACOT was established in September 2004 as part of a national initiative to improve standards of teaching and learning and the organisation operated as a regulatory body to oversee the delivery of high quality outcomes for all students. The call for WACOT to be established as a professional body for teachers, incorporating compulsory teacher registration, evolved in the late 1990s as the implementation of the WACF and OBE gained momentum. Legislation to establish WACOT passed through the Western Australian Parliament in late 2003, to take effect from January

2004. The main roles for WACOT were identified as being that of advocacy for teachers and the teaching profession; on-going professional learning for teachers; and the establishment of teacher registration (WACOT, 2003).

By early 2004 Western Australian schools had been advised by the WA/CC that permanent features of the transformed educational landscape now included:

- WACOT;
- teacher registration (2005 onwards);
- mandated professional development in order to renew teacher registration every five years;
- mentoring for beginning-teachers;
- the full implementation of the WACF.

As is often the case with extensive change, apprehension was manifest among even experienced visual arts teachers about the impact teacher registration might have at a time when simply navigating the implementation of the WACF appeared sufficiently challenging. In response to such concerns the AEA/WA developed a program of professional learning workshops to support visual arts teachers as they confronted the changes that unfolded before them. Extensive work to elaborate the scope of the WACF was undertaken by AEA/WA in partnership with the WA/CC. This process resulted in the identification and mapping of key visual arts content and concepts to be embedded across the various phases of schooling, including early childhood, middle childhood and early adolescence. The program of professional learning presented by AEA/WA facilitated discussion on various aspects of the WACF/Arts Learning Area outcomes and informed public debate on the changing shape of the visual arts education profession. The areas of AIS and ARS were identified as being particularly problematic for many teachers and once again the challenges facing beginning-teachers were formally recognised. The AEA/WA Executive restated its commitment to offer mentoring to graduate teachers should the opportunity to work with graduates and training providers eventuate.

### **Early Western Australian forays into visual arts education**

The evolution of the WACF and particularly the Arts Learning Area may be traced to early work undertaken by AEA/WA members, Western Australian visual arts education pioneers and the Getty Centre in the United States. The 1984 (primary) visual arts and Craft Carrier Project (WA/ACCP) and (secondary) Unit Curriculum models (WA/UC) in visual arts education evolved during the 1980s. These materials were produced alongside the emerging discipline-based visual arts education (DBAE) approach pioneered by Dwaine Greer, Elliott Eisner and other researchers affiliated with the Getty Centre in the United States.

Anecdotal evidence from AEA/WA members of the period suggests that the visit of eminent American visual arts educator/researcher Elliott Eisner's to Western Australia in 1978 for the inaugural Western Australian visual arts education conference and later discussions between Eisner and Greer, may have contributed to the final form of Greer's pioneering model of DBAE. According to Lummis (2005) it was in fact Eisner, rather than Greer, who coined the term DBAE following his visit to Perth in 1978. The exchange of information between local and international visual arts educators that occurred at the conference, informed the subsequent review of visual arts education in Western Australia (Lummis, 1986). Greer's work drew upon the professional disciplines of the aesthetician, studio artist, visual arts critic and visual arts historian and underpinned local and international models of visual arts education until the advent of OBE delivered new approaches and priorities. Upon its release in 2004 the WACF structure drew together the remaining threads of existing visual arts curricula in Western Australia. The new structure synthesised the primary carrier project model, the middle school 'unit curriculum' and post-compulsory Tertiary Entrance Examination for visual arts (TEE) and the Common Assessment Framework course visual arts and Design (A&D) syllabuses into a single framework for learning. This 'Curriculum Framework' spanned kindergarten to year 12 and acknowledged the importance of the Arts as one of eight Learning Areas.

#### **The integration of existing curriculum models into the new W.A.C.F**

By 2004 the implementation period for the WACF had expired and all schools were required by legislation to have fully implemented the structure. The K-7 Visual Arts & Craft Syllabus which had proven so valuable during the preceding 20 years was subsumed into the larger structure and continued to inform curriculum planning in respect of key competencies K-7. By contrast, the remnants of the Unit Curriculum model had all but disappeared and a new look curriculum developed in its stead. Post-compulsory education structures continued to evolve and TEE visual arts and A&D courses became the subject of extensive review that resulted in new courses of study being developed. These are due for implementation in 2009.

The WACF is characterised by an outcomes-based approach at its core foundation and students' learning is referenced against eight levels of achievement from K-12. The Arts Learning Area within the WACF comprises five discipline contexts, including dance, drama, media, music and the visual arts. The shared learning area outcomes are:

- Arts Ideas – the generation of arts works that communicate ideas;
- Arts Skills Processes – the use of skills, techniques, processes, conventions and technologies of the arts ;
- Arts Responses – the use of aesthetic understanding to respond to, reflect upon and evaluate the arts;
- Arts in Society – the understanding of the role the arts assume in society.

With implementation timelines for new WACF post-compulsory courses set at 2008-9, the wider public debate about the validity of OBE gained momentum throughout 2006. Heated ‘letters to the editor’ in respect of OBE and the proposed courses for years 11 and 12 appeared on a daily basis in both national and local newspapers. OBE represented a fundamental change in the predominant educational paradigm and had the effect of polarising stakeholders in the education community. Such polarisation was clearly apparent from the comments of:

- the then Federal Minister for Education Dr. Brendan Nelson (Weekend Australian, September 24 2005 p. 1);
- the Western Australian Minister for education Ms Ljiljana Ravlich (the Sunday Times, September 25, 2005, p. 32);
- acting chief executive officer Curriculum Council of WA Mr. Greg Robson (the Western Australian, September 24, 2005);
- members of the general public;
- PLATO.

Contributors to the PLATO website (Persons Lobbying Against Teaching Outcomes<sup>2</sup>) were strident critics of the approach and frequently wrote heated letters to the local newspapers opposing the implementation of the WACF. Ensuing confusion about the impact the proposed changes might exert on the daily life of both established and beginning-teachers fuelled debate within AEA/WA about the kinds of critical support the Association might provide. The notion that some kind of mentoring of beginning-teachers would be valuable was reiterated and endorsed by the Association. This endorsement formed the foundation for a partnership approach to induction between ECU and the AEA/ WA in the GMP in Visual Arts Education. The partnership approach to supporting beginning-teachers through the period of their induction, in an educational climate of significant change, has proven pivotal to the research across the two-year study. The university provided training for mentors and ECU students both provided and benefited from mentoring in a reciprocal process that arose from the research. In 2006, five AEA/WA mentors participated in the research and in 2007 a further five signed on. During 2007 the notion of a reciprocal approach to mentoring arose from the research and this dimension is elaborated chapter five.

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2. PLATO was founded on 14 June 2005. It is a non-profit incorporated body created out of extreme frustration over some teachers’ failure to be heard by the powers responsible for the proposed post compulsory OBE regime. Their hope is that this site will provide teachers (at all levels of schooling), parents and students with a venue at which they can express their feelings on educational issues. (*Brief History from PLATO website – [www.plato.com.au](http://www.plato.com.au)*)

## **THEME FIVE: THE INQUIRY PARADIGM**

Beginning-teachers entering the rapidly changing educational landscape described in this review of literature are particularly vulnerable to high rates of attrition in the fifth year of service if they are not supported during their first year of teaching (Paris, 2006, p. 6). It seems that the pressure and stresses associated with navigating life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in combination with the rigorous demands of the teaching profession, increasingly culminate in a re-evaluation by beginning-teachers of their suitability to the profession (Senate Report, 2007). Moreover, experienced classroom teachers who might once have served as mentors in the school environment, increasingly find their own personal and professional resources stretched to the point where they are no longer willing or able to assume the role of mentor to new graduates. This is particularly the case during periods of extensive curriculum change typified by the implementation of the WACF 2004-2008. If the future of visual arts education is dependent upon the retention of its human resources (as clearly it is), the case for a GMP is compelling when viewed through the lens of this review of literature.

Traditionally, beginning-teachers have been able to rely upon the school-based mentors to offer direction in content selection. In contemporary educational contexts, however, experienced teachers are themselves struggling with the impact of OBE. In such a climate it is understandable that there may be less support for beginning-teachers, because the demands of the OBE may be so exhaustive as to prohibit experienced teachers from volunteering to mentor new teachers. The OBE demands that are relatively new expectations, include:

- the generation of learning planners;
- the production of documents articulating values and compliance with the overarching outcomes;
- the writing of student briefs identifying tasks within the learning area outcomes;
- the compilation of student support documents/worksheets;
- construction of assessment criteria and rubrics for every project;
- synthesis of levelling templates;
- establishment and maintenance of student performance record spreadsheets;
- completion of a plethora of reporting documents - all whilst still undertaking the other exhaustive commitments that constitute teaching.

Importantly, it is the implication of beginning-teachers professing gaps in their subject discipline content knowledge, in combination with a move away from prescribed content in education generally that is the crux of the debate. If experienced mentors are not available to help fill the gaps in beginning-teachers' knowledge, it is reasonable to wonder how and when this might happen. The consequences of failing to address this challenge will be borne by the beginning-

teachers, by the profession itself and, most importantly, by the secondary school. Therefore, one can assume the visuacy outcome for our students will be diminished, a notion of literacy in the traditional context once reserved for students who could not read and write in print-based text.

Unlike traditional literacy, however, visuacy does not generate the same political noise as its more popular twin, perhaps because the general public assume (wrongly) that most children can 'see'. In addition, it appears that current efforts to address print-based deficiencies in literacy standards among students have largely failed also. Recent articles in the West Australian newspaper in Jan 2007 decried the appalling rates of both traditional literacy and numeracy competence among primary students. What is emerging is a potential lowering of multiple literacies because of the systemic problems outlined. It can be reasoned, therefore, that in the event this same generation also failed to acquire visuacy, they could number among the most disadvantaged in society with multiple literacy failures.

### **Research orientation for the Graduate Mentor Project**

A number of critical premises provided the orientation for the research, including the belief that:

- initial teacher education providers could (within the constraints of budget and political agenda) ensure beginning-teachers have access to best practice visual arts education pedagogy;
- within current economic realities initial teacher education providers may not be able to deliver the comprehensive (breadth) subject discipline content knowledge within the four outcome areas of the WACF Arts Learning Area;
- the provision of quality mentoring (until at least the end of the first year) represented a sound response to the university's duty of care to facilitate survival of beginning-teachers beyond graduation;
- school employer groups could provide general support for beginning-teachers navigating the unfamiliar school environment through 'buddy-style' mentoring for school life;
- WACOT could fulfil its regulatory mandate to support the profession ensuring compliance with high professional standards through registration protocols and periodic checks of beginning-teacher performance;
- the professional association could provide critical support for the ongoing acquisition of subject discipline expertise (particularly in the vital area of visual literacy education);
- external mentors could provide a safe sympathetic sounding board for reflective processes;
- the experience of mentoring a beginning-teacher has much to offer the experienced teacher in respect of their own ongoing professional development;

- the age-old adage that “it takes a village to raise a child” has currency in contemporary teacher education and it is appropriate that a convergence of stakeholder groups be deemed a normal and critical part of the process of producing quality teachers.

### **Selection of the inquiry paradigm**

The inquiry paradigm selected for the research was predominantly qualitative, resulting in case studies of mentoring in action. This approach derived from a formal acknowledgement that the participants would work together in a structure (the GMP) that was specifically constructed for the purposes of the research. It was my initial view that the multiple realities of the mentors and beginning-teachers would combine over time to reveal the impact of mentoring in informal environments beyond those of the employment context. These realities would be revealed through interviews, journal writings, field notes, conversations, questionnaires and email/telephone contacts. Throughout the research a specific focus upon visual literacy education was highlighted. Importantly, the mentors were external to the beginning-teachers’ employment context – a reality that, over time, generated differing responses from the participants as to the efficacy of the arrangement.

### **Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is common in educational research, unpicking the dynamic of values, beliefs and personal experiences typically found in the school context. According to Burns (1990) it is the life-world of the various participants that becomes the focus for the educational researcher ... the challenge is to capture what people say and do in the process of interpreting the complexity of their world” (p. 9). Burns continued that the task is particularly challenging as there is seldom a single ‘truth’ about any aspect of the educational context. ‘Reality’, he went on, is almost “invariably multi-faceted” (p. 9). The shared values and beliefs of the educational community typically permeate the various relationships and this in turn allows some synthesis of the individual perspectives into themes.

### **Constructivist perspectives**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) note that constructivists enter the research context with an open mind and are unwilling to assume that they know enough ‘a priori’ to know what questions to ask. Accordingly the constructivist waits until these naturally emerge from the research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) use the terms ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ within qualitative constructivist research to describe the roles afforded participants:

- the term ‘emic’ refers to the ‘insider’ perspective and language categories used by people in the culture studied;



- the term 'etic' denotes the 'external' perspective and language categories used by anthropologists investigating important cultural signifiers and distinctions (Patton, 2002, p.267).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) noted:

It is not possible to pursue someone else's emic construction with a set of predetermined questions based solely on the inquirer's etic construction. Constructivists typically enter the frame as learners, not claiming to know pre-ordinately what is salient ... constructivists typically face the prospect of not knowing what it is they don't know (p. 175).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) the constructivist moves into the research environment without the propositional knowledge or hypothesis most often associated with the quantitative sciences:

The constructivist moves into a situation without prior propositional formulations in mind; indeed, it is a premise that the constructivist will initially have very little idea of what is salient and, therefore, ought to be examined. How can he or she go about sensing out what to examine? The constructivist's answer to that question is to bring one's tacit knowledge to bear. Of course, it is unlikely – indeed, impossible – for the constructivist to enter a situation with a tabula rasa; the fact that the investigator selects this particular problem or focus to investigate implies that a great deal is already known or understood and those constructions can be laid on the table early on. But it is the emic material that remains opaque to the investigator's propositional formulations; if the investigator is to be prohibited from using tacit knowledge as he or she attempts to pry open this oyster of unknowns, the possibility of constructivist inquiry would be severely constrained, if not eliminated altogether (p. 176).

Past studies demonstrated that mentoring had the potential to be beneficial for beginning-teachers in the navigation of school life generally (Yeomans & Sampson, 1994; Lindgren, 2005). My own tacit knowledge and experience, however, led me to consider that mentoring may additionally have benefit in the key 'content' domains of visual literacy/visuacy education. The area of enquiry was relatively untraversed and no previous similar studies were identified during the review of literature. Consequently, whilst not strictly adhering to the principles of constructivist research, the GMP employed quasi or hybrid constructivist strategies to distil an understanding of mentoring in this area. Mixed methodologies (interviews, field notes, email/telephone records, meetings records and open-ended questionnaires) and the broad principles of the hermeneutic dialectic process as described by Guba and Lincoln (1989) were used. The application of hermeneutic dialectic processes within the research allowed the

multiple and often divergent realities of the participants to be collated, connected, analysed and distilled into an understanding of the mentoring process.

### **Mixed methodologies**

Miles and Huberman (1984b) noted that it was increasingly common in contemporary practice to find the researcher straddling divergent conceptual frameworks:

It is getting harder to find any methodologists solidly encamped in one epistemology or the other. More and more 'quantitative' methodologists, operating from a logical positivist stance, are using naturalistic and phenomenological approaches to complement tests, surveys and structured interviews. On the other side, an increasing number of ethnographers and qualitative researchers are using pre-designed conceptual frameworks and pre-structured instrumentation, especially when dealing with more than one institution or community (p. 20).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) writing on the same issue, suggested that whilst it may be common for researchers to employ a range of methods in research, it was critical that the researchers had a clearly defined inquiry paradigm. Guba and Lincoln define the term 'paradigm' as a framework that allows the meaningful collection, analysis and interpretation of evidence relating to human experience. According to Guba and Lincoln, different frameworks elicit different interpretations of behaviour or evidence. They identify that an inquiry paradigm may be understood and distinguished from others on the basis of its ontology, epistemology and methodological positioning. According to Knight (1996):

Ontology is that branch of philosophy which deals with the order and structure of reality in the broadest sense possible. Ontological beliefs deal with the question "what can be known" about phenomena. Epistemology embodies "that branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge" (p. 162).

The GMP aligned beginning-teachers with experienced mentors from the AEA/WA. The research was premised upon the notion that each graduate would have divergent needs and that each mentor would bring their own expertise to the mentoring process. The solutions to challenges that confronted the beginning-teachers, were jointly constructed by participants and those that worked for one mentoring partnership often proved fruitless in another partnership. A framework that acknowledged that participants would see and understand their situations differently, encompassing multiple interpretations, understandings or constructions, allowed the mentoring experience to be tailored to the individual needs of the new graduates. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 142) validated such an approach when they noted:

The major task of the constructivist investigator is to tease out the constructions that various actors in a setting hold and, so far as possible, to bring them into conjunction – a joining – with one another and with whatever other information can be brought to bear on the issues involved

Within this 'emic' enquiry the challenge was to find connections, distil themes and construct a case that embodied the multiple realities of participants. Importantly, the research environment for the study was the intellectual and emotional environment underpinning the 'first year of teaching', rather than any physical place, in the form of a specific school or employment context. Guba and Lincoln (1989) maintain that constructions of this type "are 'created realities' which do not exist outside the persons who create and hold them. They are not part of some objective world that that exists apart from their constructors". They observed that:

Constructions come about through the interaction of a constructor with information, contexts, settings, situations and other constructors (not all of whom agree) using a process that is rooted in the previous experience, belief systems, values, fears, prejudices, hopes, disappointments and achievements of the constructor (p. 143).

### **Hermeneutic Dialectic Process**

The Hermeneutic Dialectic process is described by Guba and Lincoln as an approach that allows the researcher to ask participants about their understanding of the research issue, context, or problem. Such an approach forms the foundation of the constructivist's research orientation. The information is used as the basis for the formation of relevant questions that seek to further clarify the participants' understanding of the phenomena being investigated. The process is both cyclic and thematic and can be expanded to cross-match the responses with other participants or sources of information. Guba and Lincoln note that there is six conditions which support the operation of the Hermeneutic-Dialectic Process:

1. a commitment from all parties to work from a position of integrity;
2. minimal competence on the part of all parties to communicate;
3. a willingness on the part of all parties to share power;
4. a willingness on the part of all parties to change if they find the negotiations persuasive;
5. a willingness on the part of all parties to reconsider their value positions as appropriate; and
6. a willingness on the part of all parties to make the commitments of time and energy that may be required in the process (p. 150).

As the researcher records each participant's understanding of the issues inherent in the research, lines of inquiry are pursued and refined. The resulting constructions of reality are distilled into themes, compared with the emergent themes of other interviewees and then referenced back to the participants understanding. Guba and Lincoln (1989) note:

The major purpose of this process is not to justify one's own construction or to attack the weaknesses of the constructions offered by others, but to form a connection between them that allows their mutual exploration by all parties. The aim of this process is to reach a consensus when that is possible; when it is not possible, the process at the very least exposes and clarifies the several different views and allows the building of an agenda for negotiation (p. 149).

The researcher's own etic understanding can additionally be used as a platform for further questioning of emic participants.

The inquirer's (researcher's) own etic formulations have no particular privilege save that he or she is quite possibly the only person who has moved extensively between participants, stakeholders and respondents and therefore, has the benefit of having heard a more complete set of constructions than anyone else in the setting is likely to have heard. Thus that particular construction is likely to be one of the most informed and sophisticated, at least toward the end of the process. This does not procure for the evaluator more power, merely a greater ability to facilitate the negotiation process that must occur (p. 154).

In the GMP, qualitative case study design incorporating a constructivist perspective allowed rich descriptions of the experiences of the participants. Narrative reporting in the form of vignettes, built the layers of perception that collectively represented the 'first year of teaching'.

### **Case studies**

Turney and Robb (1971) observed that research in education was well suited to the use of descriptive methods. They observed that because school problems involved people and by definition were constantly in a state of flux, descriptive methodologies could capture specific moments. Over time these frozen moments combined to form a rich tapestry of school life. Turney and Robb (1971) suggested that intermittent forays into the research environment could provide insight into the changes that occurred and they considered 'case study' an ideal methodology (p. 62). They believed that this was particularly true when a small number of participants were the focus of the research. The GMP adopted this intermittent approach through periodic meetings. Over time, the discussions that occurred at these 'café' meetings, highlighted the shared challenges that new teachers face.

Stake (1988) noted that within qualitative case study design, the cases (individuals, groups or structures) exist within a bounded system. The purpose of the research is then to investigate the complexities of cases that are either particularly representative, or particularly atypical of the social system in which they occur. The intent is to construct a picture of reality through the cases and, where possible, to link the experiences thematically to the larger population or system (p. 256). Within the GMP the bounded system was the experiential environment of the 'first

year of teaching'. The constructed mentoring groups were diverse in structure, with differing participant profiles and employer schools, yet in spite of this diversity, strong thematic links emerged.

Guba & Lincoln (1989) noted that case study research was characterised by "rich, thick descriptive accounts" of events from which grounded theory could emerge. They posit that multiple sources of evidence gathered with an emphasis on rich detail underpinned successful research. The adoption of journals in the GMP research allowed participants to record rich vignettes (little stories) during the first year of teaching in this study. These narratives subsequently enabled deeper levels of abstraction and synthesis about the participants than would have been afforded through other research methods.

### **Narrative inquiry and vignettes**

As a school-based practitioner I was familiar with the sometimes cathartic process of sharing stories around the staffroom table at recess or lunch that occurs in all big schools. I recalled having personally engaged in collaborative discussion leading to solutions for colleagues' concerns. Whilst occasionally describing sad experiences, these story telling and 'sharing' sessions were more often than not affirming, collegial and even funny. Importantly, the busy school day meant that the stories were more often than not abridged versions and constituted 'snapshots', of the actual day's events.

Over time the staff room became an important source of information about 'what was really going on in the school'. The notion that 'snapshots' of school life might cumulatively represent a source of deeper knowledge about teaching and learning is a position espoused by advocates of narrative inquiry. In the GMP these 'snapshots' are collectively described by the term 'vignettes' or 'little stories'. Luke & Freebody (2000) noted that effective vignettes were a slice in time of the work of the teachers in classrooms, echoing the sentiments of Stenhouse (1988) who described vignettes as "a sketch, rather than a fully worked picture" (p. 52). Miles & Huberman (1994) extended this definition of vignettes noting that they were:

A focused description of a series of events ... narrative, story-like in structure, preserving the chronological flow across a brief time span; limited to one or a few key actors; to a bounded space; or to all three (p. 81).

Carter (1993) echoed these sentiments and posited that narrative vignettes provided teachers with an opportunity to recount, organise, analyse and synthesise the substance of events in teaching and learning:

Vignettes ... (a) a situation involving some predicament, conflict or struggle; (b) an animate protagonist who engages in the situation for a purpose; and (c) a sequence with implied causality during which the predicament is resolved in some fashion (p. 6).

The journal notes made by the beginning-teachers during the research provided information about the day-to-day events in the classroom. Subsequent notations/observations made by the authors about related discussions with their beginning-teacher buddies, advice/guidance/intervention procured from their mentor, records of collaboratively devised solutions, implementation of the solutions and, finally, the processes involved in reporting back to the mentor, formed a rich 'in situ' record of the cyclical mentoring process. The busy teaching environment and demanding daily school structure meant that, whilst peppered with descriptive adjectives and rich sentiment, the classroom incidents were typically 'snapshots' of events rather than detailed representations of the setting or its players that echoed the findings of Luke, Freebody (2000), Carter (1993) et al..

In combination with other sources of evidence, the narrative vignettes recorded in the participants' journals appeared to fulfil the same function as the cathartic staffroom 'story telling'. Importantly, as I analysed the journals and other sources of evidence, many of the experiences and concerns expressed by the beginning-teachers resonated as 'true', because I recalled similar challenges in my own practice during the early years of teaching. Mindful of post-modern principles underpinning contemporary research and the validity of multiple perspectives about the meaning of any data, the themes distilled from the vignettes were confirmed through member-check (consultation with the authors) and other colleagues. Additionally, as I moved between the various groups at the regular café meetings I acknowledged that the emergent themes resonated across the different groups and over the two-year research period.

### **The importance of qualitative methodology in this study**

The use of qualitative methodology was particularly helpful in this study precisely because the beginning-teachers were placed in diverse school settings where varied induction experiences prevailed. These differences needed to be richly described in order to adequately convey a sense of the (often difficult) personal journey the graduates faced as they moved from the 'safety' of the tertiary context, through the 'uncertainty' of relief teaching or unemployment to the 'stress' associated with full time work. Though there were indeed shared contexts and emergent themes, the specific challenges were divergent and the combination of interviews, journals, meetings, questionnaires, email and telephone contacts allowed the beginning-teachers' personal stories to be richly described. Notwithstanding the different settings, a large number of the participants ultimately reached a point where they considered leaving teaching during their induction year,

due to the stressors they faced. In all instances they were persuaded not to do so by their mentor. Quantitative methodology, though useful in other settings, would have been less effective in conveying the intensity of emotional stressors than the narrative vignettes used here which capture the averted 'crisis'. The conceptual framework for the study is represented in diagram one on the next page.

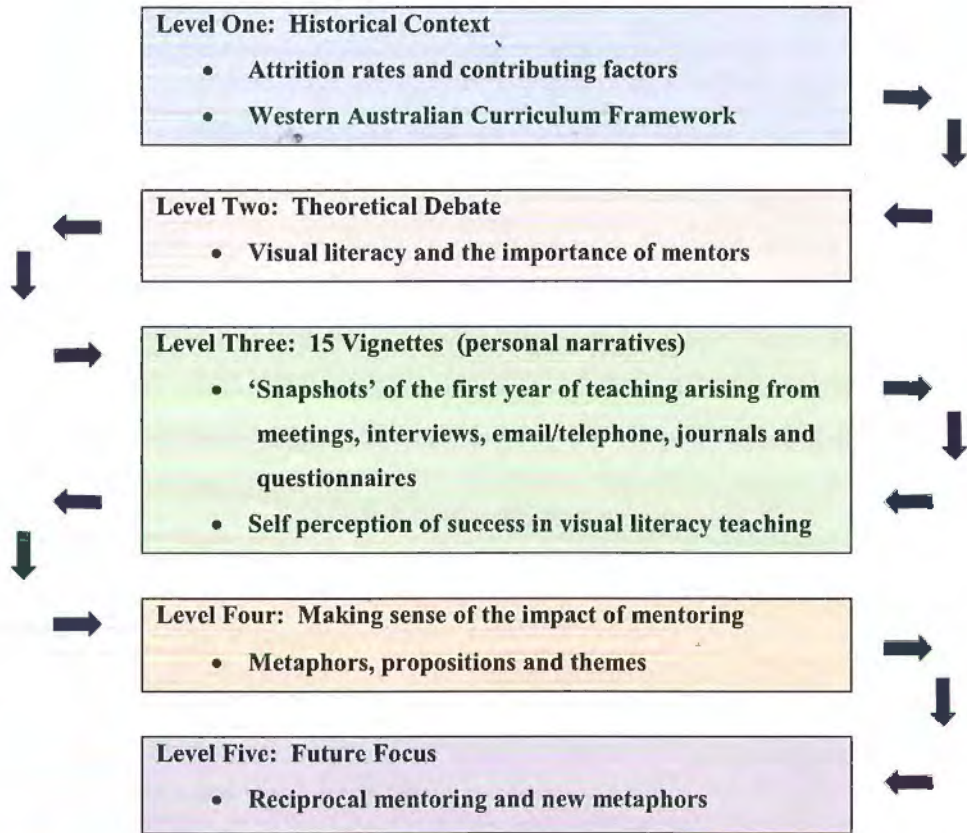
## **Conclusion**

The critical themes which emerged from the review of literature for the research encompassed notions that:

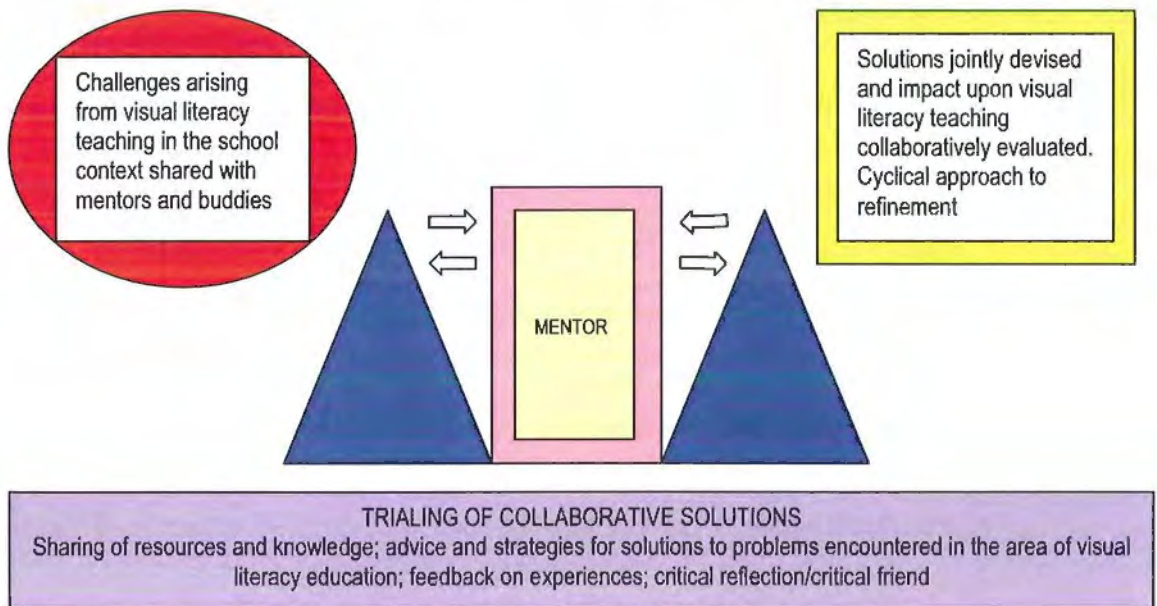
- 1 secondary school students who fail to become visually literate are vulnerable to manipulation by media/industry in an Australian society saturated with visual culture (McKeon 1994; Atkins 2002; Freedman 1997);
- 2 beginning-teachers who bear responsibility for delivering such visual literacy may be prone to increased levels of stress (unless supported) as the magnitude of the challenge becomes apparent (Moir, NCTAF Symposium 2003);
- 3 failure on the part of the teaching profession/initial teacher education providers to meet the needs of beginning-teachers inevitably results in 'burn-out' and high rates of attrition that in turn compromise the longevity and health of the profession itself (Western Australian Department of Education and Training, 2002, p. 6);
- 4 new approaches to mentoring which encompass alternative perspectives to the simple 'navigation of school life' model are warranted as beginning visual arts teachers engage in visual literacy education of secondary school students.

In response to these emergent themes the GMP employed a qualitative case study design involving 10 mentoring partnerships over 2006-2007. Each partnership comprised one mentor and two beginning-teachers, all of who were based at different schools. The research commenced with a training workshop and a schedule for meetings and mentoring support. Throughout the year the beginning-teachers in each partnership acted as buddies for one another that provided an additional layer of collegial support. I was invited to sit in on meetings and I recorded the conversations that occurred in my researcher's journal. I conducted interviews with participants and used this data to construct participant profiles. Journals and questionnaires were completed by some participants and not by others. Some groups engaged in extensive communication via email and/or telephone and (where this occurred) either sent me copies of emails or described the discussions to me.

**DIAGRAM ONE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESEARCH**



**RESEARCH PROCESSES:** questionnaires; interviews; personal professional journals; regular meetings/field notes; email support; telephone support; Internet Blogs



Mentoring groups were configured to comprise two linked beginning-teachers for each mentor; in each group the beginning-teachers acted as buddies for one-another before calling for assistance from the mentor.



## CHAPTER THREE

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### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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#### **Introduction**

The methodology selected for the research drew predominantly upon case study methods and employed emic inquiry to elicit both experienced and beginning-teachers' impressions of the impact mentoring. The research drew upon the practices and principles of 'conversation analytic research' (CA) espoused by Perakyla (2004) to enhance reliability and validity considerations.

The data collection tools included:

- taped oral interviews;
- researcher's journal notes;
- records of dialogue at meetings;
- questionnaires;
- reflective journals;
- email, telephone and Blogg interactions.

Rich vignettes were distilled from this source material and emergent themes were extracted for analysis.

#### **EMIC RESEARCH PRACTICES**

The research terms emic and etic were devised by ethno-semanticist Kenneth Pike who distinguished classification systems used by anthropologists. Patton (2002, p. 267) noted:

An emic approach ... based on the language and categories used by people in the culture studied. An etic approach ... categories created by anthropologists based on their analysis of important cultural distinctions

The dual perceptions of mentors and beginning-teachers provided emic perspectives which led to a rich description of the research context within the GMP. This understanding was extended through the interaction of the researcher and participants over two twelve month periods.

#### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As previously stated initial impetus for the GMP arose from discussions I had had with pre-service teachers and my subsequent concerns for their welfare in the period following graduation. I had held these concerns in one way or another for almost a decade of teaching in

schools and later in a university context as course co-ordinator for secondary visual arts education. Experiences in two contexts sustained an emerging conviction I held that a re-framing of the duty of care owed by pre-service providers to beginning visual arts teachers was urgently needed. These beliefs developed:

- firstly, in the period I worked in schools as a mentor-teacher for pre service teachers;
- secondly, at ECU as an educator responsible for initial visual arts teacher training.

A repositioning of this duty of care from the point of graduation, to the end of the first year of teaching is one of the significant emergent themes arising from the research. The questions and implications surrounding this re-framing have already begun to impact upon teaching and learning delivery within the School of Education at ECU. Conducting research into the welfare of students/teachers, for whom I had responsibility during their tertiary studies, raised questions about the nature of research where the ‘teacher as doctoral researcher’ role operated. The positioning of ‘teacher as doctoral researcher’ is not a new phenomenon and much quality research emanates from both school and tertiary contexts. The desire to assess, develop or improve educational practice underpins the role of the teacher as researcher (doctoral or otherwise) according to Gilbert & Smith (2003). Anderson and Herr (1999) similarly noted:

Practitioner research involves professionals legitimising knowledge produced out of their own lived realities as professionals ... an articulation of an epistemology of practice that includes experiences with reflective practice, action research, teacher study and teacher narratives (p. 20).

Importantly, my role as a teacher-researcher seemed appropriate, given that I had ongoing responsibility for the review and development of units within both undergraduate and postgraduate visual arts education at ECU. The GMP research constituted a new area of inquiry, with the potential to contribute new knowledge. Importantly, none of the participants were in a student-teacher relationship with me at the time they entered into the research. This ensured equality in respect of the ‘power-politics’ which can operate within the research experience. No other ethical considerations were identified and the inquiry was approved through the usual ethics clearance processes in late 2005.

### **QUALITY CRITERIA (TRUSTWORTHINESS)**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify parallels to the quality criteria generally employed in the quantitative sciences that the qualitative researcher can utilize to ensure authenticity and exactitude in data collection and analysis. Pearson (2002) noted that:

Guba and Lincoln refer to parallel criteria that are intended to parallel the rigor criteria that have been used within the conventional paradigm for many years but had not been constructed to reflect the quality of grounded theory. These criteria include internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. These parallel (trustworthiness) criteria include credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability. They also introduced what they called 'authenticity criteria' - reflecting the Constructivist paradigm – which include fairness and ontological authenticity. (p. 31)

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identified a number of measures that the qualitative or naturalistic researcher could employ to parallel the rigour normally associated with quantitative or the conventional research paradigm methods. According to Guba and Lincoln (1980, p. 233) parallel criteria are employed to ensure that the validity, reliability and credibility of the data is established and preserved throughout the research period.

### **Parallel criteria and credibility considerations**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identified prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing and member checking as effective strategies that could be employed by the qualitative researcher to ensure the integrity or credibility of raw data. The intention of employing parallel criteria in the GMP was to ensure that the findings of the research had portability and could be extrapolated beyond the experience of the participants to the wider experience of all Graduate Diploma beginning-teachers. To facilitate such extrapolation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer-debriefing and member checking were utilised.

### **Prolonged engagement**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) consider that the qualitative researcher is best served through involvement over an extended period of time. The rationale for this belief is that interaction with participants over an extended period is likely to reveal more of the lived experience than can be gleaned in a single interaction. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 236) define it as:

Substantial involvement at the site of the enquiry, in order to overcome the effects of misinformation, distortion, or presented "fronts", to establish the rapport and build the trust necessary to uncover constructions and to facilitate immersing oneself in and understand the context's culture.

Within the GMP, prolonged engagement was employed through ongoing interaction with the participants over a two-year time frame. The groups met with varying frequency and I sat in on the meetings, observed the interactions and recorded the discussions. Over time the meetings acquired something of a social dimension and a profound trust appeared to develop between the members of each partnership. The themes that emerged by the end of the year were not apparent

at the commencement of the research. Accordingly, the findings would have failed to reflect the reality of the mentoring experience (and its impact) had they been based on a single interview or observation. Prolonged engagement allowed the impact of mentoring to be ‘tracked’ over time and its development to be recorded.

### **Persistent observation**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) considered that persistent observation allowed the qualitative researcher to really understand the nature of the research context and its participants by spending time with them. They argue that, particularly in the case of qualitative research, persistent observation is critical because it allows the researcher multiple opportunities to confirm that phenomena is consistently present in the interactions of individuals/contexts. They observed this involved:

Sufficient observation as to enable the evaluator to “identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and to focus on them in detail (p. 236).

Guba and Lincoln continue that the rationale for engaging in persistent observation is that it brings depth to the understandings which emerge over time. In the GMP most groups met together on least three occasions. Each of the hour-long meetings was intended to provide a forum for the beginning-teachers to discuss their feelings, share concerns, brainstorm solutions and generally bounce ideas off their mentor and buddy. The discussions ranged across a variety of topics related to teaching, including:

- the unemployment experience and applying for jobs;
- managing the demands of relief teaching and part time work;
- devising age appropriate learning experiences;
- selecting subject discipline content knowledge and pedagogy;
- reporting and assessment;
- working with colleagues;
- navigating school policies, procedures and politics.

### **Peer debriefing**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) consider that peer debriefing allows the researcher to confer with a colleague who is suitably qualified, but not involved in the research, in order to ensure that the results appear sound and plausible. They define peer debriefing as:

The process of engaging with a disinterested peer, in extended and extensive discussion of one's findings, conclusions, tentative analyses and, occasionally, field stresses, the purpose of which is both "testing out" the findings with someone who has no contractual interest in the situation and also helping to make propositional that tacit and implicit information that the evaluator might possess.

The disinterested peer poses searching questions in order to help the evaluator understand his or her own posture and values and their role in the inquiry; to facilitate testing working hypotheses outside the context; to provide an opportunity to search out and try next methodological steps in an emergent design; and as a means of reducing the psychological stress that normally comes with fieldwork - a means of catharsis within a confidential, professional relationship (p. 237).

As I undertook the research for the GMP, I engaged in regular peer debriefing. One of the peers was completing a mixed methodological inquiry into an unrelated arts context at the same time that this research was unfolding. The opportunity to discuss the research with a colleague who was interested in the research design, but had no vested interest in the results, provided me with a critical friend who could ask probing questions and act in the role of 'devil's advocate'. The observations and suggestions that arose from these interactions were very useful and influenced the kinds of questions I subsequently posed at the regular mentor meetings. On a number of occasions, my colleague would query why a particular beginning-teacher seemed to feel as they did, or behave in a specific manner. When I was unable to provide a coherent hypothesis, this issue was raised at the next meeting. The process of debriefing the research with my colleague facilitated regular checks with the respondents to confirm that I had understood what they were saying. This was further checked by having the participants 'read and approve' the final vignettes.

### **Member checking**

Member checks provide confirmation that the results or findings the researcher distils from qualitative data do in fact capture the reality/understandings/experiences of the participants. Guba and Lincoln (1989) consider member checks to be the single most important tool the qualitative researcher possesses in establishing credibility. They defined member checks as serving a number of critical functions:

- allows the evaluator to assess the intent of a given action;
- gives the respondent the chance to correct errors of fact or errors of interpretation;
- provides interviewees with the chance to offer additional information;
- puts the respondent 'on record' having said certain things; the interviewer 'got it right';
- allows the inquirer to summarize material as a first step toward analysis;
- gives the respondent a chance to judge the overall adequacy of the interview/data collection process.

Within the GMP, member checks were conducted at several points throughout the year and also at the completion of the research. As I analysed and reconstructed the field notes into vignettes, I forwarded these to the participants and requested confirmation that I had accurately understood and described what had occurred at meetings. Periodically, I reconciled each person's story against the original research question and attempted to distil some sense of the impact of the mentoring. This process was repeated across the two years and at the end of each year I emailed the completed vignettes to respondents and asked them to 'sign off' on the write-up. Most participants were more than happy to review and approve/correct the vignettes, however, a few simply failed to return the scripts. In these instances I asked the mentor for the group to confirm that I had accurately described the meetings. Over time the approved vignettes gave rise to a series of metaphors, propositions, themes, implications and recommendations and these were also provided to the participants to elicit their impressions of the 'big picture' story.

### **Validity considerations**

Punch (1998, p.30) defined validity as: the "isomorphism (or otherwise) between the reality studied and the reality reported". He clarified:

The validity of data is usually expressed as a question "how well do these data represent the phenomena for which they stand"? In developing ways to deal with this question, researchers have used the more specialised ideas of content validity, criterion-related validity and construct validity. But the issue is in fact very similar in both approaches, because of the hierarchical nature of abstraction in the link between data indicators and variables (quantitative) and concepts (qualitative) (p. 30).

Miles and Huberman (1994) further elaborate validity, noting two forms:

Descriptive/contextual validity – whether the account of the research is complete and thorough. Interpretive validity – whether the account given in the research connects with the lived experience of the people studied (p. 36) ... assessing internal validity is the central means for ascertaining the "truth value" of a given inquiry, that is the extent to which it establishes how things really are and really work (p. 234).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) define internal validity as the extent to which variations in an outcome can be attributed to 'controlled variation in an independent variable'. In the case of the GMP, internal validity was deemed to relate to the degree to which the actions of the mentor might reasonably be considered responsible for changes in the experience of the beginning-teacher assigned to them). Guba and Lincoln continue that external validity is the degree to which the findings of an inquiry could reasonably be extrapolated to a wider pool of participants and be deemed to remain true (p. 234).

This latter explanation of the term validity connects with the notion of 'fit' elaborated under reliability issues in this document. Punch (1998, p. 101) stated that all validation methods have limitations and accordingly inferences about validity "cannot be made solely on the basis of quantitative or statistical procedures". He advocated a validation strategy that triangulated both quantitative and qualitative methods. Punch (1998) drew from Zeller (1997) and observed that "a valid inference occurs when there is no conflict between messages received as a result of the use of a variety of different methodological procedures" (p. 101). In order to enhance validity and reliability considerations the GMP combined both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The research predominantly utilised a qualitative descriptive case study structure, however, some mixed methodology applied to questionnaire design and analysis.

### **Triangulation of methodology**

Patton (2002, p. 248) promoted the triangulation of research methodology and data collection/analysis and noted the 'vulnerability to error' of studies that utilised only one method:

A rich variety of methodological combinations can be employed to illuminate an inquiry question. Some studies intermix interviewing, observation and document analysis. Others rely more on interviews than observations and vice versa. Studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method (e.g. loaded interview questions, biased or untrue responses) than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks.

Using multiple methods allows inquiry into a research question with "an arsenal of methods that have non-overlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths. Borrowing and combining distinct elements from pure or coherent methodological strategies can generate creative mixed inquiry strategies that illustrate variations on the theme of triangulation ... Measurement, design and analysis alternatives can be mixed to create eclectic designs, like customizing an architectural plan to tastefully integrate modern, post-modern and traditional elements.

Narrative reporting of participants' responses was utilised within the GMP and was deemed to be highly appropriate because 'rich meaning' is able to be communicated through this narrative form. The conversational style of qualitative investigation allowed greater flexibility in the direction the research interview took whilst in progress.

Borg (1987) noted that semi-structured interviews were valued in educational research because of their inherent adaptability. The dialogue that takes place between interviewer and interviewee allows much greater depth of insight compared with other methods of collecting research data. Borg observed that:

Most interviews used in educational research are semi- structured. The interviewer follows a guide that lists questions covering all essential information needed by the researcher. He has the option to follow up any answers in an effort to get more information or clarify the respondent's replies (1987, p. 110).

A two-part procedural structure consisting of a pilot study and the larger research was implemented within the GMP. The pilot study was completed in late 2005; the research instruments were refined in the light of feedback from the pilot study. All participants were interviewed at the commencement of the research period and the transcripts were used to construct a participant profile which described:

- the interviewee's educational and employment history;
- current employment status;
- perceptions about their readiness for teaching, generally;
- perceptions about their readiness for visual literacy teaching, specifically.

The semi-structured interviews conducted with beginning-teachers and mentor-teachers through 2006 and 2007 were triangulated against closed-form questionnaire responses of past graduates from ECU for the ten year period 1994-2004. Additionally, the participants' interviews were triangulated against their own reflective questionnaires completed at the end of the first year post graduation. The questionnaires in both instances focused upon challenges presented by visual literacy education. Borg (1987) maintained that:

A questionnaire usually contained questions aimed at getting specific information. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Questions may be of either the closed form, in which the questions permits only certain responses, or the open form, in which the subject makes any response he wishes in his own words. Generally it is desirable to design questions in closed form so that quantification and analysis of the results may be carried out efficiently (p. 109).

Employing both semi-structured interviews with beginning and mentor-teacher participants, as well as structured/closed questionnaires with past ECU graduates and current research participants, provided triangulation of the research methods. The data collected was contextualised against literature review and analysis:

Triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and/or using a variety of (two or more) methods. By collecting and analysing different viewpoints, the evaluator ensures that the final evaluation report reflects the multiple realities of specific social relationships (Burns, 1990, p. 273).



Interestingly, the respondents who completed the end-of-year questionnaire inevitably annotated their fixed responses with examples of the situations which led them to answer questions in particular ways. The final questionnaire had been designed to have the respondent rate a series of statements about the mentoring. I formed the impression that the participants felt they could best capture the reality of the mentoring experience by giving specific examples to exemplify the themes they were describing. Furthermore, I formed the impression that some of the respondents considered the fixed structure (rating scale) of the questionnaire to be an inappropriate measure of the experiences they were describing. Notwithstanding these reservations, the final questionnaire proved a useful data collection device, because it enabled identical responses (indicators on a rating scale) to be used as a base for comparison across the two years.

### **Reliability considerations**

Kirk and Miller (in Perakyla, 2004, p. 285) define reliability as the “degree to which the finding is independent of the accidental circumstances of the research”. In the quantitative social sciences this definition is expanded to mean the degree to which the same results are reproducible over subsequent occasions. Within qualitative research this definition is problematic because, according to Walker (1985), there is little reason to expect consistency by specific individuals on a second occasion (which is the usual paradigm for measuring reliability). Walker asserts that such variation occurs because of the “fluidity of human thinking”:

There is little in human mental life that is static and enduring and unaltered by the circumstances and occasion surrounding production. However, because a particular insight is not reproducible by the same person on another occasion, is it any less of an insight” (p. 115)?

Walker (1985) maintained that the researcher’s judgement and the success or failure of those judgements in the market place was critical to resolving issues of reliability. Ultimately, the findings of the researcher must be measured against information from the research context to see whether the results ‘fit’ or made coherent sense. According to Walker (1985) the reality that research subjects may not say exactly the same thing on several occasions did not devalue the underlying themes or messages that underpinned the conversations/interviews recorded by the researcher. Data gathered over multiple and subsequent occasions could be holistically reconciled against emergent themes. Data in opposition to the emergent themes could be interrogated further through subsequent dialogue/interview/conversation to determine its reliability and ‘fit’.

Perakyla (2004) noted that recording of conversations, interviews and dialogue on audiotape cassette could be an extremely useful research activity. She noted that these practices were linked to reliability and validity considerations that were critically important in qualitative research, because in them the objectivity and credibility of research are at stake:

The aim of social science is to produce descriptions of a social world – not just any descriptions, but descriptions that in some controllable way correspond to the social world that is being described. Even though all descriptions are bound to a particular perspective and therefore represent the reality, rather than reproduce it, it is possible to describe social interaction in ways that can be subjected to empirical testing (p. 285).

Perakyla (2004, p. 284) contextualised issues of reliability in qualitative research through reference to audio/video recordings and, in particular, focussed upon these forms in ‘conversation analysis’ (CA). She delineated two types of conversation upon which qualitative research often focuses:

- institutional conversation (verbal interaction between professionals and clients or amongst professionals);
- ordinary conversation (informal talking among friends, family members and the like).

Perakyla noted that the aim of all CA studies was to produce rich descriptions of patterns of social interaction and language. The intent was to enhance the researcher’s understanding of the relationship between research subjects within their environment. She continued that CA could expose recurrent themes that could later be checked against the CA of other subjects’ ‘talk’. According to Perakyla, this process of cross-referencing CA results strengthened the reliability/transferability of the findings. Importantly, Perakyla argued that CA allowed the researcher to go back to the recorded sources of evidence to check and confirm that interpretations appeared sound:

In research practice, enhancing objectivity is a very concrete activity. It involves efforts to assure the accuracy and inclusiveness of recordings ... in conversation analytic research, recordings and transcripts are the ‘raw material’ comparable to ethnographers’ field notes. Accordingly the quality of recordings and transcripts has important implications for the reliability of conversation analytic research (p. 285).

Perakyla (2004) noted that reliability considerations could be enhanced in qualitative research through the use of audio and video recordings and CA of transcripts which “eliminate at one stroke many of the problems that ethnographers have with the unspecified accuracy of field notes and with the limited public access to them”. She observed that tape-recorded

conversations could be listened to over and over again. Importantly, Perakyla (2004) maintained that the recordings were sources of evidence that could be scrutinised by other interested researchers or analysts. The records were objective entities that were available for multiple viewings/hearings and constituted detailed publicly accessible representations of social/professional interaction. Perakyla claimed for qualitative research employing CA higher degrees of reliability than could be afforded by other branches of naturalistic inquiry (for example, ethnographies). She noted that in order for enhanced reliability to be realised, however, appropriate consideration of aspects CA needed attention and involved scrutiny of:

- selection of what is recorded;
- the technical quality of recordings;
- the adequacy of transcripts.

Perakyla (2004) continued that decisions relating to 'how much conversation should be recorded' were critical. She noted that the researcher would often need to have access to a large collection of conversation cases (audio or video tapes) which could be stored as a resource that is used only when the analysis has progressed so far that the phenomena under study have been specified. At that later stage, short sections from the data in reserve could be transcribed, allowing the full variation of the phenomena to be observed. The GMP conversations and interviews were recorded both through audio cassette and in the researcher's journal. The tapes were transcribed and repeatedly scrutinised to ensure that the audio record was authentically duplicated in written form. The documents were coded and analysed to distil emergent themes.

## **RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that a range of interpretive data-gathering tools are available for use by the qualitative researcher and that among these interviews, were deemed particularly suitable for educational research contexts. Interviews were employed in the GMP and complemented through the use of:

- initial historical questionnaires distributed to past ECU graduates;
- field notes from meetings;
- record of email and telephone conversations;
- reflective journal;
- final reflective questionnaires distributed to GMP participants.

## **RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

All participants in the research were selected using a convenience sample method. Patton (2002) noted that "convenience sampling denotes doing what's fast and convenient. This is probably the most common sampling strategy ... do what's easy to save time, money and effort" (pp. 243-4). Convenience sampling was deemed to be appropriate in the GMP because the

availability of participants (particularly beginning-teachers) would not be known until February 2006, when teaching appointments were confirmed. Once teaching appointments were largely finalised, the GMP sample was quickly selected from possible candidates, all of whom had indicated their willingness to participate. In fact only four of the beginning-teachers actually had full time (temporary) teaching positions by January 2006; the remaining participants were either unemployed or engaged in relief or part-time teaching.

### **Beginning-teachers**

During the course of 2005, I called for expressions of interest from beginning-teachers. An initial cohort of 20 pre-service teachers indicated interest in the GMP, however, final participants were not selected until January 2006. The pool from which beginning-teachers were drawn was limited to students completing studies in the Graduate Diploma of Education (visual arts) at ECU during 2005. Selection criteria for the beginning-teachers included:

- completion of an undergraduate visual arts degree;
- a 'pass' in all units undertaken during the Graduate Diploma.

The final selection of ten beginning-teachers occurred in early 2006, once teaching appointments had been finalised and graduates had a clearer idea about their availability to participate. The selection process was repeated for 2007, with a further 10 beginning-teachers being drawn from the Graduate Diploma of 2006. Specific profiles for each beginning-teacher are provided as a preface to their respective vignettes.

### **Mentor-teachers**

In 2005, five experienced visual arts teachers from the AEA/WA were selected as mentors for Phase One in 2006. As previously noted, the mentors were all senior visual arts education staff with responsibilities as Head of Department or Learning Area Co-ordinators. The mentors were highly proficient in the teaching of visual arts history and criticism and had more than ten years' teaching experience with Tertiary Entrance Examination students in years 11 and 12. One mentor withdrew on the day of the 2006 training workshop due to serious health issues that left only four mentors in the cohort. This required the rapid reorganisation of mentoring groups during the training workshop; however, two of the beginning-teachers also withdrew from the program within the first month, reducing the groups to four. The five 2007 mentors were similarly qualified; however, several groups disintegrated before the research properly began.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### RESEARCH PROCESSES

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#### **Introduction**

The research period spanned 2006-2007 and adhered to an eight-stage plan that had been approved for the GMP research proposal in late 2005:

- Stage One: Trial/refinement of the research instruments (October 2005);
- Stage Two: Historical questionnaire administered to 189 past graduates of ECU Graduate Diploma in visual arts education (November 2005);
- Stage Three: Interview with all participants based on themes evidenced in the historical questionnaire (February 2006 and February 2007);
- Stage Four: Periodic meetings with all participants (typically in April, July and October 2006 and 2007);
- Stage Five: Collection of reflective journal (December 2006 and 2007);
- Stage Six: Electronic reflection and review questionnaire (December 2006 and 2007);
- Stage Seven: 'Member check' to determine accuracy of vignettes and reconciliation of research questions;
- Stage Eight: Formal comparison of the 2006 data with the results of the 2007 leading to distillation of:
- repeating themes;
  - metaphors;
  - preliminary answers to research questions;
  - propositions;
  - conclusions;
  - recommendations;
  - reflections.

#### **CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

ECU records indicated that there were 189 students who graduated with a visual arts degree and teaching qualification during the period 1994-2004. This group of students constituted the pool from which data about historical trends in beginning-teachers' challenges derived. The contextual questionnaires and postage-paid return envelopes were sent to the last known address of graduates. Acknowledging that many of them might have relocated, it was anticipated that

responses might be returned from less than half the cohort. In fact only 12 completed questionnaires were returned and many were returned to sender unopened. The data were nonetheless useful background information for the study. The brief questionnaire targeted:

- the pedagogical challenges encountered during the first year of teaching;
- solutions devised to meet these challenges;
- experiences with mentors and the role they played in overcoming professional challenges;
- specific challenges in visual literacy teaching
- preferred approaches to visual literacy teaching
- other visual literacy issues.

### **Trialling of the questionnaire**

In late November 2005 and prior to the mail-out, the historical questionnaire was trialled by two experienced teachers from the AEA/WA who were not participants in the larger research project. The trial was conducted electronically. The two teachers who completed the questionnaire were asked to suggest other questions that they believed should have been included to better identify and understand challenges encountered in the first year of teaching. Additionally, trial respondents were asked about:

- the style of the document;
- the clarity of questions;
- the relevance of questions;
- the length of the document;
- the time required to complete the document.

The questionnaire was adjusted in the light of the feedback received from the trial participants and was distributed by mail in mid-December 2005. Returns from the mail-out were disappointing, only two questionnaires were returned by mid January 2006.

### **Email requests through AEA/WA**

In recognition of the importance of the historical context and in the light of so few returns from the initial mail-out, a request for information about the current contact details of past ECU graduates was initiated through AEA/WA. All members of the Association were emailed and invited to complete the questionnaire to see if they were past ECU graduates with a Graduate Diploma in visual arts education. No responses were received and a decision to widen the research pool was made after consultation with the research supervisor. In late January 2006, an additional email request was sent out to all members of the AEA/WA seeking completion of the

questionnaire by any graduate of a visual arts education (secondary) course during the period 1994-2004 from any of the local Perth universities. These universities included:

- Curtin University (Bachelor of Education; Graduate Diploma of Education)
- Edith Cowan University (Bachelor of Education; Graduate Diploma of Education)
- University of Western Australia (Graduate Diploma of Education)

There were three respondents and the questionnaires in combination with those received from the initial mail-out, were used to construct the historical context within which the initial interviews were framed. To support this process each of the mentor-teachers in the project was similarly asked to complete the historical questionnaire that captured their experiences in the first year of teaching. A total of nine historical questionnaires were used to refine the interview schedule. A period of six weeks was allocated to the distribution and return of the historical questionnaires. Analysis of the questionnaire material and the construction of a matrix reflecting challenges and experiences were then undertaken (mid December 2004-mid January 2005). Minor refinement of the initial interview schedule, prior to the research commencing, was completed.

#### FIGURE ONE: EXTRACT FROM HISTORICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please make brief comments about the kinds of challenges you encountered in **teaching visual arts history/visual arts criticism** during your **FIRST** year of teaching:

- the pedagogical challenges encountered during the first year of teaching;
- solutions devised to meet these challenges;
- experiences with mentors and the role they played in overcoming professional challenges;
- factors which impacted negatively upon teaching of visual arts history criticism.

#### MENTOR TRAINING WORKSHOP

An initial training workshop was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2006 to support the mentoring partnerships during the research. Five mentors had initially agreed to participate in the program, but one mentor withdrew at the last moment due to ill health. The remaining four mentors, from the AEA/WA, were all experienced visual arts educators with senior roles within their schools. The mentor-teachers attended the morning session of the workshop from 9.30 am -12.30 pm and returned at 1.30 pm to meet the beginning-teachers and formalise the mentoring partnerships. The beginning-teachers arrived at 12.30 pm and remained until 3.30 pm.

### **Selection of the facilitator**

The facilitator was an experienced teacher and researcher who worked for the Centre for Professional Excellence (CPE) in Perth. The CPE is an independent provider of professional development for business and Government organisations that had previously delivered mentor-training workshops for DET in 2003. The GMP training workshop was a modified version of the one implemented by CPE for DET in 2003. The modifications derived from discussions/meetings between the researcher and facilitator prior to the training workshop in 2006. The research focus of visual literacy was used to tailor the structure of the workshop to the needs of the participants. Minimal changes were made to the DET structure with the most significant of these being the removal of the fourth module - the learning project cycle. The removal of the fourth module was deemed appropriate given the short time frame (one day, rather than two) and the narrow focus for the mentoring support (visuacy).

### **Structure of the workshop**

The GMP workshop occurred in January at ECU from 9.30 am – 3.30 pm. The event was repeated in 2007 and followed an identical structure. The venue in both instances was the ECU School of Education. The workshop was structured into three parts:

- a session for mentor-teachers;
- a session for beginning-teachers;
- a session for both mentor-teachers and beginning-teachers.

### **Session for mentor-teachers**

Mentor-teachers attended the morning session and a specific program clarifying the role of the mentor was delivered. The content of the morning workshop was organised into four specific modules and participants engaged in a number of activities both individually and with peers. The facilitator acknowledged the expert status of mentor-teachers and emphasised a desire to draw upon their expertise, knowledge and understanding where possible. The modules covered:

Module one - introducing partnership-based mentoring:

- models of mentoring;
- assumptions about mentoring;
- definition for partnership-based mentoring;
- principles of adult learning;
- characteristics of partnership-based mentoring;
- stages of a mentoring partnership;
- benefits of mentoring.



Module two - key attributes for effective mentor performance:

- personal reflections;
- key attributes of mentors (overview);
- four key attributes of mentors;
- more about mentors – being ‘open’;
- the first meeting – demonstrating the attributes.

Module three - the mentor’s role/key functions:

- the mentor’s role;
- key functions;
- relationship building;
- coaching and giving constructive feedback.

Module four - mentoring teachers from specific target groups:

- mentoring to support teachers from different target groups;
- matching mentor support to the recipient’s situation;
- developing strategies to assist recipients.

(Martin, Centre for Excellence in Teaching, p.3).

### **Session for beginning-teachers**

At 12.00pm the mentor-teachers went for lunch and at 12.30 pm the beginning-teachers arrived for their workshop. The facilitator worked for an hour with the beginning-teachers clarifying:

- their concerns about the first year of teaching;
- their employment prospects;
- their hopes for the mentoring partnerships.

Additionally, she discussed the role of WACOT as a regulatory body for the teaching profession and highlighted the significant shared concerns arising from the one-hour workshop that included:

- general classroom management issues;
- assessment issues;
- establishing rapport with students;
- programming issues;
- status of relief-teachers (if this is all that is available);
- ADHD and other behavioural disorders.

The beginning-teacher component of the workshop concluded at 1.30 pm, when the mentor-teachers returned.

### **Finalising the mentoring partnerships**

The initial part of the training workshop was premised on the notion that the mentors and recipients had differing roles, needs and understandings within the research and that these differences needed to be clarified and explored before the mentoring partnerships could effectively be established. Upon their return at 1.30 pm the mentor-teachers were briefly introduced to the beginning-teachers and following some brief revisiting of the earlier material, were matched into partnerships (one mentor and two beginning-teachers in each group).

### **Mentoring partnerships**

The mentoring partnership structures were arbitrarily determined by the researcher. I had been the visual arts education lecturer for the beginning-teachers during the period they studied at ECU. My knowledge of the beginning-teachers 'personal style and personality type' synthesized throughout the year they studied at ECU, coupled with my lengthy association with the mentors through the AEA/WA network, allowed me to facilitate the partnerships.

### **Resources**

Mentor-teachers were provided with a professionally produced workbook entitled "Creating effective mentoring partnerships – a professional development program for teachers". The workbook elaborated the modules of the mentoring program (previously identified) and defined the structure for the training session. Mentor participants were each provided with a professional journal and were asked to maintain a log of instances where they had provided mentoring to the beginning-teachers to whom they were matched. The '5-Rs' (reporting; responding; relating; reasoning and reconstructing) model was promoted and participants were asked to use this approach to record critical incidents wherever possible.

### **Significant outcomes of the training workshops**

A number of significant outcomes emerged from the training workshops:

- the participants were given the opportunity to develop a shared understanding of the mentoring process;
- the participants developed a shared understanding of their respective responsibilities within the project;
- the partnership groups were formed within an informal 'conversational' framework, where participants had the chance to 'get to know each other' before starting on the formal mentoring pathway;

- beginning-teachers were given the opportunity to meet and chat with their beginning-teacher 'buddy'. The buddy is the person to whom the beginning-teacher might first speak before contacting the mentor about a specific issue. This 'buddy process' has the potential to solve many of the concerns beginning-teachers hold about teaching in general, thereby alleviating the need to contact the mentor on matters which are not the subject of the research project. Additionally, the 'buddy process' has the potential to support beginning-teachers by reassuring them that other beginning-teachers are experiencing similar concerns and issues in their first year of teaching;
- beginning-teachers were given the opportunity to express the concerns and fears they held and some limited discussion of these concerns was undertaken.

### **Beginning-teacher concerns which emerged at the training workshops**

Beginning-teachers were asked to share the concerns they had about the teaching appointments they had recently accepted or intended to accept in the near future. These concerns seemed to cover a variety of topics that appeared largely related to classroom management and programming issues. Comments/concerns from the beginning-teachers included:

- as a relief teacher I am concerned about making an effective connection with students. Constantly changing faces; student behavioural issues; effective teaching and learning;
- is graphic design really art?;
- general checklist of all the responsibilities and red tape overall to avoid neglecting one or more;
- the first day – how to get the ball rolling; making sure that the content is all covered; expectations of the school;
- how to put in place the democratic learning environment with a bunch of students whom you don't know and are already misbehaving?;
- how do you manage all the paperwork?;
- I would like some help with job applications and researching about Aboriginal education;
- can you help me to streamline my programs?;
- I anticipate having difficulties remembering students' names. I found that on my final teaching practice I generally remembered students who were cheeky or misbehaved most. How do I remember names?;
- planning for year 8 – is it better to plan two smaller projects per term or one larger one?;
- at school – being expected to know everything;
- dyslexia; and being unfamiliar with non-art subject areas that I am teaching; I

- don't feel I know enough about the Curriculum Framework;
- how do I get to know students in a large class and still have time to get through all the content in a short time?;
- addressing prior knowledge/skill levels before devising term programs.

These concerns were tabulated into a cohesive form and along with an evaluation questionnaire were mailed to all workshop participants. The beginning-teachers' concerns were shared in the hope that they may provide a starting place for discussion and planning within the partnership structures.

### **Review of the training workshop**

Following the workshop, participants were mailed a brief questionnaire that sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the training session. The questionnaire asked participants to rate aspects of the workshop using a numeric scale from five (excellent) to one (poor) and invited participants to provide comments about their impressions of the day:

- suitability of venue;
- morning tea/refreshments;
- expertise of facilitator;
- structure of the workshop;
- content delivered in the workshop;
- clarity of objectives of the workshop;
- outcomes achieved from the workshop;
- time allowed to complete the workshop;
- resources provided during the workshop;
- clarity of follow-up process after workshop.

The results of the 2006 questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive and consequently, the same structure was employed in 2007. The analysis of the questionnaires indicated that the training workshop was a useful forum for establishing responsibilities and developing shared understandings for research. Most respondents rated the critical areas of the workshop structure, facilitator, content, clarity of objectives and outcomes achieved as being either excellent or good. Minor concerns were expressed about the venue and the morning tea.

## **General comments supporting the questionnaire**

The questionnaires were anonymous and participants had the opportunity to make general comments about the training workshop at the end of the document. These comments included:

r.1 I enjoyed the day. The entire content was relevant – resources were appreciated and assisted in understanding the presentation and aided note taking. The booklet was great. Time to speak with the mentee was adequate and structured so that we had something to discuss and organise – that was a good strategy to engage us in meaningful conversation. I am looking forward to meeting the mentees again. I feel that two is plenty enough. I'm slightly nervous and apprehensive, but only due to expectations.

r.2 It (GMP) is supportive.

r.3 One on one would be better for establishing rapport.

r.4 Overall very effective – I certainly came away with a sense of purpose and commitment. We are addressing the isolation factor that definitely contributes to the loss of direction and a sense of loneliness.

r.5 I would like to discuss and hear some strategies to help motivate year 12's to work independently and in a more self-driven manner. I would like to hear the thoughts of all the mentors on the questions and concerns presented by the new teachers (such as answering on topics they have useful ideas and solutions for) in a panel formation.

r.6 I would have liked some discussion surrounding the Beginning-teacher concerns expressed at the workshop. Raising the concerns without discussing solutions or ideas simply made me a little more anxious than before they were mentioned.

r.7 I could have done with a toilet break and possibly a 10 minute coffee break.

r.8 I found it a stimulating and worthwhile experience. I learnt some skills and strategies – it was inspiring and motivating.

**TABLE FOUR: ANALYSIS OF INITIAL TRAINING WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE**

<b>INDICATOR KEY: respondent one = r.1, respondent two = r.2, etc</b>						
	5	4	3	2	1	<b>Supporting comment - 5 (excellent) 4 (good) 3 (sound) 2 (fair) 1 (poor)</b>
Suitability of venue	r.4 r.5 r.7	r.1 r.2 r.3 r.8	r.6			r.1 wonderful; r.3 size and type of meeting room was not conducive to forming/developing relationships; r.4 no problems: visual arts area which is their environment;
Morning Tea/Refreshments r.6 – no response	r.4	r.7 r.8	r.2 r.5	r.1 r.3		r.1 thanks for the coffee; r.3 polystyrene cups make everything taste mediocre. r.4 a simple activity – no troubles; r.5 I don't remember seeing any;
Expertise of Facilitator	r.2 r.3 r.4 r.5 r.6 r.7 r.8	r.1				r.1 very well received; r.3 very pleasant manner and related well to the participants; r.4 I thought the info was great – set me on task;
Structure of the workshop	r.4 r.8	r.1 r.2 r.3 r.5 r.6 r.7				r.1 there was a long wait for mentors over lunch whilst the mentees were meeting; r.3 the afternoon session needed more structure – perhaps the concerns as listed in your letter could have been addressed with group; r.4 good ice breakers; r.5 possibly could it be structured less formally?;
Content delivered in the workshop	r.3 r.4 r.7 r.8	r.1 r.2 r.5 r.6				r.1 the presented material – relevant/interesting; r.3 the material presented from the 'creating effective mentoring partnerships' was very good; r.4 I came away with purpose and direction;
Clarity of objectives of the workshop	r.4 r.7 r.8	r.1 r.2 r.5	r.6	r.3		r.1 understanding my role would rate at 4.5 or 5; r.3 I'm not sure if it was to meet the mentees or inform us of the role of the mentor. The documentation states 'training workshop'; r.4 very good;
Outcomes achieved from the workshop	r.4 r.7 r.8	r.1 r.2 r.5 r.6	r.3			r.1 requiring that everyone be committed to a first meeting with time and date was an excellent strategy; r.4 great. I was made aware of my considerable background, a sense of purpose and the need to support our new colleagues;
Time allowed to complete the workshop	r.3 r.4 r.7	r.2 r.5 r.6 r.8	r.1			r.1 half a day may have been just as adequate and we waited around at lunch; r.2 fine – it worked well all round; r.4 rushed but effective;
Resources provided during the workshop	r.3 r.4 r.7 r.8	r.1 r.2 r.5 r.6				r.1 good and appreciated; r.4 good – personal;
Clarity of follow-up process after workshop	r.3 r.7 r.8	r.1 r.2 r.5	r.6			r.1 expectations were covered. Follow up is vital; r.4 there wasn't so much a clear purpose – but a need to develop and expand a simple needs-based association with others; r.6 I am happy to be a part of this project.

## **INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS**

With the consent of research participants, an audiocassette was used to record and store interview responses. Participants were assured that, in the event that they elected to withdraw from the inquiry process, the tape/s would be returned to them. To further protect the identity of the participants the names of both individuals and the schools at which they worked were changed. Only the descriptions of events and places remain the same. This proved to be especially important as the year progressed, because some of the meetings became quite cathartic - typified by 'venting' or 'letting off steam'.

A number of the beginning-teachers made a point of checking on several occasions that their identity would remain anonymous. The initial interview structure was typified by funnel questions. Burns (1994) employed two types of open-ended interview questions in a study of secondary arts teachers' and found funnel questions to be useful research tools. He noted "funnel questions gradually guide the direction of the interview by commencing with broad general questions and focusing progressively onto the topic with more specific questions" (p. 28).

### **Mentor-teachers**

A written initial interview schedule comprising funnel questions was prepared. This ensured a consistent approach to mentors and enables replication of the study. Several key areas were addressed, including:

- descriptive information about the mentor;
- mentors' perceptions of the importance of the arts outcomes (CAI, ASP, AIS and ARS) within visual education and visuacy programs;
- recurrent challenges in teaching CAI, ASP, AIS and ARS;
- solutions generated;
- success of methods, strategies and techniques in the teaching of CAI, ASP, AIS and ARS;
- mentors' perceptions of the degree to which secondary students accept the validity of CAI, ASP, AIS and ARS in their visual arts programs;
- narratives of their previous experience with mentoring (as either provider or receiver of mentoring)
- mentors' perceptions of the role they might play in facilitating beginning-teachers' success in visual literacy education.

The interview schedule was formatted under the categories of:

- personal information;
- background questions;
- clarification of terms;
- general philosophical questions;
- teaching practice;
- mentor contributions;
- final commentary.

### **Beginning-teachers**

Similarly, beginning-teachers were interviewed at the commencement of the research period and funnel questions were used to elicit:

- descriptive information about the beginning-teacher;
- perceptions of the importance of CAI, ASP, AIS and ARS in visual arts programs;
- perceptions of the degree to which secondary students understand the importance of CAI, ASP, AIS and ARS;
- perception of what it is that constitutes 'success' in CAI, ASP, AIS and ARS;
- narratives describing previous experiences with mentoring;
- perceptions of the role their assigned mentor might play in facilitating success in visual literacy education.

The interview schedule of approximately 30 questions was similarly formatted under the categories of:

- personal information;
- background questions;
- clarification of terms;
- general philosophical questions;
- teaching practice and pedagogy;
- mentor contributions and support;
- final commentary.



**FIGURE TWO: EXTRACT FROM INITIAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**Self-assessment of pedagogical knowledge/expertise in respect of AIS/ARS**

- 12 Could you please give an overview of your teaching strategies portfolio?
- 13 Could you please give an overview of your teaching style in respect of classroom/behaviour management?
- 14 How useful do you consider your under graduate training to have been in providing you with specialist content knowledge for AIS and ARS?
- 15 How would you measure success in the teaching of AIS or ARS?
- 16 What strategies might you employ in the event that you encountered difficulty in successfully teaching AIS/ARS?
- 17 Are there any resources that you consider critical to the successful teaching of AIS/ARS?

**MENTORING MEETINGS**

Following the initial interview, a number of mentoring meetings occurred at times and places that suited the participants. The meetings occurred most frequently at weekends and in informal environments such as cafés that created a relaxed atmosphere for discussion. I was invited to ‘sit in’ on the meetings and observe/record interactions through field notes in my researcher’s journal. The structure of meetings was reflexive to the specific experience of mentor-partnerships, that is, they took the form of informal conversations about the beginning-teachers’ experiences. This allowed the mentor and the buddy to assist in the devising of solutions for the problems that arose.

My purpose at the meetings was to act as a catalyst for discussion, to facilitate everyone feeling at ease and to record the themes and types of questions discussed. During the meetings I periodically redirected conversation to elicit information, experiences and observations about the role mentors play in ameliorating negative experiences confronting beginning-teachers. As the meetings progressed, questions relating to the impact the mentors had were added to the enquiry categories and these were used to build a research history and profile for each mentoring partnership group:

- pedagogical challenges arising for beginning-teachers in the teaching of AIS and ARS;
- pedagogical challenges arising for beginning-teachers in the teaching of CAI and ASP;
- strategies employed to facilitate beginning-teachers’ expertise in AIS and ARS teaching;
- strategies employed to facilitate beginning-teachers’ expertise in CAI and ASP teaching;

- solutions devised to meet visual literacy challenges identified by beginning-teachers;
- other support offered to beginning-teachers (including access to programs, behaviour management support etc);
- experiences particular to the partnership.

Over time, the style of interaction during the café meetings resembled a gathering of friends who chatted amiably about a shared area of interest. These conversations became the glue that secured the relationships of the participants. Personal and professional stories ebbed and flowed into a rich tapestry of the first year of life as a beginning-teacher. Between meetings, the mentors responded to their assigned beginning-teachers' enquiries about both visual arts making and visual arts interpretation and visual literacy education. These challenges largely related to the four pivotal professional knowledge outcome areas of visual arts ideas; arts skills and processes; arts responses; and arts in society. Support encompassed:

- help with construction of learning programs;
- lesson preparation;
- identification of suppliers of materials;
- suggestions for useful artist interrelationships for projects;
- strategies for engaging students with artworks.

This latter contribution (strategies for engaging students with artworks) extended beyond traditional lecture-style presentation of materials and included games, image analyses, collaborative investigations and other materials); provision of worksheet and inquiry templates and any other advice or direction the beginning-teachers needed. Some participants recorded these interactions at meetings in their professional journal along with anecdotal records of classroom events and cases. This became an important tool in preserving the substance of daily experiences for later conversations with their mentor. Other participants preferred not to use and journal and simply talked about their experiences over coffee. In both instances the mentees received affirmation, reassurance, support and feedback from their colleagues and new friends.

### **Engagement with beginning-teachers and mentor-teachers**

I met the participants both informally over coffee and more formally at ECU for their interviews. These taped oral interviews allowed me an insight into the personal histories of the beginning-teachers and mentors. Prolonged engagement resulted in the development of a collegial relationship between the participants and myself that was both open and founded on trust. A number of the beginning-teachers appeared to view me as a 'critical friend' who acted as a nexus between their recent university study-life and their new post university working-life. The tone of all interactions between the beginning-teachers and myself was extremely positive

and I formed the overwhelming impression that they were 'pleased to hear from me' when I contacted them. Many of the beginning-teachers commented that they appreciated the connection to the university and believed the connection fulfilled the duty of care the university had to them. From time to time the beginning-teachers spoke about their families, partners, friends and lives beyond teaching and the tone of our interactions took on the quality of genuine friendship. There were ethical implications associated with this trust/friendship characteristic and I was mindful of my professional responsibility to participants at all times.

Despite tentative and hesitant beginnings the café meetings quickly evolved into vibrant social gatherings punctuated by animated stories, shared exclamations of frustration, attentive discussion, robust laughter and sighs of relief about the complex processes of visual education. The very act of sharing their personal stories and receiving support from colleagues and friends seemed to invigorate the participants and the confirmation from mentors that they were not alone and were in fact quite typical of beginning-teachers everywhere appeared to sustain many of the graduates through the inevitable stresses which comprise the landscape of the first year of teaching. The old adage that 'a problem shared is a problem halved' seemed to be at play and the beginning-teachers unanimously endorsed the experience as being invaluable in managing the stresses they encountered during the first year.

### **Peer debriefing**

I met regularly with my principal supervisor and my two associate supervisors throughout the data collection period and took account of the advice and feedback they offered on the direction of the research. My principal supervisor offered guidance about the direction of the research and assisted in the interrogation of raw data and distillation of emergent themes, often suggesting possible implications of the discourse. Most importantly, he acted as a sounding board for my ideas and skilfully played devil's advocate to my suppositions. My associate supervisors were particularly helpful in ensuring internal consistency in the methodological and analytical processes applied to the data gathered. I also intermittently chatted with a music educator and fellow Ph D researcher colleague at ECU, who acted as my critical friend. Our exchanges were both collegial and affirming. These conversations became reciprocal forums for sharing ideas and refining questions prior to meeting with our joint supervisors. Interestingly it is precisely this model of 'a buddy/critical friend' which underpinned the cases within the GMP. I was appreciative of the opportunity to test the model for myself as the research unfolded.

### **Member checking**

At regular intervals throughout the first year I provided excerpts from my 'write-up' of the meetings to the participants and asked them to review the descriptions for accuracy and trustworthiness. Any aspects of the 'impression recordings' from my researcher's journal that

seemed at odds with participants' perceptions or views were interrogated, discussed and excluded where the member requested that this occur. The intent of the process was to strengthen the credibility of the data by ensuring that the source endorsed the accuracy of the material. This process worked well and was repeated in the second year of data collection. The interviews with participants provided opportunities to discuss related issues and collaboratively develop conclusions about the meaning of the data and the value of the mentoring process.

## **REFLECTIVE JOURNALS**

Teachers increasingly use reflective journals in critical self-evaluation and reflective practice. The DET released the 'Reflective Teacher' package in 2003 as an offshoot of the 'Quality Teacher Program' and developed a two-day professional development workshop to support teaching staff engaged in Action Learning. ECU became the training provider for DET and delivered the two-day workshop on behalf of the Department in 2004. The Department's Reflective Teacher Package outlines a model of school-based research where participants are engaged in Action Learning processes. Action Learning like Action Research requires the researcher to be a participant in the research, however, in Action Learning the focus of enquiry is directed entirely toward improving one's teaching practice through critical self-evaluation. Questions relating to professional practice and inherent strengths/weaknesses are explored through reflective writing and discussion with colleagues and peers. Reflective journals have been employed in the GMP.

The reflective journal is a particularly valuable tool in the research process, because the document becomes a record of the thoughts, experiences and reflections of participants at the time the events are actually occurring, that is, in the classroom context. The Australian Scholarship in Teaching Project (ASTP - a joint initiative of four Australian Universities) recently explored the process of improving pedagogy and professional practice through research, reflection, discussion and innovation. The importance of reflective writing in the action learning process was a key component of the mission statement posted on the project website and particular attention was paid to the value of maintaining a reflective journal. The website stated:

Reflective writing enables the documentation of experiences, thoughts, questions, ideas and conclusions that signpost our learning journey. A scholarly approach to teaching requires critical inquiry into practice and into learning; change and improvement result after reflection, planning and action. Keeping a journal develops this as part of our every day practice. Scholarly teaching involves an appreciation of the teaching and learning process and the ability to intervene purposefully and positively in the learning experience.

Reflective writing provides an opportunity for us to think critically about what we do and why. It provides:

- a record of events and results and our reaction to them;
- data on which to base reflective discussion;
- opportunity for us to challenge ourselves and what we do;
- impetus to take action that is informed and planned;
- the means to develop a personal philosophy of teaching; an opportunity to view our teaching objectively – not as personal inadequacy;
- an enrichment to our classroom because we are prepared to innovate;
- increased confidence through increased insight;
- basic documentation to support future entries in our teaching portfolio and for job applications

(<http://www.clt.uts.edu.au/Scholarship/Reflective.journal.htm>)

The use of a reflective journal needs to be structured in order to avoid the decline of the document into a mere collection of descriptions or reports of events. The reflective component of a journal generally derives from a clearly defined process of description, analysis and evaluation of events and incidents. Such reflection ultimately allows the experienced practitioner (in the case of the ASTP project), or beginning-teacher in the GMP research, to subsequently plan to improve pedagogy.

### **5-Rs Reflective Writing Scale**

Bain and Ballantyne (2002) developed a framework of critical self-reflection to improve professional practice through reflective writing. The 5-Rs Reflective Writing Scale derived from a three-year research project concerned with ways to enhance student-teachers' reflective writing and thinking. Initially, the framework had been developed to facilitate reflective writing in student teacher journals. Over time the framework expanded to incorporate two other outcomes, that of: helping student teachers understand what was involved in serious reflection; and identifying ways in which student teachers could assess their own journal writing' (p. 12).

The framework articulated by Bain & Ballantyne comprised a five-tier structure across levels of reflection of increasing complexity. The levels included:

- reporting: a descriptive account of a situation, incident or issue;
- responding: an emotional or personal response to the situation, incident, or issue;
- relating: drawing a relationship between current personal or theoretical understandings and the situation incident or issue;
- reasoning: an exploration, interrogation or explanation of the situation, incident or issue;

- reconstructing: drawing a conclusion and developing a future action plan based upon a reasoned understanding of the situation, incident or issue.

According to Bain & Ballantyne (2002), key findings deriving from the research project which led to the development of the 5-Rs reflective writing scale included:

- the reality that when they are not assisted or instructed beforehand, student-teachers produce journal entries that vary widely in scope and depth, ranging from simple descriptions of events to carefully reasoned reconstructions of their teaching approaches and future intentions. By far the most common entries were simple descriptions which fell short of the potential for professional growth that advanced reflection offers;
- most student-teachers are unlikely to improve the level of their reflective writing unaided because they need assistance;
- reflective writing can be assisted substantially with the use of the 5-Rs self analysis scale;
- feedback from an experienced mentor also can improve reflective writing (p.12).

It was hoped that discussions between mentors and beginning-teachers in the GMP would be informed by reflections in the journals. It was envisaged that some writing would inevitably occur in the classroom as events and incidents occurred whilst other writing might be delayed, occurring at a later time (at home) as participants reflected upon the events of the day.

Beginning-teachers were encouraged to begin journal entries in the classroom, where possible, reporting events and creating an accurate record or sequence of events for further reflection.

According to Bain and Ballentine (2002) this type of in-situ recording is extremely valuable, because the immediacy of the experience is preserved. This allows a more authentic examination of events at a later time. In the GMP beginning-teachers were asked to focus on stories that related to the experience of the mentoring partnerships. The critical aspects of the reflective journals were identified as being:

- chronological events (dates, times, locations and details);
- pedagogical challenges;
- strategies implemented to counter challenges;
- stories about students;
- stories about colleagues and the school environment;
- discussions with mentors;
- mentor suggestions/guidance
- discussions with colleagues;
- resources employed;

- professional agencies enlisted;
- anecdotal observations;
- thoughts, feelings and observations.

Participants were asked to adopt a critical incident model and to write in the reflective journal when significant events were deemed to have occurred:

Case studies of critical incidents provide a holistic means of describing and interpreting significant phenomena in context...they tend to mark significant turning points or changes in a person or in some social phenomenon. Critical incidents are not characterised as being 'critical' due to any drama or sensationalism attached to them. Rather, their criticality is based on the justification, significance or meaning given to them by participants. While incidents happen, critical incidents are produced by the way we view a given situation, hence, a critical incident is an individual 'interpretation of the significance of an event' (Howitt, 2004, p. 2).

Howitt (2004) observed that critical incident vignettes need to incorporate "enough local detail to provide authenticity and enough structure to identify the critical incident". She further reflected that each vignette is then a constructed narrative account, based on actual events and expressed through the voice of the participant. The value of the vignette was further underscored by reference to the work of Eisner (1994) who maintained:

... these accounts are not intended to be mirrors to reality, but rather expressive reconstitutions of the experiences from which they originated. Both 'artistic reconstruction' and 'distillation' are employed to capture the action and interactions in a vivid and life-like manner (p. 4).

All participants in the research were provided with a professional learning journal during the initial training workshop and the facilitator spent some time discussing the use of the journal. Mentors were explicitly asked to use the journal as a place to record details of contacts with their beginning-teachers and any advice they provided to them. Beginning-teachers were explicitly asked to use the journal as a place to record events that occurred in the classroom which were of concern and about which they felt their mentor's advice or guidance might be needed. The training workshop facilitator recommended the reflective writing model (5-Rs) as a useful approach to recording events, thoughts, ideas and concerns for later discussion. A synopsis of the model was included at the front of the journal.

### **Initial responses to the professional learning journal**

Beginning-teacher participants were asked at the training workshops for their initial reactions and impressions about the importance the journal might play during the research. Most

expressed the view that the journal would be a useful way of keeping track of their experiences and concerns and that this would prompt them to raise these issues later with their mentors. One or two raised the issue of time and wondered whether they would actually find time to maintain the journal whilst they were navigating the demands of a new job. A number of mentors said that whilst they did not doubt the journal would be useful for the beginning-teachers, they believed that they would be unlikely to find time to complete it. They consider that this was so, given their hectic teaching schedules and other responsibilities. The facilitator conceded that time factors might be problematic for some participants, however, she recommended that everyone at least try to maintain the journal for at least, the beginning of the research period.

In fact, only two research participants (Mary 2006 and M -Tom 2007) maintained their journals. Some of the remaining participants said that though they had intended to do so, they simply had not had time. Others confided that they had lost their journals and no longer knew its whereabouts. One participant said she had not bothered as she felt it was a waste of her time. The failure of the participants to keep a journal (despite my occasional reminders and encouragement to do so) raises serious questions about the value of the instrument in the mentoring process, despite the findings of other researchers including Bain & Ballentine (2002).

### **REFLECTIVE END-OF-YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE**

At the completion of the research period beginning-teacher participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about the impact mentoring had upon the first year of teaching. The data was collected/analysed using mixed methodology and the questionnaire was formatted under the categories of:

- adequacy of pre-service training;
- current philosophic framework in respect of visual literacy education;
- the school experience during the first year of teaching;
- mentoring partnership experiences;
- reflections.

The questionnaire comprised questions requiring a fixed response. Respondents were asked to rate each of the statements against key descriptors by placing an 'x' in the appropriate box alongside the statement. Space was provided for comments and examples to support the ratings.



**FIGURE THREE: EXTRACT FROM REFLECTION REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Key: 5=Always true 4=often true 3=sometimes true 2=rarely true 1=never true**

<b>The AEA/WA Mentoring Experience</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1</b>	The AEA/WA mentoring experience was a valuable support during my first year of teaching.					
<b>2</b>	The AEA/WA mentoring experience provided tangible solutions to problems I encountered in teaching including AIS/ARS.					
<b>3</b>	The mentoring partnership lived up to the expectations I had at the outset of the research.					
<b>4</b>	The mentor-teacher was happy to answer any questions I had and made me feel that contact initiated by me was appropriate.					
<b>5</b>	The mentor-teacher inspired me to experiment with my AIS/ARS repertoire and to take calculated risks in the delivery AIS/ARS.					
<b>6</b>	My teaching improved as a result of the mentoring experience.					

**EMAIL COMMUNICATION**

Where groups had elected not to meet regularly, or in cases where the groups appeared to disintegrate and meetings ceased before the end of the research period, I encouraged the participants to keep in touch with one another and with myself through email and telephone communication. In the case of one 2007 group (M - Janine, Chloe and Trish) this became the primary source of interaction and data collection. Copies of the email communication were collected from participants and verbatim excerpts have been reproduced in the vignettes. Emails, vignettes arising from meetings, interviews, questionnaires and journals became the primary source material against which the original research questions were reconciled. This reconciliation is undertaken in the next chapter at the end of each participant’s ‘story’.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### RECIPROCAL MENTORING

#### An unexpected dimension of the research

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##### **Introduction**

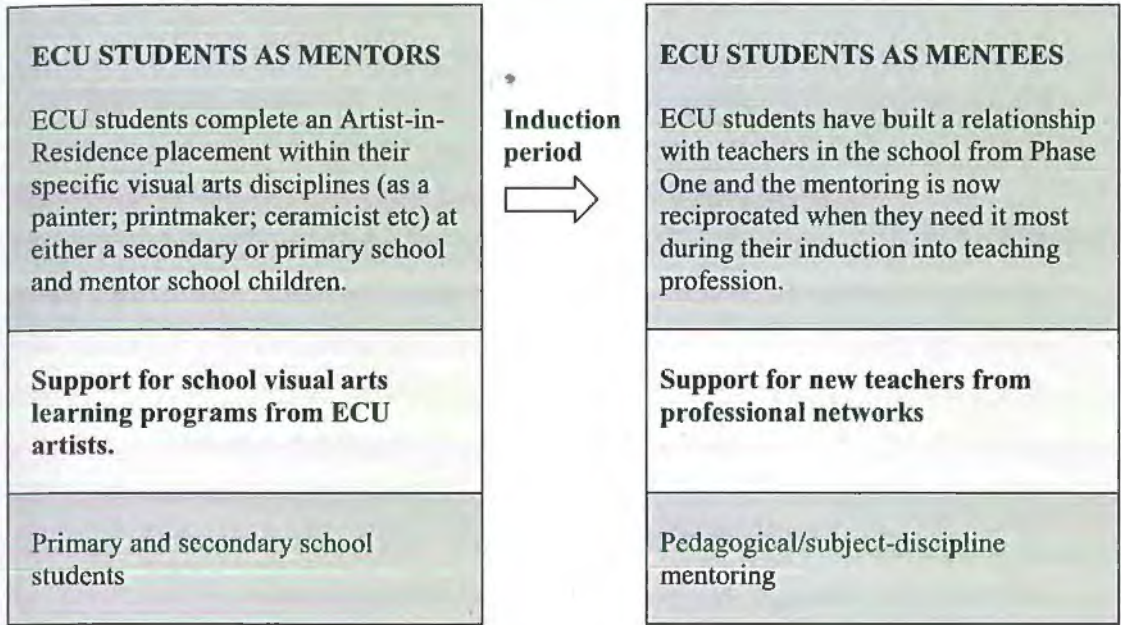
The GMP spanned a two-year research period (2006-2007) through an interconnected two-phase structure and gave rise to an unexpected and innovative dimension that I have termed 'reciprocal mentoring'. The reciprocal mentoring initiative continued after the formal research period ended and in 2008 during the period when the research data was being analysed and written up. Importantly, the reciprocal mentoring Artist-in-Residence project appears to provide a solution to one of the key concerns arising from the research: namely how and where an ongoing supply of mentors might be sourced for future ECU beginning-teachers after the conclusion of the research.

##### **RECIPROCAL MENTORING: ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE (AiR)**

The reciprocal mentoring initiative has arisen from the larger research that sought to investigate the merits of mentoring for Graduate Diploma students in the period following graduation. The program extended ECU community engagement and enhanced the teaching and learning processes that operated within the Graduate Diploma. The initiative addressed the key issue of supply of mentors for graduates, because it offered an incentive (access to a highly skilled AiR at no cost to the school) in exchange for school-based teachers 'signing-on' to mentor a beginning-teacher on more than one occasion. There was an implicit understanding in the program that a school-based teacher who had accessed an ECU pre-service teacher as an AiR would in turn mentor that student after they graduated as a beginning-teacher. The reciprocal mentoring process involved:

- ECU students mentoring high school or primary school students in their major studio area (painting; printmaking; textiles; ceramics). Over time the program expanded from a focus purely on the secondary school to one that now encompasses both primary and secondary schools.
- ECU students receiving mentoring from practising teachers during their course of study at university.
- ECU graduates receiving mentoring from practising teachers and ECU staff during the first year of teaching which is the induction period into the profession.

**DIAGRAM TWO: THE RECIPROCAL MENTORING FRAMEWORK**



**PHASE ONE: The post-graduate year**

**PHASE TWO: The first year**

**AIMS OF RECIPROCAL MENTORING**

The Artist-in-Residence reciprocal mentoring project has four broad aims:

1. Improve the teaching and learning experiences for students completing a Graduate Diploma at ECU:
  - the program seeks to reinforce and extend subject-discipline content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge by allowing the student to observe the operation of a visual arts department over an extended period;
  - the program aims to facilitate the development of professional relationships and networks whilst students are still studying at the University, with the hope that these contacts will further reinforce material covered at the University.
2. Reframe and reposition ECU's duty of care for visual arts education graduates:
  - reframed from a duty of care to provide quality teaching and learning only within course units, to one which encompasses holistic collegial learning experiences (facilitated by the University). Such reframing repositions the student as a valuable skilled visual arts practitioner who has much to offer the school;
  - repositioned from one which ends at the point of graduation, to a place well after induction into the profession (at least a year after graduation).
3. Enhance the University's standing with schools/community stakeholders through a partnership approach to producing quality beginning-teachers.

4. Respond to recent calls for improved beginning-teacher induction as cited in the 2007 'Top of the Class' report produced by the House of Representatives inquiry into teacher training and induction through the creation of an innovative and distinctive reciprocal mentoring structure.

### **THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND SCALE OF THE PROGRAM**

The reciprocal mentoring initiative operated during the period 2006-2008 and has evolved and grown over that time. The project initially involved only a few ECU students being matched to local secondary schools/teachers in a fairly informal manner. It has now grown into a highly refined yet flexible program. In 2008 the participants included:

- 20 schools (including a number of primary schools);
- 20 school-based mentors;
- several industry organisations and associated mentors;
- 30 ECU final year students (both Graduate Diploma and double degree students);
- AEA/WA;
- ECU staff.

### **THE MERITS OF THE PROGRAM**

The program appears to be a highly distinctive initiative which positively impacts a number of stakeholders through benefits to:

- ECU students whose subject-discipline and pedagogical content knowledge covered in ECU units is reinforced and refined through an extended placement in one school;
- school-based (primary and secondary) students/teachers who have access to a highly skilled ECU Artist-in-Residence who is a valuable resource;
- ECU students who have the opportunity to experience the kudos associated with being an Artist-in-Residence (compared with that of being a practicum student which may enjoy less status);
- ECU through the extension of our commitment to community engagement through partnership arrangements;
- recent ECU graduates who derive ongoing support after graduation and throughout the period of their induction into the profession (the first year of teaching).

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM**

The program has grown dramatically in scale and impact over two years. Its character and purpose has developed from a quite simple intent to improve student learning and experience

into a distinctive, coherent and sophisticated model of professional learning that seeks to radically improve the retention and effectiveness of visual arts education teaching graduates.

## **2006**

A small number of the then current Graduate Diploma students worked in partnership with visual arts staff at a local Government high school in the multi-arts program as mentors for secondary students (years 8-11). M - Janine (one of the mentors in the larger research) was based at the school and participated in both projects. It was in fact her suggestion that a reciprocal mentoring model might address the issue of an ongoing supply of mentors for the larger research program. The program was entirely voluntary for ECU students, free from assessment obligations and operated independently of the professional practicum completed at other schools that same year. The participants had all completed a three-year visual arts degree and were skilled artists in a number of disciplines (painting, printmaking, textiles, ceramics, sculpture, or graphic design). The ECU students were advised that their role in the program would be to mentor secondary school students and that, wherever possible, this should occur within the context of their major area of expertise. In total, nine ECU Graduate Diploma students participated in the 2006 program. On the basis of feedback received from participants (end of year questionnaire) the experience appeared to be very beneficial for both the Graduate Diploma students involved and the secondary students to whom they offered their Artist-in-Residence expertise. The project proved an invaluable adjunct to the quality of teaching and learning during the ECU students' course completion and was a worthwhile addition to the curriculum vitae of our 2006 graduates. In late 2006 the program was promoted extensively and 19 schools/institutions signed on to take an ECU student in 2007.

## **2007**

In 2007, the aims of the program were further refined and more clearly targeted:

- reinforcement of the teaching and learning experience within ECU units;
- improved understandings of the Artist-in-Residence role;
- enhanced supports for the previous year's graduates as they commenced their induction into the teaching profession;
- liaison with partner organisations and schools through the investment of more time in the management of the program.

After graduating, the 2006 ECU participants were mentored by staff at school in which they had worked as an Artist-in-Residence. Thus, the students acted as mentors for secondary students whilst at ECU and then became recipients of mentoring as beginning-teachers, creating a culture of reciprocity in mentoring.

### **Mentor training workshop**

In response to international findings (Yeomans & Sampson 1994) which suggest that mentoring relationships are most productive when the mentors are trained for the role, together with the success of the training day in the larger research project, ECU provided a one-day training workshop which sought to ensure shared understanding of the mentoring process by participants.

### **The next group of Artists-in-Residence**

Simultaneously, the then-current cohort of 2007 Graduate Diploma students were inducted into the program. They were placed at a variety of schools as Artists-in-Residence. In response to a greater demand for Artists-in-Residence than could be met from the available Graduate Diploma students alone, some graduating 4<sup>th</sup> year Bachelor of Education (double degree) students were also included in the program, resulting in 50 students being placed at 20 schools. The length of placements varied from a few weeks to spanning the entire year.

### **End of year questionnaire**

Toward the end of 2007 a questionnaire was distributed to all participants to gather their impressions of the program's strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. Common concerns related to the need to more clearly define the role of the Artist-in-Residence. In response, a clearly defined role statement was developed for the 2008 program.

### **2008**

In 2008 20 schools and 30 ECU students signed on to participate in the program.

### **DISTINCTIVENESS, COHERENCE AND CLARITY OF PURPOSE**

Whilst there are a number of worthwhile mentoring programs that operate within the Schools of Education at a range of Australian universities, no evidence of any program specifically tailored for a visual arts education context has emerged. The 'reciprocal mentoring' partnership model which characterises this program encompasses:

- the industry professional association (AEA/WA);
- the university (ECU);
- school-based mentors;
- ECU students/graduates/staff.

The partnership approach to visual arts education within the Graduate Diploma distinguishes this program as unique within the Australian context. Furthermore, whilst partnership mentoring programs do operate for beginning-teachers within international spheres, no evidence of reciprocal mentoring has emerged in any context (either international or national).

## **THE INNOVATION**

Reciprocal mentoring is an innovative adjunct to quality teacher preparation and induction that has the potential to significantly strengthen engagement with community partners and improve the University's community profile.

### **Duties that may fall within the AiR role statement**

Where possible, the AiR's major studio discipline should be the context and focus for the work they complete in the school and (as an example) might entail:

- a painter working on their own visual arts practice whilst school students observe and learn specific skills, techniques and processes. Other studio disciplines might include ceramics, printmaking, textiles, sculpture, graphic design, drawing etc;
- delivering talks to groups of students/teachers about the work they are completing;
- delivering talks to groups about the work of other contemporary artists;
- mentoring students in the area of visual literacy (especially appreciation of the arts in society and arts responses);
- studio skills support (teaching specific techniques in ceramics; mosaics; painting; printmaking; sculpture; textiles; photography; graphic design/media);
- visual inquiry support (drawing skills; use of media; annotation techniques);
- after-school visual arts classes/clubs perhaps involving a mixed group of staff and students from the school learning together;
- exhibition (curatorial) support for the end-of-year school exhibition;
- art camps/drawing camps/painting camps;
- set design and production for school play;
- murals in the school environment.

### **Duties that may fall outside the AiR placement**

The AiR placement is not intended to be simply another version of the professional practicum that pre-service teachers complete during their double degree or Graduate Diploma education. Rather, the purpose of the placement is to allow the ECU artist (who typically has one or two specialist areas of expertise) to share this knowledge with school students and teachers.

Accordingly, the placement would generally not include tasks such as:

- assisting the school visual arts technician with their duties (such as cleaning store rooms, preparing materials or tidying visual arts rooms);
- behaviour management responsibilities;
- whole class teaching/supervision responsibilities (the mentor-teacher retains this role and the AiR works within this support structure);
- marking of students' work produced within the program;

- reporting on student progress.

Additionally, other structures normally associated with the professional practicum do not apply and there are no requirements for:

- lesson plans;
- curriculum planners;
- rubrics;
- resource files;
- self evaluations;
- teacher evaluations;
- reports.

### **OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

All AiR pre-service teachers involved in the program were covered by the usual practicum insurance provisions and had 'police clearance' and 'working with children' clearance. The duration/organisation of the majority AiR placements encompassed:

- typically one-to-two terms' duration (some ran for an entire year in 2006/7);
- once a week for between one and three hours (to be negotiated);
- the AiR placements were suspended during the professional practicum period.

### **Phases of the program**

The program operated in two phases:

**Phase One:** ECU students as mentors - Graduate Diploma students were placed in the school on a voluntary basis to enhance ECU community engagement by offering their visual arts expertise and services to teachers and students. There were observable and direct benefits to both the ECU participants and the school in the relationship which typically operated for one to two terms.

**Phase Two:** ECU students as recipients of mentoring - following graduation the ECU participants in phase one were mentored by the experienced school-based teachers with whom they had worked the previous year. The development of the mentoring relationship over two years had much to offer all stakeholders.

Throughout the phase one placements, the ECU Graduate Diploma students were both making a valued contribution as mentors to secondary students and importantly, were afforded an opportunity to observe the operation of the visual arts department as an emic-participant. The



informal nature of the placement allowed the students to acquire subject-discipline/pedagogical content knowledge that was missing from their undergraduate qualification and postgraduate learning experience. Furthermore, the relationship with school-based staff formed the foundation of their own later mentoring as beginning-teachers in 2007.

The ECU Unit Teaching Evaluation Instrument results for the Graduate Diploma students inducted into the program (Table Five) showed a steadily improving trend in 'overall satisfaction' levels among the students; at a time when little else about the curriculum units had changed. This suggested that the reciprocal mentoring program may have been a contributing factor to students' teaching and learning success.

**TABLE FIVE: UNIT TEACHING EVALUATION INSTRUMENT RESULTS**

	Unit OS	Unit OS	Unit OS		Unit OS	Unit OS	Unit OS
Unit	2005/2	2006/2	2007/2	Unit	2005/1	2006/1	2007/1
AED4109	14	65	<b>75</b>	AED4104	39	54	<b>67</b>

The improvement in UTEI overall satisfaction results have been dramatic over the period in which the program has operated and although other factors may have contributed to the results, student feedback suggests that it is reasonable to attribute much of this to reciprocal mentoring experience. The following comments typified student feedback:

Chloe: Graduate Diploma student (2006)

Twice a week, I worked with year 11 and 12 students on their visual arts Work, offering ideas and inspiration when required. Students responded well to my presence and enjoyed asking about my art. Students benefited by having an extra ear in the classroom to work through ideas and I was able to interact with upper school students, before becoming a teacher myself. I gained a clearer understanding about the way they work, what inspires them and their broad range of skills. This gave me greater confidence during my final practicum in 2006 and boosted my abilities.

Steven: Graduate Diploma student (2007)

The program gave me the opportunity to spend time in the classroom as a visual arts specialist, without the added pressure of being constantly assessed and critiqued as if on prac, a situation that allowed me to build self confidence as a beginning-teacher.

## **BREADTH OF IMPACT**

On 26<sup>th</sup> January 2007 the Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training tabled its report on the inquiry into Australian Teacher Education entitled 'Top of the Class'. One of the significant findings of the report was:

### **Beginning-teachers should be allocated a mentor (6.22):**

Beginning-teachers should be supported by an experienced teacher who would act as a guide and mentor through the induction year. In recognition of the importance of the role of the mentor, the mentor-teacher should be allocated time to observe the beginning-teacher at regular periods, to model teaching strategies, to meet with the beginning-teacher to discuss teaching approaches and matters of concern and to help identify and arrange for appropriate on-going professional development. In the committee's view, the role of mentors should be linked to their registration status. For instance, mentors could use their participation in induction programs as evidence of progress towards meeting professional standards for teaching at higher levels of accomplishment. Mentors should receive training for their mentoring role. There is the potential for employing authorities to work with teacher education providers on the development of programs to prepare mentor-teachers for the role (p. 90).

The reciprocal mentoring initiative anticipates the important findings of the committee report through:

- its emphasis upon University-school partnership approaches to induction of beginning-teachers;
- facilitation and funding of formal training for mentors;
- tacit acknowledgement of the value of mentors in quality induction processes;
- its linkage to research and ongoing PhD study (publications).

## **BENEFITS TO MENTORS**

In the event that the program flourishes and should the committee's recommendation that the role be linked to registration status, the benefit to mentors over time in respect of salary and seniority could be significant. One GMP mentor (M - Janine, 2005-2007) offered the following observations about her experience in the program:

The initiative established last year where Graduate Diploma students were extended the invitation to mentor senior students was of an informal nature which allowed for flexibility and an opportunity for them to build confidence in being in the classroom and to share their expertise as artists. Other benefits included having assistance in the classroom as an aid and tutoring support. The tertiary students also bring youthful enthusiastic energy, recent training and current curriculum knowledge in mentoring the secondary students. The development of an ongoing opportunity for ECU students to mentor and be mentored over a two year period can place them in a stronger role of sharing within the profession.

## **BENEFITS TO STUDENTS**

The observable benefits to Graduate Diploma students which arise from the program include opportunities to:

- fill gaps in their subject-discipline and pedagogical content knowledge bases;
- both feel and be of service to community partners within non-assessed placements;
- develop and extend expertise in with working with children within an arts context;
- develop relationships with school-based staff that may be well disposed to reciprocally mentor them as beginning-teachers.

Nicola (double degree student 2007):

I feel that the mentoring program has much merit as it allows a student to participate in a school setting without the pressure of assessment and lesson preparation. Often our practicum experiences are so stressful and busy that you don't have the opportunity to simply step back and absorb the school environment from an observer's viewpoint. It may well have been useful to have formed this relationship early in the course as there is more time available outside of semesters to participate in volunteer activities.

## **SECONDARY BENEFITS ARISING FROM THE PROGRAM**

A number of secondary benefits appear to be likely outcomes of the program. These include:

### **Teacher Registration**

WACOT currently requires beginning-teachers to maintain a log of mentoring accessed over the first three years of provisional registration in order to qualify for ongoing teacher registration. The reciprocal mentoring program affords graduates access to mentors at a time when WACOT appears to offer only limited support in finding and securing mentors.

### **Recruitment**

The potential to recruit year 12 secondary students to visual arts education or other courses at ECU is significant and advocacy of both the arts and ECU during the placements may be a useful strategy to combat diminished student enrolment numbers. Furthermore, the relationship the University enjoys with mentor-teachers in the program creates the opportunity to recruit experienced teachers to study in a number of post graduate contexts:

My involvement as a mentor has provided me with further professional development and increase of skills through the training workshops and opening up of professional discourse and networking with other mentors, mentees and University staff in a research project. I value the role of mentoring in enhancing my own professional reputation and developing further knowledge and skills which has lead me to consider carrying out further studies at a Masters level in the future (M - Janine 2007).

### **Expansion to other learning areas**

In the event that the Reciprocal Mentoring initiative continues to enjoy success, the model may be attractive to other learning areas at ECU. Preliminary discussions with the course co-ordinators for secondary design technology education, music education and drama education suggest that similar initiatives have been considered, have been partially implemented, or are of interest to staff within the School of Education.

### **EQUITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS**

The profile for Graduate Diploma students who enrol in secondary visual arts education often encompasses:

- students who are very busy navigating the demands of both University study/life and employment responsibilities beyond the University;
- diverse family structures, including those built around single parent models with moderate/poor incomes;
- international students (four Canadian students in 2006; one Italian student in 2007);
- first-generation access to university within the 'family of origin' context – a number of Graduate Diploma students are the first member of their family to study at university.

The program addresses issues of equity, flexibility, open access, positive teaching and learning experiences and enhanced learning outcomes through the provision of a flexible, individually negotiated, no-cost program that responds to the student's personal circumstances through varied placement arrangements.

### **LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS**

Graduate Diploma students have frequently given up careers in other industries to return to university to enter the teaching profession and as a result they may struggle financially throughout the completion of the degree. The flexibility of the program allows students to make individual placement arrangements that provide them with an opportunity to participate in the project at no cost and at a time that suits their other commitments. This allows them to quickly

build professional networks that prove invaluable during the induction into the profession. Importantly, the structure is not just another add on unit. The opportunity to access a no-cost program which positively impacts their teaching and learning, ensures equity and access regardless of financial resources.

## **INDIGENOUS STUDENTS**

In 2007 two students from the Bachelor of Education (double degree) cohort that participated in the program came from indigenous backgrounds and achieved excellent outcomes from the placements. One of these students (Elizabeth) observed the following about her mentoring placement:

Regardless of the few shortcomings this program did allow for a MASSIVE opportunity of learning and making connections with my prospective fellow educators that I would otherwise never had. I have already been able to utilise the knowledge and connections of my mentor-teacher for a project outside of the program which as a beginning-teacher with limited networking and connections of my own, the support and advice offered by my mentor was extremely important.

This program permitted me to gain insight and the chance to:

- test theories in a practical context;
- gain employability confidence, with an emphasis on developing professional relationships;
- develop opportunities and range of skills and abilities;
- find out more about jobs;
- develop an awareness of the visual arts sector and how organisations work.

## **REMOTE AND RURAL CONTEXTS**

A number of visual arts education ECU graduates have been placed in rural or remote contexts following graduation and the program has been invaluable in supporting their induction into the profession. Chloe (2007 beginning-teacher) noted the essential contribution her mentor made to her first year of teaching when she was posted to a rural appointment as the only teacher of visual arts in the school:

I continued with the GMP at the beginning of this year when I accepted an visual arts teaching position. My mentor, assisted me in areas of teaching where I was not confident that eased the stress when everything seemed a little too much! Her experience in the classroom and expertise in areas where I myself was still learning made her a valuable colleague and friend to have during my induction into the world of teaching. Lisa has developed a very worthwhile and important program that has helped me to realise that there is support out there for beginning-teachers even when the workload appears to be getting too much! The continuation of mentoring for beginning-teachers is paramount, if we are to maintain the standard of teaching in our schools and keep the stress levels of beginning-teachers to an absolute minimum.

The enthusiasm with which schools have embraced the program in 2006-2008 suggests that there may be a significant market for reciprocal mentoring on an ongoing basis. The pre-service teachers have all completed a three-year visual arts degree from local universities or international contexts (or equivalent within the Bachelor of Education double degree program). Many have both impressive artists' profiles and much to offer schools as an AiR. Reciprocally, the rewarding partnership the ECU students form with their school-based mentors significantly enhances their induction experience during their first year of teaching. This partnership initiative between ECU and the participating schools/teachers constitutes an important first response by ECU to the recommendations of the House of Representatives 'Top of the Class' report on the induction of graduate teachers and extends the university's commitment to 'community engagement'.

It is worthy of note that the AiR reciprocal mentoring initiative arising from the larger research project was officially recognised as meritorious in 2008 through an ECU Vice Chancellor's award for programs that enhance post-graduate learning. A grant of \$5000 accompanied the award that will be used to pay for the training workshops over the next few years. Additionally, following receipt of the award a number of meetings occurred at ECU to explore ways in which the model might be expanded across other Graduate Diploma programs (drama; music; design technology and dance). The course co-ordinators for those areas have now signed on to participate in the program.

### **SUSTAINING THE WORK OF THE LARGER RESEARCH**

Importantly, the reciprocal mentoring initiative which arose from the larger research project appeared to address the question of why school-based mentors would be willing from year to year to continue to act as mentors for newly-graduated teachers. These questions of 'what's in it for the mentors?' and 'why should they keep giving their time free of charge?' are addressed through the reciprocity of the program. Essentially, the school-based mentors have access to a valuable resource (the highly skilled Artist-in-Residence) which is free of charge at times that suit them and which actively supports the work they are undertaking with their students. The goodwill generated by the Graduate Diploma students as they donated their time to 'their school and teacher' free of charge as an AiR has the potential to elicit a positive response from schools/teachers who appear well disposed to reciprocate during the induction period in teaching. The symbiotic nature of the program suggests that this 'reciprocal' element may be critical in sustaining the supply of mentors both within the visual arts and The Arts generally.

## CHAPTER SIX

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### ANALYSIS OF DATA

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#### **Introduction**

Prior to the formal data collection, past graduates of the University were surveyed to gather information about the challenges they had faced during their induction year. I had intended to use this information to inform GMP interviews and meetings. Regrettably, only a small number of historical questionnaires were actually returned, despite extensive attempts to procure them. The few returns were coded using a thematic approach. Any information that did not directly relate to the questions within the questionnaire was evaluated and then either eliminated or included as anecdotal examples of related issues.

#### **HISTORICAL QUESTIONNAIRES**

Themes emerging from the historical questionnaires included:

- pedagogical challenges encountered during the first year of teaching;
- solutions devised to meet pedagogical challenges;
- experiences with mentors and the role they played (or didn't play) in overcoming professional challenges;
- factors that impacted negatively upon teaching of visual arts history and criticism;
- factors that impacted negatively upon teaching of visual inquiry and studio work;
- factors that impacted positively upon teaching of visual arts history and criticism;
- factors that impacted positively upon teaching of visual inquiry and studio work;
- reflections about resources which could have been helpful in visual literacy education.

The schedule for the initial interview was refined in the light of these emergent themes.

#### **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**

The analysis of qualitative data especially in the case of interview materials, lends itself to narrative-style reporting. Burns (1993) recommended that interview transcripts initially be category-coded and filed to provide a framework by which each new interview could be judged. Burns stated that "the purpose of the coding and filing was to enable the investigator to sort and organise the information into patterns and themes" (p. 285). Ultimately, making meaning from interview materials requires that the primary questions and original propositions be used to

suggest conceptual codes. Burns stated that organisation of interview content is beneficial to the evaluation of source material:

Narratives taken verbatim from interviews should be content analysed as soon as possible. One way to analyse the data has been, where possible, to translate it into a form amendable to analysis by coding events and making counts of items allocated in content analysis. Other approaches involve making a matrix of categories and putting evidence within such categories, creating flow charts and diagrams tabulating frequencies, sorting information into chronological order. But these strategies are only preliminary data manipulations. The ultimate goal is to analyse the evidence in relation to the original propositions and to any feasible alternative interpretations (p. 322).

Within the GMP the interviews were primarily conducted with the participants at the beginning of the research year in which they were involved. These conversations were predominantly open-ended in form, with the result that some interviews took longer than others. All interviews were taped and then transcribed. The record of interview was category-coded in an effort to distil themes and most particularly, to build a profile for each participant. Critical questions about the beginning-teacher's perception of their readiness for teaching (generally) and visual literacy education (specifically) were explored. These perceptions have been included in the participant profile that prefaces each vignette.

The interview transcripts were coded initially through the elimination of information that was not directly relevant to the research topic. Subsequent coding resulted in the grouping of data into categories informed by the research questions. The specific process leading to the construction of the matrix included:

- data collection: transcribing interview audio tapes into verbatim scripts;
- data reduction: classification of narrative responses into key statements, exemplified by text samples;
- data display: of thematic categories from which a matrix was constructed; overlay of key statements into the matrix to reveal patterns and common responses;
- data synthesis: identification of emergent patterns and reconciliation with initial research questions;
- data validation: confirmation with source that conclusions were consistent with the interviewee's experience and perception.

As the year unfolded, the participant profiles that emerged from the initial interviews became critical organisers for each person's story. By way of example, Trish (a mature-age beginning-teacher 2007) who had completed her undergraduate degree overseas, indicated in her interview



that she was very worried about deficiencies in her knowledge of contemporary Australian visual arts movements. Progressively through the year I asked her to bring me up to date on the impact her mentor was having on this area of concern. As was often the case for the participants, Trish reported that her mentor (M – Janine), had been extremely helpful in assisting her to access historical and conceptual information and other useful resources that gave her greater confidence as the year unfolded. Similarly, Zack (beginning-teacher 2007) reported that he was very worried about his studio skills in several disciplines. I asked him to bring me up to date on the impact the mentor (M - Tom) had as the year progressed. Once again, the mentor made a significant difference to Zack’s sense of professional wellbeing and perception of his readiness for teaching. Accordingly, the matrix I constructed following the interviews became a critical organiser against which the impact of mentoring could be referenced and the attendant shift in the beginning-teachers’ perception of their success in visual literacy teaching could be measured.

## **FIELD NOTES**

Burns (1994) recommended that the researcher keep field notes (independently of any audio recording of interviews), where the impressions and reflections of the researcher can be noted at the time of the interview. These observations and notes allow the researcher to more accurately code, file and interpret the intent as well as the meaning of the participants’ responses at the later stage of data analysis. Miles and Huberman (1984) support a strategy of processing respondents’ comments through simplifying and coding these into patterns or themes.

The richness of “verbal responses” and the “word tapestry” is preserved and processed, according to Miles and Huberman, through an analytical cycle of simplification and reduction to thematic elements (p. 21). In the model promoted by Miles and Huberman the process of analysis, simplification and reduction of data is ongoing and cyclical throughout the research process. They suggested that the researcher is best served in qualitative research by conducting preliminary analysis during data collection and later modifying data collection methods according to the results of that process. Miles and Huberman (1984) observed that:

Analysis during data collection lets the fieldworker cycle back and forth between thinking about existing data and generating strategies for collecting new – often better quality – data; it can be a healthy corrective for built-in blind spots; and it makes analysis an on-going, lively enterprise that is linked to the energizing effects of fieldwork. ... The ideal model for data collection and analysis is one that interweaves them from the beginning. Field visits are interspersed with time for data reduction and display, for drawing conclusions ... (creating) the interactive cyclical nature of qualitative data analysis (p. 49).

Within the GMP a number of meetings occurred for groups at various times throughout the year. Following the first few group meetings, I discerned that the discussions appeared to revolve around three main domains: the socio political/curricular domain, the subject-discipline domain and pedagogical domain. Each of these became the focus for mentoring at various times throughout the remainder of the year. Following Miles and Huberman (1984) I constructed a matrix and noted the frequency which the discussions at the meeting revolved around one or more of the categories. The process of counting and noting patterns, distilling themes and deriving metaphors was very useful throughout the data-gathering period. The process proved particularly helpful during the final analysis of results and construction of propositions, themes and metaphors. Miles and Huberman observed about this process:

Counting; noting patterns and themes; seeing plausibility; clustering; making metaphors; splitting variables; subsuming particulars into the general; factoring; noting relations between variables; finding intervening variables; building a chain of evidence; and making conceptual/theoretical coherence (p. 229).

## **REFLECTIVE JOURNALS**

Few of the participants actually maintained a journal despite having been provided with one at the initial training workshop. Where journals were maintained I collected these at the conclusion of the research and adopted a similar process of coding and extracting relevant annotations. The evaluative process included:

- data collection: collection of the reflective journal where participants had recorded their impressions and perceptions through description/interpretation of critical incidents;
- data reduction: classification of critical incidents into key statements, exemplified by text samples;
- data display: reconciliation of the annotations against the thematic categories arising in the interviews and field notes;
- data synthesis: identification of emergent patterns and reconciliation with initial research questions; overlay of key statements into the matrix to reveal patterns and within the perceptions of respondents; clarification of common challenges which were often subsequently raised at the group meetings for discussion;
- data validation: confirmation with source that conclusions were consistent with the participant's experience and perception.

Where possible the reflective journals of both mentors and their linked protégés were analysed together, providing dual perspective of incidents.

## **EMAIL AND TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION**

In the case of several beginning-teachers (notably Chloe, who was posted to a rural setting) email correspondence became something of a substitute for the journal. This correspondence was similarly analysed using the coding methodology described above. Chloe felt that she simply did not have time to maintain the paper-based journal, however she proved to be quite effusive in her email contact. In Chloe's case, she emailed photographs of students' samples of work as attachments to her emails and these have occasionally been reproduced in the thesis to support her vignette.

## **REFLECTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE**

The final reflective questionnaire sought to distil participants' final evaluation of the benefits of the mentor-beginning-teacher partnership. It was hoped that the analysis would reveal the extent to which the mentors influenced the beginning-teachers' perception of the first year and specifically their success in the teaching of visual literacy skills. The questionnaire was distributed to participants as an email attachment, with similar provisions for return of the document. Participants were not required to make written commentary and simply indicated their response by placing an 'x' in the descriptor box which best reflected their perception. In some instances however, the respondent not only completed the relevant question by checking the appropriate box, but also went on to make pertinent (or otherwise) clarification of their feedback. The evaluation of electronic questionnaires followed the same coding process of data collection, reduction, display, synthesis and validation previously described.

The analysis of: 'historical questionnaires', 'interview transcripts', 'field notes', 'journals', 'email/telephone contacts' and 'reflective questionnaires' proved time-consuming but, illuminating. Progressive analysis allowed the participants' personal stories to be written and refined following each data collection process. As each vignette took shape I emailed it to the participant and asked them to read and correct any element of the story which seemed at odds with their sense of what had occurred. At the conclusion of the research period, I attempted a reconciliation of each vignette against the original research questions. Once again, I asked each respondent whether they believed that I had been able to distil an appropriate description of their individual experiences.

Once the vignettes had been written, analysed and reviewed a specific six- tiered approach was adopted to make sense of the findings. This process included:

- **metaphors:** description of three specific metaphors that appeared to encapsulate the critical understandings arising from the research and the subsequent crafting of new metaphors which mentoring might deliver;
- **preliminary responses:** preliminary answers to the research questions;
- **propositions:** synthesis of ten propositions about the impact mentoring had exerted on the experience of the beginning-teachers;
- **themes:** distillation of three emergent themes;
- **implications:** identification of ten implications arising from the research;
- **recommendations and reflections:** recommendations and reflections which are presented in the final chapter of the thesis.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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### RESULTS

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#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I present a series of vignettes arising from the experiences of the research participants throughout the mentoring process. The vignettes are literally 'little stories' that present snapshots of the first year of teaching for a small group of beginning-teachers who graduated from the University in 2006 and 2007. The vignettes are distilled from the experience of the new teachers as described by themselves and their mentors and expressed at meetings, in journals and questionnaires. Some elements of the vignettes were distilled from email and telephone correspondence. Most importantly, the stories provide a window into the thoughts and feelings of the participants as they dealt with the challenges, solutions and successes that arose in their induction period and continued until the end of the first year. The vignettes convey a sense of the personal and professional wellbeing and confidence the new teachers experienced as they enjoyed the support of the mentors throughout the first year of teaching.

#### **CONSTRUCTION OF THE VIGNETTES**

The vignettes are important because they arise predominantly from the self-perception of the beginning-teachers about the degree to which they believed they were being successful in their new profession. The degree of success appeared to be linked to feelings of wellbeing or otherwise. This in turn appeared to be a motivator for the new teachers re-affirming their commitment to the profession or, in some instances to considering leaving. At those times when the beginning-teachers felt upset and overwhelmed, they re-evaluated their suitability for the profession. The mentor was then able to offer a sympathetic ear that often dissuaded the new teacher from resigning. The mentors made suggestions for strategies and solutions to help resolve the difficulties that gave rise to negative feelings. This in turn made it possible for the beginning-teachers to re-assess their position and develop resilience.

Similarly, a sense of success in their new profession experienced by the new teachers appeared to be linked to feelings of personal and professional wellbeing. The mentors were able to reinforce this sense of success by acknowledging and affirming the new teachers' progress toward effective visual arts education practice. Much of the advice provided by the mentors targeted difficulties deriving from five domains within which teachers operate (Marland, 2007) and the three critical knowledge types upon which teachers predominantly draw (Schulman

1986). Schulman identified three knowledge types which typified the expertise and work of teachers. According to Schulman (1986), these knowledge types encompassed subject-discipline content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular content knowledge:

Subject matter content knowledge ... requires understanding the structures of the subject matter in the manner defined by scholars ... both the substantive and the syntactic structures. The substantive structures are the variety of ways in which the basic concepts and principles of the discipline are organized to incorporate its facts. The syntactic structure of a discipline is the set of ways in which truth or falsehood, validity or invalidity, are established.

Pedagogical content knowledge ... goes beyond knowledge of the subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter for teaching ... the most useful forms of representation of the ideas most regularly taught in one's subject area. ... include an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult including the conceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons.

Curricular content knowledge ... the curriculum is represented by the full range of programs designed for the teaching of particular subjects and topics at a given level, the variety of instructional materials available in relation to those programs and the set of characteristics that serve as both the indications and contraindications for the use of particular curriculum or program materials in particular circumstances (p. 10).

Marland (2007) identified five domains within which teachers operated, employing at various times some or all of the three types of knowledge described by Schulman. He described these domains as being:

- the personal-professional domain;
- the classroom domain;
- the school domain;
- the school-community domain;
- the wider-profession domain.

Marland (2007) elaborated saying:

The work of teachers is very diverse and complex. Teachers work in a number of domains, the most obvious being the classroom and the school, where most of their work is conducted. However, these are at least three other important domains of teacher work, these being the personal professional domain, the school-community domain and that of the wider profession (p. 4).

Marland (2007) noted that these five domains encompassed specific types of knowledge demands that he described as complex, challenging and interrelated:

The Personal domain: teachers have to work at facilitating their own learning and development as teachers. ... Work in this domain involves gaining information about the quality of their own teaching making regular assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses, identifying ways of better performing their duties, setting themselves goals for improvement, specifying performance levels they want to attain and planning activities and programs that will assist them to achieve their professional growth goals.

The Classroom domain: the work of teachers covers the design and creation of learning environments, lesson planning, selection and preparation of learning resources, acquiring information about students and their backgrounds, adjusting learning strategies to suit the class, making use of computer technology, building relationships and counselling students, instruction, student assessment and evaluation of teaching/learning.

The School domain: outside the classroom, but within the domain of the school ... work in this domain involves engaging with colleagues, serving on school committees, developing school policy and regulations, interpreting and developing curriculum plans and participating in staff development activities.

School-Community domain: the work of teachers involves reporting to parents, liaising with the community on project of mutual educational interest and providing leadership in the community on education matters.

Wider Profession domain: teachers are expected to be involved in groups and committees, such as subject associations and professional bodies that promote the welfare of the profession (pp. 8-9).

The vignettes underscore stories of the impact the mentors had on the beginning-teachers' personal wellbeing and professional wellbeing. They also convey the beginning-teachers' capacity to acquire and confidently utilise the three types of knowledge within the five domains, (particularly the classroom and the school domains). Without exception, the beginning-teachers who remained in the GMP research until the end of their induction year reported significant improvement in their mastery of the three knowledge types and several of the five domains which concern teachers. The vignettes that appear in this thesis are brief descriptions or snapshots of elements of the process of improvement. Each participant's experience in its entirety is attached as an appendix to the larger document.

## **ORGANISATION OF THE VIGNETTES**

Three related processes were employed in respect of the vignettes. Firstly, I have grouped the vignettes of each mentoring partnership into a bounded set of three year-long descriptions (a mentor and his or her two beginning-teachers). Some vignettes are longer than others that is a

by-product of the varying degree to which I was able to discern what was actually happening in the study. Some beginning-teachers (e.g. **Zack**) were somewhat shy or retiring and tended to say very little about their experience. In these instances, anecdotes were gleaned through active questioning rather than voluntary sharing. Where the beginning-teachers tended to say little about what was happening to them, I asked their mentor and buddy to fill me in on what seemed to be happening. I also formed impressions about several of the quieter beginning-teachers from the manner in which they interacted at the meetings (**Marnie**) and from email correspondence that I received from them (**Trish**).

Other beginning-teachers (**Katy and Anna**) thoroughly enjoyed the experience of meeting and talking about what was happening to them and what they were feeling. In these instances, the discussion was often wide-ranging and tended to incorporate information about teaching and learning and life in general. The challenge in these instances was to filter and isolate important information about visual literacy education and professional wellbeing through coding of data, as previously identified. Secondly, at the end of each person's story I have attempted some reconciliation of their journey with the original research questions. Once again the degree to which this was possible varied and in some instances I was unable to clearly answer one or more questions for that person. Thirdly, I have concluded with an evaluation of the collective experiences of each group in an attempt to synthesize the impact mentoring exerted on the beginning-teachers' confidence in the teaching of visual literacy skills. From these collective experiences, I have attempted to distil the recurring themes that the vignettes convey and have formulated propositions about the impact of the mentoring.

#### **ATTRITION RATES WITHIN THE RESEARCH**

Half of the mentoring groups involved in each year of the study disintegrated before the end of the research. The participants in the 'failed' groups cited a diverse range of influences as being responsible for this attrition phenomenon, including:

- failure of the group to meet regularly;
- the failure of beginning-teachers to secure regular employment and a disenchantment with their status as teachers;
- acknowledgement that some beginning-teachers felt they simply did not need the support the mentors offered;
- a personality clash between the mentor and recipient.

Groups which disintegrated within the first few weeks of the year have been excluded from the final results of the study, because it was not possible to collect meaningful data about the mentoring processes over a sustained period of time (prolonged engagement).



TABLE SIX: STATUS OF THE 2006 GROUPS AT THE END OF THE RESEARCH PERIOD

	Participants	Status	Reasons sited
Group 1	M - Tess Katy Mary	<b>Group remained intact</b>	This group remained in regular contact and held five meetings which they effectively supported with telephone and email contact; this continued until the end of the year. <b>The group remained intact until the end of research period and was included in the findings of the study.</b>
Group 2	M - Janine Beth Marnie	<b>Group partially disintegrated</b>	This group began effectively and met on two occasions; then one of the beginning-teachers, Beth, was diagnosed with a serious illness that necessitated her withdrawal from teaching and research. Subsequently, Marnie felt she was too busy to attend meetings and, despite expressing the view that the mentoring had been useful in the early phase, elected to correspond only via email and phone for much of the year. This contact continued for much of the year and so <b>this group has been included in the findings of the study.</b> It is worthy of note that Beth returned to join the research after her recovery in 2007; (after briefly being partnered with a different mentor 'Sarah') M - Janine resumed the role of her mentor.
Group 3	M - Olive Nancy Kathleen	<b>Group disintegrated</b>	The group members determined that they did not see benefit in the mentoring process: Nancy was deemed to be highly competent and Kathleen decided to return to study rather than commence teaching. The mentor, M - Olive, felt that she did not really have time to give to the process, given her extensive teaching commitments. <b>The group broke up within a few weeks of the start of the year and was not included in the findings of the study.</b>
Group 4	M - Harry Christopher Laura	<b>Group disintegrated</b>	This group disintegrated quite early in the year. Laura accepted a country posting in a remote indigenous community and contact between her and the mentor ceased. Thereafter, she wrote expressing the view that there was a personality conflict between herself and the mentor. She said that this made her uncomfortable, despite feeling that she needed mentoring. Christopher continued to seek (minimal) help via email and telephone from M - Harry until the end of term one; he then simply felt he no longer needed the support. <b>This group was not included in the findings of the study.</b>
Group 5	M - Hetty Suzie Jade	<b>Group disintegrated</b>	M - Hetty was diagnosed with a serious illness and withdrew from the research on the day of the training workshop. I attempted to match the beginning-teachers to another mentor but, at short notice, this was unsuccessful. The beginning-teachers withdrew shortly after M - Hetty advised that she would not be available to mentor them. <b>This group was not included in the findings of the study.</b>

TABLE SEVEN: STATUS OF THE 2007 GROUPS AT THE END OF THE RESEARCH PERIOD

2007	Participants	Status	Reasons cited
Group 6	M - Jocelyn Anna Lesley	<b>Group remained intact</b>	Lesley accepted a teaching position outside her major specialisation. Her experiences have not been included in the findings of the study. By contrast, Anna and M - Jocelyn maintained regular until mid-year; they continued with intermittent email and telephone correspondence until the end of the year. <b>This group has been included in the findings of the study.</b>
Group 7	M - Janine Chloe Trish	<b>Group remained intact</b>	This group remained intact. M - Janine assumed the role of mentor for two Perth-based beginning-teachers through face-to-face contact and that of 'virtual' mentor for Chloe, who accepted a rural posting. M - Janine and Chloe established regular email and telephone contact in the early phase of the year, but this diminished as the year progressed. Regular meetings between M - Janine and Trish continued until the end of the year. <b>This partnership remained intact and has been included in the findings of the study.</b>
Group 8	M - Tess Kristin Lyn	<b>Group disintegrated</b>	M - Tess withdrew from the program (despite having been a mentor in 2006) because union 'work-to-rule' policy prohibited any out-of-school-hours activity (unless that occurred in a paid capacity). M - Tess felt quite conflicted by the competing desires to support both the new graduates and her colleagues within the Government school system. She finally decided that she had no alternative but to withdraw from the program in order to support her colleagues who had been attempting to re-negotiate the terms of their industrial agreements. <b>I was unable to find a replacement mentor at short notice and this group has not been included in the findings of the study.</b>
Group 9	M - Sarah Kasey Beth	<b>Group disintegrated</b>	Kasey did not attend the first meeting and failed to respond either to M - Sarah's or to my attempts to contact her. Subsequently Beth, who had previously participated in the 2006 phase one part of research, indicated that she would prefer M - Janine to mentor her and this transition took place with the consent of both M - Sarah and M - Janine. M - Sarah went on long service leave in 2007 and Beth felt it might be more useful if she was aligned to a mentor who was actually based in a school during the period of the mentoring. M - Sarah and M - Janine both kept contact with Beth until the end of the year. However, <b>Beth's experience has been reported in the findings of Group Six.</b>
Group 10	M - Tom Penny Zack	<b>Group remained intact</b>	Despite Zack not securing a teaching position of any kind until mid-way through the year, the group met regularly that proved useful in sustaining the mentoring partnership. Penny, Zack and M - Tom achieved the greatest longevity of any of the groups in 2007, primarily due to M - Tom's determination to offer regular mentoring support to his beginning-teachers. <b>This group has been included in the findings of the study.</b>

## **THE STYLE OF THE VIGNETTES**

The vignettes have been presented in two parts :

- firstly, the 2006 vignettes have been grouped together;
- secondly, the 2007 vignettes have been grouped together.

One mentor (M - Janine) participated in both years, but her vignettes have been reconciled against the research questions only in 2006. M - Janine confirmed that her position had not changed and she felt that the 2006 stories had captured the substance of her mentoring experience. The descriptions of the beginning-teacher experience convey the multiple challenges over and above those connected to visual literacy education. Far from being ordered and calm environments (which schools often appear to be to the outside observer), the landscape of the first year of teaching was, for many of the participants both chaotic and hostile. To varying degrees they had to navigate the stress of:

- interviews and applying for teaching positions;
- short- and long-term unemployment;
- the disconnection that often accompanies relief-teaching;
- the financial stress arising from sporadic work opportunities;
- the politics of different schools, departments and staff;
- the failure of school induction;
- challenging student behaviour;
- baffling policies and procedures that varied from school to school (which one beginning-teacher described as secret knowledge that had been withheld from her);
- students with diverse special needs (often with little or no training);
- entrenched ways of working and outdated programs;
- arrogance and gender politics;
- isolation arising from rural posting;
- extreme ill health;
- teaching outside their area of expertise;
- limited budgets and inadequate teaching facilities and resources.

These elements combined to form a potent mix of stressors that simply seemed to overwhelm some of the new teachers, at a time when everything was unfamiliar and when no-one appeared to have time or interest to listen to them. A number of the beginning-teachers felt so overwhelmed that they found themselves on the verge of succumbing to the stress and leaving teaching before they had even begun. It was impossible to accurately describe and assess the impact of mentoring upon the visual literacy teaching facility of the beginning-teachers, without taking into account all of the other factors they had to overcome during their induction period

and first year of teaching. Accordingly, from time to time there is a distinctly 'emotional' tone to the vignettes. This is simply a reflection of the chaos that many of the beginning-teachers were navigating in both their professional and personal lives. Importantly, 'teacher-story' research has the potential to directly influence the experience of future beginning-teachers. The 'teacher-talk and teacher-stories' in the GMP have informed the development of the reciprocal mentoring program described in chapter five. It is hoped that future beginning-teachers (participating in the AiR reciprocal mentoring program) will experience improved induction processes. O'Brien & Down (2002, p. 116) suggested that listening to and recording the real-life stories of teachers allowed "teachers voices to have legitimacy" at a time when the bureaucratic and economic management of schools appears to have priority over the experience of people. They noted:

Teachers' stories provide a powerful means of exploring and understanding the changing nature of teachers' work. ... teachers' stories offer insights that are replete with the language, values, prejudices and perceptions teachers have about their work. They provide a means of capturing the richness, intimacy and complexity of teaching (p. 116).

Such vulnerability to the changing nature of the work context and political structure is not confined to new teachers such as those in the GMP. O'Brien & Down (2002) observed that experienced teachers were often similarly stressed and they emphasised the importance of teacher-talk and teacher-story in contemporary research:

Accountability and performance management processes created an increasingly threatening work environment for this group of teachers. Their stories indicate that they are feeling vulnerable to a results-oriented teacher appraisal system that relies on expansive documentation, non-teaching interests and self-promotion rather than improved classroom practices. In short, they described a working environment that was uncertain and professionally unreasonable (p. 124).

Many of the participants in the GMP also described feeling as though they inhabited professionally unreasonable work environments. Several expressed the view that it felt as if their work-life was 'ganging up on them'. A number confided that their work had imposed significant pressure on their private life and relationships with partners, family and friends. I have tried to preserve the authenticity of this experience and accordingly the stories seem often to ebb and flow away from and then return to, the central focus of inquiry – that of success in visual literacy education. In the vignettes which follow, there are many references to the professional challenges the new teachers faced in their induction year, but in so many ways it was the stress arising from the relentless emotional drama that made the job of teaching so hard (and made some of the beginning-teachers decide that they had simply have enough and would

prefer to leave). It was in this area that the mentors seemed to have the greatest impact in the period immediately following graduation. The mentor offered affirmation, empathy, tangible advice, as well as the combination of these supports that made the beginning-teacher's experience viable (or not).

The impact the mentors had on deficiencies in subject-discipline content knowledge, whilst extremely important, was only one part of the mix. The remainder appeared to be linked to the cultivation of emotional intelligence (both the intra-personal and inter-personal varieties) as well as the development of strategies for maintaining work/life balance. Interestingly, many of the mentors were strong advocates of the concept that visual arts teachers owed it to themselves and others to maintain their own visual arts and creative practice, because this was identified as a nurturing part of the visual arts teaching experience. They urged the beginning-teachers to make time for themselves and their own art. Some of the beginning-teachers in the first year of the study said that it was not until their second year that the mentoring relationship really began to pay dividends in the area of visual literacy education. They observed that what it had offered them in the first year was (as one beginning-teacher, **Anna**, put it) "a lifeline and the hand of a friend". These supports combined to compensate for systemic failings in tertiary training, employment and induction failures.

As I reflect on the journey of the last four years, I am grateful that the participants trusted me sufficiently to tell me honestly how they felt. There were lots of tears, venting, complaining, drinking, laughing, discussing, researching, brainstorming and worrying. It was a portrait in adversity, stress, collegiality, friendship and human resilience. These emotional realities were a significant aspect of the life-world of the beginning-teachers in the research.

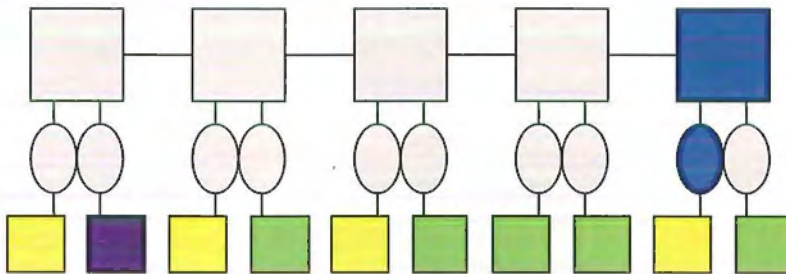
### DIAGRAM THREE: 2006 PARTICIPANTS

Five mentor-teachers each with two beginning-teachers

- Female participants - pink;
- male participants - blue;

Employment status at commencement of research period

- unemployed in yellow;
- relief work in purple;
- full-time work in green;
- part-time work in orange;



Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
<b>TESS</b>	<b>JANINE</b>	<b>OLIVE</b>	<b>HARRY</b>	<b>HETTY</b>
Katy	Beth	Kathleen	Christopher	Suzie
Mary	Marnie	Nancy	Laura	Jade
(I)	(P)	(D)	(D)	(D)

**Key: D - disintegrated I - in tact P – partially intact**

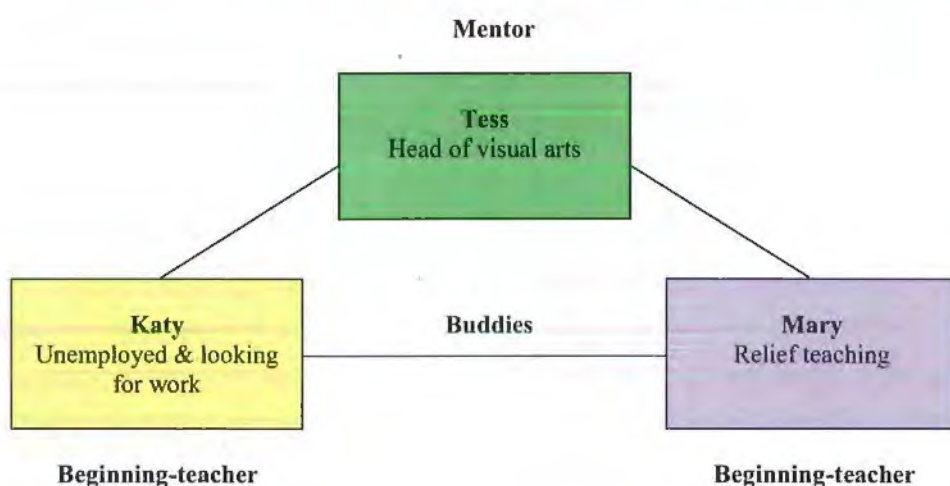
# PHASE ONE VIGNETTES - 2006

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## RESULTS: GROUP ONE

This group elected to meet at a café in Leederville on five occasions. Between meetings, the participants emailed one another and chatted via telephone. Katy and Mary formed a quick bond with each other as buddies that developed into a friendship that continued after the research period ended.

**DIAGRAM FOUR: REPRESENTATION OF GROUP ONE**



## PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

### Katy: beginning-teacher

In her individual interview, Katy noted that she had been keen to participate in the research as she wanted to maintain the momentum that had been created as the end of her studies approached. She recalled that everyone in her graduating class had felt excited about beginning teaching and many had actually secured teaching positions before the end of the year. Unfortunately, Katy had not been among these graduates and she was worried that if she simply left university without having a teaching position she might become disheartened, or forget some of the things she had learned during her studies. She identified the research program as a way of keeping teaching at the forefront of her thinking and also explained that she looked forward to speaking with her mentor about strategies for interviews for teaching positions and relief teaching opportunities.

**Mary: beginning-teacher**

Mary volunteered to participate in the research because she considered there might be networking opportunities that could enhance her prospects of gaining employment.

Additionally, she said that the pace of the Graduate Diploma had been such that she felt she had significant gaps in her knowledge base and she hoped that a mentor might be able to help overcome any problems or deficits that arose once she began teaching.

**Tess: mentor (M – Tess)**

In mid 2005, M - Tess received an email from the Western Australian College of Teaching indicating that they wished to appoint her to mentor a beginning-teacher as a part of his provisional registration to teach<sup>3</sup>. After receiving notification to this effect, M - Tess contacted WACOT to indicate that she would be happy to offer her support to the new teacher. This was noted by staff at WACOT, but M - Tess heard nothing further from them and finally contacted the beginning-teacher herself the following month (October 2005). The beginning-teacher apparently knew nothing of the mentoring requirements for registration, but seemed appreciative of M - Tess' offer to meet with him at her school. Following the meeting, the entire process seemed to 'peter out'. M - Tess heard nothing more from either WACOT or the mentee and she felt somewhat disillusioned and decided to let the matter go. Shortly thereafter, M - Tess was asked to participate in this study through her membership of the AEA/WA that endorsed the research. M - Tess expressed interest in participating in the program, but raised the concern that if she agreed to do so, she needed to be confident that it would be managed professionally. Her concerns in this regard were addressed through the initial training workshop and a schedule of regular meeting times and researcher support. As a result she agreed to mentor both Mary and Katy during 2006.

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3 WACOT provisional registration is automatically granted to all beginning-teachers upon completion of an accredited teacher education degree course at a tertiary institution. After three years the beginning-teacher has to apply for ongoing registration and it is a condition of that process that they be able to demonstrate that they have accessed regular mentoring during the first three years of teaching. Beginning-teachers are required to maintain a log book of the mentoring received.



## **KATY'S STORY ... the journey from jeweller to visual arts teacher.**

### **Participant profile: beginning-teacher**

Katy completed a Bachelor of Design degree with major specialisations in jewellery and textiles and subsequently undertook a Graduate Diploma in 2005. She graduated from university as a beginning-teacher in 2006.

### **Employment status**

When the research commenced, Katy was unemployed and actively seeking employment.

### **Data gathering**

Katy attended a number of meetings throughout 2006 and kept a journal in which she initially recorded the stories she shared with her colleagues in the group. I interviewed Katy and she was provided with a professional learning journal, however as the year unfolded she failed to maintain it, citing a shortage of time as the reason. Katy completed an end of year questionnaire and together with some periodic email correspondence, this was used to complement the vignettes arising from the meetings of her group.

### **Self-perception of readiness for teaching generally**

Katy had performed very well on her final 10 week professional practicum (ATP) and had been rated as 'outstanding' in the twin areas of professionalism and classroom practice. She had achieved high distinctions in most of her studies at university and was looking forward to commencing teaching. Katy declared herself to be a profound optimist who believed that she would in time become not only a highly competent teacher generally, but an outstanding visual arts educator.

### **Self-perception of readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

Katy said that she loved contemporary visual arts and considered herself to be a talented visual artist. She said that she regularly worked on her visual arts practice and had aspirations to exhibit her work toward the end of 2006. She hoped to have the opportunity to show her work to her students, because she considered that this would add to her credibility as a visual arts teacher. Katy said that she felt she had significant studio expertise to share with students and she felt some frustration that she was still unemployed at the commencement of the research. She considered that she was well placed to facilitate visuacy in her students.

### **The impact of mentoring on Katy's first year**

I met with Katy and her group on four occasions during 2006 and a number of themes emerged as the year unfolded:

- self doubt about her suitability to teaching;
- a lengthy period of unemployment following graduation;
- financial difficulty;
- behaviour management challenges;
- difficulty in identifying appropriate projects that would motivate students;
- difficulty in navigating school policies and protocols.

### **The Vignette: a story about connecting to students**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Katy's mentor supported her during her first year. Katy believed that her mentor had been especially helpful in guiding her selection of projects that were age appropriate. Katy's story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. This group met for the third time in May 2006. Katy described the pressure she was experiencing in having to quickly devise projects 'on the run' as few resources had been supplied to her and she remarked that she felt as though she had 'massive gaps' in her content knowledge. She explained that her year 8 classes occurred in short rotations as students moved through the elective 'options' subjects (one of which was art). The current group had proven to be quite a challenge, because they felt that the work Katy proposed to complete with them was identical to that completed the preceding year. The students were disgruntled at the prospect of having to 'repeat' the work and Katy could not convince them that, despite a similar theme, the project would be different. In response to the students' clear and increasing dissatisfaction, Katy had contacted M - Tess to ask for advice. M - Tess had recommended that Katy select an alternative theme area, but retain the studio discipline. This advice proved to be helpful and the new project was progressing well.

In addition to her discussions with M - Tess, Katy mentioned that she had also raised the challenge of this group with her Head of Learning Area, who had given similar advice about content and had made other suggestions to manage behaviour. Katy noted that, although she had spoken with her Head of Learning Area on M - Tess' advice, she had significant reservations about doing this. Katy said that she felt that there was an unspoken expectation that she would be 'perfect' and that admitting to her 'failures' could be seen negatively and might compromise her standing at work. As she described these feelings, Katy concluded that although she recognised this thinking was flawed and that it was important to seek advice from her colleagues who were working with the same students, at a 'feelings' level, it seemed unsafe to do so.

As Katy talked about her experiences, her mentoring buddy Mary, interjected with snippets of her own teaching experience that appeared to connect to, or mirror, Katy's frustrations and concerns. The two women laughed and agreed that it was good not to feel 'alone'. The

presence of a buddy who was also navigating the same challenges appeared to positively support both beginning-teachers. M - Tess listened quietly to the conversation and nodded as the beginning-teachers made pronouncements about what they had learned from their experiences. In many respects it appeared that the beginning-teachers simply needed someone to listen to them – someone who would not judge them and would offer emotional support and suggestions for solutions to their teaching challenges.

A little later in the meeting Katy asked M - Tess whether she could recommend any specific strategies for engaging the year 8 students with visual arts history themes, because this had become increasingly problematic. She talked about the skill building activities she had trialled, including vocabulary building activities so she could talk with students about images and arts works. Katy noted that this was important, because there was a requirement for the inclusion of research on artists in the students' visual diaries. She observed that this had seemed a little artificial and almost superfluous to the learning on some occasions and she wanted the importance of the 'Arts in Society' to become 'real' for the students. She worried that she was not handling this as well as she might. As M - Tess talked about her favourite strategies for incorporating these components in larger projects, both Katy and Mary made notes in their journals and resolved to try them.

### **Reconciling Katy's experience against the larger research question**

#### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

Katy expressed the view that success in visual literacy education could most effectively be measured through students' confidence and autonomy in the development of their own projects. Katy considered that this autonomy relied on students employing a visual language (line, shape, colour, texture, form etc) in both the exploration of themes/ideas and the design development process. She cited examples where students seemed over time to have become more confident in both speaking about their own and others' visual arts works. She felt this increasing confidence had come from an expanding knowledge base about the elements and principles of visual arts and design. The capacity to speak about and analyse visual arts had, in turn, enhanced the confidence students exhibited in developing and making their own art. By the end of the year Katy believed that her students were all acquiring visual literacy skills to varying degrees, although she believed that this had only begun to occur in the second half of the year. She attributed this success to continuity of teaching and learning and time for students to consolidate their new knowledge. Katy concluded that more time would be needed to know for sure whether her teaching specifically had been the catalyst for this success.

**2 What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

Katy noted that her first year of teaching had been punctuated by periods of unemployment, relief teaching and contract work. She reflected that it was not until the middle of the year that she had an opportunity to work consistently with any group of children in improving their visual education and visual literacy skills. She felt that the general lack of continuity in the teacher/students relationship in the early part of the year had undermined any progress which may have been made in individual lessons or projects. Although Katy seemed unable to articulate clearly what it was that epitomised the visually literate person, she repeatedly identified issues related to failing to connect to student's interests as obstacles to establishing the skills associated with visual literacy. Katy concluded that a lack of continuity in the teacher/students relationship, together with a mismatch of project to areas of interest, were the greatest obstacles to visual literacy acquisition and success in teaching.

**3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

When asked about the benefit mentoring had offered her during her first year of teaching, Katy was extremely positive. She endorsed the experience of having been matched to an external mentor and research buddy. She doubted that, without M - Tess and Mary, she would have survived the first year of teaching. The camaraderie which had developed between the participants in her group had sustained her through periods of intense self doubt and had provided both support and a sounding board for her ideas about possible solutions to the education challenges she faced. Katy concluded that M - Tess' guidance in the selection of both 'art making' and 'art interpretation' content and teaching strategies had been extremely helpful and had confirmed that she was 'on the right track'. This had, in turn, given her confidence to stretch beyond her initial thoughts and ideas to experiment in responding to individual student's needs, particularly students in the remedial category. M - Tess' advice about the day to day operation of schools had supported Katy when she felt overwhelmed by the intricacies of school protocols. Katy noted that she had greatly appreciated being able to email or call M - Tess to chat about materials, resources, budgets, excursions, assessment and evaluation, reporting and parent meetings. These duties that often comprise the nuts and bolts of a teacher's daily life, were a great mystery to Katy when she began teaching, but had become almost second nature by the end of the year. She attributed much of her confidence in these areas to M - Tess' support and suggestions.

Finally, Katy expressed the view that the mentoring project facilitated by her university had particular value at various times during the first year of teaching. This was most evident in the early part of the year, when her employment had been sporadic and her confidence had been particularly low. Katy expressed the view that, without the continuity of connection to her university, she would have lost confidence in the value of the pedagogical and subject discipline content knowledge she had acquired over four years of study. She maintained that connection to the University (through my involvement in the research) provided a bridge between study and work. She said that this gave her a sense that the University had an ongoing interest in her wellbeing and survival in the profession that had been important at times when she had felt lost or disoriented. On balance, Katy felt that the mentoring relationships had been pivotal to her survival and success during the first year of teaching. She observed:

Participating in the Graduate Mentor Program as a beginning-teacher has benefited me in a variety of ways and offered valuable assistance. I have developed positive professional relationships with several teachers involved in the program establishing a network which spans several learning areas. These continuing relationships have offered me connections to seek advice, support and acceptance in my new career which is vital for diversifying knowledge. Also offered a feeling of belonging and keeping sane amidst stressful times. We met regularly over the year in a casual environment which fitted into our schedule and didn't add pressure to our personal lives.

The network connections that the program has helped build have been a major advantage moving into a new industry. I did not receive a posting immediately and was quite daunted by the prospect of cold calling at schools for relief work. My mentor gave me names of people to contact to get started and put a good word in for me at her own school, where I got my first relief position. It was a relief to have a friendly face to alleviate the nerves on my first day. The friendly face was also welcome when attending the visual arts Education Association meetings and she was able to introduce me to my new peers.

When I finally got my first teaching position, half way through first term 2006, I was expected to teach outside my area of expertise. Being trained in visual arts I was unfamiliar with the workings of the media animation class I had inherited mid project. Fortunately for me my buddy was trained in media and ironically she was teaching a visual arts class. The exchange of notes and worksheets proved advantageous for both of us. In turn this benefited our students with them getting the knowledge and know-how from two beginning- teachers.

## **MARY'S STORY ... the journey from painter to visual arts teacher.**

### **Participant profile: beginning-teacher**

Mary completed a Bachelor of Communications degree in 2004 and graduated in 2006 with a Graduate Diploma. Mary had limited previous experience of mentors and as a consequence, had few expectations of the research other than a general belief that it might be valuable.

### **Employment status at commencement of research**

At the time the research commenced Mary was working in a relief capacity at a number of schools.

### **Data gathering**

Like her buddy Katy, Mary attended a number of research meetings and shared stories of her teaching. I interviewed her and she sent some email correspondence both to her mentor and to me from time to time. She completed an end of year questionnaire and for a brief period at the beginning of the research period maintained a journal. Mary provided me with the journal at the end of the year, but explained that she had largely been too busy to find time to write anything very meaningful. The interview, emails, journal and questionnaire were used to construct the vignette distilled from the research meetings.

### **Self perception of readiness for teaching generally**

Mary was both a mature aged beginning-teacher and a single parent who had had extensive interaction with both her own children and their friends. She had been closely involved in team sports and other community projects over several years. At the start of the research she appeared quietly confident about her readiness for teaching. Mary was, however, worried about the varying policies and protocols at different schools and reflected that schools were very different from each other. She said it was difficult to feel very settled when constantly moving between different school settings. She observed that this was an important area in which a mentor could be of assistance, especially since relief teachers typically did not receive any formal induction to the various schools in which they taught. She noted that she had positive experiences with mentors in the past and was feeling very pleased to have been assigned M - Tess, who had a reputation as a gifted visual arts teacher.

### **Self-perception of readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

I asked Mary during her interview about her perception of her readiness for visual literacy teaching and she observed:

When it comes to visual literacy skills ... sometimes I wonder whether I am actually teaching that. Because I'm in a position where I'm sharing another person's class (on prac and in the relief work I've done) ... I've sort of taken over from them and they're still there ... I feel like I should be doing something but don't want to overstep the mark ... I feel I just do what I can. If I can see a connection between images I have shown students and their own work, or if I can see them transferring the analysis skills they learned with me and then use them to analyse new images or advertisements that they see on television ... and then to see them analyse something else ... then that's good.

In terms of media studies ... visual literacy is just so critical ... with the year eights I teach I keep throwing these terms at them and I know it doesn't mean a lot yet ... but I think even if they don't quite understand everything now there will be a point somewhere within the next five years when it does. In the meantime I just have to guide them through and just keep making them familiar with the language initially ... then I can bring it to a point where its tied into their own practical studio work. Hopefully then they will be able to sit and analyse and research particular artists and bring a clear influence back into their own practice. Anyway ... yes I think I'll be ok ... my intuition tells me its working.

### **The impact of mentoring on Mary's first year**

I met with Mary and her group on four occasions during 2006. Her journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- self doubt about her suitability to teaching;
- financial difficulty;
- behaviour management challenges;
- difficulty in the relationship she had with her Head of Learning Area;
- difficulty in navigating school policies and protocols.

### **The Vignette: a story about school politics and exploitation**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Mary's mentor supported her during her first year. Mary believed that her mentor had been especially helpful in suggesting ways to establish her independence as a teacher in her own right. Mary's story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. During one of the meetings for this group Mary explained that she had completed her ATP in the school at which she was later given a part time teaching appointment. Her extensive knowledge of the new media course which was her second teaching area, prompted James (her colleague and line manager) to ask her if she would like to teach the subject the following year. Mary was delighted to have the opportunity to do so and accepted James's offer to represent the school at official Curriculum Council meetings, since he had little or no time to invest in the course. Initially, Mary had interpreted being asked to implement the trial of the new media

course at her school as an indication that she was well regarded by colleagues for her content knowledge/expertise. Over time, however, she had begun to feel that none of them wanted the extra workload associated with the course and were simply 'offloading' this to a new and inexperienced colleague. Mary confided that, to make matters worse, she was never really sure whether the work she was doing for the new course was 'right' and harboured self doubt that her content knowledge (whilst contemporary and fairly wide-ranging) might be inadequate for the new directions the course seemed to be taking. Mary noted that her part time status at the school meant that she seldom had an opportunity to discuss with colleagues her thoughts about the new course and the recommended themes/learning contexts. Her relationship with her Head of Learning Area James, did have elements of a mentor/protégé structure about it which afforded some opportunity for discussion, but Mary harboured a desire to break free from the 'trainee teacher' tag still seemed to underpin her relationship with him. Accordingly, she tried to limit discussions to areas aligned with the culture of the school rather than her professional knowledge.

Mary's sense of isolation arising from her reluctance to discuss proposed course/unit content was further exacerbated by the fact that new courses were an extension of the WACF that had no prescribed content or syllabus documents. The absence of content, in combination with her lack of experience, caused Mary significant bouts of self doubt and stress. Mary said that, because she felt that she needed to break the label of pre-service teacher, there was little choice other than to bluff her way through the whole implementation/trial process, despite her doubts about whether she really understood what was needed. To alleviate the stress this created, Mary explained that she had contacted M - Tess on a number of occasions to discuss her ideas, ask questions and get feedback. M - Tess had been working on preparation for the implementation of the new post compulsory visual arts course of study at her own school and given that all the new courses were framed around a shared design template, had been able to offer insight from her own experience and preparations. The discussions that Mary had with M - Tess helped clarify such issues as the types of learning tasks, number of times assessment of specific tasks should occur and evaluation of aspects/outcomes and reporting mechanisms. M - Tess' suggestions proved invaluable for Mary, who expressed doubt that she could have coped without this external mentoring support and collegial relationship.

Mary explained that as a result of M – Tess' support, she felt she had been making good progress with her preparations for the new media course of study. She continued that this had been rewarded with the promise of inclusion in a claim for performance-based pay which the Education Department was in the process of implementing. James, her Head of Learning Area, had recommended that she be one of the recipients of this extra payment, in recognition for the many hours of unpaid time she was investing in the development of the program and related



resource material. Whilst M - Tess and Katy both agreed that this endorsement by the Head of Learning Area was very good, each expressed concern that there was the potential for Mary to be exploited: she was only employed in a part time capacity, yet the preparations for the new course appeared to be consuming much of her week and weekends. Both doubted whether the performance based pay would really reflect the extra time and effort Mary was investing in the project. Though I did not say so, I also had the sense that she was in danger of being exploited. Mary agreed that there was potential for exploitation and said that she had worried about this initially, but over time had come to believe that the extra workload was probably of limited duration.

The conversation seemed to change direction after this, but the theme of 'status' within the department surfaced again a little later in the meeting. Katy had been speaking about the open plan style of her classroom and the way in which staff and students seemed to move freely in and out of each other's classrooms. She noted that this had some benefits, but also generated challenges, particularly in terms of noise and the distraction to students' attention. Mary agreed and began to recount her own experiences with colleagues simply walking into her classes in an unannounced manner. Of greatest concern for Mary was the way in which James, her Head of Learning Area and media studies colleague, simply walked in and out of her classes on a whim. This had generated some tension for Mary, because James often reprimanded students for their behaviour and made reference to the fact that Mary should have dealt with the issue. He declared that since she had not, he would need to do so.

James' intervention made Mary feel as if her relationship with students and her authority were being undermined and damaged, but she had been unsure how to respond to this in view of his role as her Head of Department. When M - Tess asked why this seemed to be happening, Mary speculated that it might be a hang-over from her ATP practicum that she had completed with James. To complicate matters further, Mary and James shared a number of classes and each taught at various times through the week. As a result, the students were equally the responsibility of the two members of staff. M - Tess agreed that this was difficult, but urged Mary to address the problem before it became entrenched and damaged the relationship. She observed that, if any of her colleagues were to walk into her classes and reprimand students whilst she was in the room, she would be greatly offended and would consider such intervention grossly inappropriate and discourteous. As the conversation continued, the group agreed that it would be helpful for Mary to break the practicum student role in which she seemed type cast. The group declared that it was important that students acknowledge her as their teacher during the periods they spent with her. M - Tess noted that this situation might necessitate Mary meeting with James to express her concerns and to seek his cooperation in adjusting and revising the open door policy. Mary was clearly worried about how to do this and the group

spent some time brainstorming ways in which she could initiate the conversation without jeopardising her relationship with her colleague.

Over the course of the meeting it had become apparent that beneath Mary's initial assessment of 'all being well' the reality was something quite different. She confirmed that she was feeling stressed, anxious and almost intimidated by her colleague, whose conduct her external mentor and buddy were now calling unprofessional. Mary explained that the reality of team teaching with James, in a room that was at all other times 'his classroom', in combination with his unannounced appearance in her classes, caused her to feel as if the professional boundaries that normally applied to colleagues, simply did not exist. Mary felt that the stress associated with this aspect of her position was a major hindrance to effective teaching and student learning. She felt that she could never quite relax and needed to be on show at all times. This interfered with her ability to focus her energies on the important issues of student learning in the twin visual literacy domains of arts making and arts interpretation. Consequently, Mary felt that she was not as successful in her teaching as might otherwise have been the case. At the conclusion of the meeting, this issue remained unresolved. As I left the group I could hear the conversation continuing around suggestions for ways to initiate a discussion and resolution for the problem.

### **Reconciling Mary's experiences with the original research questions**

At the completion of the year I asked Mary to complete a questionnaire that was designed to reconcile her experiences with the original research questions. Her responses have been distilled from that source, in combination with discussion at meetings, journal entries and email correspondence.

#### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

Mary measured the success of her teaching programs and students' acquisition of visual literacy skills through reference to their increasing confidence and autonomy in their work in both media and multi-arts programs. This encompassed speaking about arts works and making arts works. Of particular importance was the end of year 'MOSO' awards that Mary felt provided clear external validation that students' competence in visual literacy was improving. Students at the school had not previously won the MOSO awards and Mary was delighted to have helped students achieve this goal.

**2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

Mary said that she felt the politics of teaching had been particularly challenging during the first year. She continued that the challenge of 'standing up for herself' had been especially daunting, because the colleague with whom she was experiencing difficulty was in a position of power. Mary felt vulnerable about her part time, temporary status. She valued the support of her mentor, M - Tess and said that her advice had been critical in resolving this difficult situation. In retrospect, Mary wished she had addressed her concerns much earlier in the year and she believed that she could have avoided considerable stress and self doubt about her teaching had she done so. By contrast, Mary felt that a lack of stress could have positively affected the quality of her teaching. As a consequence, she identified stress as a significant obstacle to her success during the first year.

**3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

Mary summarised her first year in teaching as being extremely challenging and fraught with emotional, administrative and political hurdles. Her reflections about the teaching process itself were coloured by her belief that issues other than teaching had taken priority during the first year. Mary described the first year as a 'baptism of fire' and noted that, during the week in which she had been ready to leave teaching, talking to her mentor had proved invaluable. These conversations had helped shift the way she viewed teaching and had balanced her expectations of herself.

The mentor had helped Mary become aware of and understand, the 'process' she had been going through - that it was simply a process! Mary had adopted the mantra 'teaching takes time!' She felt that she had become a much more relaxed and effective teacher as the year progressed and she cited comments made by colleagues that she felt confirmed the substance of the internal shift she had experienced. In terms of visual literacy teaching, Mary felt that she could now talk and relate to students more effectively rather than teaching 'by the book'. She considered that the mentoring program had enabled her to find her personal niche as a teacher; she believed that all new teachers should have an external mentor and buddy.

## **TESS' STORY... the journey from experienced visual arts teacher to mentor**

### **Participant profile: mentor**

M - Tess completed a Bachelor of Education in 1986 and then spent some time travelling and working overseas. After her return to Australia she worked at a number of Western Australian Government schools teaching visual arts .

### **Employment status**

M – Tess is currently employed as the co-ordinator of visual arts at a Government school in the outer suburbs of Perth.

### **Data gathering**

M - Tess attended a number of meetings and I interviewed her at the beginning of the year. She was provided with a journal at the training workshop, but declined to maintain it or to complete the questionnaire, citing a lack of time as the reason for this choice.

### **Observations about the beginning-teachers' readiness for teaching generally**

M - Tess said that she believed the mentoring experience had been beneficial for her two beginning-teachers. She observed that they both appeared positive in their outlook as they entered their new profession but, like most beginning-teachers, had some concerns about their readiness for teaching.

### **Observations about the beginning-teachers' readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

M - Tess observed the following about her beginning-teachers' readiness for their visual arts and visual literacy teaching responsibilities:

This is more difficult really ... I guess when a new teacher comes into any school ... they need to build confidence with classroom management before they can get on with their visual arts teaching. Then there are all the little things ... voice control ... and a set of strategies to help the students learn. From what I can see both Katy and Mary know quite a lot about visual arts but I'm not sure where they are at with the day to day stuff that makes it possible to actually teach. I think Mary and Katy will have to deal with this management stuff before they can really get down to teaching visual arts in a meaningful way.

### **The impact of mentoring on the first year**

I met with M - Tess and her group on four occasions during 2006. Her journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- assisting mentees to secure employment;
- advice on age appropriate projects;
- navigating school politics;
- behaviour management challenges;
- school policies and protocols.

### **The Vignette: a story about collegiality**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which M - Tess supported her protégés during their first year. M - Tess had an extensive knowledge of school policies and procedures and was able to guide Katy and Mary as they coped with reporting and assessment regimes at their schools. Her story is reproduced in its entirety as an appendix. The third meeting for group one occurred in May 2006. The initial conversation centred on the stress both beginning-teachers felt, because they were in the midst of reporting processes in the part time positions they held. Neither appeared to feel confident about what precisely was expected of them. Meetings to brief the wider staff of each school on the specifics of electronic reporting systems invariably seemed to occur when the beginning-teachers were absent and Mary went so far as to say that she really felt as though there was some secret knowledge to which everyone except herself was privy.

When she asked colleagues for guidance, Mary often felt that they were too busy to really spend time guiding her in the finer points of utilising the reporting system. Katy similarly was experiencing challenges with reporting, particularly for students she hardly knew, although her colleagues were more amenable to offering advice about reporting strategies. M - Tess listened quietly to the concerns expressed by Mary and Katy and advised them to try to get a copy of the school's annual calendar that would clearly outline the reporting timeline and deadlines. Additionally, she suggested that in most schools employing an electronic reporting system there generally was either a document that outlined steps to follow, or alternatively, technicians or ICT staff who could help. Both Mary and Katy said that they would follow up on this and see if support was available.

I asked M - Tess how she was coping with the demands of the teaching year and her mentoring role. M - Tess had previously indicated that she felt a little stressed because she had taken on the 'structured workplace learning' co-ordination in addition to her teaching load and the mentoring for this research. She explained that she was essentially quite fine, but could identify with the stress the beginning-teachers were experiencing, because she was also currently caught up the hectic reporting timeline at her school. Unlike the beginning-teachers, however, M - Tess

had experienced this stress many times before and knew that it was a temporary thing. She knew from first-hand experience that when properly managed, the stress was entirely survivable. She also spoke about the challenges of learning to 'let go' of stress in order to achieve a balance in the area of life/work. M - Tess explained that it was easy at stressful times to blur the line between work and home and she emphasised that many new teachers fell into the trap of either working, or worrying about work, to the exclusion of other areas of their lives. This inevitably increased stress, because extra time directed to work matters often robbed the teacher of their family time during the demanding periods such as reporting and parent/teacher nights.

M - Tess explained that collegial support in school, especially at busy times, was a critical element in her own set of mechanisms for coping with stress. She emphasised the importance of being able to unwind over coffee at recess or lunch and simply chat about school life with colleagues. She gave several examples of the ways in which this type of informal discussion had given rise to solutions to the problems she faced, especially when managing students with behavioural and learning difficulties. In order for this collaborative dialogue support to be possible, M - Tess considered that it was necessary to be working in the school fairly regularly. She explained that this was because the foundation of this type of interaction was the relationship which developed between people. Such relationships, she added took time to build and develop. She spoke about the sense of 'being in it together' and underlined how important this was for both staff and the students in their care. She expressed concern that new teachers often missed out on this collegial support simply because they were on the merry go round of relief-teaching.

M - Tess gave several examples of the way in which this brainstorming over coffee had helped her resolved specific challenges. She explained that the graffiti theme she was currently exploring with her year 12 students within the new course of study pilot at her school had developed from this type of interaction. When chatting over morning coffee, she had complained to colleagues that she was unable to motivate this group. The general discussion that ensued among four teachers at the table had given rise to the idea of linking pop culture and graffiti to the students' involvement in various leisure pursuits, including skateboarding. This discussion had then become the springboard for the project on which students were currently working. M - Tess went on to speak about the experience of trialling the new visual arts course of study for visual arts and mentioned that she had been part of the reference group that had initially developed the course. Accordingly, she felt well placed to implement the new format, however, reflected that the constant revision to the structure of the course was stress inducing for teachers who were trialling the course. She said that during periods of stress, talking with colleagues assumed even greater importance.

Some discussion then ensued about types of tasks and learning strategies which could be employed within the arts and media courses since both were framed around an identical template and M - Tess offered Mary and Katy suggestions about how to improve the work in which they were currently engaged. She talked about her own strategies for engaging students and suggested mechanisms for covering the essential content of the course. Both beginning-teachers were appreciative of this support and left the meeting with a new enthusiasm for the work they were doing.

### **Reconciling M - Tess' experience against the original research questions**

#### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

M - Tess suggested that, in her view, success in visual literacy education hinged on the teacher's capacity to inspire students and convey to them a sense of passion about the importance of visual arts in their lives. She noted that the critical element in this process was to find out what 'kids' were interested in and build both visual arts making and visual arts interpretation experiences around that source material. She commented that it was all about "making it real" for students. M - Tess considered that if students could become excited about visual arts because it had something to do with their own interests, then there was a real chance that they would begin to notice the visual world around them in other contexts. She believed that this would allow them to engage with that visual world through informal analysis. She went on to say that it was at this point teachers that needed to make sure that students had a vocabulary with which to assess the visual arts form. M - Tess considered that visual literacy was being achieved when students naturally and automatically looked for meaning in visual forms and were able to distil some sense of the artist's agenda. In summary, her view appeared to be that success encompassed making links to students' life world interests, engendering passion in students and establishing and building vocabulary.

#### **2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

M - Tess appeared to believe that school politics, interruption to opportunities to work, failure to build relationship with students and colleagues and unresolved stress, presented as the greatest obstacles to successful teaching and learning. She did not identify subject discipline content knowledge as an area for great concern, because she considered that all teachers were on a professional learning journey and acquisition of content was a challenge which would be part of the professional landscape on an ongoing basis. M - Tess considered that behaviour

management issues also had the potential to undermine success in visual literacy education. She went on to remark that she considered that new teachers needed to work to improve their pedagogical repertoire.

**3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

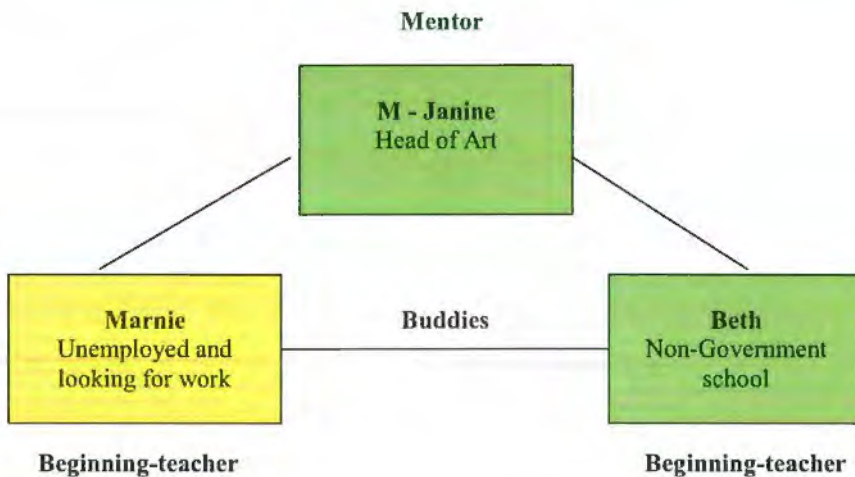
M - Tess said that she believed that the mentoring experience had been a positive one for all concerned. She noted that there had been benefits for her personally, because the process of offering advice to her beginning-teachers had caused her to become a more reflective practitioner and this in turn had improved her own practice. She felt that the buddy system had worked well for her beginning-teachers and that they had sustained each other when she had been unable to buoy their moods. She felt both new teachers had grown immensely over the course of the year and she felt proud to have been part of the experience. M - Tess indicated that she would be keen to participate in the program again in 2007 and I gratefully accepted this offer.



## RESULTS: GROUP TWO 2006

The second research group comprised M - Janine (mentor), Marnie and Beth. Beth had been appointed to a full time permanent teaching position in a Non-Government school before the end of 2005. Marnie, by contrast, had commenced the 2006 school year with only occasional relief work. M - Janine was the Head of Visual Arts at a Government school which had recently been refurbished. This group initially elected to meet on a regular basis, however, there were only two meetings and the group disintegrated after Beth withdrew as a result of ill health. Their first meeting occurred in March 2006.

**DIAGRAM FIVE: REPRESENTATION OF GROUP TWO**



## PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

### **Janine: mentor (M – Janine)**

M - Janine agreed to participate in the research because she held the view that all experienced teachers owed the profession a debt of gratitude for the training and support they had received during the course of their careers (pre-1980s). She considered mentoring of new teachers to be a valuable form through which this debt could be repaid.

### **Beth: beginning-teacher**

Beth volunteered to participate in the research, saying that she felt the experience would be of value during her induction into the teaching profession. She explained that she was looking forward to being able to speak honestly about challenges to someone outside the school at which she was employed. Beth said that securing a full time teaching position in a Non-Government school before she had even finished her degree felt somewhat daunting and she worried that the

staff might not be sympathetic to any questions she had. She expressed the concern that the school might unreasonably expect her to be 'perfect' on day one because they were paying her to be an effective and competent teacher. Beth felt reassured that there was an experienced teacher off campus to whom she could turn without fearing any repercussions in terms of her status within the school.

**Marnie: beginning-teacher**

Despite not having successfully gained a teaching position whilst at university, Marnie joined the research project at the end of 2005, saying that she felt it would be useful once she finally secured a position. She explained that after so many years of studying and carrying the responsibilities of a single parent, she might need support as she returned to the workforce on a full time basis. Marnie's background as a film maker and graphic designer also meant that she had significant gaps in her content knowledge in the critical areas of painting, ceramics and printmaking. She was keen to get advice from M - Janine in the event that she had to teach across these studio disciplines.

## **BETH'S STORY... from painter to beginning-teacher**

### **Participant profile: beginning-teacher**

Beth graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (visual arts) before completing a Graduate Diploma in 2005. She was appointed to her first teaching position prior to the completion of her studies and commenced teaching at a Non-Government school in Perth in January 2006.

### **Employment status**

Beth's teaching appointment encompassed visual arts, home economics, religious education, manual arts, sewing, computing and child development.

### **Data gathering**

Beth attended one meeting and established an internet blogg site for her group that had some fledgling use, however, she was not formally interviewed for the research. She did not complete an end of year questionnaire or professional learning journal during 2006. Beth withdrew from the research project in May 2006 as a consequence of ill health that necessitated a leave of absence from her teaching position in the early part of the year.

### **Self perception of readiness for teaching generally**

I did not have an opportunity to interview Beth prior to her illness but I formed the view that she was an articulate, principled and dedicated graduate who would develop into a gifted teacher over time.

### **Self perception of readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

Beth was a confident painter and although I did not get an opportunity to ask her specifically about her sense of her readiness for visual literacy education, I formed the view that she was feeling optimistic about this teaching and learning process and its attendant challenges.

### **The impact of mentoring on Beth's first year**

I met with Beth and her group on one occasion during 2006. Her journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- uncertainty about appropriate projects for middle school students;
- ill health.

### **The Vignette: a story about vulnerability and ill health**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Beth's mentor supported her during her first year. Beth believed that her mentor had been especially helpful in confirming her own

judgement about appropriate projects for students. She also noted that during a period of ill health her mentor's affirmation and concern for her wellbeing was a nurturing influence. Beth's story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. This group met for the first time in March 2006. At the time of commencing her teaching appointment, Beth had been provided with copies of existing programs for some of her classes. She described the support offered to her by colleagues in the Technology and Enterprise area as a kind of informal mentoring that encompassed a range of focus areas. These included discipline/behaviour management, subject content, pedagogy, advice about the school protocols, policies and co-curricular life of the school. She greatly appreciated this help and explained that she felt as if the Technology and Enterprise staff were nurturing her transition from graduate to staff member within their department.

In other departments, Beth felt that she had been essentially left to her own devices. She had to devise her own learning programs and whilst she had enjoyed the challenges associated with this task, she described experiencing a sense of isolation ... of being almost abandoned and left to survive on her own. It was as if there was an expectation by teaching colleagues, especially in the visual arts area, that she should be 'fine' and able to manage her teaching responsibilities on her own. Beth noted that it seemed as if being fully competent on day one was viewed as a minimum professional responsibility which accompanied the teaching appointment she had won. M - Janine asked Beth whether there had been any formal induction into the school and Beth confirmed that a thorough induction program was offered to all new staff. In addition to this, the deputy principal had offered a number of suggestions to ease her transition into teaching and had reported being very pleased with her rapport and connection to the students in her classes. Beth found that the high level of new staff to the school (around 20 other staff) had also offered a degree of emotional support. All the new teachers seemed to band together to share knowledge and support each other.

Beth was enjoying the collegiality of other young teachers who were as enthusiastic about their discipline as she was about visual arts. She looked forward to morning recess and lunch, as these were times when the new staff sat around and chatted about their experiences. Beth felt that her relaxed personal style and friendly demeanour had elicited positive responses from students and staff and she cited as an example her burgeoning year 10 visual arts class that had been steadily growing since the commencement of the year. At the time of the meeting 28 students were enrolled and still more were trying to join the group. Beth noted that many of these students were considered to be poorly behaved by staff in the school, but she described these same students as both productive and happy in her visual arts learning program.

Beth felt that she had found her 'calling' and spoke about wanting to develop her repertoire of

behaviour management strategies to further support students who, for a variety of reasons, seemed not to be experiencing success at school. M - Janine offered Beth advice about a range of strategies which she had personally found useful in managing students who seemed disengaged or unmotivated and Beth was eager to accept this advice. I reflected that Beth was extremely passionate about the social justice implications of students being tagged as 'problem kids' and it seemed as if she felt that she had a personal responsibility to try to 'save' them.

During the meeting I asked Beth if she had any thoughts about why these students appeared not to be as successful in other subjects as they were in art. She thought about this for a moment and then responded that there were a number of issues about the physical school environment which appeared counterproductive to the educational success of some children in her classes. She spoke specifically about working in an open plan teaching environment and noted that students in years 9 and 12 were frequently in close proximity to one another. She observed that the noise generated could at times be quite disruptive for children and staff in both classes. Notwithstanding these environmental issues, Beth spoke with enthusiasm about the projects she was delivering in her visual arts and other learning programs. She talked about her plans to establish an extension program in the visual arts for gifted students and it was clear that she enjoyed the varied aspects of school life. Beth said that she was actively seeking opportunities to join committees, panels and other groups connected to the co-curricular life of the school. Her sense of wellbeing seemed linked to the high levels of involvement in the life of the school and the support and friendship this elicited from colleagues at the school. She appreciated how fortunate she had been to secure a full time permanent position at a 'good' Non-Government school and was looking forward to her career.

Beth also noted that she was enjoying sharing her own visual arts practice with her students and she looked for opportunities to speak about her work and also to bring in examples for her students to view. She said that various groups of students had taken a keen interest in this aspect of her as their teacher and she reflected that at some level being a 'practicing artist' gave her greater credibility with her students. She noted that she had used discussions about her own work to further her students' visual arts criticism skills and they seemed keen to talk with her about the themes and concepts that she employed in her paintings. I asked Beth if this might be a tool for facilitating visual literacy over time and she agreed that this seemed to have potential. Beth said that she certainly considered that nurturing her own skills as an artist and sharing this journey with her students, represented a way to transmit a personal passion to them. She said that she felt optimistic both about her journey as an artist and a visual arts educator. Beth's enthusiasm starkly contrasted with that of Marnie (her buddy), who had had an entirely different kind of experience and as the meeting progressed, Beth tried to offer encouragement and reassurance to her. Marnie and Beth had studied together during the preceding year, but they

had moved in different circles at the University and I detected that Marnie was not particularly open to Beth's suggestions and ideas. The meeting concluded on a mixed note: Beth was enthusiastically engaged in forward planning for the projects she intend to implement, while Marnie was sombrely trying to devise solutions for the issues she had encountered in her own teaching context.

Neither Beth nor I attended the second meeting for group two. I sent my apologies and asked that, if possible, M - Janine send me a brief update on the meeting. Beth had apparently been feeling unwell for some time and sent her apologies the day before the meeting occurred. M - Janine and Marnie met in our absence. A few weeks later I received an email from a school colleague, who advised that Beth was extremely unwell and in hospital. I made a number of attempts to get in touch with Beth's family to enquire about her condition and finally spoke to her mother, who said that Beth was unwell but appeared to be improving. Beth's mother suggested that I might like to email Beth that I did. Several weeks later (in late May) I got an email from Beth indicating that her situation had stabilised and whilst she was still seriously ill, her prognosis was much improved.

M - Janine, Marnie and I went to see Beth at her home when we were next due to have a meeting and spent the morning talking with Beth about her health and circumstances. Although quite unwell, Beth displayed a great degree of optimism about her circumstances and said that the mentoring experience had been a great support for her during her first term as a teacher. She doubted that she would be well enough to return to teaching that year, but was delighted that the school had promised to hold her position for her. Beth advised that all things being equal, she was keen to rejoin the program the following year when she returned to work and I promised to contact her again in the New Year to finalise the details of her re-entry to the program. Following this exchange Beth withdrew formally from the program and her group contracted to a two person structure. Despite planning to do so, this group did not meet face to face again during the year. Instead, Marnie kept in touch with M - Janine via telephone and email and the mentoring assumed a 'virtual' form.

No attempt was made to reconcile Beth's experience against the research questions, given the brevity of her involvement with the study in 2006. Beth did rejoin the research in 2007 and after a brief period with an alternative mentor, M - Janine resumed the role of Beth's mentor.

## **MARNIE'S STORY... the journey from film-maker to beginning-teacher**

### **Participant profile: beginning-teacher**

Marnie graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (visual arts), before completing a Graduate Diploma in 2005. Throughout the years she studied at university, Marnie worked part time in the film and television industry and was involved in a number of advertising campaigns and short films.

### **Employment status**

Marnie was appointed to a part time (0.5) media position at a Government school in January 2006.

### **Data gathering:**

Marnie attended two meetings, but that ceased when her buddy, Beth, withdrew from the program due to ill health. I interviewed Marnie and recorded her experiences. Despite having been provided with a journal at the training workshop, Marnie elected not to maintain it and declined to complete the questionnaire, citing a lack of time in both instances. I received some email communication from Marnie during 2006 which was used to complement the other sources of information.

### **Self-perception of readiness for teaching generally**

Marnie was a mature aged beginning-teacher and said that she had quickly developed a friendly yet firm style and the students tended to respond quite well to this. She considered that being a mature-aged beginning-teacher worked in her favour in this early part of her career and she felt that she was quite well prepared for teaching. Marnie noted that on the occasions she was unsure about any aspect of teaching she tended to bluff her way through by simply acting confidently and figuring out what to do as she went along. She hoped that her relationship with her mentor, M - Janine, would facilitate this process more effectively.

### **Self-perception of readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

Marnie believed that she had a solid visual arts history base from which to teach her students. She went on to remark, however, she felt that there were some deficiencies in her visual arts studio skills (particularly in painting printmaking and ceramics) and she worried that this might somehow limit her capacity to help her students become visually literate. I asked her to elaborate on why she felt that deficiencies in studio skills might negatively impact success in visual literacy education. Marnie said that, whilst she felt confident to talk about visual arts forms, she worried that she might not be able to demonstrate practically for students the skills that artists had used. She observed that, without actually seeing how the techniques were

employed, students might fail to connect the oral information to the visual context. Marnie felt that to really convey the meaning of artworks it was important that the teacher be able both to interpret visual arts and to produce visual arts and demonstrate this for students. I asked Marnie where she considered her strengths lay in terms of visual arts studio disciplines. She explained that she had an array of skills in textiles, photography, electronic arts and film/media but not in the other common studio areas needed for middle school art. This made her feel tentative about her readiness for visual literacy education as opposed to general teaching.

### **The impact of mentoring on Marnie's first year**

I met with Marnie and her group on one occasion during 2006. Her journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- unemployment;
- financial difficulties;
- difficulties with Centre-link and the requirement to apply for other kinds of work;
- poor induction experiences;
- vulnerability arising from temporary contract work with no guarantee of continuity;
- students with diverse special needs;
- students with challenging behaviours;
- unsympathetic staff who expected her to 'simply cope'.

### **The Vignette: a story about losing and regaining confidence**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Marnie's mentor supported her during her first year. Marnie believed that her mentor had been especially helpful in confirming her suspicions that unreasonable demands were being made upon her as a part time graduate employee. Her mentor offered advice in resolving these challenges. Marnie's story in its entirety and attached as an appendix. During the first meeting for this group I asked the beginning-teachers to update both M - Janine and I on what had occurred since the training workshop in January. Marnie spoke with mixed emotions about her situation. On one hand, she felt delighted at having been appointed to a teaching position so quickly and on the other she was navigating a bout of depression about her financial circumstances. She spoke about the shock that accompanied the realisation that a halftime (0.5fte) teaching position paid less than the Government study allowance she had received during the preceding 5 years. Marnie described the disappointment her two teenage children had verbalised as they realised that the family's financial position would not improve, despite a long standing promise from Marnie that this would happen when she was qualified and working as a teacher. She felt she had let everyone down. Marnie had been forced to apply for a partial unemployment benefit and had experienced a sense of worthlessness as she lined up in a 'dole queue' to be interviewed by Centre-link staff.



Notwithstanding her part time teaching position, Centre-link required Marnie to be actively seeking full time work, including positions unrelated to teaching, in order to continue to receive her allowance. The Centre-link staff seemed unsympathetic to the dilemma this created for Marnie. They appeared uninterested in the clash arising from being required to seek work whilst trying to meeting her teaching obligations that were on different days/times throughout the school week. Marnie tried to explain that she could not predict when she would have to remain at school, beyond her part time teaching hours, to participate in the duties/meetings compulsorily associated with her employment. These conflicting agendas caused Marnie to feel stressed, anxious and disappointed. Her sense of anxiety was further heightened by other challenging aspects of her part time employment, most notably the lack of any induction to the school and its teaching and learning programs. Marnie explained that the school was unlike any other she had experienced on her practicum placements, because she had been assigned a challenging mix of 'special needs' students, who were peppered throughout many of her classes.

These special needs students encompassed those with hearing impairment; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; Autism and Aspersers syndrome. She said that she initially felt overwhelmed by the diverse nature of the challenges she had to navigate on an almost daily basis, but did not feel it was safe to draw this to the attention of other staff. I asked her why she felt vulnerable about raising her concerns with the school hierarchy and she responded that the few tentative remarks she had made about needing help to manage students' needs had drawn a dismissive response. Marnie's mentor, M - Janine, had been listening quietly until this point and after making several suggestions for ways in which Marnie might secure other work to complement the part time position she already had, went on to ask about the classes Marnie had been assigned.

M - Janine asked Marnie to describe the skill levels of students and also the kinds of work they were currently undertaking. Marnie prefaced her description of the learning program by saying that few, if any of the children had ever taken media as a subject previously. Consequently, her assumptions about their content knowledge and skill level had proven to be incorrect and this had meant that she had spent the first couple of weeks simplifying the work she had initially planned to do with them. Marnie described having had to adopt a 'back to basics' approach that required her to teach the foundations of the media discipline from scratch – a position of assuming no prior knowledge. She mentioned that, in addition to this remedial approach, a number of the classes were extremely challenging from a classroom management perspective. In one such class, the deaf students had a team of interpreters assigned to them to 'sign' Marnie's instructions and translate the students' responses. These staff offered little or no help, however, with behaviour management because this was not officially part of their job description. She observed that the highly audio-visual nature of the media discipline often

resulted in the deaf students withdrawing “into their own little worlds” or, conversely, becoming disruptive as a result of disconnection, boredom and isolation. M - Janine asked Marnie whether she had been provided with any training for working with the special needs students and Marnie said that she had not. She went on to explain that on the one occasion during a performance management meeting that she had intended to raise the issue, she found the person conducting the appraisal unsympathetic to her situation. M - Janine asked Marnie to elaborate and Marnie said that she was reminded by her line manager that as a graduate she was fortunate to have any kind of work at all in the metropolitan area.

The notion that she should be grateful to have a job at all exerted an intimidating effect upon Marnie and she decided she should refrain from ‘complaining’ and should just get on with the task of teaching as best she could. As a result, she did not feel confident to raise other concerns she harboured about her ability to work with students with so many special needs in the same class at the same time. This vulnerability seemed a strange contrast to the confident persona Marnie mostly projected. Trying to remain objective, I had refrained from talking until this point, but as I sat and imagined what it must have been like trying to teach a complex discipline like media from almost no foundation, whilst simultaneously contending with a diverse range of special needs and behaviours. I found I simply had to say something, and I asked Marnie how she felt she would cope with the situation. Marnie stopped for a moment and almost looked as if she might cry. She then composed herself and said she wasn’t really sure, but she noted that she needed the work and therefore really did not have much choice other than to bluff her way through. At this point she laughed and said there were times she felt as if she deserved an Oscar, because she actually felt almost terrified of facing her students and colleagues. There was something of a sombre mood about the meeting at this point, as if everyone was trying to think of what to say to make Marnie feel better. Eventually, M - Janine suggested that Marnie tell the group something more about what had been happening and Marnie appeared to welcome the opportunity to move on.

As Marnie shared the stories of her first few weeks of teaching and then in turn listened to Beth’s experiences, her mood deflated in an almost visible manner. It was apparent that she was upset that her experience had been so challenging. She spoke about the uncertainty she was experiencing about what was ‘normal’ and expressed self doubt about whether she was really ‘cut out for teaching’. Marnie seemed even more upset when M - Janine, her mentor, said that she believed the circumstances that surrounded her induction/class allocation had been poorly handled. M - Janine reminisced about her own beginning-teacher experiences from 1978. Contrasting her own positive experience with that of Marnie, M – Janine concluded that the lack of formal induction or training for the special needs students in Marnie’s classes had essentially ‘set her up to fail’.

In the general discussion that ensued, both Beth and M – Janine brainstormed with Marnie the actions she might take to improve her sense of wellbeing and feeling of control in the classroom and school. M - Janine suggested that, in her experience, learning support staff for hearing impaired students typically did more than simply 'sign'. She asked Marnie whether it might be possible to ask the learning support staff to be more actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Marnie barely hesitated before saying that she felt she had a good rapport with the support staff and that they probably would do whatever she asked of them. She elaborated that she simply had not felt comfortable to require more of them than they had traditionally been used to doing. Some further discussion then ensued about the role of support staff in a range of learning contexts both within media and visual arts and also more generally in education. M - Janine then asked Marnie if perhaps it might be worth calling a meeting with all learning support staff to share her concerns about the students' needs and Marnie resolved to do this as soon as possible.

M - Janine continued to question Marnie about whether she felt she could perhaps seek the input of the aides into brainstorming strategies for achieving her goals for the learning tasks and, further, whether they might be prepared to actively teach small groups under her guidance. This tangible strategy for opening dialogue seemed to be well received, but Marnie was still clearly feeling upset about what had been happening to her. M - Janine asked her whether the behaviour management was as significant an issue as the mechanics of teaching to diverse special needs. Marnie noted that, for the most part, the students were well behaved but that, from time to time, the students with hearing impairment became quite disruptive. M - Janine asked Marnie several questions about the strategies she employed to deal with this problem and the physical layout/seating plan of the room was highlighted as a focus area for discussion. M - Janine suggested that Marnie's level of control could be amplified by separating the special needs students from one another, thereby forcing their participation in the lesson rather than limiting their interactions to those children who were similarly challenged.

M - Janine, Marnie, Beth and I then spent some time talking about the challenges associated with special needs education and the group agreed that Marnie should have received induction and training for her teaching role with these groups. The meeting was drawing to a conclusion and I was concerned that Marnie still appeared unsettled so I asked if there was any support I could offer to her. Marnie replied that she would be fine, but gratefully accepted M - Janine's offer to follow up with her via phone later that day to chat a little further about the issues which had been raised. Beth also volunteered to set up a blogg site to facilitate speedy communication with her buddy and mentor. Marnie left the meeting feeling more positive than when she had arrived and with a sense of purpose about changes she intended to implement. The meeting had served to empower her through simple discussion, empathy and collegial support.

## **Reconciling Marnie's experience against the original research questions**

### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

Marnie suggested that, in her view, visual literacy was simply the students' ability to meaningfully construct and read images and artworks without the assistance of others. She felt that her students were demonstrating increasing visuacy and that this independence arose from the hard work she had undertaken to establish a visual vocabulary. She considered that this facility required a sound knowledge of the elements and principles of visual arts and design and in her experience many students did not appear to have acquired these skills by the end of year 10. A substantial part of her teaching experience in the media/design context during her first year of teaching had focused on this challenge of establishing basic skills and Marnie felt that she had become increasingly successful and confident in meeting this challenge as the year progressed.

### **2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

Marnie identified the interruption to contact with students as a result of her part time status as being a contributing factor to some students possessing less visuacy than others. She was convinced that the absence of any skills in the media area at the time students commenced high school suggested a failure of visual literacy education in the primary school context. Marnie considered that the absence of primary visual arts specialists may have had something to do with this and she advocated formal studies in media/design principles in the later primary years of schooling. As Marnie reflected on this issue, she said that the politics of her school had presented as significantly challenging for herself and the other new teachers at her school and this had not been helped by her status as a mature beginning-teacher. She observed that she had been taken by surprise by the extent to which new and inexperienced teachers were simply left to fend for themselves and there appeared to be a culture that demanded high levels of functionality from all staff. Marnie said that, at a number of times during the year, she had seen experienced teachers who were having personal problems in their private lives struggle to 'hold it together'. She said the school culture seemed intolerant of this 'human' aspect of the staff and over time, it seemed that everyone simply accepted this as normal. Marnie said that her discussions with M - Janine and other colleagues in the AEA/WA had convinced her that this was not typical of most schools. Marnie reflected that this intolerant attitude, combined with poor induction into the policies and procedures of the school (particularly in respect of special needs children), had proven the greatest obstacle to her success in visual literacy education.

3. **Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

Marnie said that the mentoring support she had received from M – Janine had exerted a generalised and positive effect on her confidence and optimism about her professional practice. This was particularly the case at times when the day to day routines of the school seemed to induce stress. Marnie had appreciated M - Janine's willingness to share ideas for projects and suggestions for ways to maximize the school's resources. She had also provided a sympathetic sounding board for Marnie's concerns about her conditions of employment and the manner in which other staff interacted with her. Marnie confided that, when she had been at her lowest point, she felt sure she would have left teaching altogether had it not been for M - Janine's affirmation and generous support.

## **JANINE'S STORY... the journey from exemplary visual arts teacher to mentor**

### **Participant profile: mentor**

M - Janine completed a Bachelor of Arts in 1976. Following graduation, she worked at a number of Government schools teaching visual arts and, at different times, held the position of 'Teacher in Charge' of visual arts and acted in the role of Head of Learning Area (Arts ).

### **Employment status**

M - Janine is currently employed as the Teacher in Charge of Visual Arts at a large Government school close to where she lives. M - Janine was one of the first school based teachers to respond to the call for mentors for the GMP and she so enjoyed the experience of mentoring in 2006 that she returned to participate again in 2007.

### **Data gathering**

M - Janine attended the two meetings for her group during 2006 and shared stories of the ways in which she had supported her beginning-teachers. I recorded details in my field notes journal and M - Janine provided an evaluation of the mentoring process via an email statement at the end of the year. She did not complete the formal questionnaire, because she considered that she had responded to the types of questions contained in the questionnaire through her periodic email communication and the formal statement she provided. She did not maintain the professional learning journal and said that despite having begun to maintain the journal she had misplaced and then simply forgotten about it. She also noted that a shortage of time would ultimately have dissuaded her from maintaining the journal even if she had not misplaced it.

### **Perception of the beginning-teachers' readiness for teaching generally**

M - Janine said that she initially considered that both Beth and Marnie were confident beginning-teachers who possessed all the requisite skills required to competently manage the various demands of teaching. Over time, M - Janine revised this position. She realised that Beth was quite unwell and suffering from fatigue and although Marnie had appeared confident, M - Janine realised she was actually quite intimidated by her school culture and its staff. M - Janine felt that, despite having many years experience in an industry setting, Marnie's teacher training experience had been only barely adequate for the position she ultimately achieved. M - Janine considered that the school placed unreasonable demands on new staff, particularly graduates and she reflected that had Marnie been employed in a different setting she might have had a more affirming induction experience.

### **Perception of beginning-teachers' readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

When asked for her impressions about the mentoring process so far, M - Janine described having received several phone calls from both Marnie and Beth and some email communication. She noted that this level of contact seemed to have been appropriate and she explained that she had adopted a stance in which she left it to them to contact her according to their needs. M - Janine felt that both women were competent visual artists and she considered that they were well placed to facilitate visuacy in their students.

### **The impact of mentoring on the first year**

I met with M - Janine and her group on one occasion during 2006. Her journey as a mentor encompassed offering advice on a number of themes including:

- health and physical well-being;
- managing stress;
- securing employment;
- the politics of schools;
- age-appropriate pedagogy;
- age-appropriate subject content knowledge.

### **The Vignette: a story about nurturing others**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which M - Janine supported her beginning-teachers during their first year. Her story in its entirety has been attached as an appendix. At the first meeting, M - Janine listened in a somewhat dismayed manner to the stories Marnie relayed about the challenges she was navigating in her new position. M - Janine expressed the view, several times during the conversation that she considered it a tragedy that beginning-teachers repeatedly appeared to be simply left to fend for themselves in new and unfamiliar teaching situations. She said that this was probably a by-product of the changes associated with WACF, in that experienced teachers seemed to be too busy to worry about younger teaching colleagues. M - Janine was startled to hear that Marnie had to manage large, mainstream classes without training or support, into which special needs students had been blended. She urged Marnie, as a matter of urgency, to meet with her line manager to seek a review of her teaching allocation. M - Janine encouraged Marnie to 'stand up for herself' since it appeared that her line manager was either unwilling or unable to support her. M - Janine offered tangible strategies for renegotiating the terms of her teaching allocation and responsibilities and Marnie felt empowered to attempt these upon her return to school. Beth's more positive experiences did little to overcome M - Janine's sense of sadness and frustration about Marnie's plight and she mentioned feeling somewhat disillusioned and flat. I reflected at the time that it was as if she had absorbed her mentee's emotional disposition, leaving Marnie buoyed and her deflated.

As a silent observer at the meeting, I wondered about this absorption process and pondered the dynamic which had begun to play out in this mentoring partnership. M - Janine's response to her mentee's situation had a markedly similar quality to that of another mentor, M - Tess, who had also been alarmed at the experience of her beginning-teachers. Both mentors had remarked to me at various times that they felt it was unacceptable that new teachers were simply left to fend for themselves, or worse still, were almost exploited by staff at their schools. M - Janine said that she spent many hours thinking about Marnie's situation and tried to devise solutions for the challenges associated with the special needs students. I reflected on the similarity between M - Janine and M - Tess, in that they both seemed to feel that it was up to them to 'fix' the difficulties their beginning-teachers were experiencing. I wondered about the stress this generated for the mentors and included in my field notes questions about coping mechanisms for these busy teachers.

This reflective process underlined the critical and potentially problematic, issue of procurement of mentors. I questioned why mentors would agree to be available on more than one occasion if the first experience proved stressful. I raised this with both M - Janine and M - Tess and they each said that, whilst they were happy to participate in the mentoring, other teachers might not agree to be involved if the process generated extra work or stress. M - Tess put it simply and asked: 'What's in it for them?' At a time of extensive education reform embodied in the WACF and particularly preparations for the new courses of study at the senior school level, this question was both pertinent and extremely problematic. I simply could not identify a rationale for repeated involvement in mentoring and accepted M - Tess's observation that altruism was a fleeting thing and that most mentors would be unlikely to participate in a second year. During one of these conversations, M - Janine suggested that perhaps the beginning-teachers could come and help out in the mentor's school whilst they were still students at university and, if that went well, the mentor might be well disposed to 'return the favour the following year'. This provided a tangible solution to the question of 'what's in it for the mentors?' This fledgling conversation developed over time into the Artist-in-Residence reciprocal mentoring model described in chapter five.

### **Reconciling M - Janine's experience against the original research questions**

#### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

M - Janine observed that students were acquiring the fundamental skills of visual literacy when they could understand and use key visual arts terms to discuss their own and others' work. She noted that visually literate students could:



- describe aesthetic qualities, content/subject, form, processes and mood of artworks;
- decipher and critically appraise visual forms;
- appraise artworks with an understanding of elements, principles and conventions;
- respond to, a range of historical, cultural and contemporary visual arts and design works.

M - Janine considered that success in visual literacy education could be measured by the extent to which students could demonstrate mastery of these skills. She considered teaching successfully required the teacher to employ strategies which would facilitate mastery.

**2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

Reflecting on the experience of her protégés, M - Janine suggested that a significant obstacle to successfully teaching visual literacy skills lay in the area of confidence. M - Janine reflected that Marnie was in fact quite competent, but the stress of her school environment had increasingly undermined her ability to do her job. M - Janine said that, in Beth's case, it was difficult to identify how successful she might have been in this critical area had she not become ill. M - Janine noted that many of the early discussions between Beth and herself had been framed around the limited budget in the school as well as the need for more comprehensive resources and reference texts. M - Janine surmised that this might have developed into a focus area for mentoring had Beth remained in the study.

**3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators' impact Beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

M - Janine was delighted with the quality of the mentoring experience in 2006. She had found it particularly rewarding, having increasingly felt that she had something valuable to share with others. M - Janine said that she now not only felt very competent, but actually felt that she could tacitly acknowledge excellence in her teaching. M - Janine said that, as a consequence of the mentoring experience, she was now seriously considering pursuing further study at university at Master of Education level and was looking forward to the opportunity to adopt a scholarly approach to her own practice.

M - Janine was convinced that both her beginning-teachers had derived great benefit from the experience of sharing, within a safe group context, the worries and stresses they were navigating in their teaching appointments. M - Janine cited the occasions on which she had recommended

texts, references, resources and identified ideas she had shared for projects. She summarised the impact of the mentoring by saying that she felt the main benefit of the process was the nurturing support that the group offered the new teacher. She believed that as consequence of the mentoring experience Marnie had remained in teaching when she would otherwise have been lost to the profession. M - Janine had been shocked by the poor level of training and induction offered to Marnie and having discussed this with other school based colleagues, now realised that induction failure was extremely common, if not endemic, to the profession.

## **DISINTEGRATED GROUPS**

The remaining three groups from the 2006 research period disintegrated within a few weeks of the study commencing. A brief overview of the factors which led to the disintegration are presented here, but no attempt to reconcile the experiences of the groups against the research questions has been undertaken.

### **Group Three 2006**

There was only one meeting for the members of group three. The group determined within a few weeks of the training workshop that they did not see benefit in the mentoring process and the group disintegrated.

### **Group Four 2006**

This group had decided at the training workshop not to meet at all, given Laura's imminent transfer to a remote teaching context and Christopher's high level of confidence and past exposure to schools as a visual arts technician in a secondary school. The group disintegrated within the first few weeks of the school year and the members cited varying reasons for this outcome. It is worthy of note that Laura later confided to me that she felt there had been a personality clash between herself and the mentor and this was a catalyst for her withdrawal from the program.

### **Group Five 2006**

This group disintegrated almost immediately. The mentor M - Hetty, was diagnosed with serious illness and withdrew from the research on the day of the training workshop. I attempted to match the beginning-teachers to another mentor, but this was unsuccessful at short notice. The beginning-teachers attended the training workshop, but withdrew shortly thereafter once they had been advised that M - Hetty would not be available to mentor them.

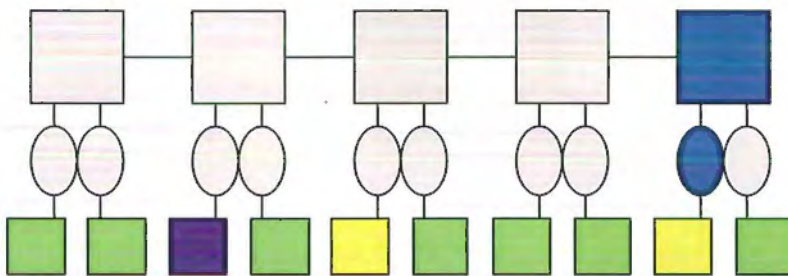
## DIAGRAM SIX: 2007 PARTICIPANTS

Five mentor-teachers each with two beginning-teachers

- Female participants - pink;
- male participants - blue;

Beginning-teacher employment status at commencement of research period

- unemployed in yellow;
- relief work in purple;
- full-time work in green;
- part-time work in orange;



Group 6	Group 7	Group 8	Group 9	Group 10
<b>JOCELYN</b>	<b>JANINE</b>	<b>TESS</b>	<b>SARAH</b>	<b>TOM</b>
Anna	Chloe	Kristin	Beth	Zack
Lesley	Trish	Lyn	Kasey	Penny
(P)	(I)	(D)	(D)	(I)

Key: D - disintegrated    I - in tact    P – partially intact .

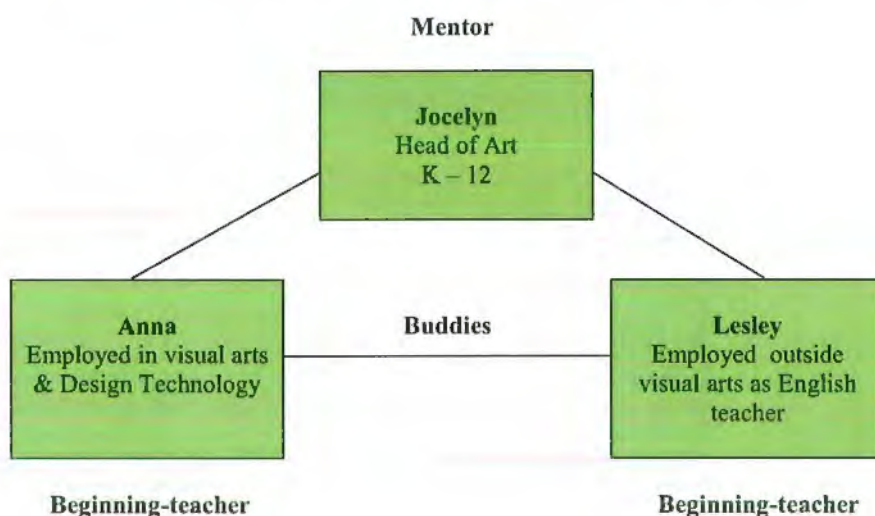
## PHASE TWO VIGNETTES - 2007

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### RESULTS: GROUP SIX

This group met on two occasions and utilised some email and telephone contact.

#### DIAGRAM SEVEN – REPRESENTATION OF GROUP SIX



### PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

#### Anna: beginning-teacher

Anna left a successful career as a graphic designer in order to re-train as a visual arts teacher. She was determined to do everything possible to make her career change successful. She volunteered to participate in the mentoring program as soon as it was advertised to students in 2006.

#### Lesley: beginning-teacher

Lesley volunteered to participate in the research because, despite having been appointed to a fulltime English position at a Government school about 50kms from Perth. She hoped that in time she might be able to move into visual arts that was her major specialisation. She felt it might be helpful to be in touch with mentor who could support her if such a transition occurred.

**Jocelyn: mentor (M- Jocelyn)**

M - Jocelyn had initially volunteered to participate in the research in 2006, but ill-health had precluded this. In 2007 she again volunteered and was matched with Anna and Lesley. M - Jocelyn described the impact mentors had had upon her success at various times in her teaching career and noted that she felt a responsibility to reciprocate and offer the same guidance and support to other beginning-teachers.

## **ANNA'S STORY... the journey from designer to visual arts teacher.**

### **Participant profile: beginning-teacher**

Anna graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Design) in 1996 and then completed her Graduate Diploma in 2006. Her teaching specialisations were visual arts (major) and design technology (minor). Between the two degrees, Anna travelled extensively and, upon her return to Perth in 1998, accepted a position as a set designer for theatre, where she used both her marketing and visual arts skills. Her supervision of a number of young people on work experience placements helped Anna decide that she had an interest in teaching and she returned to study to complete a teaching qualification.

### **Employment status**

In early January 2007, Anna was appointed to a full time 12 month contract position at a Government school. Her teaching responsibilities encompassed visual arts and design technology across years 8-12. She also had a year 8 study group that she described as difficult because they presented significant behaviour challenges.

### **Data gathering**

There were two meetings, a number of telephone conversations and some email exchanges, from which an account of Anna's induction and mentoring experience has been constructed. She completed a questionnaire and I interviewed her early in the year. She did not maintain a journal, despite having undertaken to do so. Anna was extremely apologetic about the journal, but said that she simply had not found time to record anything during the teaching day. She noted that by the time the evening came around she was often exhausted and simply could not find the enthusiasm needed to update the journal. She confided that mid way through the year, she had lost the journal and had accepted the reality that even if found, it was unlikely that she would maintain it.

### **Self-perception of readiness for teaching generally**

Anna explained that she had gained a lot from her tertiary studies and felt ready for teaching. Anna's final practicum had gone very well and she had achieved outstanding ratings for professionalism and teaching performance. She noted that this confidence evaporated shortly after commencing work as the only woman in an all male design technology department. The department appeared to have learning programs framed around outdated or traditional content, but Anna nevertheless felt that, because she possessed an extensive industry experience, she would be able to upgrade the learning programs over time. When she attempted to do this, her efforts were blocked by her colleagues. This caused Anna significant stress and frustration.

Anna said that her only other concern related to the behaviour management of some students who appeared to spend much of their day in the deputy principal's office or engaged in behaviour modification programs. Her status as a mature aged beginning-teacher gave Anna confidence to deal with people generally and she expressed the view that, over time, she would learn how to respond appropriately to these particular children and their needs. She went on to say that most staff in the school appeared to be similarly challenged by the behaviour of these students and there was a well developed, school wide plan for managing their behaviour.

### **Self-perception of readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

Anna considered that she had a solid subject content knowledge arising from her past work as a graphic artist and clothing designer. She felt that this knowledge base, in combination with an adequate set of pedagogical strategies, placed her in a good position to effectively facilitate visuacy within her students.

### **The impact of mentoring on Anna's first year**

I met with Anna and her group on two occasions during 2007. Her journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- poor induction experiences;
- vulnerability arising from temporary contract work with no guarantee of continuity;
- challenging gender politics within the school's male dominated design technology department;
- students with challenging behaviour;
- unsympathetic staff who expected her to simply cope;
- colleagues who were resistant to her attempts to contemporise outdated learning programs and content;

### **The Vignette: a story about breaking with tradition**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Anna's mentor supported her during her first year. Her story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. During the first meeting for this group M - Jocelyn asked Anna how she was finding the first few weeks of the school year. Anna explained that, despite the apparently relaxed teaching environment, she often felt quite stressed, particularly with regard to her design technology classes. She continued, that when she accepted the appointment she had automatically expected that there would be resources available within the school to support the teaching and learning program, but this had proven to be incorrect. Anna noted that the other teachers in the department had all been at the school for many years and had their own teaching resources that whilst they were happy to share them, were significantly outdated. M - Jocelyn asked Anna why she believed the resources were outdated and Anna responded that she had formed this view in the light of the materials which had been



reviewed during her university education, particularly the Graduate Diploma, in combination with the standards which applied in the industry setting. Anna had asked her Head of Department if she could use alternative learning program/resources in preference to the ones the school had traditionally delivered but, given her inexperience, she had been asked to trial the existing programs before making changes. Anna had then raised the possibility of updating the existing programs to encompass more contemporary approaches to technology and design in education, but had received a resounding 'no' from her colleagues and Head of Department. This caused her significant frustration, because her industry experience and postgraduate studies had all been centred on contemporary approaches to both subject discipline and pedagogy and she believed that the learning programs were counter productive to the visual literacy needs of her students.

Resistance by colleagues to her suggestions for updating courses caused Anna to feel considerable stress and this was exacerbated by what she described as attempts by other staff to take advantage of her as a consequence of her 'new teacher' status. She explained that two teachers in the physical education department at the school had pressured her into swapping her year 8 supervised study group for a more challenging class that she described as 'the naughty year 9 rugby boys'. Her original group had been a small and well behaved year 8 class and the attempts to 'offload the naughty class' onto her had caused her significant anxiety. She felt that she was being taken advantage of and did not know what to do, or to whom she should speak. Anna explained that there was very little for the 'naughty rugby boys' to do in the study group session which made matters worse and, in an effort to improve the quality of the learning experience, she had begun devising worksheets for the students to complete.

Predictably, there were significant behaviour problems among students with nothing to do and Anna had attempted to apply her pre-service training to manage the behaviour challenge. The physical education staff had expressed concern that, since they did not give worksheets to their study groups, it was not appropriate for Anna to do so either. They maintained that the study period was for homework completion and some students had complained about the work Anna was distributing. These experienced staff seemed to believe that it was preferable for students with no homework to simply sit in the room with nothing to do in preference to completing the visual arts puzzle worksheets Anna had devised. One teacher had recommended that Anna tell the students to simply "put their head down on the desk and have a sleep". Anna explained that she felt compromised by these 'silly' suggestions and continued to distribute the worksheets, much to the ire of the physical education staff. Anna's awareness that her colleagues were unhappy with her made her feel vulnerable. Her appointment was only a short term contract assignment and she was having trouble managing the stress arising from these interactions.

M - Jocelyn (her mentor) listened as Anna described the events that had occurred during her first month of teaching and agreed that these 'other aspects of the school context' were negatively affecting Anna's capacity to do her job. She reassured Anna that, whilst unpleasant, such experiences were regrettably quite typical of those experienced by beginning-teachers everywhere. M - Jocelyn recommended that Anna meet with her Head of Learning Area to discuss the unauthorised substitution of the 'study group', with a view to having the 'switch' reversed. She also talked about the vulnerability of new teachers to unreasonable demands from co-workers, who might not even appreciate the stress this caused the new teacher and encouraged Anna to speak up for herself. M - Jocelyn expressed the view that induction into the profession was difficult enough in its own right, without beginning-teachers having to navigate other unnecessary stressors. This simple advice and affirmation by M - Jocelyn, that it was reasonable for Anna to feel ill-at-ease with the pressure her colleagues were imposing on her, seemed to encourage Anna to stand firm and tackle the issues with her Head of Department. She said she would do this as soon as possible.

M - Jocelyn then went on to consider the issue of the school's outdated design technology learning programs and resources and agreed that this was a little more difficult to navigate. She considered that this was especially the case, given Anna's description of the Head of Learning Area as being 'territorial' about the programs. According to Anna, the staff who were currently at the school had devised the programs over many years, appeared dismissive of the views of a younger female beginning-teacher (despite her having many years experience within the design industry) and were unwilling to consider changes. M - Jocelyn suggested that, in such a political climate, it might be preferable to trial the programs on an 'as is' basis and then engage in moderation processes for assessment. This would allow an opportunity to identify ways in which the learning programs could be improved without incurring significant costs which had been cited as one of the objections to change. Anna said that she would try this approach and appeared happier about both issues than she had on arrival. M - Jocelyn then chatted about the 'rugby boys' behaviour management and cited several successful strategies she employed in her classes with difficult and disengaged students. Anna agreed that these suggestions were valuable and she left the meeting feeling much more positive than she had been when she had arrived.

### **Reconciling Anna's experience against the original research questions**

#### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

Anna considered that she had had some success in teaching visual literacy skills and placed

these experiences squarely with the technical skills domain. In one of her emails she noted the following:

During my first year teaching I found success in some areas of visual literacy education. When my students' ability to communicate through visual media improved they appeared to feel less inhibited and were prepared to explore other ideas more openly. As their confidence grew I observed that they became more confident with applying visual language and ultimately were able to be more creative and able to communicate graphically.

I found students felt more included in the world of visual arts if they were able to physically contribute to it in some way and "own the communication". This affected my understanding of how to work more successfully with them and as a result I became a better teacher. Over time I focussed more on 'arts skills and processes' before 'arts ideas' or 'arts in society'. The skills were the key ... it made putting their ideas in practice possible. Without the skills they were lost .... So this was the area in which I had greatest success and is now the main way I evaluate how things are going.

## **2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

Anna identified outdated learning programs and inadequate or redundant teaching resources as the most significant obstacle she had to overcome in respect of her students' visual education. She noted that this was particularly frustrating, given the reality that contemporary Australian society was saturated with images, new technologies and modes of communication. She considered that updating to more appropriate resources would have been relatively easy had her colleagues supported this idea. She felt that she had to continually 'fight' entrenched ways of thinking about teaching both in design technology and visual arts, where staff at her school had failed to take account of the new technological realities with which students were engaged. The unwillingness of Anna's colleagues' to embrace new technologies and ways of working continued, unabated, until quite late in her first year of teaching. Eventually, Anna simply made subtle changes without consultation and she said that M - Jocelyn's affirmation and encouragement had been pivotal in finding the courage to do this.

Anna's agenda was to transform the learning programs over time, despite her colleagues' reticence to do so. She explained that gender and age-based issues had also permeated her induction into teaching and she frequently reiterated her frustration at being the only woman in the design technology department. This, in combination with her age and beginning-teacher status, meant that Anna did not have the respect that she felt she was owed, due to her industry experience over many years prior to re-training for teaching. Her colleagues appeared to give

little importance to this industry experience. Anna said that there was a clear hierarchy within the department, in which she felt she occupied the lowest level.

**3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

Anna felt that the external mentoring program had been an extremely valuable support during her first year of teaching. She particularly endorsed the external nature of the program and noted that she felt as if her own school environment was counterproductive to her success as a beginning-teacher. She did not feel confident to repeatedly raise her concerns in her school and M - Jocelyn became her 'safe zone' for discussion and reflection. Anna said that the various hidden agendas of her school colleagues made it difficult for her to feel comfortable in asking for help with her learning programs at the very time this was needed most. She continued that, without support and input from her external mentor, she felt she might well have left teaching within the first 12 months. The most critical benefit of the mentoring was the nurturing that the mentoring afforded. This, in combination with some practical advice about day to day management of students, gave her the courage to search for ways to improve her teaching and learning program for both visual arts and design technology students.

## **LESLEY'S STORY... the journey from painter to English teacher.**

### **Participant profile: beginning-teacher**

Lesley completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts in 2005 and subsequently completed a Graduate Diploma in 2006.

### **Employment status**

Lesley was offered a teaching position immediately after graduation and whilst she had hoped to teach in both her subject specialisations of visual arts and English, she was in fact only offered a position in English. She accepted the position in the hope that, over time, some relief teaching or part time work in visual arts might become available at the school.

### **Data gathering**

Information about Lesley's experience was collected via telephone, email and through the impressions of her mentor M - Jocelyn. I was unable to discern Lesley's impressions about her readiness for either teaching generally or visuacy education specifically.

### **The impact of mentoring on Lesley's first year**

I met with Lesley's group on two occasions during 2006 and chatted with her by telephone from time to time. Her journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- disappointment at being unable to teach visual arts which was her major specialisation;
- acceptance of the reality that she had been allocated a full load of English teaching and this was unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

### **The Vignette: a story about changing direction and adjusting expectations**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Lesley's mentor supported her during her first year. Her story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. Lesley failed to attend the first meeting of her group, but made contact a week later and explained that whilst she had intended to come to the meeting, the journey to Perth had proven difficult for her. She also doubted that she would be able to make other meetings very often given the fact that she had been posted to a Government school about 50kms from the city. Lesley enquired whether M - Jocelyn would be prepared to mentor her remotely via telephone and email and explained that, despite not teaching visual arts, she was actually very happy with her progress to date. She continued that the staff at the school had been extremely supportive of her as a new teacher and that the formal induction offered by the school had been very useful. Lesley said she would be very happy to forgo contacting her mentor until she had something specific to discuss and M - Jocelyn agreed

that this would be fine, but was unsure about the extent to which she could offer assistance for English. She went on to say that, if there were any administrative issues or behaviour management issues which needed to be addressed, she would be more than happy to help and noted that she had many practical strategies which she believed would be of value to Lesley as a beginning-teacher. Lesley had gratefully accepted these suggestions as she had been assigned some difficult classes with challenging behaviours. M – Jocelyn felt that there might be some overlap between teaching traditional text based literacy skills for English and visuacy, but she was unsure how these would be evident. Whilst she was happy to help in any way that she could, M – Jocelyn encouraged Lesley to try to find an experienced English teacher who could offer support and Lesley agreed this was a good idea. M – Jocelyn then volunteered to try to source an appropriate person through her professional networks. Lesley thanked M - Jocelyn for this offer but felt that one of the other English teachers at the school would probably be able to help her with challenges in the English area.

As the researcher for the project I contacted Lesley to enquire about her intentions for the research. Lesley disclosed that she might leave the mentoring program at some future time, though she liked M - Jocelyn and respected her depth of knowledge of visual arts and teaching generally. She appreciated the suggestions M - Jocelyn had given in terms of behaviour management and said she would like to leave this option open, if that was acceptable to M - Jocelyn. I agreed that this seemed reasonable and suggested that I would follow up periodically to see how she was going. Lesley appeared happy with this open-ended arrangement and reaffirmed her desire to teach visual arts in the future, noting that having M - Jocelyn as a mentor would be invaluable should this occur.

I subsequently heard from Lesley that she had in fact decided to withdraw from the program. She suggested that she would be willing to continue to participate in the program through a 'virtual' mentoring format via email and telephone and I encouraged her to discuss this with M - Jocelyn to ensure that this was agreeable to everyone. Although M - Jocelyn was happy to mentor Lesley on a remote basis, the placement ultimately broke down and M - Jocelyn continued only to mentor Anna.

## **JOCELYN'S STORY... from exemplary visual arts teacher to mentor**

### **Participant profile: mentor-teacher**

M - Jocelyn completed a Bachelor of Education degree in her 20s and worked at a number of Non-Government schools during her teaching career. She travelled extensively overseas and has visited most of the internationally renowned galleries of Europe. M – Jocelyn has been an active member of the AEA/WA and has a strong commitment to the teaching profession.

### **Employment status**

At the commencement of the research M – Jocelyn had been employed as the Head of visual arts at her school for the last 8 years. She had responsibility for staff in the creative and performing arts department.

### **Data gathering**

The main forms through which data was gathered from M – Jocelyn encompassed meetings, interview, email correspondence and telephone contacts. She did not maintain a journal and failed to return the final questionnaire.

### **Perception of the beginning-teachers' readiness for teaching generally**

M - Jocelyn noted that Anna was a confident beginning-teacher that she attributed to Anna's many years' industry experience in combination with her age and previous international travel/work experience. M - Jocelyn felt that Anna was a highly capable graduate, who would develop into an effective and efficient teacher. M - Jocelyn considered that Lesley appeared quite confident at training workshop but because contact dwindled she was unable to form any real impression of Lesley's competence.

### **Perception of the beginning-teachers' readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

M - Jocelyn considered that Anna possessed a high degree of visual literacy and this, in combination with her excellent practicum experience, suggested that Anna would excel in the teaching of visual literacy skills. M - Jocelyn was unable to form any impression of Lesley's preparedness for visual literacy education.

### **The impact of mentoring on the first year**

I met with M - Jocelyn and her group on only two occasions. Her journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- advice on age appropriate projects;
- navigating gender politics;

- behaviour management challenges;
- school policies and protocols.

### **The Vignette: a story about juggling balls and maintaining respect**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which M - Jocelyn supported her mentees during the induction year. M - Jocelyn's story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. The second meeting for this group occurred in March 2007. M - Jocelyn was a little late arriving at the meeting and she was clearly feeling stressed and unhappy as she seated herself at the table. Both Anna and I were concerned for her and asked how she was. M - Jocelyn volunteered that she was feeling quite anxious and remarked that she seemed to be constantly engaged in one quasi conflict or another with staff at her school. This was a new experience for her and a new phenomenon at the school that had a reputation as a harmonious working environment. M - Jocelyn went on to explain that, as a consequence of what many staff regarded as a 'hostile' take over of the media department by visual arts, a number of staff were feeling quite disgruntled and venting their frustrations. M - Jocelyn was feeling similarly frustrated at constantly having to defend the merger of media into the Arts learning area, of which she was the coordinator. She explained that she had tried to impress upon media staff that the blending of the two subjects arose as a consequence of wider curriculum reforms initiated by the CC/WA.

Whilst M - Jocelyn understood the concerns staff expressed, she said it felt as though she was constantly trying to placate one person or another and observed that at the end of some days she was quite simply emotionally exhausted. She laughed and joked that it sometimes felt as though her whole life had turned into a circus and she was a clown constantly trying to juggle balls without dropping any of them. M - Jocelyn continued that in fact their school had been slow to implement the compulsory changes and she had tried repeatedly to explain that the school principal had directed the move to occur. She advised all staff to accept this decision as the prerogative of the school Principal, however, this appeared to have done little to assuage feelings of ill will from some staff. This angst was now clearly taking a toll on M - Jocelyn as the Head of the Arts learning area.

As M - Jocelyn settled into the meeting over a cup of coffee she began to relax a little and asked Anna how she was going. After a couple of opening remarks, Anna mentioned that she was struggling to navigate the onset of the reporting period. M - Jocelyn understood Anna's concerns and advised that she also was feeling worn out by the relentless timeline within which the reporting had to be completed. Anna was very interested to hear about the reporting procedures that were adopted at M - Jocelyn's school and although belonging to different systems, indicated that any advice M - Jocelyn could offer would be most welcome. Til that



point very little information had been provided to Anna about reporting protocols and she confided that she didn't feel comfortable in admitting to her colleagues that she was confused.

As the discussion unfolded M - Jocelyn stressed the importance of formative assessment and explained that she placed a lot of emphasis upon the students' visual diary. She talked about the ways in which the visual diary often gave indications of whether or not a student's level of visual literacy was improving. M - Jocelyn was dismayed to hear Anna say that very little help had been provided to her by her colleagues throughout the reporting period and she encouraged Anna to raise this issue formally during her forthcoming performance management appraisal. M - Jocelyn described the ways in which she supported her own new staff through every aspect of the induction period and emphasised that this was part of the duty statement of both senior teachers and Heads of Learning area. M - Jocelyn felt that the Head of the Arts Learning Area at Anna's school either was not doing his job or was simply unaware that she was struggling. Whatever the case, this was an unacceptable situation that was placing unreasonable demands on a new, graduate teacher at the school.

Anna then detailed her sense of frustration at being unable to utilise her many years of industry experience, because her colleagues would not allow her to implement new ideas and learning opportunities for students. M - Jocelyn suggested several strategies for persuading other teachers at Anna's school to agree to the updating of material and suggested that Anna's strongest argument might lie in the area of social justice. M - Jocelyn said that if Anna truly felt that the current learning program disadvantaged students because of its irrelevant content, she could spotlight the new courses being implemented in many schools that were both contemporary and exciting. Anna might thus be able to shift the focus from her own preferences to what was happening in other schools and in education generally.

M - Jocelyn identified a number of software programs that were used at her school, both within visual arts and design/technology that were achieving great results. She observed that in a fast changing world, students who were not provided with contemporary materials, skills and processes were disadvantaged when compared with their more knowledgeable peers at other schools. She observed that students who were still engaged in learning programs with traditional and outdated methodology, were highly likely to become bored and, predictably, disengaged from the subject. Anna agreed that this was a strong argument but she was worried that her colleagues might take it personally. She feared that they might view her actions as stepping beyond her place in both the school and learning area. M - Jocelyn acknowledged that this could be problematic, but urged Anna to pursue the respect to which she was entitled. Anna advised that the next performance management meeting would not be for a while, but said she would raise the matter, because it was a justice issue both for herself and her students.

## **Reconciling M - Jocelyn's experience against the original research questions**

### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

M - Jocelyn considered that visual literacy education required the teacher to establish a solid visual vocabulary to support student engagement with visual text. She emphasized that in her own teaching she spent much of the middle school years building a visual vocabulary framed around the elements and principles of art. She said she also spent a significant amount of time working with the critical response frames developed by visual arts educationalists such as Israel (2002). The response frames (subjective, cultural, structural, or post-modern) were employed widely in schools and the AEA/WA had run several professional development workshops for teachers in their use. M - Jocelyn concluded that, to be successful in visual literacy education, teachers needed to focus on building both a theoretical and practical knowledge of the frames. She clarified that, once students could debate the merits or otherwise of other artists' works, they were well on the way to being more conceptual and intellectual in the construction of their own work. In M - Jocelyn's view this was the clearest evidence of visual literacy acquisition.

### **2. What factors do teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

M - Jocelyn said that her mentoring experience had highlighted the destructive influence that politics could exert on the success of any teaching and learning program. She had been critical of the manner in which the staff at Anna's school appeared to block her attempts to improve and contemporise outdated learning programs. She went on to say that the stress arising from navigating these variables in combination with the difficulties associated with students' behaviour, also had the potential to interfere with a young teacher's capacity to teach effectively.

### **3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators' impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

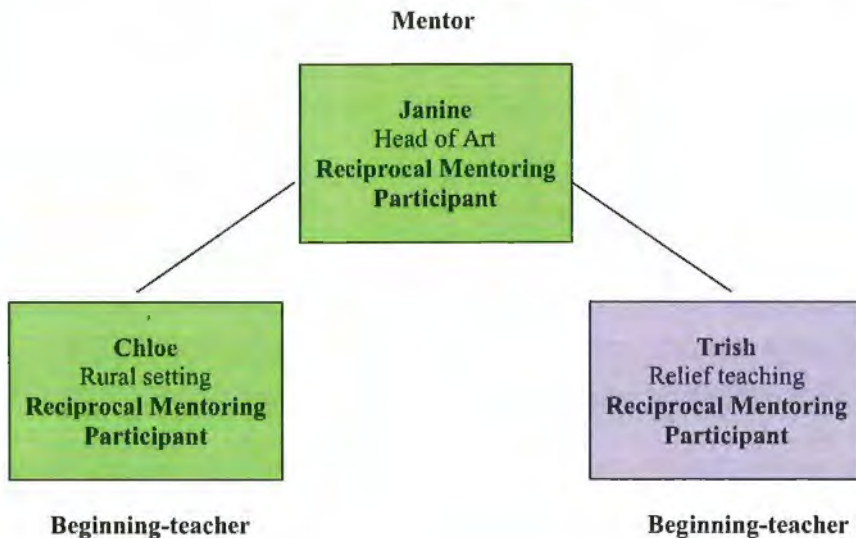
M - Jocelyn felt that the mentoring experience had been beneficial for Anna, particularly in dealing with school politics. I asked M - Jocelyn if she might consider participating in the program again in 2008. She responded that whilst she had enjoyed the experience, she was still contending with a challenging set of politics in her own school setting and needed to devote her time and energies to supporting the staff for whom she was responsible. Consequently she declined to re-enter the program.

## RESULTS: GROUP SEVEN 2007

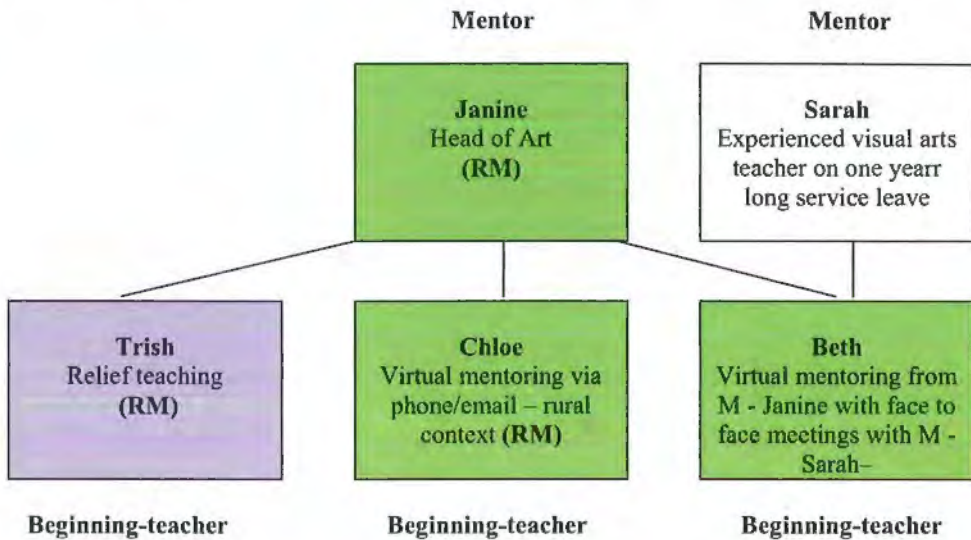
Unlike the other mentoring groups there was almost no interaction between the beginning-teachers in this group as a consequence of country posting and evolving structures. Group seven had a complex and somewhat organic structure that changed shape several times during 2007. Initially, M - Janine had agreed to mentor Chloe and Trish but following Chloe's departure to a rural teaching position a few days before the school year, she and M - Janine renegotiated the terms of the relationship.

It is worthy of note that both Chloe and Trish had been participants in the Artist-in-Residence program during 2006 whilst they were completing their Graduate Diploma and that this had been undertaken at M - Janine's school. The placement had involved each pre-service teacher mentoring students in years 8-12 and M - Janine had agreed to now reciprocally mentor them as beginning-teachers. M - Janine was particularly keen to support Chloe during her induction into the teaching profession and did not want to simply dissolve the mentoring structure as a consequence of her country position. M - Janine offered to conduct the mentoring through a virtual format via email and telephone that Chloe gratefully accepted. Chloe's country position meant that, though the group had planned to meet regularly, this was not now practicable. M - Janine nonetheless indicated that she would be happy to mentor Trish, as agreed, through regular face to face meetings and with email and telephone support. She would support Chloe on an as needed basis through 'virtual' means. This suited all three participants and the group functioned in this form until Beth returned to teaching and re-established the mentoring relationship she had enjoyed with M - Janine the preceding year.

### DIAGRAM EIGHT – REPRESENTATION OF GROUP SEVEN



## Which over time evolved into



## PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

### **Chloe: beginning-teacher**

Chloe volunteered to participate in the Artist-in-Residence placement while studying for her Graduate Diploma. During 2006 she had built a good relationship with M - Janine as one of the AiR and was assigned M - Janine as her mentor in the larger research in 2007.

### **Trish: beginning-teacher**

Trish volunteered to participate in the research because she was concerned that her content knowledge that arose from her past overseas studies, might not be sufficient to support the needs of her Australian students in an outcomes-based education context. She observed that there appeared to be significant emphasis upon contemporary Australian arts in current curricula and she did not feel sufficiently well informed for the challenge.

### **Beth: beginning-teacher**

Beth had been a participant in the research in 2006, but had withdrawn due to ill health. By 2007 she had recovered and returned to work and was keen to rejoin the program. Her previous mentor, M - Janine, had already been allocated two new mentees and Beth was therefore matched to a different partnership. Beth's buddy Kasey withdrew before the research started, leaving her as the only mentee in her group and for a while she sought guidance from both M - Sarah and M - Janine, before swapping exclusively to M - Janine.

**Janine: mentor (M – Janine)**

M - Janine had enjoyed the experience of mentoring in 2006 and volunteered to participate again in 2007. I was delighted to accommodate this request.

**M - Sarah: mentor (M – Sarah)**

M - Sarah was sourced through the AEA/WA whilst on long service leave during 2007. She was also completing a Master of Education in the area of mentoring and participating in this research served a clear purpose in both her own studies and the GMP research.

## **CHLOE'S STORY... the journey from painter to visual arts teacher**

### **Participant profile: beginning-teacher**

Chloe completed a Bachelor of Arts (visual arts) in 2005. She subsequently completed her Graduate Diploma in 2006.

### **Employment status**

Chloe was appointed to a teaching position in a rural setting, four days before the beginning of the 2007 school year. She was required to teach from K-10, in classes across a range of disciplines, including several for which she had not been trained.

### **Data gathering**

The main data collection method employed in Chloe's case was email communication. Chloe did not maintain a journal, saying that she simply did not have time to do so. Her appointment to a district high school meant that she would be in Perth infrequently throughout the induction year and the group then decided to hold meetings without her. M - Janine and Chloe therefore formed a smaller sub group of the larger one that included Trish (and later Beth). In time, the group split again, with M - Janine eventually maintaining three separate mentoring relationships.

### **Self-perception of readiness for teaching generally**

Chloe seized the opportunity to work in M - Janine's school as an Artist-in-Residence whilst she completed her Graduate Diploma in 2006. She noted that the reciprocal mentoring program was quite unlike her other school placements for practicum and she had enjoyed the kudos that arose from working as an artist in the school. Chloe felt that she was a valued resource and the staff and students had embraced having her in their community. As a result of this very affirming experience, Chloe was now looking forward with great anticipation to commencing teaching her own students and she felt more than ready for the task.

### **Self-perception of readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

Chloe felt her own visual arts practice was of a high calibre and she was very passionate about the arts and painting in particular. She believed that her command of visual language was very strong and this enabled her to engage successfully with visual text and visual arts works. She had a strong interest in inter-disciplinary visual arts works and had thoroughly enjoyed the placement she completed with M - Janine and the students in the multi-arts program of the school. Chloe felt that she was well placed to help students both produce their own work and respond critically to the work of others.



### **The Vignette: a story about moving away and finding yourself**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Chloe's mentor supported her during her first year. Chloe's story in its entirety has been attached as an appendix. Chloe was a confident and talented young artist who had entered the Graduate Diploma course with a great sense of conviction about the importance of teaching. She had trained to be a secondary visual arts specialist, with English as her minor teaching area. She spent a few hours each week working as an Artist-in-Residence at M - Janine's school and during the first semester of 2006 developed a strong relationship with both staff and students.

During her AiR placement, Chloe assisted with a range of tasks including:

- mentoring students in visual arts history/criticism (exam preparation);
- studio tutoring support in painting;
- visual inquiry tutoring support;
- after-school visual arts classes in painting;
- multi-arts integration;
- set design and production for the school play;
- murals in the school environment.

The informal nature of the AiR placement allowed Chloe to acquire discipline/pedagogical content knowledge which was missing from her undergraduate and postgraduate experience. By the end of 2006, Chloe had become a part of the school - she knew the students and staff well and they valued her contribution to their community. When her formal course at university came to an end, Chloe expressed sadness that the placement at M - Janine's school was also coming to an end, but she noted that she was looking forward to her first real teaching appointment.

She attended her interview at the Department of Education and Training, applied for a few positions at Non-Government schools and then waited. Some two months later, with only four days' notice, Chloe was appointed to a school in a small country town and had to move away from home for the first time. When she arrived at the school, she was informed that she would be teaching both primary and secondary visual arts, secondary English, mathematics and society & environment. Chloe later told me that, as soon as the appointment was confirmed, she began preparing learning programs, but despite a solid teaching preparation for visual arts and English, realised she was in some trouble. That was when, according to Chloe, "reciprocal mentoring and my mentor, M - Janine, stepped in to save the day".

Chloe advised me that M - Janine was able to provide her with a range of learning task sheets and suggestions for projects in the arts and also gave her contact details for colleagues who

specialised in the other subject disciplines to which Chloe had been appointed. A few weeks after she arrived at the school, I received several emails from Chloe in quick succession:

Dear Lisa, finally able to get onto the internet at school...everything here has been crazy. I have nine classes in total ... seven in art, one maths and one society and environment class. It's really hilarious. I'm LOVING the visual arts teaching ... it's kind of nice being the head of my own department ... and having a budget to spend! The school used to have a cooking teacher but now that I'm here they have given the cooking budget to me also, so I have a reasonable amount to spend!! SOC and Maths are doing my head in ... but it's alright ... small price to pay for teaching all that art!

and then:

I am stressing out!! The initial shock of being here and adrenalin has kept me going for the past four weeks. I have no idea how I've really been able to function in the classroom as I had four days before starting this year to plan for nine different classes. What is worrying me right now is the fact that I am rather alone ... being the only visual arts specialist, away from any PD's to enhance my skills ... as a beginning-teacher I was planning to rely on those to keep myself up to date ... but I feel completely isolated ... I have Kindy, years 2/3, 4, 5/6 and 6/7 visual arts ... and I'm doing yrs1/2 and Prep next term ... I have never felt so disorganised in my life ... it's not like me to only have HALF the planning done the night before it's due. I must call M - Janine again I know, she will probably be able to help ... I will try and give her a buzz tomorrow night.

followed by:

The kids are loving the visual arts ... they haven't had it for years and they enjoy my classes, I've managed to get about seven different projects going but primary school visual arts has me confused as far as planning goes. I have managed to get my briefs, planners and rubrics for the three secondary classes I have, but I don't even know where to start with the primary. I ordered some books that loosely go over projects and some of the outcomes they address, but I'm thinking about formulating my own rubric for all the primary classes.

I don't seem to have a problem at the moment with ideas for projects, it's just the assessment and planning that I'm freaking out about ... I haven't had much time to stew over any of it as there have been so many behaviour management issues to address before the teaching actually occurs ... some of the kids are pretty difficult to work with! And that's not even including the SOC and Maths outcomes and standards framework I've had to get my head around. When the kids aren't bouncing off the walls they make me LAUGH. I'll speak to you soon, Chloe :)

Subsequent to receiving Chloe's email to me and M - Janine, I received several additional emails from her, telling me that she was feeling very homesick. She said that she was planning



to return to Perth as soon as possible and certainly at the end of her 12-month contract. She felt lonely and professionally isolated. She said that she had been emailing M - Janine quite regularly since arriving and this had been a valuable support. Chloe said that M - Janine had not only given her professional advice for learning programs, specific visual arts projects and behaviour management strategies but, importantly, had reassured her that the first few weeks were always difficult in any new school and that this was even more the case for new graduates. M - Janine went on to reassure Chloe that, in time, all would be well. M - Janine reminded Chloe of how well she had performed in the AiR placement and said she was sure that, in time, Chloe would make an excellent teacher. Chloe said that this personal affirmation and reassurance had meant a great deal to her when the unfamiliar environment seemed to present insurmountable personal challenges. Accordingly she stayed put and continued to correspond periodically with both M - Janine and myself. As time passed Chloe formed strong relationships with the students, staff and parents of the school. She survived her first year of teaching and voluntarily elected to remain in her teaching position for at least a second year. When she last contacted me she advised that she loved teaching and was thriving in the country town to which she had been posted. She largely attributed her survival to her mentor M - Janine.

### **Reconciling Chloe's experience against the larger research questions**

#### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

Chloe believed that, by adopting a 'back to basics' approach and teaching basic elements and principles of visual arts and design that were missing from her students' visual vocabulary, over time their visual literacy skills would be enhanced. On a number of occasions she referred to the frustration she experienced on realising that the students had almost no previous experience with visual arts education and, consequently, could not understand what she wanted from them. Chloe soon realised that, in order to advance her students' visual education, she needed to go back and establish a sound visual vocabulary. Her delight in the practical work her primary students produced as a result of this process, reflected her belief that this was one of the key elements of achieving success in visual literacy education.



**Photographs: year seven students masks which were shown at the school assembly**

**2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

Chloe's email correspondence both to M - Janine and myself during her first year, made reference to the challenges presented in three areas, including attendance, behaviour management and poor content knowledge. Firstly, sporadic attendance by indigenous children presented a significant challenge to success in the visual arts program. Whilst not directly part of her students' visual education, non-attendance was clearly an obstacle to learning. Secondly and probably a related phenomenon, the absence of critical skills in these students compared with other students of a similar age, prevented progress. She spoke of the frustration she experienced as she realised that the projects she had devised were wrongly premised on a belief that students in a specific year group would have similar content knowledge and foundation skills within the four arts outcomes. This proved not to be the case and Chloe had to abandon much of the work she had planned for her students.

In order to fill the significant gaps in students' skills, she had to return to much simpler tasks and challenges. Finally, Chloe spoke about behaviour management as a significant challenge. This issue was clearly linked to sporadic attendance, because it was difficult to reinforce appropriate behaviour if students simply failed to attend detention, or even the next class. Similarly, speaking to parents about their children's conduct at school proved difficult as parents often simply failed to respond to letters or calls from the school about behaviour, attendance, or academic progress. Chloe observed that these three variables (attendance, behaviour and existing content knowledge) interacted on an almost daily basis. This meant that Chloe had to become far more resourceful and resilient in the way she managed the visual education of her students. Chloe noted that M - Janine's advice and support across these three areas had proven to be particularly helpful during the first months of the school year, when she was adjusting to a new community and school, at a time when she was feeling professionally isolated, personally vulnerable and very homesick.

**3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

Chloe said that she had derived enormous benefit from the relationship she enjoyed with M - Janine, both during the reciprocal mentoring placement whilst she was completing her Graduate Diploma (2006) and later during her first year of teaching in 2007. The induction phase of her first year had been particularly challenging, because Chloe had not only to cope with the demands of teaching, but also to contend with the emotional issues associated with moving away from home for the first time. She frequently spoke about feeling homesick and stressed and observed that these feelings seemed more pronounced because the school was understaffed. Chloe went on to remark that this made her relationship with M - Janine even more important than it might otherwise have been and she believed that she might not have survived the early months had M - Janine not been part of her support network. Chloe said that M - Janine had talked her out of 'throwing in the towel and going home' on more than one occasion when Chloe had simply wanted to pack her bags and leave, regardless of the professional fallout and consequences.

## **BETH'S STORY... resumed from 2006**

Beth had been a beginning-teacher participant in the GMP research in 2006 and had been assigned M - Janine as her mentor. The partnership had worked well until Beth suddenly withdrew as a result of ill health. She rejoined the research program at the last moment, in January 2007 and was initially matched to a new mentor, M - Sarah. M - Janine, her previous mentor, had already been assigned two new recipients for 2007. M - Sarah was also assigned to mentor another beginning-teacher, Kasey, who withdrew at the last moment, leaving only Beth and M - Sarah in group eight.

Following Chloe's posting to a country position, M - Janine volunteered to mentor another city based beginning-teacher. M - Janine was aware that Beth was returning to teaching and asked whether she might resume her previous mentoring role with Beth. I drew this to Beth's attention, because I was aware that they had previously formed a strong bond. M - Sarah had expressed reservation about the being involved with only one beginning-teacher and in view of M - Janine's desire to resume mentoring Beth, I asked Beth if this might appeal to her. Beth said that she would like to be matched to M - Janine, but felt that she could still benefit from M - Sarah's expertise and wondered if there was any way in which she could work with both mentors.

Given M - Sarah's reticence, I wondered whether it might be preferable to condense the two groups into one, with M - Janine supervising both Trish and Beth (with Chloe participating as and when she could on an electronic basis). I tended to favour this arrangement, because the research model had been framed around the notion of one mentor and two beginning-teachers who were buddies for one another. I then received an email from Chloe saying that she greatly appreciated M - Janine's support and, further, that she felt very isolated and homesick. I formed the impression that Chloe fully intended to call regularly upon M - Janine for support, because she had developed a strong relationship with M - Janine during the AiR placement and felt that she could trust M - Janine with her concerns. Given these circumstances, I considered that it might be preferable for Beth to continue with M - Sarah until M - Janine, Trish and Chloe worked out how their group might function. Beth said that she was quite happy with this proposal, but reaffirmed her desire to work with both M - Sarah and M - Janine if that suited everyone. M - Janine confirmed that she would be more than willing to share the support of Beth's return to teaching and, for a time, both M - Sarah and M - Janine were jointly mentoring Beth. M - Janine's mentoring of Beth largely took the form of email and telephone support rather than face to face meetings. M - Sarah's support of Beth took the form of email communication and two meetings.

### **The Vignette: a story about coming back and finding yourself**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which her mentor supported her induction to teaching. Her story in its entirety has been attached as an appendix. The second meeting for Beth and M – Sarah occurred at a cafe in June 2007. Beth had still been unwell during the early months of 2007 and was slowly regaining her health and confidence. Returning to teaching had been an important milestone for this young teacher and when she finally arrived at the meeting, it was immediately apparent that she was in good health and high spirits. This was in marked contrast to her demeanour and circumstances some six months earlier, when she had been extremely ill and depressed.

She now seemed to be glowing and her bubbly personality was clearly evident. When asked how things were going, Beth began the conversation by relaying details of the current staffing at her school. The previous visual arts Coordinator had apparently left the school suddenly, suffering ‘burn out’ and was on extended leave. Beth strongly doubted that her colleague would return. The experience of working at the school had apparently been sufficiently challenging for the Coordinator to make leaving teaching altogether appear a more likely outcome than returning to the school. Beth was unsure why things had deteriorated so badly, but suggested that the difficult teaching environment which featured large open-plan spaces where multiple classes were taught simultaneously, in combination with the absence of a technician, had made life very challenging for staff.

In light of Beth’s previous ill health and part time status, the school had employed another full time member of staff when the visual arts Co-ordinator left. The new appointee was a recent graduate (Jake), who was only 21 years of age. Despite being an extremely talented artist, he was not a strong exponent of behaviour management principles and Beth explained that this had resulted in her informally mentoring him in this area. In exchange, he had reciprocally shared his significant expertise in the area of painting and studio practice. This symbiotic relationship had served both beginning-teachers well and Beth noted that a kind of ‘team-teaching’ had spontaneously developed. The opportunity to team-teach had been further facilitated by the fact that they often had to share the same physical space when teaching their respective classes. Beth said that she greatly appreciated Jake’s expertise in a range of studio areas and considered that she was able to support his management of classes. When asked how she felt about this, given her own graduate status, Beth commented that she felt she had acquired a significant set of skills during her first year. She continued that this allowed her to respond to challenges more effectively than her young colleague, who often remarked that he felt hardly any older than his students.

Beth continued that Jake carried a lot of the administrative responsibility within the department where he managed the budget and ordering of materials. She observed that he appeared to be 'stretched' to capacity', whereas she felt quite relaxed in her part-time teaching position and more confident in her teaching when compared with the preceding year. M - Sarah noted that her visit to Beth's school the preceding week had allowed her to see the facilities and she concurred that the physical teaching space was indeed quite challenging, given its open-plan style. In response to these constraints, Beth explained that she was currently writing a proposal to present to the Deputy of Curriculum, making a case for an expansion of the teaching facilities through the building of a small teaching space adjacent to the existing room. The deputy had become something of a mentor for Beth during 2006/7 despite being new to the school herself. She was very supportive of Beth's ideas to improve the outcomes for students and there were a number of discussions about how best to do this. One such discussion focused on including the year 7 students in the secondary visual arts program as a new initiative. This had been approved by the school and seemed likely to occur in 2008.

Beth's other strategies to improve the effectiveness of her visual arts program had centred on the size of classes (particularly for students in year 10). In previous years, year 10 students had often been placed in visual arts despite a lack of skill or interest in the subject as consequence of timetabling constraints. This had resulted in large classes, where behaviour management had been quite challenging. Beth had worked to change this culture of 'dumping' students into art and over time had begun to lift the standard of work and the students' work ethic. Her Deputy Principal, had supported these initiatives as she too wanted to improve the academic performance of students. As a part of this process, Beth had requested and been granted a number of computers for the exclusive use of visual arts students. Beth argued that the acquisition would eventually allow students with weaker visual arts skills to use programs such as Photoshop to refine their visual arts ideas. Beth had liaised with the Head of Computing to acquire the hardware and he had agreed to support the transfer of computers to the visual arts area. Beth had also employed other devices to improve the performance of students within the visual arts program in year 10. These included the use of merit certificates and house points with students who demonstrated stronger skills. Her hope had been to attract these students to ongoing study in the visual arts in years 11 and 12 and the strategy had had some success. When M - Sarah enquired about the kinds of projects Beth was completing with her students, she described an interesting 'dada-style' painting project which she had undertaken with her year 10 students. She explained that initially the students' limited painting skills had been something of an obstacle but, using the recently acquired computers, they had researched dada artists and created designs that appropriated that influence. Jake's team teaching had resulted in improved painting skills which had been quite critical to the success of the project. As the year progressed Beth observed that she felt as if she had found her niche and she was thoroughly enjoying

working with her students, colleagues and mentors. She said that the experience of returning to work after having been so ill was like 'coming home and finding herself again'.

### **Reconciling Beth's experience against the larger research questions**

#### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

Whilst she considered visual arts history and criticism to be relevant to her students' visual education, Beth appeared less concerned about students engaging with the work of other artists and emphasised the importance of students pursuing their own creative practice. Beth believed that improving her students' technical skills would dramatically enhance their visual literacy facility. She considered that the degree to which she could facilitate growth in this area would be the measure of her success.

#### **2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

Beth felt that the greatest obstacles to success in the visual education of her students lay in the physical resources of the department. She considered the facilities to be entirely unsuited to her student's needs and believed that much of the behaviour with which she had to contend could be attributed to poor environmental design. Beth also believed that a culture had developed within the school that did not privilege the importance of the arts in education. She and her colleagues, were working together to change this situation and Beth expressed the hope that, over time, her dedication and enthusiasm might break down the barriers.

#### **3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

Beth had no doubt that she had derived benefit from the experience of being mentored by M - Janine and M - Sarah. She remarked that she had also gained personal benefit from mentoring her younger colleague, Jake, during his first year of teaching. Beth was looking forward to a long career in visual arts education and hoped to be able to be a strong support for new teachers. She had joined AEA/WA even before graduating from university and mentioned that she now often spoke with her professional association colleagues about the needs of young teachers. She said that she had had many conversations about the way in which the professional community could support the induction of graduates for the betterment of the profession.

## **TRISH'S STORY... from painter and textiles artist to visual arts teacher**

### **Participant profile: beginning-teacher**

Trish completed an overseas teaching qualification in 1974 and had taught in a number of primary and secondary schools and also in a tertiary context in that country before immigrating to Western Australia in mid 1995. She completed a Graduate Diploma in 2006. Trish's overseas qualification had been deemed inadequate for teaching purposes in Western Australia and she was required by WACOT to retrain and upgrade her degree. During her tertiary studies, Trish participated in the reciprocal mentoring Artist-in-Residence program and was placed at M - Janine's school along with her fellow student, Chloe. She enjoyed good relationships with both the students she mentored in painting and with M - Janine, their teacher. Accordingly, M - Janine was assigned as Trish's reciprocal mentor in 2007.

### **Data gathering**

For much of 2007, Trish taught in a relief-teaching capacity and met with her mentor, M - Janine, on several occasions. Her buddy Chloe had been posted at the last moment to a rural teaching appointment hundreds of kilometres from Perth, precluding meetings for the group. M - Janine and Trish therefore resolved to meet on their own. Trish did not maintain a journal, but she did complete a questionnaire at the end of the year which was used complement the vignette arising from the meetings.

### **Employment status at the commencement of the research**

Trish was working in a relief teaching capacity at a number of schools, both within visual arts and in other subject disciplines.

### **Self-perception of readiness for teaching generally**

Early in 2006, Trish had remarked that she felt quite resentful at having had to upgrade her qualification to Western Australian standards. She felt that the re-training was more about WACOT and the university generating revenue than it was about quality teacher assurance. By the end of the year, Trish had altered her view and confessed that she had not realised the extent of difference between the local educational structures (WACF) and those of other countries. Trish reflected that the Graduate Diploma had been extremely valuable in consolidating her knowledge of outcomes-based education and the various learning modalities of students. She remarked that she was looking forward to the opportunity to teach again and was feeling more than ready for the task.



### **Self-perception of readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

Trish was an accomplished visual artist who had exhibited on many occasions in both group and solo shows. Her work was represented in several important collections and she considered that she had an extremely high visual literacy facility. Trish had taught within the visual education program at a tertiary institution in another country before immigrating to Western Australia and believed that she would be able to facilitate visual literacy in her secondary students without any difficulty. Trish considered that developing strong studio skills, techniques and processes was more important than acquiring a broad visual arts history or criticism base in the process of becoming visually literate. Her mentor M - Janine had a differing view on this issue and this became a focus of discussion/debate within the mentoring in 2007.

### **The impact of mentoring on Trish's first year**

I met with Trish and her group on two occasions during 2007. Her journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- diminished self esteem as a result of having to retrain to upgrade her teaching qualification to Western Australian standards;
- challenges associated with relief teaching;
- questioning the value of visual arts history and criticism.

### **The Vignette: a story about changing your mind**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Trish's mentor supported her during her first year. Her story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. M - Janine and Trish met over coffee for the first time at the café in the visual arts Gallery of Western Australia in March 2007. During the meeting, Trish talked about the importance of studio practice. She appeared to be a strong advocate for teaching skills to students and observed that many of the students she had taught on her practicum placements appeared to have poor skills. M – Janine agreed that many students would benefit from intensive studio support, but also stressed the importance of helping students grow in the area of engaging with the work of other artists. Trish appeared to hesitate at this suggestion and, whilst not overtly disagreeing, said that she felt convinced that the critical issue in contemporary visual arts education was to teach the skills of the various studio disciplines. M - Janine agreed that this was important, but went on to give examples of the ways in which she integrated both the conceptual and visual arts historical influences which Western Australian curricula had prioritised over time.

Much of the meeting centred on creative strategies for reinforcing studio practice through links to established artists and movements. M - Janine spoke about using role plays, power-point presentations, practical demonstrations, collaborative group investigations and an array of other methods for engaging visual arts history. She clearly had a strong commitment to integrating

visual arts historical influences in visual education programs and spoke with genuine passion and delight about the results which had arisen from this work. M - Janine's students were frequently represented in a number of prestigious exhibitions (including 'Perspectives' exhibition which was held annually at the visual arts Gallery of WA) and she said that she felt sure the delivery of a broad integrated learning program was critical to this success. M - Janine gave examples of students whose work had improved dramatically as their knowledge of conventions and concepts increased. She noted that wherever possible she tried to emphasise the importance of local Western Australian and Australian artists.

I formed the impression during the meeting that Trish was considering M - Janine's advice and that something of an internal struggle was occurring. Both women were of similar ages and had well-developed creative practice in their own right. Each had exhibited widely in the past and had much to offer students in terms of studio skills and content knowledge. Both women had teaching experience at a variety of levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) and well-developed pedagogical strategies. M - Janine had many years' teaching experience in the Western Australian context, whilst Trish had much less experience that she had gained mostly in an international context.

Trish had worked as an AiR at M - Janine's school in 2006 and had enjoyed the kudos arising from her 'expert-status' as an Artist-in-Residence during the placement. In this new context as a beginning-teacher, Trish's status had shifted to that of novice. I wondered if it would be difficult for her to restructure her relationship with M - Janine and now acknowledge M - Janine's expertise that clearly was more substantial than her own. The first meeting concluded with a tentative date set for the next meeting in June 2007. A few days after the meeting Trish sent me an email saying that she greatly appreciated M - Janine's support and was feeling excited about the possibilities for working. She mentioned that a position as a primary visual arts specialist had been advertised and she was keen to apply for the job. She asked if I might act as a referee for her and again I indicated that I would be delighted to do so. Several days later I received another email, confirming that Trish had applied for the position and alerting me to the fact that I might receive a call from the school.

Over the course of the next few months, Trish worked as a relief teacher in a number of schools in both visual arts and other subjects. I noted that gradually her belief about the hierarchical relationship between visual arts history/criticism and studio work seemed to soften until she appeared to have accepted the equal importance of both domains. This was most evident in the last meeting of the year. Trish was still working in a relief capacity and was clearly experiencing some frustration at not having been appointed to an ongoing position. Trish said that she was very tired and was juggling relief teaching in a number of schools. M - Janine

responded by highlighting the importance of work/life balance and both women agreed that maintaining their own visual arts practice was a critical element in dealing with stress. Trish said that, despite being a busy relief teacher, she always tried to make time to nurture her own creative practice and whenever possible to bring in samples of her own work for students to see and respond to. This seemed at odds with Trish's stated position at the start of the year that had tended to favour students pursuing their own work rather than worrying too much about the work of others. I asked her to clarify her present attitude to the arts in society/arts responses outcomes and she remarked that M - Janine's priorities appeared to have blended with her own. She now considered that it was equally important for students to engage in visual arts interpretation as in visual arts making. M - Janine was delighted to hear this and then went on to speak about how this balance across the four outcomes had proven so helpful in the visual literacy program that she delivered at her school. The meeting concluded shortly thereafter. A tentative date for another meeting was set for November, but this did not eventuate. As a final note M - Janine sent me an email about Trish at the end of the year observing:

This year Trish was concerned that she didn't have enough background in Australian visual arts and visual arts history, I recall giving her some useful titles for texts that I use. Trish's confidence grew as she had opportunities to work as a relief teacher, although she already had experience. I feel that being part of the mentor program gave her a more balanced view of the four arts outcomes and the extra confidence to be proactive in seeking relief work and in gaining a professional reputation for future work.

## **Reconciling Trish's experience against the original research questions**

### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

At the commencement of the study Trish considered that the key to visual literacy acquisition lay in the area of studio practice rather than in the area of art-interpretation. She felt that learning about artists and styles often did little to open the window to the artists' real intention for their art that often ran counter-intuitively to the dominant work of the period. Trish believed that placing strong emphasis on the work of other artists had the potential to limit or block the students' capacity to follow their own ideas. She advocated a child-centred approach to visual-arts education and hoped to encourage all students to find their own creative voice. 'Learning by doing' was the mantra she adopted in her own work and she considered that this was the key to enhancing visual literacy in her students.

By the end of 2007, Trish appeared to have shifted her perspective on the importance of art-interpretation and she now tried to incorporate visual arts inter-relationships more strongly into

her students' learning. Trish and M - Janine had built a relationship based on trust during the course of the research and she noted in confidence, toward the end of the year, that she had been quite worried about deficiencies in her knowledge of Australian artists and movements. Trish confided that it was possible that she may simply have been avoiding the issue of Australian visual arts history and criticism because "it was all just a bit too hard". She conceded it was possible that this had coloured her view of the importance of the arts in society and arts responses.

Trish ultimately concluded that there was little point to any visual education that did not teach skills, techniques and processes in a range of studio disciplines and felt that any measure of visual literacy education would need to take account of three dimensions:

- skills techniques and processes;
- creative conceptualisation;
- personal and critical response.

## **2 What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

In her answer to this question, I expected Trish to focus particularly on the lack of skills students possessed, but she was adamant that the greatest obstacle to success in visual literacy teaching had been her relief-teaching status. The lack of continuity in teaching students made it virtually impossible to achieve anything of real substance. Interestingly, I discerned over time that Trish's definition of successful visual literacy education shifted from the art-making domain to a model which favoured balance across visual arts making and visual arts interpretation. This shift seemed to be attributable to the influence of her mentor M – Janine and I was encouraged that M - Janine's affirming style had created a context in which it was 'safe' for Trish to re-evaluate her stated priorities.

## **3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators' impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

Trish was in no doubt that M - Janine had been an outstanding support throughout her induction year. This support had included:

- advice on resources and suppliers;
- advice for appropriate themes and studio disciplines for various year groups;
- advice on strategies for securing ongoing work;
- being a sympathetic colleague who would just listen to concerns;

- suggestions for professional development opportunities;
- playing devil's advocate in the area of the importance of visual arts history and criticism in learning programs.

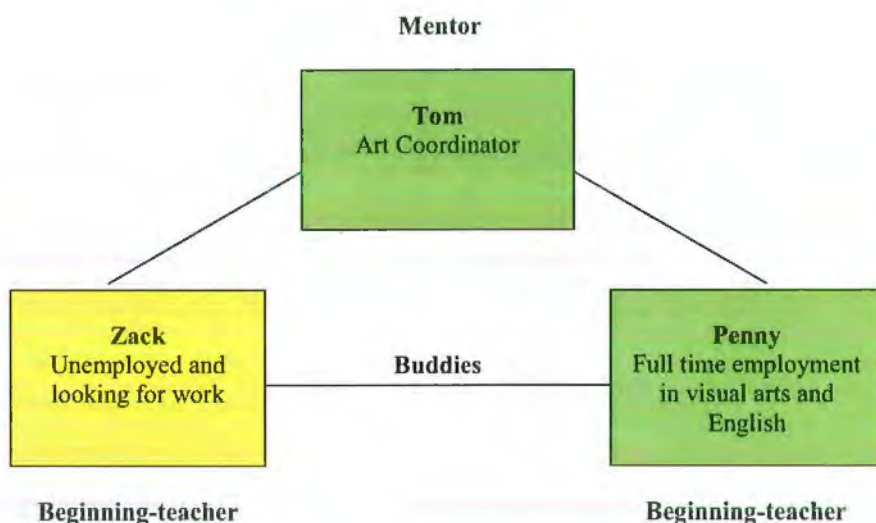
#### **A note about M - Janine**

No reconciliation of M - Janine's story in 2007 has been undertaken, because my conversations with her led me to the view that she had not changed her position in respect of the research questions from the responses provided in the preceding year. The style and specific form of her interactions with the beginning-teachers in 2007 are apparent in the vignettes crafted for Chloe, Trish and M – Janine. I was satisfied that her story had been told both accurately and in sufficient detail through these mechanisms.

## RESULTS: GROUP TEN 2007

Group Ten met on four occasions in 2007 and maintained regular email and telephone contact. The mentor, M - Tom, kept a journal for much of the year and both he and Penny completed a questionnaire at the end of the year. I interviewed all three participants at the commencement of the research period.

**DIAGRAM NINE – GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF GROUP TEN**



## PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

### **Zack: beginning-teacher**

Zack volunteered to participate in the research prior to the end of the Graduate Diploma year. He expressed the view that having an ongoing relationship with an experienced male teacher would be of great value. Zack had been born overseas and had grown up in a number of Asian countries and his English proficiency, whilst sufficient for teaching, was of concern to him. M - Tom was sympathetic to Zack's situation and worked extensively with him to support his induction to teaching and transition to full time work that ultimately occurred in June of 2007. Importantly, Zack was unemployed for the first six months of the year and did not have any relief or other part-time teaching and had all but given up hope of securing a position by time one was offered to him. He attributed remaining in the profession to M - Tom's affirmation, influence, support and advice.

**Penny: beginning-teacher**

Penny signed on to participate in the research as soon as she knew that she had a job which would encompass both visual arts (K-10) and English (8-10). She was particularly concerned about the demands of teaching primary art, because her training at university had been predominantly framed around secondary schooling. Penny explained that she hoped the teacher to whom she was aligned might have some experience with primary students and asked me to try to source a mentor with such a background. I considered that M - Tom would be ideal as he had taught primary visual arts for many years and had now moved to a position where he now co-ordinated middle school visual arts at a Government school.

**Tom: mentor (M – Tom)**

M - Tom had been an active member of the AEA/WA over many years and was particularly proactive during the period in which I was president of the organisation. During his tenure as a primary visual arts specialist M – Tom said that he had often felt quite isolated as a consequence of the move away from specialist visual arts teachers to generalists in primary schools. He had tried wherever possible to establish a network of primary visual arts teachers who could support one another and his involvement in the primary sub-committee of the visual arts Education Association/WA was highly valued both by new and experienced teachers.

M - Tom volunteered to participate in the research despite the fact that, at the time the study began, he was moving from primary specialisation to work in a middle-school for the first time. He acknowledged that he might be rather busy as a result of his new responsibilities as the co-ordinator for middle years' visual arts at his school; but he gave an undertaking to do his best to support his protégés. M - Tom's main motivation for involvement in the research was to extend the professional status of visual-art teachers through an industry network. He considered that mentoring of new teachers was fundamental to the success of any such network.

## **ZACK'S STORY ... the journey from painter to visual arts teacher**

### **Participant Profile: beginning-teacher**

Zack is in his mid-20s and completed Bachelor of Design, followed by a Graduate Diploma in 2006. Zack specialised in both visual arts (painting and graphics) and TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other Languages) and began teaching in mid-2007. At the time the research began he was living alone in an inner-city flat and had been surviving on a limited income throughout the previous four years whilst studying at university. During our interview, he confided that he was feeling a little depressed about life generally and attributed this to having found the Graduate Diploma year quite demanding and stressful.

Zack had come to see me on several occasions during his final year at university to discuss withdrawing from the Graduate Diploma program in favour of working in a different industry. He told me that he was worried that his knowledge of visual arts might be insufficient for secondary teaching, especially in terms of skills related to ceramics, sculpture, textiles and visual arts history. Though he felt generally confident to teach in the areas of painting and graphic design/media studies, he worried that these were both two-dimensional studio disciplines. He was concerned that the 2.D emphasis formed a fairly narrow part of the visual arts curriculum in most schools. I managed to convince Zack to remain at university and complete the Graduate Diploma and support this by enrolling in additional professional development workshops through the AEA/WA. He joined the association but found it difficult to connect to the people there, who were largely "older women who seemed to have different priorities" from his own.

### **Employment Status**

At the commencement of the research, Zack was unemployed and was waiting to have his interview with DET for teaching positions. Zack said that he was hopeful that he would secure a teaching position quite quickly as he was prepared to be posted to the country and there was an apparent teacher shortage. This expectation proved to be ill-founded and Zack was unemployed for the first six months of the school year. During the interview I conducted with him, he said that his confidence during this period had plummeted to an all time low; and his relationship with his mentor, M - Tom, had been critical in sustaining his self-belief/worth as a teacher.

### **Self-perception of readiness for teaching generally**

When I asked him about his readiness for teaching, Zack explained that he was not feeling confident about his suitability to teaching at all, but was unable to identify why he felt that way. I asked him whether he felt that the concerns he had raised with me during the previous year



might still be 'playing out' and he agreed that that was possible. Zack said that he felt he still had much to learn about curricular, subject-discipline and pedagogical-content knowledge and accepted that this was a matter of ongoing professional development in the life of every teacher. He felt that his command of basic teaching strategies, behaviour management protocols and subject-discipline content was fairly basic but sufficient to at least make a start in teaching.

Zack said that his practicum experience throughout the Graduate Diploma had been very positive and he had quickly established a rapport with most of the students with whom he had had contact. He did, however, note that he needed to work on voice projection; he felt that in some instances the students simply could not hear him speaking when he addressed the group as a whole. Zack said that he was basically a shy person; this was something which he needed to overcome in order to reach his 'teaching potential'. He also attributed his quiet demeanour, in part, to his second teaching area of TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages), where a 'quiet conversational style' and smaller classes predominated. Zack said that his visual arts classes had always featured large groups, with a variety of tasks occurring simultaneously; noise was an inevitable outcome of the 'busy' classroom. He indicated that (in addition to any advice in respect of subject content) he would be keen to take advantage of advice from his mentor, in the classroom management area.

### **Self-perception of readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

Zack indicated in his initial interview that he was a little worried about the knowledge demands arising from visual arts teaching and visual literacy in both the art-making and art-interpreting domains. He confided that he really was not sure whether he was ready for teaching generally, let alone anything involving visual literacy education. Zack had made several changes in degree courses and countries throughout his undergraduate education and worried that there might well be significant gaps in his knowledge in all four Arts outcome areas. I wondered how someone could have completed four years of study in several tertiary institutions, passing all assessments, if they did not possess the requisite skills for success. I concluded that (in light of the work Zack had submitted to me) he probably was competent, but lacked the confidence to view himself in a positive light. I hoped his mentor might work with him to build a positive self image as a beginning-teacher.

I brainstormed with Zack the areas in which he felt M - Tom could offer him most assistance in the year ahead. Zack was keen to access M - Tom's extensive knowledge of middle-school and primary-school visual arts projects and programs. He reiterated that he had also recently joined the AEA/WA in the hope that he could access both their professional development workshop program and their 'beginning-teacher's survival kit' that was published in a members' section of

their web site. Zack mused that perhaps the Association might be of more use to him as he gained experience.

### **Data gathering**

There were a number of face to face meetings for this group that were complemented by several school visits (Tom invited Zack to undertake volunteer teaching at his school to sustain his connection to the profession during his period of unemployment.) I interviewed Zack on one occasion. He did not maintain a journal nor email me or the other members of the group, but his mentor, M - Tom, maintained a journal in which he recorded conversations he had had with Zack. These journal notes were supported with his impressions of Zack's demeanour and progress. Zack did not complete a questionnaire and subsequently failed to give me feedback on my write-up of his year. As a result, the following vignette is based on his mentor's and my own perceptions of his story.

### **The impact of mentoring on Zack's first year**

Zack's journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- diminished self esteem as a result of being unemployed for the first six months of the year;
- a sense of disconnection from both his tertiary training and the teaching profession;
- challenges associated English language competency;
- financial difficulty arising from no work;
- behaviour management challenges.

### **The Vignette: a story about being optimistic, losing confidence, giving up and trying again**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Zack's mentor supported him during his first year. His story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. The first meeting of this group occurred in February 2007 at the visual arts Gallery of Western Australia café; As we waited for the meeting to begin I asked Zack how he was and he responded by telling me that he was feeling a little stressed about his DET interview that was booked for later that week. He emphasised that he really needed a job because his financial resources were running out; and he was worried about whether he would perform well enough on the day. Much of the first meeting was spent brainstorming strategies for managing the interview and Zack left the group feeling optimistic and prepared for the challenge.

The second meeting occurred a few weeks later in March 2007 and was quite brief. Penny, the other beginning-teacher, was the focus of much of the early discussion as Zack had not yet begun teaching, whereas Penny was already working in a permanent position. I had the sense that M - Tom, had a specific agenda to give time and attention to Penny during this meeting,

because much of the first meeting had focused on Zack and strategies which he might find useful as he prepared for the DET interview. M – Tom largely chatted with Penny and I noted that Zack sat quietly and appeared flat and unmotivated. It seemed to me that his disconnection from the research group mirrored his disconnection from the momentum of the Graduate Diploma and teaching generally. In essence, it appeared that there was no continuity between Zack’s university studies and transition to work and as a result, he seemed to be losing confidence in his prospects for employment. When there was a break in the conversation I asked Zack how his DET interview had gone; he replied that he felt it had been successful, but as yet he had not received a teaching posting. It was clear that this troubled Zack. He mentioned several times that he had been more than willing to be posted to a country position at a time when the newspapers/media reported almost daily that there were chronic teacher shortages. Despite having had a successful interview and good results in his final practicum, Zack was still unemployed several months after graduation. He had been unable to find work as a teacher in any capacity, including relief work and was clearly feeling disappointed and disillusioned.

M - Tom asked Zack about the questions that had arisen at the interview. Zack explained that indeed the kinds of issues M - Tom had flagged had indeed been raised. He continued that he had had an opportunity to take M - Tom’s advice and hints and accordingly, Zack felt that he had been fairly well prepared for the day. He believed that the interview had been successful and that he had passed the review/selection process. M – Tom seemed pleased to hear that his advice had been useful and encouraged Zack to apply for relief-teaching immediately. Zack seemed to hesitate at this suggestion and eventually expressed reservation at the notion that in a relief capacity he might have to teach across a range of learning areas. He clarified that did not really feel confident to do this outside visual arts and TESOL. M - Tom appeared a little frustrated at Zack’s reticence to pursue work wherever it might be available and he urged Zack to come out to his school to meet the staff. He suggested that doing so might increase Zack’s chances of securing relief-teaching in the school. He went on to say that this kind of professional networking had the potential to open up other opportunities for young teachers. Zack thanked Gary for the invitation and agreed to take advantage of the offer of assistance. Following the visit M - Tom noted in his journal:

Zack came out to school today. He was very quiet to begin with but as the morning progressed he opened up. He really needs to think about what he really wants to do. He seems to be looking for a way out as everything becomes too difficult. He is not coping with not having a job ‘presented’ to him. He needs to go out there and ‘find one’. Zack feels that he is hard done by, by not having a job. He feels he has done the right thing by completing the course and doing the interviews and is finding it difficult to keep in touch with teaching in a practical situation when he is not getting the chance to have any ongoing experience.

And then:

Zack is very pleased with himself. Has been doing relief work for 3 weeks solid and has been offered a 0.2 teaching position at a local high school. He asked me "what do you think I should do?" I said TAKE IT!!! After three weeks of relief work he hadn't been offered much more ... only a day here and there and was feeling as though he may have done something wrong. I explained that it's just like that sometimes. He is more confident about going out there and "getting" a job now. I recommended that as well as accepting the job, he take on extra relief work at a restricted number of schools to build up a school clientele.

Followed by:

Zack is a much happier person. He came over to my school for another visit. He is much more positive ... seems to have a more inquiring nature. He has developed a greater self confidence and has finally gained an ongoing 0.2 teaching position at a school every Thursday. He has also been doing relief at the same school. He was worried that they didn't really think he was doing a good job and that was why he had only been offered a 0.2 position. I talked to him about the process of gaining a position at a school and assured him that he was doing well ... otherwise the Principal wouldn't even have him near the school. He needs to enquire about his appointment next week to ensure that the paper work goes through over the holidays in readiness for term three.

There were two other meetings for this group, however, I was only able to attend the final gathering. Zack had a much more animated demeanour on this occasion and was delighted to advise that his 0.2 position had been increased to 0.82 – almost a full-time teaching position. Better still, he was mainly teaching visual arts to students from yrs 8 – 11. I asked Zack how he was finding his new teaching position. He explained that he was very relieved to finally have a job, but also noted that because it had been a long time since he had completed his final practicum, combined with the fact that relief work had been difficult to obtain, he was now struggling with managing student behaviour. He attributed this difficulty to a lack of opportunity to practice the skills he had acquired during his studies.

Zack said he felt as if he had become quite disconnected from his tertiary experience and had largely forgotten much of the material he had learned. This disconnection was exacerbated by the fact that Zack had some very challenging students in his classes, whilst others were disinterested in visual arts and simply sat and did nothing. Zack said that he found this 'non-participatory' demeanour as challenging as the disruptive behaviour. He said that he took the students' lack of commitment to visual arts quite personally, however, on M - Tom's advice was trying to accept that this was more likely to be a failure of schooling generally than any particular attitude toward him.

Essentially, these students were bored and not happy at school. Zack worried that there was something he should be doing to address this problem but he was unable to identify what that might be. M - Tom spent some time talking about the motivational strategies he liked to use with students who were disengaged and Zack agreed that it would be good to try these. Penny also interjected with descriptions of the motivational techniques she had successfully employed in her classes and Zack said he would try these.

M - Tom wondered whether the 'degree of difficulty' of Zack's learning programs was appropriate for the various classes he taught. He emphasised that many of the behaviour problems he had encountered over the years were either linked to this issue or could be ameliorated through an adjustment to pedagogy or content. M - Tom said that the worst thing a teacher could do, when confronted with disengaged students, was to ignore that fact and continue to do what clearly was not working. He said it would be better to throw the whole learning program out and start again, rather than continue simply because that was the 'published' version. He concluded that a learning program which did not 'fit' the students' needs was entirely counter-productive and had the potential to undermine principles of good teaching and learning.

Zack listened to M - Tom and confided that he was struggling with lesson planning and programming and really wasn't sure if the programs were appropriate. He said that this was a result of having been offered his teaching position so late in the year and so long after graduation. He continued that he had largely given up hope of teaching; and had either lost or thrown away many of the resources he had acquired during his final year at university. With only a few days notice he then had to develop a full semester's learning program and the issue of 'fit' had seemed somewhat irrelevant. Zack said that there were some resources and old learning programs available in the school that the previous teacher had left for him and he had used much of this in his preparation. M - Tom suggested that that was fine, but it might well be prudent to take another look at the learning programs to check that they were in fact appropriate for the students now that Zack had had an opportunity to spend some time with them. M - Tom then went on to give suggestions for projects, themes and supplies and he recommended several recycling companies which offered materials to schools/teachers quite cheaply or for no charge.

M - Tom spoke about trial and error as the only way to really refine teaching and suggested to Zack that it would be important to try something and repeat it over a couple of years until it was right. He went on to say that, after several years' use, he usually discarded particular projects or themes as he generally found that, although it was a new experience for the students, he was personally bored. This in turn affected the enthusiasm he could bring to delivery. When Zack left the meeting he was clearly feeling happier and appeared to have regained some of the

optimism he had at the beginning of the year. M - Tom's nurturing appeared to have had sustained him through a difficult period and despite losing confidence, he had now reconnected with his earlier enthusiasm and was looking forward to teaching.

### **Reconciling Zack's experience against the larger research questions**

#### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

Zack seemed particularly hesitant about his entry into the teaching profession. He appeared to consider that his tertiary experience had largely not provided him with the confidence, skills, content knowledge, or expertise he required to successfully navigate the first year of teaching. This hesitancy was compounded by a loss of confidence arising from an extended period of unemployment immediately following graduation. Regrettably, while other new graduates without permanent work were at least able to secure sporadic relief-teaching, Zack had been unable to source even this intermittent work. As a result, as each month went by he seemed increasingly disconnected from his new career. When Zack did finally manage to acquire a teaching contract mid-year, he appeared to be overwhelmed by the full-time teaching commitment and associated duties. Rather than restoring his confidence, the work load appeared to further erode his belief in this ability to do the job.

When I asked Zack about how he felt he was handling the demands of visual literacy education, he seemed unsure how to respond. He told me that he felt increasingly unsure of his capacity to manage student behaviour, let alone anything as complex as visual literacy education. He suggested that, when his teaching contract came to an end, he might well leave Perth in pursuit of other kinds of work. I explored the issue a little further and Zack confided that he often had little idea about whether he was being successful in his teaching. He said that he often felt as if he was simply going through the motions and was happy to simply get through a day of teaching without having to deal with behaviour issues.

Toward the end of the induction year, I asked Zack whether he felt that the students were enjoying the work he had set for them, but he seemed unable to answer me. He said he that hoped they were enjoying the projects, but could not describe the kind of evidence which might be relevant in making judgements about skills acquisition in the area of visual literacy. Zack appeared to be depressed by the whole experience of the first year; notwithstanding that M - Tom had been available to offer advice, guidance and share resources. Zack said that he had often felt quite alone and abandoned during this induction experience and doubted whether he was 'good enough for teaching'. This seemed at odds with the kind of views Zack had

expressed when we spoke about his readiness for teaching at the end of the preceding year when he at least seemed to believe that (with support) he could be successful. At various times throughout the year, when I asked Zack to rate the importance of visual literacy as a life skill and outcome of visual education, he appeared unsure about what I was asking. He was unable to describe or define what a visually-literate person might look like, or even to suggest the kinds of indicators that might demonstrate that students were acquiring this facility. Zack said if his students were working quietly and seemed happy, that gave him a sense that he was being successful. He appeared unable to talk about other measures of quality assurance in his education programs; and suggested that perhaps he would need to administer a formal written test to determine what students had learned.

**2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

Zack appeared to consider that his extended period of unemployment had interfered with his ability to successfully teach in a visual education (or any other) context, but he hoped that this would improve over time. He was unable to identify any obstacles to visual literacy acquisition specifically, but suggested that time seemed an illusive element in his daily life. He said he often felt as if everything was about to overwhelm him. Zack observed that he often felt as if he was never quite in control of his daily life and he felt flustered and rushed most of the time. He considered that less direct teaching time and more preparation time, might have a flow-on effect in terms of what his students learned. Zack periodically indicated that he had suffered from depression and anxiety throughout much of the year following graduation. He had been seeing his doctor about this problem and he acknowledged that the condition made it difficult for him to navigate the daily demands of his work. M - Tom's mentoring had been helpful at a practical level, but Zack said that his ill-health, a lack of time and the loss of continuity of employment, had all proven to be significant factors which interfered with his ability to teach effectively.

**3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

Zack was extremely appreciative of the support M - Tom had offered him throughout the first year of teaching. Although he was unable to identify ways in which M - Tom's mentoring had affected the visual literacy of his students, he certainly felt that M - Tom's positive influence, guidance and advice had made it possible for him to survive the first year after graduation. Zack described M - Tom's mentoring as having been beneficial in a number of distinct ways. He said that the mentoring had:

- provided strategies for navigating the DET interview and any other interview which might have eventuated;
- sustained his confidence during the long period of unemployment when he was increasingly inclined to leave Perth and pursue work in a different industry;
- provided opportunities for him periodically utilise his teaching skills (albeit in an unpaid capacity);
- provided opportunities to observe M - Tom teaching across a range of middle-school classes, thereby adding to his repertoire of behaviour management and pedagogical-content knowledge;
- provided access to resources, lists of suppliers, suggestions for projects and themes;
- provided reassurance that he was still quite able to do the job despite the preceding six months of unemployment.

Zack said that the affirmation he received from M - Tom had made a huge difference to his prospects for success and whilst not convinced that he would remain in teaching, he acknowledged that M - Tom's support had at least made this possible.



## **PENNY'S STORY... the journey from painter to visual-arts teacher**

### **Participant profile: beginning-teacher**

At the commencement of the research period Penny was mid 40s and a mature aged beginning-teacher. She completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at a Perth university and then complemented this with a Graduate Diploma, completing a major in visual arts education (painting and textiles) and a minor in English, in 2006.

### **Employment status**

Before the end of the Graduate Diploma Penny had been appointed to a half time teaching position at a small Non-Government school in Perth. The college was run by a school board consisting mostly of parents. Penny's teaching load encompassed both visual arts and English in the middle-school and all the visual arts in the primary school. She said that she was finding preparation for English quite demanding, given she was the only English teacher in the school, but said that she had been assigned a mentor for English from a neighbouring college. She had also found the mentoring workshop held at the beginning of the research very helpful. Penny expressed the view that her visual arts mentor, M - Tom, had been most helpful in assisting with preparation for her primary visual arts classes. She appreciated that M - Tom had extensive previous experience as a primary visual arts specialist and she felt that involvement in the research had many potential benefits to offer her induction year.

### **Data gathering**

Penny attended several research meetings, participated in an interview and completed the reflection questionnaire. She did not maintain a journal; however, M - Tom (her mentor) did, so I was able to complement the oral material from Penny with M - Tom's written observations. I asked Penny if there was any particular reason that she had decided not to maintain the journal. She indicated that she had not been able to see the point of the activity and had simply not had time to attend to it.

### **Self-perception of readiness for teaching**

Penny was feeling quietly confident about her readiness for teaching when I interviewed her in the first few weeks of the year. She did, however, express the view that the nature of community based schooling meant that funding was limited which in turn had the potential to create difficulties for all teachers. She identified limited resources and the necessity for general purpose classrooms to double as specialist classrooms, as a potential area of concern for her teaching practice. She confided that she was not sure that she was entirely ready for the challenges associated with such a limited budget:

As a beginning-teacher in a school of busy people from different teaching areas I do feel a bit alone sometimes ... but think I am ready for my role as an visual arts teacher ... although I don't really understand the rationale behind the logistics of teaching visual arts without an visual arts room. Seems to me that people often seem to perceive teaching visual arts as easy and relatively unimportant so having M - Tom has been great.

Talking to him about the problems of running between rooms with piles of work and materials with humour was a great morale boost. He has apparently had to do this for years in a shared facility. More than anything else the contact with M - Tom has helped re-ignite my enthusiasm for the job. Talking to an experienced professional is the best way to brainstorm about managing difficulties and validate your role. So yes I think Ill be fine and yes I'm ready for it.

### **Self-perception of readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

During the interview I asked Penny whether she considered that her undergraduate training had properly prepared her for the demands of visual literacy education and she noted:

I guess so ... I had hoped to use more technical equipment and software, do more studio work and cover a bit more visual arts history and criticism during the Grad Dip year ... but I guess the fact that we didn't was about keeping costs down. For me personally it was a long time since I had used a wide range of equipment and materials so I needed some refreshing about processes. I guess we did get the essentials but a little bit of 'frosting' would have been good. I am trying to get that now through professional development workshops and also through sharing with other visual arts teachers through the visual arts Ed Assn and other networking, but that's likely to be an on-going thing ... so for now I guess I'll be fine and just keep adding to that.

### **The impact of mentoring on Penny's first year**

Penny's journey encompassed a number of themes including:

- challenges associated with teaching visual arts at primary level;
- teaching visual arts in a classroom which was not built for that purpose;
- teaching visual arts to multi age class groups;
- inadequate funding within the visual arts budget;
- teaching English as the only teacher of the subject without support.

### **The Vignette: a story about connecting to students' interests and making a little money go a very long way**

This story exemplifies one of the ways in which Penny's mentor supported her during her first year. Her story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. At the first meeting, Penny delightedly advised that she had had a fairly smooth start to the year, although she considered that some of

her students had the potential to be challenging if they were not kept busy and fully engaged.

The range of classes she taught each week encompassed:

- two combined kindergarten/year one visual arts classes;
- one mixed visual arts class of students from years 5-7 for a double period each week;
- one general visual arts class combining years 8-10 for a double period once a week;
- all of the English taught at the middle school level.

I asked Penny whether she considered her training at university had been relevant and helpful. Penny responded that she felt generally well prepared to teach both primary and secondary classes and explained that she had been able to access a number of resources from both M - Tom and other primary visual arts specialist teachers through AEA/WA. M - Tom then asked Penny what obstacles to teaching had arisen. Penny quickly responded that, whilst the general school facilities were great, the funding resources for visual arts were fairly minimal. She explained that the school was operating on a very small budget and, although important, visual arts had been deemed a lesser priority in the distribution of overall funds. Penny continued that the entire annual school budget for visual arts was only a thousand dollars for more than 300 children that appeared to shock everyone at the meeting. We all agreed that \$1000 was entirely inadequate.

Penny then explained that one of the significant consequences of the small operating budget was that students did not have their own visual arts equipment. This meant that in order for the learning program to operate, the school required donations from families. Penny continued that the school community had been very generous with donations and she felt buoyed by this clear demonstration of parental support. She noted that the children (particularly the primary students) greatly valued their visual arts classes and were always excited to come to art, notwithstanding that the classroom was not an ideal environment. She went on to explain that the school did not yet have a purpose-built visual arts room and said that working in a general classroom gave rise to operational and organisational issues. A clear example of this was the absence of a sink.

Penny said she was losing a great deal of time carting buckets of water to and from class in order for students to undertake painting projects. She explained that this often made starting class on time difficult, because the teacher before her tended to work to the bell. Penny then spent the first 10 minutes setting up for her class. At the end of the session she often had to finish early in order to thoroughly clean up and exit the space before another colleague was scheduled to teach in a different discipline, such as maths. This loss of time was relentless and particularly challenging. Penny said that the pressure to vacate in a timely manner did not allow

her to speak to students after class about their work and the rush caused Penny some stress. She noted that this occurred on an almost daily basis. Penny then highlighted other deficiencies in funding for the visual arts department. Despite all students in years 8-10 having their own laptops, she noted that they did not yet have individual drawing folios or, importantly, anywhere to store their work. This lack of storage space meant that students' work was occasionally lost or damaged that gave rise to a number of problems as students became upset and lost motivation. Students simply could not see the point of putting a lot of effort into their work if it subsequently was damaged or misplaced. Penny said that she had already discussed this issue with her colleagues and, although visual arts (equipment and facilities) appeared not to have been a high priority at the school in the past, she said that the culture appeared to be changing. Penny felt that she had the support of the people with whom she shared the space and this spirit of co-operation made the situation bearable. I asked Penny if she felt that she had the support of the school administration and hierarchy in dealing with this issue. She remarked that she did feel that the Principal and Deputies were on side and that, over time, would be amenable to any reasonable request for resources or increased funding to improve the visual arts in the school. Penny said that she looked forward to the time when she had her own visual arts room and was not having to continually 'get out'.

Several days after the meeting I phoned Penny to see how she was and asked her to update me on how things were going at the school. Penny responded saying that she was fine though very busy updating programs. She spoke about having devised new learning programs which took account of the reality that she had multi-aged classes, a small budget and students with diverse interests outside school. She said that she had taken on board M - Tom's suggestions for cheap suppliers and said the work students were currently completing was now strongly organised around things the students liked or were interested in. She described the challenges associated with finding themes or concepts to which students of differing ages could equally relate. Themes which appeared to work well in the multi-age classes included visual-arts projects linked to what Penny called 'big picture' ideas such as 'identity' and 'sense of place'.

Penny talked about a graduated approach that included these concepts viewed from various perspectives which increased in complexity and difficulty, allowing for developmental stages. Penny gave the example of identity as a case in point and said that in multi-aged classes this theme could be viewed on a scale of increasing complexity:

- my place in my family;
- my place in my peer group;
- my place in my local community;
- my place in Australia;
- my place as a global citizen.

She continued that other themes she had successfully employed with multi-age classes since the beginning of the year had included projects linked to:

- the environment and environmental responsibility;
- social commentary;
- religion/spiritual experiences.

Penny had sought guidance from M - Tom about appropriate multi-aged themes and she was enjoying the challenge of creating 'rich tasks' that allowed children to respond to concepts according to their developmental readiness. The selection of key artists and movements had proven a little challenging, because students did not always appear to understand the connection to the project they were completing and Penny said that M - Tom had been able to offer significant help in this area.

I asked Penny whether there were any other specific difficulties she felt that M - Tom might be able to assist her with in the year ahead. She responded saying that she felt the greatest difficulty she faced lay in the issues associated with a lack of resources and facilities, most notably arising from the necessity to use a general-purpose classroom as an visual arts space. She hoped that M - Tom might have tangible strategies for dealing with the challenges this situation presented. She then went on to say that she still harboured concerns for a number of children who were falling behind the rest of the multi-aged class groupings. She elaborated that these lower-ability children in both visual arts and English seemed to be lost in a program that had to cater for the needs of a variety of ability levels within the one class. Penny said that her English mentor at a neighbouring school continued to be a great support, in much the same manner as had M - Tom, but, as time went by, more and more problems were emerging (particularly within the English program). She said she was trying to be patient and hoped that over time these issues would be addressed.

Penny was the only visual arts teacher in the school and students in years 5-7 were grouped together into very large classes. This created problems in trying to cover all studio areas which students needed to experience in order to successfully cope with the demands of senior-school visual-arts courses in TEE visual arts and visual arts & Design. Particularly challenging were the disciplines of printmaking and sculpture that needed separate areas for the various parts of the studio construction process such as cutting lino blocks, inking and printing. Drying racks were also scarce that created further problems for storage. Penny said that, if she had to summarise what was wrong, she would say there simply was not enough space.

Penny also found the lack of a kiln at the school particularly frustrating. Younger students seemed to love the three-dimensional, tactile experience of working with clay, but were

disappointed when their work was unable to be bisque-fired. Penny had tried for a while to transport the children's work to other schools which had generously offered her the use of their kiln, but this was time consuming and invariably resulted in some breakage of work during the transport phase, either before or after firing. Additionally, the limited budget for visual arts simply would not allow for the use of clay substitutes such as DAS (an air-drying clay). Penny felt that students were missing out on basic visual arts experiences as a result of the limitations imposed by the facilities and resources of the school. M - Tom agreed that a limited budget made it difficult to provide a broad base in skills and he gave several suggestions for cheap alternatives to clay. M - Tom qualified these suggestions, acknowledging that students using these processes would still need good studio skills, because the substitutes tended to dry quickly. He recommended that such product be saved for upper-primary/middle-school students and bread dough or play dough be employed with younger students.

When I later reviewed M - Tom's journal entry for the meeting, I noted that he considered that English appeared to be a far greater challenge for Penny than teaching visual arts .

Penny seems more settled as far as organisation is concerned. Challenges in meeting requirements for the Curriculum Council are still ongoing. But she is enjoying the job ... which is great! The marking of student work and levelling is a worry, but the process is still ongoing ... her English mentor is very helpful. She is involved in moderation for English and it is working well. I suggested she contact the visual arts Education Assn to get a hold of 'Arts Still Alive' journal for ideas for primary especially K-2. The suggestions I gave her for reporting process and classroom management are being put into practice but it has been difficult for her.

Penny talked also about the stress of teaching students in years K-2 which occurred twice a week for 45 minutes without an aid. She felt that she was struggling to come up with interesting ideas for students of such a young age and reflected that in many ways their regular classroom teacher probably had more to offer them at this early stage of their visual literacy education. M – Tom disagreed with this sentiment noting that the challenge with very young students was really to ensure that the teaching focus was on 'fun' and 'play' whilst learning basic studio techniques. M – Tom suggested that, whilst a balanced approach to all four arts outcomes was critical with older students, visual arts lessons with children in K-2 could legitimately be skewed to studio production, where he felt it was easier to embed the philosophy of visual literacy acquisition through 'play'. M - Tom urged Penny to join the AEA/WA that he believed would be able to provide her with many good ideas for projects for younger children. Importantly, the projects on the Association website had been modelled around the WACF arts outcomes that M - Tom maintained were 'road-tested and ready to go' and educationally quite sound. Penny said

that she had already joined the Association and was looking forward to the advice and resources they might offer her.

## **Reconciling Penny's experience against the larger research questions**

### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

Penny seemed to define visual literacy as the ability to communicate complex ideas about a concept, idea, or theme to an intended audience. She emphasised that some of her students would do this most effectively in their practical studio work, whilst others would have greater success in written or oral form. Penny considered that a measure of the success of her teaching lay in her capacity to identify and meet the divergent needs of students through catering for these two modalities or strengths.

I think visual literacy relates to complex meaning and this will be a subjective understanding based on a personal life experience combined with visual education. Meaningful response through creative practice can relate to very effective communication of arts ideas without being an exceptionally finely linked to the studio piece.

What I'm saying is that not all students have the same goals and values when approaching their visual arts education. This means that it is possible that for some students a program with more emphasis on visual arts making may be more pertinent for their needs and visual literacy than to others. I tend to emphasise the practical studio work for some students and for others I emphasise the theoretical side.

Ultimately it's all about students being able to get their ideas across in a logical and coherent way. Viewing and visual interpretation are also addressed in the English learning area in my school to ensure students are not disadvantaged from a literacy point of view, so students have two streams for this.

### **2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

Penny identified a lack of resources (capital and consumable) as the greatest impediment to success of her visual education and visual literacy program. The paucity of equipment and poor classroom environment had seemed an enormous obstacle to quality teaching and learning and Penny described the frustration she felt at having constantly to improvise with poor or unsuitable materials and resources. As the year progressed (and often following her meetings with M - Tom), Penny remarked that she was developing creative strategies to deal with these physical challenges:

I have found that there are often ways around things like low budgets ... recycling, op shops ... great for clay tools like rolling pins, pattern making objects and butter knives. Old clothes' airers make fine drying racks and old fabric scraps make awesome weaving materials on bird wire murals. Make a lino cut serve several purposes is a way of getting more mileage out of materials. M - Tom recommended a great supplier called ReMida that have all kinds of recyclable materials for free or almost no cost to schools – just great.

**3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual-arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

Penny indicated that the experience of having been assigned a mentor during the induction year had been extremely beneficial and had assisted her in meeting the demands of visual literacy teaching. In her reflection and review questionnaire, completed at the end of the year, she noted:

I would love to have had more time to make contact with M - Tom, but just knowing there was a person available who had a shared enthusiasm for visual literacy was excellent. I think it would have helped to have had someone a lot closer to home or school and because of this I actually made contact with other teachers close to home for some things. As a beginning-teacher in a school of busy people from different teaching areas I often felt quite alone and the logistics of teaching visual arts without an actual visual arts room often got too hard. People often perceive visual arts teaching as easy and relatively unimportant.

Talking to M - Tom about the problems of running between rooms with piles of work and materials with humour was a great morale boost. He has done the same for years in a shared facility. More than anything else the contact has helped re-ignite my enthusiasm for my job. Talking to an experienced professional is the best way to brainstorm about managing difficulties and validate your role. M - Tom suggested themes and concepts, shared successful project ideas and offered much advice about materials. He had many useful suggestions for combining materials to create high finish at minimum cost that made all the difference when you are operating on a small budget. He was great.”



## **TOM'S STORY... the journey from exemplary visual arts teacher to mentor**

### **Participant profile - mentor**

At the commencement of the research period, M - Tom was in his mid 40's and lived in an inner city suburb of Perth. He completed a diploma of teaching in Perth in the mid 1980s and later undertook further studies to convert this qualification to a Bachelor of Education degree. M - Tom worked at a number Western Australian Government schools as a primary visual arts specialist and at the time the study commenced had recently moved into secondary schooling setting, where he was the co-ordinator for visual arts in the middle school. M - Tom noted the following about his professional journey to date:

I possess an extensive range of educational and life learning experiences attained across a variety of settings including level 3 teacher, mentoring of staff and students in times of emotional trauma, in physically challenging locations. I have a great deal of confidence and proven ability working directly with children in primary, middle and secondary school settings. I have worked in metropolitan primary schools and rural schools ranging from years K – 7 across the 8 learning areas and in secondary schools across years 8 – 12 teaching Art.

I have facilitated extensively to enhance learning programs for students with special needs, integrated visual arts programs and produced materials for K-7 visual arts Syllabus. I have presented to professional bodies at PD seminars, have in-serviced teachers and principals across the metropolitan area and some remote areas of the state presenting primary Art/Craft, as an integrated approach, plus I have been extensively involved with the visual arts Education Association of W.A. over the past 20 years.

M - Tom was feeling a degree of stress, because he began the school year at a new school; he was worried that he might not have sufficient time to adequately support the beginning-teachers assigned to him.

### **Employment status**

M – Tom was the coordinator for middle school visual arts and employed at the same school at which Marnie (beginning-teacher from 2006) was employed. However, the two teachers were unaware of each other's involvement in the study, because M - Janine was Marnie's mentor.

### **Data gathering**

M - Tom attended four meetings with the beginning-teachers in his group and maintained a journal in which he recorded his impressions of the progress of his mentees. Between the meetings, he also invited Zack and Penny to come to his school for voluntary experience and chatted with both beginning-teachers by phone from time to time. I interviewed him at the

commencement of 2007 and he completed a questionnaire in which he evaluated the success of the mentoring program. I asked M - Tom to review the write-up for his group and he made suggestions about changes that might enhance the accuracy of the group's narrative. This was important, because I was unable to get confirmation from Zack that I had accurately captured his experience of the induction year.

### **Perception of the beginning-teachers' readiness for teaching generally**

M - Tom said that he felt that Pam appeared both confident and competent at the commencement of the research. He observed that teaching English as the only teacher of the subject had the potential to become problematic, but he did not consider that visual arts would be a problem. By contrast M - Tom appeared to have reservations about Zack's readiness for teaching and he suggested that Zack might need a lot of support.

### **Perception of beginning-teachers' readiness for visual literacy education specifically**

M - Tom felt that Pam was well placed to support students in the area of visual literacy education, however, he was unable to say whether Zack was ready for the challenge.

### **The impact of mentoring on the first year**

M - Tom supported his mentees through suggestions for:

- age-appropriate subject content knowledge;
- affordable materials/resources;
- access to professional development opportunities;
- maximizing limited funding;
- securing employment and ongoing work.

### **The Vignette – a story about good people being stretched to the limits**

This story describes one of the ways in which M - Tom supported his beginning-teachers. His story in its entirety is attached as an appendix. Zack had been out to M - Tom's school to watch M - Tom teach and to gain further experience in respect of visual-arts content. I discerned that M - Tom had begun to worry about Zack's confidence and, further, that he appeared to have some reservations about Zack's readiness for teaching. I formed the impression that, despite the fact that M - Tom wanted to do whatever he could to support Zack, he also felt that Zack needed to be more proactive in resolving his employment circumstances. M - Tom appeared to find Zack's reticence in applying for relief work disconcerting and I wondered whether this reaction was a reflection of being overloaded, given he had taken on the mentoring role on top of his own increasing workload in a new position.

During one of the meetings for this group M - Tom gave practical solutions to both Penny and Zack as they raised their concerns about their employment circumstances and teaching challenges. M - Tom had a wealth of experience and seemed to shine when given an opportunity to speak about the joy he had felt in teaching over the years. This passion was quite inspirational. I felt that M - Tom's style, in combination with his affirmation of his protégés, was helping to build resilience in Zack, particularly. I believed that Zack would have left the teaching profession had it not been for M - Tom's support. M - Tom's enthusiasm was infectious and I found myself reflecting on the privilege of listening to someone who had contributed so much to teaching over the years.

M - Tom's personal narrative encompassed all kinds of teaching contexts and was filled with examples of innovation and resilience. He described having had to make do on tiny budgets in classrooms that were clearly not suited to teaching visual arts (particularly in primary contexts). Notwithstanding these challenges, some of the most rewarding experiences in his teaching experience had emanated from projects where the students had been asked to bring in materials and objects from home to complement the materials provided by the school. M - Tom said that the students appeared to delight in the opportunity to 'show and tell', to talk about the 'precious' things their parents had given them to supplement the tiny budget on which the visual arts department had been required to operate.

I discerned that M - Tom seemed to be under pressure to move between the competing demands of Penny (who wanted to talk about resources and teaching strategies) and Zack (who wanted to talk about getting a job) and I worried that he might feel stretched too thinly. I made a note to raise this with him at a later time, to see if I could offer any support for his mentoring role. I had the opportunity to chat briefly with him later and he assured me that he was feeling fine and coping with the different needs of his protégés. I reflected that, in so many ways, M - Tom himself a portrait of resilience. At a time when most teachers, entering a new position with increased responsibilities, would have divested themselves of everything except the most pressing responsibilities, M - Tom was willingly assuming more. This degree of altruism was impressive, but I reflected on the opinion expressed by both M - Janine and M - Tess (mentors from 2006) that there would need to be 'something in it for the mentors' in order to persuade them to support new teachers on more than one occasion. I raised this issue with M - Tom and, although he indicated that he would be happy to do the mentoring again, it is worth noting that in 2008 he did not volunteer to take another beginning-teacher.

I did not attend the third meeting, but M - Tom indicated that it had gone quite well. He continued to worry about Zack and I gathered that he was coming to the view that Zack might not be able to sustain his connection to teaching if he did not soon secure permanent

employment. M - Tom had again invited Zack to come to his school to renew his skills and maintain his motivation. M - Tom observed that Penny appeared to be fine and I felt that he was enjoying working with her more than Zack.

Much of the last meeting for this group was spent debriefing the new position which Zack had recently secured. M - Tom gave concrete examples of appropriate behaviour-management strategies and worked with Zack to refine the kinds of ideas for teaching and learning experiences which might be appropriate for the students in his classes. He seemed unimpressed that, having finally secured a teaching position, Zack seemed to be complaining about the workload he now had to carry. M - Tom mentioned on more than one occasion during the meeting that Zack's workload was "par for the course" and quite typical of the teaching responsibilities of all new full-time teachers. M - Tom appeared happier to focus on Penny's circumstances and spent considerable time speaking about suppliers and projects which would accommodate the multi-aged classes with which Penny had to work. He seemed more interested in speaking about the positive aspects of teaching and finding solutions to challenges, than focusing on the justice issues associated with those challenges. I discerned that there was almost an element of irritation in his voice when he responded to Zack's assertion that the school expected too much of him. I wondered whether the mentoring experience was asking too much of M - Tom and stretching his own personal resources too thinly. I reflected that a mentor that was stretched too thinly and feeling annoyed might not be well placed to support a mentee who was feeling stressed and overwhelmed.

As the meeting concluded I formed the impression that, despite some talk of another meeting, M - Tom was rather glad the mentoring experience was coming to a conclusion. I was surprised when he said that he would like to take another pair of beginning-teachers in 2008, because he appeared rather tired and somewhat worn out. I gratefully accepted his offer to act as a mentor again, but this did not eventuate and confirmed my thinking that something more than altruism would be needed to sustain the work of the research.

### **Reconciling M - Tom's experience against the original research questions**

#### **1 How do beginning-teachers and experienced mentors define success in the teaching of skills for visual literacy?**

M - Tom defined visual literacy as a person's ability to make sense of the visual world. He said that he spent many hours talking with students about the meanings and messages embedded in images and visual text. M - Tom said that this work was particularly important for young adolescents who were forming a distinct identity and he enjoyed challenging their acceptance of

visual stereotypes. M - Tom said that the key to visual literacy education lay in giving students tools with which to interrogate visual forms. He had a number of response frameworks he preferred to use and suggested that:

- Feldman's (1973) model was appropriate for primary students;
- Marsh's (1994) contextual model was appropriate for students in years 8-9;
- Israel's (2002) model was suitable for older students.

M - Tom considered that the test of visual literacy acquisition lay in the extent to which students could meaningfully engage with visual forms which were previously unknown to them. He emphasized the acquisition of a visual language vocabulary as a critical foundation in this process.

## **2. What factors do beginning-teachers identify as obstacles to successfully teaching visual literacy skills during their first year of teaching?**

M - Tom noted that the greatest obstacle to success for Zack had simply been unemployment. He felt convinced that Zack's prospects for success both generally in teaching and specifically in visual literacy education, were much improved now that he had an opportunity to practice his craft. M - Tom had urged both Penny and Zack to join the AEA/WA and both had apparently done so. M - Tom felt that, in combination with regular opportunities to engage with students, active involvement in professional development through the Association would further enhance Zack's confidence and skills. M - Tom reflected that the greatest obstacle Penny had had to contend with lay in the area of facilities and materials resources. He felt confident that, over time, her school would address these issues and that she would go on to become a fine teacher.

## **3. Does structured mentoring by experienced visual arts educators impact beneficially upon the ability of beginning-teachers to meet their obligations in respect of visual literacy education in Western Australian secondary schools?**

M - Tom felt convinced that his beginning-teachers had both derived significant benefit from the experience of being mentored during their induction year, though he observed that, in Zack's case, the benefit had accrued more in personal survival and resilience than in success in visual literacy teaching. M - Tom said that Zack appeared to have had a particularly difficult year and he worried that Zack might still be lost to the profession. Zack was still unsettled in his new teaching position and, M - Tom observed that he appeared to have lost some of the basic teaching skills and expertise he had developed during his practicum placements.

Notwithstanding the difficult start to the year, M - Tom believed that, with support, Zack could develop into a competent teacher. At this point, however, he appeared to be struggling to meet

the demands of his profession. M - Tom felt that Penny had particularly benefited from the mentoring experience and the knowledge and expertise he had been able to offer her in the area of materials, budgets and suppliers. He said that felt this support had made a big difference to her ability to deliver a quality visual education program.

M - Tom felt that Penny was a competent beginning-teacher and was coping extremely well with the challenges arising from her visual arts teaching. M - Tom reflected that Penny had been more challenged by her experiences in teaching English that was her second teaching area, than she had been by visual arts as her major subject. He said that he had thoroughly enjoyed working with both Penny and Zack and would be more than happy to repeat the role with two new teachers the following year. He particularly enjoyed the process of reflecting on his own practice and sharing stories from his teaching career and said that, to some extent, experienced teachers often fell into routines that they failed to question. The mentoring had been a stimulant for questioning his practice and M - Tom felt this had been beneficial for him. He concluded by observing that he had had a hectic year and believed that he would have enjoyed the mentoring experience much more if it had occurred in a year when he had not moved schools and changed roles.

M - Tom did not pursue the offer to mentor again in 2008 and at the time of writing this thesis had not volunteered to be part of the program in 2009.

## **DISINTEGRATED GROUPS 2007**

### **Group Eight 2007**

The remaining group from the 2007 research period disintegrated even before the official research began. M - Tess, a mentor from 2006, had volunteered to repeat her role in 2007, but the DET staff who belonged to the School Teachers' Union had imposed a 'work to rule' ban which required all union members to refuse to undertake any activities related to education outside official school hours. M - Tess advised that she was therefore unable to participate in the program in 2007, but said that she would be available at another time. At the time of writing this thesis in 2008, however, she had not volunteered to participate in the program in 2009 and I think that she may well have simply decided that the task was too onerous and without personal or appropriate professional reward.

### **Group Nine 2007**

This group blended with group seven and has been described in those vignettes.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

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### FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

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#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I present the findings of the research and based on the findings suggest an answer for each of the three research questions around which the inquiry was framed.

Data gathering elicited markedly similar responses from the participants over two separate years and, though deriving from different teaching and personal contexts, the repeating elements of responses combine to create a largely uniform picture of the impact that mentoring exerted on the beginning-teachers during the induction year. The consistent style of the responses made it possible to distil a number of themes and understandings about the induction year. These understandings are represented in the form of metaphors that subsequently give rise to 10 propositions about the impact mentoring might play in a teacher's induction experience. These propositions are presented and discussed in the next chapter.

#### **THE VALUE OF METAPHORS IN RESEARCH**

Berman (2001) noted that the use of metaphors has long been employed by researchers as they struggled to define the structure of complex concepts. Berman suggested that educational researchers have embraced the metaphor in narrative inquiry because it provides a form of engagement with the realities of the school setting which the pre-service and beginning-teacher can examine, evaluate and (where necessary) reshape over time. Berman (2001) noted:

I realised that your personal metaphor is at the core of your existence ... your driving force ... I have decided to reshape my metaphor into something that I can live by, something that is so close to my heart that it hurts. This is the challenge (p. 12).

Metaphor is a rich literary device that has the potential to articulate intention processes. The key quality that recommends the use of metaphor is its ability to function as a connecting agent. When we carry over the expression of one thing in order to relate it to another, we do not build categories but expand our experience of similarities. ... the use of metaphor in teacher education provides both experienced instructors and (pre-service) novices with the invitation to risk entertaining different challenging ideas about themselves and their work (p. 1).



Berman (2001, p 2) noted that the use of metaphors “effectively provides pre-service and beginning-teachers (who may be operating without an extensive repertoire of automated procedural knowledge) with an invitation to risk entertaining creative and inclusive ideas about themselves as professional teachers”:

Our interest in using metaphors to encourage reflective practice was in part stimulated by concern about the less tangible aspects of teaching ... transitive knowledge ... moral knowledge arising out of connection with other persons and the world. In striving to foster self awareness and critical reflection in our students we have explored metaphors of teaching and asked students to articulate their own conceptions of what teachers “are” and what teachers “do” (p. 2).

The outcome of our engagement with this process has been a deeper understanding of the complexity of metaphors and the enhancement of our ability to work together as a result of sharing our own life histories and metaphorical journeys as teachers (p. 5).

The metaphors ‘teacher as artist’, ‘teacher as vulnerable child’ and ‘teacher as critical friend’ may be useful devices to orient contemporary and future approaches to beginning-teacher training and induction that would benefit from the formal inclusion of mentoring. The study was undertaken within a specific localised educational and socio-political context (2006-2007 Western Australian Curriculum Framework and Arts Learning Area) and the overwhelmingly positive impact of the mentors in this study is important. The results give rise to the notion that aligning mentors to beginning visual-arts teachers, even before the pre-service education is completed, may be beneficial. Such benefit appears independent of any impact on visual literacy education teaching since the greatest support appeared to lie in the ‘personal wellbeing’ of the beginning-teachers.

It was this personal domain that appeared to prompt some of the new teachers to consider leaving or remaining in the profession and, accordingly, has implications for the high attrition rates that currently beset the industry (45% within the first 5 years). Furthermore, it may be argued that beginning visual-arts teachers entering the profession may be well served by positioning themselves in relation to an experienced mentor, with whom the metaphors teaching can be explored. These metaphors which include ‘teacher as artist’, ‘teacher as vulnerable child’ and ‘teacher as critical friend’ might then be re-shaped over time to those of ‘teacher as artist’, ‘teacher as expert’ and ‘teacher as scholar’.

## **THE FIRST RESEARCH QUESTION**

The first research question sought to determine how the participants defined success in visual literacy education. The emergent definition appeared to be strongly linked to the capacity to:

- acquire and develop personal facility with visual-arts practice and appreciation;
- confidently transmit to students knowledge about art-making and art-interpretation;
- facilitate autonomy within the students themselves as they made choices for their own work in skills, techniques and conceptual understandings.

### **Metaphor: teacher as artist**

The vignettes revealed critical sentiments regarding visual literacy ‘teaching success’ that collectively positioned the successful educator within the metaphor of the ‘teacher as artist’.

This metaphor was framed around the notion that the teacher needed to possess and build personal facility in both the art-making and art-interpretation domains through ongoing personal studio practice and praxis (the process of putting theoretical knowledge into practice). Some participants went so far as to say that the teacher should exhibit their work and make time to grow as an artist. Success in teaching visual literacy skills appeared to be defined by the participants in terms of the depth and breadth of the teacher’s own subject-discipline content knowledge. Prowess as an artist and skill in transmitting that knowledge to students through innovative and creative pedagogy featured strongly in the debate. It was in the area of a broad pedagogical-content knowledge that many of the beginning-teachers felt that their mentor had been most helpful.

### **The definition of ‘success’ in visual literacy skills teaching, distilled from the experience of the participants, encompassed various facilities**

#### **Practice/practical:**

- possessing and developing a solid repertoire of skills, techniques, conventions and conceptual understandings in the art-making domain (visual inquiry/studio work);
- being a practising artist and having a passion for the visual-arts .

#### **Historical critical:**

- possessing and developing a solid repertoire of historical knowledge about contemporary and traditional artists and movements;
- possessing a repertoire of skills, techniques, conventions and conceptual understandings in the art-interpretation domains (use of response frames and visual analysis in visual arts history and criticism).

#### Pedagogical:

- ability to clearly convey the subject-discipline content knowledge to students through appropriate innovative and creative pedagogy;
- ability to tailor and modify learning programs to students' needs in both the art-making and art-interpretation domains at any point in the visual education program;
- employing strategies which encourage student autonomy.

#### Relational:

- a growing knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses through the establishment of rapport with students;
- knowing the students well and tailoring learning programs to students' needs.

#### Resources:

- a flexible teaching style, encompassing a portfolio of alternative strategies to overcome limited resources and poor facilities.

#### Behavioural:

- 'a positive 'emotional tone' in the classroom that arose from the beginning-teacher's passion for the discipline and the craft of teaching;
- overcoming a lack of confidence/gaining confidence and the capacity to trust own judgements in the selection of subject discipline and pedagogy.

#### Attitudinal:

- valuing both the art-making and art-interpretation domains within visual education and being able to place more or less emphasis on each half of the literacy acquisition process according to students' needs.

### **THE SECOND RESEARCH QUESTION**

The second research question sought to identify factors which undermined the beginning-teacher's capacity to facilitate visuacy in students. The emergent definition appeared strongly linked to:

- pragmatic elements of the teaching context including time, teaching facilities, resources, limitations of budget, multi-age class compositions and fixed/entrenched outdated learning programs which the new teacher was unable to modify;
- interruption to continuity in teaching opportunities through sporadic, intermittent/part-time relief work or unemployment;

- lack of self-belief, confidence in the appropriate selection of age-appropriate subject-discipline and pedagogical- content knowledge;
- insufficient subject-discipline, pedagogical and curricular content knowledge.

**Metaphor: teacher as vulnerable child**

The vignettes revealed the metaphor of the ‘teacher as vulnerable child’. This metaphor was framed around the notion that the beginning-teacher was often powerless and vulnerable in the unfamiliar teaching environments they encountered in the first year and this vulnerability interfered with their capacity to successfully teach the skills of visual literacy. Within this metaphor the mentor assumes dimensions of the related role of ‘parent’ and oversees the growth of the beginning-teacher from vulnerability to competence and autonomy.

**The obstacles to success in teaching visual literacy skills in the first year, derived from circumstances including**

Resources:

- poor teaching resources and facilities;
- multi-age classes and large classes.

Professional knowledge/training:

- insufficient subject-discipline content knowledge;
- insufficient pedagogical-content knowledge to facilitate the design of age-appropriate learning programs;
- insufficient curricular-content knowledge.

Employment circumstances:

- special needs students with little or no training provided to the beginning-teacher;
- political contexts which position the new teacher as vulnerable to bullying by other staff;
- part-time or relief-teaching appointments which make it difficult to establish a rapport with students and staff;
- little or no formal induction into a school community;
- lengthy periods of unemployment, resulting in a disconnection from the tertiary teacher training and practicum experience;
- a lack of time to properly prepare for teaching.

Self efficacy:

- professional isolation arising from positing to a rural or remote setting;
- emotional stress arising from a perceived expectation to be 'perfect' and job-ready;
- loss of confidence in teaching ability and suitability to the profession.

Other:

- financial pressure arising from relief, part-time or no work.

### **THE THIRD RESEARCH QUESTION**

The third research question sought to identify whether the beginning-teacher's capacity to facilitate acquisition and application of learned material, could be enhanced under the guidance of an experienced mentor. The emergent definition of the contribution the mentors made to the beginning-teacher's success in visual literacy teaching appeared strongly linked to the mentor as:

- an affirming friend and sympathetic confidant (dealing with stress);
- a repository of professional knowledge (subject- discipline; pedagogical and curricular content knowledge);
- a sounding board for beginning-teacher's own ideas (rational objective feedback).

### **Metaphor: mentor as companion and critical friend**

The vignettes revealed the metaphor of the 'mentor as companion and critical friend'. This metaphor was framed around the notion that the new teacher's capacity to successfully teach the essential skills of visual literacy could be enhanced if their personal and professional wellbeing was nurtured by an experienced colleague. The contribution the mentors made to the beginning-teacher's induction experience and professional journey through the first year, appeared to be grouped into two domains – personal wellbeing and professional wellbeing.

Personal well-being:

- encouragement from mentors to pursue personal visual-arts practice including details of forthcoming professional development opportunities through the AEA/WA (studio discipline);
- self-belief arising from encouragement by the mentor for the beginning-teacher to take risks in teaching and learning; and having these culminate in successful experiences for students;
- positive self-image arising from belief by the beginning-teacher that, over time, they were developing into an effective and highly competent (albeit beginning) visual-arts teacher;

- resilience arising from the knowledge that the mentor was there to help; believing that perceived failures could be reframed into opportunities for growth; not giving up when work was sporadic or difficult to find; not giving up when older more experience staff seemed to block ideas for innovation or creativity; sustaining enthusiasm even in the face of small failures;
- passion arising from the belief that visual literacy education is a critical life skill that all students require in order to successfully navigate contemporary Australian society; osmosis and exchange of ideas between beginning-teachers and experienced mentors about contemporary visual-arts practice, concepts, directions, advancements, challenges; intellectual debate about the future of the visual-arts both in education and contemporary life;
- relief arising from the belief (and reality) that the mentoring context provides a safe environment in which to express fears, doubts and failures; opportunity to collaboratively devise solutions for problems in a manner which is devoid of judgement or negative repercussion;
- kudos/enhanced self-esteem (self-belief) arising from positive feedback from mentors (and students) about ideas developed by the beginning-teacher;
- coping skills including managing work-related stress (strategies for coping with limited time to prepare for teaching; advice for time management and meeting deadlines to complete evaluation, assessment and reporting; co-curricular demands including school camps, sporting teams, duties, meetings; ensuring balance by making time for life beyond school with family and friends);
- enjoyment arising from a sense of competence and increasing professional excellence; and
- confidence arising from participation in the decision making of the visual-arts department/learning area staff about the policy issues or the future direction of curriculum implementation.

#### Professional well-being:

- increasing pedagogical-content knowledge;
- increasing subject-discipline content knowledge;
- increasing curricular-content knowledge;
- experiencing success as students demonstrate acquisition of visual literacy facility through learning experiences designed and implemented by the beginning-teacher;
- increasing autonomy in the crafting of solutions for professional challenges; and
- credibility and respect from colleagues as the beginning-teacher's students exemplify excellence through the winning of awards for their work (selection for

inclusion in highly competitive prestigious exhibitions such as 'Perspectives' or the 'Young Originals').

The metaphors emanating from this research give rise to 10 propositions about the impact mentors may have on the experience of beginning visual-arts teachers during the induction year following graduation. These propositions are presented and explained in chapter nine.

## CHAPTER NINE

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### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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#### **Introduction**

The GMP research employed predominantly qualitative research processes and investigated the effects that mentoring had on beginning visual-arts teachers' success during their first year in the profession. The measure of success in this context lay exclusively in the participants' perception of their own expertise in meeting the visual literacy needs of their students. The following is a summary of the findings arising from the research, a discussion of conclusions and identify implications arising from the results.

#### **PROPOSITIONS**

Analysis of the vignettes gave rise to 10 propositions about the impact mentoring might exert on beginning-teachers during their first year of visual arts teaching within the WACF and contemporary induction processes.

**Proposition One: the very act of sharing their concerns with a sympathetic mentor significantly and positively impacts the professional and personal wellbeing of the new teacher because they no longer feel they are alone.**

The first proposition arose from the repeating theme that the first year of teaching is a challenging and often frightening or overwhelming experience for Graduate Diploma visual-arts teachers, who may feel ill- equipped to meet the demands of the new and unfamiliar profession. This sentiment was particularly evident in the experience of beginning-teachers **Katy, Marnie, Mary, Zack and Anna**.

Mentoring by an experienced visual-arts specialist appeared to be beneficial for these new teachers, because the mentor offered them a safe place in which to voice fears and concerns. They were able to ask specific questions relating to their daily experience with children and colleagues. Furthermore, the very act of describing or naming their fears facilitated the formation of a solution. In addition to this safe sounding board, the mentor reassured the new teacher that their experience was similar to that of other new teachers (particularly when part-time or full-time employment opportunities take some time to be resolved)



**Proposition Two: the mentor can fulfil an essential function by filling gaps in the new teacher's knowledge about policies procedures and systems.**

The second proposition expressed by some of the beginning-teachers was that their teacher training had not provided them with adequate information about the 'duties other than teaching' that they would be required to navigate and perform professionally as a teacher. For many of the new teachers in this study (particularly **Zack, Penny, Chloe and Trish**) this inadequate knowledge base failed to be remedied by the schools at which at which they commenced teaching, because no induction program, or an inadequate induction program, had been provided for them.

For these participants, mentoring by an experienced visual-arts specialist was beneficial, because the mentor is a repository of knowledge about school systems, policies and procedures. The mentor can share this knowledge with the new teacher at a time when they may feel unable or unwilling to ask busy colleagues. **Penny** expressed the view that she did not wish to be a burden on her colleagues by constantly asking questions about procedures and **Chloe** clarified that she felt some pressure to appear to 'be perfect' since she was being paid as a teacher. **Chloe** elaborated to some extent, that she felt that asking for help might indicate to colleagues that she was not really capable of fulfilling her duties. For both women, their mentor alleviated this pressure to know about things that were simply beyond their training and expertise.

**Proposition Three: the mentor is a repository of subject- discipline content knowledge which can be shared with the new teacher to create a foundation for visual literacy education.**

The third proposition arose from the experience of all of the beginning-teachers' (particularly **Chloe, Penny, Zack, Mary, Trish and Anna**) expression of relief and gratitude as their mentor supported them with content for projects. The mentors suggested ideas for subject-discipline content knowledge through age appropriate themes, projects, studio techniques, visual arts history interrelationships, resources and worksheets, audio visual materials, suppliers and materials.

The beginning-teachers were often 'stuck' and unable to identify ways to improve the programs they were delivering. However, the mentor assisted by offering valuable tips for content. Over time the beginning-teachers observed that students appeared to assimilate this content and began to apply it in ways which indicated growth in visual literacy competence. The mentor was a repository of subject-discipline content

knowledge which had both short and long-term benefits. In the initial phase of the induction year, the mentors assisted the beginning-teacher to quickly identify and select age-appropriate subject-discipline content. **This kind of content knowledge that was previously described in syllabus documents for visual arts, was lost with the removal of syllabi which accompanied the introduction of the WACF.**

The loss of this record of age-appropriate content knowledge rendered many new teachers (particularly those with a Graduate Diploma) uncertain about the 'right' learning materials for various groups. As the year progressed, the new teachers began to build a repertoire of appropriate content knowledge and were increasingly able to independently identify materials which appeared to be of value.

**Proposition Four: the mentor is a repository of pedagogical- content knowledge which can be used to manage student behaviour, learning styles and special needs, to ensure successful transmission of the visual literacy subject-discipline content knowledge.**

The fourth proposition arose from the experience of all the beginning-teachers (particularly **Zack, Chloe and Anna**) who expressed gratitude as their mentor suggested effective pedagogy. This encompassed strategies for behaviour management of challenging or unmotivated students; identification and accommodation of learning styles; motivational techniques; and support for special needs students to ensure effective and efficient transmission of visual literacy content.

For a number of the beginning-teachers in the study the task of identifying appropriate content within learning programs was particularly difficult, because the teaching strategies they used failed to address behavioural or other special needs. The experienced mentors were able to draw on an extensive repertoire to suggest ways of moderating or mediating behaviour and other challenges.

**Proposition Five: the mentor is a repository of socio-political context knowledge (curricular knowledge) which can be used to assist the new teacher to navigate the political landscape of the unfamiliar school and staff.**

The fifth proposition arises from the experience of beginning-teachers **Mary, Zack, Marnie and Anna**, who all encountered difficulties with colleagues and school structures which appeared unreasonable or to take advantage of their inexperience and vulnerable status as a graduate teacher. In these instances the mentor worked with the beginning-teacher to identify the areas of concerns, to reconcile these against what

might normally be expected of beginning-teachers and to devise ways of resolving these issues with senior staff, some of whom were the cause of the difficulties.

In each instance the new teacher was feeling helpless, overwhelmed and distressed by the circumstances of their appointment and the mentor was able to suggest mechanisms for resolving the issues. In the case of **Mary, Katy and Anna**, particularly, this support was pivotal in countering their general orientation to leave teaching that suggested that the mentor had facilitated a culture of resilience.

**Proposition Six: reciprocal mentoring may offer pre-service teachers an opportunity to establish a professional relationship with a single mentor or a network of mentors before graduation who may be well disposed to assist the new teacher during the induction year.**

The reciprocal mentoring dimension of the research (albeit on a small scale) allowed beginning-teachers **Anna** and **Chloe** the opportunity to work in a school over an extended period. The placement occurred during their final year at university, when they assumed the role of an Artist-in-Residence. The kudos they experienced appeared to enhance their enthusiasm for their studies and gave them the opportunity to learn about the operation of the visual arts department. Importantly this occurred as an emic participant over an extended period of time.

Their involvement as an Artist-in-Residence with a specific teacher and school, allowed **Chloe** and **Anna** to gain insight into the practice of that teacher as they navigated school policies and procedures. This not only complemented and reinforced the formal studies the pre-service teacher was undertaking, but allowed them to build goodwill in the school at which they offered their voluntary service. In the year following graduation, these beginning-teachers were able to call upon the teacher and school for assistance in navigating the demands of their new profession.

For **Chloe** particularly, the support she reciprocally received from **M - Janine** helped make it possible for her to survive the first year of teaching in a challenging rural setting, with a high percentage of indigenous students who came from transient family structures and were often missing from school. Furthermore, **Janine** assisted **Chloe** as she struggled to teach in several areas for which she had not formally been trained.

**Proposition Seven: reciprocal mentoring may constitute a model for effective procurement of mentors for beginning-teachers when such mentors might otherwise be difficult to source.**

This proposition arises from the experience of the mentor-teachers **M -Janine** and **M - Tess**, who both expressed a willingness to repeatedly mentor beginning-teachers. They observed other experienced teachers may be reluctant to volunteer unless there was some tangible benefit or reward for doing so.

M - Janine participated in the reciprocal mentoring process from 2006-2008 and was a mentor in both years of the research period. M - Tess, by contrast, participated in 2006 but said that she was unable to do so in 2007 as a consequence of industrial action being undertaken by teachers in DET schools. She added the codicil that whilst she believed mentoring was important for new teachers, she really did not feel willing to take on the responsibility again because she considered she would be professionally stretched, with little return.

M - Tess had initially committed to the second year of the research period, but withdrew before it formally began and observed that the lack of tangible reward for mentors (other than those who were altruistic by nature) was a flaw of the program. M - Janine suggested that the reciprocal mentoring program that she had jointly designed with me, might represent a solution to this question of reward for mentoring. Within such a program, mentors would be rewarded for agreeing to support a beginning-teacher, by having access to the services of a skilled Artist-in-Residence during the final year of their pre-service training as a visual-arts teacher. Within the model, both the mentor and the beginning-teacher have the potential to derive equal benefit from the arrangement, particularly in schools where budgets might otherwise render the procuring an Artist-in-Residence prohibitive.

**Proposition Eight: a partnership approach to induction involving the university, professional association, mentor-teacher and beginning-teacher, has the potential to offer significant support to the new teacher through scaffolded entry to the profession and ongoing support throughout the first year.**

In all cases the beginning-teachers who participated in the research expressed the view that the partnership between me the researcher and the mentor (who derived from AEA/WA) gave them a sense of a scaffolded entry into the teaching profession.

**Marnie** observed that this experience of mentoring could be represented through the metaphor of a bridge: with a foundation established whilst she was at university; consolidated through the mentoring workshop and my attendance at mentoring meetings; and culminating with the mentor making herself available throughout the first year. She said she felt supported as her mentor offered advice, guidance and reassurance as issues or challenges arose. Marnie observed that, without the support M - Janine had given, she believed that she would have left teaching, because the challenges had seemed insurmountable.

Without exception, the beginning-teachers said that the relationship they had with both the mentor and the University liaison after graduation, made them feel safe and supported. Several considered that the absence of the mentoring might have exacerbated the feelings they had briefly experienced of being cut loose or abandoned at the end of their one-year Graduate Diploma. **Zack, Marnie and Mary** particularly noted that the mentoring partnership between the university, themselves and the AEA/WA mentor gave them confidence to remain in teaching when they felt they would otherwise have left.

**Proposition Nine: mentors will be better equipped to support beginning-teachers if they themselves are supported in their role. Such support could reasonably be expected to encompass training for mentors; regular telephone or email contact from the university liaison; and ongoing support from a university liaison as determined by the needs of the group.**

The mentors **M - Tom, M – Tess and M - Janine** all noted that they had found the initial training workshop at the beginning of the research particularly helpful in clarifying the nature of their mentoring role and the year ahead. They indicated that they appreciated the fact that the University was keen to support them and this helped preserve the momentum of the process at times when they themselves felt a waning level of commitment.

**M - Janine** noted that regular correspondence which occurred between her and myself, coupled with the meetings of her two groups, meant that over time a strong relationship grew, not only with her beginning-teachers, but also with me as a university contact. M - Janine said she felt that this was an excellent by-product of the process and had been a catalyst for considering other ways of extending the University/School partnership. It was this sentiment that led M - Janine to initially suggest that she would be keen to explore a reciprocal mentoring process. M - Janine had the sense that she was part of a

well- developed approach to mentoring that offered support both to herself and her students, as well as to her beginning-teacher recipients. She advised that she intended to pursue further study at Masters level and felt that mentoring might be part of her focus.

**Proposition Ten: a mentoring model which is framed around beginning-teachers acting as ‘buddies’ for one-another has the potential to alleviate some demand on the mentor’s time and resources because the buddies themselves may be able collaboratively to devise solutions for challenges.**

This proposition arose from the experience of the beginning-teachers, (**Katy and Mary**) and (**Zack and Penny**), who remained as partners for each other throughout the mentoring experience. These four participants said that they had derived great benefit from the support the buddy offered and noted that it was good to know another person who was entering their career at the same time that they were. The buddy-model afforded each beginning-teacher the opportunity to run their ideas and concerns past another new teacher, who was able to suggest ideas/strategies that often obviated the need to involve the mentor.

## **THE POLITICAL CONTEXT**

The Graduate Mentor Project research occurred within a specific political context which is elaborated in the literature review and summarised here. Significant elements of the context included:

- sweeping changes to local curriculum structures (embodied in the introduction of the outcomes-based Western Australian Curriculum Framework **WACF** in 1994) resulted in the loss of syllabus documents and defined content for visual-arts education K-12 in Western Australian Schools;
- increasingly complex WACF demands on experienced teachers’ time made the provision of traditional mentoring for beginning-teachers unsustainable and difficult to source;
- WACOT required all new teachers to demonstrate that they had been in receipt of mentoring in order to secure re-registration of their licence to teach at the end of the initial three-year phase;
- a marginalisation of the visual arts as a discrete discipline, as a result of the amalgamation of five arts disciplines into one learning area within the WACF

(visual arts ; drama; dance; music; and media) - an outcome which was not shared/borne by the traditional core subjects of English, Mathematics, Science, or Society & Environment;

- loss of primary visual arts specialists, as a consequence of primary teachers having to deliver all eight WACF learning areas within a generalised learning program meant that secondary visual arts specialists often have to teach across K-12;
- substantial restructuring and reduction in the substance of tertiary teacher-training programs within the visual arts resulted in a narrowing or loss of subject-discipline content knowledge, (particularly in areas of visual-arts history and criticism)that are critical foundations for visual literacy;
- high attrition rates among new teachers that research suggests might partly be attributed to loss of support structures, of the induction process, of mentoring and of continuity of employment, in the first year of teaching;
- increasing complexity of visual literacy education challenges for beginning-teachers translated to pressure to perform. High stakes for failure within a visually-saturated Australian society where an individual's failure to become visually literate renders them vulnerable to manipulation (life-skills issue).

### **EMERGENT THEMES**

The findings of the thesis have given rise to the distillation of three themes that impacted the majority of participants:

#### **Theme One: The mentors had a positive impact on the beginning-teachers' sense of wellbeing:**

- the mentors offered their beginning-teachers a safe place to share their worries and concerns about the demands of the induction process;
- they had a positive impact on the beginning-teachers' sense of personal/professional wellbeing as they waited to be appointed to a teaching position and helped them prepare for the DET interview;
- the mentor helped sustain the beginning-teachers through long periods of unemployment, when they seemed to have lost confidence in their suitability for the profession. On more than one occasion they persuaded their protégées not to

abandon their aspirations to be a teacher;

- the mentors were able to encourage the beginning-teachers to trust in their judgement about modifications to projects and programs, assessment and reporting, that in turn, gave them confidence to believe in themselves and to have confidence that they were performing well in their professional duties. This contributed to the beginning-teachers' sense of professional and personal wellbeing.

**Theme Two: The mentor had a positive impact on the beginning-teachers' ability to navigate the general demands arising from the school and teaching environment:**

- the mentor had a positive impact on the beginning-teachers' ability to navigate the general demands of teaching and those arising from the school and classroom environments;
- they offered the beginning-teachers specific advice about enhancing the profile of visual arts in the school and, over time, this often led to a commitment for an increased budget for visual arts from the school hierarchy;
- the mentor guided the beginning-teacher through the difficulties relating to evaluation, assessment and reporting and an array of other duties once a regular teaching position had been secured. This proved invaluable, because some beginning-teachers had either forgotten the things they had learned on practicum and in their tertiary studies, or felt unsure about how to implement these;
- the mentor was able to guide their mentees through the complexities of applying the WACF level statements to both programming and assessment at middle-school and senior- school level;
- The mentor was able to offer the beginning-teacher valuable advice about navigating the political landscape, through negotiation with colleagues, to effect solutions to challenges which appeared to emanate from unreasonable expectations on the new teacher.

**Theme Three: The mentor had a positive impact on the beginning-teacher's ability to navigate the demands of visual literacy education:**

- the mentor had a positive impact on the beginning-teacher's ability to navigate the demands of visual literacy education;



- the mentor offered the beginning-teacher a range of invaluable tips for studio techniques, themes and materials. They complemented these with suggestions for artists and visual arts movements which might effectively reinforce the skills the students covered in their work;
- the mentor gave the beginning-teacher tips for pedagogy (e.g. guiding student discussion and understanding of visual language). This informed the autonomy evidenced in the choices the students made about their own work that in turn suggested an evolving visual literacy facility.

## CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions have been drawn from the inquiry. The mentoring program resulted in:

- One: improved induction experience for the beginning-teacher participants that resulted in an enhanced sense of personal wellbeing;
- Two: improved attrition rates during the induction period of the research. Several of the beginning-teachers in the study reported that they would have left teaching as a consequence of stress, had it not been for the positive support provided by their mentor. National attrition rates suggest that departure from the profession is most likely to occur during the first five years and the induction period represents a particularly high risk period in the profession;
- Three: practical support for beginning-teachers, who do not have routine access to a definitive syllabus or experienced subject- discipline colleagues in the school setting. Despite the recent return to and development of draft syllabi in most WACF learning areas, the documents much like the curriculum guides before them, are very open-ended and require the reader to possess extensive knowledge of the concepts, themes and foci listed;
- Four: ongoing access to subject-discipline, pedagogical and curricular content knowledge that may facilitate improved skills and confidence in visual literacy teaching by the new teachers. Further research would need to be undertaken to measure the actual impact on visual literacy of students before any claims in this domain could be made and substantiated;
- Five: benefit to the mentors' teaching practice, as a consequence of the reflective practitioner process which the mentoring relationship encourages;

- Six: the development of a reciprocal mentoring program which appears to offer a supply of mentors for new teachers. Furthermore, reciprocal mentoring delivered tangible benefit to school-based teachers through access to an Artist-in-Residence at no cost and also to beginning-teachers who used the program to reinforce the content of their tertiary studies and to establish professional networks.;
- Seven: enhanced community engagement and improved public profile for the University training provider were desirable by-products of mentoring experience;
- Eight: enhanced membership of AEA/WA, because all participants were members of the association by the end of the study, suggesting the potential for recruitment and development.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

Tangible benefits to the new teachers appear to have arisen from the study. However, any implications arising from the research are premised on a clear acknowledgement that the study was perceptual in nature, that is, reporting the way the beginning-teachers 'felt' about their success in visual literacy teaching, rather than through any quantitative measure of visual literacy facility within their students. Accordingly, the results are limited and unlikely to be easily extrapolated beyond this perceptual domain. Nonetheless, the perceptual nature of the inquiry may have an important link to attrition rates arising from beginning-teachers' confidence, personal and professional wellbeing. The implications of mentoring in this instance appear to be:

- One: mentoring has an important role to play in the induction experience of Graduate Diploma beginning visual-arts teachers and can act as a bridge between study and work, ensuring a smooth transition from one domain to the other;
- Two: where beginning-teachers believe that there are gaps in their professional knowledge which arise from (perceived or actual) inadequacies in preparation for teaching, mentors may have an important place to play in addressing this actual or perceived inadequacy;
- Three: the important contribution mentors made to the induction experience of graduates, warrants formal acknowledgement by pre-service training providers, who may be well positioned to facilitate the routine provision of mentoring for all beginning-teachers. Such provision could be undertaken in partnership with schools as well as professional association(s). The duty of care which the training provider has to graduates, should

accordingly be repositioned from one which ends at graduation, to a point at least at the end of the first year after graduation;

Four: mentoring relationships could effectively be established by the pre-service training provider during the Graduate Diploma year through a reciprocal mentoring program. Reciprocal mentoring appears to be a mutually-beneficial model for beginning-teachers and experienced visual-arts teachers alike, in the establishment and maintenance of professional networks;

Five: within a reciprocal mentoring model, the school-based teacher has access to a skilled Artist-in-Residence at no cost and, reciprocally, the beginning-teacher has access to the experienced mentor during the often stressful induction period;

Six: reciprocal mentoring as a model may have value in ensuring an on-going supply of mentors, when these are otherwise be difficult to source in the current educational and political context. Such an arrangement would address the legislative requirement from WACOT for new teachers to demonstrate participation in mentoring at the time they apply for re-registration. The model may further be beneficial in reframing the experience of Graduate Diploma pre-service teachers, away from that of needy practicum student to one of valuable Artist-in-Residence, with the attendant kudos that for the first time, acknowledges their expert status as visual arts practitioners. . Finally, a reciprocal mentoring program could easily be extended to other arts and perhaps all disciplines within the Graduate Diploma (Mathematician-in- Residence; Writer-in-Residence; Historian-in-Residence, etc.) with similar benefits for all beginning-teachers, regardless of teaching discipline;

Seven: mentors have the capacity to positively impact both the perception and reality of success as the new teacher engages subject, pedagogical and curricular content knowledge in the process of visual literacy education;

Eight: mentors may themselves derive professional benefit as they reflect on their own experience over many years, in the course of offering advice to beginning-teachers. Several mentors in this study observed that this reflective practitioner process actually enhanced their own day-to-day teaching and visual-arts practice;

Nine: the metaphors which arose from the program 'teacher as artist', 'teacher as vulnerable child' and 'teacher as critical friend' encompassed the year-long journey of the beginning-teacher from graduation to the second year. The contribution the mentor

made to the journey could give rise to new metaphors such as ‘teacher as expert’ and ‘teacher as scholar’;

Ten: new metaphors could operate as powerful connecting agents between ideas, as the beginning-teacher evolved from a competent (or otherwise) graduate to effective professional visual educator in the post induction period.

## **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Six key recommendations arise from the research and these are framed around the critical finding of the study, that mentoring of beginning visual-arts teachers is beneficial during the induction period. The finding echoes international and national research (most recently the 2008 National Review of Visual Education ‘First We See). However, the local context of the research renders the GMP of particular interest to Western Australian pre-service training providers. Accordingly, the key recommendations of the research are framed in a manner that identifies tangible changes which have implications for the teacher education providers in Western Australia:

### **One: formalise and extend the trial of Reciprocal Mentoring**

The first recommendation arising from the research is that the program be formalised, requiring compulsory involvement in reciprocal mentoring (as an AiR) for all students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma.

### **Two: expand the program to other arts disciplines and develop role statements**

The program should be expanded within the School of Education at ECU to encompass the other arts disciplines: drama, music, media and dance. Such expansion would test the efficacy of the model with a wider sample of beginning-teachers and go part way to legitimising further dissemination of the model.

A second tier of expansion might encompass the further dissemination of the program to all disciplines within the Graduate Diploma where postgraduate students could establish and benefit from a culture of reciprocity in mentoring, for example:

- writer-in-Residence (English Graduate Diploma)
- mathematician-in-Residence (Mathematics Graduate Diploma)
- geographer-in-Residence (Society and Environment Graduate Diploma)
- scientist-in-Residence (Science Graduate Diploma)

- athlete-in-Residence (Health and Physical Education Graduate Diploma)
- historian-in-Residence (Society and Environment Graduate Diploma)
- designer-in-Residence (Design Technology Graduate Diploma)

**Three: appoint a university liaison officer**

Appoint a university liaison officer to oversee the operation of the program, with time and funding to provide training and support for mentors and beginning-teachers alike. Such appointment would respond directly to the recent call from the House of Representatives inquiry into teacher education, for universities to be more directly involved in the induction phase of beginning-teacher experience.

**Four: undertake continuing research to track progress of the beginning-teachers**

Undertake further research to measure the impact mentoring has on beginning-teachers during the first five years of the profession. Tracking the results of the mentoring experience over a five-year period (the critical period for attrition statistics) would allow assessment of whether the mentoring positively impacted induction failure and attrition statistics.

**Five: undertake continuing research to assess impact on students**

Undertake further research to measure the actual visual literacy impact on secondary school students who are taught by beginning-teachers in receipt of mentoring/reciprocal mentoring. Confirmation that visual literacy acquisition is actually occurring in students who are taught by the beginning-teachers, would give credibility to the structure and form of the program and appears to be a worthy pursuit.

**Six: initiate cross-institutional research**

Commence dialogue with other Western Australian teacher training providers in respect of cross-institutional initiatives and research around reciprocal mentoring for Graduate Diploma pre-service teachers. A collaborative project involving partnerships with other universities has the potential to demonstrate the benefits of the model across a range of settings. This, in turn, may build a case for the routine provision of reciprocal mentoring in all Western Australian Graduate Diploma settings and have implications for national and international practice.

## **REFLECTIONS AND A NEW VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

The mentoring experience recorded in this research affirmed the value of mentoring for the beginning visual-arts teachers who entered the profession with differing personal and professional profiles. Notwithstanding the differences between participants and on the basis of the findings of this research, it seems reasonable to suggest that all beginning-teachers should be routinely assigned a mentor. Importantly, this should occur during the final year of pre-service education.

Such assignment would ensure continuity of support as the beginning-teacher moves from the tertiary to the employment domain. Reciprocal mentoring would facilitate such pre-service alignment and ensure an ongoing supply of mentors who, with training, could replace or support the articulation of subject-discipline content knowledge in syllabi currently under development. What is less clear, however, is whether there may be some merit in a re-consideration of the educational landscape itself and the attendant questions of whether there is something dramatically amiss which needs to be 'fixed'. Having invested millions of dollars in the development of the WACF, such examination may not be well received by policy makers. Nonetheless, at a time when a national curriculum looms large on the political horizon of the Rudd Government's 'Education Revolution', perhaps such examination would be well placed and might add momentum to the debate. Berlach (2006) captured this sentiment when he observed:

Given the current concerns about how education is being conceptualised in Western Australia, one could be forgiven for suggesting that schooling in that state best aligns with the 'meltdown' scenario. For this scenario, the OECD suggests that there would be a major crisis of teacher shortages, highly resistant to conventional policy responses. It is triggered by a rapidly ageing profession, exacerbated by low teacher morale. Crisis management predominates. Even in areas saved the worst difficulties, a fortress mentality prevails.

The crisis, is in part caused by teaching's unattractiveness. All of the above meltdown conditions are now evident in the State's education system. One would be foolish to suggest that OBE is to blame for all of education's woes. Nevertheless, the recent heightened dissatisfaction with OBE suggests that a looming meltdown scenario as identified by the OECD, is not beyond the realms of possibility (p. 9).

Perhaps the reintroduction of syllabi and curriculum guides within the WACF (albeit welcome by new and experienced teachers alike), however, rather misses the point. Berlach continued:

The production of Curriculum Guides themselves was a meritorious attempt on the part of the Curriculum Council to address teachers' urgent pleas to redress the content vacuum created by the move to OBE. This in itself, though, ought to have signalled to the CCWA that teachers want to know what they are expected to teach, they don't want to be, by and large, curriculum developers. Neither have their university initial teacher education courses prepared them for such a task. Reiterating a previously expressed contention, teacher joined the profession to gain a sense of value from actual teaching. The bulk do not appear to be interested in entering the never-ending cycle of generating designer outcomes (p. 8).

Put simply, it may well be that, after a decade of constant revision of the aspects of the WACF, it is simply time for a more fundamental paradigm shift than can be achieved by the superficial 'tinkering with the machinery'. Such a shift might encompass the replacement of OBE (and the WACF) with a new curriculum (national or otherwise) which valued the integral role of content knowledge (subject-discipline, curricular and pedagogical) in teaching and learning. Syllabus materials would form a critical component of such a structure and mentoring of new teachers could be a routine experienced by all new graduates. Supply of mentors could be assured through reciprocal mentoring as a lynch-pin of the model and the mentors themselves might, over time, enjoy a new status with appropriate remuneration and professional recognition. Rejuvenation and reinvigoration of the profession might, in turn, give rise to a new appreciation by the community of the important work teachers (and particularly visual arts educators) do in a visually- saturated Australian society.

Such a paradigm shift might also result in a shift in the emphasis within pre-service education programs. Attendant reorientation in undergraduate visual arts degrees away from an emphasis predominantly upon conceptual understanding, to approaches which favour integration of both conceptual understanding and content knowledge would occur through broad engagement with diverse studio disciplines. Content acquisition in undergraduate visual arts degrees, followed by strong emphasis upon pedagogical and curricular content in the Graduate Diploma, could then be supported by curriculum guides and comprehensive syllabi that clearly articulated the scope and sequence of K -12 learning programs. Evaluation of student learning against a prescribed visual arts syllabus might, in turn, encompass a return to norm-referenced assessment regimes and grade distribution models, with outcomes-based education philosophy guiding the design (rather than assessment) of learning programs.

Supported by scaffolded entry into the profession under the auspices of 'reciprocal mentoring', beginning-teachers would have a markedly different and more affirming induction experience than is currently afforded many new graduates. Pre-service training providers would, in turn, be able to more effectively meet the duty of care owed to graduates through community engagement and formal partnership approaches to beginning-teacher induction. The

combination of broad visual arts knowledge and detailed syllabi/resource materials, would offer greater security to the new teachers as they navigate the challenges associated with pedagogy and the broader school curriculum. The graduates themselves would experience enhanced wellbeing and security in such a reconfigured educational landscape, as they moved from the role of Artist-in-Residence and the metaphor of 'teacher as artist' within the tertiary environment, to that of 'teacher as novice' (rather than 'teacher as vulnerable child'). In time, a new metaphor of 'teacher as scholar' might emerge, as a culture of reciprocity in mentoring gave rise to a more reflective and scholarly attitude to the 'art of teaching' by both beginning-teachers and experienced mentors. Such a new vision for visual arts teachers and visual literacy education seems a worthy goal. I hope that the educational climate, as Berlach suggests, is ready for such a paradigm shift.

The issues surrounding OBE's ideological framework have divided the educational community and destabilised education in Western Australia for well over a decade. But there is hope. The admission by the Director-general (DETTWA) that a syllabus is required is a possible first step to avoiding catastrophe. Teacher morale is likely to be boosted with the provision of documentation which actually frees teachers do what they do best – teach. Thus allowing them to once again be charged with the task of disseminating a body of sequential and developmentally appropriate content to be imparted in a systematic fashion. Such an announcement may also address attrition concerns as hopefully future teaching graduates will not take the course of action ... (to leave teaching) (p. 9).

Despite having been a strong advocate for the philosophy of OBE in the past, I for one would welcome such a move.



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# APPENDICES

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## **Section A – Research Instruments**

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## APPENDIX ONE: CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONNAIRE

### GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION

#### Note to Participants:

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Could you please answer the following questions which ask for your reflections about your experience/s during your first year of teaching. Your answers (along with those of other respondents) be used to create a context for a research project into 'mentoring of beginning-teachers' in respect of visual arts history and criticism education. Your responses will remain anonymous.

#### ABOUT YOU:

Background information - could you please identify your:

Name

Age

Gender

Secondary School (private, state etc)

University

Year of Graduation from University

Year of first teaching appointment

Location of first teaching appointment

Type of first teaching appointment

Level of current teaching appointment (e.g. Head of Department etc)

#### CHALLENGES

Please make brief comments about the kinds of challenges you encountered in teaching visual arts history/visual arts criticism at middle school level (yrs 8, 9 and 10) during your FIRST year of teaching

- the pedagogical challenges encountered during the first year of teaching;
- solutions devised to meet these challenges;
- experiences with mentors and the role they played (or didn't play) in overcoming professional challenges;

- factors which impacted negatively upon your teaching of visual arts history and criticism (eg lack of visual/text material etc);
- factors which impacted positively upon your teaching of visual arts history and criticism;
- reflections about resources which could have been helpful in respect of teaching visual arts history and criticism;
- other observations/commentary.

Could you please share an interesting/funny/alarming anecdote about teaching visual arts history/criticism to middle school students during your first year of teaching:

## **APPENDIX TWO: 2006 INTERVIEW WITH ALL PARTICIPANTS**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. This research project is designed to study the benefits formalised mentoring partnerships offers to beginning-teachers during their first year of teaching. Your responses will remain anonymous and should you wish to withdraw from the project at any time your tapes will be returned to you.

### **Participant's background/personal details (if easier ... simply attach a copy of your CV)**

- 1        Could you please provide the following information which will be used to discriminate your responses from other participants. All responses will remain confidential:
  - name;
  - age (optional);
  - gender;
  - current teaching position;
  - teaching or study experience.
  
- 2        Could you please provide an overview of the pathway to your participation in this research program (eg graduate of University selected for inclusion in the study or experienced teacher member of Art Education Association etc).
  
- 3        Could you please elaborate your reasons for agreeing to participate in this study.

### **Self Assessment of content knowledge/expertise in respect of AIS/ARS - mentors**

- 4        Could you please give your impression of the depth/breadth of your knowledge base in respect of AIS
  - knowledge of historical visual arts movements;
  - knowledge of artists;
  - understanding of impact of historical movements on contemporary culture and arts practice.
  
- 5        Could you please give your views on the place/role/importance of AIS/ARS in contemporary middle school visual arts education programs.
  
- 6        Could you please give your impressions of your capacity to integrate AIS/ARS in a meaningful way in visual arts education programs.
  
- 7        Could you please highlight your impressions of your strengths within this domain.
  
- 8        Could you please highlight your impressions of your weaknesses within this domain.

- 9 How would you measure success in the teaching of AIS or ARS (what evidence do you consider relevant)?
- 10 What strategies might you employ in the event that you encountered difficulty in successfully teaching AIS or ARS?
- 11 Are there any resources that you consider critical to the successful teaching of AIS and/or ARS?

**Self Assessment of pedagogical knowledge/expertise in respect of AIS/ARS – beginning-teachers**

- 12 Could you please give an overview of your teaching strategies portfolio (preferred methodology for teaching AIS/ARS in middle school).
- 13 Could you please give an overview of your teaching style in respect of classroom/behaviour management during AIS/ARS lessons or in related contexts.
- 14 How useful do you consider your under graduate training to have been in providing you with specialist content knowledge for the teaching of AIS and ARS in middle school.  
You may wish to consider:
- Knowledge of visual arts historical movements;
  - Knowledge of artists, their styles, motivations and creative priorities;
  - Expertise/repertoire - approaches to visual arts criticism.
- 15 How would you measure success in the teaching of AIS or ARS (what evidence do you consider relevant)?
- 16 What strategies might you employ in the event that you encountered difficulty in successfully teaching AIS or ARS?
- 17 Are there any resources that you consider critical to the successful teaching of AIS and/or ARS?

**Questions for Mentor-teachers only**

- 18 How comprehensive do you consider your specialist content knowledge for the teaching of AIS and ARS in middle school to be? You may wish to consider:
- Knowledge of visual arts historical movements;
  - Knowledge of artists, their styles, motivations and creative priorities;
  - Expertise/repertoire - approaches to visual arts criticism.

### **Participant's previous experience with mentoring partnerships as either a student or teacher**

- 19 When/where have you previously been involved in a mentoring partnership?
- 20 Could you please elaborate your participant role in mentoring partnerships in the past.
- 21 If you have participated in mentoring partnerships in the past could you please elaborate the nature of any preparation or training which was provided.
- 22 Could you please identify observable benefits for either the mentor or beginning-teacher which derived from this experience.
- 23 If you have not previously been involved in mentoring partnerships could please give your impressions of the operation of mentoring partnerships of which you have been aware.

### **Participant's knowledge of mentoring partnerships - theoretical perspective**

- 24 Could you please elaborate your understanding of the rationale supporting mentoring partnerships between beginning-teachers and experienced practitioners in contemporary educational contexts.
- 25 Could you please elaborate your general expectations about the manner in which the partnership in which you are involved will operate (consider frequency and nature of contact, meetings, areas of support etc).
- 26 What positive expectations do you have for the results of the mentoring partnership (aspirations)?
- 27 What negative expectations (or limitations) do you have for the results of the mentoring partnership (fears/reservations)?

### **Participants' attitudes towards visual culture and visual literacy**

- 28 Do you believe that the study of visual arts history is a worthwhile undertaking in middle school contexts? Why?
- 29 Do you believe that the study of visual arts criticism is a worthwhile undertaking in middle school? Why?
- 30 Do you favour a particular approach to the analysis and interrogation of visual arts images/artefacts?

- 31 Do you consider contemporary images appearing in the media and other forms of visual culture should be part of the visual arts program? Why?
- 32 How do you define the term visual literacy and how would you measure a student's competence in this area?
- 33 On a scale of one to ten how would you rate your own:
- knowledge of contemporary visual culture (Australian and international);
  - visual literacy competence.

### **Participant's knowledge of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework**

- 34 Can you describe what you understand the term WACF to mean?
- 35 Can you elaborate your understanding of the terms Arts Learning Area and the Arts Outcomes?
- 36 To which arts outcome areas do you understand the study of visual arts history and visual arts criticism to belong?
- 37 Do you consider the study of visual culture to belong to one of the arts outcome areas (which one/s and why)?
- 38 Do you consider that the study of visual arts history, visual arts criticism and visual culture contribute to the acquisition of visual literacy in the middle school context? Why?

### **Other**

- 39 Can you elaborate any other thoughts, ideas or observations which you believe are relevant to the Graduate Mentor Project Research?
- 40 Would you like to receive a copy of the thesis document at the time of completion? If so, provide a mailing address (your own, or parents etc) and contact phone number which is likely to be current for the next 3 years.



## **APPENDIX THREE: 2007 INTERVIEW WITH ALL PARTICIPANTS**

### **Verbatim script to be read to all participants:**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. This research project is designed to study the benefits formalised mentoring partnerships offers to beginning-teachers during their first year of teaching. This initial interview is the first of several we will conduct during the next twelve months and with your permission I will use an audio tape cassette to record our conversations. Your responses will remain anonymous and should you wish to withdraw from the project at any time your tapes will be returned to you.

Can you confirm that you consent to your interview being recorded in this manner and for this purpose please?

Note: the abbreviations AIS = arts in society/art history; ARS = arts responses/art criticism.

### **Participant's background/personal details**

- 1        Could you please provide the following information which will be used to discriminate your responses from other participants? All responses will remain confidential:
  - name;
  - age (optional);
  - gender;
  - current teaching position;
  - teaching or study experience.
  
- 2        Could you please provide an overview of the pathway to your participation in this study (eg graduate of university selected for inclusion in the study or experienced teacher member of Art Education Association etc);
  
- 3        Could you please elaborate your reasons for agreeing to participate in this study;

### **Self Assessment of content knowledge/expertise in respect of AIS/ARS - mentors**

- 4        Could you please give your impression of the depth/breadth of your knowledge base in respect of AIS:
  - knowledge of historical visual arts movements;
  - knowledge of artists;
  - understanding of impact of historical movements on contemporary culture and arts practice.
  
- 5        Could you please give your views on the place/role/importance of AIS/ARS in contemporary middle school visual arts education programs?

- 6 Could you please give your impressions of your capacity to integrate AIS/ARS in a meaningful way in visual arts education programs?
- 7 Could you please highlight your impressions of your strengths within this domain?
- 8 Could you please highlight your impressions of your weaknesses within this domain?.
- 9 How would you measure success in the teaching of AIS or ARS (what evidence do you consider relevant)?
- 10 What strategies might you employ in the event that you encountered difficulty in successfully teaching AIS or ARS?
- 11 Are there any resources that you consider critical to the successful teaching of AIS and/or ARS?

**Self Assessment of pedagogical knowledge/expertise in respect of AIS/ARS – beginning-teachers**

- 12 Could you please give an overview of your teaching strategies portfolio (preferred methodology for teaching AIS/ARS in middle school)?
- 13 Could you please give an overview of your teaching style in respect of classroom/behaviour management during AIS/ARS lessons or in related contexts?
- 14 How useful do you consider your under graduate training to have been in providing you with specialist content knowledge for the teaching of AIS and ARS in middle school.  
You may wish to consider:
- Knowledge of visual arts historical movements;
  - Knowledge of artists, their styles, motivations and creative priorities;
  - Expertise/repertoire - approaches to visual arts criticism.
- 15 How would you measure success in the teaching of AIS or ARS (what evidence do you consider relevant)?
- 16 What strategies might you employ in the event that you encountered difficulty in successfully teaching AIS or ARS?
- 17 Are there any resources that you consider critical to the successful teaching of AIS and/or ARS?

**Questions for Mentor-teachers only**

- 19 How comprehensive do you consider your specialist content knowledge for the teaching of AIS and ARS in middle school to be? You may wish to consider:

- Knowledge of visual arts historical movements;
- Knowledge of artists, their styles, motivations and creative priorities;
- Expertise/repertoire - approaches to visual arts criticism.

**Participant's previous experience with mentoring partnerships as either a student or teacher**

- 19 When/where have you previously been involved in a mentoring partnership?
- 20 Could you please elaborate your participant role in mentoring partnerships in the past?
- 21 If you have participated in mentoring partnerships in the past could you please elaborate the nature of any preparation or training which was provided?
- 22 Could you please identify observable benefits for either the mentor or beginning-teacher which derived from this experience?
- 28 If you have not previously been involved in mentoring partnerships could please give your impressions of the operation of mentoring partnerships of which you have been aware?

**Participant's knowledge of mentoring partnerships - theoretical perspective**

- 29 Could you please elaborate your understanding of the rationale supporting mentoring partnerships between beginning-teachers and experienced practitioners in contemporary educational contexts?
- 30 Could you please elaborate your general expectations about the manner in which the partnership in which you are involved will operate (consider frequency and nature of contact, meetings, areas of support etc)?
- 31 What positive expectations do you have for the results of the mentoring partnership (aspirations)?
- 32 What negative expectations (or limitations) do you have for the results of the mentoring partnership (fears/reservations)?

**Participants' attitudes towards visual culture and visual literacy**

- 28 Do you believe that the study of visual arts history is a worthwhile undertaking in middle school contexts? Why?
- 29 Do you believe that the study of visual arts criticism is a worthwhile undertaking in middle school? Why?

- 30 Do you favour a particular approach to the analysis and interrogation of visual arts images/artefacts?
- 31 Do you consider contemporary images appearing in the media and other forms of visual culture should be part of the visual arts program? Why?
- 32 How do you define the term visual literacy and how would you measure a student's competence in this area?
- 33 On a scale of one to ten how would you rate your own:
- knowledge of contemporary visual culture (Australian and international);
  - visual literacy competence;

**Participant's knowledge of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework**

- 34 Can you describe what you understand the term WACF to mean?
- 35 Can you elaborate your understanding of the terms Arts Learning Area and the Arts Outcomes?
- 36 To which arts outcome areas do you understand the study of visual arts history and visual arts criticism to belong?
- 37 Do you consider the study of visual culture to belong to one of the arts outcome areas (which one/s and why)?
- 38 Do you consider that the study of visual arts history, visual arts criticism and visual culture contribute to the acquisition of visual literacy in the middle school context? Why?

**Other**

- 39 Can you elaborate any other thoughts, ideas or observations which you believe are relevant to the proposed Graduate Mentor Project Research?
- 40 Would you like to receive a copy of the thesis document at the time of completion? If so, provide a mailing address (your own, or parents etc) and contact phone number which is likely to be current for the next 3 years.

## APPENDIX FOUR: REFLECTION AND REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your participation in this electronic questionnaire. Please rate each of the statements against the following key descriptors by placing an 'x' in the appropriate box alongside the statement. You may wish to clarify your responses in the space provided:

Key:	5=Always true	4=often true	3=sometimes true	2=rarely true	1=never true
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Pre Service Training		5	4	3	2	1
1	My undergraduate training provided adequate preparation for the task of teaching AIS and ARS;					
2	I was formally taught how to include AIS/ARS in lessons and learning programs during my undergraduate training;					
3	I graduated with an extensive knowledge base in respect of AIS and ARS;					
4	I had adequate opportunities to hone my AIS/ARS pedagogy during my professional practice practicum/s;					
5	Prior to my teaching appointment I felt confident to include AIS/ARS in my lessons with students;					
6	During my undergraduate training practicum/s students were enthusiastic about participating in visual arts lessons incorporating AIS/ARS.					

Comments:

Current philosophical framework in respect of AIS/ARS		5	4	3	2	1
I believe ....						
1	AIS/ARS learning experiences should be used to build a knowledge base about important artists and visual arts movements;					
2	AIS/ARS delivers visual literacy to student;					
3	AIS/ARS should be used inspire the development of student's own studio works;					
4	AIS/ARS learning experiences should be used as teaching aids to exemplify skills techniques and processes;					
5	AIS/ARS delivers critical life skills to students and must always be included in learning programs;					
6	Learning programs which do not include AIS/ARS can be quite successful.					

Comments:

<b>The School Experience</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1</b>	The first year of teaching was extremely challenging in respect of teaching AIS/ARS;					
<b>2</b>	I felt confident to include AIS/ARS in my lessons with students ;					
<b>3</b>	I was able to solve problems in the teaching of AIS/ARS without the intervention of any other party;					
<b>4</b>	The school had sufficient resources (time, images, text/internet) to facilitate the successful teaching of AIS/ARS with students					
<b>5</b>	I was provided with mentoring by staff <u>within</u> the school context in respect of teaching AIS/ARS;					
<b>6</b>	I felt that I needed more support from other staff in respect of teaching AIS/ARS.					

**Comments:**

<b>The AEA/WA Mentoring Experience</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1</b>	The AEA/WA mentoring experience was a valuable support during my first year of teaching;					
<b>2</b>	The AEA/WA mentoring experience provided tangible solutions to problems I encountered in teaching including AIS ARS;					
<b>3</b>	The mentoring partnership lived up to the expectations I had at the outset of the research;					
<b>4</b>	The mentor-teacher was happy to answer any questions I had and made me feel that contact initiated by me was appropriate;					
<b>5</b>	The mentor-teacher inspired me to experiment with my AIS/ARS repertoire and to take calculated risks in the delivery of learning experiences;					
<b>6</b>	My teaching improved as a result of the mentoring experience.					

**Comments:**

<b>Reflections</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1</b>	The existing structure of pre-service training is quite adequate and no change is required;					
<b>2</b>	Mentors have limited value and should not be routinely matched to beginning-teachers;					
<b>3</b>	Mentors should be routinely assigned to teachers in their first year of teaching to support the transition from study to work;					
<b>4</b>	School based mentors should be assigned to beginning-teachers from within the school at which they are teaching;					
<b>5</b>	Universities should continue to monitor the progress of beginning-teachers during their first year of teaching to support the transition from study to work;					
<b>6</b>	Professional Associations (AEA/WA) should offer mentoring to beginning-teachers.					

**Comments:**

**APPENDIX FIVE: GRADUATE MENTOR WORKSHOP - REVIEW**

Could you please provide feedback on the quality of the initial training workshop:

<b>RATING SCALE:</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Sound</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>

Could you please select an appropriate rating from the key (above) and ascribe it to each criteria:

**Suitability of venue** \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**Morning Tea/Refreshments** \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**Expertise of facilitator** \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**Structure of the workshop** \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**Content delivered in the workshop** \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:



**Clarity of objectives of the workshop**

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**Outcomes achieved from the workshop**

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**Time allowed to complete the workshop**

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**Resources provided during the workshop**

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**Clarity of follow-up process after workshop**

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**General Feedback and suggestions to improve the training workshop:**

**Observations about the Graduate Mentor Project to date:**

## **APPENDIX SIX: KATY'S STORY**

### **The first meeting – February 2006**

At the time of the first research meeting, Katy had not yet secured a teaching position and had been contending with mixed feelings about her status as a teacher. Katy had done very well in her final teaching practicum, receiving an 'outstanding' mark from her school-based mentor. She had been an energetic and dedicated student throughout her Graduate Diploma studies and had sought to participate in any professional development opportunities that arose during her education training. Acknowledging the importance of the professional networking opportunities that inevitably arise from contact with others in the profession, Katy had been an early applicant for membership of the visual arts Education Association. She had achieved good results in her theoretical units at university and by any measure appeared an outstanding candidate for employment. Her interview with the Education Department had been a positive one and Katy had applied for, and received, her provisional registration to teach with the Western Australian College of Teaching. But almost a month after other graduates had begun teaching, Katy still had no regular work (either within the visual arts or any other subject area) and her resilience and optimism were being significantly tested. Katy had begun to believe that perhaps she was not deemed by employer groups to be a suitable employment candidate and she had begun to experience mild depression about these suspicions.

As we chatted over coffee, Katy began to share her concerns and confided that she struggled with self-doubt and questions about why she had not been employed. She wondered whether her interview with the education department had been as positive as she had imagined; she confessed that she questioned whether her sense of optimism from the successful completion of her training and professional practice placements had been misguided. This self-doubt was further exacerbated by Katy's experience of having to apply for unemployment benefit through Centre-link, where she had been required to wait in line with other unemployed people in anticipation of meeting with Centre-link staff to justify her eligibility for unemployment benefit payments. Katy described experiencing a real sense of 'shame' about this process of accessing financial support. Money was becoming a problem and Katy met with no success no matter where she turned in her search for employment as a teacher.

Tess, Katy's mentor-teacher, chatted with her by phone and email to reassure her that in time a position would become available. Tess arranged for Katy to have some relief teaching at her school (a state-run senior college in the northern suburbs of Perth) although the opportunities were limited and much of the work was in areas other than the visual arts. During the meeting, Tess spoke about her own sense of self-doubt as a mentor; she said that she had begun to feel that she had failed Katy and worried that this young teacher might be lost to the profession even before she had really had a chance to begin working. Katy had listened to Tess' advice and had distributed her CV to as many schools as she could manage; she had also tried (unsuccessfully) to meet with the deputy principals in these schools to discuss relief teaching opportunities. In most instances, Katy got no further than a brief conversation with secretarial staff, who seemed (to Katy) intent on blocking her access to the deputies/human resource officers in the schools. Somewhat deflated, Katy nevertheless continued to distribute her résumés and some sporadic relief work began to trickle in.

Mary, Katy's buddy in the research, was experiencing similar concerns; she too had not yet secured a full-time position. However, Mary appeared not to face the same

financial difficulties as Katy and therefore could offer little help as ‘buddy’ to her partner beginning- teacher. As our first meeting progressed and the three women chatted amiably, Katy seemed to regain some of her usual enthusiasm. Despite not having a teaching appointment, she described the delight she had felt during the times when she had been in a classroom ‘for real’ during her infrequent ‘call-ins’ for work in a relief capacity. Most of this work was at a school located in the northern suburbs of Perth (a 40-minute drive from her home) and catered for a discrete population of senior students – those who had completed their compulsory education up to year 10 and were now yrs 11 and 12 students engaged in post-compulsory education. The school was a large Government facility with mixed- gender classes. Katy reflected that other staff at this school had been friendly and helpful that had been a welcome support, especially since there been very little formal induction to the school. In essence, she arrived as a beginning-teacher for relief-teaching duties and ten minutes later was ‘thrown’ (uncertainties in tow) directly into a classroom full of students – none of whom were studying the visual arts .

In the weeks preceding our first meeting, Katy’s relief lessons had covered everything from cooking to sports, with the odd visual arts class along the way. She described feeling a sense of disconnection from the students – they just wanted to know where their ‘real teacher’ was and demanded to know why they were doing ‘this filler lesson’. Some students were clearly upset by what they considered to be a disruption of their learning program. Katy confessed to her mentor and buddy that she struggled to come up with convincing answers to such questions (especially in teaching contexts outside the visual arts), but did her best to keep the classes focused on the tasks set by the regular teachers. She tried to maintain a positive attitude to the relief-teaching context and looked forward to the time when she would have her own class on an ongoing basis. At the conclusion of the first one-hour meeting for group one, Katy left, saying that she felt quite positive; she stated her resolve to distribute her CV even more widely in the hope that she could speed up the employment process. Tess undertook to attempt to secure more relief teaching for Katy at her school; Mary said that she would keep in regular contact with Katy in the hope that they could support one-another. A date for a second meeting for the group was set for early April 2006.

### **The Second Meeting – April 2006**

The second meeting for group one occurred about two months later at the same café in Leederville. Katy arrived early and happily advised that she had just (that week) accepted and commenced a maternity-leave teaching position at a northern suburbs school for the remainder of the school year. The position was only for two days per week, but this additional work, in combination with the regular day of relief-teaching at Tess’ school each week, seemed to have overcome many of the concerns Katy had expressed in the first meeting. Katy’s financial position appeared set to change for the better and she had regained a sense of optimism and purpose. Her buddy, Mary, was unable to come to the meeting and had asked Katy to offer her apologies to the group.

I’m taking over a maternity leave position which will run until she comes back. At first I was told it was only for two terms and then later it was til the end of term 3 and then some of the other teachers told me she won’t be back til next year ... so it could go til the end of the year. I have no idea what’s going on really... never mind.

I’m team teaching one year 7 group for one hour a week ... but it’s dance!! ... I just found out on the day of my first lesson with them that it wasn’t visual arts but was in fact dance. I laughed

and then got a bit stressed. I also teach two year 8 groups for visual arts ; I have one year 9 media animation class and that's a real challenge; and I also have a year 10 visual arts class.

My second teaching area is TESOL ... not media ... but I'm teaching it anyway! Luckily for me the technical stuff is quite easy and a lot of it involves visual arts ... film making, the models, the sets ... but I'm often back to staying one step ahead of the kids!

Everyone at the meeting congratulated Katy on her achievement and asked about other details of the school. Katy explained that the position was a challenging one which featured significant behaviour- management issues. She went on to say that staff at the school had been very supportive that she attributed to the relationship she had developed with them during her final practicum at the school in 2005. The practicum had created the foundation for her expanding professional network; when a position became available at the school, she had been recommended for consideration by the staff who had supervised her placement. The position had commenced mid-March 2006 and, given that Katy had been feeling quite disheartened by the lack of employment she had experienced to date, the timing of the position had been pivotal in sustaining her motivation and enthusiasm for teaching.

Despite her elation at being finally offered a job, Katy confessed that she had felt quite stressed during the first few weeks of the position. She explained that very little had been provided in the way formal curriculum material or programs for the classes she had been assigned, nor had there been much in the way of induction into the culture of the school. There seemed, to Katy, to be an expectation from colleagues that she would simply know what to do, given that she had completed her ATP at the school. She talked about the stress she felt on realising the enormity of the differences between the responsibilities of teaching as a qualified beginning-teacher and those of a pre-service teacher. The daily routines of the school (whilst familiar from the practicum perspective) were nonetheless ambiguous in many respects; Katy found herself constantly having to ask colleagues about processes and protocols. This caused her a degree of discomfort, because she was keen to be seen not only as competent but also as an asset to the school. Of particular concern for Katy was the challenge of identifying appropriate content for the learning programs she was delivering (or designing); she said that the few programs which appeared to exist for her classes were very 'thin' documents with little direction in terms of the arts outcome areas, particularly AIS (art history).

Tess, Katy's mentor, recommended that she try to link the projects she was delivering to the interests of students, with the rationale that this would support both effective behaviour management and positive relationships with students. Tess particularly recommended the use of urban visual arts and graffiti as an influence, since most of Katy's classes were in the middle school (yrs 8-10) and this suggestion seemed to excite Katy. Tess went on to say that urban visual arts could be employed in strategies to 'get to know' the students, because of the link to 'skate board culture' which was of interest to many children in this age group. As the meeting progressed, Katy spoke about the many disruptions which appeared to have affected the students' learning during the first few months of the year; she explained that they seemed to be quite "out of sync" with the skeletal learning program with which the Head of Learning Area had provided her. Of particular concern to Katy were the year-10 students who had been assigned a mixed media sculpture project around the theme of 'blow fish' and another group of yr-10s engaged in traditional landscape painting around the theme "the bush". The students were apparently completely uninterested in the work, were often disruptive and had achieved very little in the time they had been at school. Tess' suggestion of urban visual

arts as a theme (particularly in respect of skater culture), seemed to present a solution for the difficulties Katy had been experiencing. She resolved during the meeting to discuss with her Head of Learning Area, modification of the project to include the production of a skate board which featured a 'tag' by each child. Tess raised the issue of the politicisation of graffiti and the two women chatted about the various genres by which world graffiti is often characterised. These included graffiti for ownership, anarchy, personal voice and aesthetic enhancement. The general tone of the meeting became quite animated as the women brainstormed ideas for Katy's classes.

As the researcher for the project I had deliberately tried not to engage in the conversations of the research participants; but the enthusiasm of the group was infectious and, almost imperceptibly, I found myself participating in the ebb and flow of conversation. The discourse that ensued for the remainder of the meeting was both professional and intimate. The women appeared to be relating to one-another more as a group of friends than as professional colleagues. Katy took notes in her journal about suggestions from both her mentor and buddy and annotated these with her own ideas as the discussion progressed. She appeared happy and excited and exuded an air of confidence as she spoke about her preliminary ideas for implementing Tess' suggestions. Later, Tess emailed Katy her project brief for this theme and Katy was able to adapt it for use in her classroom. Katy made notes throughout the meeting and enlarged these as she reflected on the meeting later that day. The meeting concluded approximately an hour after beginning and the group endorsed the experience as both highly valuable and affirming. Another meeting was arranged for a date in May at the same café and the meeting concluded on a 'high' note; Tess and Katy continued to talk on the pavement outside the café as I left.

### **The Third Meeting – May 2006**

The third meeting for group one occurred in May at the same café in Leederville. Katy arrived first and automatically ordered coffee and snacks for the group to share. Mary arrived shortly afterward and the two buddies chatted amiably whilst we waited for Tess to arrive. Katy and Mary shared stories of the teaching they had undertaken since the last meeting; Katy described feeling as though she had been caught in a whirlwind – each time she seemed to have gained her bearings another task or responsibility had been thrown at her, with what seemed like an impossible deadline attached. The latest in the sequence had been the term-one reporting round. Despite being a new graduate who had only very recently commenced her first teaching appointment, Katy had been instructed to write reports for children with whom she had had classes for little more than a week. Having never completed reports before, the task appeared daunting in its own right, but was further compounded by a general expectation from colleagues that she would 'figure it out' as she went along.

Katy talked about her frustration as she realised that everyone around her was extremely busy with their own teaching and reporting responsibilities and that it was unlikely that anyone would be available to 'walk' her through the process for the first time. Each enquiry about what to do and where to find resources for the task had been met with a curt response that appeared tinged with impatience. Katy talked about feeling as though she had become a liability and an imposition. She contacted Tess via email to gain some advice about pastoral care reports generally and Tess had been very helpful. Importantly, she urged Katy to make an appointment with the Head of Learning area to access formal support with reporting. Additionally, she stressed the importance of

acquiring a copy of the school calendar so that the timeline for reporting and other important events would be known well in advance of the due date.

Katy had taken Tess' advice to meet formally with her Head of Learning Area; she now spoke about the importance this colleague had increasingly assumed and her emergence as another mentor for Katy. Despite carrying the greatest workload in the department and being genuinely stretched beyond her own coping capacity, this colleague had nevertheless tried wherever possible to make time for Katy. She advised Katy that whilst it was difficult to report on the progress of children she had had for such a brief time, it was nonetheless school policy that children received a report for all subjects they were completing at the close of term one. She said that whilst this was a challenging task it was possible of completion, because the term-one reports were 'pastoral care' reports – not academic progress reports. Pastoral care reports required a comment about such issues as attitudes, values and completion of homework; the degree to which the child appeared settled; their behaviour in class; and their degree of preparedness and organisation. Katy's Head of Learning area suggested that Katy would be able to comment on these pastoral care aspects of the class she currently taught; she might need to make anecdotal notes during class time to support the completion of the report. Despite experiencing some discomfort throughout the process, Katy had completed the reporting more or less successfully.

Tess' arrival at the third meeting prompted the conversation to focus more explicitly upon teaching and learning processes, particularly visual arts content. Katy described the pressure she was experiencing in having to quickly devise projects 'on the run' and feeling as though she had significant deficiencies in her content knowledge. She explained that her yr-8 classes occurred in short rotations as students moved through the elective 'options' subjects (one of which was art). The current group had proven to be quite a challenge, because the project Katy proposed to complete with them had (according to them) been identical to one they had completed late in the preceding year; they were disgruntled at the prospect of having to 'repeat' the work.

Katy could not convince the students that, despite a similar theme, the project would be different. In response to the students' clear and increasing dissatisfaction, Katy had contacted Tess to ask for advice; Tess had recommended that Katy select an alternative theme area, but retain the studio discipline. This advice proved to be helpful and the new project was progressing well. In addition to her discussions with Tess, Katy mentioned that she had also raised the challenge of this group with her Head of Learning Area, who had given similar advice with respect to content and had made other suggestions to manage behaviour. Katy noted that, although she had raised the challenges with her Head of Learning Area voluntarily (and on Tess' advice), she explained that she had had significant reservations about doing this. Katy said that she felt that there was an unspoken expectation that she would be 'perfect'; admitting to her 'failures' could be seen negatively and might compromise her standing at work. As she described these feelings, Katy concluded that she recognised this thinking was flawed; she acknowledged that it was important to seek advice from her colleagues who were working with the same students, but that, at a 'feelings' level, she considered it unsafe to do so.

As Katy talked about her experiences, Mary interjected with snippets of her own teaching experience which appeared to connect to, or mirror, Katy's frustrations and concerns; the two women laughed and agreed that it was good not to feel 'alone'. The presence of a buddy who was also navigating the same challenges appeared to positively

support both beginning-teachers. Tess listened quietly to the conversation and nodded as the beginning-teachers made pronouncements about what they had learned from their experiences. In many respects it appeared that the beginning-teachers simply needed someone to listen to them – someone who would not judge them and would offer emotional support and suggestions for solutions to their teaching challenges.

As the meeting progressed I asked all three participants how the mentoring process was influencing their professional life. Katy enthusiastically noted that the relationship was invaluable. She felt that without Tess and Mary ‘being there’ she would probably have given up; they had become an important part of her coping strategy. Katy said she had worried that she was becoming dependent on their support, but noted that, as time went on, she would probably become more self-assured. She worried about ‘the things she did not know’, particularly in respect of content; but, despite being in the midst of a steep learning curve, she was gradually getting her bearings. What she really needed was time and the continuing support of her mentoring colleagues. At this point Katy laughed and said that ‘time’ seemed to be a precious commodity for everyone. She noted that it felt like ages since she had done any of her own art; she felt both a little sad and also worried that losing her visual arts practice might negatively impact her capacity to contribute to students’ skills. I asked her if she felt that this might affect her capacity to facilitate visual literacy in her students; she reflected that it was unlikely to do so in the short term but, over time, might impede the process. Katy felt that participating in professional development studio workshops and nurturing her own visual arts practice as an artist, needed to be an ongoing priority.

A little later in the meeting Katy asked Tess whether she could recommend any specific strategies for engaging the year-8 students with visual arts history themes (outcomes three and four of the WACF Arts Learning Area) because this had become increasingly problematic. She talked about the skill-building activities she had trialled, including vocabulary-building activities so she could talk with students about works. Katy noted that this was important, because there was a requirement for the inclusion of research on artists in the students’ visual diaries; she observed that this had seemed a little artificial and almost superfluous to the learning on some occasions. Katy wanted the importance of the ‘Arts in Society’ outcome to become ‘real’ for the students; she worried that she was not handling this as well as she might. As Tess talked about her favourite strategies for incorporating these components in larger projects, both Katy and Mary made notes in their journals and resolved to try them.

With only 15 minutes of the meeting remaining, Katy raised the subject of the new courses of study which were due to be implemented for year 11 and 12 students in 2007; she asked whether anyone had any more information about the timeline for professional development for teachers who were likely to deliver the courses. Katy explained that staff at her school had always been very proactive in implementing new curriculum materials and noted that the school was currently trialling a Vocational Education and Training (VET) version of the visual arts course. Despite this involvement, she was concerned that she could not get a clear indication of when the ‘pure’ visual arts course might be implemented nor, importantly, what structure the course might finally assume. She expressed concern that the specifics of the new course seemed to change shape on an almost daily basis, as public concern about the courses gained momentum. Tess agreed that elements of the implementation process left much to be desired; she confided that she was encountering similar challenges as she prepared for the course implementation at her own school. She concluded the meeting with a description of her understanding of the structure of the proposed course and shared her thoughts about the

nature of assessment and course standards which had been developed by the WACC curriculum writers. The next meeting was set for August 2006.

#### **The fourth meeting – August 2006**

The fourth meeting for group one occurred in August 2006. Everyone arrived at the café at around the same time and conversation commenced immediately. Katy mentioned that she had been really looking forward to this meeting, because previous meetings had proven invaluable in her efforts to find solutions to challenges; she had a store of questions and issues she wanted to raise. Tess and Mary laughed at this; and it was apparent that the three women had developed a warm friendship during the preceding eight months. Katy began by recounting the period since the last meeting, updating everyone on the success of the strategies she had trialled following the last meeting.

Tess' suggestions, that Katy consult her Head of Learning Area and that she respond to the students' interests by modifying the projects she had previously planned, had worked well. The Head of Learning Area now seemed to be proactive in supporting Katy's professional development and the entire department appeared to be working more closely with one-another. Katy explained that she felt that she had been accepted as a legitimate part of the team and that her contributions were valued. She spoke about having divested herself of the 'prac student' tag she had previously been carrying. Katy mentioned that she felt better about her status in the school but was feeling somewhat worn out as a result of having been quite unwell during the preceding school holidays; as a result she had not had a chance to 'recharge her batteries' from the previous term's work. She noted that there was now plenty of work available; she was working almost at full-time capacity between her two full days at one school and a variety of relief work at another school. This increased work level had allowed her to quit her part-time job at a picture framer that had been her primary source of income throughout the period she was studying. Resigning from this position had been an empowering experience for Katy; she finally felt as if she really was a teacher and could finally let go of the profession in which she had previously been engaged.

Katy advised that there had also been recent turnover of Arts staff at her main school; three young teachers had joined the department and there seemed to be a new spirit of co-operation developing. The new staff were working together very well and were collaboratively devising new projects which seemed to link to the students' interests and abilities. Katy noted that one of the most important lessons she was learning about teaching was the importance of matching the learning program to the interests and needs of the students. Whilst she had begun the year with a wide range of ideas about what children needed to learn to become visually literate and achieve their creative potential, these beliefs had been modified over the last eight months; she now felt that real learning was occurring, because the children were motivated to engage with the new material. Motivation seemed inextricably linked to students' areas of interest outside the school context; employing this key principle of linking school work to the students' life-world seemed to Katy to support success within her teaching.

Katy mentioned that one of her greatest challenges with students throughout the period she had been teaching had been in the area of providing them with a visual language with which to express their ideas. Basic understanding of line, shape, colour, tone and texture and the drawing skills which conveyed these elements, had proven difficult to engender in students; she was now searching for ways to enhance these skills. Tess and



Mary both had much to offer in respect of suggestions for ways to build facility in the area of visual language skills; Katy took notes about the most interesting of these suggestions as the meeting progressed. Katy was particularly interested in any appropriate strategies which could enhance students' capacity to identify these elements (line, shape, colour, tone, texture etc) in artists' work; she considered this a critical component in developing facility with the elements in their own work. She described occasions where students had worked in groups to discuss images and gave an example of a totemic project where she had trialled group discussion, with mixed results. Katy explained that, in the longer term, she hoped the discussions would be a springboard for a family tree project; students might make connections between the totemic influences they had discussed and their own family, through this visual form.

In addition to discussions about studio content and facility with visual language which had worried her, Katy talked about other challenging aspects of the first year of teaching, with which she was struggling. She relayed several anecdotes which portrayed the school culture as a foreign entity in which new teachers could get into trouble simply because they were unaware of specific protocols, expectations, or rules with which staff needed to comply. The pressure of having to appear perfect – to know exactly what was going on at all times – was imposing a significant degree of stress upon Katy. She explained that she had recently had a deputy principal 'tell her off' because she had failed to complete a yard duty as a consequence of not receiving advice of changes to the roster. This had occurred as a result of her part-time status that was characterised by interruption to the flow of information to other staff. This incident, in combination with challenging classes exhibiting poor behaviour, had prompted Katy to question her suitability for the profession. Katy's colleagues had offered some support, but seemed to expect that by now she 'ought to know how things worked'. As a part time-member of staff, Katy had a sense of being disconnected from the school and felt she missed out on information that other staff received automatically. Her disquiet at being reprimanded by the deputy principal had been raised with her mentor Tess and buddy Mary; their encouragement had dissuaded her from tendering her resignation.

### **The final meeting – November 2006**

The final meeting for group one occurred on 24<sup>th</sup> November at the same café in Leederville. Katy was unable to attend the meeting and offered her apologies via text message which was received shortly after the meeting commenced. Subsequent to the meeting, I forwarded Katy an end-of-year 'reflection/review' questionnaire and asked her to sum up her impressions of the impact the mentoring experience had exerted on her professional wellbeing and confidence in visual literacy education. Katy's responses were reconciled against the original research questions; in combination with themes that arose within the vignette, her 'answers' are summarised below.

On balance, Katy felt that the mentoring relationships had been pivotal to her survival and success during the first year of teaching; she made the following comment at the end of her reflection/review questionnaire:

Participating in the Graduate Mentor Program as a beginning-teacher has benefited me in a variety of ways and offers valuable ongoing assistance. I have developed positive professional relationships with several teachers involved in the program, establishing a network which spans several learning areas. These continuing relationships have offered me connections to seek advice, support and acceptance in my new career which is vital for diversifying knowledge, a feeling of belonging and keeping sane amidst stressful times. We met regularly over the year in a casual environment which fitted into our schedule and didn't add pressure to our personal lives.

The network connections that the program has helped build have been a major advantage moving into a new industry. I did not receive a posting immediately and was quite daunted by the prospect of cold calling at schools for relief work. Tess gave me names of people to contact to get started and put a good word in for me at her own school, where I got my first relief position. It was a relief to have a friendly face to alleviate the nerves on my first day. The friendly face was also welcome when attending the visual arts Education Association meetings and Tess was able to introduce me to my new peers.

When I got my teaching position, half way through first term 2006, I was expected to teach outside my area of expertise. Being trained in visual arts I was unfamiliar with the workings of the media animation class I had inherited mid project. Fortunately for me Mary was trained in media and ironically she was teaching a visual arts class; the exchange of notes and worksheets proved advantageous for both of us. In turn this benefited our students with them getting the knowledge and know-how from two teachers.

The 'first year out' is recognised as the most stressful and busy year of a teaching career. Assistance from peers in the form of advice and support is invaluable. Just knowing that I wasn't the only one finding things hard helped me. Being able to talk situations through and get varying perspectives expanded my repertoire of strategies and understanding which I took back to my classroom practice.

Sometimes overlooked in its importance, the positive perception of peer acceptance has been, for me, the most important off shoot of the mentor program; being able to discuss with my peers (both established and starting out) in a professional manner, as an equal. This has increased my confidence in school discussions and enabled me to see myself as a valuable member of the arts team, not a 'rookie' with limited experience.

## **APPENDIX SEVEN: MARY'S STORY**

### **The first meeting – February 2006**

At the time of the first research meeting Mary had not yet secured a permanent teaching position, but she had been offered a temporary part-time (0.4) teaching position for 'media' that was her second teaching area. Additionally, she had undertaken relief teaching in a range of subjects at the same school and also at another metropolitan school. The combined workload of these positions equated to four-and-a-half days' work each week, although the remuneration amounted to something much less. The school at which Mary's more regular part-time/relief teaching occurred was a Government school with a large student population from years 8 – 12. The facility had recently been refurbished and was well resourced in most departments. Mary's teaching load encompassed students from years ten to twelve in media (a discipline within the arts learning area – sharing identical learning outcomes as the visual arts) and relief work at the same school, as required, in classes encompassing music, work-studies and mathematics. The other school at which she undertook some work was a Government school located in the northern suburbs of Perth that catered for students from years 8-12. In her journal entries of the period she noted:

### **Journal Entry 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006**

I still can't believe I get paid to do this! I was initially a little nervous as I only had 10 minutes to familiarise myself with the school and procedures. Another relief teacher 'took me on board'. great classes. It wasn't 100% clear what I had to do and I often found that I did not have adequate time to prepare. Worked through this, related well with students and tackled 'questions' effectively. I feel staying relaxed and treating students with respect (give eye contact) develops a level of mutual respect. Having a laugh also helps. I wonder if it's because I know many students there from my children's primary school that they are so well behaved? Or maybe it's because I allow a certain level of talking as long as they are on task?

### **Journal Entry 13<sup>th</sup> February 2006**

I have been offered a 0.4 – 0.6 media position at a local school. I can't believe it and still don't have all the details. I think I start in two weeks and was found via a telephone call by the Associate Principal to the Education department. It's all a bit of a blur, the details haven't sunk in and my mind is racing with a million questions! I think I am on priority relief until I start and after, so I can have a full load. There are so many things to consider now and it's finally happening and real! No more practice (mock teaching) I am now accountable! I will write more about this as I go along.

### **Journal Entry 25<sup>th</sup> February 2006**

How will I go at a 'new' school where I have no prior connections/contacts with students? Very nervous and a little disoriented. I forgot everything after the first ten minutes after having been offered a media position. Emotions and events affect my level of teaching. Allowed students to be too chatty. During the first class one girl ran out very distressed after a boy spilt water on her. I sent a student to check on her. She was eventually taken away by another teacher. Should I have left the class and seen to her myself?

Must remember to follow up on upset student (tried but failed to find her). This shows a level of concern and I could possibly find out what actually happened – for future reference ... (a later entry made on this page noted that Mary had finally found her in another class). I have to remember to demand silence during instruction and get control/student attention established in the very beginning.

Mary spoke about the challenges of navigating the 'politics' of being a part-time, temporary worker; she described the difficulties that arose when relief work was offered to her during the period when she was contracted to complete her part-time media teaching. Staff at the school where she taught media seemed unsympathetic to Mary's desire to maximize her income by accepting relief work at the other school. The deputy principal implied that, because she had a part-time position at the school, he expected that Mary would make herself available for last-minute relief assignments. Mary explained that with some notice she would be more than happy to do the relief teaching, but in the absence of any indication that work was available she had accepted relief at her second school. The deputy principal appeared unsympathetic to Mary's financial situation and simply re-directed the relief work to other staff when she indicated that she had given an undertaking to the second school to be available. Mary said she felt that there was an implied suggestion that she would not be offered further relief teaching if she turned it down as a result of her commitment to teach another school. The conflict arising from much needed work opportunities created stress for Mary, who was keen to accept work whenever possible.

I asked Mary how she was finding the actual experience of teaching in a regular capacity in the media context. Mary explained that her colleagues within the media department were supportive of her as a new teacher and encouraged her to team-teach with them whenever possible. However, there did not appear to be a formal curriculum for media studies; James, the other media teacher (who by all accounts was a highly-skilled practitioner), seemed to have an organic style and appeared able to improvise without difficulty. Mary noted that James seemed somehow able to accurately ascertain where the students were up to and proceeded from that point along an (unwritten) continuum of skills acquisition. Mary felt a degree of discomfort from this apparent lack of structure; she acknowledged her colleague's obviously extensive expertise, but determined that, for her own peace of mind, she needed to write her own programs for the classes she had been assigned. The lack of existing formal programming caused Mary a degree of stress and anxiety. She greatly appreciated the informal mentoring offered to her by her school-based colleagues in addition to the support she was receiving from Tess and Katy.

### **Journal Entry 15<sup>th</sup> March 2006**

James has given me a couple of days where he is in the class with me. Still not given anything definite and I am finding this confusing. I am utilising this time to get to know the students. Although I am trying to be confident I am finding myself flustered and often having 'content' instructional blanks! I am however working with students in groups and developing a rapport. James has no concrete plans or outlines! Our styles are so different and although I have been given three classes I tend to hold back. One class (yr 11) we have decided to team-teach (38 students). I feel I have to do things James's way.

Need to gain confidence through knowledge and planning ... Find out how to do administrative duties – get access and passwords. Keep blending 'my way' with 'James's way'.

Mary noted that, although she felt she was gradually getting her bearings, there many aspects of her teaching which were troubling. She particularly felt as if her age (combined with having completed her ATP in the school) meant that she was expected to be perfect and just get on with the job. She noted that she was doing her best, but often doubted whether she was getting it right all the time. She did note that she felt buoyed by the relationships she was building with students, who appeared to respond well to her nurturing, almost 'mothering', style.

## Journal Entry 20<sup>th</sup> March 2006

This week has had good and bad days. There is a prac student in most of my classes who does not speak English very well and has difficulty gaining student attention. He has said he will plan and 'take' lessons – but actually he leaves it to me. I have bought an organiser and created/found back up lessons when this occurs. I am gaining confidence – James hasn't been in with the 10s so much and the students are beginning to respond to me.

I must really have 'taken on board' the caring, compassionate teaching persona. Students (x 3) have turned to me with problems and advice. It makes me realise the responsibility we take as teachers for students emotional well being. I can't NOT LISTEN although refer to appropriate persons. I have realised that sometimes what 'we' have learned at uni doesn't apply in all situations. There is a fine balance between 'following the theory' and knowing when to let that go and go with your instincts.

Mary's extensive curriculum knowledge of the new media course (her second teaching area) that was due for implementation in all Western Australian Schools in 2007, prompted James (her colleague) to ask her if she would like to teach the subject the following year. Mary was delighted to have the opportunity to do so and accepted James's offer to nominate her to represent the school at official Curriculum Council meetings, since he had little or no time to invest in the enterprise. Tess asked Mary how that affirmation felt; Mary confided to her mentoring colleagues that (despite feeling pleased) she felt rather overwhelmed. Her mentor asked her how she responded in the school setting to the experience; Mary said that in many respects she was 'acting' as though she were feeling confident, when in fact she felt extremely nervous and vulnerable about her inexperience and graduate status. On the one hand, she was delighted to accept the Curriculum Council role as an affirmation and indication that she had been accepted as a knowledgeable and valuable member of the arts department; on the other, she felt as though she had been 'left to it', with little or no support from the experienced media teachers at the school and this troubled her.

Mary noted that there had been little or no formal induction offered to her as a part-time employee; this seemed to be predicated on an assumption that, because she had completed her Assistant Teacher Placement (10-week extended practicum) in 2005 at the school, she would be fine. Mary noted that in some respects this was true – the school was familiar to her, but the routines and protocols that staff followed had not been part of her prac experience – James had simply told her what to do. The relationship with James still had some elements of the practicum student/supervisor dynamic about it; yet, at other times, Mary felt that she had been abandoned and left to figure things out without support that caused her much confusion.

Like her research 'buddy' Katy, Mary said that the pressures of her limited income were becoming difficult to manage; she had ever-increasing financial commitments which necessitated the acceptance of any work offered her. The tension resulting from the politics of competing employers' needs for staff at short notice created stress in her daily life and this was undermining her ability to stay positively focused on the work she was doing. Mary wanted to accept relief work as it became available (and particularly wanted to ensure the continuing opportunity to work in a relief capacity); yet, simultaneously, she wanted to protect the regular (if temporary) part-time work she was committed to during semester one 2006. Having said that, Mary was aware that the part-time work she was currently completing might not be available in semester two and she was therefore keen to take advantage of relief opportunities at both schools.

Despite wanting to be of help, there was little that Tess or I could suggest to Mary to help her manage the competing demands of relief and part-time work. Katy pointed out to Mary that, no matter how difficult things appeared to be, at least she did have regular work that was more than Katy had enjoyed for much of the year (although her circumstances had recently changed). Mary's mentor agreed, but emphasised the importance of making time for herself (to deal with stress); Katy urged Mary to work on her painting as a means of releasing pressure. Katy said that during the many months of unemployment, working on her own visual arts practice had kept her focused on the positive areas of her life. Mary good-humouredly laughed at this suggestion and said that returning to her own visual arts practice would be 'nice', but between work and her children there simply wasn't any time.

Mary appeared to have accepted stress as an unavoidable dimension of the beginning-teacher experience. She spoke about the importance of 'self talk', almost as if 'reminding herself' of the reason she had undertaken the teacher training in the first place would sustain her through this post-graduation period of partial employment. She said this 'positive self talk' was critical in maintaining a positive attitude. Mary left the first meeting feeling better about her situation. As a participant at the meeting, I speculated at the time that perhaps the comparison to Katy's less-resolved employment circumstances had restored Mary's previously buoyant mood and provided reassurance that she was better off than many other beginning-teachers; she had regular work and was still in receipt of some child support from her ex-husband. She would be able to 'make do' until something better came along. The next meeting was set for April 2006.

### **The Second Meeting**

The second meeting for group one occurred about two months later (April 2006) at the same café in Leederville. Mary was unable to attend due to pre-existing family commitments; she contacted her buddy, Katy and asked her to convey her apologies to the group. When I later analysed Mary's journal, I realised that this had been a difficult period for her, because the students appeared to be 'testing' the limits of her boundaries; I wondered whether she was feeling overwhelmed and simply could not face meeting with her colleagues.

### **Journal Entry 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2006**

What a horrible experience! I think I have gained more control of this yr 8 multi arts class but it got so bad at one point I called James in (he was going to come in anyway to explain the media equipment usage). One young girl who seemed very disturbed by the fact that I was upset that 'no-one' was listening (she took it personally) saw me after class. She explained that I come across very 'soft' and 'gentle'. I said this is not a bad thing and that doesn't give the class the right to be rude and keep wasting class time. I also said we would have to learn together about all of our expectations. I have tried all of the strategies I know and they seem to backfire. I had a couple of full class attention moments, but I was at full capacity (voice/tone etc) ... there has to be another way! Maybe there is a contradiction in my 'nice/soft' appearance-presence and using the strategies (name on the board/keeping in/not allowing the use of equipment yet). I will keep thinking about this and discuss it with Tess ... try new strategies till I get it right. My 9s, 10s and 22s are all fine. What am I doing wrong here? Maybe it's the drama room – the wrong environment for media? Use lollies?

There were no further entries in Mary's journal; I wondered whether there was a relationship between making time to write in the journal and feeling 'in control' of the situation. When things were going well she seemed to write frequently; when they deteriorated, the notes became sporadic, minimal and then simply petered out.

### **The Third meeting – May 2006**

The third meeting for group one occurred in May at the same café in Leederville. After the initial greetings and exchange of stories about the difficulty each had faced in getting to the meeting on time, Mary advised that she was enjoying her teaching, but confided that there were a number of professional challenges with whom she was really struggling. Of significant concern was a phenomenon she described as the ‘cultural-politico issues’, the ‘hidden’ protocols of the schools at which she had regular work. Mary said that she often simply did not know what was going on and felt as if there was some ‘secret knowledge’ about each school that the majority of staff shared but from which she was excluded. For reasons she could not quite articulate, Mary confessed that (almost irrationally) she felt it might not be ‘safe’ to ask colleagues about things which they might consider she ought to know by now. When I queried this with her, she said she had a fear that, if she did not appear to be functioning at an independent level by now, her status might be diminished in the eyes of her colleagues. She said that she felt she could be replaced at any moment and seemed to be constantly trying to prove herself worthy of the position. She reflected that at some level she felt a degree of resentment about this; she wondered whether all new teachers felt as if they had constantly to prove themselves.

To make matters worse, the precise nature of the ‘shared knowledge’ to which Mary referred seemed to vary between the schools at which she had regular relief or part-time work. She noted that it was as if each school had its own distinct cultural and political patina that overlaid and coloured the familiar aspects of schooling generally. Mary had increasingly come to rely on ‘patterns’ of generic knowledge about schooling (the things she had learned through observation, anecdotal information and research were common to schools generally) in combination with her intuition. Keen to preserve her evolving status as a highly-competent and valuable (and employed) member of the staff of the schools at which she worked, Mary said she felt obliged to keep her head just below ‘the radar’ until she figured things out. She emphasised that, with the support of Tess (with whom she often consulted via phone or email), she felt confident that in time this vulnerability and stress would decrease. At this point Mary laughed, paraphrased a colloquial saying about ‘service’ in the hospitality industry and said (only half jokingly):

Can’t complain about the induction ... there was none!

Mary confided that, in addition to the ‘cultural-political issues’ of each school, she also felt quite burdened by the responsibility of having to implement and trial the new post-compulsory media course of study at one of her schools. The new media course was due to be implemented the following year (2007) in most Western Australian schools for students in yr 11 and 12. The implementation process for all of the new senior school courses had attracted significant criticism from teachers and parents generally; many experienced teachers declared that the Curriculum Council had rushed the process and had made a mess of things. In Mary’s view, there simply were not enough resources to support the new courses. Further criticism had been levelled at the style and format of documents which curriculum writers had developed for the courses, particularly in respect of the language which had been used to describe the themes, learning contexts and course standards for the units that many teachers claimed were akin to ‘gobbledegook’. The nature of the debate about the courses had become increasingly heated in local newspapers and the timeline for implementation seemed to be constantly under review.

Initially, Mary had interpreted being asked to implement the trial of the new media course at her school as an indication that she was well regarded by colleagues for her content knowledge/expertise; over time, however, she had begun to feel that in reality none of them wanted the extra workload associated with the course and were simply 'offloading' this to a new and inexperienced colleague. Mary confided that, to make matters worse, she was never really sure whether the work she was doing for the new course was 'right', and harboured self-doubt that her content knowledge (whilst contemporary and fairly wide-ranging) might be inadequate for the new directions the course seemed to be taking. Mary noted that her part-time status at the school meant that she seldom had an opportunity to discuss with colleagues her thoughts about the new course and the recommended themes/learning contexts. Her relationship with her Head of Learning Area did have elements of a mentor/protégé structure about it which afforded some opportunity for discussion but Mary harboured a desire to break free from the 'real teacher-practicum student' dynamic which had developed with this colleague when she had completed her ATP practicum at the school. This 'trainee teacher' tag still seemed to underpin her relationship with James at times, so she had tried to limit discussions to areas aligned with the culture of the school rather than her professional content knowledge.

Mary's sense of isolation arising from her reluctance to discuss proposed course/unit content was further exacerbated by the fact that new courses were an extension of the WACF that had no prescribed content or syllabus documents. The absence of content, in combination with her lack of experience, caused Mary significant bouts of self-doubt and stress. Mary said that, because she felt that she needed to break the label of pre-service teacher, there was little choice other than to bluff her way through the whole implementation/trial process, despite her doubts about whether she really understood what was needed. To alleviate the stress this experience generated, Mary explained that she had contacted Tess on a number of occasions to discuss her ideas, ask questions and get feedback (notwithstanding that Tess' area of expertise lay predominantly in visual arts). Tess had, in fact, been working on preparation for the implementation of the new post-compulsory visual arts course of study at her own school and, given that all the new courses were framed around a shared design template, had been able to offer insight from her own experience and preparations. The discussions that Mary had with Tess helped clarify such issues as the types of learning tasks, number of times assessment of specific tasks should occur, and evaluation of aspects/outcomes and reporting mechanisms. Tess' suggestions proved invaluable for Mary, who expressed her doubt that she could have coped without this external mentoring support and collegial relationship.

The interplay of school-based mentor (James) and external mentor (Tess) offered Mary invaluable support as she navigated the twin responsibilities of day-to-day teaching duties and the larger area of curriculum development and new course implementation. Interestingly, the reality of having both a school-based and external mentor mirrored Katy's experience and the two buddies were able compare these support structures. The consensus was that, in many respects, this was an ideal situation for new teachers, with advantages over simply having a mentor in one context or the other. The meeting concluded with both beginning-teachers feeling more optimistic about the future, despite having arrived at the meeting with reservations about how they might manage a range of problems.



### **The fourth meeting – August 2006**

The fourth meeting for group one occurred in August 2006. Everyone arrived at the café at around the same time and the conversation commenced immediately. Mary shared that her employment circumstances were somewhat fluid at the moment and that she had ceased working at one school and accepted an invitation to do regular relief at another. Her major teaching appointment continued at a 0.4 level; Mary said that she was quite happy with these arrangements, particularly since the 0.4 position appeared likely to continue until the end of the year.

Mary explained that she felt she had been making good progress with her preparations for the new media course of study at her school; this had been rewarded with the promise of inclusion in a claim for performance-based pay which the Education Department was in the process of implementing. James, her Head of Learning Area, had recommended that she be one of the recipients of this extra payment, in recognition for the many hours of unpaid time she was investing in the development of the program and related resource material. Whilst Tess and Katy both acknowledged that this endorsement by the Head of Learning Area was very good, each expressed concern that there was the potential for Mary to be exploited: she was only employed in a part-time capacity, yet the preparations for the new course appeared to be consuming much of her week and weekends. Both doubted whether the performance based pay would really reflect the extra time and effort Mary was investing in the project. Though I did not say so, I also had the sense that she was in danger of being exploited.

Mary agreed that there was potential for exploitation; she had worried about this initially, but over time had come to believe that the extra workload was probably of limited duration. She went on to say that the lack of formal support from colleagues meant that developing materials was taking longer than might otherwise have been the case, had the task had been shared among a team, but hoped that this would improve as time went on. In response, Tess observed that, based on her own experience with the similarly- structured visual arts course of study, it was likely that the work load might continue for much of the year. She suggested that Mary approach the Head of Learning Area to see if another staff member might be able to formally included in the preparations. Mindful of Mary's earlier desire to preserve her status within the department, Tess suggested that the request could be couched in terms of the department's professional accountability and moderation processes that would provide the support she needed whilst preserving her status within the department. Mary agreed that this seemed a worthwhile approach to the politics of the challenge.

The conversation seemed to change direction after this, but the theme of 'status' within the department surfaced again a little later in the meeting. Katy had been speaking about the open-plan style of her classroom and the way in which staff and students seemed to move freely in and out of each other's classrooms. She noted that this had some benefits, but also generated challenges, particularly in respect of noise and the distraction to students' attention. Mary agreed and began to recount her own experiences with colleagues simply walking into her classes in an unannounced manner. Of greatest concern for Mary was the way in which James, her Head of Learning Area and media studies colleague, simply walked in and out of her classes on a whim. This had generated some tension for Mary, because James often reprimanded students for their behaviour and made reference to the fact that Mary should have dealt with the issue; since she had not, he would need to. This made Mary feel as if her relationship with students and her authority were being undermined and damaged, but she had been unsure how to respond to this in view of James's role as her Head of Department. When

Tess asked why this seemed to be happening, Mary speculated that it might be a 'hang-over' from her ATP practicum that she had completed with James in his classes. To complicate matters further, Mary and James shared a number of classes and each taught at various times through the week; as a result, the students were equally the responsibility of the two members of staff. Tess agreed that this was difficult, but urged Mary to address the problem before it became entrenched and damaged the relationship. She observed that, if any of her colleagues were to walk into her classes and reprimand students whilst she was in the room, she would be greatly offended and would consider such intervention grossly inappropriate and discourteous.

As the conversation continued, the group agreed that it would be helpful for Mary to break the practicum-student role in which she seemed type-cast; further, that it was important that students acknowledge her as their teacher during the periods they spent with her. Tess noted that this situation might necessitate Mary meeting with James to express her concerns and to seek his co-operation in adjusting and revising the open door policy which appeared to be standard practice. Mary was clearly worried about how to do this and the group spent some time brainstorming ways in which she could initiate the conversation without jeopardising her relationship with her colleague. Mary then shared her feelings about what had been occurring; she said that, on several occasions, she had contemplated leaving the school as a result of this issue. She felt that James viewed her as a subordinate person in the department and, despite the rhetoric associated with the delegation of the new course of study responsibilities, really did not consider her to be a qualified and independent teacher. She noted that her Head of Department did not appear to interact with other staff in the same style as she had been experiencing and this caused her to feel stressed and anxious. Mary's vulnerability was further heightened by the fact that her Head of Department was the person who would conduct her performance review meetings and ultimately would either recommend that her position be continued or be reassigned to another person. This made a discussion framed around professional courtesy and 'respect' particularly difficult for Mary to visualise, because she felt that it would be tinged with insubordination.

I took notes throughout the meeting as usual and Mary suddenly became quite alarmed that I was recording information about her colleague and Head of Department. I reassured everyone that my researcher's notes were confidential; no identifying information about schools or staff would appear in the final thesis for the research. Mary stressed that she wished both her own name and those of her colleagues to be changed in the thesis; she clearly felt very vulnerable and uncomfortable at the notion that her colleagues might become aware that she was unhappy with aspects of her position. She feared that she might 'rock the boat' if she asked for the kind of professional courtesy which most teachers not only enjoyed, but demanded. Mary continued to speak about her sense of being vulnerable in the assessment and appraisal of her position by James; she noted that this sense of vulnerability had been heightened in recent weeks, because she had been unwell and had missed both a few days of work and a department meeting. This unavoidable and quite normal part of most teachers' working lives had become a further source of tension for Mary, who did not yet have a sense of job security.

As Mary spoke about her concerns, Katy contrasted these with her own experience of colleagues walking into her classes. Where Mary had been subjected to James's reprimanding of her students, Katy described her colleagues as being extremely supportive and affirming. This appeared to upset Mary even further and Tess asked whether there might be another staff member with whom she could discuss the issue.

Mary replied that she was reluctant to do this for fear that it might 'get back to him'. Given that James was her school-based mentor and, simultaneously, the person who was causing Mary the greatest stress and anxiety of her induction period, assigning these roles (Head of Department, mentor, team-teaching colleague) to one person was tantamount to a conflict of interest.

Over the course of the meeting it had become apparent that beneath Mary's initial assessment of 'all being well' the reality was something quite different. She confirmed that she was feeling stressed, anxious and almost intimidated by her colleague, whose conduct her external mentor and buddy were now calling unprofessional. Mary explained that the reality of team-teaching with James, in a room that was at all other times 'his classroom' and in combination with his unannounced appearance in her classes, caused her to feel as if the professional boundaries which normally applied to colleagues simply did not exist. She again identified the ATP practicum experience as the likely foundation for the dynamic that appeared to be at play in the relationship, because during her practicum she had actively and appropriately sought James's regular appraisal of her performance. In this new setting, where she was no longer a practicum student and her supervisor was now her colleague and Head of Department, Mary felt at a loss to know how to find a solution to the problem and to establish appropriate professional boundaries. Mary felt that the stress associated with this aspect of her position was a major hindrance to effective teaching and student learning. She felt that she could never quite 'relax' and needed to be 'on show' at all times. This interfered with her ability to focus her energies on the important issues of student learning in the twin visual literacy domains of arts making and arts interpretation. Consequently, Mary felt that she was not as successful in her teaching as might otherwise have been the case. Tess and Katy urged her to do something about the problem and continued to make suggestions about ways in which this could be achieved.

At the conclusion of the meeting it remained unclear what Mary would do about the difficulties she was having with 'professional boundaries'; both Tess and Katy were alarmed to hear Mary say that she was starting to believe she may not be suited to teaching. They urged her to re-assess the situation as being about her interaction with a colleague, rather than her expertise as a beginning-teacher. At the conclusion of the meeting, this issue remained unresolved. As I left the group I could hear the conversation continuing around suggestions for ways to initiate a discussion and resolution for the problem.

### **The final meeting – November 2006**

The final meeting for group one occurred in November 2006 at the same café in Leederville. Katy was unable to attend the meeting that comprised only Mary, Tess and myself. Tess asked Mary how she had been and enquired about the status of the difficult relationship with her Head of Learning Area she had described previously. Mary was delighted to advise that she had taken Tess' advice and raised her concerns with her Head of Learning Area in respect of professional boundaries. She noted that he had seemed quite surprised by her concerns and stated he had been unaware of the effect his actions had exerted on Mary. He apologised and gave a commitment to curb intervention in her teaching. This in turn had led to increasing autonomy for Mary; she now felt much happier with her working environment and the quality of her professional experience. On a similarly bright note, Mary went on to say that three of her students had recently won prestigious Education Department 'MOSO' awards for excellence in film and television (her 2<sup>nd</sup> teaching area); furthermore, James (her Line Manager) had

decided to take long-service leave and there was now the possibility of a year-long appointment becoming available at the school. Mary explained that she would be eligible to apply for the position and, with James' support, she felt she stood a good chance of securing this 'merit select' position. The possibility of an ongoing appointment had buoyed Mary's spirits considerably in recent weeks; she certainly appeared more self-assured and confident during our meeting.

Without Katy's participation in the meeting the conversation moved quite quickly from discussions about the past to directions for the future. Mary spoke about her desire to continue to be involved in the development of the new courses of study and said that she felt she had learned a lot from her participation as the school's representative on the media course of study professional development days. She then spoke about her delight at having had her position increased from 0.45 to 0.55 and her receipt of back-pay. Her financial circumstances were improving and her outlook seemed to reflect this positive change in circumstances. Little else related to teaching experiences was discussed during the meeting; conversation was focused on Christmas and holiday plans and we finished a little earlier than usual. As Mary left the meeting for the year she suggested that, despite the approaching end of the group's formal participation in the research, she would like to continue to meet from time to time to chat and 'catch up'. Tess agreed that this was a good idea and the two women left the café chatting happily about life beyond the confines of teaching and their profession.

At the end of her questionnaire Mary made the following comments:

In 2005, at the end of my Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary), I was given the opportunity to be a part of The ECU Graduate Mentor Project in visual arts education. As a beginning-teacher and after having completed a very intensive course at ECU I welcomed the opportunity for continued and ongoing support. Whilst the course had prepared me sufficiently to teach I still felt that I lacked classroom experience and would be apprehensive at an initial appointment.

The process began with a workshop prior to the school year commencing. At this stage in 2006 I had not been offered a position and it was invaluable to be able to reconnect with old and new colleagues. The workshop enabled me to start building relationships straight away. I was placed with Tess as a mentor.

As I began relief teaching I found that the contact I had with Tess, Katy and Lisa made me more confident in my approach to starting my career. That is, I felt supported in making contacts with schools and circulating my resume. Our scheduled meetings were also a life-line at a time when things seemed uncertain. The support offered was both professional and informal.

Once I secured a temporary teaching contract the nature and role of the mentoring program changed for me. As a graduate teacher it is easy to feel isolated and unsure about whom to approach for support. Because of this project I had a network with which I could communicate my apprehensions and concerns as well as share my successes. By the time we had our last meeting I felt more like a beginning-teacher rather than a graduate. Had it not been for some of the initial meetings with my group I think my first year experience would have been much more stressful. I highly recommend this project and any similar projects, to beginning-teachers. I definitely would! The main benefit I gained from this experience was that I always knew there was support available to me at all times and for all aspects of teaching. This was very reassuring and helped me develop my confidence, especially in the first six months.

## **APPENDIX EIGHT: TESS' STORY**

### **The first meeting – February 2006:**

The first meeting for group one was quite typical of many teachers' meetings where the participants are strangers. The style of the interaction was initially a little mechanical; occasional silences were punctuated by animated accounts of personal teaching experience and goals for the year ahead. For the beginning-teachers in group one, the commencement of their teaching careers had got off to a faltering start – work was proving difficult to find and their spirits were waning. The security of the tertiary education context had been replaced with the uncertainty of unemployment – an uncomfortable place to be. Tess had had some contact with both beginning-teachers via phone and email and had offered suggestions for ways to maximize opportunities for work. When asked for her impressions about the mentoring so far and how it had affected her, Tess commented that she felt a heavy responsibility for the new teachers – she worried about what would happen to them if time continued to pass without a full time position becoming available for one or both of them. She described feeling helpless to solve the problem, but spoke about feeling relieved that she had managed to secure some relief-teaching work for both teachers at her own school.

Tess said that she had initiated contact with both Katy and Mary on a number of occasions, because she wanted to try to keep their spirits up by reassuring them that it was quite normal for some time to elapse before regular work eventuated. At our meeting she explained that she felt a significant responsibility for 'making it work' – by supporting her recipients, to ensure that they did not become lost to the profession before they had even really begun.

Tess had attended the mentor training workshop and had thoroughly read the training materials and journal articles distributed on the day. Her failed involvement with mentoring for WACOT had made Tess feel determined to make the Graduate Mentor Project experience a positive one. Her desire to make a valuable contribution to the induction of the beginning-teachers assigned to her had caused Tess to worry about them and for them; as a result, she did whatever she could to keep their mood buoyant in the initial weeks after the workshop. Tess noted that she had worried about this challenge to a far greater extent than she had imagined possible; she somehow felt personally responsible for keeping her beginning-teachers on track and feeling good about their professional prospects. As the meeting progressed and each beginning-teacher talked about their fledgling attempts at teaching and concerns about securing an ongoing supply of work, Tess interjected from time to time with suggestions for strategies that might enhance employment prospects. She favoured personally visiting schools in the local area and said that making contact with the deputy principals, who were responsible for co-ordinating relief staff, could dramatically enhance the flow of work and ultimately part-time or ongoing work.

When I asked Tess how she was managing to meet her ongoing teaching and coordination responsibilities, as well as offering mentoring to two new teachers, she laughed and said her head was swimming. She had again taken responsibility for organising the senior school ball; in addition, she had extensive involvement with the preparation at her school for the visual arts course of study which was due for implementation the following year. She was also heavily involved in preparations for the school's camps programs. Despite having fulfilled both of these (ball and camp) duties in the past, Tess said she felt little affinity with the events and was much more

interested in the mentoring role she had so recently assumed. She commented that she felt it was 'important work' which could make a real difference, not only for the new teachers, but ultimately for the students they taught.

A little later in the meeting, as the women discussed strategies for gaining confidence in unfamiliar teaching environments, Tess recommended a number of useful texts which she commonly relied upon. She particularly endorsed a teaching journal entitled 'The Innovative Teacher – Creative and both Mary and Katy resolved to subscribe to the journal. Tess noted that the tips for teaching and general layout of the journal had proven invaluable to her over recent years; she felt sure both beginning-teachers would greatly benefit from this tangible support. Tess concluded the meeting with another invitation to both teachers to contact her whenever they needed help. She stressed that, whilst she might not always respond to their emails on the day she received them, she would definitely receive them and would be very pleased to be of help. Both beginning-teachers appreciated this offer of support and the meeting concluded on a positive note.

### **The second meeting – April 2006**

The second meeting for group one occurred in April 2006 at the same café. Mary was unable to attend the meeting and the group comprised Tess, Katy and myself. After the initial greetings, Katy updated the group on her current employment circumstances, particularly the challenges of relief teaching. A general theme emerged around the difficulties that arose when relief teachers did not know the policies and protocols of the school and were unfamiliar with students. Tess agreed that this was difficult and observed that developing a good relationship with students over time was a critical component of success in terms of the learning program. She gave the example of a group of yr 12 visual arts and design students which had proven problematic for many teachers at her school in the past. Tess commented that she had made a sustained effort to get to know the students and to find out what they were interested in outside the confines of the school. As a result of this developing relationship, she had modified her proposed learning program and had substituted the designated project for one which focused on skate board culture. To complement this research and design development process, Tess explained that she had linked the theme of popular culture to graffiti that had resulted in her students undertaking research into the various genres of graffiti which occurred both locally and internationally.

She continued that her students had been surprised to learn that graffiti arose from a number of discrete motivations, including the desire to stake territory through 'tags'; the desire to proclaim anarchistic messages – particularly against those in power (Governments or related agencies such as police); for the purpose of decoration – aesthetic improvement – despite what the public might feel about such 'beautification'; as an avenue for the individual's 'personal voice'; and for purely destructive purposes with no intent other than to damage property or offend the owners of the object attacked.

Tess explained that, after her students had undertaken research activities and investigated the international 'graffiti centres' that included Paris, Barcelona, Melbourne and New York (and the varying agendas of the 'artists' in those locations), they were excited about the prospect of applying the principles of graffiti to their own personal culture through the skater context and skate boards. Tess continued that she had shown the students a 'Lonely Planet' DVD which had extended the research they had individually undertaken within the Arts in Society (art history) and Arts Responses (art criticism) component of the project. The resultant arts ideas (visual inquiry) and arts skills and processes (studio work) had far exceeded the quality of work the students had

previously produced; this had reinforced for Tess the importance of ‘getting to know students’, building a relationship based on trust and a good rapport and linking projects to students’ interests. Katy seemed impressed by this narrative and excitedly said that she would also like to use this project with her students. Tess then gave her details of suppliers of skate board blanks and other tips to support the project.

Following this exchange, I asked Tess how she felt the mentoring process was working. She explained that she was very happy for Katy, who had just accepted a part-time ongoing position at a northern suburbs school which she intended to undertake in addition to any relief-teaching she might complete at both Tess’ and other schools. Tess said that she felt a weight had been lifted in terms of responsibility for this new teacher, now that Katy had some continuity in teaching experience through this appointment. Tess continued that she felt the mentoring processes were working well for Katy and that the relief days Katy had completed at Tess’ school in recent weeks had given an opportunity for the mentoring to occur on a ‘face to face’ basis rather than via email and telephone.

This internal rather than external mentoring experience had raised questions for Tess about where the greater value might lie for new teachers – in having assigned to them at graduation a mentor who was external to the employment context, or one appointed at the school at which they taught and from within the visual arts discipline. Some discussion occurred around these two options and the group tentatively agreed that face-to-face mentoring had significant benefits. However, the lapse in time from graduation to securing work meant that the external mentor could offer support when none would otherwise be available to the new graduate. The two women concluded that a combination model, where new graduates were linked to an experienced mentor during the transition from study to work and subsequently aligned to an experienced visual arts teacher in their school, had the most to offer graduates. I concurred that this would be ideal, but emphasised the high number of recent ECU graduates who had not moved directly into either ongoing teaching positions or even regular relief-teaching. The group agreed that, given the reality of these circumstances, the external mentor model had most to offer.

As the meeting progressed, Tess confided that, in addition to her usual teaching duties, responsibilities in respect of preparing for the new courses of study for yrs 11 and 12 and involvement in this research project, she had this year been asked to co-ordinate structured workplace learning (SWL) for a specific cohort at her school. Despite her wealth of experience as a visual arts teacher, this program for students who completed both school and TAFE studies in a transition program from school to the employment context, was unfamiliar and challenging for Tess. The staff member who had previously co-ordinated the program for her cohort was not available to offer any support when Tess assumed the role and few of the other staff at the school appeared to have either time or knowledge they could offer Tess in her new role as co-ordinator.

Tess laughed and said that in many respects she felt like a beginning- teacher herself; she explained that being out of her comfort zone had helped her better understand how the beginning-teachers were feeling. Katy expressed amazement at the notion that Tess might still experience confusion and discomfort in new teaching contexts and asked what she did to cope with this. Tess spoke about the importance of friends and colleagues with whom she could share her feelings (even if they were unable to solve the problems presented by the experience). She also talked about the need to make time

for oneself ... working on visual arts practice or even just taking time to read a book. She urged Katy to seek balance in her professional and personal lives.

As the end of the meeting approached, I asked Tess whether she had any thoughts about the form the mentoring might take in the foreseeable future. Tess elaborated that she intended to continue to work with Katy at school, when she attended for relief days and also had arranged to meet with Mary in the holidays. She observed that this would be important, given that Mary had been unable to attend the meeting and therefore had not experienced the support the group could offer her. Tess explained that she had chatted to Mary by phone from time- to-time and was aware that Mary was feeling under pressure at work and home, particularly in respect of time issues. Mary was trying to accommodate both the demands of family life and working in several schools in a relief capacity. In that capacity she was required to be available on short notice to attend a number of schools to cover absent teachers. Tess confessed that she was unsure about how best to help Mary. Tess hoped that, by meeting in the holidays, she might be able to offer guidance about strategies for improving teaching when Mary was in the classroom; as a result, some continuity in Mary's work schedule might then have had sufficient time to develop. Katy agreed that these arrangements would also work well for her. A tentative date for another group meeting was set for mid-May.

### **The Third meeting - May 2006**

The third meeting for group one occurred in May 2006. The initial conversation centred on the stress both beginning-teachers felt, because they were in the midst of reporting processes in the part-time positions they both held. Neither appeared to feel confident about what precisely was expected of them; meetings to brief the wider staff of each school on the specifics of electronic reporting systems invariably seemed to occur when the beginning-teachers were absent. Mary went so far as to say that she really felt as though there was some secret knowledge to which everyone except herself was privy. When she asked colleagues for guidance, she often felt that they were too busy to really spend time guiding her in the finer points of utilising the system. Katy similarly was experiencing challenges with reporting, particularly for students she hardly knew, although her colleagues were more amenable to offering advice about reporting strategies. Tess listened quietly to the concerns expressed by Mary and Katy and advised them to try to get a copy of the school's annual calendar that would clearly outline the reporting timeline and deadlines. Additionally, she suggested that in most schools employing an electronic reporting system there was generally either a document which outlined steps to follow, or alternatively, technicians or staff who had an ICT support role to fulfil in respect of reporting. Both Mary and Katy said that they would follow up on this and see if support was available.

I asked Tess how she was coping with the demands of the teaching year. Tess had indicated at the previous meeting that she felt somewhat overloaded this year; she had taken on unfamiliar 'structured workplace learning' co-ordination responsibilities, in addition to her usual teaching load and the mentoring role for this research. She explained that she was essentially quite fine, but could identify with the stress the beginning-teachers were experiencing, because she was also currently caught up the hectic reporting timeline at her own school. Unlike the beginning-teachers, however, Tess had experienced this 'stress' many times before and knew that it was a temporary phenomenon; when properly managed, it was entirely 'survivable'. She also spoke about the challenges of learning how to 'let go' of stress in order to achieve a balance in the area of life/work. Tess explained that it was easy at stressful times to blur the line between work and home and she emphasised that many new teachers fell into the trap of



either working, or worrying about work, to the exclusion of other areas of their lives. This inevitably increased stress, because extra time directed to work matters often robbed the teacher of their family time or personal time during the demanding periods such as reporting and parent/teacher nights.

Tess explained that collegial support in school (especially at busy times) was a critical element in her own set of mechanisms for coping with stress; she emphasised the importance of being able to unwind over coffee at recess or lunch and simply chat about school life with colleagues. Tess gave several examples of the ways in which this type of informal discussion had given rise to solutions to the problems she faced (especially when managing students with behavioural and learning difficulties). In order for this collaborative dialogue-based support to be possible, however, Tess considered that it was necessary to be working in the school fairly regularly, because the foundation of this type of interaction was the relationship which developed between people. Such relationships, she added, took time to build and develop. She spoke about the sense of 'being in it together' and underlined how important this was for both staff and the students in their care. She expressed concern that new teachers often missed out on this collegial support simply because they were on the merry-go-round of relief-teaching. Tess gave several examples of the way in which this 'round table' brainstorming over coffee had helped her resolve specific challenges. She explained that the graffiti theme she was currently exploring with her yr 12 students within the new course of study pilot at her school had developed from this type of interaction. Tess described how, when chatting over morning recess coffee, she had complained that she was concerned about trying to motivate this group.

The general discussion that ensued among four teachers at the table had given rise to the idea of linking pop culture and graffiti to the students' involvement in various leisure pursuits, including skateboarding. This discussion had then become the springboard for the project on which students were currently working. Tess then began to speak about the experience of trialling the new visual arts course of study (which both she and Katy were doing for visual arts; Mary was implementing the media course of study and similar concerns). She agreed with Katy and Mary that the speed and frequency with which the course structures appeared to change was both rapid and frustrating. Tess had been part of the reference group that had initially developed the early work for the course and was well placed to implement the new format; however, she felt that the constant revision was stress-inducing for teachers who were trialling the course.

Some discussion then ensued about types of tasks and learning strategies which could be employed within the arts and media courses (since both were framed around an identical template) and Tess offered Mary and Katy suggestions about how to improve the work in which they were currently engaged. She talked about her own strategies for engaging students in both visual arts making and visual arts interpretation outcomes and suggested mechanisms for covering the essential prescribed content of the course. Both beginning-teachers were appreciative of this support and left the meeting with a new enthusiasm for the work they were doing.

#### **The fourth meeting – August 2006**

The fourth meeting for group one occurred at the same café in Leederville in August 2006 and began with Katy talking about her teaching successes and challenges. She was particularly worried about how to build students' competence in the area of visual language (the elements and principles of visual arts and design) as the lack of understanding of these basic building blocks of the creative process had limited the

success of students' works. Tess had taught with an emphasis upon visual language for many years; as the meeting progressed, she suggested resources that might be helpful in both establishing and consolidating familiarity with the elements of visual arts (line, shape, colour, texture, tone, etc.). Tess felt that visual arts students were most commonly visual learners; in order to tap into this preferred learning modality, she explained that she always filled her classroom with high impact visual material such as posters and prints. Both beginning-teachers agreed that this was an essential strategy; Katy said that she was already doing this, but the benefit had been difficult to measure to date. Tess suggested this was likely to be a temporary problem that would improve the more the visuals were talked about and connected to student work and design processes.

Tess then went on to list the titles of a range of books that she had found quite helpful. She explained that several of these texts had an emphasis on design development, the part of the creative process with which many students struggled. Tess continued that in her experience students were often quite capable of creating the studio product, but the process of exploring, developing, creating and presenting their plans (through drawing) required a strong command of visual language – the very issue Katy was concerned about. Tess said that she tried to spend some time each week building vocabulary with students; she ensured that this skill-building activity was reinforced through visual material in the classroom, such as posters showing how important artists (both traditional and contemporary) used visual language to convey concepts.

The conversation changed direction again at this point and Katy began to speak about the difficulty faced by part-time staff in keeping abreast of developments within the school. By way of example, she spoke about her frustration at having been reprimanded by her Deputy Principal for having missed a yard duty. Tess sympathized with Katy about this experience and agreed that it seemed a common pitfall of relief or contract positions. School culture was so rich and complex that keeping abreast of developments required regular attendance. To support Katy in overcoming her feelings of anxiety (to the point where she had considered resigning), Tess offered a number of 'survival strategies' which teachers who had irregular contact with the school could employ. These included:

- having a buddy on staff who would telephone details of developments or points of interest as they arose;
- speaking directly to the Deputy and requesting that changes be advised in ways other than via the notice board (email etc)
- persuading support staff at the school to flag matters of high importance when the teacher reported for teaching.

These were all fairly time-intensive approaches that impinged on other staff and required an investment of goodwill. Tess said that many teachers were happy to support their part-time colleagues in these ways; the best outcomes generally arose from a friendship structure rather than those which called on colleagues to take on an extra job. Katy was appreciative of these suggestions and agreed that they were worthy of further consideration. Tess then responded to Mary's description of the time she was investing in the implementation of the new course of study in media at her school. Mary was excited about the work she was doing and enjoyed the improved status the role seemed to have afforded her in recent weeks. Tess observed that she was similarly enjoying the work she was investing in, preparing for the implementation of the visual arts course of study at her school; but she cautioned Mary to be careful about managing the amount of time she invested in the undertaking. This was particularly relevant, given that Mary

was employed in a part-time capacity, with no extra time allocation for the substantive work load required to develop the new course at the school.

Tess went further and suggested that it would be worthwhile to approach James and ask for an additional staff member to be assigned to the task, to alleviate the pressure Mary was experiencing. Tess elaborated that this could be contextualized within the framework of moderation processes, to ensure quality and consistency in the development of materials. Mary agreed that this was an excellent idea and resolved to raise the matter with James as soon as possible. This gave rise to concerns from Mary about how this conversation might be received by James and Tess urged Mary to attempt to break the 'practicum student role' that still seemed to be afforded to her. Some discussion between the three participants occurred and the group agreed that this would require the re-negotiation of professional boundaries which operated within the relationship. The group brainstormed about how to do this without damaging the relationship with Mary had with her Head of Department; Tess suggested that she try to talk it through with another colleague before speaking to James.

This advice was well received and Mary began to consider how she would broach the subject. This in turn led to something of a crisis of confidence for Mary, who then began to doubt not only her suitability for the task, but also her suitability to teaching in general. Tess seemed to be upset by Mary's confidence failure and did her best to reassure her that everything would be fine. She spoke about the importance of re-framing the challenge as one pertaining to professional relationship boundaries, rather than self-worth as a teacher. I noticed that Tess seemed to feel that she had somehow personally added to Mary's worries and appeared to be searching for something to say that would alleviate Mary's discomfort. It was as if she felt it was her job to 'fix it' and to sustain her protégé through this challenge. Another date for a final meeting was set and, after some further discussion, the group departed in something of a somber mood.

### **The final meeting**

The final meeting for group one was quite brief, because Katy had been unable to attend. Mary updated Tess on the developments in respect of the new course of study project at her school and was delighted to advise that her discussion with her Head of Department had gone well. A greater sense of collegiality seemed to have emerged from Mary's forthright approach to James's manner; in a related happy turn of events, she had just been advised that her position (paid time allowance) had been increased and she was to be back-paid for the course of study development work undertaken in her own time to date. Tess was delighted to hear of these developments and the two women chatted amiably about the professional development and intellectual challenges they were both enjoying as a result of their involvement in the new courses of study at their respective schools. These discussions, coupled with Mary's excitement at the possibility of securing an ongoing position at her school, imbued the tone of the meeting with a sense of optimism which distinguished it significantly from the preceding one. At the end of the short professional discussion, a more generalised style of interaction ensued and agreement in principle was reached to keep in touch as a group of friends. Discussion after that centred on other life-world issues including partners, children and Christmas.

## **APPENDIX NINE: BETH'S STORY**

### **The first meeting: March 2006**

At the first research meeting Beth spoke openly about gender politics, her sexual orientation as a gay woman and her delight at having secured a teaching position so soon in her new profession. She explained that she was team-teaching one class of year 11 visual arts and design students in a science laboratory and the remainder of her classes in an 'open plan' environment that resulted in sporadic noise-related problems and attendant behaviour-management issues. At the time of commencing her teaching appointment in January 2006, Beth had been provided with copies of existing programs for some of her classes (including those within the Technology and Enterprise – Manual Arts area) and staff had been very supportive of her. Beth described the support offered to her by colleagues in the Technology and Enterprise area as a kind of informal mentoring that encompassed a range of focus areas. These included discipline/behaviour management, subject-discipline content knowledge, pedagogy and tips for teaching and advice about the school protocols, policies and co-curricular life of the school. She greatly appreciated this help and explained that she felt as if the Technology and Enterprise staff were nurturing her transition from graduate to staff member within their department.

In other areas (departments) within the school curriculum, Beth felt that she had been essentially left to her own devices. She had to devise her own learning programs and, whilst she had enjoyed the challenges associated with this undertaking, she described experiencing a sense of isolation ... of being almost abandoned and left to survive on her own. It was as if there was an expectation by teaching colleagues, especially in the visual arts area, that she should be 'fine' and able to manage her teaching responsibilities on her own. Beth noted that it seemed as if being fully competent on day one was viewed as a minimum professional responsibility which accompanied the teaching appointment she had won.

Janine asked Beth whether there had been any formal induction into the school and Beth confirmed that, in fact, a thorough induction program was offered to all new staff. In addition to this, the deputy principal had offered a number of suggestions to ease her transition into teaching and had reported being very pleased with her rapport and connection to the students in her classes. Beth found that the high level of new staff to the school (around 20 other staff) had also offered a degree of emotional support. All the new teachers seemed to band together to share knowledge and support each other. Beth was enjoying the collegiality of other young teachers who were as enthusiastic about their discipline as she was about visual arts. She looked forward to morning recess and lunch, as these were times when the staff (particularly the new ones) sat around and chatted about their experiences. Beth felt that her relaxed personal style and friendly demeanour had elicited positive responses from students and staff; she cited as an example her year 10 visual arts class (which numbered 28 at the time of the meeting) which had been steadily growing since the commencement of the year and still had a large number of students trying to join the group. Beth noted that many of these children were considered to be poorly-behaved by staff in the school, but she described these same students as both productive and happy in her visual arts learning program. Beth felt that she had found her 'calling' and spoke about wanting to develop her repertoire of behaviour-management strategies to further support children who (for a variety of reasons) seemed not to be experiencing success at school. I reflected that Beth was extremely passionate about the social justice implications of students being

tagged as 'problem kids' and it seemed as if she felt that she had a personal responsibility to try to 'save' them.

I asked Beth if she had any thoughts about why these children appeared not to be as successful in other subjects as they were in art. She thought about this for a moment and then responded that she felt there were a number of issues about the physical school environment which appeared counterproductive to the educational success of some children in her classes. She spoke specifically about working in an open-plan teaching environment and noted that on many occasions students in yrs 9 and 12 were in close proximity to one another; the noise generated could at times be quite disruptive for children and staff in both classes. Notwithstanding these environmental issues, Beth spoke with enthusiasm about the projects currently being implemented in her visual arts and other learning programs and talked about her plans to establish an extension program in the visual arts for gifted children. Beth was clearly enjoying the varied aspects of school life and was actively seeking opportunities to join committees, panels and other groups connected to the co-curricular life of the school. Her sense of wellbeing seemed linked to the high levels of involvement in the life of the school and the support and friendship this elicited from colleagues at the school. She appreciated how fortunate she had been to secure a full-time permanent position at a 'good' independent school and was looking forward to her career.

Beth also noted that she was enjoying sharing her own visual arts practice with her students; she looked for opportunities to speak about her work and also to bring in examples for her students to view. She said that various groups of students had taken a keen interest in this aspect of her as their teacher and she reflected that at some level being a 'practicing artist' gave her greater credibility with her students. She noted that she had used discussions about her own work to further her students' visual arts criticism skills and they seemed keen to talk with her about the themes and concepts that she employed in her paintings. I asked Beth if this might be a tool for facilitating visual literacy over time (constantly bringing in real works for discussion) and she agreed that this seemed to have potential. Beth said that she certainly considered that nurturing her own skills as an artist and sharing this journey with her students, represented a way to transmit a personal passion to them. She said that she felt optimistic both about her journey as an artist and an arts educator.

Beth's optimism starkly contrasted with that of Marnie (her buddy), who had had an entirely different kind of experience; as the meeting progressed, Beth tried to offer encouragement and reassurance to Marnie. Marnie and Beth had studied together during the preceding year, but they had moved in different circles at the university and I detected that Marnie was not particularly open to Beth's suggestions and ideas. The meeting concluded on a mixed note: Beth was enthusiastically engaged in forward planning for the projects she intend to implement, while Marnie was somberly trying to devise solutions for the issues she had encountered in her own teaching context. A date for the next meeting was set for May 2006.

### **Second Meeting: May 2006**

Neither Beth nor I attended the second meeting for group two. My daughter was unwell and I sent my apologies and asked that, if possible, Janine send me a brief update on the meeting. Beth had apparently been feeling unwell for some time and sent her apologies the day before the meeting occurred. Janine and Marnie met in our absence. A new date for a subsequent meeting was set for August 2006.

A few weeks later I received an email from a school-based colleague, who advised that Beth was extremely unwell and in hospital. The colleague had initially contacted me asking for details of any graduates I could recommend for a full-time, temporary teaching appointment, as a result of a teacher being rushed to hospital and remaining seriously ill. I had been happy to oblige and had recommended a number of graduates from the previous year, including those participating in the research. I was quite shocked when I realised that the ill teacher was in fact Beth, who had seemed so well only a few weeks earlier. The advice was quite brief:

Dear Lisa, since you suggested two names on Monday, I learned that the teacher who is ill was a recent ECU grad, Beth. My friend, the visual arts teacher at her school, says that Beth speaks of you all the time in glowing terms. For this reason I thought you might want to know that Beth was diagnosed with cancer last week and by Monday night she had deteriorated with organ failure and, as of last night, was on life support. My friend does not have much hope for her survival. I am not sure how close you were to this student, but felt you might want to know the circumstances. Unfortunately it looks like the position at we discussed may be ongoing or permanent for someone. Because of the long term nature now of the appointment, it will be the Principal who contacts the women you recommended. Sorry to be the bearer of sad news. Perhaps if Beth had other friends in the department at ECU, they might also want to know of her condition.

I made a number of attempts to get in touch with Beth's family to enquire about her condition and finally spoke to her mother, who said that Beth's condition was quite serious, but appeared to be improving. Beth's mother suggested that I might like to email Beth that I did. Several weeks later, in late May, I got an email from Beth indicating that her situation had stabilised and whilst she was still seriously ill, her prognosis for survival was much improved:

Dear Lisa, I am sifting through all my emails. It got up to 408 while I was in hospital. I'm kind of in and out of hospital; and have completed two out of the eight chemotherapy rounds. On the upside the scariest bit is over. I now know what it is. My work has been wonderful the Principal and the Padre have been dropping in and out all month. The school have told the kids what is going on. I miss work immensely especially the kids. I have a large card collection even from the cleaners. I hope all is going well for everyone else and wanted to let you know that I had a great and busy first term and am looking forward to returning to work in the future. Cheers, Beth

Janine, Marnie and I went to see Beth at her home when we were next due to have a meeting and spent the morning talking with Beth about her health and circumstances. Although extremely weak, Beth displayed a great degree of optimism about her circumstances and said that the mentoring experience had been a great support for her during her first term as a teacher. She doubted that she would be well enough to return to teaching that year, but was delighted that the school had promised to hold her position for her. Beth advised that, all things being equal, she was keen to rejoin the program the following year when she returned to work and I promised to contact her again in the new year to finalise the details of her re-entry to the program. Following this exchange Beth withdrew formally from the program and her group contracted to a two-person (one mentor – one beginning-teacher) structure. Despite planning to do so, this group did not meet face-to-face again during the year. Instead, Marnie kept in touch with Janine via telephone and email and the mentoring assumed a 'virtual' form. No attempt was made to reconcile Beth's experience against the research questions, given the brevity of her involvement with the study in 2006. Beth did rejoin the research in 2007 and, after a brief period with an alternative mentor, Janine resumed the role of Beth's mentor.

## **APPENDIX TEN: MARNIE'S STORY**

### **The first meeting: March 2006**

Group Two met for the first time at the visual arts Gallery of Western Australia in the gallery café. I asked both beginning-teachers to update both Janine and I on what had occurred since the training workshop in January. Marnie spoke with mixed emotions about her situation during the course of the first meeting. On one hand, she felt delighted at having been appointed to a teaching position so quickly; on the other, she was navigating a bout of depression which accompanied the realisation that a half-time (0.5fte) teaching position paid less than the Government study allowance she had received during the preceding 5 years. Marnie described the disappointment her two teenage children had verbalised as they realised that the family's financial position would not improve, despite a long-standing promise from Marnie that this would happen when she was qualified and working as a teacher. She felt she had let everyone down. Additionally, Marnie had been forced to apply for a partial unemployment benefit and had experienced a sense of worthlessness as she lined up in a "dole queue" to be interviewed by Centre-link staff. Despite having been appointed to a half-time teaching position, Centre-link required Marnie to be actively seeking full-time work, including positions unrelated to teaching, in order to continue to receive her allowance. The Centre-link staff seemed unsympathetic to the dilemma this created for Marnie and appeared uninterested in the clash arising from being required to seek work whilst trying to meeting her teaching obligations (which were distributed on different days/times throughout the school week).

Marnie tried to explain that she could not predict when she would be obliged to remain at school, beyond her part-time teaching hours, to participate in the duties/meetings compulsorily associated with her employment. These conflicting agendas caused Marnie to feel stressed, anxious and disappointed. Her sense of anxiety was further heightened by other challenging aspects of her part-time employment, most notably the lack of any induction to the school and its teaching and learning programs. Marnie explained that the school was unlike any other she had experienced on her practicum placements, because it was configured around discrete phases of schooling. Marnie had been placed in a dedicated middle-school environment which was organised around 'community' cohorts and she had been aligned to the year 9 group. Marnie continued that she had been assigned a challenging mix of 'special needs' students, who were peppered throughout many of her media classes. These special needs students encompassed those with hearing impairment; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; autism; and Aspersers syndrome.

Marnie said that she initially felt overwhelmed by the diverse nature of the challenges she had to navigate on an almost daily basis, but did not feel it was safe to draw this to the attention of other staff. I asked her why she felt vulnerable about raising her concerns with the school hierarchy and she responded that the few tentative remarks she had made about needing help to manage students' needs had drawn a dismissive response. Marnie's mentor, Janine, had been listening quietly until this point and, after making several suggestions for ways in which Marnie might secure other work to complement the part time position she already had, went on to ask about the classes Marnie had been assigned. Marnie explained that the school was configured around a middle-school campus and a discrete senior school. The school calendar within the middle-school was structured around three 13-week trimesters and the student cohort was divided into three communities from yrs 8 – 10. Marnie had been assigned to the

yr 9 community and, as the only media teacher, had come to know most of the children quite well. Janine asked Marnie to describe the skill levels of students and also the kinds of work they were currently undertaking. Marnie prefaced her description of the learning program by saying that few, if any, of the children had ever taken media as a subject previously; consequently her assumptions about their content knowledge and skill level had proven to be incorrect. This had meant that she had spent the first couple of weeks simplifying the work she had initially planned to do with them. Marnie described having had to adopt a 'back to basics' approach that required her to teach the foundations of the media discipline from scratch – a position of assuming no prior knowledge. Marnie mentioned that, in addition to this remedial approach, a number of the classes were extremely challenging from a classroom management perspective. She went on to say that one class simultaneously featured all of the special needs previously listed. In that particular class, the deaf children had a team of interpreters assigned to them to 'sign' Marnie's instructions and translate the children's responses, but these staff support officers offered little or no help with behaviour management issues (because this was not officially part of their job description). Marnie observed that the highly audio-visual nature of the media discipline often resulted in these deaf children withdrawing "into their own little worlds" or, conversely, becoming disruptive as a result of disconnection, boredom and isolation. Janine asked Marnie whether she had been provided with any training for working with the special needs children and Marnie advised that she had not. She went on to explain that, on the one occasion (during a performance management meeting), she had intended to raise the issue; this had not occurred, because she found the person conducting the appraisal unsympathetic to her situation. Janine asked Marnie to elaborate and Marnie said that, when she had raised her concerns about the teaching load she had been assigned (0.5 part time) and the associated financial difficulties she was experiencing, she was reminded by her line manager that as a graduate she was fortunate to have any kind of work at all in the metropolitan area. The notion that she should be grateful to have a job at all exerted an intimidating effect upon Marnie and she decided she should refrain from 'complaining' and should just get on with the task of teaching as best she could. As a result, Marnie did not feel confident to raise the additional concerns she harboured about her ability to work with children with so many special needs in the same class at the same time. This vulnerability seemed a strange contrast to the confident persona Marnie mostly projected.

Trying to remain objective, I had refrained from talking until this point. But as I sat and imagined what it must have been like trying to teach a complex discipline like media from almost no foundation, whilst simultaneously contending with a diverse range of special needs and behaviours, I found I simply had to say something. I asked Marnie how she felt she would cope with the situation, given her part-time status in the school that in itself, other beginning-teachers had already flagged was causing them stress. Marnie stopped for a moment and almost looked as if she might cry. She then composed herself and said she wasn't really sure; but she noted that she needed the work and therefore really did not have much choice other than to bluff her way through. At this point she laughed and said there were times she felt as if she deserved an Oscar, because she actually felt almost terrified of facing her students and colleagues. There was something of a sombre mood about the meeting at this point, as if everyone was trying to think of what to say to make Marnie feel better. Eventually, Janine suggested that Marnie tell the group something more about what had been happening and Marnie appeared to welcome the opportunity to move on.

As Marnie shared the stories of her first few weeks of teaching and then in turn listened



to Beth's experiences, her mood deflated in an almost visible manner. It was apparent that she was upset that her experience had been so challenging. She spoke about the uncertainty she was experiencing about what was 'normal' and expressed self-doubt about whether she was really 'cut out for teaching'. Marnie seemed even more upset when Janine, her mentor, said that she believed the circumstances surrounding Marnie's induction/class allocation had been poorly handled. Janine reminisced about her own beginning-teacher experiences from 1978 and, contrasting this positive experience with that of Marnie, concluded that the lack of formal induction or training for the special needs children in Marnie's classes had essentially 'set her up to fail'. In the general discussion that ensued, both Beth and Janine investigated with Marnie the actions she might take to improve her sense of wellbeing and feeling of control in the classroom and professional teaching environment. Janine suggested that, in her experience, learning support staff for hearing-impaired children typically did more than simply 'sign'. She asked Marnie whether it might be possible to ask the learning support staff to be more actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Marnie barely hesitated before saying that she felt she had a good rapport with the support staff and that they probably would do whatever she asked of them; she elaborated that she simply had not felt comfortable to require more of them than they had traditionally been used to doing.

Some further discussion ensued about the role of support staff in a range of learning contexts (both within media and visual arts and also more generally in education); Janine then asked Marnie if perhaps it might be worth calling a meeting with all learning support staff to share her concerns about the students' learning experiences. Janine continued to question Marnie about whether she felt she could perhaps seek the input of the aides into brainstorming strategies for achieving her goals for the learning tasks and, further, whether they might be prepared to actively teach small groups under her guidance. This tangible strategy for opening dialogue designed to formulate a solution to the stress Marnie was feeling seemed to be well received; but Marnie was still clearly feeling upset about what had been happening to her. Janine asked her whether the behaviour management was as significant an issue as the mechanics of teaching to diverse special needs. Marnie noted that, for the most part, the children were well-behaved but that, from time to time, the children with hearing impairment became quite disruptive. Janine asked Marnie several questions about the strategies she employed to deal with this problem and the physical layout/seating plan of the room was also highlighted as a focus area for discussion. Janine suggested that Marnie's level of control could be amplified by separating the special needs children from one another, thereby forcing their participation in the lesson rather than limiting their interactions to those children who were similarly challenged.

Janine, Marnie, Beth and I then spent some time talking about the challenges associated with special-needs education programs and the group agreed that Marnie should have received induction and training for her teaching role with these groups. The meeting was drawing to a conclusion and I was concerned that Marnie still appeared unsettled. I asked if there was any support I could offer to her. Marnie replied that she would be fine, but gratefully accepted Janine's offer to follow up with her via phone later that day to chat a little further about the issues which had been raised. Marnie also volunteered to set up a blogg site to facilitate speedy communication with her buddy and mentor (such communication having previously occurred via email and telephone calls).

Marnie left the meeting feeling more positive than when she had arrived and with a sense of purpose about changes she intended to implement. The meeting had served to empower her through simple discussion, empathy and collegial support.

### **The second meeting:**

Janine and Marnie met for the second time in May 2006. Neither Beth nor I had been able to attend the meeting and a few days later I enquired of Janine how things had gone. Janine advised that Marnie was well and was working fairly regularly, but explained that she seemed to lack confidence about her self-worth as a teacher. This perplexed Janine, because Marnie had a wealth of industry experience in film and television and, moreover, had performed extremely well in all her practicum placements during her training. Janine said that she felt that Marnie had other issues playing out in her life which were causing her difficulty at the same time as she was struggling to cope with the demands of her new career. Janine noted that Marnie appeared not only to doubt her suitability to teaching, but also appeared to lose confidence in her ability as an artist and film-maker. Marnie had been an accomplished film-maker and textiles artist in her undergraduate degree, but had given little time in almost eighteen months to nurturing this endeavour. The Graduate Diploma had been a demanding course which focussed almost exclusively on curriculum and pedagogical content and the first six months of 2006 had been absorbed in the processes of securing work. Marnie had remarked to Janine on several occasions that she really did not know why she had chosen to become a teacher; she said also that she felt she was no longer even competent in her major specialisations.

Janine relayed that she had listened sympathetically to Marnie's concerns and had encouraged her to make time to nurture her visual arts practice; Janine observed that this had been an important component in developing her own prowess as a visual arts educator over many years. Janine went on to say that she looked for opportunities to work as an artist and exhibit wherever and whenever possible. This personal practice component had sustained Janine when she had felt as if she was stressed or approaching burn-out at various points in her career. At the conclusion of the meeting Marnie had given Janine an undertaking to make time to nurture her own visual arts practice and conveyed that she felt the imperative to do this arose from the need to be able to confidently demonstrate for students the fundamentals of studio practice, rather than any personal benefit she might derive.

### **After the second meeting**

I interviewed Marnie shortly after the second meeting and, in addition to talking about her background prior to teaching, she updated me on what had transpired since the first time the group met. Marnie spoke about being very interested in visual culture and contemporary visual arts history, but confided that she felt her visual literacy content knowledge was weak in the area of traditional arts and historical artists. This was increasingly of concern to her, because as she realised that her students had almost no knowledge in this area and a significant amount of work needed to be done to facilitate their growth in the Arts in Society and Arts Responses outcome areas within the Media/Arts context. Marnie said that, since meeting with Janine for the second time, she had been trying to embed both contemporary designers and traditional design movements into the learning programs in media at her school. Marnie believed that this would be important as a foundation for visual literacy education in either the visual arts or media contexts.

Following her discussions with Janine, Marnie said she felt strongly that visual literacy education was critically important for all students; the focus upon contemporary artists and craftspeople offered a viable connection to students' own life-worlds through the cultural contexts of leisure and (skate-board design; graffiti, etc). I asked Marnie to describe the kinds of concerns she had raised with Janine during their meeting and she

spoke about feeling 'time-poor'. Marnie explained that, despite being only part-time, she felt she simply did not have enough time to adequately research the designers, artists and movements she hoped to embed in her students' learning programs; she noted that this was difficult to do in the midst of her hectic personal and work schedules. Marnie went on to stress that she was really struggling with the reality that her students had no previous media education experience and she had realised that her teaching and learning emphasis needed to be on skills acquisition, rather than conceptual understandings.

Marnie mentioned that she had explained to Janine, during the second meeting, that she was trying to establish student understanding of communication models, history of media forms and a variety of technologies. She had then spoken about her frustration arising from the need to take "absolute baby steps", to facilitate her students' learning. She explained that the work she was doing seemed as though it was in complete opposition to her previous experience; there, prior to her Graduate Diploma, Marnie had only ever worked with adults at an advanced level. She elaborated that, prior to her current appointment, it had never occurred to her that she might be working in a secondary context with students who had absolutely no knowledge of the media discipline. She continued that she found the work she was currently engaged in with students was at the level of basic functions, such as 'copy, cut and paste' which she had previously associated with children at primary school level. Marnie's desire to tackle the more challenging conceptual domains associated with visual literacy education within the media/design context had been largely set aside, from necessity, until basic fundamentals of design and associated ICT skills had been mastered.

Marnie described that, as a part of this process of establishing basic skills and content knowledge, she had been trying to get students to work on arts responses skills. She had spent some time talking with Janine about appropriate strategies for engaging lower-ability students with visual text. Janine had been very helpful and had suggested that Marnie could ask the students to record written reflections in their journals on any topic related to the media experience, including their own design work or future ambitions. To reinforce this process, Marnie had (on Janine's advice) also spent time establishing skills within the personal and critical response domains. To this end, she had required students to both speak and write descriptively and analytically about the visual text/image-based work of others, about their own work and about works within the society. She had employed two of the four dominant response frames with the students and said that they generally could navigate the lower level 'subjective' and 'structural' frames. The more complex conceptual understandings associated with the cultural and post-modern frames were difficult to use and Marnie had largely abandoned these, despite their common usage in most secondary school settings.

Although frustrated by the limited knowledge-base her students possessed, Marnie nonetheless had been excited about the good progress they were making. She explained that Janine's support had been invaluable in her attempts to change student's attitudes about themselves and their own abilities to work within the design and media contexts. Over time, Marnie had realised that her students seemed not to believe that they had a 'voice' of any consequence and using design to engage in social commentary (albeit at a rudimentary level) through image manipulation and film-making had been very empowering for them. She explained:

We've had class discussions at viewing points ... we've viewed students works ... we've got a routine where when we view a work ... the filmmakers ... the students who made it have the first say ... that's their opportunity to actually say .... "oh, well that worked well, this didn't work

well, we could change this etc” ... and the class have been prepped in such a way that they applaud ... everyone applauds and its constructive criticism. Quite an affirming experience. And ... we've been viewing visual material (for example – adverts) ... so as we've been looking at those we've been talking about the values represented and the function of those adverts ... what they are actually used for and what the film maker intended ... so that's all 'arts in society'. The students really enjoy reading those images .... so codes, conventions, symbols, those have been a really strong point.

### **The remainder of the year**

Following the May meeting, Marnie and Janine periodically kept in touch via email and telephone that appeared to work well for the both of them, given their hectic teaching schedules. I spoke with Marnie and Janine from time to time to see how the mentoring relationship was functioning and was informed that it largely operated on a 'needs-only' basis. For the most part, Marnie would simply contact Janine when she felt she needed support. The frequency of these contacts declined significantly in the second semester of the 2006 school year, with only three email/phone contacts occurring between July and November. Both Marnie and Janine appeared to be happy with the move to a more informal mentoring style following Beth's departure in May that seemed to have been a catalyst for the shift. I asked both women whether they would like to meet formally as a group to conclude the year, but neither seemed keen to do this, so I left the option open and focused on attending the meetings of other groups.

### **July 2006**

In July 2006 I heard from Marnie again and she advised me that she had continued to prioritise a focus on design fundamentals and foundation skills in ICT/media within her middle-school students' learning programs. I asked whether Janine was still providing mentoring support and what benefit this offered as the year progressed. Marnie advised that she regularly sent Janine an email updating how things were going and often asked for suggestions to consolidate this work. The emails I received from Marnie always made reference to feeling quite stressed by the school structures and lack of support for new teachers. She said that she was feeling quite stressed much of the time and considered that on a number of occasions the only thing that had stopped her from resigning from her position at the school was the affirmation and encouragement offered to her by Janine. Marnie said that the conversations she had with Janine helped her believe that not all schools were like the one at which she taught; despite having grown very fond of the children, Marnie was increasingly considering applying for other positions which might provide more support for new teachers.

### **October 2006**

In October of 2006, Marnie advised me that she was feeling completely overwhelmed by her beginning-teacher experience and confided that she had recently been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder which had come to a head at the beginning of term four. On the advice of friends and family Marnie sought professional counselling and with their support had begun to manage her stress levels over the last months of the year. She said that she had taken Janine's advice and now regularly participated in visual arts studio workshops that both extended and consolidated her visual arts skills and provided some relief from stress. Marnie said that as her visual arts expertise broadened she felt increasingly that, in a different school setting, she would be able to assist her students achieve their visual literacy potential regardless of whether they were visual arts or media students. Marnie also said that she was increasingly giving thought to her longer-term employment options and acknowledged that that consideration had prioritised the studio workshops in order to add to her employment profile. She felt that her improved skills base in visual arts would make her more employable in another school should her

position not be ongoing and I discerned that there was something of a fatalist tone to the conversation ... as though Marnie felt that she was preparing for the inevitable.

### **November 2006**

At the end of 2006 I sent Marnie a reflective questionnaire about the mentoring process and asked her to evaluate the impact that mentoring had had on her induction into the profession and her success in the area of visual literacy education. After several follow-up queries from me about the questionnaire, she explained that she was unlikely to complete it due to time constraints. Marnie again noted that she felt as if her life was on the verge of being out of control; completing the questionnaire was an extra job that she simply did not have time to do. She did, however, make some observations about the mentoring project in email correspondence and said that the experience had been particularly useful in the early stages of the year when her employment circumstances were uncertain. During that period, Janine had been a source of reassurance for Marnie and a sounding board for her ideas. As the year progressed, Janine's suggestions had translated into tangible strategies for improving the results of teaching within the design-media context. Given Marnie's employment in a teaching role (media) other than visual arts (which was her major teaching specialisation), Janine's presence as her mentor had the two-fold benefit of maintaining her connection to her major discipline whilst offering her affirming support in a neutral external context – Marnie could ask any question of Janine without fearing her status or standing would be diminished. In her email, Marnie made the following comments:

Essentially.. I'm actually quite amazed and rapped that even though there were negative things about my first year of working experience, I just cant believe how good the year has been really. The Graduate Diploma was great and the mentoring program (and my mentor Janine) were fantastic.

Here I am, actually teaching - all of a sudden I've got a career from just one year of study. I know I did all the under graduate study but how many times have people said "oh you've got an Arts degree – so what" I've realised that that was something deep down inside colouring my belief about myself.

So between the one year Graduate Diploma and the mentoring support, here I am in a job that I love ... and I'm on my way. So it's essentially really positive.

I continued to stay in contact with Marnie throughout the next year (2007) and although this did not form part of the study, it is worthy of note that Marnie remained at her school despite having believed the position would end with the 2006 school year. She remarked that it was only in her second year of teaching that she felt as if she was in control of the basic fundamentals of school life. Interestingly, Marnie told me in late 2007 that she considered that she would probably have derived far greater benefit from having had a mentor for subject-discipline content knowledge and visual literacy education in her second and third year of teaching ... the first year had been all about surviving the day-to-day challenges of managing students, school bureaucracy and life beyond the school. Marnie concluded an email to me with the observation:

I expect Janine will remain a life long friend and personality in my life.

I was delighted to hear that Janine and Marnie had become good friends in the period since the mentoring project began and were apparently still catching up every three months or so over a meal or drink. Marnie mentioned that, despite now being good friends, Janine continued to maintain something of a quasi-mentoring role and imparted very useful insights, advice and ideas about teaching and life skills for coping with

school challenges. In 2007, Marnie entered several of her students' work into the Young Originals Competition that was an elite and highly competitive industry award for excellence in visual arts /design studies. Marnie was successful in having two Visual Communication and Design students' work included in the exhibition and was delighted at the impact her teaching and learning program appeared to be having on students' success and external recognition. Marnie's mentor, Janine, emailed me to let me know of her success and reflected:

Marnie has gone on to become a highly successful teacher at her school, we still keep in touch, she had some of her students photography selected for the "Young Originals", at the time she hadn't realised the prestige of this and I was able to congratulate her and compliment her on this achievement as she was less inclined to appear unknowing among her immediate colleagues at her school. The expectations and demand for self reliance on teachers at her school seems quite high and this can be daunting for a new teacher; having a "Safe friend" enabled her to question some of these expectations and manage them with confidentiality.

She noted:

Because of my growing stress levels and lack of coping in term 2 and 3 coupled up with Beth's withdrawal, I could not offer the time even for a coffee meeting. Because of Beth's withdrawal I felt embarrassed that the program would run just for me taking Janine and Lisa's time. Once I gained some skills for coping with my anxiety disorder during term 4 and over the first holiday break I contacted Janine again. I am now feeling more confident and worthwhile as a teacher.

I enjoyed speaking with Janine and gained so much from her presence during 2006 that I kept in contact during 2007 (the year after the actual mentoring program finished). This was when I received the most impact from the mentoring program. I am extremely grateful to Lisa for the help she provided and for the connection that she arranged between Janine and myself.

## APPENDIX ELEVEN: JANINE'S STORY

### **The first meeting – March 2006**

At the first meeting, Janine listened in a somewhat dismayed manner to the stories Marnie relayed about the challenges she was navigating in her new position. Janine expressed the view, several times during the conversation, that she considered it a tragedy that beginning-teachers repeatedly appeared to be simply left to fend for themselves in new and unfamiliar teaching contexts. She said that this was probably a by-product of the changes associated with WACF, in that experienced teachers seemed to be too busy to worry about younger teaching colleagues, despite themselves having undoubtedly needed support at the time they commenced their own careers.

Janine was startled to hear that Marnie had to manage large, mainstream classes without training or support, into which students with ADHD, autism and hearing impairment/deafness had been blended. She urged Marnie, as a matter of urgency, to meet with her line manager to seek a review of her teaching allocation. Janine listened to Marnie's reservations about meeting with her line manager (Marnie seemed to feel that she should be grateful to have a job at all and was reluctant to 'make waves') and encouraged her to 'stand up for herself' since it appeared that her line manager was either unwilling or unable to support her. Beth's more positive experiences did little to overcome Janine's sense of sadness and frustration about Marnie's plight and she left the meeting feeling (like Marnie before her) somewhat disillusioned and flat; it was as if she had absorbed Marnie's emotional disposition, leaving Marnie buoyed and herself deflated.

As a silent observer at the meeting, I wondered about this absorption process and pondered the dynamic which had begun to play out in this mentoring partnership. Janine's response to her recipient's situation had a markedly similar quality to that of another mentor, Tess, who had also been alarmed at the experience of her beginning-teachers. Both mentors had remarked to me at various times that they felt it was unacceptable that new teachers were simply left to fend for themselves, or worse still, were almost exploited by staff at their schools. Janine said that she spent many hours thinking about Marnie's situation and tried to devise solutions for the challenges associated with the special-needs students she had to teach. I reflected on the similarity between Janine and Tess, in that they both seemed to feel that it was up to them to 'fix' the difficulties their beginning-teachers were experiencing.

I wondered about the stress this generated for the mentors and included in my field notes questions about coping mechanisms for these busy teachers and the likelihood of them repeating the mentoring process from year to year. This reflective process underlined the critical and potentially problematic, issue of procurement of mentors. I questioned why mentors would agree to make themselves available on more than one occasion if the first experience proved stressful. I raised this with both Janine and Tess and they each reflected that, whilst they were happy to participate in the mentoring, other school-based teachers might not agree to be involved if the process generated extra work or stress. Tess put it simply and asked, 'What's in it for them?'. At a time of extensive education reform embodied in the WACF and particularly preparations for the new courses of study at the senior-school level, this question was both pertinent and extremely problematic. I simply could not identify a rationale for repeated involvement in mentoring and accepted Tess's observation that altruism was a fleeting thing and that

most mentors would be unlikely to participate in a second year. During one of these conversations, Janine suggested that perhaps the beginning-teachers could come and help out in the mentor's school whilst they were still students at university; if that went well, the mentor might be well disposed to 'return the favour the following year'. This provided a tangible solution to the question of 'what's in it for the school-based teachers?' This fledgling conversation developed over time into the Artist- in-Residence reciprocal mentoring model described in chapter 5.

### **The second meeting – May 2006**

I was unable to attend the second meeting for this group; Beth, whose health was by now deteriorating, was also absent. I asked Janine to give me some feedback about the second meeting; she responded not only with a report on Marnie's progress, but a synopsis of her involvement in the program so far. Janine worried that Marnie appeared to be under considerable stress and increasingly seemed to doubt her suitability for both the teaching profession and the visual arts. Janine had urged Marnie to pursue her own visual arts practice, because she reflected that at stressful times during her own teaching career this had proven an invaluable stress-management device. Janine also observed that both Marnie and Beth had at various times expressed concern about the lack of time they now had to continue their own work as artists; each had worried that they might not be able to nurture this part of their professional knowledge. Janine had urged each of them to make time if at all possible; further, she had recommended that they enrol in professional development workshops to learn new techniques. Janine felt that the passion practising artists brought to the teaching of visual arts was a critical component of inspiring students to themselves feel passionate about art. Janine did not complete the end-of-year questionnaire and had not maintained a journal. I asked her if she could put something in writing about her experience, to help refine the research, before the commencement of Phase Two in 2007 and she sent me something of a report:

Over the past two years Lisa Paris and I have established a working partnership between my school and Edith Cowan University. The Visual Arts Education Mentoring Research Project that Lisa has undertaken together with her commitment to work in partnership with my school is making a significant contribution towards nurturing a culture of research and innovation as well as promotion of a common interest in the development of education.

Our initial venture started informally and set out to trial initiatives aimed at reciprocal benefits for our students in the teaching and learning of the Visual Arts. We have recognised that my school and Edith Cowan form an educational precinct and creative community that potentially can mutually enhance the engagement of our students and provide professional development for staff and tertiary students. The initiatives have largely been in the area of mentoring, beginning in 2005 and continuing and strengthening in 2006 to the present.

At my school we have a flourishing Arts faculty and a Specialist Visual and Performing Arts program that focuses on collaborative learning and blending the 4 arts. The specialist program aims to introduce the students to an Arts rich education that is unique to our school and aims to open up pathways into contemporary and creative arts. From an initiative in 2005 placing Grad Dip pre-service students to work collaboratively with our Specialist year 10s in creating an original multi arts presentation, the model of mentoring has continued to develop. A culture of collaboration in the Arts has steadily developed at my school and we are constantly looking to enhance unique learning opportunities for our students and due to our close proximity we have set out to make the best use of facilities and expertise at our disposal.

As an established senior teacher and the Teacher in charge of Visual arts at my school I am keen to enhance opportunities and nurture support and innovation in joint endeavours. I am currently attached to the senior school and working with the TEE students therefore my main concern is in motivating these potential graduating students. My interest has been to provide my students enrichment through contact with tertiary students as role models of successful learners and artists and awareness of pathways to further studies in the Visual Arts at a tertiary level. The initiative



established last year whereby Grad Dip pre-service students were extended the invitation to mentor senior students at my school was of an informal nature which allowed for flexibility and an opportunity for them to build confidence in being in the classroom and to share their expertise as artists. Other benefits included having assistance in the classroom as an aid and tutoring support. The tertiary students also bring youthful enthusiastic energy, recent training and current curriculum knowledge in mentoring the secondary students.

The development of an ongoing opportunity for ECU students to mentor and be mentored over a two year period can place them in a stronger role of sharing within the profession. My involvement as a mentor has provided me with further professional development and increase of skills through the training workshops and opening up of professional discourse and networking with other mentors, mentees and University staff in a research project. I value the role of mentoring in enhancing my own professional reputation and developing further knowledge and skills which has lead me to consider carrying out further studies at a Masters level in the future. This current research project has the potential to enhance and expand in the future some of the aspirations of the Memorandum of Understanding to further innovation, curriculum development, enrichment programs, pre-service and professional development, shared research and the development of a teaching school relationship.

## APPENDIX TWELVE: ANNA'S STORY

### **The First Meeting: February 2006**

The first meeting for this group occurred a few weeks after the training workshop; Anna, Jocelyn and I met at a café in Fremantle. Everyone was a little late getting to the meeting because parking had been difficult to find, but the group had resolved at the training workshop to meet in different locations on each occasion, in an effort to accommodate the different suburbs in which we all lived. The choice to meet in Fremantle took account of the fact that Lesley was living south of Perth and had been appointed to a teaching position in Mandurah, a sea-side town approximately 50kms from the city. We waited for Lesley, but after 15 minutes the meeting commenced, because one of the fundamental premises for the meeting structures was that they should remain within the one-hour time frame.

After the initial pleasantries I asked Anna to update Jocelyn and I on the employment interview she had attended with the Department of Education and Training at the end of 2006 and on her subsequent posting to her school. Anna commented that, despite initially not having been offered a teaching position, she believed her persistence and frequent enquiries about 2007 teaching appointments had ultimately led to her being offered a metropolitan assignment rather than a country posting.

She was delighted that her teaching load encompassed work in her two teaching specialisations of visual arts and design technology. Anna explained that she was happy to be teaching in a Government school; this appealed to her (as she described it) "left of centre - social justice sensibilities" for an egalitarian society, but she indicated her desire to teach in a Non-Government school at some point in the future. I asked her to elaborate on this desire to work in a Non-Government school in the future and she explained that she had formed the impression that the private sector was generally better resourced than the state system. She went on to say that she had joined the visual arts Education Association of WA and colleagues in that organisation had led her to believe that Non-Government school appointments were considered to be more prestigious than those in the state sector. As a result, Anna had formed the view that working in a Non-Government school would be good for her CV and longer-term career prospects and aspirations.

Jocelyn, Anna's mentor, agreed that teaching in a Non-Government school was a desirable experience for all teachers at some point in their career. She was interested to hear that Anna's practicum experiences had largely been in Government schools, including one where she had participated in a formal gifted and talented specialist visual arts program. Following this exchange, Anna talked for a little while about her practicum placements and expressed the view that it seemed as though demands made on staff in the state system seemed less rigorous than those in the private sector. She described her current position and past practicum placements as very 'laid back'. Jocelyn agreed that this relaxed style often seemed to be the norm in Government schools; but she urged Anna to nonetheless maintain a vigilant approach to her teaching and suggested that she begin documenting her achievements in preparation for her performance management appraisal which all new teachers had to complete during their first year. As the researcher for the group, I suggested that the mentoring journal each person had received during the initial training workshop, might be an appropriate place for this 'cumulative record of achievements' to be documented. Anna agreed that the journal appeared useful, but noted that she had quite recently received documentation

about the forthcoming performance review and there appeared to be provision for record keeping in those materials. She indicated that she would probably use this facility for her review, but said that she hoped to maintain the journal as a part of her participation in the research.

Jocelyn asked Anna how she was finding the first few weeks of the school year; Anna explained that, despite the apparently relaxed teaching environment, she often felt quite stressed, particularly with regard to her design technology classes. She continued, that when she accepted the appointment she had automatically expected that there would be resources available within the school to support the teaching and learning program, but this had proven to be incorrect. Anna noted that the other teachers in the department had all been at the school for many years and had their own teaching resources which (whilst they were happy to share them) were significantly outdated. Jocelyn asked Anna why she believed the resources were outdated. Anna responded that she had formed this view in the light of the materials which had been reviewed during her university education, particularly the Graduate Diploma, in combination with the standards which applied in the industry setting. She had asked her Head of Department if she could use alternative learning program/resources in preference to the ones the school had traditionally employed, but (given her inexperience) had been asked to trial the existing programs before making changes. Anna had then raised the possibility of updating the existing programs to encompass more contemporary approaches to technology and design in education, but had received a resounding 'no' from her colleagues and Head of Department. This caused her significant frustration, because her industry experience and postgraduate studies had all been centred on contemporary approaches to both subject discipline and pedagogy and she believed that the learning programs were counter-productive to the visual-literacy education agenda she maintained.

Resistance by colleagues to her suggestions for updating courses caused Anna to feel considerable stress and this was exacerbated by what she described as attempts by other staff to take advantage of her as a consequence of her 'new teacher' status. She explained that two teachers in the physical education department at the school had pressured her into to swapping her yr 8 supervised study group (within the school pastoral care program) for a more challenging class that she described as 'the naughty yr 9 rugby boys'. Her original group had been a small and well-behaved yr 8 class and the attempts to (as she put it) 'offload the naughty class' onto her had caused her significant stress. She felt that she was being taken advantage of and did not know what to do, or to whom she should speak. Anna explained that there was very little for the 'naughty rugby boys' to do in the study group session that made matters worse; in an effort to improve the quality of the learning experience, she had begun devising worksheets for the students to complete.

Predictably, there were significant behaviour problems manifest among students with nothing to do and Anna had attempted to apply her pre-service training to manage the behaviour challenge. The physical education staff had expressed concern that, since they did not give worksheets to their study groups, it was not appropriate for Anna to do so either; the study period was for homework completion and some students had complained about the work Anna was distributing. These experienced staff seemed to believe that it was preferable for students with no homework to simply sit in the room with nothing to do other than complete the visual arts puzzle worksheets Anna had devised. One teacher had recommended that Anna tell the students to simply "put their head down on the desk and have a sleep". Anna explained that she felt compromised by these 'silly' suggestions; she continued to distribute the worksheets, much to the ire of

the physical education staff. Anna's awareness that her colleagues were unhappy with her made her feel vulnerable; her appointment was only a short term contract assignment and she was having trouble managing the stress that derived from these interactions.

Jocelyn (her mentor) listened as Anna described the events which had occurred during her first month of teaching and agreed that these 'other aspects of the school context' were negatively affecting Anna's capacity to do her job. She reassured Anna that (whilst unpleasant) such experiences were regrettably quite typical of those experienced by beginning-teachers (and experienced teachers) everywhere. Jocelyn recommended that Anna meet with her Head of Learning Area to discuss the unauthorised substitution of the 'study group', with a view to having the 'switch' reversed. She also talked about the vulnerability of new teachers to unreasonable demands from co-workers (who might not even appreciate the stress this caused the new teacher) and encouraged Anna to speak up for herself. Jocelyn expressed the view that induction into the profession was difficult enough in its own right, without beginning-teachers having to navigate other unnecessary stressors. This simple advice and 'affirmation' by Jocelyn, that it was reasonable for Anna to feel ill-at-ease with the pressure her colleagues were imposing on her, seemed to encourage Anna to stand firm and tackle the issues with her Head of Department. She said she would do this as soon as possible.

Jocelyn then went on to consider the issue of the school's outdated design technology learning programs and resources and agreed that this was a little more difficult to navigate. She considered that this was especially the case, given Anna's description of the Head of Learning Area as being 'territorial' about the programs. According to Anna, the staff who were currently at the school had devised the programs over many years, appeared dismissive of the views of a younger female beginning-teacher (despite her having many years experience within the design industry) and were unwilling to consider changes. Jocelyn suggested that, in such a political climate, it might be preferable to trial the programs on an 'as is' basis and then engage in moderating processes for assessment. This would allow an opportunity to identify ways in which the learning programs could be improved without incurring significant costs (which had been cited as one of the objections to change). Anna said that she would try this approach and appeared happier about both issues than she had on arrival. Jocelyn then chatted about the 'rugby boys' behaviour management and cited several successful strategies she employed in her classes with difficult and disengaged students. Anna agreed that these suggestions were valuable; she left the meeting feeling much more positive than she had been when she had arrived.

### **The second meeting: March 2007**

The second meeting for this group occurred in March 2007 at a café in Mt. Lawley. Anna had arrived a few minutes early and had already ordered coffee; she and I had begun chatting by the time Jocelyn arrived. When she finally did arrive, Jocelyn's demeanour was a little flustered. She described feeling very tired and somewhat stressed by the politics which were unfolding within her school, a situation which had resulted from the combining of visual arts and media into one department, for which she had co-ordination responsibilities. Jocelyn's suggestions during the first meeting of a 'hostile take-over' of the media department had by now become much clearer statements and she noted that she felt this was a situation she would need to deal with over time. This was causing Jocelyn some stress, because some staff in the media area were clearly unhappy about having been subsumed into the visual arts area. Jocelyn noted that her

sense of tiredness had been exacerbated by the onset of the usual round of term one reports that were exhausting and extremely time-consuming.

The topic of reports was relevant for Anna, also, as her school had similarly begun reporting, but very little information had been provided to her about what to do or what was expected of her. Jocelyn responded by describing the reporting protocols at her own school and stressed the value of gathering evidence progressively throughout the term to support the assessment and reporting process. She noted that, in her department, many of the teachers used the student's visual diary as an indicator of the student's work ethic as well as a source of evidence for the development of visual-literacy facility. The purpose of the diary was to document the development of students' ideas about the project they were working on; the drawings and annotations provided useful clues about student's conceptual understandings and skills levels in respect of the elements and principles of design – a key indicator for visual language and literacy. Jocelyn stressed that term one reports were typically framed around pastoral care issues; she acknowledged that this could be challenging to report on, especially when new teachers were still getting to know the children.

As she listened to Anna's concerns about reporting protocols, Jocelyn enquired about the kind of support the school formally offered to new teachers. Anna explained that there were other new teachers who had begun working at the school that year, but that she was the only graduate teacher in 2007. She said that there seemed to be an expectation that everyone would simply know what to do and very little induction had been provided. Almost no support had been offered in respect of assessment and reporting and she was now struggling with the demands of the task as a result of having very little information. Anna said that she did not feel comfortable in sharing with her male design technology colleagues the fact that she was unsure about what to do; she felt as though her very job might depend on being 'perfect'.

Anna noted that, whilst she had felt confident with marking and assessment during her practicum when the supervisor was there to guide her judgements, she now felt quite overwhelmed by the task which she had to complete on her own. She confided that she simply did not know what was expected in this school, compared with any other. Jocelyn suggested that this would be an important issue to raise at the performance management interview which all Heads of Learning Area were obliged to undertake with staff each year and suggested that it would be worth asking to see samples of past term one reports. Anna agreed that this was good idea for the next review, but noted that her initial performance management review had already been completed and the next one would not be until much later in the year. Anna continued that the notion that she should just know what was going on in the school seemed to have infiltrated every aspect of her role. She described her colleagues as being 'very casual' or even dismissive about the policies to be followed, though she emphasised they were also 'nice' to her. Anna said she felt as though everyone at the school had forgotten what it was like to be a new teacher and, given she was one of only a few new members of staff that year, almost no provision seemed to have been made to support her induction into the school; everyone simply expected her to "get on with it".

To prepare for her recent performance management review, Anna had begun keeping her own 'record of performance'; here she noted her achievements and listed evidence which might support her claims in regarding the teacher competencies against which the review was measured. She said that this strategy that Jocelyn had suggested at the previous meeting, had been an extremely useful one. Anna noted that the very act of

recording her achievements in Design Technology and Visual Arts classes had begun to give her a sense of ownership of the groups she taught. There continued to be tension, she noted, between herself, as the current teacher of the subject and other staff who had developed the programs which she had been obliged to deliver. Anna had many excellent ideas about ways in which the content for photography, particularly, could be made more relevant for students, but her attempts to implement the materials had been largely blocked by the Head of Learning Area. The reality of her status as the 'new female graduate' in an all-male learning area of staff who had been there for many years, appeared to sit uneasily with Anna, who believed that her content knowledge was both sound and contemporary, given her industry experience. She felt extremely frustrated that she was not being 'allowed' to implement the knowledge that she had, particularly since she was convinced that the outcomes for students would be much improved in respect of their visual-literacy and practical skills. Anna said she felt that many of the behaviour management challenges which continued to beset her arose directly from student's boredom; she maintained that, by changing the program structures, she felt convinced she could overcome a significant number of these problems.

Jocelyn agreed that 'ownership' was a difficult issue in schools where staff had been employed over many years, but she emphasised that it would be important for Anna to have input into the structure of the subjects she was teaching. She also suggested that the boredom factor might be related to the traditional nature of the content material that may have appeared to students to have little or no connection to contemporary life and the potential for 'real jobs'. Anna agreed this was quite likely and welcomed Jocelyn's suggestion that she encourage students to identify employment contexts where visual arts and design technology skills might be valuable. Jocelyn continued that the students themselves could create posters promoting a range of professions; over time, Anna could target skills-acquisition related to the students' interests and personal research.

### **The third meeting – postponed with an update via email**

I received an email in early June from Anna cancelling the third meeting for the group, in which she outlined a number of issues which were causing her stress and concern:

Dear Jocelyn and Lisa, is it possible to change the date of this weekends meeting?, I think I am struggling against time as I have to do all my marking by next Tuesday and the system has not given me access to my classes ( a Government system thing I think) (the admin is shocking). I realise that you are both frightfully busy and my late cancellation has possibly put you both out as I am sure you have had a lot on your agendas and have turned events down because of me. I apologise profusely and feel very bad, as I secretly pride my self on being able to handle all of these things.

What I can tell you is – I have learnt to basically produce POLICE reports when dealing with violence whilst on lunch time duty...drama... drama...drama..... I have had very little support with marking and grading and have only just been shown the new system – which is why I am freaking out, as I am worried about justifying myself to parents when I have only recently been told how I am meant to grade their children!!!!!! Sh\*t . – why give A, B, C's when we are dealing with levels???????

It all just seems so chaotic ... I really don't know if I'm 'getting it right' ... any of it!! Feel like I'm just barely holding it all together ... really appreciate you both being there ... someone to talk honestly to about all this stuff and get some good advice. Some of the teachers I am working with are misogynistic old pervs who don't give a damn about their jobs as they retire in 3 years and I really have to struggle to get accurate answer regarding outcomes for year 9 materials D&T. I was only told about a WACOT training day on "marking and assessment" by the

administration staff at this school the day before it was to be held. (Tony the Lecturer in D&T at ECU is GREAT by the way – he has been and enormous help).

Jocelyn ... personally ... your tips on difficult teenage girls (by winning them over with flattery) has worked a charm. I have managed to get one girl to not “quit school and have babies” and she has stuck with photography with the idea that she will pursue a career in media (I have never in my life seen such a turn-around in attitude ... she used to insult me in front of everyone ... really nasty stuff ... am so pleased with her positive attitude and now bright future. In order to win over these scary girls I have offered a mini lunch time course in photo shopping Zits (they only like to look at photos of themselves anyway). This has won me much respect. Girls, I very much look forward to catching up with you..I do sincerely hope that my cancellation of this weekend has not put you out. Apologies most sincerely once again and can we reschedule for another time soon?. Much love, Anna

A few days later I received another email from Anna, further elaborating her concerns. I discerned that some issues were becoming especially problematic; there was something of a ‘cry for help’ tone about the correspondence:

Hi Lisa, I think I am at the stage now where I am focussing more on actual teaching rather than behaviour that is a relief. My initial confidence in teaching visual arts history, reading and evaluating images after to finishing your course was very strong, however, since being placed in the position I am now and I am feeling a little "shattered" and need to focus again on these areas. The first part of the year was heavily focused on Photography skills i.e. how to develop film etc.....and of course behaviour management. As I have previously mentioned in our meetings I am currently quite restricted by the pre-written course structure that I am not overly happy with as I don't feel it really delivers what it needs to, or what is relevant to students today. I realise, not surprisingly, a lot of the female teachers have been very supportive in letting me know I should feel free to do what I feel is best and not feel hemmed in by the patriarchal and practical practices in Design and Technology and photography teaching. This has recently given me more confidence.

I do plan to start over the next few weeks to begin focussing heavily in the area of ‘arts ideas’ and ‘arts in society’ by creating motivational power-point presentations demonstrating successful contemporary photographers and by bringing some visual arts (story board drawing) and more digital media into photography ... just to get away from the laborious technical stuff students hate for a while. I really want to get the students to create PP's themselves and animatics (digital photographic stories). At the moment I feel I am not providing nearly enough of this (too busy just surviving) and realise that the students need me to provide more cultural/artistic references for them in order to put all their new found technical knowledge into some context. I have attempted to get students to do the research themselves, but feel they are still lacking a lot of the skills - or life experience - needed to complete such tasks.

A major conflicting factor to my progress (and the students’ progress) has been the lack of computer equipment and space available within the school. The ICT is very poor and I am very reliant on the ICT. My biggest challenge is to find a way to juggle the equipment and create paper based work that students find engaging and challenging (or they simply won't do it and do not care if they fail).....so, that's what I need to do and to motivate these students who do not see the important part visual arts plays in their everyday life!! Sorry I know this is more info than you need and I do waffle a bit. I hope this year has been going well and thanks again for taking an interest in graduates.

Despite some email correspondence about a third face-to-face meeting, there were only two meetings and some intermittent email correspondence between March and June for this group. Jocelyn continued to mentor Anna remotely via email and telephone. Over time, aspects of the relationship Anna had with her colleagues improved to the point where she could begin to make changes to a more progressive style of teaching and learning.

Periodically, I received other emails from Anna and noted that her concerns about the nature of teaching and learning increasingly began to encompass concerns about an undercurrent of violence within the student population of the school. She remarked that, whilst her behaviour-management skills had increased enormously (with extremely valuable advice and tips from Jocelyn), she often did not feel safe and was aware that other staff and students experienced similar concerns.

As the year drew to a close, Anna expressed the view in her emails that, as her colleagues slowly agreed to allow her to update material, her sense of professional wellbeing and satisfaction also improved; she felt that she was being increasingly effective in improving her students' visual-literacy skills. She observed on a number of occasions that it was really only toward the end of the first year that she felt she was really teaching. She reflected that, until that time, it had been a matter of simply surviving the obstacles and politics that seemed to regularly interfere with the teaching and learning experience.

At the end of her reflection and review questionnaire Anna noted:

The mentor program has already proved invaluable to me as a beginning-teacher. Though I am a mature aged entry teacher with a wide range of industry experience, none of my previous professional roles could have possibly prepared me for the complex world of teaching. The responsibility and pressure to perform the minute one enters a classroom is immense and to have encouragement and support is vital to surviving in this profession. Adopting and implementing methods suggested by my mentor-teacher, Jocelyn Dilkes has already helped me to deliver better lessons and to cope with the new environment of a school. The many years of excellent experience my mentor-teacher has and is able to pass on, though she may not even realise it, is greatly appreciated and I do hang on her every word knowing that this advice has grown from many years of her own professional growth as a teacher.

Having an external mentor/mentoree partnership, as opposed to one within the school environment in which I work, is important as it helps to maintain one's own educational philosophy and to not be hindered, or swayed in the direction of the particular school's philosophical system that at times may not be in line with your views of education. This program offers more personal assistance to mentoree's as opposed to the many PD's offered by DET. It gives the beginning-teacher the individual time for one on one discussion. I sincerely hope that future graduates receive the same undiluted support that I did as they enter the teaching profession. Lisa Paris' EDU Arts course and the Mentor program are testimony to ECU's dedication to the West Australian education system.

In early 2008 I received a final email from Anna further endorsing the benefits of the mentoring program and reiterating her belief that the provision of external mentoring had had a hugely beneficial impact on her induction experience and first year of teaching:

**Mon 18<sup>th</sup> February 2008**

Hi Lisa, I was very pleased to get through the first year – the hardest of my life! In retrospect I probably did not make the most of Jocelyn due to some of my classes being in other learning areas and I was simply trying to keep my head above water. My school is a very challenging one, especially for a graduate. The violence within the school alone was a huge thing for me to deal with. This year, however, has so far been great. My classroom management skills have improved enormously and I am now teaching only jewellery and photography – a huge weight off my shoulders. I have re-written the course for photography and have introduced more Arts Ideas, Arts in Society & Arts Responses exercises that are more specific to each project and introduce



more contemporary and relevant influences that are broader than just photography its self. I just need the department to get a digital projector. I feel that the second year is the year when I can really start improving my teaching skills and a mentor would be of more benefit to someone like me. The school offered me a 3 year contract to apply for permanency, however, I will only be teaching until June as I will be off on maternity leave for a year – Yay! Thanks again, best regards, Anna

## **APPENDIX THIRTEEN: LESLEY'S STORY**

### **About Lesley**

Lesley failed to attend the first meeting of her group, but contacted her mentor, Jocelyn, a week later and explained that (whilst she had indeed intended to come to the meeting) the journey to Perth had proven difficult for her. She also doubted that she would be able to make other meetings very often. Lesley enquired whether Jocelyn would be prepared to mentor her remotely via telephone and email and explained that, despite not teaching art, she was actually very happy with her progress to date. She continued that the staff at the school had been extremely supportive of her as a new teacher and that the formal induction offered by the school had been very useful. Lesley said she would be very happy to forgo contacting her mentor until she had something specific to discuss.

Jocelyn agreed that this would be fine, but said she was unsure about the extent to which she could offer assistance to Lesley with respect to teaching English. Jocelyn went on to say that, if there were any administrative issues or behaviour-management issues which needed to be addressed, she would be more than happy to help; she had many practical strategies which she believed would be of value to Lesley as a beginning-teacher. She suggested that there might be some overlapping areas between the teaching traditional text-based literacy skills associated with the English learning area and contemporary visual-literacy skills associated with the visual arts, but she was unsure how these would be manifest. Jocelyn suggested that it would probably be important for Lesley to find a subject-discipline specialist (English teacher) who could offer additional guidance and advice, but she was nonetheless happy to offer any help Lesley might need. Jocelyn and Lesley had ended their conversation on this basis, but at the second meeting, Jocelyn relayed that she had had no further contact with Lesley and sensed that Lesley might be withdrawing from the process.

As the researcher for the project I contacted Lesley to enquire about her intentions for the research. Lesley disclosed that she might leave the mentoring program at some future time, though she liked Jocelyn and respected her expertise as an experienced visual arts teacher. She would like to leave this option open, if that was acceptable to Jocelyn. I agreed that this seemed reasonable and suggested that I would follow up periodically to see how she was going. Lesley appeared happy with this open-ended arrangement and expressed the desire to teach visual arts in the future, noting that having Jocelyn as a mentor would be invaluable should this occur.

I subsequently heard from Lesley that, despite being appreciative of the opportunity to be mentored by Jocelyn, she had decided to withdraw from the program, because her teaching load was entirely outside her specialisation of visual arts. Lesley had been given a teaching appointment in the English learning area and did not believe that she would have any opportunity to teach within the visual arts. I asked her if there might be some benefit from remaining within the program, because of the connection between English and visual arts in the form of literacy issues (traditional literacy for English and visual-literacy for art). In both instances students are learning to work with text (language-based or visually-based) for the purpose of constructing meaning and deriving meaning from texts. Lesley considered this and agreed to remain in the program; but she said it was unlikely that she would be able to come to the meetings, because her school was based in Mandurah, south of Perth. She suggested that she would be willing to continue to participate in the program through a 'virtual' mentoring format via email and telephone and I encouraged her to discuss this with Jocelyn to ensure that this was

agreeable to everyone. Although Jocelyn was happy to mentor Lesley on a remote basis, the placement ultimately broke down; thereafter, Jocelyn continued only to mentor Anna.

No attempt has been made to reconcile Lesley's early comments with the research questions. When I contacted her, late in 2007, she advised that she would again be teaching exclusively in the English learning area in 2008; further, she had resigned herself to the possibility that she might not teach visual arts in the foreseeable future after all.

## APPENDIX FOURTEEN: JOCELYN'S STORY

### **The first meeting:**

Jocelyn and Anna met in mid-February, at a café in Fremantle, for the first time since being paired at the training workshop on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2007. Jocelyn had been employed for eight years at an exclusive girls' college as the Head of Art and had recently been appointed to a new leadership position as Head of Creative and Performing arts. The promotion had generated some ill-feeling with staff in the media department at MLC, as a consequence of what Jocelyn described as a 'hostile take-over' when media was subsumed (at the direction of the school principal) into the Arts Learning Area. Jocelyn was navigating some hostility from staff while simultaneously attempting to familiarise herself with new post-compulsory courses of study for visual arts, design and media. Furthermore, the school had recently undergone a significant restructuring of timetabling procedures; this had resulted in an extra period being added to the 10-day cycle which configured the timetable, with the net effect that all periods through the day had shortened.

This shortening of periods was creating difficulties for Jocelyn, because there was little turn-around time between classes; both staff and students were unhappy with the new structure. Jocelyn's offer to mentor two beginning-teachers (Anna and Lesley) added extra responsibilities to her already significant teaching load and she expressed a sense of feeling a little 'stretched' by her circumstances. Anna arrived at the meeting and began chatting about her new teaching appointment whilst the group waited for Lesley. After some 15 minutes the meeting commenced without Lesley, who failed to attend.

I asked Jocelyn how she was feeling about the mentoring process so far. Jocelyn explained that (despite being an experienced teacher) she was a little uncertain about the extent to which she would be of value to her two protégés; but she took comfort from discovering that the other mentors at the training workshop had expressed similar reservations. The workshop itself had proven very useful for her in clearly defining the role of the mentor and the boundaries of the relationship with recipients. She expressed the hope that her practical advice about what to teach and how to manage student behaviour might be of some value to the Lesley and Anna.

Jocelyn asked Anna to begin the meeting by describing her background and the new school setting in which she had been employed. Throughout the meeting Jocelyn listened to the issues Anna raised about her colleagues and behaviour-management challenges and took notes in her research journal as a record of the conversation for later reference. She was very interested in the gender composition of Anna's department at the school and noted the imbalance in Anna being the only woman in the department. Jocelyn expressed surprise at the resistance Anna described having experienced in response to her suggestions to update the existing programs for design and technology. The dialogue between the two women flowed easily; Jocelyn interposed questions, suggestions and practical strategies to support Anna's teaching.

Jocelyn identified 'respect' as a significant theme for all beginning- teachers; she emphasised the need to establish clear boundaries for students in respect of behaviour, rights and responsibilities. Toward the end of the meeting Jocelyn identified practical issues, including the establishment of a seating plan, display of art-room rules and clear

expectations of and consequences for behaviour; she emphasised the importance of gaining 'control' of the group before any teaching could really begin. Jocelyn noted that clear behaviour expectations for students were critical in establishing and maintaining the rapport needed for teaching. Anna agreed and confessed that she had felt as if behaviour management represented a significant challenge for her – particularly in respect of the 'rugby boys'. Anna was extremely appreciative of Jocelyn's suggestions and took notes in her research journal to support her implementation of the ideas.

As Jocelyn talked, she gave examples of the issues she was raising. Among other things, she spoke of the challenges which accompanied children with special needs, including those with ADHD and other similar conditions. Jocelyn talked about the importance of giving such children a sense of purpose and a feeling of importance in the class, through allocating responsibility for specific tasks. Anna noted that this appeared to be a different approach from that advocated by her colleagues at her school, who tended to simply remove disruptive children. She noted that there were several children who seemed to spend all their time outside the classroom, as a consequence of having been removed for behavioural reasons. She continued that this had caused her some discomfort, because it appeared to be at odds with her pre-service training that had emphasised the importance of inclusivity for all children.

Jocelyn's suggestions regarding practical strategies for including difficult children resonated with Anna's own sense of what was appropriate and she was much encouraged by the ideas Jocelyn conveyed. By the end of the first meeting, the mentoring role had begun to take shape for Jocelyn, who had clearly enjoyed sharing her expertise with her younger colleague. Her practical suggestions had been well received that had validated her role as mentor. Jocelyn left the meeting with a journal full of notes and a feeling of enthusiasm for the year of mentoring which lay ahead. She encouraged Anna to email or telephone her if she could be of any value; she would try to locate resources she thought might be of value for the classes Anna had described.

### **The Second Meeting:**

The second meeting occurred in March 2007 at a café in Mt. Lawley. Jocelyn was a little late arriving at the meeting; she was clearly feeling stressed and unhappy as she seated herself at the table. Both Anna and I were concerned for her and asked how she was. Jocelyn volunteered that she was feeling quite stressed and remarked that she seemed to be constantly engaged in one quasi conflict or another with staff at her school. This was a new experience for her and a new phenomenon at the school that had a reputation as a harmonious working environment.

Jocelyn went on to explain that, at present (largely as a consequence of what many regarded as a 'hostile' take-over of the media department by visual arts), a number of staff were feeling quite disgruntled and venting their frustrations. Jocelyn was feeling similarly frustrated at constantly having to defend the merger of the media department with the arts learning area, of which she was the co-ordinator. She explained that she had tried to impress upon media staff that the blending of media into the arts learning area was a consequence of wider curriculum reforms initiated by the Curriculum Council of WA over several years. In fact, their school had been slow to implement the compulsory changes. Furthermore, Jocelyn had tried to explain that the school principal had ultimately directed the relocation of media into arts; all staff needed to accept this decision as the prerogative of the school administration. This appeared to have done

little to assuage feelings of ill-will from some staff that was now clearly taking a toll on Jocelyn as the Head of the Arts learning area.

As Jocelyn settled into the meeting over a cup of coffee she began to relax and asked Anna how she was going. After a couple of opening remarks, Anna mentioned that she was struggling to navigate the onset of the reporting period. Jocelyn understood Anna's concerns and advised that she also was feeling worn out by the relentless timeline within which the reporting had to be completed.

Anna was very interested to hear about the reporting procedures which were adopted at Jocelyn's school; although the two schools belonged to different systems, any advice Jocelyn could offer would be most welcome. To date there had been little specific information provided to Anna by her colleagues about what she needed to do; they all simply expected her to know what to do and she didn't feel comfortable in admitting that she was feeling confused. Jocelyn stressed the importance of formative assessment and explained that she placed a lot of emphasis upon the visual diary students completed. She talked about the ways in which the visual diary often gave indications of whether or not a student's level of visual literacy was improving.

Jocelyn was dismayed to hear Anna say that very little help had been provided to her by her colleagues throughout the reporting period; she encouraged Anna to raise this issue formally during her forthcoming performance management appraisal. Jocelyn described the ways in which she supported her own new staff through every aspect of the induction period and emphasised that this was part of the duty statement of both senior teachers and Heads of Learning area. Jocelyn said that the Head of the Arts Learning Area at Anna's school either was not doing his job or was simply unaware that she was struggling. Whatever the case, this was an unacceptable situation that was placing unreasonable demands on a new, graduate teacher at the school. Anna described her sense of frustration, also, at what she saw as the wasting of her years of knowledge and expertise, simply because her colleagues in the all-male Design Technology department would not allow her to implement new ideas and learning opportunities for students. Jocelyn suggested several strategies for persuading other teachers at Anna's school to agree to the updating of material; but, ultimately, Anna's strongest argument might lie in the area of social justice. If Anna truly felt that the current learning program disadvantaged students because of its superseded content, she really had an obligation to make changes to ensure that her students had the same opportunity to learn as students in neighbouring schools.

Jocelyn suggested that Anna might consider demonstrating that there were now new courses of study being implemented in many schools; these were both contemporary and exciting and provided students with a superior and contemporary content knowledge base. Anna might thus be able to shift the focus from her own preferences to what was happening in other schools. Jocelyn spoke about the opportunities for enhancing visual-literacy skills through the design process; she identified a number of software programs which were used at her school, both within visual arts and design/technology that were achieving great results. In a fast-changing world, students who were not provided with access to contemporary material, skills and processes were indeed disadvantaged when compared with their more knowledgeable peers at other schools. Furthermore, students who were still engaged in learning programs with traditional and outdated modes of working, were highly likely to become bored and, predictably, disengaged from quality teaching and learning. Anna agreed that this was a strong argument; but she was worried that her colleagues might just take it personally and view her as stepping

beyond her appropriate place in both the school and learning area. Jocelyn acknowledged that this was problematic and again urged Anna to raise the issue in her next performance management meeting. Anna advised that the meeting would not be for a while, but said she would in fact take Jocelyn's advice, because it was a justice issue both for herself and her students.

**The remainder of the year:**

There was no third meeting for this group. Subsequent contacts between Jocelyn and Anna occurred infrequently and through email/telephone. Anna did send an email thanking Jocelyn for her support; without that support and advice it was possible that she might have left teaching and returned to an industry context. She was convinced that Jocelyn's affirmation, guidance and advice had made a significant difference to the ways in which she navigated the politics of her school and department and, over time, had given her courage to make changes. These changes allowed Anna to implement new ideas in place of the old, tired projects and learning experiences which had dominated the Design Technology programs in which Anna spent much of her teaching time.

## **APPENDIX FIFTEEN: CHLOE'S STORY**

### **Contextual information supporting the emails**

Chloe was an extremely confident and talented young artist who had entered the Graduate Diploma course with a great sense of conviction about the importance of teaching. She was training to be a secondary visual-arts specialist, with English as her minor teaching area. She spent a few hours each week working as a mentor at Janine's school and during the first semester of 2006 developed a strong relationship with both staff and students.

During her AiR placement, Chloe assisted with a range of tasks including:

- mentoring students in visual arts history/criticism (exam preparation);
- studio tutoring support in painting;
- visual inquiry tutoring support;
- after-school visual arts classes in painting;
- multi-arts integration;
- set design and production for the school play;
- murals in the school environment.

According to Janine, Chloe was making a valued contribution as a mentor to secondary students; in addition, she was afforded an opportunity to observe the operation of the visual-arts department as an emic participant. Janine reciprocally became her mentor-teacher when Chloe graduated, began teaching and progressed to participate in the larger research program in 2007. The informal nature of the AiR placement allowed Chloe to acquire subject-discipline/pedagogical content knowledge which was missing from her undergraduate qualification and postgraduate learning experience. Furthermore, the friendship and relationship with Janine formed the foundation of her own later mentoring as a beginning-teacher in an isolated rural context hundreds of miles from Perth. By the end of 2006, Chloe had become a part of the school; she knew the students and staff well and they valued her contribution to their community. When her formal course at ECU came to an end, Chloe expressed sadness that the placement at Janine's school was also coming to an end, but she noted that she was looking forward to her first real teaching appointment. She attended her interview at the Department of Education and Training, applied for a few positions at Non-Government schools and then waited.

Some two months later, with only four days' notice, Chloe was appointed to a school in a small Western Australian country town and had to move away from home for the first time. When she arrived at the school, she was informed that she would be teaching both primary and secondary art, secondary English, maths and society & environment. Chloe later told me that, as soon as the appointment was confirmed, she began preparing learning programs; but she soon realised that, despite a solid teaching preparation for visual arts and English, she was in some trouble. That was when, according to Chloe, "reciprocal mentoring and my mentor, Janine, stepped in to save the day". Chloe advised me that Janine was able to provide her with a range of learning task sheets and suggestions for projects in the arts and also gave her contact details for colleagues who specialised in the other subject disciplines to which Chloe had been appointed.



A few weeks after she arrived at the school, I received two emails from Chloe in quick succession:

**9<sup>th</sup> February 2007**

Dear Lisa, finally able to get onto the internet at school...everything has been crazy busy. I have nine classes in total...seven in art, one maths and one society and environment class. It's really hilarious. I'm LOVING the visual arts teaching...it's kind of nice being the head of my own department...and having a budget to spend! The school used to have a cooking teacher but now that I'm here they have given the cooking budget to me also, so I have a reasonable amount to spend!! SOC and Maths are doing my head in....but it's alright...small price to pay for teaching all that art!

and then:

Dear Lisa, I am stressing out. The initial shock of being here and adrenalin has kept me going for the past four weeks. I have no idea how I've really been able to function in the classroom as I had four days before starting this year to plan for 9 different classes. What is worrying me right now is the fact that I am rather alone...being the only visual arts specialist, away from any PD's to enhance my skills...as a beginning-teacher I was planning to rely on those to keep myself up to date...but I feel completely isolated.... I have Kindy, years 2/3, 4, 5/6 and 6/7 Art...and I'm doing yrs1/2 and Prep next term..... I have never felt so disorganised in my life...it's not like me to only have HALF the planning done the night before its due. I must call Janine again I know, she will probably be able to help...I will try and give her a buzz tomorrow night.

I contacted Janine to see if there was any support I could offer in her mentoring Chloe; the remote nature of the placement meant it was unlikely that the two women would meet face-to-face in the short term. Janine advised that she and Chloe had discussed this problem and had agreed that the mentoring would occur remotely and on an 'as-needed basis'. Janine also undertook to send me copies of the emails she received from Chloe and also to brief me about any telephone conversations that occurred. Accordingly, Chloe has described her own story as it occurred and this has been captured through the reproduction of these email communications, rather than through any re-interpretation of the data. The emails have been reproduced verbatim; there are occasional errors in spelling and sentence construction that may reflect Chloe's varying levels of stress and the problems she encountered in her induction year.

## **Conversations by correspondence**

**28<sup>th</sup> February 2007**

Hey Janine and Lisa, I am back from Esperance ... went on a graduate PD which was rather pointless to say the least. Though it was good to re-cap on a few things I learnt last year...but it was two days and I really needed to get on top of all my planning back at school. It was compulsory for us to attend though ... and it was in a nice town, so it wasn't all bad I guess!! I am stressing out. The initial shock of being here and adrenalin has kept me going for the past four weeks. I have no idea how I've really been able to function in the classroom as I had four days before starting this year to plan for 9 different classes. What is worrying me right now is the fact that I am rather alone...being the only visual arts specialist, away from any PD's to enhance my skills...as a beginning-teacher. I was planning to rely on those to keep myself up to date...but I feel completely isolated. I know I have you to talk to via email and phone but professionally I feel as though I'm stumped.

The kids are loving the art...they haven't had it for years and they enjoy my classes, I've managed to get about 7 different projects going (hence my brain working overtime 24-7) but primary school visual arts has got me confused as far as planning goes. I have managed to get my briefs, planners and rubrics for the 3 secondary classes I have, but I don't even know where to start with the primary. I ordered some books that loosely go over projects and some of the outcomes they

address, but I'm thinking about formulating my own rubric for all the primary classes spanning foundation level to level two and using it for all 5 classes. I do Kindy, 2/3, 4, 5/6 and 6/7 Art...and I'm doing 1/2 and Prep next term. I don't seem to have a problem at the moment with ideas for projects, it's just the assessment and planning that I'm freaking out about...I haven't had much time to stew over any of it as there have been so many behaviour management issues to address before the teaching actually occurs...some of the kids are pretty difficult to work with! And that's not even including the SOC and Maths outcomes and standards framework I've had to get my head around. I could go on for pages...and ask you heaps ... but that would take all night and my performance management meeting is tomorrow. I have never felt so disorganised in my life... it's not like me to only have HALF the planning done the night before its due. This is a really good experience though...as much as its worrying me every now and then the people are wonderful ... and when the kids aren't bouncing off the walls they make me LAUGH. Thanks Janine... I'll speak to you soon, Chloe :)

Subsequent to receiving Chloe's email to me and Janine, I received several additional emails from Chloe, telling me that she was feeling very homesick and was planning to return to Perth as soon as possible and certainly at the end of her 12-month contract. Chloe asked me to keep her in mind if I came across any positions in Perth and I agreed to do so. In fact, details of two positions came to my attention; I forwarded them to Chloe, encouraging her to apply for them and to list me as a referee. A few days later I received a response from Chloe.

### **22<sup>nd</sup> March 2007**

LISA!! crumbs. I have been off sick with gastro the past three days (GROSS) and totally didn't get your email. I won't be able to have my CV in by this arvo...impossible! PLUS I live in the middle of WHOOP WHOOP so I'm not sure sending it will get it there in time...I don't have the internet facilities to send it via email as my CV is on my laptop and I can't get the internet on my laptop at the school!! Big drama. It appears an absolute dream job. I'm sorry. This is CRAP. thanks so much anyway! when I get a spare sec I'll update you and Janine on my current progress :) Chloe xox

Chloe failed to submit her application in time for the Perth positions and focussed instead on making the most of her time in the town, despite still feeling a little upset, stressed and homesick. She felt lonely and professionally isolated. She said that she had been emailing Janine quite regularly since arriving and this had been a valuable support. Chloe said that Janine had not only given her professional advice for learning programs, specific visual arts project and behaviour-management strategies but, importantly, had reassured her that the first few weeks were always difficult in any new school and that this was even more the case for new graduates. Janine went on to reassure Chloe that, in time, all would be well. Janine reminded Chloe of how well she had performed in the AiR placement; she was sure that, in time, Chloe would make an excellent teacher. Chloe said that this personal affirmation and reassurance had meant a great deal to her when the unfamiliar environment seemed to present insurmountable personal challenges. Accordingly she stayed put and continued to correspond periodically with both Janine and myself.

### **29<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

Hey Janine and Lisa, hope everything's still normal in Perth. Things are never boring here...just today we had a crazy boy wanting to kill a student in one of the other classes...the deputy was running round to each class telling us to lock our doors whilst someone caught him. It was.....interesting....to say the least. I'm still going okay in Art...Its a little disheartening sometimes with the level of work I tend to get from some of the high-school students. I know they have never done visual arts before...but some of them have such attitude problems and although they appear to like the subject they will do anything to get out of the amount of work I

expect...I went through their assignments so much also and gave them class time...but have managed to get three out of 30 back from all three classes.

It's difficult, but hopefully next term I'll get there. I suppose you can't MAKE students do the work at home....but there is limited class time that I have to do entire written assignments because the studio work takes so long. Any suggestions? I'm trying my best....but it seems as though they just want to do the fun stuff....blerrgh... also ... I miss the chance to do some stuff for myself ...my own visual arts ... there's just no time. take care! :) Chloe

### 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2007

Hey Lisa and Janine! Yes... it is challenging. But I'm determined to change their perception of school in general. Since I sent you that mega winge I've had a few diaries handed in ... COMPLETED!!! I've just had to hammer it into their heads....using posters...drawn a story board for their diaries and put it up in the classroom...and sent notes home to parents. Thanks for all the suggestions ... it seems to be slowly working....but its still term 1...by term 3, I should have em trained!!Thanks for the heads up on the positions in Perth...I'll try and get my CV in on time!! take care! Chloe :)

### 10<sup>th</sup> April 2007

Hey Janine!! Holidays at last...I've been back in Perth for a few days and have quickly gotten used to relaxing...it's a nice change! The term ended quite well...I've had time to think about changes I'm going to make for next term ... at least now I have the time to think and plan. Judging by the lack of enthusiasm for doing ANY form of homework (as simple as I make it) I'll have to factor in ALL aspects of the arts outcomes into class-time... which will be difficult considering the lack of contact time I get with each class as it is! But with persistence I'm sure it'll work out. They do enjoy having art...they are just not used to the way I teach it I suppose...but in time I should have them trained! Primary classes are a little different...considering the craziness exhibited by almost all my classes I'll try and get them outside more often...collecting things...making rubbings of rocks and found objects...and maybe some BIG self portraits on cardboard cut-outs ... maybe little projects in pairs. I have socks for sock puppets ...that I was going to attempt earlier but was unsure of my OWN sewing capabilities let alone teaching kids how! Do you know what age group I should aim that at? I was thinking years 5/6.....no lower....the skills needed for sewing don't only involve dexterity ...but extreme patience. Anyhow ... I shouldn't be thinking about all this right now...I've dedicated the first week of the holidays to complete relaxation, family and friends time!! Second week is for planning... You were right though... I could make teaching a 24 hr 7 days a week job...but I would go nuts...sometimes it's difficult to know when to stop. These kids need so much! I'm even considering doing after-school visual arts classes for the talented ones....parents have already asked me about it...whoa! Thank you for all your help last term....you've been fantastic :) Take care and I'll be in contact! Chloe :)

### 17<sup>th</sup> May 2007

Hey Janine! How are you? Everything's still hectic at \_\_\_\_\_...but I'm starting to get more results from the kids! The mask project with the year 4's and 7's is nearly complete...it took them a little longer as I only see them once a week.... but they look FANTASTIC and we are showing them off at assembly next week. All other projects are going quite well also....I have solved the assignment problem by making students complete a written image analysis in class before beginning the hands-on projects...Although they complained I got their written work out of the way and now I don't have to worry so much! I'm thinking that I will definitely be coming back to Perth next year if I can get a transfer. Although I'm learning lots about behaviour management and different sorts of kids I feel as though professionally in visual arts I'm lacking the resources and information to develop my own skills. Take care, I'll be in contact. Chloe :)

**29<sup>th</sup> May 2007**

OMIGOSH Janine and Lisa we had an assembly where the kids showed their masks and it was SO GOOD!!! I'll take photos asap and send them ... I'm so proud of them!! They worked so hard

**11<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

Crumbs ARGH!! reporting is hard and I'm really frustrated and I'm unsure I really know what I'm talking about omigod I'm just a bucket of STRESS. Sorry I know it's late. I'm having an unusual panic attack.

**14<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

Hey Janine, this semester has been rather difficult as far as implementation of Arts Responses and Arts in Society goes. This is simply due to the students' lack of knowledge base in all areas of Art. This means I have had to start from scratch and modify my programs significantly to meet their needs. Rather than going straight into interpretation of visual arts work in society (in high school) I have based most of my critical written work on evaluation and response to their own visual arts and each others, as I feel that if they learn to critique their own work they can then move on to understand and interpret the work of others. They are gradually grasping the concept of image analysis and I'm working on an 'Element a week' with all classes from year 2-10 (greater detail with the older ones of course). Due to this modification of my programs I feel that I have been coping rather well as I'm going back to basics and working slowly to build their conceptual knowledge. This involves lots of repetition, examples and modelling. I haven't really needed to extend my own knowledge (just change my teaching) so the mentoring has been fantastic for pure support purposes and to know that if I crash and appear t burn I have someone to turn to! Thanks heaps, Chloe

- I did not receive any further emails from Chloe, or from Janine about Chloe. As I did for all the participants, I sent Chloe an end-of-year online reflective questionnaire, asking for her impressions of the support the mentoring had offered during her induction year. Chloe failed to return the questionnaire and so I contacted her toward the end of the year to follow up. She replied with the following:

Hey Lisa!! So sorry...I completely forgot about questionnaire. Will do it asap and get it back to you. Am going away on the weekend so when I'm back at school next week will go through it. I'm still here! learnt so much last year I decided to stay one more year...plus I'm doing a Cert 1 with yr 10/11 and 12 students in Visual Arts ...different from last year and am teaching ALL visual arts classes bar ONE English class. It's still tough...but that's the way like it at the moment! hope u are well :) Chloe

Chloe did not complete the questionnaire, but eventually sent me a statement about her experience within the reciprocal mentoring placement and larger research program that has been reproduced below:

I participated in a student mentoring program at \_\_\_\_\_ School last term of the school semester in 2006. Twice a week, I worked with Janine's year 11 and 12 students during class with their Visual Inquiry and Studio Work, offering ideas and inspiration when required. Students responded well to my presence in the class and enjoyed asking questions about my own visual arts practice and learning about new visual arts processes and experimentation. This program, organised and prepared by my lecturer, Lisa Paris proved to be a highly valuable experience for all involved. Students benefited greatly by having an extra ear in the classroom to work through ideas and processes and I was able to interact with upper school students, before becoming a teacher myself. I gained a clearer understanding about the way they work, what

inspires them and their broad range of skills. This interaction gave me greater confidence to enter the classroom during my final professional practice in October 2006 and boosted my abilities assisting students in all visual arts outcome areas.

I continued with the graduate mentor program at the beginning of this year when I accepted the visual arts teaching position at \_\_\_\_\_ District High school. Janine, as my mentor, assists me in areas of teaching where I am not so confident that eases the stress when everything seems a little too much! Janine's experience in the classroom and expertise in areas where I myself am still learning makes her a valuable colleague and friend to have during my induction into the world of teaching. Lisa has developed a very worthwhile and important program that has helped me to realise that there is support out there for beginning-teachers even when the workload appears to be getting too much! The continuation of mentoring for beginning-teachers is paramount, if we are to maintain the standard of teaching in our schools and keep the stress levels of beginning-teachers to an absolute minimum.

I responded to Chloe's email, asking whether she felt that she might consider remaining in her current position for another year. Chloe indicated that, if the job was offered to her, she would indeed seriously consider it. She noted that she did miss the opportunity to pursue her own visual arts practice, but said that her priority had been in keeping her head above water in terms of her teaching expertise; her visual arts practice would simply have to wait. Chloe said that she hoped to make this a priority in the next year; she felt that it was important for her credibility with students that they viewed her not only as their visual arts teacher, but also as an artist.

## APPENDIX SIXTEEN: BETH'S STORY REVISITED

Beth had been a beginning-teacher participant in the Graduate Mentor Project research in 2006 and had been assigned Janine as her mentor. The partnership had worked well until Beth was suddenly diagnosed with a life-threatening illness which necessitated her hospitalisation and withdrawal from teaching and the research for the remainder of 2006. Beth survived the illness and her school had been very accommodating in the support they offered her. Her permanent, ongoing, full-time position had been held for her and the college administration kept in regular contact with her through the latter half of 2006 as she recovered. When Beth felt well enough, the school encouraged her to return to teaching and, in 2007, she commenced half-time duties again. She rejoined the research program at the last moment, in January 2007 and was initially matched to a new mentor, Sarah. Janine, her previous mentor, had already been assigned two new recipients for 2007. Sarah was also assigned to mentor another beginning-teacher, Kasey, who withdrew at the last moment, leaving only Beth and Sarah in group eight.

Following Chloe's posting to a country position, Janine volunteered to mentor another city-based beginning-teacher. Janine was aware that Beth was returning to teaching and asked whether she might resume her previous mentoring role with Beth. I drew this to Beth's attention, because I was aware that they had previously formed a strong bond. Furthermore, I had formed the impression that Beth was less-well matched to Sarah than to Janine. Sarah appeared to be uncomfortable about Beth's open admission of being gay and her strong advocacy of gay rights. Janine, on the other hand, appeared entirely at ease with Beth's personal style and declared sexual orientation. Finally, Sarah appeared to be less enthusiastic about the research following Kasey's withdrawal.

Given that Sarah had expressed reticence about the being involved with only one beginning-teacher and in view of Janine's desire to resume mentoring Beth, I asked Beth if this might appeal to her. Beth said that she would like to be matched to Janine, but felt that she could still benefit from Sarah's expertise and wondered if there was any way in which she could work with both mentors. Given Sarah's reticence, I wondered whether it might be preferable to condense the two groups into one, with Janine supervising both Trish and Beth (and with Chloe participating as and when she could on an electronic basis). I tended to favour this arrangement, because the research model had been framed around the notion of one mentor and two beginning-teachers who were buddies for one another.

I then received an email from Chloe saying that she greatly appreciated Janine's support and, further, that she felt very isolated and homesick. I formed the impression that Chloe fully intended to call regularly upon Janine for support, because she had developed a strong relationship with Janine during the AiR placement and felt that she could trust Janine with her concerns. Given these circumstances, I considered that it might be preferable for Beth to continue with Sarah (who had not formally withdrawn from the research) until Janine, Trish and Chloe worked out how their group might function. Beth said that she was quite happy with this proposal, but reaffirmed her desire to work with both Sarah and Janine if that suited everyone. Janine confirmed that she would be more than willing to share the support of Beth's return to teaching; thereafter, for a time, both Sarah and Janine were offering mentoring support and advice to Beth. Janine's mentoring of Beth largely took the form of email and telephone support rather than face-to-face meetings. Sarah's support of Beth took the form of

email communication and two meetings. For a few months of 2007 Beth had the benefit of two mentors that appeared to work well for her.

### **The first meeting – March 2007**

The first meeting between Beth and Sarah following the January training workshop was quite short and both women seemed a little uncomfortable. I attempted to set everyone at ease by asking each of them to share what they had been doing recently in terms of their teaching and study. Sarah enthusiastically spoke about her Master of Education qualification *and* Beth shared that she was feeling much recovered from her illness and was greatly looking forward to returning to teaching, albeit on a part-time basis. Beth's description of her illness seemed to elicit a different response of Sarah, who thereafter seemed to have greater empathy for Beth. Sarah asked Beth how the school had responded to her illness and sudden departure the previous year. Beth explained that the school staff had simply stepped in to cover her teaching, which meant that many of her colleagues had carried a heavy load until the end of the year. She went on to say that staffing at her school was still in a state of flux, because the visual arts Co-ordinator was about to take a year's leave and a replacement had not yet been appointed.

Beth was only now starting to return to part-time work following her illness. She was carrying a 0.5 teaching load and was attending the school most days, depending on her health. The school had been very supportive of Beth's circumstances and encouraged her to take as much time as she needed to regain her health that was very affirming for Beth. There was, however, a range of other factors which were causing her some stress. These included:

- the staffing instability;
- a budget which seemed inadequate for the number of classes taking art;
- an impending trial of the new post-compulsory visual arts course of study which the school had agreed to implement in 2007;
- combined classes at upper school level, with TEE and visual arts & Design students grouped together; and
- teaching facilities which were only just adequate and needed upgrading.

Beth believed that many of these factors had contributed to the decision by the visual arts Co-ordinator to take leave at short notice and Beth considered it likely that she might not return. This colleague had confided to Beth that she believed she was suffering burn-out; given her proximity to retirement, she was unlikely to return at the end of 12 months' leave. The colleague went on to clarify that this was her orientation at the time, but that she would leave her options open, in case the time away rejuvenated her. Sarah then asked Beth to describe the kinds of classes she had been assigned and requested that Beth fill us in on the areas in which she felt she might need mentoring support. Beth explained that her part-time teaching load encompassed work in three different departments. In the visual arts department she taught a combined yr 11 TEE/Art & Design class; a yr 12 visual arts & Design class that she shared with the visual arts Co-ordinator who was about to depart; a year 10 class of 30 students who were particularly challenging in terms of behaviour management; and several groups of yr 8 students, who attended on a rotational basis for three periods each week for a term, before progressing to a different subject elective. Beth also taught a yr 9 jewellery class in the Design Technology Department; a number of computing classes from yr 9-12 in the Technology and Enterprise Department; and a religious education class. She explained that she had established good rapport with most of her students. Because this

was her second year in the school, she had taught many of the students in consecutive grades. This experience had allowed her to gather knowledge about their backgrounds and life interests beyond the school.

Beth explained that the senior students in yrs 11 and 12 were particularly weak in the area of practical studio skills (especially drawing and painting); this was very challenging, given that she was trying to deliver the post-compulsory courses with a degree of rigour. Beth likened these students' visual arts expertise to the standard of yr 9s or 10s she had taught on her practicum placements; their limited skills inhibited their ability to develop and execute their ideas. This caused frustration for many students and often resulted in poor behaviour. Beth had begun to forgo lunch to work with individual students and help them develop their skills and this had already begun to pay dividends in only a few months.

Similar difficulties were also evident in the skills base of her yr 10 class. Beth explained that some of these 30 students had been 'dumped' into art, because other teachers in the school had refused to have them in their option classes on account of past poor behaviour. Others (who had not taken visual arts since year 8) had been forced to take art, because this was the only subject their timetable could accommodate. These students were somewhat disgruntled, because they had been unable to enrol in options in which they were genuinely interested and resented the default position of being placed involuntarily in art. A number of these students had not taken visual arts since yr 8 and openly declared that they had no interest in the subject. Others exhibited a range of special needs, including ADHD and dyslexia. The remaining students were keen to do well in art, but they were outnumbered by the less-motivated class members. Sarah appeared to be alarmed at this information and asked Beth how she was coping with such a challenging mix of students. Beth responded that she had a good relationship with many of the students and generally felt confident to manage their behaviour. She went on to say that she was more concerned about the difficulties associated with finding ways to engage the students meaningfully in visual-arts experiences, when they were disgruntled at having had their choice of other options taken from them.

Sarah and I listened to Beth's description of the difficulties she was experiencing; we each made a number of suggestions to counter these, including linking themes of projects to students' areas of interest outside school. Beth agreed that this was a useful strategy and noted that she had already tried to do this, with mixed success. Some students were apparently quite upset that there seemed to have been a stream of teachers coming and going from the school; Beth hoped that some degree of stability and continuity could be established now that she was back. She expressed concern that the imminent departure of the visual arts Co-ordinator would add further pressure in this area; she was unsure what the specific impact of this would be on students' interest in art. She continued that she was aware that students in yr 10 were often quite careless in their use of materials and tools; she felt that this was an expression of their (misplaced) belief that the school did not seem to value art. Beth explained that, whilst the school was still growing, the current visual arts facilities were outdated, poorly resourced and cramped. There had been high staff turn-over and students were put in the subject for reasons (timetabling constraints) other than talent or interest. She believed students were expressing the view that "if the school did not care about the subject why should they?" Beth felt that this had become clearly manifest in students' attitude toward the facilities and physical space.



Sarah asked for a little more information about the staff changes. Beth explained that, when she commenced in 2006, she had been one of 22 new teachers appointed, following a larger than usual exodus of staff in 2005. Whilst this had been disruptive for students it had, conversely, been a great support for Beth. The new staff had an opportunity to form a strong bond and acted as informal buddies for each other, sharing information and assisting each other as problems arose. With such a large number of new staff, the school had provided a fairly comprehensive induction program. The camaraderie had been extremely important to Beth a few months later, when she was diagnosed with an extremely serious cancer. The new staff pulled together, visiting Beth in hospital and sending their thoughts and best wishes to her family. Beth said that this support had been wonderful; it gave her a sense of still being connected to the school and teaching, during the period she was away in hospital and later recuperating at home.

Beth then went on to speak about other women she had known who had developed cancer and recovered; invariably it appeared that the support of close friends and colleagues had been pivotal in their recovery. The chemotherapy Beth had been required to undertake had been quite debilitating and demoralising. She made several jokes about hair loss and other side effects associated with her treatment. Beth mused that, without the support of friends and colleagues, she might have simply given up and (as she put it, in a broad Australian accent) 'carked it'. At this point we all laughed. The group then went on to share a few moments of 'black humour', telling stories about cancer, death and dying. It was a strange dialogue, that somehow broke down barriers; I had the impression that a possible friendship was beginning to take shape between the two women. The meeting concluded and a tentative date for the next meeting was set for June 2007.

#### **Email Communication with Janine (May 2007):**

Between meetings with Sarah, Beth kept in regular email and telephone communication with Janine and Janine periodically updated me on Beth's progress. In May 2007, I received an email from Janine advising that Beth appeared to be coping very well with her return to teaching and, further, that she seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the experience of being mentored:

Hi Lisa, Beth has a class of Religious instruction and expressed being a bit daunted by this, I suggested she could use visual arts as a starting point and look at religious images as a way of starting with an approach she was more familiar and comfortable with- looking at the subject through art. All is going well. She is going to .8 next year and happy about that. A few notes on her progress:

- She is healthy and happy.
- trialling new COS next year
- exhibition went very well.
- Yr 12s all passed.
- Yr 11s a bit shaky
- yr 9s-10s all good
- she is teaching video graphics next year as well and would like to integrate this with visual arts wherever possible.
- still problems with 2 classes in one room and no changes on that for next year
- Luke (the other visual arts teacher) and Beth getting on very well and will continue to work with each other next year.
- Planning an visual arts camp for next year.
- she found the early stages of the mentoring good, nice to know that there is someone to bounce ideas off and have someone outside the school
- she does have mentors within the school as well.

- thinks the mentor outside of school will be very handy for assistance with the new COS.  
best wishes, regards Janine

### **The second meeting (Sarah and Beth) June 2007:**

The second meeting for Beth and Sarah occurred at a cafe in Leederville in June 2007. Sarah and I had already arrived and chatted as we waited for our coffee. Sarah had been in touch with Beth earlier in the week and was now unsure whether Beth was likely to come to the meeting. Beth had indicated that she was particularly busy in this last week of term; she would try to get to the meeting, but was unable to make a definite commitment. Sarah explained that she had had very little contact with Beth since the last meeting; she had managed to visit Beth at her school on one occasion and this had been a useful experience. Sarah was particularly impressed with the Primary visual arts program which was being delivered at the school and Beth had been keen to show her around the school and facilities. There was a warmth about the way in which Sarah spoke about Beth and it was apparent that some of the formality which had characterised the early part of the first meeting had softened. Sarah explained that she had worried about how best to support Beth, who had appeared to be extremely confident and self-sufficient. Sarah had reflected that Beth probably did not really need mentoring.

When Beth finally arrived at the meeting, it was immediately apparent that she was in good health and high spirits. This was in marked contrast to her demeanour and circumstances some six months earlier, when she had literally been at 'death's door'. She seemed to be glowing and her bubbly personality was clearly in evidence. When asked how things were going, Beth began the conversation by relaying details of the current staffing at her school. The previous visual arts Coordinator had apparently left the school, suffering 'burn out', a few months earlier and was on leave; Beth strongly doubted that her colleague would return. The experience of working at the school had apparently been sufficiently challenging for the Coordinator to make leaving teaching altogether appear a more likely outcome than returning to the school. Beth was unsure why things had deteriorated so badly, but suggested that the difficult teaching environment (large open-plan space where multiple classes were taught simultaneously), in combination with the absence of a technician, had made life very challenging for staff.

Given Beth's previous ill health and part-time status, the school had advertised for and employed another full-time member of staff when the visual arts Co-ordinator left. The new appointee was a recent ECU graduate (Luke), who was only 20 years of age; despite being extremely talented as an artist, he was not a strong exponent of behaviour-management principles. Beth explained that this had resulted in her informally mentoring Luke in this area and, in exchange, he had reciprocally shared his significant expertise in the area of visual-arts practice. This symbiotic relationship had served both beginning-teachers well and Beth noted that a kind of 'team-teaching' had spontaneously developed. The opportunity to team-teach had been further facilitated by the fact that they often had to share the same physical space when teaching their respective classes. Beth said that she greatly appreciated Luke's expertise in a range of studio areas and felt that she was able to support his management of classes. When asked how she felt about this, given her own graduate status, Beth commented that she felt she had acquired a significant repertoire of human resource management skills through her involvement in a number of national events for the 'Gay Movement', before entering the Graduate Diploma program. She continued that this allowed her to respond

to challenges more effectively than her young colleague, who often remarked that he felt hardly any older than his students. Beth continued that Luke carried a lot of the administrative responsibility within the department (he managed the budget and ordering of materials); he appeared to be 'stretched' to capacity', whereas she felt quite relaxed and more confident in her teaching when compared with the preceding year. Sarah noted that her visit to the school the preceding week had allowed her to see the facilities; she concurred that the physical teaching space was indeed quite challenging, given its open-plan style. In response to these constraints, Beth explained that she was currently writing a proposal to present to the Deputy of Curriculum, making a case for an expansion of the teaching facilities through the building of a small teaching space adjacent to the existing room. The deputy had become something of a mentor for Beth during 2006/7; despite being new to the school herself, she was very supportive of Beth's ideas about ways to improve the outcomes for students. Beth continued that she had had a number of discussions with Liz, her Deputy, about including the yr 7 students in the secondary visual arts program (which was a school-wide area of interest and discussion); this had been approved by the school and seemed likely to occur in 2008. Beth's other strategies to improve the effectiveness of her visual arts program within the school had centred around the size of classes and the previously poor outcomes in respect of skills (particularly for students in yr 10).

In previous years, the yr 10 students had often been placed in visual arts (along with a range of other option areas) despite a lack of skill or interest in the subject. This had resulted in large classes, where behaviour management had been quite challenging. Beth had worked to change this culture of 'dumping' students into art and over time had begun to lift the standard of work and the students' work ethic. Her Deputy, Liz, had supported these initiatives; she too wanted to improve the academic performance of students. As a part of this process, Beth had requested and been granted a number of computers; these would eventually allow students with weaker visual arts skills to employ their computing skills in the development of visual arts ideas in programs such as Photoshop. Beth had liaised with the Head of computing to acquire the computers and he had agreed that his budget would allow him to support the transfer of hardware to the visual-arts area.

Beth had employed other devices to improve the performance of students within the visual arts program in yr 10; these included the awarding of merit certificates and house points to students who demonstrated stronger skills. Her hope had been to attract these stronger students to ongoing study in the visual arts in yrs 11 and 12 and the strategy had had some success. When Sarah enquired about the kinds of projects Beth was completing with her students, Beth described an interesting 'dada-style' painting project which she had undertaken with her yr 10 students. Beth explained that the students' limited painting skills had been something of an obstacle to a successful outcome, but she had worked hard to ensure that they had an opportunity to review the work of important dada artists. The students were encouraged to try to incorporate some of the aspects of dada in their own work. Beth noted that Luke's support in improving students' painting skills had been quite critical to the success the students had achieved.

Shortly afterwards, the conversation settled on new directions in senior schooling. Beth talked about her desire to implement some of the units of the new senior-school course of study in visual arts that was still in the development phase. Her thinking to date had been that it might suit her rather large disruptive yr 10 class, albeit in a modified form. She explained that she had briefly reviewed the first two units (1a and 1b) and these seemed appropriate for the kinds of students she had in yr 10. A few schools had begun

to trial the new course, with mixed results and Beth felt it might be quite helpful for her yr 10 students, whom she believed would respond very positively to the contemporary focus of the units. Sarah agreed that new directions in senior-schooling seemed likely to meet the needs of disenfranchised youth more adequately than the past TEE or visual arts & Design courses and she explained that she also had been reviewing the units.

Sarah was very interested to hear about the strategies Beth had trialled with this yr 10 group in the past and agreed that they might be ideal candidates for trialling the new course of study in visual arts that had again been delayed implementation. Beth was keen to pursue this course; she felt a degree of frustration about how best to lift the standards of work among the yr 10 cohort. Given that Sarah had completed a trial of the new course with her own yr 10 students the year before, as a part of her Master of Education studies, she offered to support Beth in this enterprise. Sarah had achieved excellent results across the four outcomes of the WACF and she began to share stories about the manner in which she had challenged students to change their thinking about the creative process. She noted that the students had completed a semester of study using the new course and that their visual literacy (art-making and art- interpretation) had been significantly enhanced by the course structure. Beth was keen to pursue the matter and she and Sarah agreed to keep in touch with respect to trialling the new course.

As the two women discussed the trial Sarah had undertaken and the ways in which Sarah might support Beth's work, it became apparent that Beth's greatest concern lay in the area of the poor visual arts skills of students, many of whom seemed not to have completed any real visual arts studies since primary school. Sarah suggested a variety of techniques which might be useful in enhancing students' skills in painting, particularly and Beth agreed that she would further explore these suggestions. The meeting concluded with a discussion about how the mentoring was proceeding; both Beth and Sarah acknowledged that Beth was particularly confident and probably did not require very much in the way of intervention. Beth's confidence and success in teaching were commensurate with that of a more experienced teacher. The two women resolved to meet only once more, later in the year. Both agreed that they would initiate email contact in the event that any issue needed attention, but both conceded that this was unlikely.

## APPENDIX SEVENTEEN: TRISH'S STORY

### **The first meeting – March 2007**

Janine and Trish met over coffee for the first time at the visual arts Gallery of Western Australia, to discuss Trish's transition to teaching and her efforts in securing an ongoing teaching position. Janine had a number of useful suggestions about strategies that Trish could employ to 'market herself' and Trish asked me if I would be her referee for a number of positions in which she was interested. I was pleased to do this, because Trish had demonstrated that she was a dedicated and highly professional pre-service teacher during the completion of her Graduate Diploma in 2006. During the meeting, Trish talked about the positions which were currently being advertised and explained that one in particular was extremely attractive to her. This position was at a primary Catholic school and, given she had taught within a primary context previously (South Africa), Trish was keen to apply for this role.

As the meeting progressed, the conversation seemed to return several times to the importance of studio practice. Trish appeared to be a strong advocate for teaching skills to students; she had observed, both on her practicum and in the relief-teaching she was undertaking, that many students appeared to have poor skills. Janine concurred that many students would benefit from this support, but she also stressed the importance of helping students grow in the area of creative practice by engaging with the cultural capital which was available to them in the form of other artists' works. Trish appeared to hesitate at this and, whilst not disagreeing, said that her previous teaching experience had convinced her that the critical issue in visual arts education was to teach the conceptions/conventions and skills of the various disciplines. Janine agreed that this was very important. She then went on to give examples of the ways in which she integrated both the conceptual development and visual arts historical influences which Western Australian curricula had emphasised over time.

I formed the impression during the meeting that Trish was considering Janine's advice and that something of an internal struggle was occurring. Both women were of similar ages and had well-developed creative practice in their own rights. Each had exhibited widely in the past and had much to offer students in terms of subject discipline content knowledge. Both women had teaching experience at a variety of levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) and well-developed pedagogical strategies. Janine had many years' teaching experience in the Western Australian context, whilst Trish had much less experience that she had gained mostly in the remote South African context. Trish had enthusiastically made herself available to work as an AiR in 2006 and had enjoyed the 'expert status' afforded to her during the placement. In this new context as a beginning-teacher, Trish's status had shifted to that of novice; I wondered if it would be difficult for her to restructure her relationship with Janine and now acknowledge Janine's expertise that clearly was more substantial than her own.

The meeting ended shortly before the hour was up, having concluded with a discussion about the kinds of strategies Trish might employ to maximize her opportunities for employment. She had undertaken a number of relief-days and had hoped that these contacts might generate part-time or ongoing work, but this had not occurred. As she had, previously, for Beth and Chloe, Janine recommended a number of contacts which might be helpful in securing work. These had proved useful for Beth, who secured a teaching position even before graduating; Chloe had been appointed to a rural appointment shortly before the school year commenced. Within group 7/8, Trish

remained the only unemployed graduate that troubled her. The session concluded with a tentative date set for the next meeting in June 2007. A few days after the meeting Trish sent me an email saying that she greatly appreciated Janine's support and was feeling excited about the possibilities for working. She mentioned that a position as a primary visual arts specialist had been advertised and she was keen to apply for the job. She asked if I might act as a referee for her and again I indicated that I would be delighted to do. Several days later I received another email, confirming that Trish had applied for the position and alerting me to the fact that I might receive a call from the school.

### **23<sup>rd</sup> March 2007**

Hi Lisa, I have applied for the position we discussed. Thought I would confirm as they might call to check my references. I think I have the qualifications as I was trained as a Primary visual arts Teacher before with major in visual arts before I went to ECU and did the Grad Dip. I do think though that it is sometimes easier to get into Heaven than get into a Catholic School. I will send you some of my credentials if I can. (I need updated computer skills) Please let me know if you get them. I had 3 days teaching this week and have 5 next week. I feel specially honoured because I have been asked to do Testing for the Gifted and Talented Year 7 children for \_\_\_\_\_ school for next year. I am extremely excited as I got to write 2 new tests. I will do Testing on Monday and Tuesday and then on Wednesday I will get to mark or assess with a panel. As I love visual arts above all else, it is extremely satisfying. The Head of the Learning Area at the school has been very good to me. She and Janine know each other and work collaboratively as well. Regards, Trish

I did not hear anything further from Trish until just before the scheduled date for the next meeting that had been set for June. In that correspondence she advised that she was working in a relief capacity; she was unable to attend the meeting and requested that a new date be set. The next meeting was set for August 2007.

### **7<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

Hi Lisa, I want to enquire whether there is a possibility of me giving both you and Janine feedback on my progress via email. I am unfortunately snowed under with work and renovations and a sick child which makes it a bit difficult for me to meet you on Saturday. If it is vital, I will make a plan. All is well with me. I am currently working at \_\_\_\_\_ Senior High doing relief for an visual arts Teacher on 2 weeks leave. All is well and I have been working quite a lot. Had to say no to \_\_\_\_\_ high school and have also taught at the primary school across the road from me. I have been working an average of 4 days per week. I like doing the visual arts at the moment, makes me feel that I am in my speciality. At \_\_\_\_\_ senior high I also have Intensive English Language kids (my minor) who come to art, so it is all very rewarding. I have been booked at \_\_\_\_\_ first week of July and also towards the end of July. Will definitely come to the next meeting if you agree, otherwise I will try to make it short on Saturday. All my thanks, Trish

### **19<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

Dear Lisa, as I have just done another 2 weeks relief for a teacher on leave, I can truly say that I have no problem delivering the 4 visual arts outcomes. I find that the visual-literacy of students are not what is expected though and try and make a point of working on this. They don't use visual arts terminology and their visual arts skills are terrible.. appalling really. I find that my content knowledge is good as I have done visual arts myself for a long time. Only thing I needed help with is the kiln in firing of ceramics. Also the products are different from South Africa (by name etc) There is a lot of help out there though and I know if I need help I can call on my mentor. I have become confident quickly and I think Relief Teaching is a good way of finding your way. The fact that you are thrown in at the deep end and have to swim quickly helps.

Different schools also have different approaches to doing things, so you gain a lot of experience. I have no problems with staff and students and get called out quite a lot. Thanks so much, Trish

## 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2007

Dear Janine and Lisa, Looking forward to our next meeting. Janine, I am going to lean on you heavily. I was going to do a short relief at Carine and have just been asked for a whole term. At our next meeting I would appreciate any spectacular ideas you have. I have no idea what I have coming (whether it is TEE or visual arts and Design and also the Year groups) I wasn't told anything, so I don't know whether I should have the audacity to query. I will go in the day before school starts to get organized as I was told. What if there is nothing? Do you think I should worry? I don't know why I am doing relief yet. I am at \_\_\_\_\_ high this week again and a colleague said I could email her as well, but I don't know what I am going to need. This is where the mentoring is very helpful. Lisa, if you have any programs there, please assist as well. Much appreciated by me, Trish

## 26<sup>th</sup> July 2007

Hi Lisa and Janine, I thought I would let you know what is happening. As you know I have taken on the term position at \_\_\_\_\_ Senior High.

I have a .8 position and these were the classes I was given:

Year 8 visual arts and Craft (1 class 2x per week)

Year 8 Discovering visual arts (2 classes 2x per week)

Year 9 visual arts and Craft (1 class 2x a week)

Year 10 visual arts (1 class 2x per week)

Year 10 (Art and Craft 2 x per week)

Year 11 (Art and Design 1 class 4 x per week)

Just the curriculum and do your own thing. Two other teachers, very nice, very busy. Sink or swim.

I had to get myself organised with 6 projects for the term and also some extension ones. Worked till 1 every night. Got 6 projects together and taught from the cuff whilst doing this. One project that I had planned so well (printing , the students did last term so had to come up with another project) ... I haven't even worked out lesson plans.

I go in and I have the outline in my head and nothing on paper and teach and thank the Lord it is working so far. It was hard enough working out programs and student briefs. Students have all got student briefs. Did it Lisa's ECU way. They have different briefs but it was easier for me to take the student brief from last year and adapt to suit the projects. I am using one of theirs because it incorporates a video I want to show the students and because it is the visual arts year 10. I am doing portraiture with them (thank goodness because it is my forte). I am still unsure of where to find things and what to do. Nearly missed a meeting yesterday because I wasn't told. I don't think its deliberate it is just an ongoing problem from being part time relief. Getting there though. I am ok with teaching and the students are really nice. (There is always a clown or a ratbag somewhere but that is ok). It is just the planning . Hardly have time for this email. Have to get all my resources ordered for the different projects. Thank goodness for Arts Ideas  
Regards, Trish

## 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007

Hi Lisa, after a shaky first week , I have it all under control (I think). I have never encountered such lovely students. I love teaching visual arts to people that love it. I finally did my online reply to ECU this week and told them how happy I was with you as my major area and also the support I was getting after graduation. I know it is long overdue, but I had a lot on my plate this year. See you at the meeting next week. Regards, Trish

### **The second meeting – August 2007**

The next meeting for Janine, Trish and I occurred at the visual arts Gallery of Western Australia café in early August 2007. Trish and I arrived first and she mentioned that there had been a significant amount of email correspondence between Janine and herself in recent weeks. I was aware of some of the email traffic; Janine had forwarded email material to me from time to time, although she said that the emails she sent were only part of the ongoing dialogue. Trish said that Janine's advice and support was proving to be invaluable. She mentioned that she was currently engaged in relief work most days each week; she was based predominantly at a Government school which had been designated as a visual arts specialist school and accordingly was well resourced by the Education Department. Trish said that it was such a pleasure to work in purpose-built facilities with new capital works and machinery. Almost all the materials she requested for projects were provided without question and the Head of Learning area seemed to greatly appreciate Trish's visual-arts expertise.

In addition to the visual-arts work that Trish was doing at the school, she had been invited to complete relief work across several other departments and she noted that she was similarly valued in those contexts. The permanent staff appeared to take a real interest in her wellbeing and welfare and supported her in any way they could. Although Trish was a confident beginning-teacher, she had difficulty in coping with the behaviour of some of the pupils at the school, especially when assigned large classes. These particularly challenging students tended to be grouped together into 'access groups' that had been identified as behaviour management 'hot spots'. These groups of students had been singled out for the application of specific management protocols. Trish said it was quite difficult to know which classes she would be assigned and she found it challenging to try to remember whether they were part of the usual management protocol or part of the access stream.

Despite being highly valued at the school, particularly in the visual-arts department, Trish said that there often weeks when she had little or no visual arts to teach. She worried that, if this trend continued and she did not eventually secure her own ongoing visual arts teaching appointment, her specialist visual-arts pedagogy might deteriorate and be lost. Trish often felt a sense of disconnection from her tertiary studies and past visual-arts teaching; when this got too challenging, she made a point of phoning Janine simply to have a chat about visual arts and teaching art. This connection to her specialist discipline had a rejuvenating effect on Trish and sustained her through the periods when she was not regularly in the visual arts room.

Janine and I were both interested to hear about the programs which were running at the specialist visual arts school; Trish happily described the various specialisations offered and said that there was a rigorous testing regime which was used to screen children who had applied for entry to the school/programs. Trish was delighted to have been asked to participate in a paid capacity in the testing program, but she would have been more than happy to do it simply for the experience. I recalled that Trish had completed her ATP at the this school and asked her whether that long association was now paying dividends in terms of the relationships she had been able to cultivate. Trish confirmed that this was likely; whilst she was delighted to be working in the school at which she had completed her final prac, she was feeling a degree of frustration that she had yet to secure her own teaching position. Janine agreed that it had been quite a long time for Trish to be working in a relief capacity, especially since she had taken all the advice offered for strategies to maximize employment opportunities. Trish said that, whilst she hoped that she would soon find something more permanent, she was nonetheless happy to continue



with the regular relief work she had at the her main school client. She confessed that she was a little worried about the sense of disconnection from her university studies which seemed to have set in, in recent months.

Janine then suggested that Trish apply for consideration for the 'relief pool' at Janine's school; she felt fairly sure that (despite not having yet been advertised) a teaching position in visual arts was likely to eventuate at the school in the following year. Janine felt sure that, given Trish's voluntary work in the school as an AiR, in combination with her glowing reputation in a relief capacity over the last year, that she would be a strong candidate for the job. Trish agreed that this certainly could not hurt; she would apply for entry to the relief pool. She went on to note her awareness that some graduates spent several years working from a relief pool, but she considered that this would not suit her temperament. Janine agreed and suggested that it might be helpful to attend as many of the professional development days offered by the Curriculum Council and the visual arts Education Association as possible, because this often led to employment. Trish accepted this suggestion; whilst she enjoyed the relief teaching, it felt akin to 'damage control' - something to do until a real job came along. I asked Trish whether WACOT could offer her any support, since she was clearly an exemplary graduate. Trish laughed at this suggestion and said that WACOT had been of very little use to her. WACOT had refused to recognise her South African qualifications when she initially applied for teaching. Subsequent to the completion of her Graduate Diploma, WACOT had released an updated procedures/policies/ethics list which had been accompanied by a new ruling in respect of overseas qualifications. Had Trish been applying to teach today, she would have been allowed to do so without any further study. Whilst she accepted that she had indeed benefited from the Graduate Diploma Trish nonetheless felt somewhat disgruntled about the expenditure she had had to incur that (it now transpired) had been unnecessary.

For the next ten minutes the discussion centred on the operation of WACOT and the failures and successes of teacher registration. Janine then suggested that perhaps Trish should update her CV to reflect the recent inclusion of special visual arts teaching and, particularly, the paid work she had done for the education department in the area of assessment and entry to the program. Trish said that she would do this and reflected that she could understand why teachers seemed to be so stressed all the time. She said that (whilst obviously valuable) the testing regime had taken many hours to complete and had taken time away from her family and the other things that she valued in her life. Janine then went on to speak about the importance of work/life balance; both women agreed that maintaining their own visual arts practice was a critical element in dealing with stress.

Trish said that, despite being a relief teacher, she tried whenever possible to bring in samples of her own work for students to see and respond to. This seemed at odds with Trish's stated position at the start of the year that had seemed to favour students pursuing their own work rather than worrying too much about the work of others. I asked her to clarify her present attitude to the arts in society/arts responses outcomes and she remarked that Janine's priorities appeared to have blended with her own; she now considered that it was equally important for students to engage in art-interpretation as in art-making. Janine was delighted to hear this and then went on to speak about how this balance across the four outcomes had proven so helpful in the visual-literacy program that she delivered at her school. The meeting concluded shortly thereafter. A tentative date for another meeting was set for November, but this did not eventuate. Communication for the remainder of the year took the form of email and telephone

contact. A few weeks after the meeting I received a couple of emails in quick succession. Trish had taken Janine's advice and was actively engaged in networking at professional development opportunities in order to maximize her chances for employment.

### **19<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

Hi Janine and Lisa, all well with me. Went to Professional Development today. It was so nice to see all the people again. Saw Jamie and the lot from \_\_\_\_\_, also Tracey from \_\_\_\_\_ and met some other nice people. Seems like there could be a couple of possible jobs around so am going to explore further. Even if nothing comes of it, has been very worthwhile even just sharing ideas. Regards, Trish

### **21<sup>st</sup> August 2007**

Dear Janine, Hope your exhibition went well. All ok with me. Still doing relief work and still looking for a permanent job. I have a fabulous Head of Dept. The sort of teacher I think belongs in the visual arts world. She has been very helpful but also given me free reign ... so to speak. All is going according to plan. I can understand why beginning-teachers would give up. It is hard work if you want to do it well. All comes with time. As I worked in the Performing Arts for 15 years (a few years ago now), it has helped me because at the end of the day. THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING (or as I say THE SHOW). I still have to see what all my beauties will produce. So far so good. Regards, Trish

### **13<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

Dear Janine and Lisa, just to let you know that all is well this side. I am enjoying the term at \_\_\_\_\_. The kids are great and the Head of Department is too. A wonderful team. I finish in 2 weeks and will then have a time to breathe and do my own visual arts again. I have done MCJ PD and will do the second one later in the year. Also registered for the WACE PD. Just doing it to keep up with the times while I am doing Relief. Lisa, (or Janine) what I would appreciate is some of those planned examples that go into the box under the desk or some new ideas that come out of the in class teaching sessions. I don't mind coming to pick them up. It would be of great help as I am always planning on fresh ideas. Regards, Trish

### **20<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

Dear Lisa and Janine, I hope you are sitting down when you read this. Just to let you know that I will be the Teacher Librarian at Carine this term. Seriously!! They called and asked me if I would consider and they also agreed to make it only 3 days per week. I am having fun though. I also did a display for Halloween so my visual arts talents are not totally wasted. I am helping \_\_\_\_\_ do the Year 12 visual arts marking on Monday and I think it will be good experience. Regards, Trish

### **As a final note Janine sent me an email at the end of the year observing:**

This year Trish was concerned that she didn't have enough background in Australian visual arts and visual arts history, I recall giving her some useful titles for texts that I use. Trish's confidence grew as she had opportunities to work as a relief teacher, although she already had experience. I feel that being part of the mentor program gave her a more balanced view of the 4 arts outcomes and the extra confidence to be proactive in seeking relief work and in gaining a professional reputation for future work.

No reconciliation of Janine's story in 2007 has been undertaken, because my conversations with her led me to the view that she had not changed her position in

respect of the research questions from the responses provided in the preceding year. The style and specific form of her interactions with the beginning-teachers in 2007 are apparent in the vignettes crafted for Chloe and Trish; Janine was satisfied that her story had been told both accurately and in sufficient details through these mechanisms.

## APPENDIX EIGHTEEN: ZACK'S STORY

### **The first meeting – February 2007**

The first meeting of this group occurred in February 2007 at the visual arts Gallery of Western Australia café; Tom and Zack arrived shortly before Penny and I did. After the initial pleasantries, Tom asked each of the beginning-teachers how they were feeling and whether or not they were now working. Penny indicated that she was working in a small Non-Government school in the hills surrounding Perth; so far, she felt relatively confident and comfortable in her new teaching role. There was a brief conversation about the level of support Penny received from her school that culminated with Penny's description of the diverse learning programs she had needed to devise in order to meet the needs of her multi-age classes. As this conversation unfolded, Zack sat silently and appeared to be avoiding eye contact with anyone. His body language gave me the impression that he was not feeling very comfortable; when the opportunity arose, I asked him how he was and he responded by telling me that he was feeling a little stressed about his Education Department interview that was booked for later that week. He emphasised that he really needed a job because his financial resources were running out; but he was worried about whether he would perform well enough on the day to get a job. His mentor, Tom, then asked what Zack had done in terms of preparing for the interview and suggested a few strategies which might be useful. Tom had previously been a member of the Education Department interviewing panel for beginning-teachers and had a clear sense of what the committee was looking for in new teachers. Tom asked Zack if he would like a few tips on what was likely to happen at the interview and Zack was eager to take advantage of this advice. The substance of this conversation encompassed:

- Tips about formal preparation – materials to bring; questions which were likely to be asked; things to avoid.
- The Department's published 'dimensions of professional development and teacher competency' which all teachers were expected to demonstrate. Tom particularly recommended that Zack bring along any lesson plans from his practicum placements and the ATP.
- The importance of taking the interview slowly and, where possible, making efforts to link students' learning programs and work to the selection criteria published for DET teachers. Tom stressed the need to clearly show how these responsibilities were being met through the daily work/learning program.
- The importance of giving good examples of the ways in which the learning programs Zack had devised whilst at university might meet students' needs for visual-literacy education.
- The need for Zack to be clear about why programs were structured in particular ways; Tom encouraged him to be clear in his own mind about the rationale for the choices he had made.
- Attention to sub-groups with the larger learning program. Tom suggested that it would be useful for Zack to show how his learning programs might meet the needs of either gifted and talented students, or those with remedial needs. Reflections on the practicum experience to identify good examples of where this had occurred.
- Assessment processes and the ways in which these led to modifications in the learning program. Tom stressed that, when preparing for the interview, it was critical to adopt a position which endorsed the notion that assessment should be

'educative'. Tom went on to remark that this should be made apparent by clearly conveying to students ways in which they could improve their performance. He identified assessment criteria and rubrics as being the critical tools which teachers employed to achieve this goal and recommended that Zack either bring previously-prepared documents with him or, alternatively, be prepared to speak about the practical ways in which he had used assessment criteria and rubrics in the past.

- Art outcomes, including the teaching of arts responses and arts -in- society outcomes that continued to be particularly challenging even for the most experienced visual arts teachers. Tom recommended that Zack consider carefully the rationale supporting students' judgements about works and urged Zack to re-familiarize himself with critical response frameworks, including those employed by the Curriculum Council of WA in the syllabus documents associated with the Tertiary Entrance Examination Visual Arts Course.
- Awareness of the importance of linking learning programs to students' needs and students' interests.

At this point Penny interjected and asked what importance Tom placed upon diagnostic work at the beginning of the year, or each new term and queried whether he considered that Zack should also address this issue in the interview. Tom agreed that diagnostic work was a critical tool in teachers' pedagogy. It would be valuable for Zack to demonstrate that he understood that diagnostic work provided teachers with a mechanism for identifying weaknesses in students' performance (or in the suitability of the learning program); thereafter it provided data from which learning programs could be tailored to target students' needs. Tom then went on to speak about behaviour management that he considered was often a strong focus area during the selection interviews. Penny recalled that this had certainly been true for her, both at the DET interview and at the subsequent interview she had completed for her current position in the independent sector. Penny had given examples of the behaviour- management strategies which had proven to be useful on prac and Tom agreed that it would be useful for Zack to do likewise.

Tom then talked generally about a number of students, over the years, who had presented significant behaviour-management challenges and the ways in which appropriate behaviour management could turn these difficult students into productive and optimistic learners. Tom went on to cite several specific examples of children who had proved particularly challenging. He described the ways in which he had strategically 'won them over' through consistent application of the school's behaviour-management policy and common sense. Zack then raised the issue of not feeling very confident about having 'his own classes' and dealing with poor behaviour without the support of a supervising teacher. He went on to explain that he worried that he might lack critical knowledge and expertise in respect of several studio disciplines, visual arts history and criticism. Tom asked whether Zack had taken any PD workshops in recent months; he recommended that Zack view ongoing professional development as a critical part of the lifelong teaching landscape. He also invited Zack to visit his school and sit in on the 'arts link' program, where students were completing a learning program which combined both media and visual- arts elements. Tom considered that any kind of teaching (either paid or volunteer work) would be a useful addition to Zack's CV in the quest for securing permanent or contract/relief work.

Penny also was very interested in the multi-arts program at Tom's school and asked if she might also be able to sit in on some classes if time permitted. Tom said he would be

delighted to have both her and Zack visit and recommended that they might arrange to come together. Zack then asked about the software Tom used in the media component of the course. Tom explained that, despite having a strong media program in yrs 11 and 12, there was actually very limited software used in the middle school that was his co-ordination and teaching area. He identified 'Paint Shop Pro' as the most favoured software and spoke about the 'big graphics area' in the Design Technology courses at his school where Photoshop was used quite extensively in the resolution of Arts ideas.

Zack and Penny gratefully accepted Tom's invitation to sit in on his classes and the meeting concluded about an hour after it began. In his journal record of the first meeting, Tom observed the following about Zack:

Zack is a very quiet participant, he is not sure of his approach towards his teaching career as he has not yet been appointed to a school. He seems very disillusioned about getting a job; he hasn't done the interview process yet. Zack is finding it difficult to relate to career aspects, let alone his ability to present in a teaching situation. Appears to lack confidence in having the ability to deliver course content because of his personal academic reshuffle ... moving from Malaysia to Singapore and then to Perth. Zack is prepared to listen but didn't really contribute a great deal. He has mentioned that he is not confident in presenting visual arts History due to the different courses studied in other countries prior to moving to Perth. For the next meeting Zack needs to make sure he has booked into an interview session. I'll check the website for him if necessary. He does have booklets from courses taken ... but it's really up to him.

#### **The second meeting – March 2007**

The second meeting for group eight occurred in March 2007 at the visual arts Gallery of Western Australia café and was quite brief. Penny, the other beginning-teacher, was the focus of much of the early discussion; Zack had not yet begun teaching, whereas Penny was already working in a permanent position. I had the sense that Tom, the mentor, also had a specific agenda to give time and attention to Penny during this meeting, because much of the first meeting had focused on Zack and strategies which he might find useful as he prepared for the Education Department interview. Tom mostly chatted with Penny and I noted that Zack sat quietly and appeared flat and unmotivated. It seemed to me that his disconnection from the research group mirrored his disconnection from the momentum of the Graduate Diploma and teaching generally. In essence, it appeared that there was no continuity between Zack's university studies and transition to work; as a result, he seemed to be losing confidence in his prospects for employment.

When there was a break in the conversation I asked Zack how his DET interview had gone; he replied that it appeared to have been successful, but as yet he had not received a teaching posting. It was clear that this troubled Zack; he mentioned several times that he had been more than willing to be posted to a country position during a period when the daily newspaper/media had frequently reported that there were chronic teacher shortages. Despite having had a successful interview and good results in his ATP practicum, Zack was still unemployed several months after graduation; he had not been able to find work as a teacher in any capacity, including relief work. He was clearly feeling disappointed and disillusioned. In his journal, Tom noted the following observations about Zack and preparation for the interview:

Zack came out to my school and saw what is being done in the middle school with yrs 8 & 9. He has a graphic design background and a lack of knowledge in the area of skills presentation. At my school graphics is taught only in the senior school. Zack is quiet and finds it difficult to present thoughts and ideas at times ... hasn't had much classroom experience. Suggested he contact someone in Teacher Recruitment at DET. Have suggested to Zack that in preparing material for interview he should concentrate on assessment and presenting to parents.

Tom asked Zack what questions had arisen at the interview. Zack explained that the types of questions Tom had suggested might be asked had indeed been posed. Because he had had an opportunity to take Tom's advice and hints, Zack felt that he had been fairly well prepared for the day; he sensed that it had gone successfully and that he had passed the review. Tom encouraged Zack to apply for relief-teaching. Zack seemed to hesitate at this suggestion and eventually expressed the reservation that he might have to teach across a range of learning areas and did not feel confident to do this outside visual arts and TESOL. Tom appeared a little frustrated at Zack's reticence to engage in work wherever it might be available; he urged Zack to come out to his school to meet the staff and thereby increase his chances of securing relief-teaching in the school. He suggested that this kind of professional networking had the potential to open up other opportunities for Zack. Tom suggested again that Zack might like to sit on his visual arts classes and watch teaching strategies and content delivery. Zack agreed to do this and set a date for a visit.

As we departed, I worried about what Penny might be feeling about the bulk of the meeting having focused on Zack and his attempts to secure employment. I took a moment to chat to her about how the year had started for her. Penny was a mature-aged beginning-teacher and replied that everything seemed to be going quite well. She was chatting via phone and email with Tom from time to time and felt quite fine at the moment. I asked whether she had been concerned by the degree to which the meetings had focused on Zack's situation; she replied that she was not in the least worried by that. She said that she felt confident to jump into the conversation as when this seemed appropriate. As we left the meeting I had formed the view that Penny seemed fine, but Zack appeared to be losing hope in the enterprise of commencing teaching.

### **The third meeting – April 2007**

I was unable to attend the third meeting for this group. Tom indicated that there would be other meetings and mentioned that he was maintaining his journal and recording Zack's progress. I asked whether he could send me an update following the third meeting and Tom agreed that he would do this. In this correspondence he mentioned that Zack had indicated an ongoing interest in coming to Tom's school to observe and consolidate his knowledge that he feared might dissipate the longer he was out of the tertiary context and not yet in an ongoing teaching appointment. Tom also made reference to this in his journal where he observed:

Zack ... relating to the job allocation ... apparently got good results and had a good interview. He is not feeling too happy about still not having a job. I've suggested that he do some relief and keep coming out to my school to see the set up... maybe in the next week. When he comes he can help with the teaching and step up in front of the class to gain experience.

### **Following the visit Tom noted:**

Zack came out to school today. He was very quiet to begin with but as the morning progressed he opened up. He really needs to think about what he really wants to do. He seems to be looking for a way out as everything becomes too difficult. Not coping with not having a job 'presented' to him. Needs to go out there and 'find one'.

Feels that he is hard done by, by not having a job. Has done the right thing by completing the course and doing the interviews. Not sure about taking on teaching as a profession. Finding it difficult to keep in touch with teaching in a practical situation when he is not getting the chance to have any ongoing experience.

### **Journal Entry 24<sup>th</sup> May 2007:**

Zack is very pleased with himself. Has been doing relief work for 3 weeks solid and has been offered a 0.2 teaching position at a high school. He asked me 'what do you think I should do' ... I said TAKE IT!!!

After three weeks relief work he hasn't been offered much more relief ... only a day here and there, feels as though he may have done something wrong. I explained that its just like that sometimes. He is more confident towards going out there and "getting" a job. I recommended that he take on extra relief work at a restricted number of schools to build up a school clientele to work from.

### **Journal Entry 21<sup>st</sup> June 2007:**

Zack is a much happier person. He came over to my school for another visit. Much more positive ... more inquiring nature. Developed a greater self confidence. He has finally gained a 0.2 position at \*\*\*\* High School every Thursday. He has been doing relief at the school. Was concerned that they didn't really think he was doing a good job that's why he was only offered a 0.2 position. I talked to him about the process in gaining a position at a school and assured him that he was doing well ... otherwise the Principal wouldn't even have him near the school. He needs to enquire about his given appointment next week to ensure that the paper work goes through over the holidays in readiness for term three.

There were no further journal entries in respect of Zack.

### **The fourth meeting - August 2007**

The fourth meeting for this group occurred at the visual arts Gallery of WA café in August 2007. Zack had a much more animated demeanour that had been the case at the previous three meetings; he was delighted to advise that mid-way through term three he had been offered a 0.82 teaching position at a Perth high school. He was mainly teaching visual arts to students from yrs 8 – 11. However, one year 11 class was a remedial/education support group and Zack was using visual arts with these students wherever possible as a focus for a variety of other learning area experiences. Zack had planned at the last meeting to visit Tom on several occasions, but there had been only two opportunities to do this; the Education Department had contacted him to offer him relief-work on the day he was due to go for his third visit. Appropriately, the relief-work took precedence. Tom was very happy for Zack to give priority to the relief-teaching and did not mind his failing to keep the arrangements which had been put in place. He did, however, imply that the last minute cancellation had caused him some stress; he had arranged a variety of teaching tasks for Zack and then had to improvise at the last moment.

I asked Zack how he was finding his new 0.8 teaching position. He explained that he was very relieved to finally have a job, but also noted that because it had been a long time since he had completed his final university practicum (semester one of 2006), combined with the fact that relief work had been difficult to obtain, he was now struggling with managing student behaviour. He attributed this to a lack of opportunity to practice the skills he had acquired during the postgraduate year. Zack said he felt as if he had become quite disconnected from his studies and had forgotten much of the material he had learned on practicum.

This was exacerbated by the fact that he had some very challenging students in his classes; others were uninterested in visual arts (and school generally) and simply sat and did nothing. Zack said that he found this 'non-participatory' demeanour as challenging



as the alternative disruptive behaviour. Although he described his students as basically nice people, Zack took their lack of commitment to visual arts quite personally; on Tom's advice, he was trying to accept that it was more likely to be a matter of disengagement rather than any particular attitude toward him. Essentially, these students were bored and not happy at school. Zack worried that there was something he should be doing to motivate these students, but he was unable to identify what that might be. Tom spent some time talking about the motivational strategies he liked to use with students who were disengaged and Zack agreed that it would be useful to try these. Penny also interjected with descriptions of the motivational techniques she had successfully employed in her classes; again, Zack said he would try these. For the next ten minutes Penny spoke about the strategies she used with disengaged students and reflected that Tom had given her excellent tips for dealing with such students.

Tom wondered whether the degree of difficulty of Zack's learning programs was appropriate for the various cohorts. He emphasised that many of the behaviour-management problems he had encountered over the years were either linked to this issue or could be ameliorated through an adjustment to pedagogy or content. Tom said that the worst thing a teacher could do, when confronted with disengaged students, was to ignore that fact and continue to do what clearly was not working. Tom said it would be better to throw the whole learning program out and start again, rather than continue simply because that was the 'published' version. Tom asked Zack how he felt the learning programs were operating and whether or not they seemed to take account of this 'developmental fit' criterion. Zack confided that he was struggling with lesson planning and programming; this was a result of having been offered his teaching position so late in the year and so long after graduation. Zack said that he had largely given up hope of teaching; he had either lost or thrown away many of the resources he had acquired during his final year at university. With only a few days notice he then had to develop a full semester's learning program and the issue of 'fit' had seemed somewhat irrelevant. Zack said that there were some resources and old learning programs available in the school that the previous teacher had left for him and he had used much of this in his preparation. Tom suggested that that was fine, but it might well be prudent to take another look at the learning programs to check that they were in fact appropriate for the students, now that Zack had had an opportunity to spend some time with them.

Tom then went on to give suggestions for projects, themes and supplies; he recommended several recycling companies which offered materials to schools/teachers quite cheaply or for no charge. He urged Zack to visit one of the local school's suppliers to obtain a teacher's daily work pad. Tom was adamant that this was a critical tool for most teachers, because it allowed them to keep records about class progress within the learning program. Tom spoke about trial and error as the only way to really refine teaching; he suggested to Zack that it would be important to try something and repeat it over a couple of years until it was right. He went on to say that, after several years' use, he usually discarded particular projects or themes; he generally found that, although it was a new experience for the students, he was personally likely to be bored with it, and this effected the enthusiasm he could bring to delivery. I asked Zack to elaborate on the school and the classes he had been allocated; he advised that there were only two visual arts teachers in the school. His teaching load encompassed all of the middle-school visual arts (the other teacher had the senior-school visual arts classes) and he also taught one yr 11 class in the remedial education special needs program. Zack had been assigned this class because the students were generally quite interested in art; in addition, there were a number of opportunities for him to undertake cross-curricular

initiatives using visual arts as the experiential organiser. Zack's previous concerns about programming were particularly relevant for this group, because he felt he had insufficient training to really know how to meet their special education needs.

Zack mentioned that he had been provided with a remedial learning program tailored for this class; but the program did not have any visual arts content and this was what he had been asked to bring to the students' learning program. During the initial period of appointment to the school Zack had largely been following the existing program and trying to anticipate visual arts experiences which might reinforce the generic skills (literacy, numeracy, technacy and visuacy<sup>2</sup> within the program); but he felt that the students might benefit from additional projects and ideas. Tom said that this was an admirable goal; he had had significant success using contemporary culture and street visual arts with year 10 and 11 students in the past.

Tom stressed that there were some management issues associated with creating a graffiti installation; these included obtaining the support of the school hierarchy and ensuring that the 'art' version of graffiti did not suddenly spawn graffiti in other parts of the school and surrounding community. There had to be effective control of students' access to materials (like spray cans) to avoid any opportunity for students to be destructive. According to Tom, the critical element of this project resided within the initial design phase, where students explored the kinds of images and text they wanted to create on their section of the wall. Tom said that the students were not allowed to commence any painting on the wall until the design was fully resolved and had been approved by the teacher. The design then had to be carefully drawn up on the wall; only when the entire installation appeared to have achieved design cohesion (each person's section of wall needed to seamlessly extend into the sections on either side) were any of the students allowed to actually start painting. Tom went on to say that this type of project would ideally be connected to some contemporary political issue in which students were interested (war; youth; cultural groups; global warming, etc.) as this could be used to reinforce an understanding of the political nature of art and thereby enhance student's visual-literacy. Penny agreed that this critical issue of connecting to students' interests had been particularly important in her programs; she spoke briefly about the work she was doing and the feedback she had received from both students and parents about the success of the tasks.

When the opportunity presented, I asked Zack whether he felt he had had a proper induction into the school; he indicated that, because he had been employed casually on a relief basis before accepting a more substantial contract, the usual induction offered to new staff had simply been omitted. Zack said that he felt he would have benefited from a formal induction (notwithstanding his relief experience); he now had a form class and felt under pressure to complete all the activities required each day in the time allotted (50 minutes). He attributed this pressure to never quite being sure whether he was completing tasks appropriately; but so far no-one had complained. I formed the impression that Zack almost seemed to think such complaint was inevitable, despite it not having yet occurred. He then spoke about feeling stressed at having to teach all day, most days, as if this was an unreasonable demand and something other than the usual teaching load of most new graduates. His teaching load actually turned out to be four out of five periods, Monday through to Thursday and only two periods on Friday morning. This seemed to be a fairly standard teaching load and so I asked Zack how much he felt he should teach, given that the position was a 0.8 appointment. He seemed unable to quantify what might be reasonable, but said he felt that his current responsibilities were quite heavy. Tom laughed and said that this was a normal load; Zack just needed to

allow time to get used to it. Notwithstanding Zack's current workload, Tom again invited him to come to his school (suggesting that perhaps this could happen after Zack finished on Friday mornings) to see new ideas for content and materials and to get a sense of behaviour-management strategies. Zack agreed that this was a good idea and said he would visit Tom the following week. There were no further meetings for this group. Zack failed to complete either a journal or end-of-year questionnaire and I attempted to get in touch with him several times to seek his feedback on the write-up of his 'story'; but he did not respond to these representations. I finally asked Tom if he might read Zack's vignette to corroborate my retelling of events and he confirmed that I had accurately re-created the focus of the meetings and email correspondence.

## **APPENDIX NINETEEN: PENNY'S STORY**

Following the mentoring workshop in January and before the mentoring program really began for this group, Tom (Penny's mentor) noted the following in respect of Penny:

### **Journal Entry 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2007**

Penny found it easy to respond to the introductory session at ECU. She related well to possible needs of the program and gained support in relation to the situation she had been put into in her new school for the 2007 year.

She seems ready to reason and comply with any suggestions given as a means of coping strategies. She has had a pretty good visual education and ready to teach to others now. She has a job at a little community school and was prepared to express her situation she had been placed in, but was also finding it difficult to gather strategies for which she could approach the requirements of her proposed teaching role. Her school seems a challenge to her professionalism. For the first meeting in February Penny is going to bring:

- Strategies for resourcing her visual arts craft course
- Discussion outcomes from her talk with the Principal about the course structure

I need to bring lino samples and a copy of the visual arts Detective worksheet (Arts in Society) to give her.

### **The first meeting: February 2007**

At the first meeting, Penny delightedly advised that she had had a fairly smooth start to the year, although she considered that some of her students had the potential to be challenging if they were not kept busy and fully engaged. The range of classes she taught each week encompassed two combined kindergarten/year one visual arts classes; one mixed visual arts class of students from years five to seven for a double session each week; one mixed class combining year 8-10 students in a general visual arts class for a double period once a week; plus all of the English taught at the middle-school level. I asked Penny whether she considered her training at ECU had been relevant and helpful. Penny responded that she felt generally well prepared to teach both primary and secondary classes; she had been able to access a number of resources from both Tom and other primary visual arts specialist teachers through the visual arts Education Association of WA. Tom then asked Penny what obstacles to teaching had already appeared. Penny quickly responded that, whilst the general school facilities were great, the funding resources for visual arts within the school were fairly minimal. She explained that the school was operating on a very small budget for visual arts and, although important, it had been deemed a lesser priority in the distribution of overall funds. Penny continued that the annual budget for visual arts was only a thousand dollars for the entire program for K-10 that appeared to shock everyone at the meeting. We all agreed that \$1000 was quite inadequate.

One of the significant consequences of the small operating budget was that students did not have their own visual arts equipment; in order for the learning program to operate, the school required donations from families. Penny said that the school community had been very generous with donations and she felt buoyed by this clear demonstration of parental support. She noted that the children (particularly the primary students) greatly valued their visual arts classes; they were always very excited to come to art, notwithstanding that the classroom in which the lessons occurred was not an ideal environment. The school did not have a dedicated visual arts room, although plans had been approved for the construction of a purpose-built visual arts room in the future. In the interim, Penny had to remove all visual arts equipment at the completion of the

lesson, because other teachers from different departments were scheduled to teach in the same space. I was interested to hear from Penny about the kind of start to the year she had experienced and asked whether there had been any formal induction into the operation of the school and its policies and protocols. Penny indicated that she had received a very thorough induction from her Deputy Principal and this had helped give her a sense of her professional responsibilities within the school. These responsibilities extended to compliance with the regulatory obligations of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework; diagnostic testing and development of individual learning programs for students who were gifted and talented and also for those who fell into the remedial category; participation in the faith-life of the school; parent/community/school liaison; and the usual pastoral care duties which were commonly part of the landscape of most Non-Government schools.

Penny went on to elaborate that she was feeling very positive about her visual-arts classes and observed that she felt well-prepared for these responsibilities. By contrast, she explained that she was finding her English teaching rather stressful and challenging. I asked her why that seemed to be the case and she explained that, whereas the visual arts had a flexible structure that essentially meant that she was at liberty to teach any content she wished, English had a prescribed curriculum with specific tasks at different levels. This emanated from the fact that classes were multi-aged, with students of differing ages grouped together and working on different projects/challenges. Tom listened to the concerns that Penny expressed in relation to multi-aged classes and recommended that she consider using an education department learning program entitled 'THRAS'. The THRAS program was a primary literacy program which had been highly successful in Tom's school. It tended to be particularly appropriate when used in combination with collaborative learning strategies.

Penny said that she was already using collaborative strategies, in which older children assisted younger students in the classes that had multi-age groupings. She noted that she was grateful for the support of parent volunteers who assisted with group-learning situations. She was very interested to hear about the THRAS program and said that she would explore this upon her return to school. Tom then asked how she was handling the behaviour-management challenges associated with multi-aged groups. Penny responded that this largely worked well, but that she would welcome any advice Tom might have for her; she acknowledged that she needed to be very strategic in the way she dealt with children with learning difficulties. Tom asked Penny to elaborate and Penny identified a number of students who had given her cause for concern. She cited the case of one student who was on dialysis and struggled with high levels of toxicity. This student was often very quite vague in class and unable to learn much.

Penny went on to say that the mother or an aid often accompanied the student and this made the child's inclusion in the class possible. Another student was in remission from cancer but was often unwell that again required the mother or an aid to accompany the child to class. The parents and staff at the school had negotiated that management of this latter child should have a focus on 'normality' that encompassed keeping the child happy and 'included' at school rather than worrying about his academic achievement. Whilst Penny had been happy to accommodate these demands, she remarked that having so many other adults in the room whilst she was teaching had caused her to feel stressed initially. Over time, however, she had grown to accept them as part of the school landscape. She noted that the support they provided was invaluable and, because the parent volunteers were good at simply blending into the class operation, she now viewed them as a useful resource.

A brief discussion among the members of the group then ensued about the place and priority afforded the visual arts generally in various schools/systems. Penny asked Tom what his priorities were within his learning programs, particularly at middle-school level and queried whether schools he had worked in were generally supportive of these priorities. Tom remarked that he had always worked in schools where the arts were well regarded; so long as students were well engaged and producing quality work, most schools were more than happy to provide an adequate budget and appropriate resources. Tom expressed concern at the size of the budget Penny had been allocated; over time this was an area which might need strategic intervention. He also went on to say that, when materials were scarce, it was even more important that learning programs be developed strategically, with clear connections to students' areas of interest beyond the confines of the classroom. Tom continued that, in his view, finding areas of student interest and linking visual-arts programs and projects to those interests, was a critical component in keeping students engaged. He often allowed students input into the theme and studio area for projects as an extension of this ownership concept. If a learning program could be tailored to students' needs and be delivered within cost and on time, it was a successful visual-arts experience.

Tom said that he always tried to ensure students kept all their work in a file at school and, where possible, annotated all drawings and ideas development work. In this way he was able to affirm student thinking throughout the development process that greatly assisted in the assessment and reporting regime at the end of semester. Tom also noted that he supported this source of evidence of student learning with anecdotal information that he collected in his teacher's daily work pad during the lessons; he drew on both formative and summative processes for the final assessment. Penny was very interested to hear about the efforts Tom had made to link visual-arts projects to students' outside interests and asked what his students were currently working on. Tom briefly described the projects and then identified a range of commercial suppliers and companies that might be willing to donate materials to Penny should she wish to emulate the projects. He said that he was always looking for ways to reduce costs; over the years had developed an extensive list of suppliers and businesses that were happy to support schools and especially primary visual arts programs. Tom even went so far as to offer Penny some old materials which were surplus at his school. Penny was delighted and gratefully accepted the offer; her budget (unlike Tom's) was extremely tight.

Some further discussion ensued about Tom's work with students; he then asked Penny to speak about the projects she was currently implementing. Penny described the various projects students were engaged with. She had, initially, been quite concerned about one group of students in particular; they were currently working on self-portraits and appeared not to be enjoying the experience. She had recently been surprised to hear from parents that, contrary to her initial impressions, students had in fact remarked that they found the project both stimulating and enjoyable. This had been a great relief to Penny; she had subsequently relaxed a little and begun to trust in her own judgements. The project was nearing conclusion and Penny was quite proud of the quality of the work students had produced. Penny said that she had, over time, formed the view that students at the school had had so little visual arts in the past that they were genuinely fearful of failure each time they began a new project or experience. The feedback from parents buoyed Penny's optimism that the work she was doing was actually having a positive impact upon students. Zack had been sitting quietly throughout the discussion and appeared to be uninvolved in the meeting to this point. I then redirected the focus of discussion to his preparations for his Education Department interview. When I later analysed Tom's journal record in respect of the meeting, he had noted a number of

impressions about Penny and the ways in which he envisaged he might be able to support her.

### **Journal Entry 24<sup>th</sup> February 2007**

Penny appears to be coping with the first few weeks. Sometimes feels that she is a hassle and doesn't want to be in the way. Always prepared to listen BUT seems to be aloof at times when expressing her thoughts and opinions.

She is worried about yr 8 boy on dialysis and the level of his participation in class. She is also struggling with devising appropriate work processes in the multi-age classes with children of ranging abilities ... I suggested rich tasks/extra work. She has visual arts k-10; English 8-10 and is moving on work processes to have work to assess.

Much of the remainder of the first meeting was spent talking with Zack about strategies for enhancing his employment opportunities and I felt that there were things Penny had wanted to say which had not been discussed. Before we all departed I told Penny that I would like to give her a call in a day or so just to chat a little further about how the year had begun and she said this would be fine. Tom also indicated that he intended to call her; we departed with these arrangements in place and a tentative date set for another meeting.

Several days after the meeting I phoned Penny to see how she was and asked her to update me on how things were going at the school. Penny responded saying that she was fine; she had devised learning programs which took account of the reality that she had multi-aged classes and students' interests outside school. She said that she had taken on board Tom's suggestions and said the work students were currently completing was now strongly organised around things the students liked or interested in. Penny described the challenges associated with finding themes or concepts to which students of differing ages could equally relate and which she had coped with successfully. Themes which appeared to work well in the multi-age classes included visual-arts projects linked to what Penny called 'big picture' ideas such as 'identity' and 'sense of place'. She talked about a graduated approach that included these concepts viewed from various perspectives which increased in complexity and difficulty, allowing for developmental stages. Penny gave the example of identity as a case in point and said that in multi-aged classes this theme could be viewed on a scale of increasing complexity:

- My place in my family.
- My place in my peer group.
- My place in my local community.
- My place in Australia.
- My place as a global citizen.

Penny continued that other themes she had successfully employed with multi-age classes since the beginning of the year had included projects linked to:

- the environment and environmental responsibility;
- social commentary;
- religion/spiritual experiences.

Penny had sought guidance from Tom about appropriate multi-aged themes; she enjoyed the challenge of creating 'rich tasks' which allowed children to respond to the visual arts ideas according to their developmental readiness. The selection of key artists and movements had proven a little challenging, because students did not always appear to understand the connection to the project they were completing.

I asked Penny whether there were any other specific difficulties she felt that Tom might be able to assist her with in the year ahead. She responded saying that she felt the greatest difficulty she faced lay in the issues associated with a lack of resources and facilities, most notably arising from the necessity to use a general-purpose classroom as an visual arts space. She hoped that Tom might have tangible strategies for dealing with the challenges this situation presented. Penny explained that the school did not yet have a purpose-built visual arts room; working in a general classroom gave rise to operational and organisational issues. A clear example of this was the absence of a sink. Penny said she was carting buckets of water to and from class in order for students to undertake painting projects. She went on to explain that this often made starting class on time difficult, because the teacher before her tended to work to the bell. Penny then spent the first 10 minutes setting up for her class. At the end of the session she often had to finish early in order to thoroughly clean up and exit the space before another colleague was scheduled to teach in a different discipline, such as maths.

This loss of time was relentless and challenging. Penny said that the pressure to vacate in a timely manner did not allow her to speak to students after class about their work. The rush to leave caused Penny some degree of stress and this occurred on an almost daily basis.

Penny then went on to speak about other deficiencies in provisioning the visual arts department. Despite all students in years 8-10 having their own laptops, they did not yet have individual drawing folios or, importantly, anywhere to store their work. This lack of storage space meant that students' work occasionally was lost or damaged that gave rise to a number of problems as students became upset and lost motivation. Students simply could not see the point of putting a lot of effort into their work if it subsequently was damaged or misplaced. Penny said that she had already discussed this issue with her colleagues and, although visual arts (equipment and facilities) appeared not to have been a high priority at the school in the past, she said that the culture appeared to be changing. Penny felt that she had the support of the people with whom she shared the space and this spirit of co-operation made the situation bearable. I asked Penny if she felt that she had the support of the school administration/hierarchy; she did feel that the Principal and Deputies were on side and that, over time, they would be amenable to any reasonable request for resources or increased funding to facilitate growth of the visual arts in the school. Penny said that she looked forward to the time when she had her own visual arts room and was not having to continually 'get out'.

### **The second meeting March 2007**

At the second meeting for the year Penny spoke about the school's reporting process that had just been completed. She was very happy with the experience and said that it had gone very well. Penny had completed the visual arts reports without difficulty and had overcome her initial concerns about reporting on achievement in English. She noted that the collaborative work processes she had been using continued to work well in both visual arts and English; her greater challenges now lay in trying to meet the demands of the WACF and still keep content and learning experiences relevant to students' interests and needs. Tom asked whether Penny had had an opportunity to test the THRAS program which he had recommended at the previous meeting. Penny explained that, for a variety of reasons, this had not yet occurred, though the school appeared supportive of purchasing the program in due course. Penny then went on to say that she still harboured concerns for a number of children who were falling behind the rest of the multi-aged class groupings. She elaborated that these lower-ability children in both visual arts and English seemed to be lost in a program which had to cater for the needs



of a variety of ability levels within the one class. Penny explained that her English mentor at a neighbouring school continued to be a great support, in much the same manner as had Tom; but, as time went by, more and more problems were emerging (particularly within the English program). She said she was trying to be patient and hoped that over time these issues would be dealt with productively.

Penny then went on to explain that, whilst English was proving a challenge (which she largely attributed to her own subject-discipline and pedagogical-content knowledge deficiencies), her visual arts challenges lay in different areas and these were also deteriorating. Penny was the only visual arts teacher in the school and students in years 5-7 were grouped together into very large classes. This created problems in trying to cover all studio areas which students needed to experience in order to successfully cope with the demands of senior-school visual-arts courses in TEE visual arts and visual arts & Design. Particularly challenging were the disciplines of printmaking and sculpture that needed separate areas for the various parts of the studio construction process such as cutting lino blocks, inking and printing. Drying racks were also scarce that created further problems for storage. Penny said that, if she had to summarise what was wrong, she would simply say it was a 'space problem'; there simply was not enough space.

Penny talked also about the stress of teaching students in years K-2; this occurred twice a week for 45 minutes without an aid. She felt that she was struggling to come up with interesting ideas for children of such a young age; in many ways their regular classroom teacher probably had more to offer them at this early stage of their visual-literacy education. Tom disagreed with this sentiment; the challenge with very young children was really to ensure that the focus of learning experiences was on 'fun' and 'play' whilst engaging with basic studio techniques. Tom advanced the idea that, whilst a balanced approach to all four arts outcomes was critical with older children, visual arts lessons with children in K-2 could legitimately be skewed to studio production, where he felt it was easier to embed the philosophy of visual-literacy acquisition through 'play'. Tom urged Penny to join the visual arts Education Association; he believed they would be able to provide her with many good ideas for projects for younger children. Importantly, the projects on the Association website had been modelled around the WACF arts outcomes that Tom maintained were 'road-tested and ready to go' and educationally quite sound. Penny said that she had already joined the Association and was looking forward to the advice and resources they might offer her.

Penny found the lack of a kiln at the school particularly frustrating. Younger children seemed to love the three-dimensional, tactile experience of working with clay, but were disappointed when their products were unable to be bisque-fired. Penny had tried for a while to transport the children's work to other schools which had generously offered her the use of their kiln, but this was time consuming and invariably resulted in some breakage of work during the transport phase (before or after firing). Additionally, the limited budget for visual arts simply would not allow for the use of clay substitutes such as DAS that was an air-drying clay. Penny felt that students were missing out on basic visual-arts experiences as a result of the limitations imposed by the facilities and resources of the school. Tom agreed that a limited budget made it difficult to provide a broad base in skills; he gave several suggestions for cheap alternatives to clay, including a mixture of bicarbonate of soda (industrial bicarbonate). This mixture would dry rock-hard and provide an excellent base for finer surface decoration which students could apply using the more expensive Das product. Tom qualified these suggestions, acknowledging that students using this process would still need good studio skills, because DAS tended to dry quickly; he recommended that this product be saved for

upper-primary/middle-school students, and bread dough or play dough be employed with younger children.

Tom also recommended the use of substitute products such as clay-crete with paper pulp for detailed features on masks and other sculptural forms. He explained that these products in particular provided an excellent modelling process for middle-school classes, because the products were very cheap and could be easily stored in tubs, where they would last for two to three weeks. When I later reviewed Tom's journal entry for the meeting, I noted that he considered that English appeared to be a far greater challenge for Penny than teaching visual arts.

### **Journal Entry 28<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

Penny seems more settled as far as organisation is concerned. Challenges in meeting requirements for the Curriculum Council are still ongoing. But she is enjoying the job ... which is great! The marking of student work and levelling is a worry, but the process is still ongoing ... her English mentor is very helpful. She is involved in moderation for English and it is working well. I suggested she contact the visual arts Education Assn to get a hold of 'Arts Still Alive' journal for ideas for primary art... especially K-2. The suggestions I gave her for reporting process and classroom management are being put into practice but it has been difficult for her.

After the initial focus on Penny in the early part of the meeting, Tom went on to speak to Zack for much of the remainder of the time about the preparation he was making for securing relief-teaching and employment. He extended an invitation to both Penny and Zack to visit his school to see the operation of the multi-arts program; both seemed interested in taking advantage of the offer. I wondered whether Penny felt she was receiving enough attention during the meetings and so I again suggested that I would try to phone her in the next day or so. Penny said that she was always happy to chat with me, but she was in fact quite fine and felt comfortable to phone Tom if she needed any advice. As the conversation shifted from Penny to Zack, I became aware that one of my key roles at the meetings was to ensure balance in the time and focus given to each of the beginning-teachers.

I felt a tension arising from the competing demands of each new teacher's needs. Zack needed time from Tom for clear advice regarding strategies to secure work; Penny needed advice about strategies for teaching and learning. Whilst it had been quite common in the other groups for the beginning-teachers to be in different places at the beginning of the year, most the groups had more shared needs by the middle of the year. In the case of Zack and Penny, however, they were at quite different places in their careers; if not properly managed, one or the other might question the point of coming to the meetings. I was also aware that withdrawal from the meetings might have a flow-on effect for participation in the research and mentoring program. I also wondered how Tom was coping with these two very different sets of needs of his two protégés and made a note in my journal to raise this with him at a later time when he could speak freely. The meeting concluded with Penny agreeing that the session had been very useful; she now had concrete suggestions for materials and teaching strategies which she hoped would facilitate a more effective teaching and learning program and experience. Zack appeared less convinced about the point of anything and I had the very real sense that if his fortunes did not change soon, he might well be lost to the profession. I discerned that Tom seemed to share my sentiments; he repeated his invitation to Zack to visit his school several times during the meeting. I tried to phone Zack several times over the next few days and sent him a couple of emails, but he did not respond to these contacts.

### **The third meeting – April 2007**

I was unable to attend the third meeting. Tom indicated that Penny was doing well; he had given her suggestions for suppliers and resources for the visual arts projects she was working on. She appeared quite happy and more settled with respect to the challenges she had been facing, particularly for her English teaching load. Penny seemed appreciative of Tom's advice and Tom felt that the mentoring relationship was proving useful for Penny during her induction year.

### **The fourth meeting - August 2007**

The final meeting for this group occurred in August 2007 at the visual arts Gallery of WA café. Penny was fairly quiet during the meeting; much of the conversation was devoted to hearing about Zack's new teaching position. Toward the middle of the meeting, when Tom and Zack had finally debriefed Zack's new role, I asked Penny how things were proceeding at her school. Penny said she felt as if her first year of teaching had been quite rewarding; finally, the success she was having in visual arts was being mirrored in her more challenging role as the middle-school teacher of English at her school.

Throughout the year, Penny had indicated that her teaching responsibilities for her minor specialisation in English were proving more troublesome than those associated with her major discipline of visual arts. I asked Penny about the visual arts projects her students were currently working on and whether there seemed to be evidence that their visual-literacy skills were improving as the year progressed. Penny considered that her students were demonstrating visual-literacy skills acquisition when they could make informed, well-reasoned choices about their own work and/or offer considered opinions about the works of others. She explained that in her view visual-literacy necessarily encompassed both the art-making and art-interpretation domains; she tried wherever possible to ensure that her learning programs placed equal emphasis upon both types of learning experiences. Penny said that she felt it was very important that her students attended an actual visual arts gallery whenever possible, to stimulate their thinking about their own work and to enhance their capacity to make sense of the work of important contemporary and historical artists. Furthermore, she tried, wherever possible, to have her students engage in independent research about the visual-arts techniques and skills they were employing in their work, because this gave them a degree of autonomy about the direction in which their work evolved.

I asked Penny to elaborate on this a little further. She explained that, when students suggested that they would like to try something different or new that had been inspired either by the visit to the gallery or the research they had undertaken (rather than the generic work she had specifically set for them), she encouraged them to pursue these tangents or alternative ideas; this was the way in which their visual-literacy facility could most effectively be honed or improved. This meant that, although she may have set a particular project or theme for the whole class, very often this independent inquiry resulted in markedly differing studio outcomes for students in the same group. Penny explained that it was this very act of making informed choices about their own or others' works that was, in her view, the clearest evidence of visual-literacy acquisition and extension among her students. Whilst she considered it unlikely that the majority of her students would go on to pursue careers in the visual arts, Penny hoped that they would benefit throughout their lives from being visually-literate and that this would enable them to confidently participate in the cultural life of the city in which they lived.

Tom asked for an update on the work the students were completing and Penny then went on to talk about the ceramics project she had undertaken with middle-school students, where students had made Egyptian-themed Canopic jars. She illustrated the importance she placed on linking the students' own work with that of established artists and movements/genres. For this project, Penny wanted her students to understand that there was often a connection between ancient artefacts and religious or spiritual beliefs and that these objects actually served a function over and above their aesthetic value. Penny considered that this kind of contextual knowledge allowed her students (even those in the early years of secondary school) to expand their understanding of the function of visual forms, which in turn had implications for their own work. She hoped that her students would learn ceramic construction and decorative techniques and might also appreciate that these techniques had been utilised over thousands of years in a range of cultural settings and that the visual arts had played a significant place in the lives of ordinary people. At a simple level, Penny also wanted her students to know that the competing elements of form (aesthetics, surface structure and appearance) and function (purpose and meaning) was a discourse in which artists and artisans had long engaged. Penny hoped that her students might appreciate that, even though they were working in their school classroom, they were nonetheless part of a long tradition of visual arts practice and cultural heritage.

I asked Penny whether these lofty ideals for the outcomes of visual education were proving easy or difficult to achieve. Penny responded that making links to the work of artists/movements was relatively easy, but the logistics of completing this project had been difficult to manage. Just as had been the case earlier in the year, Penny was spending a great deal of time trying to find ways to have the ceramic work fired externally. This involved packing the unfired studio pieces and then transporting them to an external site, because the school budget had not been sufficient to provide a kiln for the visual arts department. Notwithstanding the difficulties, Penny had managed to source a kiln at a neighbouring school that would allow her to fire her students work until her own school provided her with firing facilities. The school that had offered to help was also the school at which her external mentor for English was based that reinforced for Penny the importance of mentors and professional networks/teaching colleagues during the first year of teaching.

Tom then asked whether Penny felt that the end result of the ceramics project had been what she had expected and hoped for. Penny responded that she felt the project ceramics project had been highly successful; students had created a wide range of varied studio products which reflected not only their recent visit to the visual arts Gallery of WA to view the Egyptian exhibition currently showing, but also their independent research into the work of a range of contemporary artists that Penny had identified as being useful for appropriation purposes. These artists had all been influenced by Egyptian hieroglyphics or colour schemes and had appropriated this pictorial element into their work. Penny had discussed the issue of appropriation with her students, who had then been asked to research the function and form of Canopic jars in Egyptian society. The students had completed both written and visual research (small drawings which imitated or copied part or all of the original artwork) and had then employed Egyptian visual arts as an interrelationship (visual influence) for the project they were working on. Furthermore, Penny arranged for the students to visit the ancient Egyptian exhibition at the AGWA that was very extensive and reinforced the information the students had acquired in their own independent research.

Penny had also arranged for all other children in the school to attend the gallery; staff at AGWA had provided both volunteer guides and a learning program for Arts in Society and Arts Responses outcomes for use both on the day and later at school. The school-wide visit had provided opportunities for cross-curricular initiatives and Penny was looking forward to working with other staff on joint projects. Tom then suggested that Penny could follow on from the Canopic Jars and extend the students' knowledge, by having them complete ceramic masks based around the sarcophagi which were on show in the exhibition. Penny liked this idea and asked Tom for advice about a supplier for moulds for masks. Tom provided this information and the meeting concluded shortly thereafter.

In her reflection and review questionnaire, completed at the end of the year, she noted:

“I would love to have had more time to make contact with Tom, but just knowing there was a person available who had a shared enthusiasm for visual-literacy was excellent. I think it would have helped to have had someone a lot closer to home or school and because of this I actually made contact with other teachers close to home for some things. As a beginning-teacher in a school of busy people from different teaching areas I often felt quite alone and the logistics of teaching visual arts without an actual visual arts room often got too hard. People often perceive visual arts teaching as easy and relatively unimportant. Talking to Tom about the problems of running between rooms with piles of work and materials with humour was a great morale boost. He has done the same for years in a shared facility. More than anything else the contact has helped re-ignite my enthusiasm for my job. Talking to an experienced professional is the best way to brainstorm about managing difficulties and validate your role. Tom suggested themes and concepts, shared successful project ideas and offered much advice about materials. He had many useful suggestions for combining materials to create high finish at minimum cost that made all the difference when you are operating on a small budget. He was great.”

## APPENDIX TWENTY: TOM'S STORY

Tom noted the following about his professional journey to date:

I possess an extensive range of educational and life learning experiences attained across a variety of settings including level 3 teacher, mentoring of staff and students in times of emotional trauma, in physically challenging locations. I have a great deal of confidence and proven ability working directly with children in primary, middle and secondary school settings. I have worked in metropolitan primary schools and rural schools ranging from years K – 7 across the 8 learning areas and in secondary schools across years 8 – 12 teaching Art. I have facilitated extensively to enhance learning programs for students with special needs, integrated visual arts programs and produced materials for K-7 visual arts Syllabus. I have presented to professional bodies at PD seminars, have in-serviced teachers and principals across the metropolitan area and some remote areas of the state presenting primary Art/Craft, as an integrated approach, plus I have been on the executive of the visual arts Education Association of W.A. including the role of Vice President over the past 20 years.

Tom was feeling a degree of stress, because he began the school year at a new school; he was worried that he might not have sufficient time to adequately support the beginning.

### **The first meeting:**

Group Ten met for the first time after the training workshop at the visual arts Gallery of Western Australia café in February 2007. Tom, the mentor, took charge of and directed much of the interaction of the meeting. He again introduced himself and spoke about his background in teaching that had encompassed both primary and secondary teaching over more than 20 years. He spoke about his role on the Education Department's interviewing panel for the placement of new graduates in annual teaching positions in Government schools. He was particularly interested in the interviews Penny and Zack had completed; on discovering that Zack had not yet had his interview that was due to occur later that week, he spent much of the first meeting running through the interview process and making suggestions for ways to prepare for the experience. Tom's contribution to the first meeting tended to be pragmatic, in the sense that he gave advice to Zack about handling his approaching interview for employment with the Education Department. These practical tips were invaluable and alleviated some of Zack's stress about the kinds of questions he might be asked by the panel. Tom had been on the interviewing panel several times in the past and was able to give Zack specific examples of previous questions and the kinds of answers which had been well received. He was also able to reassure Zack that the kinds of teaching positions he might be offered were within his level of expertise and would suit his preference for a country teaching position.

In addition to the practical advice that Tom offered to Zack about preparing for his interview, he spoke with Penny about the kinds of challenges she was facing in her part-time permanent position as a teacher of both visual arts and English. Penny's greatest concern lay in the poor teaching facilities for visual arts and the significant responsibility she held as the only teacher of English in the school. Tom was able to offer Penny tangible strategies to cope with the limitations arising from having to work in an environment which was not built for visual-arts education. He gave Penny suggestions for suppliers of alternative, inexpensive materials that proved invaluable in making viable the school's limited budget for art. Both beginning-teachers left the first meeting feeling as though they had had an opportunity to share some of their worries;

importantly, they took with them practical strategies which Tom had suggested for dealing with the challenges they faced.

The first meeting concluded on a relatively optimistic note and I formed the view that Tom had a particularly positive and affirming style that had encouraged the new teachers to open up and speak honestly about their concerns. The suggestions that Tom offered the recipients were practical and easy to implement; they derived from his own experience in that over many years, he had met and coped with similar challenges. As a result, the beginning-teachers were provided with strategies that had been tested and proven successful. Despite taking on a new role in a different school setting shortly before the research began, Tom appeared to be in his element in the role of mentor; he seemed genuinely to enjoy helping his protégés as they embarked on their new careers. He encouraged both Zack and Penny to visit him at his school to further consolidate their content knowledge and to establish their professional network by interacting with the other arts staff at his school. Tom stressed the importance of the visual arts Education Association of WA as an invaluable support for new teachers, particularly in respect of primary visual arts education; he urged both Penny and Zack to get involved in the professional development program offered by the group. At the end of the session I asked Tom how he felt the meeting had gone and he said that he felt it had been very successful. Despite a heavy workload (which he worried might limit the degree to which he could support his protégés) he was looking forward to acting as a mentor for these beginning-teachers. The next date for the group to meet was tentatively set and everyone left around one hour after the meeting commenced.

#### **The second meeting:**

Between the first and second meetings for this group, Zack and Tom had had a number of conversations. Zack had been out to Tom's school to watch Tom teach and to gain further experience in respect of visual-arts content. I discerned that Tom had begun to worry about Zack's confidence and, further, that he appeared to have some reservations about Zack's readiness for teaching. I formed the impression that, despite the fact that Tom wanted to do whatever he could to support Zack, he also felt that Zack needed to be more proactive in resolving his employment circumstances. Tom appeared to find Zack's reticence in applying for relief-work disconcerting and I wondered whether this reaction was a reflection of himself being overloaded, given he had taken on the mentoring role on top of his own increasing workload in a new position. Once again, Tom gave very practical solutions to both Penny and Zack throughout the meeting, as they raised their concerns about their employment circumstances and teaching challenges.

Tom had a wealth of experience and seemed to shine when given an opportunity to speak about the joy he had felt in teaching over the years. This passion was quite inspirational. I felt that Tom's style, in combination with his affirmation of his protégés, was helping to build resilience in Zack, particularly. I believed that Zack would have left the teaching profession had it not been for Tom's support. Tom's enthusiasm was infectious and I found myself reflecting on the privilege of listening to someone who had contributed so much to teaching over the years. Tom's personal narrative encompassed all kinds of teaching contexts and was filled with examples of innovation and resilience. He described having had to make do on tiny budgets in classrooms that were clearly not suited to teaching visual arts (particularly in primary contexts). Notwithstanding these challenges, some of the most rewarding experiences in his teaching experience had emanated from projects where the children had been asked to

bring in materials and objects from home to complement the materials provided by the school. Tom said that the children appeared to delight in the opportunity to 'show and tell'; to talk about the 'precious' things their parents had given them to supplement the tiny budget on which the visual arts department had been required to operate.

As the meeting progressed, I discerned that Tom seemed to be under pressure to move between the competing demands of Penny (who wanted to talk about resources and teaching strategies) and Zack (who wanted to talk about getting a job) and I worried that he might feel stretched too thinly. I made a note to raise this with him at a later time, to see if I could offer any support for his mentoring role. I had the opportunity to chat briefly with him later and he assured me that he was feeling fine and coping with the different needs of his protégés without difficulty. I reflected that, in so many ways, Tom himself a portrait of resilience. At a time when most teachers, entering a new position with increased responsibilities, would have divested themselves of everything except the most pressing responsibilities, Tom was willingly assuming more. This degree of altruism was impressive, but I reflected on the opinion expressed by both Janine and Tess (mentors from 2006) that there would need to be "something in it" for the mentors in order to persuade them to support new teachers on more than one occasion. I raised this issue with Tom and, although he indicated that he would be happy to do the mentoring again, it is worth noting that in 2008 he did not volunteer to take another beginning-teacher.

#### **The third meeting:**

I did not attend the third meeting, but Tom indicated that it had gone quite well. He continued to worry about Zack and I gathered that he was coming to the view that Zack might not be able to sustain his connection to teaching if he did not soon secure more permanent employment. Tom had again invited Zack to come to his school to renew his skills and maintain his motivation. Tom observed that Penny appeared to be fine and I felt that he was enjoying working with her more than Zack.

#### **The final meeting:**

Much of the last meeting was spent debriefing the new position which Zack had recently secured. Tom gave concrete examples of appropriate behaviour-management strategies and worked with Zack to refine the kinds of ideas for teaching and learning experiences which might be appropriate for the students in his classes. He seemed unimpressed that, having finally secured a teaching position, Zack seemed to be complaining about the workload he now had to carry. Tom mentioned on more than one occasion during the meeting that Zack's workload was "par for the course" and quite typical of the teaching responsibilities of all new full-time teachers. Tom appeared happier to focus on Penny's circumstances and spent considerable time speaking about suppliers and projects which would accommodate the multi-aged classes with which Penny had to work. He seemed more interested in speaking about the positive aspects of teaching and finding solutions to challenges, than focusing on the justice issues associated with those challenges. I discerned that there was almost an element of irritation in his voice when he responded to Zack's assertion that the school expected too much of him. When the opportunity presented itself, Tom asked Zack to describe the kinds of projects he had set and then gave practical advice about ways in which to connect to students' interests and challenge them to move forward. Tom suggested that Zack pursue graffiti visual arts and contemporary visual culture as appropriate themes for students in year 11 in the



remedial class that Zack had been assigned; he spent some time talking about motivational strategies and appropriate pedagogy for special needs classes. Tom then again invited both Penny and Zack to visit his school; given their part-time status, both indicated that they would try to do so. As the meeting concluded I formed the impression that, despite some talk of another meeting, Tom was rather glad the mentoring experience was coming to a conclusion. I was surprised when he said that he would like to take another pair of beginning-teachers in 2008, because he appeared rather tired and somewhat worn out. I gratefully accepted his offer to act as a mentor again, but this did not in fact eventuate and confirmed my thinking that something more than altruism would be needed to sustain the work of the research.

# OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

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## KEY ORGANISATIONS

Art Education Association of WA (AEA/WA)

Professional Association for Western Australian Art Teachers

Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA)

Non-Government Schools employing authority and schools' collective. Schools which are independent of the Department of Education and Training.

Curriculum Council of WA (CC/WA)

Regulatory body which oversees the delivery of teaching and learning in Western Australia

Department of Education and Training (DET)

Government Schools employing authority

Western Australian College of Teaching (WACOT)

Regulatory body which oversees the teaching profession in Western Australia

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Graduate-teachers/beginning-teachers

In this research these terms are interchangeable and denote tertiary sector graduates in both the Australian and International contexts who have embarked on their first year of visual arts education in secondary schools.

Mentor-teachers

Experienced visual arts education teachers with 10 or more years continuous teaching experience in Western Australian schools. Members of the visual arts Education Association of Western Australia whose Curriculum Vitae evidences extensive knowledge, experience, skills and leadership roles within the arts in schools. Experienced visual arts teachers who have worked as moderators for the Curriculum Council of Western Australia.

Teachers' perceptions:

Insight and understanding (of teaching and learning visual arts history and visual arts criticism) deriving from observation, intuition and participation.

## SCHOOLS, TEACHING AND LEARNING

Curricular content knowledge

Specific content related to the operation of the school domain – policy, procedures, politics, cross curricular initiatives (information which elaborates the rationale for structures within the school context)

Middle school students:

Students undertaking formal schooling across years 8 – 10 Western Australian schools.

**Outcomes-based visual arts education:**

... identifying what students should achieve (in visual arts education) and focusing on ensuring that they do achieve... a shift away from an emphasis on what is to be taught and how and when, to an emphasis on what is actually learnt by each student.  
(Curriculum Council, 1998, p 14)

**Pedagogical content knowledge:**

Specific content related to teaching practices and skills (content which informs the question of how to teach successfully)

**Post compulsory Students:**

Students undertaking formal schooling across years 11 – 12 in Western Australian schools until 2007, when schooling until year 12 was made compulsory.

**Subject discipline content knowledge:**

Specific knowledge and content related to the disciplines within visual arts ( in this research specifically visual inquiry, studio practice, visual arts history and visual arts criticism)

## **WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK:**

Major reform of school curriculum in Western Australia, built upon a commitment to the philosophy that learning is continuous and should reflect an 'outcomes-approach' to learning. The essential purpose of the WACF is to improve the learning and achievement of all students. The Framework establishes learning outcomes expected of all students from kindergarten to year twelve.

**Core-shared values**

The core shared values support the learning programs of each learning area and relate to:

- The pursuit of knowledge and commitment to the achievement of potential
- Self acceptance and respect of self
- Respect and concern for others and their rights
- Social and civic responsibility
- Environmental responsibility (Curriculum Council, 1998, p 325)

**Learning areas**

The eight Learning Areas of the Curriculum Framework comprise:

- The Arts (including visual arts , dance, drama, media and music)
- English
- Health and Physical Education
- LOTE – Languages other than English
- Maths
- Science
- Society & Environment
- Technology & Enterprise (including home economics, computing, design technology)

**Learning outcomes**

The observable end result of learning experiences where students demonstrate acquisition of knowledge, skills and understandings. Learning outcomes are evidenced in/through what students 'can actually do' as a result of schooling, rather than through what has been 'taught'. The WACF comprises 8 Learning Areas, each of which privilege subject-specific learning outcomes which are particular to their subject/cluster of subjects. Each of the Learning Areas within the Curriculum Framework privilege specific learning outcomes and these are particular to their area.

Within The Arts Learning Area outcomes are:

- Communicating arts ideas (formerly the process of visual inquiry)
- Arts skills and processes (formerly the process of studio work)
- Arts responses (formerly the process of visual arts criticism)
- Arts in Society (formerly the process of visual arts history)

Over-arching outcomes

The 13 over-arching outcomes are enumerated within the overarching statement of the WACF. (Curriculum Council, 1998, p 19) They prescribe learning outcomes which all students should achieve regardless of subject specialisation or learning area. Each learning area is required to embed the overarching outcomes in their learning programs.

The overarching outcomes relate to:

- Communication through language
- Numerical and spatial concepts
- The sourcing and application of information
- The selection, use and adaptation of technologies
- Patterns and relationships and their use in the making of predictions
- Visualising consequences and thinking laterally
- Engagement with the physical, technological and biological world
- Cultural, geographical and historical contexts
- The Global Community (Curriculum Council, 1998, p 325)
- Participation in creative activity/engagement with artistic, cultural/intellectual work of others
- Personal growth and well-being
- Individual and collaborative learning
- Rights and responsibilities (Curriculum Council, 1998, p 325)

Post compulsory education:

Voluntary period of education encompassing years 11-12 in Western Australian Schools until 2007. There are currently configurations of subjects which direct post compulsory students toward further study in tertiary environment (Tertiary Entrance Examination Subjects) or those which constitute a common assessment framework subject (CAF subjects) typically leading to study in the TAFE sector of work. From 2007 onwards school became compulsory for all students until the completion of year 12.

Principles of teaching and learning

The principles of teaching and learning which are privileged within the Curriculum Framework are:

- Opportunity to learn
- Connection and challenge
- Action and reflection
- Motivation and purpose
- Inclusivity and valuing difference

Vocational education and training (VET)

A number of education and training providers offer alternative course structures and study pathways leading to tertiary study or the post-school destinations of work or apprenticeships. These Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses or units derive from National Training Packages and combine to create Certificate Degrees (cert 1,2 3 or 4) in a variety of disciplines including the visual arts .

## **VISUAL ARTS PRACTICE AND PEDAGOGY**

### **Visual arts appreciation:**

The structured study of visual arts works, specifically addressing their formal qualities, in the search for artistic meaning.

### **Visual arts criticism:**

The appraisal, appreciation and critique of visual arts works within phenomenological, psychological, socially and culturally critical contexts for the purpose of deriving meaning (Duncum, 1994, p. 41).

### **Visual arts history:**

An examination of artists, artworks and their contexts, with the intent of revealing priorities and beliefs.

### **Visual arts imagery:**

Photographic/slide reproductions of important works of art.

### **Visual culture:**

- (i) is concerned with visual events through which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology (wikipedia)
- (ii) is a field of study that generally includes some combination of cultural studies, art history, critical theory, philosophy, and anthropology (wikipedia)

### **Visual literacy/visuacy:**

Visual literacy (now known as visuacy) comprises three specific abilities: to visualise internally; to create visual images/artworks and to read visual images/artworks (Atkins, 2003).

### **Visual arts works:**

Artefacts which have entered the public realm so as to embody the culture of a particular society.