Transforming professional learning: Educational action research in practice

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Abstract

This article seeks to extend current understandings of educational action research, particularly how teachers' actions, talk and ongoing relatings can serve as a vehicle for transforming their learning, including under current global conditions of more performative accountability. The research is grounded in Noffke's (2009) understandings of the nature of the personal, professional and political dimensions that characterize action research. While validating Noffke's (2009) dimensions, we also argue that specific instances of action research help provide insights into not just how action research might be currently understood, but details about how it has actually transformed teachers' learning practices. To do so, we draw upon recent theorizing into the nature of educational practice, and an example of action research in one school in Australia. Specifically, and drawing upon Kemmis et al. (2014), we reveal the particular 'doings' (actions), 'sayings' (talk) and 'relatings' (relationships) that characterize specific instances of teachers' learning during part of an action research cycle in this school, under current policy conditions. By indicating how this learning came about, we reveal how the personal, professional and political dimensions (Noffke, 2009) in action research settings are enacted, leading to transformed practice through specific doings, sayings and relatings under current conditions.

Keywords

Teacher professional learning, practice theory, educational action research, transformation

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Introduction: understanding transformative learning in practice

In this article, we seek to reveal how teachers engaged with one another during the early phases of an action research initiative, to gain a better understanding of their practice. The goal of the research is to reveal the specific practices and associated conditions that characterized a particular instance of the transformation of teachers' understandings of their work. Reflecting this goal, the principal research question guiding the study was: What are the specific collegial/discursive practices and conditions for productive collegial exchange that contribute to the transformation of teachers' understandings of their practice? In seeking to answer this question, we draw upon and extend existing theorizing into the nature of action research – particularly Noffke's (2009) work on the personal, professional and political dimensions of action research – to better understand how educational transformation might occur, in practice. To this end, we employ recent theorizing into the nature of professional educational practice through what Kemmis et al. (2014) refer to as the 'doings'/actions, 'sayings'/discourse and 'relatings'/relationships that characterize practice, and the broader conditions or 'practice architectures' within which these practices unfold.

To help ground this theorizing and our argument about how practice might be transformed, we draw upon empirical research into the nature of teachers' learning practices in one school in the northern regions of Queensland, Australia, under current policy conditions of increased national and global focus on testing and results. Facilitated by an experienced literacy educator as the Head of Curriculum in the school, these teachers were required by their principal to engage in ongoing professional learning in individual year level groups, on an ongoing basis (once a term), in the context of a new curriculum in Queensland. The research reveals the specificity of teachers' efforts to make sense of a new curriculum in these 'Inquiry Cycle' groups, the 'Curriculum into the Classroom' ('C2C'), and how teachers sought to enact this curriculum. The research focuses upon the nature of the interactions that occurred during a day-long meeting of Year 5 teachers at this school, as an example of how the transformation of teachers' learning for student learning might come about. We construe these interactions and these teachers' efforts to inform their practice as part of a process of action research oriented towards improving teachers' understandings for improved teaching practice, and as an instance of enacting learning beyond more (local, national and global) performative accountability purposes.

The nature of action research: personal, professional and political dimensions

Action research is recognized as a way for teachers to develop their practices, often in collaboration with one another and a facilitator. It is also a vehicle to challenge more reductive, neoliberal conceptions of teachers' learning (Hardy & Rönnerman, 2011). Working and dialoguing with peers about issues of mutual concern have long been argued to have a powerful role to play in renewing professional practice and advancing its sustainability and development (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Edwards-Groves, 2008; Somekh, 2006). In what is commonly described as 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998), participating in professional dialogue provides a communicative space for colleagues to interrogate and interpret the enabling and constraining factors about their teaching practices (Rönnerman et al., 2015). Such interactions foster a site-based intersubjective forum in which participating teachers have the opportunity to develop a form of collective self-reflective enquiry (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Teachers' involvement in action research also helps to generate practices of leadership on the part of these teachers (Edwards-Groves and Rönnerman, 2013) – often expressed in practices of facilitating peers during collective reflective practices. In recent studies, Grootenboer et al. (2015) have identified how such middle leading practices, involving

teachers leading their colleagues' pedagogical change, begin with critical reflections on their practices and require a capacity to enable teachers' voices and agency for developing their own practices.

In the context of such practices, and through historical studies of action research projects, Noffke (2009) recognized three dimensions to action research which she identified as the 'professional, personal and political'. In her first review of the literature, Noffke (1997) presented the three dimensions as a way to understand action research, and thereby to explore the multiple layers of assumptions, purposes and practices that underpinned notions of action research. These categories were considered non-hierarchical and understood as intertwined. At the same time, Noffke (1997, 2009) emphasized that all forms of action research are political, and that the political dimension is also always part of the professional and the personal. The 'political' also takes on particular salience in the current context of increasingly globalized policy practices (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010), particularly around what Biesta (2010) refers to as 'an age of measurement'.

Through history, the *professional* dimension is evident in early work of action research in the US and the UK; this included Kurt Lewin's work in health and social provision in the US, and later work in the UK that was aimed at transforming the nature of teaching (supported by universities) via curriculum reform, in order to solve broader social problems. As a form of research, it emphasized looking at data from one's own practice as a basis for further actions and theorizing practice. In Australia in the 1980s, action research became more school-based and practitioner-centred as an approach to improve educational understandings and practice, in context. The work of Carr and Kemmis (1986) made a significant contribution to the professional development of teachers at the time, as action research emerged as a new way of dealing with the relationship between theory and practice. In Europe, the longest tradition was in the UK where Lawrence Stenhouse and John Elliot were key figures in establishing action research in education, in collaboration with universities (Elliot, 1991). The collaborative action research network was also established (CARN), with annual conferences and its own journal. Slightly later, in the US, there was an increased focus upon building stronger university–school collaborations, and highlighting the importance of teachers' voices in generating knowledge for practice; this turn towards more practitioner-led research was an important shift in viewing teachers as producers of knowledge and not just consumers, helping institutionalize a more grounded way to influence the development of the profession more generally. In the Nordic countries, action research can be traced back to work sciences with a focus upon various democratic forms for meeting, an emphasis on collaboration and dialogue in sharing experiences, and building new knowledge for professional development (Rönnerman and Salo, 2012, 2014). A strong tradition of action research for school reform in Austria has resulted in a network amongst schools and universities, and a bank of documented action research projects for teachers to use (Altrichter et al., 1993; Rauch, 2016). The professional dimension has grown as it has gained acceptance in different ways in many research venues where teachers are invited to present their own research for discussion amongst peers.

The *personal* dimension has three distinct aspects, with the first 'dealing with the personal growth and development of those who engage in it, [while] another emphasizes the individual versus the collaborative nature of work, and a third addresses the involvement of individual university faculty in the action research process' (Noffke, 2009: 10). The typically collaborative nature of action research contributes to not just problem solving in the individual teacher's classroom but to teachers becoming more skilful by reflecting upon and discussing educational issues together. Depending on the nature of these issues, the political and professional dimensions are more or less evident. The personal dimension largely centres on teachers' identity and agency. Recently, Kemmis et al. (2014) raised the profile of the personal through their advocacy for more critical participatory (collaborative) action research. Furthermore, work by Rönnerman (2008) specifically

recognizes the personal dimension through the study of the connections between the personal in specific university programmes; this includes teachers' participation in Master's level and Doctoral programmes at different universities as ways to examine and improve one's own practices. In these studies, teachers' voices are crucial.

The *political* dimension has to do with a strong concern for creating democratic processes. This was shown in the US before the 1950s, but is also evident in the roots of the Nordic traditions of action research (Rönnerman and Salo, 2012, 2014). It is also noted in work undertaken in South America by Freire, and in projects undertaken in South Africa. In relation to the political dimension, action research is seen as making change directly rather than waiting for someone to implement changes based on a conception of research as external to the practice of the practitioner; it also flags how professional learning, understood more broadly, has multiple aims and is deeply contested (Hardy, 2012). Noffke (2009) has found the political dimension has become even more evident in an era of recognition of the increasing complexity of school reform, in which action research projects are constituted as a vehicle for 'local knowledge production for civil purposes' (Noffke, 2009: 17). Importantly, under current more globalized policy conditions (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010), the local is heavily influenced and rearticulated in response to broader, often more performative, global pressures and demands. This 'global panopticism' (Lingard et al., 2013) influences both national and international policy-making and, subsequently, the work of those in schools.

Action research is also a form of research that addresses the specific context and programmes at hand. Action research has become part of professional learning whereby curriculum is created involving research skills applied to developing practice at a more local level, including under these more globalized policy conditions. In this way, a sense of personal, professional and political agency develops and is evident in more agentic 'activist' professional approaches more broadly (see particularly, Sachs, 2003). However, action research cannot be construed as an arbitrary research 'method' (Carr and Kemmis, 2005), but rather needs to be understood as a set of 'commitments sharing an epistemology that sees knowledge as essentially connected to practice' (Noffke, 2009: 21). Also, as noted above, even as there is always an emphasis upon the local, this is a 'local' that is increasingly influenced by broader, often global, policy conditions.

These three dimensions of action research (Noffke, 1997, 2009) are visible in today's discourses on school development. However, the name action research is increasingly rarely mentioned in the programmes conducted by universities, states or school systems; instead, terms such as 'collegial learning' (Timperley, 2011) have gained increased attention. Similarly, 'professional' or 'teacher learning communities' are highlighted as the pathway to success (Stoll et al., 2006). At the same time as recognizing collegial learning and learning-in-community as essential, if Noffke's three dimensions are considered necessary regarding action research as instrumental for practitioner transformation, it is also important to recognize that these necessary dialogical processes occur in relation to more fulsome embodied understandings of professional learning as simultaneously personal, professional and political.

However, we would argue that the understanding of action research she presents underplays how change or transformation in learning actually comes about. In the case presented below, we seek to identify not only the value and validity of Noffke's (1997, 2009) three dimensions of action research, as evident in teachers' learning in one school site, but also how such personal, professional and political 'development' might actually come about, in practice, ultimately leading to transformed practice. To try to address this gap, we seek to draw upon recent theorizing of practice, grounded in specific locations, or 'sites', and how these sites can serve as places for the development of teacher and student learning. We also seek to make sense of these local sites as influenced by national, state and regional accountability processes that are themselves affected by globalized educational accountabilities (Lingard et al., 2016).

Theorizing professional learning in practice

Recent theorizing of practice argues that practices cannot simply be understood in relation to the 'doing' of particular acts. Rather, drawing upon the work of philosopher Theodore Schatzki (2002, 2010), and Kemmis et al.'s (2014) expansion of his approach, we understand educational practices as characterized by particular assemblages of not simply 'doings', but also language ('sayings') and relationships ('relatings'), and the particular conditions within which they develop and which help to constitute them.

For Schatzki (2010), a social practice comprises an 'organised array of doings and sayings' (Schatzki, 2010: 51) which are oriented towards a particular end ('the future'), and are simultaneously influenced by both previous and current events and processes. Schatzki (2010) understands an activity as a temporal–spatial event which occurs through the 'site of the social' (Schatzki, 2002) – specific spaces within which social life unfolds in relation to particular orders/arrangements of people and objects, and which help constitute particular kinds of practices.

While relationships are infused throughout Schatzki's conception of practice, Kemmis et al. (2014) argue that these social relations need to be made more overt in efforts to understand actual practices. Indeed:

> [m]aking 'relatings' explicit brings the social–political dimension of practice into the light, draw[ing] attention to the medium of power and solidarity which always attends practice, and invites us to consider what social–political arrangements in a site help to hold a practice in place.
>
> (Kemmis et al., 2014: 30)

On this view, practices are composed of particular 'doings', 'sayings' and 'relatings' which help to constitute practices as being of a particular kind. Furthermore, these practices do not exist in and of themselves, but are always and everywhere influenced by existing arrangements which affect how practices play out – and which are themselves simultaneously influenced by these practices. Kemmis et al. (2014) refer to these arrangements collectively as 'practice architectures' – particular entities which shape how practices 'hang together' in specific and identifiable projects. These practice architectures both enable and constrain the particular practices to which they pertain. Reflecting the nature of practices as comprising particular 'doings', 'sayings' and 'relatings', practice architectures which enable and constrain practices exist in three dimensions: cultural–discursive ('sayings'); material–economic ('doings'); and social–political ('relatings'):

- *cultural–discursive arrangements* (in the medium of language and in the dimension of *semantic space*) … are the resources that make possible the *language and discourses* used in and about this practice; these arrangements enable and constrain the *sayings* characteristic of the practice;
- *material–economic arrangements* (in the medium of *activity and work*, in the dimension of *physical space-time*) … are the resources that make possible the *activities* undertaken in the course of the practice; these arrangements enable and constrain the *doings* characteristic of the practice; and
- *social–political arrangements* (in the medium of *power and solidarity* and in the dimension of *social space*) … are the resources that make possible *the relationships between people and non-human objects* that occur in the practice; these arrangements enable and constrain the *relatings* of the practice (Kemmis et al., 2014: 32).

These arrangements could include, for example, particular policies (cultural–discursive arrangements) to reorient curriculum, assessment or professional learning approaches at a whole-system

level; physical infrastructure (material–economic arrangements) such as dedicated rooms in a school for teachers to collaboratively plan; and union-negotiated work plans (social–political arrangements) to ensure equitable distribution of hours for planning within a particular sector. These socio-political resources include not only more localized influences but also broader national and international policies, including more globalized policy influences (Lingard et al., 2016).

Finally, practices are always located in particular sites and are influenced by the specificity of these sites. It is these sites which furnish the particular arrangements which pertain to specific practices and which help identify practices as practices of a particular kind. Even as educational systems and governments may seek to cultivate common practices across sites, the peculiarity and specificity of particular sites will always and everywhere influence how practices unfold.

In relation to particular instances of action research practices, this implies that the personal, professional and political dimensions to which Noffke (2009) refers are actualized in specific locations and are characterized by particular doings, sayings and relatings. These dimensions are 'lived' through the particular actions ('doings'), dialogue ('sayings') and relationships ('relatings') that play out in specific sites. And these doings, sayings and relatings, in turn, both reflect and are constitutive of particular arrangements that influence how these personal, professional and political dimensions are enacted; cultural–discursive, material–economic and social–political arrangements all affect the personal, professional and political dimensions to help constitute the specific practices that characterize these dimensions. It is the *specificity* of these doings, sayings and relatings that we seek to highlight, particularly through the dialogic spaces created by teachers as they seek to make sense of their practice. These spaces become, arguably, a potentially transformative environment shaped in and through the dialogue that unfolds (Edwards-Groves, 2013). Engaging in collaborative dialogue through action research enables teachers to understand, reconceptualize and potentially transform their learning practices. Examples of such practices reveal the dynamic interplay between the personal, professional and political dimensions, which necessarily occur within the particular material–economic, cultural–discursive and social–political arrangements that characterize the conditions – the 'architectures' – of and for practice. The case presented below elaborates the nature of the early stages of a specific instance of action research and the particular actions, dialogue and relationships that helped constitute the personal, professional and political dimensions, under broader globalized policy conditions, and that transformed these teachers' learning in practice.

The case: 'Northam Primary'

The research draws upon one instance of teachers' learning in a particular year level in one school site in Queensland, Australia, during a period of significant educational reform. In response to relatively poor results on national literacy and numeracy tests (NAPLAN – National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy) in Queensland vis-à-vis most other Australian states, and a federal government push for a national curriculum ('The Australian Curriculum'), the public educational authority responsible for schooling in Queensland developed and implemented a detailed curriculum. The 'Curriculum into the Classroom' ('C2C') outlined individual lesson plans for each of 25 lessons developed as part of 5-week units of work. This curriculum was enacted in a variety of ways in schools, including in heavily prescribed ways in those regions in the state that had performed most poorly on national testing and that were perceived to be in most need of direct and directive intervention. This included the northern regions of the state in which the school reported here was located. These tests and this curriculum were a product of state and ultimately national concerns about educational practices in the context of an increasingly globalized space of commensuration in which international markers of attainment (particularly the OECD's PISA results) were used as proxies of national achievement (Lingard et al., 2016).

The research explores how a particular instance of part of a broader action research process – described as the 'Inquiry Cycles'[1] – was undertaken in a primary (K-6) school within this context. This initiative was supported by the principal at the school, and initiated and facilitated by the Head of Curriculum (HOC) – an experienced literacy educator, 'Anna',[2] who brought her extensive experience as a regional literacy educator/consultant to her work at Northam, and who had learnt about and actively supported the inquiry process approach through her previous work in this consultancy role. This included several years working across multiple school sites and working to facilitate such Inquiry Cycles in school sites, including in relation to the newly implemented Australian Curriculum. This was a school-driven and local response to educational reform, rather than a systemic response. All teachers in the school were required by the principal to participate in the Inquiry Cycles.

Methods and methodology

The research is based on the beginning phases of a particular instance of teachers' learning, as part of a much larger data set collected over a three-year period (2013–2015). This included observations of teachers' learning practices, including more than 45 individual professional development days or afternoons, including as part of, or after, weekly staff meetings. These data were supplemented by interviews with several staff across all year levels and multiple roles within the school. Documents were also collected at the school site, as these pertained to teachers' learning. A key part of this data set included transcripts of whole-day year level meetings held once per term at the school site. The data reported here are based on one of these transcripts from a meeting held in October 2013 and involving five Year 5 teachers, the HOC (as facilitator of the group) and a reading coach (who worked with teachers across all year levels to facilitate improved reading practices amongst students). To ensure the accuracy of transcripts (which were transcribed remotely), this work also involved the first author taking detailed (often verbatim) notes during the meetings. The research was approved by the relevant university ethics committee, and by the educational authority and the school. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the research, to having meetings recorded, and for the use of transcripts (and associated materials) for purposes of public reporting (publication) about the work.

The data report the initial phases of a broader action research process involving teachers reflecting upon key aspects of their relationship with their students, and the new curriculum. This particular meeting/transcript was chosen for the way in which it indicated how teachers' learning practices transformed during the discussion. This meeting was also chosen because it reflected the realities of the challenges, tensions and contestations of professional change, and so had strong potential to serve as a 'negative case', thereby illuminating the difficulties of collaborative learning for transforming teachers' understandings of practice. In this sense, it was not simply chosen because it was an example of a 'positive' or seamless instance of professional learning, but because it reveals how the work of developing more transformative understandings is hard work for those involved; things could have gone very differently during the course of the interaction described. While there was evidence of these difficulties within the corpus of material as a whole, the particular excerpt presented here is a more accurate reflection of the hard work in which these teachers engaged during these meetings, and of how this hard work could have productive outcomes. Not all meetings led to more overtly evident forms of transformation (as described here), but they were certainly oriented towards such an outcome.

Methodologically, the research involved drawing upon Kemmis et al.'s (2014) concepts of practice as comprising particular 'doings', 'sayings' and 'relatings', and the broader conditions – 'practice architectures' – surrounding these practices, together with Noffke's (2009) understandings of

action research as characterized by specific personal, professional and political dimensions. Kemmis et al.'s conceptual resources were used to analyse how the characteristic features of the personal, professional and political dimensions of teachers' learning came about in relation to this data and constituted instances of the transformation of practice. As part of this process, two broad themes were identified, as these pertained to these practices of teachers' learning. These themes emerged from the data, in light of these conceptual resources, and through close and repeated reading and re-reading of the transcript. Specifically, the research process involved a hybrid approach to data coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994), involving eliciting perspectives from existing research and theorizing about the nature of action research and practice theory, and by simultaneously drawing inductively from the empirical data. After Reichertz (2014), this more 'abductive' approach involved the authors: hypothesizing about teachers' learning practices in light of Kemmis et al.'s notion of practice architectures, and Noffke's (2009) personal, professional and political dimensions of action research and the data; testing the 'hypotheses' arising from the data; and identifying key themes that arose through this process. In this way, new insights were derived about the nature of teachers' learning practices in the context of current policy reforms in Queensland. This process was done in two stages, with the first author identifying initial 'theories'/themes, and the second and third authors interrogating these theories/themes in light of their interpretations of the transcript. The two themes emerging through this process related to: teachers' perceptions of their students and their circumstances, and how teachers came to see these differently; and the extent to which the new curriculum, the C2C, was seen as enabling and constraining in relation to how teachers understood their students' needs. This analysis includes insights into how the accountability agenda around this new curriculum was part of a broader national and global discourse around increased accountabilities more generally (Lingard et al., 2013). The nature of these practices of change and development are elaborated below in relation to each of these themes. These points of change/transformation are particularly evident in relation to the dialogue between the teachers, the facilitator and reading coach as they discussed their work, as part of the Inquiry Cycles.

In relation to positionality of the authors, the first author acted as an external critical friend to the facilitator, teachers and administrators (principal, deputy-principals) in the school. This included providing his perspective when called upon during Inquiry Cycle meetings, and during discussions with all participants, both before and after each meeting and set of meetings. Over the four years of the Inquiry Cycles, the facilitator, teachers and school administrators came to see his participation as a 'normal' part of the Inquiry Cycles. The second and third authors were academic colleagues engaging in similar sorts of work in other national and international schooling settings, and provided important intellectual stimulus to the first author in relation to the work of the group.

Findings: teachers' learning in action

Challenging teachers' pedagogies and teachers' perceptions of students

For teachers, there was initially a strong focus upon looking externally for the source of what was seen as the lack of students' learning, engagement and achievement:

Anna: If we start the day thinking about, well, what were the key messages from yesterday and you think that some kids are never going to get beyond a 'D'[3] because –

Riley: Yeah, and I think environmental factors at their home, I know, we were talking about no sleep, allowed to play on computers all day, all those factors factor in. But some kids just are never actually going to have that brain power, just not smart enough; I

don't know what the actual technical term for that is, but they're just not going to get it – and I think that's life …

Hope: Some of these kids don't give a toss.
Riley: I know that, yeah.
Anna: Because some, I agree, some children don't understand the need for it, so the motivation is not there and part of that …
Hope: And parents don't see a need for it either.

In this context, we can see how the broader material–economic arrangements affecting students' lives (environmental and economic factors) influenced the substance of the talk – the cultural–discursive exchange – as these teachers met together. Teachers began by critiquing the nature of the classroom practice that occurred in relation to their work. Their overt criticisms of students acted as a potential constraint to these teachers' learning by externalizing responsibility for student learning to the students themselves, without adequate regard for their own role in students' learning. Their focus upon students 'just not [being] smart enough' positions responsibility to external causes, including students' 'brainpower'. This externalization was further exemplified in criticisms of students' lack of motivation: 'so the motivation is not there'.

Similarly, the focus upon parents' circumstances exemplified how the environment in which teachers worked influenced their understandings about what they felt they could achieve/do and how they related to students. For one teacher, perceptions of students' lack of motivation was viewed as a natural extension of parental influence, or of a lack thereof: 'parents don't see a need for it either'. In this case, we can see how the 'sayings' that characterized these teachers' interactions were potentially dominated by problematic discourses of student deficit; the fault seemed to lie with the students, their parents and the external environment, rather than the nature of teachers' teaching practices.

For some teachers, this was challenging work, with students' contextual circumstances continuing to be seen to constrain teachers' teaching practice:

Hope: Yeah, so they don't have the intellect, plus they don't want to, they don't want to be here, they don't care, they – they're allowed to be on the computer all night.

However, at the same time, we see transformed practice in action through a considered but robust challenging of these discourses of deficit, particularly on the part of the facilitator:

Anna: That's right, that's right, and part of that is our job. And I think what you're talking about, Riley, is a set of skills – like adults learning how to decode, how to learn how to read and write at an adult level – what am I trying to say here: it may not be that the kids don't have the IQ or the intelligence, but they didn't get the way it was taught at school.

In this way, the facilitator was actively engaged in trying to shift the discourse – the 'talk' – from a discourse of deficit to a more positive, proactive and active stance about the need for teachers to focus upon what they did have control over in the school – their pedagogies – rather than what they did not have control over – the particular family/parenting/home/SES[4] environment within which their students lived their daily lives. In this way, multiple discourses were at play.

It was not just the facilitator who was taking a lead in challenging teachers' preconceptions about student learning. For the reading coach, concerns about student disengagement led to a change in her own practice to try to address these concerns, which she shared openly with members of the group:

Lillian: Can I say I had a class like that – early 2000s. Half of them were totally dysfunctional, disengaged; one of them was violent, aggressive, self-harming, and half of them couldn't read. They were almost illiterate, and I had to totally change the way I taught to be able to cope with that class. And ended up doing worm farms and butterfly gardens and bush tucker gardens, and did my learning through that environmental practice …

Hope: Practical.

Lillian: So we did our literacy, we did our maths, we were out in the garden, we created – we had sessions where we just went and did the worm farms, fed them, collected the castings, bottled them, worked on advertisements; did all that stuff. By the end of that year – I'm not going to say all of them – but by the end of the year, I had a huge turnaround in that group. And they were a totally different group, and would not leave the classroom at lunchtimes to go out and play – wanted to stay in and do stuff. So I hear what you're saying; I know that it is valid and it is true, but I also know what good teaching does.

Through the action of sharing her experiences, this teacher affirmed her colleagues' concerns about the difficulties of working with students who struggled with 'schooling', but she did not stop there. As a part of the sayings evident in this dialogue, the reading coach referred to how she sought to change her own practice to better reflect the needs of her students. In this way, she was trying to build better relationships/relatings with her colleagues as a way of helping them to see how they could do their work differently, even as they may have doubted their own abilities to do so. Even as the reading coach may have seemed at times to be engaging in a 'discourse of derision' about the students ('I know that it is valid and it is true'), she simultaneously sought to reorient the discussion – sayings – around how the teachers might approach their work with their students differently to enable these students' learning. The examples she provided in the discussion about the worm farms, butterfly garden and bush tucker garden were a form of cultural–discursive realignment of the discussion, in ways that foregrounded teachers' teaching practice, rather than perceptions of student deficit. Such a response is indicative of a form of 'normalizing responses' in teachers' dialogue – responses which may either move the conversation '*away from the teaching or toward the teaching as an object of collective attention*' (Little and Horn, 2007: 82; emphasis original). In the former scenario, teachers give assurance, sometimes adding pieces of personal experience and advice, and then move on. In the latter, the expected and normal character of the problem is taken as the starting point for a detailed discussion of the specific experience as it relates to more general principles of practice; in this scenario, linking general principles to actual practice is essential and fosters professional learning and development. In this case, this normalizing activity involved freeing the teacher from personal blame, but keeping the responsibility for the situation firmly in the hands of the teachers themselves; the expectation is that 'they will all consistently learn in and from their teaching practice' (Little and Horn, 2007: 87). This was not just a fleeting mention of classroom practice but an elaborated articulation of specific teaching practices, and that sought to change the nature of the sayings that characterized these teachers' learning. In this sense, the processes at play were indicative of broader normalizing responses that construe such problems as 'deserving of sustained attention' (Little and Horn, 2007: 88). This work of normalizing responses *towards* teaching as an object of collective attention can be challenging, as evidenced in Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2016) research into the facilitation of self-study of teacher education practices. Vanassche and Kelchterman's (2016) work revealed how, at times, the participants in their research fostered supportive collegial relations with one another, but how these relations can inhibit more substantive and productive professional development by limiting more challenging

and critical questioning of participants' normative perspectives on practice. However, and unlike the Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2016) research, the facilitators in the research reported here (in the form of the reading coach and the HOC) were not external persons, but members of the group (although their status as reading coach and HOC, as opposed to 'regular' (full-time classroom) teachers, did confer something of an 'outsider' status of sorts, and upon which they could draw to foster more critical inquiry on the part of other members of the group).

This is not to underplay the difficulties associated with such work. The process of discussing their teaching and their students' classroom practices was challenging for the teachers:

Hope: Are you saying I'm not a good teacher?
Lillian: No, no, no, no …
Monique: A bit early to start a fight now.
Lillian: No, no good is not the right word, no sorry, wrong word.
Monique: Moving …
Lillian: Changing the pedagogical practices to meet the needs of a student in a class.

By acknowledging explicitly the potential for conflict – 'bit early to start a fight now' – Monique sought to maintain a cordial exchange between teachers, rather than focusing upon the negative. In this instance, the facilitator (Anna) did not simply enter into this discussion, but instead provided the circumstances for the teachers themselves to help resolve this tension. Particular socio-political arrangements were being rearticulated such that the teachers themselves had the space within the group to maintain cordial relations as part of the preconditions for more robust discussions about the nature of teachers' actual teaching practice. As part of this process, the reading coach (Lillian) explicitly refocused attention to the teaching practices, rather than the teachers themselves; again, this is an example of normalizing responses orienting teachers *towards* their practice, rather than simply providing broad platitudes to 'keep the peace' (*away* from their practice). Also, by appropriating the term 'good' in response to her colleague's (Hope) concerns about being potentially criticized, the reading coach was trying to defuse potentially unproductive dialogue and sought to refocus attention upon the 'pedagogical practices to meet the needs of a student in a class'.

In part, the reading coach was seeking to shift the focus from the personal to the professional (Noffke, 2009). The public way in which she discussed the nature of teaching practices was not simply for the sole benefit of one or other of the teachers (e.g. Hope, who may have felt defensive), but an active strategy on her part to 'put the issue on the table' for all to develop better understandings of their teaching practices. However, this work did not stop here. Rather, the reading coach took the opportunity of a potentially difficult situation and sought to turn it into a vehicle for teachers to see how a 'tough' issue could be broached publicly amongst themselves so as to come up with a way to respectfully respond to concerns raised within the group, and in a way that was constructive and ultimately beneficial for both teachers' and students' learning; she was exhibiting 'substantial agency' (Horn and Little, 2010: 192) in keeping with those practices in which teachers engaged in normalizing practices oriented towards teaching. She was also 'taking over' the role of the official facilitator, thereby indicating how 'leading from the middle' (Grootenboer et al., 2014) (from beyond a senior role, such as the HOC) can be enacted in practice. This was akin to the efforts of Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2016) in facilitating the work of the teacher educators with whom they worked via more critical questioning of their practices (even as this was challenging work). It is also important to acknowledge such work can also be potentially problematic as more hierarchical relations come to the fore, and which cannot be easily resolved, particularly when such structures are seen as productive of participants' learning within the group (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2016).

The practice architectures in this circumstance were complex. The facilitator was physically present, but not always explicitly interacting with teachers. Instead, there was both active engagement on her part and active engagement on the part of the teachers in the discussion. The enabling conditions on this occasion were both the presence of the facilitator and the regulation of her own practice; she provided the space for the teachers to resolve at least some of the conflicts that arose themselves.

Transformed practice was occurring at several levels. When the discourse shifted, there was evidence of morally committed action emerging (cf. Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer, 2015) on the part of those teachers, such as the reading coach, who supported such a response. At the same time, there was also evidence of transformation (at least at the discursive level), through advocating pedagogies for sustainable practice; such advocacy was itself reflective of more substantive practice-oriented normalizing practices on the part of these teachers (Little and Horn, 2007, 2010). At the level of the facilitator, there was also, arguably, an instance of transformed practice in the way she did not simply intervene, but allowed the discussion to unfold and for other members of the group who were not institutional leaders, such as Monique, to help ensure positive relations/relatings were maintained. Such restraint is in itself a form of 'doing' on the facilitator's part, which enabled other members of the group to help determine how to resolve the tensions at play. When these teachers' talk shifted during the discussion, the teachers were 'doing differently', 'saying differently' and 'relating differently'; in this case, Noffke's (2009) personal dimension was evident in the personal growth apparent in how individual teachers were participating in the dialogue and the professional dimension in how the teachers were collectively considering the students' needs/circumstances. And at all times, a politics supportive of democratic engagement amongst teachers enabled this work to occur.

Beyond prescription: 'doing' the C2C, rather than being 'done to' by the C2C

A key constraint from several teachers' perspectives was how the curriculum in Queensland had become more prescriptive since the release of the new state curriculum – 'Curriculum into the Classroom', or 'C2C'. This prescriptiveness was part of broader policy and political responses to Queensland's relatively poor position on the initial national tests of literacy and numeracy first held in 2008, and that served as a form of 'catalyst data' to secure national educational funding (Lingard and Sellar, 2013); these tests were themselves part of a broader global educational accountability agenda centred around national comparative results in PISA (Lingard et al., 2016). A key question – asked by a teacher who was initially complaining and externalizing the demands of the curriculum – was how to address students' specific needs within the demands of the new curriculum. However, for her colleague, there were always constraints, even prior to the new curriculum:

Hope: Okay so how do we meet the needs when we have all this prescriptive stuff we have to do, though?
Lillian: I had that prescriptive stuff to do at …
Hope: Wasn't C2C in 2000?
Lillian: No, but I still had – I had two running records a term to do, I had – one of them was what I made myself do, and the other one was formal. We still had 'Waddington',[5] 'South Australia', we had a whole lot of maths; we had writing samples …

Teachers recognized that there were always constraining conditions which impacted upon their work. Even as one teacher argued the C2C didn't exist earlier in her career, there were still

standardized tests and a level of intensification that characterized teachers' work. The practice architectures at play in the meeting reflected particular socio-political arrangements at play, including teachers' varied responses to systemic and/or school demands to enact particular kinds of tests/ programmes. In the context of more globalized educational accountabilities, revealing such a response reflects how the local is not simply powerless in the face of strong and complex performative demands, but can exert influence (cf. Appadurai's (2001) notion of 'grassroots globalization'). In Noffke's (2009) terms, the political dimension was evident in the tensions that arose in how these teachers sought to best understand the prescriptiveness of the new curriculum in light of previous experiences of systemic demands and foci.

However, at the same time, these teachers also felt that the circumstances associated with the C2C were qualitatively different from those that surrounded implementation of the earlier tests and programmes. The pressure to respond to the centralized curriculum was a very significant demand that did not exist previously:

Monique: Yeah I mean I've done all that too, I still don't think that C2C pressure [was there]; I still don't think that's there back in 2000. I think you could have gone and done your gardens and your butterfly farms and whatever.
Riley: Oh I agree.
Monique: Oh absolutely.
Hope: Whereas now you can't.
Monique: Yeah that's true.

Reflecting a context of broader national and global pressures to more effectively measure and monitor teachers' work and student learning, these teachers were reinforcing one another's concerns about the C2C and what they construed as the limiting conditions – practice architectures – the new curriculum imposed upon their work. We see how the 'doing' of meeting together provided the conditions for particular 'sayings' – critiquing the C2C and how it was seen as constraining what they believed to be possible – and forging relationships/relatings that took these limitations as given. The political dimension (Noffke, 2009) was evident in the ostensibly democratic way in which teachers took turns to discuss their work, and particularly to engage in forms of meaning-making – efforts to make sense of how they were engaging with the curriculum. However, this 'politics' of participation was also potentially problematic if it stopped at this point of just criticizing the C2C; at this point, the meeting had the potential to be oriented away from their teaching practice, as teachers engaged in processes of normalizing in relation to their work conditions more broadly (Little and Horn, 2007, 2010). This more limited conception of the democratic is not the more substantive conception Biesta (2010) had in mind in his push to 'open up' understandings of education, 'to keep the discussion about the aims and ends of education going rather than to close it down prematurely' (Biesta, 2010: 26), as part of his critique of the politics of measurement and monitoring.

However, these teachers did not stop at simply criticizing the curriculum reforms. At the same time, the facilitator worked to ensure the discussion did not become bogged down in these concerns. Immediately after this comment, the facilitator took an active role in reorienting the discussion away from the constraints upon teachers' work and focused attention upon the actual quality of the teaching that occurred; again, and resonating with Vanassche and Kelchtermans' (2016) work with teacher educators, this was an instance of the sorts of teaching-focused normalized responses that sought to foreground teaching practice, rather than simply reassuring teachers about the inevitable complexity of curriculum reform. In this instance, there was an implication that the C2C more explicitly demanded higher standards of student work than was previously the case, and

that the teaching students experienced should enable them to achieve at a high standard, and that this was a good thing vis-à-vis students' learning:

> Anna: So I think that that message is, the curriculum has always been there, and the standard has always been there, although it wasn't always realized and it wasn't always necessarily taught.
> Monique: How you got to an end point back in those days was up to you basically, now it's not …
> Anna: No.
> Hope: You don't have that choice.

For the facilitator, and subsequently the teachers, as the sayings of the discussion progressed in the doing of this meeting, the C2C became reconstituted as not only a constraint but an enabler of improved student learning via a more rigorous curriculum and alignment between the curriculum and higher expectations (in assessment):

> Anna: And because the end point was all over the place across the state, what you thought [was] the end point for a Grade 5 student, could be totally different from what the teacher down the other end [of the grade block] thought was the end point …
> Lillian: Yeah, it was; I remember, being in the same block as people who had different [end points].

These sayings and doings enabled more affirming relatings amongst participants; the teacher (Lillian) affirmed the facilitator's (Anna) rendering of the need for improved standards and consistency vis-à-vis curriculum enactment in Queensland. The facilitator then flagged the importance of the teachers looking closely at the content descriptors in this dialogue, rather than becoming overwhelmed by the much more detailed lesson plans. This is a good example of enablement within constraints and of normalizing responses focused upon teachers' practice. The teachers, through their subsequent agreement with the facilitator, were not just 'going along' with the facilitator, but through the dialogue, actually acknowledging and building understanding that the curriculum could indeed be taught in multiple ways, even as they may have struggled to put this into practice:

> Anna: So the only given – keep in mind when we talk about C2Cs – the only given we've got at this school is the content and the standard. So each time we go through these units, people are getting more confident and more creative at shaping the unit to meet the needs. You can teach the content in a thousand different ways.
> Lillian: The pedagogical choices you make, how you're going to teach it.
> Anna: Well and also the assessment choices. I mean, even yesterday, we looked at what the Grade 3s had done. Some of them [teachers] had made deliberate decisions to focus on the ICT part of the unit, and less on – what was the other part?
> Monique: On the …
> Anna: They focus more on the blog and less on something else …
> Monique: The images.
> Anna: The images. And other teachers focus more on the writing and less on the images; whatever. They still do the same task. But, I got a sense they were already shaping it to meet their kids' needs. They were saying things like, 'Well, in my class, I noticed that the kids really struggled with the cohesion of the text, or the pronoun referencing so I focused on that'. And then, 'In my class, the kids really need to focus on the tense and so – so they all wrote the little narrative'.

As the discussion progressed, there was a shift away from teachers' concerns about the C2C in and of itself, and a much greater focus upon particular students' needs. The way in which the teachers were described by the facilitator as seeking to respond to their students' specific needs ('Well in my class …'; 'In my class …') was an instance of a particular type of 'saying' within the meeting that helped reinforce the possibility and capacity of teachers to engage with the curriculum in ways that actively sought to respond to students' particular needs. The 'doing' of the meeting enabled these sayings to transpire, and it was through these sayings that teachers came to see their work differently – to transform their learning. This specificity of practice is also in keeping with the sorts of generative dialogues focused on detailed instances of teachers' practice, rather than simply conceptualizing practice in relation to general principles (Little and Horn, 2007, 2010).

These teachers were 'answering back' to the constraints they had identified previously and that seemed to 'hem them in'. Through the dialogue, they were shifting from a conception of having 'no choice' about how the curriculum was to be taught, to recognizing that there were indeed options about how this could be done. In a sense, they were cultivating much 'richer accountabilities' (Lingard et al., 2016) amongst themselves – accountabilities for genuine and productive student-centred learning – rather than being dominated by the sorts of narrower accountability agendas fostered by more restrictive interpretations of curriculum, or the sorts of narrow accountability agendas that tied teachers' curricula responses to more standardized national and global measures of their progress. And these choices also extended to assessment practices, as teachers reflected upon how their colleagues in another year level had actually altered the assessment task (which was itself seen previously as a constraint alone) to better respond to their students' needs. Again, their learning was palpable and potentially transformative of subsequent practice.

Discussion: transforming professional learning

Through this example of teachers' reflections on their practice as a vehicle for learning, we can clearly see how Noffke's (2009) concepts are useful for understanding instances of action research. Noffke's (2009) *professional* dimension was clearly evident in the way the teachers at Northam came together to collaboratively reflect upon their own practices. The *personal* dimension was also evident in the skills developed by the individual teachers as they engaged with their practice and one another, including in the way the facilitator challenged the teachers and led the reflections around their practice and these teachers' subsequent learnings. And lastly, the *political* dimension was visible in how the exchange fostered more democratic participation and 'rich accountabilities' (Lingard et al., 2016) on the part of teachers, resulting in new forms of relationships and understandings of the nature of students' learning and perceptions of their abilities and capacities.

However, the data presented also revealed how these dimensions came about – how teachers were enabled to meet together over time to discuss their practice and change their understandings of this practice. The practice architectures at play included material–economic arrangements of the principal providing funding and space (in the school library) for teachers to meet together formally to interrogate their teaching practices for one day per term, during school time. This was in addition to the requirement of teachers to meet in their year level groups every week, and the provision of time during fortnightly staff meetings for teachers to also meet at least part of the time in their year level groups. The cultural–discursive arrangements were evident in language as teachers talked amongst themselves, and listened and learnt from these discussions – enabling this transformational work. And the social–political arrangements of relating together more frequently, and in robust participatory ways around their actual teaching practice, enabled them to continue discussions, to go deeper into these dialogues. What is evident from the data is that these discussions helped to shift, change – we would argue, 'transform' – these teachers' understandings of their practices during this preliminary stage of a broader

action research cycle. They did not simply become bogged down in concerns about increasingly pre-scriptive accountabilities around curriculum, or the broader national and international/global testing practices that contributed to more performative accountabilities, but actively sought to determine how to improve their everyday practices vis-à-vis their students' learning.

This transformation was evident in the way in which the teachers challenged the nature of their teaching and their perceptions of students, and focused attention upon the actual teaching that occurred. Through their sayings, teachers' problematic perceptions about the intellectual capacity of their students and the nature of parenting practices which they believed contributed to the way students engaged (or failed to engage) with their teaching, became more apparent to them. That these sayings were so public and that these teachers were prepared to share their thoughts so pub-licly and openly (with their colleagues), helped constitute new relatings that helped develop the profession – 'the professional' – as well as the 'personal' (Noffke, 2009). The way in which the facilitator and the reading coach recognized the challenges that attended some of the students' lives, provides not just a 'light-weight' empathetic understanding of students' lives and circum-stances, and teachers' struggles to respond effectively in their teaching practice. Rather, through their sayings, there was a subsequent challenging of teachers to consider how their pedagogies enabled and/or constrained these students' learning, beyond simply in relation to perceptions of their 'home environment'; as in Vanassche and Kelchtermans' (2016) research into the facilitation of teacher educators' learning, 'productive discomfort' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2016: 118) was evident in the recognition and valuing of critique of teachers' assumptions and practices. Such relatings enabled a form of advocacy for these students as able, capable learners; this is an example of 'the political' dimension (Noffke, 2009) in action – support for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and avoiding deficit discourses about their interest in and potential for learning. Such advocacy was conveyed through the concrete example of the worm farm and other forms of gardens which provided instances of the recontextualization of general teaching principles (how to draw upon the natural environment/environmental sustainability to engage stu-dents in academic learning goals) (Little and Horn, 2007). The facilitator and reading coach were not satisfied to simply reproduce the circumstances that constituted some of these children's lives, evident in how they challenged teachers to not simply 'blame' the children or their parents/environ-ment, but to focus on the teaching practices over which they had immediate control.

The shift in the discussion about the curriculum being 'overly prescriptive' also reflects how this transformation process could occur, again evident through the specific 'doings', 'sayings' and 'relatings' that characterized teachers' interactions with one another. The way in which the teachers expressed concerns about the much more detailed content provision vis-à-vis the C2C in compari-son with earlier curriculum documents had the potential to steer the conversation away from actual teaching practice. However, instead, it stimulated a response from the facilitator about the increased focus upon demanding and maintaining a higher standard of teaching and learning. While the standards and overall content of the unit were specified, through the doing of the Inquiry Cycles, the sayings within them, and the respectful and robust relations amongst colleagues, teachers came to better appreciate that how they actually achieved this was up to them. The reorientation back to teachers' practice, and the work 'to make classroom practice visible and available for considera-tion' (Little and Horn, 2007: 88), was evident through the example of the Year 3 teachers and how they engaged with the curriculum in ways that were relevant to the specific needs of their students. Through these more generative dialogues, there was a sense in which teachers were transforming their understandings of the content of the units through the doing of broaching their concerns and possibilities with one another, the sayings that gave these actions meaning, and new forms of relat-ing amongst one another to enable this to happen. They were learning to 'give account' of their practices to one another (and the practices of colleagues as examples to help them engage with

their own work), and to build a more robust regime of accountability focused on students' actual learning, rather than becoming distracted by more performative, typically numerically based measures of accountability that have characterized the 'global panopticism' that surrounds both national and international policy-making (Lingard et al., 2013), and subsequently, the work of those in schools. Again, specific enabling conditions were present within the discussion – including the presence of a facilitator who recognized how teachers' understanding of the new curriculum had grown and developed over time. The sayings that surrounded this recognition helped constitute an environment in which meeting the specific needs of these teachers' students was valued and recognized as important – and something that could be done within the parameters of the C2C, even as this might still be challenging at times. The doing of talking about how teachers in other classrooms were modifying how they taught the content ('I got a sense they were already shaping it to meet their kids' needs'), and how they assessed their students to take into account their particular needs, reflects the site-based nature of these teachers' work. This was expressed overtly:

> They were saying things like, 'Well, in my class, I noticed that the kids really struggled with the cohesion of the text, or the pronoun referencing so I focused on that'. And then, 'In my class, the kids really need to focus on the tense and so – so they all wrote the little narrative'.

Such overt recognition of the situatedness of teachers' work with their students was mirrored in the sharing of these localized experiences in what was a similarly 'situated' professional learning experience of dialoguing with colleagues to better understand and interrogate practice. The specificity of teachers' practice conveyed through these examples also reveals how the normalizing responses at play here were oriented towards 'digging into problems of practice' (Little and Horn, 2007: 88), rather than simply providing reassurance to teachers – further evidence of efforts to foster 'productive discomfort' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2016). Such responses also reflect one form of the sorts of alternative, 'rich' accountabilities (Lingard et al., 2016) needing to be developed between different actors in education (in this case, teachers, but also parents, policy-makers and members of the wider community), and which go beyond simply reductive numerical measures of student performance (Biesta, 2010). Again, this situated, shared learning, including through listening to and sharing how other teachers were similarly seeking to take their specific students' needs into account, is evidence of the 'political' dimension (Noffke, 2009) in action; it also simultaneously reveals instances of 'personal', individual teacher growth and learning, and the development of a shared 'professional' body of knowledge in relation to these teachers' experiences at this particular school.

The transformation of teachers' learning was evident in the way teachers were 'building' their individual understandings of their practice through these meetings and, at a deeper level, their understandings of their *understandings* of this practice. There was significant meta-cognitive awareness amongst participants – a situation that is not so readily apparent (or able to be cultivated) in the hurly-burly of daily work practices. There were traces of transformation of understanding as teachers engaged in sayings in the form of 'collaborative analytic dialogues' (Edwards-Groves, 2013) involving reflecting critically on what they understood to be enabling and constraining their teaching. In this way, a process of transformation occurred within an intersubjective space in which participants were engaged in particular doings, sayings and relatings, which enabled their learning, evident in how it challenged them to think differently about their practice.

Conclusion

Through a specific example of teachers' learning in the initial phases of a broader action research cycle, the data reveal how the personal, political and professional dimensions of action research

are actually enacted in practice through teachers' individual actions, talk and interactions. The research presented has revealed the specific practices and conditions for practice that characterized a particular instance of the transformation of teachers' understandings of practice. In the case of Northam, the way in which teachers sought to participate in the discussion with their colleagues about the nature of their practice, and how this might be improved, is clear evidence of the 'doing' of active inquiry into their work. This was dependent upon ongoing talk and particular 'sayings' to encapsulate the nature of current teaching practices, and how these might be improved. And the effectiveness of these doings and sayings was heavily influenced by particular forms of 'relatings' characterized by various degrees of support, critique, cajoling, exhorting, guiding and affirming of teachers' practices. As a predominantly highly experienced group of teachers, several of whom had worked with one another over a period of several years, these participants were able to sustain a relatively robust level of engagement with one another, and in ways not necessarily encouraged in so much national and international policy-making, with its focus upon improving standardized measures of student attainment (particularly literacy and numeracy test scores) as proxy measures of broader economic performance (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). This was not easy work – evident in the acknowledgement of possible tensions within the group ('bit early to start a fight now') – but it was work that these teachers were prepared to undertake. By elaborating the specificity of this practice and conditions for practice, the research has contributed to better understanding the practices and circumstances necessary to shift teachers' understandings of their own practices. This is a necessary first step towards challenging teachers' subsequent practices and for fostering the development of the sorts of 'normalizing' moves that 'highlight the complex, ambiguous nature of teaching and open up problems for analysis and reflection' (Little and Horn, 2007: 89).

Arguably, our findings contribute in part to Mockler and Groundwater-Smith's (2015) argument that much greater attention be given to the nature of *actual* teacher learning practices to reveal not only what more productive – 'transformed' – teacher learning looks like, but how such learning comes about. It is also an example of Lingard et al.'s (2016) notion of 'rich accountabilities' as an alternative to more performative, test-centric modes of accounting for school, teacher and student performance. We would argue that the doings, sayings and relatings that collectively characterized the Inquiry Cycles were moments of transition to 'transformed' learning on the part of the teachers involved, in which teachers gave robust 'accounts' of their work to and for one another. This was sometimes challenging work, and teachers' experiences involved negotiating uncertainty as part of their interactions. Close analysis of the 'doings' of teachers participating in the Inquiry Cycles, the 'sayings' of teachers within the meetings, and the new forms of 'relatings' developed through these processes, makes it possible to identify transitional moments in their professional learning. Rather than adopt the 'celebratory stance' (Mockler and Groundwater-Smith, 2015) that characterizes some conceptions of teachers' learning, or simply becoming overwhelmed by what are construed as more globalized performative effects of policy (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010), our data open up for scrutiny the struggle and tensions (and sometimes considerable discomfort) that characterizes these processes of change, growth, development – 'transformation'. In this way, the contribution we make is to a conception of professional learning that provides necessary texture to understand how the various personal, professional and political dimensions of action research to which Noffke (2009) usefully refers are actualized in practice, and the specific doings, sayings and relatings that enabled a particular instance of transformative learning to occur.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

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Notes

1. This term was drawn from literacy educator Helen Timperley's (2011) work on collaborative teacher inquiry.
2. All names are pseudonyms.
3. On a five-point scale (from A to E, with C as a passing grade).
4. SES – socio-economic status.
5. Waddington's – a reference to a diagnostic reading and spelling test; South Australia – a reference to a specific spelling test (originally developed in South Australia).

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