

PRACTITIONER EXPERIENCE OF A DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Submitted by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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Date of Submission 2008

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the University Ethics Committee

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my parents,
Sylvia and Peter Hawkes,
who sparked my love of learning,
encouraged my passion for teaching,
and have inspired me with their modelling of life-long learning.

Thank you to my supervisors, Dr Gayle Spry and Associate Professor Jeff Dorman, whose patient direction and timely questions kept me focused and purposeful.

The journey to this thesis has been a long one. Thank you to all those who have travelled with me, especially the colleagues who were co-researchers in the co-operative inquiry cycles. It has been a privilege to work with you – your commitment to student learning, your professionalism and your enthusiasm to always look for how we can ‘do it better’ have made this journey a truly enlivening and learning experience. Thank you to all those who have shared a ‘comfortable cuppa’ with me on this journey and supported me with words of encouragement and affirmation, especially my friend Lyn who has been my ‘sanity saver’ on so many occasions with her words of understanding and wisdom.

A special acknowledgement is due to my family who have built bookshelves, cooked dinners, put up with paper all over the floor and coped with distracted conversations for many years. I thank you for the myriad of ways in which you have indulged my passion for learning and your insight into my personality which has convinced you that this work is a journey not the destination!

ABSTRACT

Australian policy contexts are promoting school transformation through teacher learning and the development of schools as professional learning communities. However, Australian practitioners have very limited contextualised research to guide their efforts in response to these policies. The researcher's involvement in a school revitalisation process provided the impetus for this research study that investigates the practitioner experience of a developing professional learning community at RI College (pseudonym for a large independent girls' school in Brisbane). This study endeavours to gain a more informed and sophisticated understanding of developing a professional learning community with the intention of 'living' this vision of RI College as a professional learning community. Praxis-oriented research questions focus on the practitioner conceptualisation of their school as a developing professional community and their experience of supporting/hindering strategies and structures. The study gives voice to this practitioner experience through the emerging participatory/co-operative research paradigm, an epistemology of participative inquiry, a research methodology of co-operative inquiry and mixed methods data collection strategies. Incorporating ten practitioner inquiries over two years, recursive cycles of action/reflection engaged practitioners as co-researchers in the collaborative reflective processes of a professional learning community while generating knowledge about the conceptualisation and supporting/hindering influences on its development. The outcomes of these first-person and second-person inquiries, together with a researcher devised online survey of teachers, were both informative and transformative in nature and led to the development of the researcher's theoretical perspectives in response to the study's research questions. As outcomes of co-operative inquiry, these theoretical perspectives inform the researcher's future actions and offer insights into existing propositional knowledge in the field. Engagement in this practitioner inquiry research has had significant transformative outcomes for the co-researchers and has demonstrated the power of collaborative inquiry in promoting collective and individual professional learning and personal growth.