Challenging Traditions:
Constructing an Identity through Innovative Teaching Practices

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this chapter, the author presents the case of Mariana, a Uruguayan non-native speaking teacher of English working at Lake Primary School in Uruguay. This chapter describes an action research process during which the author and a colleague reconstructed the experience of introducing a new approach to the teaching of emergent literacy with six-year-olds. In order to generate data, apart from holding a series of interviews and class observations, they engaged in Cooperative Development sessions (Edge, 2002, p. 18) using the framework to engage in "a mixture of awareness-raising and disciplined discourse" as a further means of facilitating the understanding of professional development processes. During and after the data generation period, the author analysed the data and shared the interpretations with her colleague, who examined them critically, adding her own views and clarifying as necessary. In the midst of the explorations of pedagogical experiences, the author and her colleague allowed other discourses to emerge, and were thus able to draw conclusions regarding Mariana's identity as a non-native speaking teacher, her ability to deal with change and innovation, her relationship with peers, as well as her newly-discovered roles as researcher, leader, and change agent.

INTRODUCTION

I have always been interested in professional development and the empowerment that comes from deep engagement in the process. The present action research study is framed within a broader research project on institutional change being conducted at a bilingual primary school where I am Head of the English Department. At the time of the study, the institution was undergoing a series of changes in management and reviewing its policies in order to increase its effectiveness. Being in charge of Professional Development (henceforth referred to as PD), by engaging in participatory action research projects with teachers of English on topics of their interest and mine, I intended to facilitate their professional empowerment by raising their awareness and sense of agency, fostering an understanding of the importance of reflective practice or 'reflective action', as described by Fullan (2007, p.41).

   The chapter is organised as follows. I start by describing the institutional context in which the present research was conducted and the managerial transition which constitutes the broader research project I was leading. I then introduce the co-text that serves as background to this report, including the analytical framework. Afterwards I present Mariana, the main character in this story, through her own description of her teacher-self, before inviting the reader to be part of our journey of discovery of the many forms professional development can take in times of institutional change.

   It is my hope that this research will not only highlight the importance of making teachers voices be heard, but also that through the research process itself, teachers such as Mariana will be empowered professionally.

THE CONTEXT: UNDERSTANDING LAKE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Lake Primary School is a private school in the capital city of Uruguay, whose mission and vision are based on three pillars: ethics and values, academic excellence and the importance of sport and recreation in character building. From pre-school to secondary school, it aims at building the necessary affective support and creating a safe environment for students to acquire the learning skills that they will need throughout their academic life, as well as the life skills that will make them responsible, sensitive and sensible citizens.

   As an insider in this context, it is important for me to ensure the reader is provided with a complete picture of my role and Mariana's role in the present research, as well as the affordances inherent in our interactions. My roles in the present study were complexly intertwined, as were the potential influences they could exert on the research. It is my contention, nevertheless, that the attempt to understand and reflexively explore my role as a researcher is an aspect of the process that needs to

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