Social practices and relational agency to support student collaboration: A sociocultural perspective

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A sociocultural view of learning positions teachers as mediators who teach a curriculum that reflects what is valued by society. In this paper it is proposed that a specific focus on mediating relational agency to support collaboration further builds teacher and student capacity for learning. Relational agency is a two-way process, to become responsive so you can both receive and give support to peers. Peer interaction supports the development of communication, social and emotional competencies required for effective collaborative learning. The aim of this paper is to reflect how evidenced based social practices promoted relational agency in a collaborative classroom. These social practices can be adapted by other teachers interested in this approach with their students. The data are drawn from three linked, consecutive year-long projects conducted by the teacher/researcher with her students and teacher/colleagues whom she mentored. Rogoff's analytical planes provide a framework to analyse the qualitative data. The findings are presented as four case studies related to bullying, conflict resolution, student leadership and teacher mentoring that illustrate relational agency in action. Further research is necessary to understand how to support teachers for 21st century learning, within the context of traditional schools where the status quo is well established.

Introduction

A sociocultural theoretical perspective (Vygotsky, 1994) asserts that the learner is constituted by cultural and historical processes that are socially constructed and situated. For teachers, this perspective usually means they are mediators of student learning, teaching a curriculum that reflects what is valued by society (Edwards & Darcy, 2004). Current research supports the academic benefits of peer interaction to develop communication and collaborative competencies mediated through relational agency which also support 21st century learning (Elias, 2009; Rubin et al., 2006; Teo, 2019; Zins & Elias, 2007).

Relational agency "is a capacity to recognize and use the support of others" but also to become responsive so you can reciprocate support for others (Edwards & Darcy, 2004, p. 149). For teachers, negotiating social practices with students to mediate relational agency, can create the environment and interactional spaces to promote peer collaboration (Gibbs, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Research conducted on relational agency has been a more recent focus to understand the social and cultural processes that mediate the professional development of trainee teachers' experiences in schools (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Rajala et al., 2016). Likewise, to improve students' learning experiences, teachers need a better understanding of the role of relational agency to improve peer interaction and participation in classroom activities. The aim of this paper is to reflect on three consecutive and related year-long research projects that examine the introduction of evidenced-based social practices to mediate relational agency in the

context of establishing a collaborative classroom. These practices can be adapted by other teachers interested in this approach with their students.

Rogoff's (1995) analytical planes are applied to examine data collected from two different primary schools where the teacher/researcher was researching her practice (projects 1 and 2, school 1 and 2 respectively) and subsequently mentoring other teachers (project 3, school 2). The data are analysed through the lens of relational agency for students learning how to collaborate, and teachers who are changing their practice to learn how to guide students through the process. Rogoff's (1995) personal, interpersonal and institutional/community planes are "inseparable, mutually constituting planes comprising of activities that can be the focus of analysis at different times" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 139). Foregrounding each plane in turn allows a deeper understanding of the social and cultural factors while retaining "the mutuality of the individual and the sociocultural environment" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 140). The major findings from projects 1 and 2 focus on the social and emotional benefits for students and the classroom teacher, when they work together to solve issues in a democratic classroom. The introduction of new social practices encouraged greater student participation in the running of the classroom and taking responsibility for their learning. Students suggested reorganising the physical setting of the classroom to promote group work, electing student leaders for the new social groups formed each term and working together to manage ongoing decision-making that fostered collaboration. These findings are reported in Morcom's theses (2005, 2012) and were used to inform mentoring teachers (project 3) which are reported in Morcom and MacCallum's article (2022). The major themes of student 'relationships, leadership and friendships' were central to subsequent publications that discussed how the classroom teacher/researcher scaffolded students' social and emotional learning and positive peer interaction to resolve bullying, for making friends and enabling effective collaborative learning (Morcom, 2014, 2015, 2016). For this paper data are extracted and reviewed under the lens of relational agency, to analyse how new social practices changed teaching practices for both students and teachers in the process of creating a collaborative classroom.

Background to the schools

Both research state schools were situated in a metropolitan area and endorsed a traditional approach to teaching, but for distinct reasons. The first school was in a low socioeconomic area. Student bullying was prevalent for many successive years. Pastoral care and adult mentoring programs were introduced to reduce bullying, which met with some success but did not address the core issue of antisocial behaviour amongst peers, particularly in the playground. The traditional approach to teaching was in place to curb student interaction and reduce potential conflict. Students' academic progress was well below the minimal benchmarks set by the State Government which resulted in additional funding for literacy and numeracy support programs to lift standards. These programs used direct instruction and reinforced an individualised teacher-centred approach, which was counter to developing a collaborative classroom and the current research objectives.

In contrast, school 2 was in a high socioeconomic area and parents were aspirational. They took pride in the high academic results for literacy and numeracy which were partly attributed to the traditional teaching approaches in place for many years. At the time of the research the school priorities were thinking skills and using technology as a tool, which were actively promoted by parents. There were no specific pastoral care programs as parents and the school community deemed students were thriving. Before the research took place the teacher/researcher observed that a competitive learning environment resulted in many students lacking confidence in their abilities and an elevation in performance anxiety as they competed with their peers. The narratives at both schools were not conducive to developing a collaborative classroom to encourage students to share ideas and support one another in their learning.

Qualitative research design

Qualitative methods were chosen for the research because they are flexible enough to accommodate different viewpoints rather than predetermine outcomes (Richards, 2005; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). This was an important aspect of the current research to seek students' and teachers' perspectives about their issues, but also hold them accountable for their participation as the actors and authors of the learning (Brown & Renshaw, 2006; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011).

Qualitative research methodology is also suitable to understand the process of change as it transpires during longitudinal research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Patton, 2015) and the challenges that may arise. Case studies (Yin, 2016) are appropriate to report findings from rich qualitative data, but also raise questions of transferability to other school settings. This may be viewed as a limitation to the current research. However, both schools were quite distinct in relation to socioeconomic status, parent participation and underlying reasons for adopting a traditional approach. The same social strategies were adapted to the different school contexts to address common issues of antisocial behaviour and developing communication and social skills for group work. Addressing bullying at school 1 became the impetus for starting the research, introducing new social practices that changed relational agency. Student leadership became the catalyst for change at both schools as students enjoyed positive peer regard. Teachers requested mentoring at the second school to contribute to their professional learning as they were "dissatisfied with the status quo" (Mason, 2001, p. 5) and wanted to update their skills. The mentor used the student case study data from projects 1 and 2 to inform the teachers' mentoring journey in project 3.

The dual role of teacher/researcher raises issues of power which is partly addressed with 'duty of care' legislation embedded in the teacher's professional role (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Support during the research for students and parents was offered from the critical friends and school administration but was not required. Information meetings for the school administration, parents and students were held at the beginning and conclusion of each project to provide transparency about how data were collected and analysed and opportunities for feedback about any aspect of the research. Informed consent was sought not only from parents, but their children who had the choice to participate and

withdraw at any time. There was a hundred percent informed consent for all projects which was interpreted by the teacher/researcher as support for change. Qualitative research methodology and an action research process were combined to coordinate data collection from multiple sources, from students, parents, and teachers. This allowed interpretative triangulation of the data to ensure reliability. Pseudonyms were used for all research participants to ensure anonymity.

Parents completed surveys at school 1 each term to elicit their perspectives about the research and their children's progress. At school 2 there was the opportunity for face-to-face interviews with parents and their children each term. The classroom social practices were also videoed each week at school 2 and provided another source of rich qualitative data to triangulate with student reflection logs that were used at both schools. Personnel from the school administration and teacher colleagues were invited as critical friends to provide feedback about the research. The teacher/researcher also made observations about the students' participation in the social practices and reflected upon these each week to ensure appropriate support was tailored to meet the students' needs and advance the research. Teachers who observed social practices in the mentor's class were also offered support when the mentor visited their classrooms to model social practices with their students. Data from teachers included three formal focus group meetings spaced throughout the year and email correspondence between the mentor and mentees. The qualitative data were collated and stored in labelled files for each term with photographs and anecdotal records to document the changes occurring. These notes were reread to identify emerging themes and data were cross matched to verify findings as part of the research and publication process.

Theoretical framework: Rogoff's planes

Building on Vygotsky's (1994) sociocultural theory Rogoff (1995) featured the social and cultural process in schools with three metaphors, *apprenticeship*, *guided participation*, and *participation appropriation*, to examine the institutional/community, interpersonal and personal planes respectively. These planes delve into the social and cultural processes intrinsic in the activities of individuals. Rogoff (2003) contended that "humans develop through their changing participation in sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change" (p. 11). In the original research each plane is foregrounded to analyse how mature participation for both teachers and students developed. For students this refers to the development of prosocial collaborative behaviour, involving "conscious and informed decisions to support other's learning and wellbeing" (Morcom, 2012, p. 85). For teachers this refers to the adoption of student-centred practices transforming their teaching. For this paper social practices and relational agency are highlighted using the three planes to provide a holistic analytical tool to examine the case studies related to bullying, conflict resolution, student leadership and mentoring teachers.

Apprenticeship - institutional/community plane

The first metaphor, apprenticeship (institutional/community plane) examines the specific nature of culturally organised activities in which participants engage. The core activities

introduced were the five classroom agreements, daily social circle and weekly classroom meetings to provide the framework to mediate and change relational agency.

The *five classroom agreements*, negotiated in the first week of the school year, established shared understandings about collaborative values. The ideas for the agreements were drawn from research by Gibbs (2006), Bernard (2006) and Yeager and Dweck (2012).

1. *Participation and right to pass* - given a choice to participate (psychological safety).
2. *Attentive listening* - appreciate others' perspectives.
3. *Mutual respect*- set high expectations for behaviour.
4. *Using lift ups/No put downs* - promote a caring classroom.
5. *Personal best/growth mindset* - promote a positive mindset to achieve personal best.

The Y chart (Table 1) had three headings that linked behaviour (looks like) with language spoken (sounds like) and emotions experienced (feels like). The emotional connection highlights the different emotional responses (both positive and negative) as a normal part of the learning experience. Y charts were written for other concepts such as leadership, friendship and growth mindset to clarify abstract concepts.

The process of discussion, clarification and agreement to the content of each chart which was written in the students' language made the ideas accessible but also held the students accountable for using the charts. The word 'agreement' is used intentionally to sanction the negotiation process because it is "through dialogue that agency is constructed, contested, negotiated and re-negotiated" (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011, p. 813). Table 1 provides an exemplar of the language generated by the students for one classroom agreement, mutual respect.

Table 1: Classroom agreement - mutual respect

Looks like (behaviours observed)	Sounds like (words spoken or thought)	Feels like (emotions experienced)
• Working together • Sharing ideas • Taking turns to speak • Listening to each other • Looking at the person speaking • Kind body language - facial expressions • Waiting patiently	• Using manners - please and thank you • That is a good idea • I like that idea and I think… • Can we try this way? • Have you thought of this?' • Has anyone else got an idea?	• Satisfied because my ideas and opinions are valued • Happy • Excited • Respected • Confident • Nervous • Anxious

The *daily social circle* (see Appendix 1) occurred at the beginning of each day when children and the teacher sat in a circle, passed around an object/talking stick, stated their name and how they felt, followed by a brief explanation. The routine not only settled students into the school day but generated important social information about what students were doing in their daily lives, what they liked/disliked and how they were feeling. This

information was useful when making new friends or choosing group leaders and developed a vocabulary to express emotions and practise the class agreements. Students had the choice to contribute and the right to pass but usually they were keen to participate. The teacher/researcher reflected on how students applied the agreements during the daily social circle, observed where students sat in the circle and how participation was changing due to new friendships or social issues being resolved.

Weekly classroom meetings were conducted to provide a platform for students to air their concerns and offer solutions. The items usually centred on social issues and making friends. The agenda items were written on a whiteboard during the week and the meeting was organised for 20 minutes each Friday. The students voted to prioritise the most important items for discussion before they took turns to present them to their peers. After the weekly classroom meetings the students reflected on the class discussion and set personal goals for the next week in their reflection logs. The teacher/researcher noted what the agenda items were, who was writing them, who offered solutions and how was participation changing.

At this plane, these social practices created the conditions for relational agency to change. Students were given opportunities to share information and ideas, write their agenda items for discussion and offer solutions to improve social relations and group work. In the traditional classroom students were used to being seated in rows so needed to be guided into group work by the teacher to facilitate peer discussion.

Guided participation - interpersonal plane

The second metaphor, guided participation (interpersonal plane), examines "the processes and systems of involvement between people as they communicate and coordinate efforts while participating in culturally valued activity" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142). It is important to note the reciprocal process at play. The teacher guided the students, but to understand their perspectives, she was also guided by observations made during social activities and what students wrote in their reflection logs after discussions at the weekly classroom meetings. Similarly, when mentoring teacher colleagues the teacher/researcher used the same process to guide teachers, after the focus group meetings, reading their emails and classroom observations. The focus of social practices at this plane are sociograms and group work.

Sociograms were a crucial tool to create cohesive groups and develop potential friendships that would support future student leaders when new groups were formed each term, prioritising students' social and emotional needs. The students nominated four peers whom they agreed to support. The teacher agreed that at least one nomination would be in their new group and created a mix of academic and social talent. The teacher/researcher observed the changes in student nominations and developing friendships throughout the research.

Groups were purposefully changed each term, so students had collaborated with every peer by the end of the year. Students learnt to interact with different personalities and

leadership styles, mediated by changes in relational agency which changed students' perspectives about their peers, as exemplified in the case studies. Similarly, for the teachers a small network of support was established with the mentor and each other as they adjusted to change. The teacher/researcher noted observations about how the leadership roles played out for each series of new groups. For teachers, the mentor observed how their confidence was growing to attempt new activities and share their findings with each other and their colleagues who were not in the research project.

Participatory appropriation - personal plane

The third metaphor, participatory appropriation (personal plane) refers to "how individuals change through their involvement in the process of "becoming" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142). The four case studies examine the findings for relational agency in the context of bullying, conflict resolution, student leadership and mentoring teachers, using Rogoff's (1995) analytical planes.

Case study 1: Bullying

The data for Nathan, Denis and Lindsay (year 5 students) who had been at the same school since pre-primary are drawn from Morcom and Cumming-Potvin's article (2010).

At the institutional/community plane the school bullying policy, which was approved by parents, had strong consequences for bullying which resulted in time out of the classroom and playground and out of school by suspension. When there were misdemeanours the school administration interviewed the students, recorded the details and gave written reports to each teacher on a weekly basis. For the administration staff this was an onerous task that often took time to get to the truth as it was common for peers to support each other when they told lies.

At the interpersonal plane relational agency gave tacit support for bullying because bystander behaviour did not challenge the actions of the perpetrators. Denis and Lindsay who were friends and now in a year 4/5 class, bullied Nathan on a regular basis. Denis had 6, 12, 6 and 0 (term 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively) recorded events for antisocial behaviour. Once the new social practices and group work were implemented in term 1 there was a positive change in students' attitudes. Lindsay was one of the first leaders of a social group and he took this role seriously. He changed from bullying in the playground with Denis to becoming a responsible class member which modelled to peers that change was possible. Lindsay enjoyed positive peer regard as a leader. He gave academic support to less able students in the group, but he also sought support when he needed it to sustain his prosocial behaviour (Teacher/researcher's reflection log, term 1).

At the personal plane Lindsay recognised that it was difficult to be in the same group as Denis and behave, because Denis was still misbehaving in the classroom. Lindsay privately requested to be in a different group away from Denis for term 2. "I want to keep my nose clean" (Lindsay, student reflection log, term 1). Relational agency was a key factor in the personal choices Lindsay made. He sustained his friendship with Denis but stopped

bullying and made friends with Nathan whom he once bullied. Denis noted Lindsay's changes with ridicule. "He (referring to Lindsay) was a good friend with NATHAN - hee, hee" (Denis reflection log, term 4).

At the personal plane Denis admitted. "I have been punching, kicking and pushing Nathan in line. I have been fighting with Nathan in the playground" (Denis reflection log, term 3). Denis was not voted leader in term 2 because his peers were aware of his antisocial behaviour. Denis was disappointed and stated in the final interview, "I enjoyed group work because you get to do it together and not on your own. I learned to get along and take turns. I wasn't voted leader, but I wanted to. I would have behaved" (Denis, interview, term 4).

Denis and Lindsay appropriated the prosocial values agreed upon by most peers but at different rates. For Lindsay and other students being a leader became the catalyst for change. Relational agency now mediated prosocial behaviour and students experienced the benefits of more friends and working together. But for Denis relational agency was interpreted as working better in small groups but not stopping bullying when he had the opportunity, so peers resisted voting Denis to be a leader. Lindsay learnt to collaborate effectively with different peers and become inclusive to share his talent but also seek help when he needed it. Denis observed these changes for his best friend and stated, "I have been happy to come to school … I have friends at school" (Denis reflection log, term 4). It can be argued that the experiences of relational agency in various groups led Lindsay to renegotiate his friendship with Denis and for Denis to re-evaluate his priorities. As the students became more cohesive in their friendships, bullying was not tolerated to the same degree. This created improved negotiation skills and mutual respect as demonstrated by students in the next case study from the same class.

Case study 2: Conflict resolution

The data for Susan, Helen, Angela, Margaret and Eileen are drawn from Morcom and MacCallum's article (2009).

At the institutional/community plane, the school administration usually interviewed students when there was conflict, and this option was available to all teachers but was disruptive to the instructional program. When students lied this exacerbated the problem and resulted in deeper animosity amongst peers when they returned to the classroom. An alternative was for students to take responsibility for their actions and resolve their conflicts. In the research classroom students suggested that they use their reflection logs to write their version of events, to establish a better understanding of the facts (weekly classroom meetings, term 1). Then they read their version to peers and apologised where appropriate. This process had worked well for term 1 and as antisocial behaviour was on the decline, students spent less time engaging in this process because they sorted out their disagreements before they returned to class. But in term 2 and 3, friendship groups were getting larger and the teacher/researcher noted.

> I still have concerns about how to manage the really large friendship group that has developed among the year 5 girls. There are many strong personalities such as Angela who is jealous of the attention Eileen receives… use of reflection logs is working well… fewer complaints from students. (Teacher reflection log, Term 3, Week 6)

Susan, Helen, Angela, Margaret and Eileen (year 5 students) returned to class after a lunch break, very agitated. The girls were playing a skipping game. Rogoff (1995) argued that the participatory appropriation requires a perspective where "children and their social partners are interdependent, their roles are actively and dynamically changing" as "they communicate and share in the decision making" (p. 151). The teacher/researcher allowed time for students to follow their process of writing and sharing their version of the event. They used words such as "accidentally, I said sorry, I refused to go to the teacher" as they stated the facts. Susan accidentally hit Helen with the skipping rope and then Helen hit Susan deliberately in retaliation. Susan got a red mark on her face and went to the duty teacher because she rightly did not think it was an accident.

At the interpersonal plane, a shift in relational agency was instrumental to changing peers' perspectives about telling the truth so all parties could resolve the situation amicably. Once the girls read their versions, they took responsibility for their behaviour and apologised to maintain their friendships. There was minimal teacher supervision required as students took control to be accountable for their actions. These events were modelling to other peers the importance of friendships and how to keep them by being honest and responsible.

At the personal plane the efforts of all students were noted the deputy principal who dealt with misdemeanours across the school on a daily basis. She stated that in the research class all students had "developed very sophisticated understandings about how friendship groups work. Leadership skills have developed … huge change in the number of students at the office… due to playground disagreements… the problem is sorted out rapidly" (Critical friend, term 4).

Case study 3: Student leadership

The data for this case study for Judy and Anna are drawn from projects 1 and 2 reported in Morcom's theses (2005, 2012).

At the institutional/community plane, student leaders at both schools were usually nominated in the final year of primary school as student councillors and sport captains. There were few opportunities for younger students to learn how to be a peer leader. For Judy (year 4) and Anna (year 3) and their peers this was a novel experience. "Both students were unpretentious and behaved in a pro-social manner" (Teacher/researcher observations, project 1 and 2). Judy had few friends in her peer group, tended to be a loner but developed leadership aspirations. In contrast, Anna had a larger circle of supportive friends but did not have the confidence in her abilities to be a leader. The parents of both students agreed that their children were not 'leadership material' (Parent

Interview, Judy's mother, Term 1) and 'too young for this sort of thing' (Parent interview, Anna's mother, Term 1).

The peer relations listed in Table 2 for Judy and Anna highlight different relational agency situations that evolved throughout the research. These girls experienced diverse peer groups which arguably taught them how to lead and support other students who were not popular or cooperative.

Table 2: Peer relations for Judy and Anna

	Judy (Year 4/5 class) 31 students	Anna (Year 3 class) 26 students
Term 1 Group 1	Judy and Wendy are both Year 4 students who were together in group 1. Wendy behaved in an antisocial manner with all peers.	Anna experienced being in a group where students behaved in an antisocial manner.
Term 2 Group 2	Judy developed new friendships with Year 5 girls and expressed leadership aspirations.	Anna was elected *leader*. She coped with antisocial behaviour of Sean and James who changed their behaviour.
Term 3 Group 3 Group 4	Judy was elected *leader* (group 4). Judy befriended Wendy. Wendy's behaviour improved.	Anna was elected *vice leader* for group 4 and 5 and supported her peers.
Term 4 Group 5	Judy continued to develop new friendships.	

Judy and Wendy were in the first group together but were not friends. In round 4 when Judy was leader, she befriended Wendy. Wendy had been uncooperative and rude in the past and found it difficult to make friends. In group 4 Wendy took the initiative to design personal notes for each member, which were appreciated by the group. It is argued that Judy's prior experience with Wendy in group 1 became the basis for the positive relationship that developed between the girls in group 4. Judy developed empathy for Wendy and modelled to peers how to support Wendy with kindness and patience. In return Judy received the support she needed as a leader from her peers.

In Term 2 Judy's growing confidence was becoming evident with new friendships with year 5 students. Judy wrote: "I can work with everyone. I hope I can be leader in my next group. I am excited and I am wondering who the leader will be" (Judy's reflection log, term 2). Judy became leader in term 3 with Wendy, Lindsay, Joey, Dean and Denis. Denis and Lindsay were back together in the same group, and Judy's mother stated that Judy enjoyed the challenge of social problem solving.

> In many ways she is a very logical thinker and quite often has a good grasp of the 'bigger picture' although she is no academic. She often surprises us with thinking through about how situations affect people – without any prompting. (Extract from Parent Survey 2, for Judy, term 3)

Judy perceived that she was a "helper" and tried to "listen and think and put it into my words so people will understand" (Student reflection log, term 4) which her mother reaffirmed. Judy had taken on more responsibilities than she would have in the past even though she found it challenging. "Judy has achieved more academically this year and gives me a little more feedback on school/people than she used to" (Extract from Parent Survey 3 for Judy, term 4).

At the interpersonal plane Judy encouraged more able peers to support less able peers. Her confidence grew, as she learnt how to become part of the solution which is demonstrated in this extract.

> We got to sort our problems out. It would have been hard for some people to do it on their own ... At first, I listened because I was nervous but then I got use to people around me. Then I got the idea and joined in more. I enjoyed learning about other problems and being able to sort my problems out because I knew what to do … some children don't have respect and they need to learn it. (Judy's interview, term 4)

Judy's potential for social and academic growth was realised by her mother who started to understand why collaboration was beneficial for her child (Kumar, 2009). At the personal plane Judy had reaped the social and emotional benefits of working with different students and being confident that she could work through social issues with peers.

At the interpersonal plane Anna learnt early in the research to seek help during classroom meetings from her peers. "Today I joined the class meeting and asked lots of questions and I felt confident" (Anna's reflection log, term 2). "When people support me, I feel happy. When people say that you can do it, then that makes me feel I can do it" (Anna's reflection log, term 4). Anna's comments are an example of the importance of peer encouragement and support to develop self-confidence particularly when dealing with students such as Sean, James and Jared who could be uncooperative. Anna's leadership style was inclusive and showed genuine appreciation for peers' contributions. In response Sean wrote: "My ideas are to be as far apart as possible from James so then we can be a good and helpful group and hopefully be very responsible" (Student reflection log, Sean, term 2). James wrote: "Things that I could improve are to try and not talk to Sean only when it is appropriate. My ideas are we could have a 'chill out zone' when we could read ..." (Student reflection log, James, term 2). In her final interview Anna stated that she was 'an encourager' in her groups. She used the example of Jared who was not happy to share ideas and had a reputation for antisocial behaviour. "I just encourage him, not force him" When she was asked if anyone could be a leader she said replied, "Yes. They have to get some ideas, give respect, give ideas and make sure everyone has a turn" (Anna's interview, Term 4).

At the personal plane Anna had learnt; "I am strong, and I can put up with James and Sean together!" (Anna's interview, Term 4). Anna also chose peers for her sociogram nominations based on her observations "because Zoltan can help me with my work … Mandy is quiet, and she is a hard worker … I don't know Alex well and he is quiet" (Anna's reflection log, term 2). One can infer that Anna recognised that more peer friendships resulted in greater support, socially, emotionally and academically. Changing

social groups created new spaces and opportunities for students to grow and develop self-confidence and influence their peers in positive ways. The case studies of Judy and Anna and their peers illustrate the longitudinal nature of change for most students to develop confidence in their abilities and develop friendships based on mutual respect and trust, mediated by relational agency.

Case study 4: Mentoring teachers

The data for the case study of Adriana, Julie and Karen are drawn from Morcom and MacCallum's article (2022).

At the institutional/community plane, there was an expectation from parents and students that teachers made most of the decisions in the classroom. Thus, when moving from a traditional approach which was valued at the school, teachers were contesting the status quo. Adriana was a well-respected teacher who held senior teacher status, now collaborating with a new graduate teacher Julie in the same year level. They supported each other for the research. Karen was also an experienced teacher but a new staff member at the school, collaborating with a colleague who held a traditional stance. So, Karen did not have the same support for the research. The mentor set up focus group meetings for teachers to discuss the tensions that arose as they were learning how to become responsive to students' needs and encourage greater student participation.

The starting point for the teachers is evidenced in comments early in term 2. Julie established that she would seek help from the mentor and other teachers. "I will extend my knowledge and skills as a teacher to develop an inclusive classroom" (Julie, term 2). Karen stated, "I am open to any ideas about how to promote student leadership rather than bossiness" (Karen, term 2). Adriana identified that one of her strengths was "dealing with difficult students and parents" (Adriana, term 2) so she had that skill to offer to the teachers.

The extracts from the first focus group meetings (Morcom & MacCallum, 2022, p. 5) are evidence of the tensions balancing instructional time to include research activities which was an ongoing concern. Julie was learning how to work with Adriana and coping with the demands of students and their parents for more homework and to start social practices.

Julie	Your kids from last year kept asking me when we are going to start… I suppose if I get stuck then I can ask you (referring to mentor)
Adriana	Lots of kids knew what to do and were keen to start. The kids came with background knowledge…what I find is time to do it…
Julie	Well they (referring to parents) want to know what they are doing, … insisting on more homework… It's all pressure!
Karen	I have the same in year 1 (referring to home work and Karen laughs)… I wish I could do it more (referring to implementing social practices) [Karen was sharing the year level with another experienced teacher who was not a participant in the research].

> Mentor When I first started this work, I didn't have all the answers but what I learnt was to give the issue back to the students who would have lots of ideas" (Morcom and MacCallum, 2022, p. 5).

There were times when teachers became frustrated with juggling the multiple expectations from the research, parents, students and the school administration. But as the teachers and students experienced success and more support, they sustained their efforts, buoyed on from positive feedback from parents whose children were enjoying school.

At the interpersonal plane, the format of the focus group meeting modelled to teachers how to be responsive with students and mediate relational agency as the basis for seeking and giving support. The mentor used authentic examples from projects 1 and 2. Teachers shared their ideas but also sought and gave support to each other and used the mentor as a sounding board. Through guided participation (Rogoff, 1995) the mentor coordinated the teachers' efforts and together "found ways to manage the tensions that arose and show that participants care enough to work through these challenges with the resources available" (Morcom & MacCallum, 2022, p. 8).

At the personal plane, all teachers experienced feeling vulnerable about parent expectations and perceptions of their competencies. They encouraged each other "Julie spurs me (Adriana) on when I worry too much. We both focus on the children and what they are getting out of this" (Morcom & MacCallum, 2022, p. 6). Karen was more pragmatic about her situation and took things a step further by inviting parents to participate in social activities she initiated. "I like to try out new ideas slowly, make them work for me" (Morcom & MacCallum, 2022, p. 7). Parents wrote supportive notes about Karen's approach and how much they enjoyed working with their children which the principal shared at staff meetings.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to reflect on three separate research projects that changed relational agency for both teachers and students while developing a collaborative classroom. Rogoff's planes have been applied to examine the institutional/community, interpersonal and personal factors when negotiating new social practices that changed relational to create a collaborative classroom. The challenges of educational change for teachers in a traditional school context were evident and highlight "understanding that agency is an important mediator of educational change" (Kumpulainen et al., 2018, p. 27). Transformative activity is not possible in traditional didactic based interaction where expert-novice position is maintained. Understanding "how teachers manage learners and organise learning environments" (Edwards & Darcy, 2004, p. 150-151) is vital during the process of change. Teachers worried about perceptions of their teaching competency from colleagues, parents and students until parents recognised the benefits for their children and teachers became more confident in their new approach.

At the institutional/community plane, for teachers transitioning to a more student-centred approach, understanding how to mediate relational agency is essential but also having the

freedom and time to allow the social practices to work with students. For Adriana, Julie and Karen, "Not only were they transforming their own practice but through participation in cultural activities of the school the teachers were beginning to change the practices of other teachers" (Morcom & MacCallum, 2022, p. 8). The teachers and their students were apprentices in changing the nature of culturally organised activities in the classroom.

At the interpersonal plane, teachers and students appropriated new strategies and ways of working together because, it is argued, they viewed the new social practices as a "culturally valued activity" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142). They became responsive to each other's unique histories and perspectives. Adriana, Julie and Karen teaching role was redefined, as an attentive listener and observer, to become responsive to their students. The social practices created routines and a framework for students to interact differently with peers and provided social information to inform potential friendships and leaders. Relational agency was redefined and created different choices for behaviour, to stop bullying, to stop lying and start to tell the truth, to learn to work together, enjoy group work and become a candidate for peer leadership. For many students, this reduced social and performance anxiety and increased their self-confidence to seek and give peer support, knowing their contributions were valued.

At the personal plane, Lindsay (case study 1), Anna and Judy (case study 3) experienced the benefits of social and emotional support from peers in the process of "becoming" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142) leaders. In particular Lindsay (case study 1) realised that there were other options available when he enjoyed his leadership role, stopped bullying and made more friends. Even Denis (case study 1) admitted there were better options for him than sustaining anti-social behaviour. Susan, Helen, Angela, Margaret and Eileen (case study 2) enhanced their communication skills and confidence to keep trying to find better solutions when problems arose. At times this was difficult, but students reported in their interviews they felt supported to keep trying as they had peers as a source of support and enjoyed group work rather than working alone (Morcom, 2005, 2012).

Rather than leaving relational agency to chance teachers and students can negotiate change, one step at a time, as demonstrated in the case studies. But it is finding the way forward and building trust amongst peers and teachers that is important before change can occur. This research has shown that positive relational agency is facilitated when students participate in social practices to maximise peer interaction and take responsibility for their actions. In the research classrooms peers and the teacher/researcher were accountable to each other. Students sought and provided support from each other as did the teachers. They developed better conflict resolution skills because they valued their social partners. Relational agency had shifted to a positive path with mutual respect and trust as the basis for collaboration. The 'Y' charts for the class agreements and other concepts such as leadership and growth mindset supported and guided students efforts to change but also demonstrated in real terms how accessible change had become. Shared understandings and commitment to change evolved as students came to value the contributions of their peers.

Similarly, for teachers they supported each other as they navigated change and innovated in their classrooms, pushing the boundaries. Being cognisant of how to structure the learning environment to maximise the benefits of relational agency is vital to enrich the learning process and develop more meaningful interpersonal relationships that support prosocial choices and collaboration. The case studies in this paper demonstrate that teacher action, by paying attention to the social pedagogy of the classroom and relational agency (Blatchford et al., 2003) is worthwhile. It is strengthened when students develop the capacity to solve their issues and learn to collaborate with peers. The generalisability of the findings are limited due to the small numbers of participants but provide exemplars of how the teacher/researcher was responsive to students' needs and adapted the same social practices in two different school contexts to enact educational change. Further research to understand how teachers can share expertise and exercise relational agency is necessary to enact educational change and further develop professional agency to create classrooms for 21st century learning (Edwards, 2005, 2017; Kumpulainen et al., 2018; Teo, 2019).

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Appendix 1: Social circle

Illustrates students' likes, dislikes, interests, family issues, attitude to school

The social circle took about 3-5 mins each day to conduct. This example is taken when there was great excitement for the French dress up day in Term 3 which is mentioned by most students. The dialogue also illustrates an increase in the emotions listed for each student from Term 1 (usually only one) and how succinctly the students conveyed their messages to keep within the time limit set by the students to maintain interest.

The taking stick/s introduced by the teacher/researcher were toys and personal items and gifts students had given her in past years. So every item had a story which was related to the students and generated a personal connection/significance for the item chosen. Once this was modelled to the students, they voluntarily brought their items from home and were very pleased to relate their stories and use it in the social circle that day (see comments from student number 22 below).

My name is _____ I feel _____

1. Happy and happy because tomorrow is French dress up day and mum's coming home early.
2. Sad and happy because I broke my thumb playing football and tomorrow is French dress up day.

3. Upset and angry because mum has a big pain in her back and we're going to Bali on Sunday; angry because I want the pain to go away.
4. Happy and sad - dad's picking me up and mum's got to go to work and won't be home until 6.00pm.
5. Happy because I had a nice day yesterday.
6. Happy because tomorrow is French dress up day.
7. Happy I don't know.
8. Happy, happy and excited - tomorrow is French dress up day; I am going to the Royal show; excited because in 2 weeks I am going to get a pet carpet python.
9. Sad and happy because I cracked my knuckles and we're using this snake today for the social circle.
10. Happy and sad - may be able to buy a book at the book club; my brother kept screaming a lot really loudly and kept me awake last night.
11. Happy- tomorrow is French dress up day.
12. Sad and sad because I have a headache and tomorrow is French dress up day and I don't like dressing up. Happy - I don't know why.
13. Happy and happy because tomorrow is French dress up day and in October I am going to England.
14. Excited and sad - because it's my birthday and my dad is going to Karratha.
15. Happy because I am going to Charlotte's house after school.
16. Sad and sad - I am going to speech so I will miss French dress up day and happy because I fell out of bed and hit my head.
17. Happy and sad - I am going to Singapore with my family next week but I will miss school for a week.
18. Happy and sad because Hannah is coming to my house after school and mum broke her finger in a wheelchair at work.
19. Happy because my tooth just fell out and the tooth fairy will visit tomorrow.
20. Happy because my mum is having a baby and I will have a brother soon.
21. Frustrated and happy because I had a nightmare last night and didn't get enough sleep and happy because tomorrow is French dress up day.
22. Happy because Ms Morcom let me use my snake to day for the social circle.
23. Happy I don't why.
24. Excited because Sylvia comes back from holidays tomorrow and I can play with her.
25. Happy three times - because I am going to gymnastics with Julie tonight; this week is my birthday and tomorrow is French dress up day.
26. Happy tomorrow is French dress up day.

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