

# Facilitating In-school Collaborative Learning for Teachers' Professional Practice in an Irish Primary School

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this self-study action research is the facilitation of teachers' engagement in collaborative inquiry to improve practice. The purpose of the inquiry was two-fold: primarily to improve the quality of teaching and learning of writing, within the English curriculum, in a primary school in Ireland; secondly, it was to improve my understanding of the issues and practices involved in leading school-based professional learning.

In year one of the research, I worked with the school's staff to develop structures and processes supporting participants' action learning about collaborative inquiry. Following a multi-level model of intervention, teacher learning teams became the foundation stone of the intervention. While pedagogical content knowledge was the focus of much of the inquiry at base team level, critical examination of cultural norms of practice through collective reflection typified the professional dialogue at whole school level. The moral dimension of teacher professionalism anchored the intervention and was mediated through an unwavering commitment to dialogic action and inquiry. Data gathering and analysis served to assess the impact of the strategies on improving professional as well as student learning. Findings highlighted the significance of teacher-to-teacher discourse in shaping teacher learning; and teachers' commitment to adopting an incremental approach to learning illustrated in a co-created model of staged development.

In year two the teachers pushed out the boundaries of current norms, by observing peer practice. The findings from data gathering in phase two, informed by discourse analysis of videoed post-observation conferences, led to the creation of conceptual models of practice for peer professional dialogue.

The findings emphasise the need to create system-wide structures in Ireland to support embedded professional learning and suggest that teacher collaboration, rooted in professional values and supported by purposeful capacity building has the potential to replace autonomy as valued practice in Irish schools.

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Word count (exclusive of appendices, dedications, list of reference and bibliography): 45,185 words.

Signed: ..... *A. O' Sullivan - Dwyer* .....

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my family: Dermot, Caroline, Denis and Rónán.

Without their unfailing love, support and encouragement this thesis would have remained a dream, lost in the outer space of 'I wonder ...' land.

## **Acknowledgements**

When I started out on this journey in October 2004, I did not realise how many people would travel, part or all, of the road with me. I remember with gratitude:

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## Personal Statement

*A moment becomes a touchstone and a life is shaped*  
(O'Siadhail, 1999)

In this personal statement I present a summary of my learning experiences through my EdD journey. In doing so I make links between the various stages of that journey and demonstrate how the programme has contributed to my professional development. I view the EdD programme as a touchstone, a reference point, in my personal and professional story. By that I mean that it has helped signpost my professional life since I registered on the programme in October 2004. This personal statement outlines how that five year experience has shaped my learning and consequently my professional practice.

### **My Professional Background:**

Taking a constructivist view of learning I deem it pertinent to briefly describe my learning journey prior to starting on the EdD programme and the professional context that shapes who I am as a learner. I also do so by way of providing the backdrop that justifies my claim that the learning gained through my EdD studies is clearly relevant to my professional practice and has positively influenced that practice. A dimension of my learning through the EdD programme has been to critically examine how my experiences as a learner and a teacher, two sides of the same coin, are mutually influential. Teaching has shaped my life since I became a primary school teacher in Ireland in 1970. Like most people it also shaped my life before becoming a teacher and I believe that my early experiences as a learner in a familial, two-teacher village school have significantly, if often unknowingly, defined my experience as a teacher. Graduating when the qualification for primary teaching in Ireland was still diploma based, I immediately began what has remained a life's commitment to on-going professional development through night study. My experience as both a learner and teacher was greatly broadened in the early 1980s when I spent some years working as a volunteer in a 'pueblo joven'<sup>1</sup> in Lima, Peru. There I was exposed to the teaching and practices of Paulo Freire (1970) and Gustavo Gutierrez (1973). It was a real experience

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<sup>1</sup> 'Pueblo joven' literally means a 'young town' but often mis-referenced in English as a 'shanty town'.

of living learning. I became aware of the limitations of living life through unexamined paradigms and the obligation on all of us to develop our own agency and exercise it in shaping our world for the better, in whatever context that may be. Coming back to Ireland, shaped by values-driven learning through and from others, I studied for a master's degree in educational management as it was then called. I became a principal in a large primary school, followed by a number of years as a founder member of the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS)<sup>2</sup> programme in Ireland. Finally, last year I joined the staff of the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin as co-coordinator of the Educational Leadership and Management course.

### **My Field of Learning**

The focus of my learning throughout my EdD journey has been the concept of school-based teacher professional development. I view professional development and professional learning as interchangeable, since I believe you cannot have one without the other. My commitment to this theme is driven by an aspiration that all our schools should be places where quality learning and quality teaching are the hallmarks of each individual's experience, be they adult or child. I give a brief overview of the development of my learning around my chosen field over the course of the various assignments and research activities involved in the EdD programme. I begin with the assignments related to the taught elements of the programme:

I thoroughly enjoyed the taught courses, the intellectual stimulation of the professional discussions, the camaraderie of the class group, the reading around and beyond the subject matter, the feedback on assignments, the reflections, and learning about learning. I begin on that note because it demonstrates that like Guskey (2000) claims, professional development experiences are influenced by participants initial reactions. Because those named elements contributed to making it enjoyable and exciting, I did not count the cost of getting up at an unreasonable hour of the morning to take an early flight to the institute, nor did I count the cost of weekends and holidays consumed by reading, writing and reflection.

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<sup>2</sup> The function of LDS is similar to that of the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) in the UK.

The Foundations of Professionalism, the opening course of the programme greatly challenged my thinking around the concept of professionalism. The discussion-led sessions created opportunities for learning with and through the experiences of others. Sometime prior to starting the programme, I had had the opportunity to spend three weeks visiting schools in New Zealand. Within the broad frame of teacher professional development, one of the aspects of their educational system that I was interested in was teacher performance management. Coming as I did from an educational system where neither systems of appraisal nor performance management are practised I was left with a great number of questions around the links between performance management and professional development. I chose as my assignment for this course a reflection on the concept of performance management and its relationship to, place in, the concept of teacher professionalism. In exploring the founding ideologies of both concepts through reference to the work of Friedson, (2001), Sachs (2004), Schön (1983, 1991), Carr (2000), Norman (2003) and others I located the practice of performance management as rooted in what is commonly called 'new managerialism' and that it is inherently distinct from professional practice in its rationality and exercise. Comparing the founding logic of each, I highlighted that the professional autonomy at the heart of professionalism has quite distinct implications for the conditions of work from that inherent in the managerialist approach of performance management. However, I claimed that, in the context of the Irish education system, unless we, the teaching body assume responsibility to improve our performance and do so with integrity, we are in fact, failing our own profession and contributing to its fragmentation. The professionalism of teaching remains a constant through my work and my final thesis reflects my deepening appreciation of the challenges it poses in teaching today.

In Methods of Enquiry 1 and 2, through reading, discussion and research, I continued my exploration of the theme of in-school professional learning. In focusing on the variables that influence such learning, my reading led me to the importance of feedback on practice as integral to professional development (Askew, 2000). I undertook a qualitative research project, outlined in the assignment for Methods of Enquiry 1, undertaken over a three-month period and reported on in the assignment for Methods of Enquiry 2. The focus of the inquiry was on Irish primary teachers' understandings of,

attitudes to, and experiences of, feedback on their own professional practice. The findings showed low instances of such feedback, variability in teachers' experiences and raised my awareness of the manner in which different school cultures and contexts shape teachers' learning to improve practice (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Hord, 2004). While there was no evidence that the lack of formal structures results in poorer quality teaching, such a lack was deemed to contribute to the difficulty for schools in developing the capacity to deliver quality teaching.

For the Initial Specialist Course I followed the module on Educational Leadership. Again I was drawn to the elements that constitute powerful professional development. I contextualised my learning within my own practice as leader of peer professional development for school leaders. In that role I had engaged with others to develop a new national programme for experienced school leaders. The programme is called 'Forbairt'<sup>3</sup>. Through my assignment I critically examined the guiding principles that underpin the Forbairt programme. The significance of clear core principles to inform practice was clearly important. In the case of Forbairt the key principles were drawn from practitioners' stories and research which was contextualised for the Irish educational system. At the heart of the programme is the moral purpose to improve every child's learning through leaders: modelling as in 'walking the talk', having situational awareness as in being context relevant, empowering others and critically having the courage to act where appropriate. Those principles informed my approach to undertaking my research for the Institute Focused Study.

In reviewing my learning at the end of the taught modules a number of key themes emerged as significant for me as a learner, leader of peer professional development and researcher. These themes were: teacher professionalism in a knowledge society, the experience of co-constructing meaning with others, and the critical importance of site-based professional learning to improve practice. My reading around the concept of the school as a professional learning community (PLC) and the indisputable evidence from the work of Hord (2004), Darling-Hammond (2009), Stoll and Louis (2006) of its functionality in practice, convinced me to undertake a school based project for my IFS. I worked with two volunteer teachers to set up a Professional Learning Team (PLT) in

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<sup>3</sup> 'Forbairt' is a term from the Irish language meaning growth or development.

an Irish primary school. Exercising a participatory action research approach we, the research participants and I as researcher/facilitator, concluded that conceptually the school as a professional learning community has the potential to facilitate school-based professional learning in the Irish context. However, it was also a finding that the inquiry-based, deprivatising spirit of PLC fundamentally challenges the mental models of professionalism and the nature of professional relationships in Irish primary schools. It was our conclusion that the PLC concept offers a structure for professional learning but that how that structure is used will determine its effectiveness. The fact that this PLT functioned in isolation from the rest of the school limited its potential to influence practice at whole school level. The findings from this inquiry encouraged me to explore the possibility of facilitating the development of a PLC at whole school level in an Irish primary school. That is the theme of this thesis.

Finally, learning about research has been central to my learning in the EdD programme. The various workshops on methods of inquiry and advanced research methods opened up a window to a new world of practice. From the outset, I was naturally drawn to the broad field of qualitative research. In exploring this field, I used interviewing as a method of data gathering in the first research project (Methods of Inquiry 1 and 2). However, I finally found my home in action research. Perhaps influential in this choice was the realisation that I have been doing a form of action research all my professional life. In Chapter Two of this thesis, I offer a critical perspective on action research born out of my experience of using action research in both the IFS and this final inquiry and reflective of my learning as a researcher in the EdD programme.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis is an action research inquiry into the facilitation of teachers' shared professional learning to change practice. As external facilitator, I led an in-school professional learning programme to improve the quality of teaching and learning of writing, within the English curriculum, in a primary school in Ireland. The focus was on developing systems and procedures for sharing practice, and learning in and through that sharing. This school-based, two year research was carried out within a national teaching culture where isolated practice still predominates and no formal systems of appraisal are practised. It is grounded in learning based on firsthand experience, and highlights a range of issues that emerge when teachers and school leaders attempt to change culture and practice, and the challenges that those issues pose for an external facilitator of the process. Integral to the research is the building of in-school capacity to lead its own professional development programme in the future, based on shared professional practice.

In year one the focus of the research was on my role as external facilitator, to that extent year one could be described as self-study action research but always understood in relation to the school team with whom I worked and learned. In year two, as participants' confidence in the process grew, the teachers' role became more central and data gathering focused on teachers' peer-to-peer dialogue. Teachers' post-observation discussions were recorded, analysed and fed back to the teachers to better understand the frameworks that underpinned their practice.

The overall question that inspires the research is: What can be learned about facilitating in-school professional learning through leading a whole-school teaching staff to engage in collaborative inquiry to improve practice? It is the story of how, in trying to live in the direction of my educational values (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006), I have improved my understanding of facilitating in-school professional learning and influenced the learning and practice of fellow professionals. In doing so, I have created my own living

educational theory (Whitehead, 1999). In the spirit of action research this is a two-cycle study: each phase representing one school year.

The primary school, which I fictitiously name St. B's, is a 24 teacher, (eighteen mainstream, five learning support and principal), urban boys primary school in Ireland. In the Irish context it is considered a senior primary school. The pupils range from approximately six to seven years of age (first class) to twelve or thirteen (sixth class). While St. B's has an open admissions policy, its catchment area would be considered predominantly middle class in character. The staff profile is as follows:

**Table 1.1: Staff Profile in Year 2**

Age Group	Female	Male
25 years old or less	4	
25 - 35 years	6	3
35 - 45 years	3	
45+	4	4

Having previously been a member of staff, I was invited by the principal and senior leadership team of the school to act as external facilitator of an in-school professional learning programme. The leadership team knew of my action research work in another primary school (the subject of my IFS) and it was known to them that I was interested in working on-site for my final research. The focus of phase one of the research was on teachers learning collaborative inquiry through doing collaborative inquiry, and was underpinned by developing teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions relevant to the intervention. With the explicit intention of promoting the professionalism of the teachers, the programme included developing participants' understanding of the theory of action that informed the programme. By theory of action I mean developing an understanding of the concept of the school as a professional learning community as the context for empowering professional learning. The intervention was team based: six three-teacher learning teams, each including one facilitator and corresponding to class levels in the school, were established. These teams met about six times during each phase. I met with the facilitators prior to each team meeting. A full outline of the calendar of activities is shown in Appendix 1. I facilitated one workshop each term for the full teaching staff.



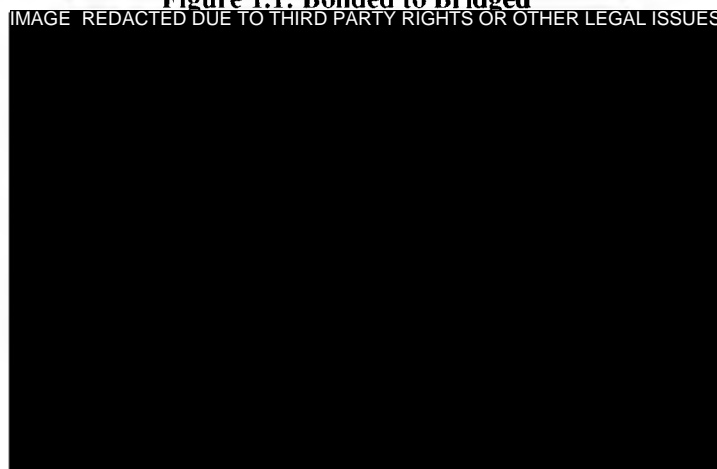
With the active participation of the teachers in the school I gathered data to determine the effectiveness of the various procedures:

- 1) Effectiveness was determined by the extent to which the teachers' engagement demonstrated an understanding of collaborative inquiry and led to improved learning and teaching in the classroom. This was informed by Guskey's (2000; 2002) five-level approach to professional development,
- 2) Data was collected to monitor the development of in-school capacity to lead collaborative inquiry, and
- 3) I monitored my own on-going learning as a facilitator of in-school professional learning.

This thesis presents evidence relating to all three exercises.

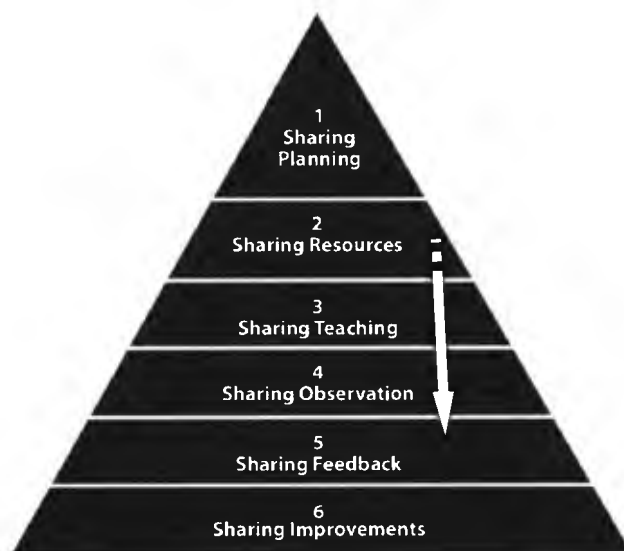
At the end of phase one, Professor West-Burnham led a full day workshop which resulted in the teachers illustrating a) their understanding of what they had experienced in the year, and b) the direction in which they saw the process going. As an exercise in synthesis and conceptualisation, it led to the creation of two images that guided phase two. The first image, Figure 1.1 below, depicts their experience of this initiative as a journey from isolated practice (shown in the orange band in the diagram as closed, isolated and individualistic) to collegiate, collaborative practice (shown in the blue band as one that encouraged experimenting, sharing) and generally opening up the classroom doors, metaphorically and physically to deprivatise their way of working. This image was the fruit of a discussion around Putnam's work on social capital (Putnam, 2000).

**Figure 1.1: Bonded to Bridged**



The second image (Figure 1.2) illustrates the stages of the learning journey from private to collaborative as they understood them and on the basis of which they were prepared to undertake this programme. This image that I call the ‘Conceptual Model for Learning Collaborative Practice’ played a significant role in the intervention.

**Figure 1.2: Conceptual Model for Learning Collaborative Practice**



(Co-constructed by teachers and West-Burnham, May 2008)

This model emerged through a reflective process led by West-Burnham. By making explicit their understanding of collaborative practice one year into the intervention, the teachers identified six levels on that journey from level one, sharing planning at the top to level six, sharing improvement at the deepest level. The model suggests that level one, sharing planning, is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to learning collaborative practice but a good place to start in that most Irish teachers are now comfortable at that level of collaboration. As teachers progress downwards, they go deeper into understanding their own practice and learning, and the effects become more widely felt through the school the deeper they go. They identified their starting point at the beginning of the intervention as level one, their current level at end of year one as sharing resources and sharing teaching. Significantly, they envisioned the process

leading to sharing observation, feedback and improvement and that this was a realistic target. This will be discussed in chapter three.

The opening staff meeting of phase two incorporated a reflection on the previous workshop and the commitments made at that time. It was decided to continue the journey of pushing the boundaries of collaboration by sharing feedback on observed practice. My task was to safely lead that process. In the Irish context, this was breaking new ground. Following consultation, videos of what we named post-observation conferences were recorded and analysed by way of learning how to share feedback in a collaborative and professionally respectful way. These conferences followed a model of meeting, loosely based on a peer coaching concept (see Appendix 2) proposed by me as facilitator, and adopted by the teachers, as offering a structure to focus the discussion. These videoed conferences were the sources of discourse data of phase two. Judith Warren Little and Llana Horn, (2007) both researchers who have done a lot of work on teacher discourse, citing McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), still claim that:

deep, sustained conversations among teachers about matters of teaching and learning remain uncommon, (2007, p. 79).

The findings from phase two analysis, I suggest, offer a unique insight into teachers' learning to change practice through providing a rare glimpse of sustained teacher to teacher talk.

### Structure of the Thesis

The overall structure of the thesis is outlined in Table 1.2 below. The review of the literature is not isolated as a separate chapter. The interplay of learning through experience and practice, and learning through reviewing research and literature in the field, weaves through the thesis as a continuous interactive discourse. In some chapters one is foregrounded more than the other reflecting the nature of the research. Chapter One gives the general background to the overall thesis. Chapters Two and Three are dedicated to phase one of the research. The preface to phase two bridges the transition from phase one to phase two. Chapters Four, Five and Six are dedicated to phase two. Finally, Chapter Seven offers general conclusions and recommendations based on the overall research.

**Table 1.2: Structure of the Thesis**

General Introduction	Chapter One		
Phase One	Chapter Two Overall Methodology and Methods of Data Gathering for Phase One	Chapter Three Findings and Discussion of Findings from Phase One	
Preface to Phase Two			
Phase Two	Chapter Four Methods of Data Gathering and Analysis	Chapter Five Presentation of Findings	Chapter Six Discussion of Findings
General Conclusions	Chapter Seven A summary of General Conclusions and Recommendations		

It is important to understand the context within which the study is situated. To that end a significant section of this chapter is dedicated to an examination of both the Irish educational context and the global theoretical context which give meaning to the relevance and manner of this research.

## **1.2 National Educational Context in Ireland: System, School and Teacher Level**

### **1.2.1 General Overview**

The Irish education system is a small system comprising of 3,284 primary and 742 second-level referred to as post primary schools. Irish education is highly centralised in the Department of Education and Science (DES). There is a direct line of control from the DES to the individual school. There is no middle level with the effect of increased bureaucracy in managing schools. The DES sets out policy, regulations for recognition of schools, prescribes curricula, and establishes regulations for the management, resourcing and staffing of schools as well as centrally negotiating teachers' salaries. The vast majority of schools in Ireland are publicly funded through the DES but privately owned, usually by religious bodies. In theory:

Teachers and staff are employed by each school's board of management. Hence while the salaries of teachers and principals are paid by the State, each school is legally autonomous in terms of hiring and firing staff and in terms of legal and compliance responsibilities (Leadership Development for Schools, 2007, p. 12).

At individual school level, the current system of primary school governance is by individual boards of management, serving a four year term. These combine patron

nominees and elected representatives including parents and local representatives. These elected representatives, in the main, have little prior experience of governance. These boards of management are not seen as exercising any real authority in Irish education. There are of course some exceptions but these are few. The DES, to all intents and purposes, determines school policy, albeit based on a model of social partnership, and in practice, it is the principal who is left to negotiate operational space between the DES and the school community to implement those policies. It is acknowledged that:

... teachers in Ireland are highly unionised with 98% of primary teachers and 91% of post primary teachers belonging to teacher unions (Leadership Development for Schools, 2007).

It is generally accepted that the primary teacher trade union is among the most powerful in the state and it is my premise that over the years, the union has been highly influential in shaping the cultural norms of teacher practices in Irish primary schools. Sheelagh Drudy would go so far as to say that 'teachers are so much involved, through their trade unions in setting policy, particularly at curriculum level, to the extent almost that they enjoy a virtual veto on the formation of national education policy' (Drudy, 2000, p. 3). Coolahan also acknowledges the strong tradition of close liaison between school management bodies at trustee level, teacher unions and the DES on all matters affecting teaching (Coolahan, 2003, p. 41):

... A long established tradition exists of ready access to the DES by the teacher union leaders. The same holds true for school management bodies. Of course, policy differences and disputes occur, but an underlying good relationship tends to exist between the personnel involved (Coolahan, 2003, p. 23).

The combination of direct control from the DES, powerful unions, and relatively weak school governance results in a situation whereby school-based leadership for change, is exercised in a procedurally unsupported environment. One of the findings in a study carried out by the Hay Group in 1999, when referring to the professional development of teachers (and there is no evidence that things have changed in the intervening decade), noted that there was:

... a lack of support in the form of procedures from Boards of Management and the Department in handling such situations (HayGroup, 1999, p. 5).

Time is a recurring theme in discussions about Irish primary education. It is often the elephant in the room when looking at school improvement in that teachers' contracted hours correspond with pupil contact time. The need to develop collaborative practices among teachers is negated by the simple fact that there is no time assigned for such collaboration in the school year. It is an issue about which a growing number of people are voicing their concerns (Coolahan, 2003; Hogan, 2007; Murchan et al., 2005), and echoed in the report issued by the inspectorate of the DES:

It is recognised that there is a difficulty about the provision of time for collaborative planning; this issue should now be resolved by all the education partners (DES, 2005, p. 10).

However, despite such disquiet there is still no change and finding time for professional collaboration comes down to school leaders finding 'creative' ways for so doing. It is my opinion that such 'creativity' is a highly unprofessional *modus operandi*, and an avoidance of tackling the bigger question of time in school.

Yet, 'there are not major concerns in Ireland about attracting competent people to enter the teaching profession. Teaching as a career has traditionally enjoyed relatively high social status and there is keen competitiveness for entry to all categories of teaching' (Coolahan, 2003, p. 26). Furthermore, OECD, PISA<sup>4</sup> reports show Ireland placed either above or at the mean scores in all three of the areas assessed. Out of the thirty OECD countries Ireland is placed 5<sup>th</sup> in Reading, 16<sup>th</sup> in Mathematics and 14<sup>th</sup> in Science. When compared to all fifty seven countries that participated in the assessment those would read 6<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. Up to the present, while there may have been periodic media rumblings of disquiet on particular educational issues there has been no evidence that Irish society was seriously challenging this status quo. Perhaps, given these recessionary times, with the spotlight on the public sector's working conditions, we may see that change.

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<sup>4</sup> PISA is a project of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), designed to assess the scientific, mathematical, and reading literacy skills of 15-year-olds [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

### ***1.2.2 Teacher Professional Development at System Level***

The story of teacher professional development in Ireland is one of ebbs and flows. John Coolahan, an eminent Irish academic who has been influential in most of the major change initiatives over the last forty years, describes it as ‘a chequered history’ (Coolahan, 2007, p. 2). It could also be argued that it is the story of the influence of OECD and the European Union on Irish education. The publication of the first OECD report on education, *Investment in Education*, in 1965 heralded a new era in Irish education. Coolahan describes the period 1965-1975 as a time of educational flourishing which included the modernisation of the colleges of initial teacher education and the establishment of Teacher Centres, later to become Education Centres, in the early 1970s. These Teacher Centres were set up around the country as resource centres for teachers and reflected a growing awareness of the need for in-service. Up to this teacher education had been focused on initial teacher education. This period also saw teaching becoming an all-graduate profession in Ireland.

Coolahan, however, states that this mobilisation was not sustained through the 1980s, which he claims became a time of ‘retrenchment’ and ‘for whatever reason, it would seem that teacher education fell well down the priority list of the Department of Education’ (Coolahan, 2007, p. 4). However, the 1990s ‘ushered in an era of unprecedented analysis, appraisal, consultation, educational policy formulation and legislation’ (Coolahan, 2007, p. 5), led by the OECD report of 1991 which paid particular reference to the teaching career. The report, while acknowledging that ‘Ireland has been fortunate to maintain the quality of its teaching force’ (OECD, 1991, p. 100), for the first time introduced the concept of teacher education as a continuum from initial through induction to in-service. This continuum became known as the three ‘I’s’: Initial, Induction and In-Service. It clearly stated:

We believe the best returns from further investment in teacher education will come from the careful planning and construction of a nationwide induction and in-service system using the concept of the teaching career as the foundation (OECD, 1991, p. 98).

Coolahan sees this report as ‘a landmark, authoritative statement, delivered in 1991 on what the bedrock policy should be for teacher education in Ireland, which has not yet been achieved’ (Coolahan, 2007, p. 7). The government’s response to this report was the publication of Ireland’s first Green Paper on Education – Education for a Changing World (Ireland, 1992). For Leonard, in terms of teacher professional development it made a surprising omission in that:

A whole section including a key Green Paper chapter is devoted to the development of teachers, yet there is not even a mention of the most seminal ideas of the OECD review of a few years ago (1991), namely the school as a learning institution for teacher development as well as for students (Leonard, 1996, p. 58).

Major reform initiatives, taken over the next decade in education, included the setting up of the In-Career Development Unit (ICDU) in 1992. The White Paper in 1995 included the commitment to teacher education as a continuum. This commitment was later supported by a large budget of £35 to £40 million for INSET secured from the European Union, in terms of teacher professional development. Leonard would say that the move was ‘away from the school classroom as the site of educational interaction between teacher, student and subject’ (ibid, p. 58). The White paper that followed in 1995 confirmed the government’s commitment to the continuum of professional development:

...the Department of Education will formulate, in active co-operation with partners in education, a strategic framework for the in-career professional development of teachers with explicit, achievable objectives, specified target groups and criteria for evaluating the impact of in-career development programmes (Ireland, 1995, p. 128).

However, there was what Coolahan calls ‘a hiatus of several years before these central planks of official policy were again seriously re-visited’ (Coolahan, 2007, p. 16). Despite the years of consultation on the question of in-service professional development, prior to 1998 the provision of teacher professional development in Ireland remained unsystematic and uptake was generally based on individual choice. Loxley et al described it thus: ‘in the absence of any form of central provision, a default policy of laissez-faire prevailed’ (Loxley et al., 2007, p. 270). From 1999 onwards the establishment of in-service programmes, organised on a national basis and designed and



delivered by teachers seconded from their schools, became the normative response to professional development needs. I will now examine these programmes in terms of the models of professional development that they typify.

### *1.2.3 Model of Professional Development in Ireland*

In 1992 the In-Career Development Unit (ICDU) was established to coordinate teacher professional development in Ireland. This division of the Department of Education and Science became known as Teacher Education Section (TES) in 2004. In the early years the teacher education programmes organised by ICDU/TES were principally curricular support or development planning support initiatives. By way of example, the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), involved teachers attending offsite seminars for an average of five to six days annually over the duration of the implementation of what is called the Revised Curriculum. The trend was that once established these agencies remain, however because of financial and other reasons, a new regionalised structure is being established from September 2010 involving the disbandment of a large number of the programmes listed below. The number of such programmes varied according to needs. The following table is not a complete list but gives some idea of the provision:

**Table 1.3: Sample List of Professional Development Programmes 1999 – present**

<b>In-Service Professional Development Programmes (Primary Level)</b>	<b>In-Service Professional Development Programmes (Post-Primary Level)</b>
Primary Curriculum Support Service (PCSP)	School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI)
School Development Planning Service (SDPS)	Second Level Support Service (Curriculum) (SLSS)
Relationship and Sexuality	Relationship and Sexuality (RSE)
School Support Programme (Disadvantaged)	Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)
Child Abuse Prevention Programme	Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
Substance Misuse Prevention Programme	Junior Cycle Physical Education (JCPE)
Teacher Professional Network Scheme	Teacher Professional Network Scheme (TPNS)
Reading Recovery	Technology
Summer Courses	Dublin Cool Schools Pilot Project (Anti-Bullying)
Special Education Support Service (SESS)	National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS)
Leadership Development for Schools (LDS)	Leadership Development for Schools (LDS)
Primary Professional Development Service [2008: An amalgamation of PCSP & SDPS]	SLSS is to incorporate SPHE, JCPE, RSE in September 2009.

The model of professional development was a seminar-led, in-service model that usually involved withdrawal from school. This releasing of teachers from school has, I believe, contributed to the perception that professional development is ‘an add-on’ (Hogan et al., 2007, p. 22), not integral to the teachers’ main work. A further concern was raised by Sugrue (2002), who highlighted that this model resulted not only in very fragmented experience for teachers, but also in an experience of professional learning that is limiting. Sugrue’s interpretation of the Cochran-Smith and Lytle delineation of teacher learning (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999) is seen in the following table:

**Table 1.4: Representations of Teachers' Learning (Sugrue, 2002, p. 38)**

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>Professional Learning</b>	<b>Research</b>
<b>Knowledge for Practice</b>			
A body of empirically verifiable knowledge is generated by experts	Disseminate/update teachers' knowledge-base to attain predetermined goals	Teachers 'bring back' 'best practice' to their classrooms: knowledge users	Researchers, not teachers, generate knowledge
<b>Knowledge in Practice</b>			
[Knowledge is] constructed by teachers in specific contexts	Focus on schools as learning communities for teachers and learners	Teachers: active agents-knowledge construction & reinventing their practice	Systematic documentation of teachers' knowledge
<b>Knowledge of Practice</b>			
[Knowledge is] problematic and contested	Should empower teachers as transformative agents	Learning is social and communal: committed to seeking significant questions	Conducted by teachers as agents of their own learning

This representation by Sugrue suggests that when knowledge is presented as coming from the expert in compliance with a given policy, teachers apply their new skills without questioning and devoid of critical examination. Sugrue concluded that:

... much of current provision, though provided by practitioners for their colleagues, may combine some of the more negative features of ‘knowledge for practice’ and ‘knowledge in practice’ where teachers are being ‘talked at’..., the absence of support at school/classroom level means learning is not sustained as it lacks appropriate support and context sensitive feedback (Sugrue, 2002, p. 318).

Joyce and Showers (2002) show that when off-site professional development is used in isolation, it has limited value in improving learning and teaching in schools. They state:

that the knowledge exists for designing and implementing programs that make a difference in the lives of students (Joyce and Showers, 2002, p. 10).

They also claim that their research shows that the difficulties in transferring and implementing new learning to the classroom are a 'product of weak pre-service and in-service programs, not in the learning ability of teachers' (Joyce and Showers, 2002, p. 3). They insist that without school based learning through feedback and coaching few professionals use new strategies until they become normative practices. They urge:

Staff development programs include demonstrations, opportunities for practice with feedback, and the study of the underlying theory..... As initial skill is obtained, the participants should be organised into teams to implement the coaching component within the community of peer coaches, pairs of teachers ...visit one another and discuss how to make the strategies work... (Joyce and Showers, 2002, p. 146).

The evidence suggests that the focus should be on continuing off-site learning within the school context. With that in mind, I now look at current norms of practice in Ireland in terms of in-school professional learning.

#### ***1.2.4 Teacher Professional Development at School Level***

I focus on two statutory instruments that have the potential to significantly impact on Irish teachers' professional learning: The Education Act, 1998 and The Teaching Council Act, 2001. In December 1998, educational provision in Ireland was for the first time formalised in a statutory mandate. This Act identified professional development as a statutory right and, significantly, placed the responsibility on the school to foster, and actively provide for, professional development of teachers in Ireland. In the words of the Act, it is the function of a school to:

... ensure that the needs of personnel involved in management functions and staff development needs generally in the school are identified and provided for (Ireland, 1998, pp. Section 9, j).

Equally significantly, the section on the duties of the principal asserts:

In addition to the functions of a Principal provided for in *section 22*, the Principal shall:

- a) be responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, including guidance and direction of the teachers and other staff of the school, and be accountable to the board for that management,

- b) provide leadership to the teachers and other staff and the students of the school,
- c) be responsible for the creation, together with the board, parents of students and the teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of the teachers, (Ireland 1998, Section 23.).

Though The Teaching Council Act was passed in 2001, it was not until March 2006 that the Teaching Council was established. According to its website, it was set up ‘to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers and to regulate standards in the profession’ (Council, 2006). Its Code for Professional Practice highlights that ‘continuous professional development is both a right and a responsibility and should be supported by policy and resources at local, regional and national level’ (Council, 2007, p. 18) and, furthermore, it suggests that: ‘teachers ...believe that professional development is a lifelong process which is influenced by personal, social and educational contexts. It is most effective when it is embedded in practice’ (Council, 2007, p. 18). However, there exists a strange anomaly. While the duty of the school, (in practice meaning the principal), to be responsible and answerable for ‘staff development needs generally’, is written into law, there is no corresponding mandatory requirement of the individual teacher and ‘no minimum professional development for teachers in a school year’ (OECD, 2000, pp. 115,124). This is particularly concerning given that the 1991 OECD report recommended that the school should be a centre of professional learning. It is my thesis that, given the predominant cultural norm of non-interference in Irish classroom practice (Daly, 2008; OECD, 1991; HayGroup, 1999), without national requirements for teachers to engage in professional learning activities, and time assigned for such in-school activities, teachers and leaders who wish to do so are left unsupported.

When we turn to teachers receiving professional feedback on their practice, the Education Act specifically states that it is the duty of the school ‘to use its available resources’ to:

... establish and maintain systems whereby the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations can be assessed, including the quality and effectiveness of teaching in

the school and the attainment levels and academic standards of students (Ireland 1998, Section 9, k).

There is little or no culture of appraisal of practice in Irish primary schools. Thus, Coolahan's comment that 'the tradition of principals' formal evaluation of teachers' work is weak (Coolahan, 2003, p. 19) is as valid in 2009 as it was in 2003. Up to 2009 the role of evaluator is clearly assigned as the duty of the DES inspectorate whose job it is to:

... evaluate the organisation and operation of those schools and centres and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools or centres, including the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers (Ireland, 1998, pp. Section 13, 3, a (1)).

The role of the inspectorate in evaluating teachers dates back to the 1830s and, with the exception of the probationary teacher, has evolved from being an individually focused exercise to a whole school endeavour (Coolahan, 2003, p. 19) through what is called Whole School Evaluation (WSE). In fact, it is often said that the WSE highlights only the role of the principal in that the principal is often the only identifiable person in the final, published report. Therefore the current practice, arguably, reinforces the responsibility of the principal to ensure a quality educational experience while disguising the individual responsibility of the teacher.

The most recent report from the OECD, at the time of writing, The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) published in June 2009, looks at the area of teacher appraisal and professional development. TALIS is based on reports from teachers of lower secondary education and the principals of their schools. An extract from the overview of country results for Ireland makes interesting reading:

- Around one quarter of teachers in Ireland had not received feedback or appraisal in their school (4th highest of the 23 countries) and almost 40% of teachers are in schools that had no evaluation (external or self-evaluation) in the last 5 years (the highest of the 23 countries)
- Of those teachers receiving appraisal/feedback, less than one quarter reported that it resulted in a development plan to improve their teaching (TALIS average 37%).
- Furthermore, only 11% of teachers believe that a teacher will be dismissed for sustained poor performance in their school (TALIS average = 28%).

I contend that the claim that only 25% of Irish second level teachers do not receive feedback is not reflective of the reality. Based on discussions with teachers through my work, evidence strongly indicates that most teachers receive little or no formal feedback on practice. The report later reflects a certain haziness around the issue when it says that, in Ireland, instructional leadership ‘is relatively weak’ compared with most of the other TALIS countries and where teachers do receive feedback it is ‘more likely to recognise teachers’ participation in professional development’ (OECD, 2009). There is a need for much greater clarity.

In summary, in recognising the highly positive influence of OECD and The European Union on Irish education in driving change for improvement, I also believe it is important to be aware of the values that underpin their activities. Sugrue in his critique of the role of external agencies on Irish education, reminds us that the OECD ‘is first and foremost an economic organisation’ (Sugrue, 2006, p. 183). The first OECD report in 1965, *Investment in Education*, made a direct link between education and economic development. It says:

As education is at once a cause and a consequence of economic growth, economic planning is incomplete without educational planning. Education, as well as having its own intrinsic values, it is a necessary element in economic development (OECD, 1965, p. 350).

Sugrue claims that there is a growing performativity agenda. He says ‘concepts of efficiency and effectiveness have percolated to the top of the agenda as economic competition has gained hegemonic influence’ (Sugrue, 2006, p. 183). Added to that is what Sugrue speaks of as the ‘refraction’ of OECD recommendations, particularly in the 1991 document by the DES in Ireland – a case in point being the ignoring of recommendations such as the school as a site of on-going professional learning. Such refraction, I suggest, has led to the focus on outcome rather than process in terms of professional learning by over-emphasising system needs (to get a revised curriculum implemented) rather than the needs of the professional learner who needs time for practice, feedback and on-going coaching. The damage to the professionalism of teachers whose learning experiences are systematically cut off or aborted, never having

the time to move from 'shallow to profound' (West-Burnham and Coates, 2005). This, I argue, has created a culture of outward compliance and an inner 'learned helplessness' (Dweck and Leggett, 1988), that is negatively impacting on the learning and teaching in schools. I write about this in chapter six. It is time for the profession to redress this imbalance.

Finally, the dominance of the in-service model of professional development has had another unforeseen outcome. Despite laudable efforts by many professional teachers running those programmes, the underpinning model of 'delivery' has created, inadvertently or not, what Loxley et al describe as 'a broad dependency culture in Irish education whereby the Department of Education and Science is automatically expected to 'provide' professional development for teachers to support changing curriculum (Loxley et al., 2007, p. 283).

It is my thesis that, in the spirit of the 1991 OECD report, there should be a variety of pathways to professional development, but that all programmes must have the expectation of improving learning outcomes in schools. Therefore, all programmes must sooner or later be brought back to the school setting for the practice, feedback and embedding into practice that is critical for change. In order for that to happen, schools must develop the structures and capacities to become professional learning communities. This investigation specifically focuses on challenging many of the cultural norms that are integral to the context as described. The context is also significant in that it underlines the relevance of the research which is aimed at intervening where there is currently a discrepancy between espoused theories on teacher professional development of the DES and other agencies such as the Teaching Council and the theories in practice, through the vacuum caused by lack of policy provision. In the next section I explain my own interest in this topic. I give an overview of how personal experience and theoretical frameworks shape this research in learning to lead a school-based programme for professional learning.

### **1.3 General Theoretical Context: School Based Teacher Professional Development**

My interest in teacher professional learning is grounded in my personal belief, born out of my experience and supported by research evidence, that teacher-learning to improve practice is the single most important factor in improving schools (Barber and Mourshed, 2007; Joyce and Showers, 2002; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003; Wiliam and Thompson, 2007). Furthermore, there is now undeniable evidence that in-school variability in the quality of teaching is a real problem and has to be tackled (Konstantopoulos, 2006; McKinsey, 2009). The emerging research about in-school variability, as well as about the way change is mediated in schools, has significance for agents of change in schools. I believe the growing agreement among respected scholars that professional learning is most effective when embedded in practice, places a clear responsibility on school leadership. From my own experience as a school principal, I believe that school leaders, when trying to improve school practice, cannot simply work with volunteers alone, as perhaps researchers can. I believe that when working for the long-term good of a whole school one must not lose people at the very beginning. As already noted, I was invited by the principal and senior leadership team of the school to act as external facilitator of an in-school professional development programme. That was my brief and I suggest the process of working at full teaching staff level is different in pacing and emphasis from leading a small group of self-starters. A research and development initiative for innovative teaching and learning has been the focus of a recent four year research project undertaken by the National University of Ireland in Maynooth, in conjunction with fifteen post-primary/secondary schools in Ireland which, in working with a small number of teachers and principals from each school, incorporated many of the principles of the PLC. Learning from that experience suggested:

... while the capacity for self-evaluation and constructive criticism is fruitfully built through continuity and rapport provided by small-scale workshop formats, advancing it on a whole scale basis requires action of another kind (Hogan et al., 2007, p. 32).

As a hill walker I draw an analogy with the guide leading a large group of walkers of varying levels of experience and fitness on a new route: the guide has the responsibility



to choose a route within everyone's capability, and must constantly check that those out front don't advance so far ahead as to lose those falling behind. The group still arrives at its destination! However, my experience has been that when inter-group interaction is nurtured, people change walking partners as they go, they connect, develop mutual appreciation and trust, the pace tends to settle and they are more likely to walk again as a group. In fact, the likelihood is they choose an even more challenging route next time. This research is fundamentally about learning: teacher learning to improve practice and my learning of the process as a self-study action researcher but all for the purpose of improving student learning. It is pertinent that I outline: a) the understanding of learning that informs the research, and b) the theoretical context within which I see such learning flourishing in our schools.

### ***1.3.1 The Theory of Learning***

My own theory of learning has been constructed over time, prompted by some great thinkers who have shared their insights and theories with others. Carl Rogers (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994) inspired me with his work on self-directed learning. Paulo Freire (1970; 1992) opened my eyes to issues of power and dominance and the importance of personal agency for human flourishing. Denison and Kirk (1990), clarified how experience is the basis for learning. West-Burnham and Coates (2005), brought new insights on the quality of learning experiences from shallow to deep to profound. Watkins (2005), helped me understand the difference between the instruction, construction and co-construction models of learning. From Donovan et al (2000) I learned that the process of learning involves the three key stages of pre-conceptions which informed the work of phase one of the research, creating new frameworks and reflection which epitomised phase two of the research. From my supervisor Susan Askew I have experienced the empowerment of learning as a shared, boundary-breaking journey supported by continuous professional dialogue.

In summary, the belief that each individual has the capacity to learn and that that capacity is developmental is central to this research (Claxton, 1997; Gardner, 1993c; Perkins, 1995). I view the processes that support learning as including opportunities to

experience a) active and experimental learning (Dewey, 1929; Freire, 1992; Kolb, 1984), with b) demonstrations of understanding (Perkins, 1992), and c) supported by feedback (Askew, 2000; Black and Wiliam, 2005), and d) incorporating reflection and meta-learning (Watkins, 2005) based on surfacing preconceptions to create new frameworks of understanding (Donovan, Bransford and Pellegrino, 2000).

I have used the terms ‘professional development’ and ‘professional learning’ somewhat interchangeably. However, at this point I make a distinction between them that is relevant to this thesis. While I believe one cannot develop unless one learns and by learning one develops, I have already noted that teachers’ experience of professional development in Ireland has not necessarily resulted in professional learning to change practice. Professional development has come to be synonymous with DES led initiatives that teachers are expected to attend. This thesis is about developing in-school initiatives to improve practice which I will henceforth refer to as professional learning. Therefore, I see the context in which professional learning happens as significant (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and that context ideally offers opportunities to support and scaffold learning (Bruner, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978) and for individual and collective meaning-making to be developed through collaborative inquiry (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Johnson, Johnson and Holubec Johnson, 1984; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006; Watkins, 2005).

Different stages of the learning cycle call for different dimensions to be emphasised. The findings of Joyce and Showers clearly demonstrate the importance of feedback through coaching at classroom level (Joyce and Showers, 2002). Developing self-regulation and intrinsic motivation are central to developing a thinking activist professional (Sachs, 2000) in conjunction with ‘continuing intellectual development’ (Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth, 2000, p. 14). Guskey highlights the importance of action learning in changing practice when he says action ‘generally precedes, and may be a pre-requisite to, significant change in the attitudes and beliefs of most teachers’ (Guskey, 2002, p. 384). This idea is reiterated by Millard Fuller and cited in Wiliam (2008) that ‘it is generally easier to get people to act their way into a new way of

thinking than it is to get them to think their way into a new way of acting' (Wiliam, 2008, p. 39). Thus the emphasis has been on facilitating teachers' acting out professional collaborative inquiry, then through gathering data and reflection, draw out the their own theory of the experience. Like Wiliam, I believe that initiatives to improve practice, must include opportunities for participants to understand their own theory of action, because, 'Otherwise, we believe there is little chance of maintaining quality at scale' (Wiliam and Thompson, 2007).

### ***1.3.2 School as Professional Learning Community***

It is my contention that, given the weight of evidence of a growing number of researchers (Carnell, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Hord, 2004; Joyce and Showers, 2002; Louis, 2006; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006; Stoll and Louis, 2007; Watkins, 2005; Wiliam and Thompson, 2007) the school as a professional learning community offers the structure for professional learning and is no longer an option but an obligation. As quoted in Stoll (2006), a professional learning community is:

... an inclusive group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other, finding ways inside and outside their immediate community, to enquire into their own practice and together learn new and better approaches that will enhance all pupils' learning (Stoll, 2006, p. 6).

There is general agreement in the literature of the core characteristics of a professional learning community (Dufour et al., 2006; Hord, 2004; Louis, Kruse and Marks, 1996; Stoll et al., 2006a):

1. Shared vision based on shared values
2. Shared leadership
3. Collective responsibility for all pupil's learning guided by on-going monitoring and assessment
4. Collaborative professional learning teams based on reflective professional enquiry and shared personal practice
5. Individual and collective professional learning
6. Norms of openness, networks and partnerships, inclusive membership, mutual trust and respect and
7. Supportive conditions.

Creating a professional learning community is a complex undertaking, as research has identified because ‘when we turn to the school level... we run into a series of structural, cultural, and vocational impediments’ (Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth, 2000, p. 10). In the Irish context points 4, 5 & 6 mentioned above, pivotal to schools learning to change practice, are particularly challenging given our dominant culture of non-interference with professionals.

It is at that interface between theory and practice that this research is located. In Ireland, there are scant examples of schools explicitly functioning as professional learning communities and at primary whole teaching staff level, none that I am aware of.

Warren-Little reminds us that:

If we are to theorise about the significance of professional community, we must be able to demonstrate how communities achieve their effects’ (Little, 2003, p. 917).

This thesis is the story of one such demonstration. The literature is in agreement that the basic building block of the professional learning community is the learning team (Dufour et al., 2006; Hord, 2004; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006). Setting up and supporting teacher professional learning teams in the school became the pivotal activity of the research. Every teacher was a member of a learning team. While the literature (Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006) recommends a professional learning community should be open and inclusive, in this case the leadership team made the decision to begin with the teachers only. (It would be my aspiration that, as this school deepens its understanding of, and practice as, a professional learning community, it will in time come to include the parents and children as valued participants. However, I deemed it valid to begin at the level at which teachers were willing to engage.) I believe that the quality of professional learning depends on the quality of practice and dialogue of the basic learning team. Learning how to support on-going, sustainable systems and process for the functioning of these learning teams is the kernel of this thesis.

Much of what has been written about professional learning communities is based on experiences within educational contexts where some form of professional appraisal is

mandatory. In this research I explore the experience where engagement with the process is based on voluntary involvement. I identify some of the issues that need to be addressed when contextualising the theory to a specific school context where many of the system-wide supports for developing schools as learning communities are not necessarily present. The next chapter describes how the theory of learning that inspired this research, the conceptual framework upon which it is based and the principles of action research itself are overlapping dimensions of this thesis.

## **CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I outline the approach to action research that underpins this inquiry. In view of my understanding of learning outlined in chapter one, I deem action research an obvious choice of methodology to learn about facilitating in-school professional learning through leading a whole-school teaching staff to engage in collaborative inquiry to improve practice. I open this chapter with an exploration of the concepts of action research that impinge on this study and what I have learned about it in the process of engaging in this two-phase, two year inquiry. In describing the ethical context within which I undertook this research I identify some of the dilemmas that I found challenging. Later in the chapter, I describe the methods of data gathering that I applied in phase one of the research and how that data was analysed.

### **2.2 Action Research**

Like many theoretical concepts, action research has as many definitions as writers on the subject. Action research may be understood as ‘a specific method of conducting research by professionals and practitioners with the ultimate aim of improving practice’ (Koshy, 2010). Reason and Bradbury describe it as:

... a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, ... to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice...in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and communities (2006, p. 1).

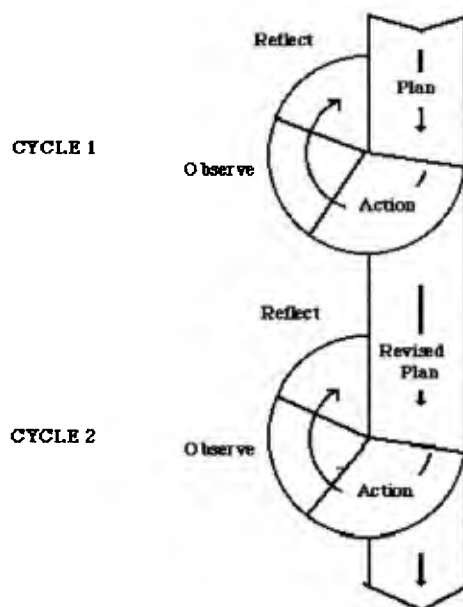
This definition highlights that action research is fundamentally solution focused. Being so, it enabled me to get a clearer understanding of ‘knowing how’ as distinct from ‘knowing that’ which, in regards to this topic, is where research is needed (Wiliam, 2008). It makes explicit the purpose

... of influencing the context in which it finds itself to bring about change.....  
There is, first, the improvement of a practice of some kind; second, the improvement of the understanding of a practice by its practitioners; and third, the

improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place (Robson, 2002, p. 215).

Finding solutions to the challenge of developing sustainable approaches to professional learning is a key driver in this research. I find that these definitions capture, what my review of the literature supports as, common features of action research: that it is fundamentally people centred (Freire, 1970), based in practice (Schon, 1983) and driven by a desire to improve that practice through participant empowerment and knowledge generation (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009). To that I add that while the processes of action research are rooted in participative action, based on respect for the individual's right to exercise personal and collective agency (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1970), they are characterised by rigorous, systematic inquiry (Winter and Badley, 2007) in the awareness that it is 'a moral and political activity' (Feldman, 2007, p. 31). Such systematic inquiry is 'boundary breaking' (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009) in that its methods of data gathering can be drawn from the field of qualitative as well as quantitative research. A traditional view of the process of action research is that it follows a recurring pattern of plan – act – observe and reflect, illustrated below:

**Figure 2.1: An Action Research Cycle (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988)**



McNiff and Whitehead suggest that ‘the action research family is wide and diverse’ (2006, p. 7). This is a theme taken up by Reason and Bradbury:

We describe action research as a ‘family of approaches’, a family which sometimes argues and falls out, whose members may at times ignore or wish to dominate others, yet a family which sees itself as different from other forms of research ... We have come to appreciate the richness and diversity of this family (2006, p. xxii).

As a novice researcher I find the categorisation of that diversity sometimes contradictory and in opposition to the very values of inclusion, fundamental to the ideology of action research inspired by Kurt Lewin, deemed by many as the author of action research (Lewin, 1946). The ‘family of approaches’ mentioned above is manifested in the labelling of different manifestations of action research as ‘participatory’ (Fals Borda, 2006) or ‘collaborative’ (Dolbec and Savoie-Zajc, 1996) or ‘emancipatory’ (Carr and Kemmis, 2005) or ‘self-study’ (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006). Given that the general definition of action research already includes each of these individual aspects, it surprises me therefore to find some followers claiming certain ownership of particular characteristics. A consequence of categorisation is the prescribing of the criteria that determine inclusion in any given category. I suggest that such prescription has the potential to be divisive and exclusive as demonstrated in the following extract from McTaggart:

...any literature search using the descriptors “participatory research”, “action research”, or “participatory action research” will still identify a confusing and meaningless confusion of diversity of approaches to research ... the term is often misused, not only because there is a lack of understanding, but also because there are attempts to represent research deliberately as inspired by communitarian values when it is not (1991, p. 169/170).

McTaggart goes further in drawing a distinction between ‘involvement’ and ‘participation’ and warns against ‘cooption and exploitation of people in the realisation of plans of others’ (McTaggart, 1991, p. 171). Participatory action research, for McTaggart must involve participants in: a) setting the agenda, b) gathering and analysing data, and c) determining what to do with the outcomes. I appreciate the laudable respect for the individual that drives McTaggart to challenge academics who when ‘doing research *on* people’ call it participatory research.



However, I take issue with McTaggart's definition of participatory action research as it could be interpreted that unless a), b) and c) mentioned above are present from the outset then the research cannot claim to be participatory action research. It has been my experience in this inquiry that participation may develop over time as I now illustrate. All participants were drawn into the process of setting the agenda in this research, but that initiative wasn't something that spontaneously and simultaneously emanated from everyone at the outset. Rather it grew out of an idea, introduced by a few, through dialogic action, the contagious enthusiasm of some inspired others to come on board. Every individual participant did not personally engage in data gathering and analysis but three teachers did on behalf of their colleagues as the need arose and the inquiry progressed. I suggest that among the important outcomes of the research were the transformations that occurred over time in the people that took part and the structures and practices within the school. To me, the 'growing into' a participative pro-active stance to research is part of the learning process and an example of what Somekh refers to when she says 'action research is something that you learn to do through its practice rather than by following a set of prescribed methods or techniques' (1995, p. 347). All participants had entered the process knowing that one of the outcomes would be my chronicling the process as a doctoral thesis. Another outcome was that two of the participants co-presented with me at a research seminar in Ireland. Would this research qualify as participatory according to McTaggart's criteria because a) all the teaching staff did not individually engage in gathering and analysing data, and b) one of the outcomes was my doctoral thesis? I vehemently defend my claim that this research is participatory.

My learning through this process of engaging in action research has led to the premise that action research is values driven. These values include respect for people, a commitment to a participative world view, a belief in the power of collective action for change and social justice, and that transformative, empowering learning begins with oneself. I also suggest that these values unite the family of action researchers, but that depending on one's context and purpose some dimensions are foregrounded more than others in certain instances but that does not mean that the other values and dimensions

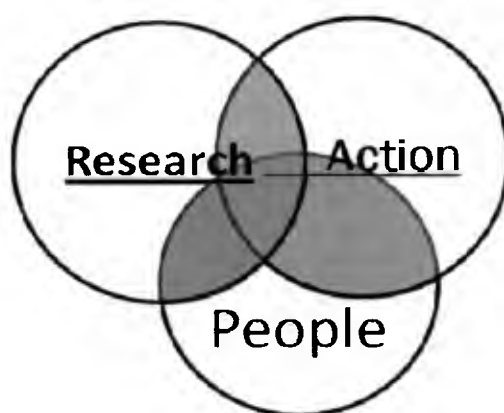
are not also present and shaping the outcomes. I base my claim that this research is participatory research on the evidence that unfolds in the following chapters of this thesis. I suggest that there is a distinction between the form of participation that this research represents and the form of participation in a case when all participants purposefully engage in data gathering and analysis as a collaborative group of researchers. To my mind, based on the purpose of the collective action, that is an example of research in which the collaborative dimension is foregrounded. That is not the case in this inquiry. Gathering and analysing data takes time and learning. I found that not all teachers in the school were interested in, or believed they had the time to do so. As an external facilitator and a doctoral student I decided that the dimension of action research that I would foreground, in year one of this inquiry would be my practice as facilitator of the professional learning programme. The decision to focus on self-study action research (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) for year one grew out of my explicit intention that commitment to this inquiry of collaborative action would be voluntary and informed over time, not based on an expectation imposed as a condition from the start. This was clearly and repeatedly communicated to the teachers.

While my learning and practice as facilitator was the main focus of phase one it was never a solitary activity. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) repeatedly emphasise that the 'I' of self-study should never be viewed in isolation in that whatever we do in our professional practice potentially influences someone somewhere. Consequently, the focus of phase one of this research is on how the exercise of my role as external facilitator (what I did and how I did it) created the conditions for participation, empowerment, and capacity building, through developing knowledge, skills and positive dispositions reflected in changing practice and improving learning for all involved. Furthermore, participant understanding of the theory of action, that is the theory of a professional learning community underpinning the intervention (see page 35) is also a key criterion. The data gathering activities of this research directly reflect those criteria.

In year two, teachers' confidence in the process was such as to lead to their role in the intervention being more central. From this experience I have learned that action research

is fundamentally about the interactions between people engaging in action to improve their practice and using research to support and inform that action (see Figure 2.2). The nature and ‘tone’ of these interactions greatly influence the actions that emerge. In this case as roles meshed, as trust in the process grew, the driving purpose of the intervention became more important than individual issues.

**Figure 2.2 The Dynamic of Action Research**



Thus, when I suggested to the teachers that data gathering might focus on their own professional dialogue there was openness to the idea. This will be discussed in greater depth in the preface to phase two and in chapter four.

The key criticism of action research may be summarised as referring to poor quality due to a lack of systematic methodology and by prioritising practice over theory generation (Adelman (1989) and Atkinson and Delamont (1985) cited in Robson, 1993, 2002, p. 216). In systematically gathering data and engaging in evidence-led theorising, I validate my claim that this thesis contributes to the body of living educational theory. I offer my work in the belief that my case is coherent and the evidence plausible (Lomax and Selley, 1996). However, I make this claim in the spirit that educational research is always tentative, in that education by its very nature is a continuous process in which truth is constantly subject to change (ibid).

While I am an external facilitator to the school, I consider this insider research for a number of reasons. Firstly, I consider myself a teacher who has spent a lifetime within the field of education: as teacher, principal, provider of professional learning for school leaders (when this research began), and finally university lecturer. As a consequence, I closely identify with the teaching culture that is under scrutiny in this inquiry and use the words 'we' or 'our' frequently as a result. Secondly, it is a form of inquiry that enables me to investigate my own practice with a view to improving both my own learning and practice, and influencing that of others. This is significant in that in my current role as lecturer on educational leadership and management, I actively promote the concept of developing our schools as professional learning communities. I speak from theory without the validation of experience. This research has improved that practice.

#### **2.4 Ethical Issues in Action Research**

Engaging in action research as a methodology of inquiry raises a number of ethical issues that 'go beyond the usual concerns for consent, confidentiality and respect for the participants' interests' (Robson, 2002, p. 70) which define general research practices. The process of action research leads to close relationships developing between the researcher and the research participants. The trust placed in me as researcher carried with it an obligation to respect the people and the professional community into which I was invited. At times I was conscious that, like Yeats in (Martin, 1992), each teacher could say to me: 'I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly because you tread on my dreams' (p. 68). Robson reminds us that 'while you have particular ethical responsibilities as a researcher, this does not mean that you have a privileged voice on what constitutes ethical behaviour in others' (2002, p. 71). That being so, I found that not only did I have a duty of care to the research participants but also to those whom the participants serve: the children in the school. It is in balancing those duties of care that I experienced my ethical practice to be tested. Below, I summarise how I adhered to core ethical practices in this research and then discuss some ethical dilemmas that were significant for me as an action researcher.

I have already outlined the circumstances under which I gained access to the research site. In addition to the issues already discussed, I ensured that school leadership and management was fully informed of what the research might involve from the outset and this was reviewed and updated as the research evolved. As some members of the leadership team are also members of the Board of Management, they brought the information to the Board meetings. A copy of my letter of request outlining my research to the chair of the board is included in Appendix 3. Irrespective of starting points, the spirit of the intervention was based on developing each teacher's intrinsic motivation leading to self-regulation. I regularly brought findings to the group for their critique. I was deeply aware that, given this was a whole teaching staff initiative, one that was partly initiated by the leadership team of the school, participation could have been perceived to be more mandatory than voluntary. It was clearly understood that anyone who did not wish to engage in any of the data gathering exercises had the right to decline to do so in privacy with no repercussions. I attach a copy of the teachers' consent form in Appendix 4. All participants were kept informed at all stages of the research and at each stage their consent to participate in data gathering exercises that would be used for this research was negotiated. Individual teachers had private access to me to indicate their wish to disengage from any of the data gathering exercises at any time. This did happen for example, when certain people did not wish to take part in the interviews in phase one. A second instance occurred when one teacher indicated their wish to opt out of the data gathering elements of phase two. In each instance, choices were discretely respected, information was not shared with other school personnel and processes ensured privacy. School level expectation to engage in whole school activities was a different matter as that is a professional expectation independent of this intervention.

In learning from the work of Sieber and Powell (1992), I make a distinction between privacy, confidentiality and anonymity and I show how I respected each in this research. In terms of privacy, I was aware that action research of this nature 'may intrude, come closer to people than they want' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 293) particularly in a context that is focusing on deprivatising teachers' practice. This is values-driven

research in which I worked in the direction of teacher self-regulation, whereby teachers' engagement is born out of an intrinsic motivation to learn for the good of their students. Therefore, I consciously tried to avoid any instances where people would feel pressurised to engage.

Confidentiality was always an issue in building trust. As I was working in the school for a significant period of time, I maintained a constant alertness to respect confidentiality at all stages of the research. This involved not recording some incidents shared in confidence. Confidentiality was also ensured in relation to collection and storage of data by limiting access to my data to only myself and the teacher specifically concerned. In-house anonymity was secured as far as possible. I suggest the manner in which I fed back findings at each of the staff workshops 'grew' the trust in the process as teachers witnessed how their identities were lost in the manner of reporting. To that end, for example, I never referred to a learning support teacher who said a, b or c. In a school of twenty four teachers the number of learning support teachers is small and easily identified. In terms of disseminating the research, I deleted any references to the school and no teachers' names are included. The staff expressed a wish to maintain the anonymity of the school. However, if in the future the school wishes to be acknowledged as the research school, I will certainly be happy to do so.

There were some dimensions of ethical practice that I found challenging throughout the course of this inquiry: personal integrity and ethical analysis. I perceive personal integrity and personal authenticity as closely aligned. Maintaining my own personal integrity throughout this research required me to clarify for myself and share with the research participants, the personal values and beliefs that underpin my own practice and that inspired the research. These included: respect for each individual; a belief in the duty of teachers to live up to the promises we implicitly make to our society to do the best we can; a belief in the capacity within each individual to learn and grow throughout life; a belief in the emancipatory power of learning and the joy of teaching in its potential to do good. The sharing of such values challenged me to live by them reflectively and reflexively. With my own overarching commitment to respect the rights

of the child in our schools, I sometimes needed to be reminded that the teachers too deserved respect. I needed to be reminded of the demanding intensity of the school day and the importance of pacing the intervention with more understanding of the impact of the changes on participants. Similarly, as a researcher who has been shaped by the same culture as the teachers I found it difficult, but believed it my role as external facilitator, to ask the awkward questions that challenged cultural norms such as non-interference in classroom practice or in-school variability of practice. Maintaining personal integrity involves making values explicit and not allowing emerging relationships between researcher and participants to cloud the integrity of the exercise.

I see analysis as an ethical exercise in that the findings affect others. Therefore I approached it as systematically and as transparently as possible aware that data analysis can have 'unintended consequences' (Rowan, 2006), in that the new knowledge that emerges may not be pleasing to all who participated. As external facilitator I owed a debt of gratitude to the research participants. I felt this debt even more acutely given that the research is also a doctoral thesis. Therefore I was aware of my own conflicting values of being appreciative of the opportunity offered by the participants and being true to any research findings that might be deemed critical of their practice. In this instance I relied on a number of practices: constantly reminding all participants that this research is a learning exercise not an evaluative one, trusting in the professionalism of the participants by honestly reporting back all findings as they emerged, always including myself within the research as a fellow teacher shaped by the same culture as participants, always remaining open to feedback and giving the particular teachers involved in any data gathering exercise the findings first so that there were no surprises when giving a full report of the final thesis to a whole staff meeting. Finally I left a copy of the first draft of the written thesis in the school for a two month period for the participants to review and come back to me privately. They were unanimous in supporting the thesis as presented as there were no surprises because of regular updating.

## 2.5 The Research in Action

The research had two overall cycles, phase one and phase two, each corresponding to a full school year in the academic calendar. Within each phase were smaller cycles based on specific professional learning questions or intentions such as: How do we improve our understanding of what is a good lesson plan for teaching 'Explanation' writing genre? Each phase was informed in its approach by the action research cycle: Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect and Re-plan (Carr, 1986; Kolb, 1984). My adaptation of the traditional cycle, seen below in Figure 2.3 has been part of my learning as an action researcher in this inquiry.

**Figure 2.3: My Action Research Cycle**

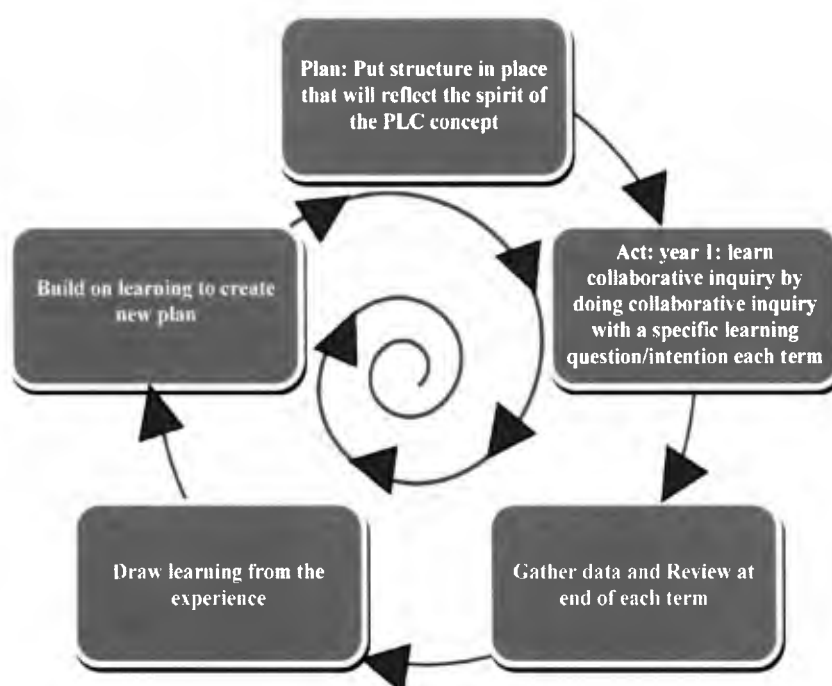


Figure 2.3 shows the second cycle of the research going inwards. This is to demonstrate that phase one, could be described as large-scale work, while phase two was about going deeper into 'understanding performances' (Perkins, 1992) to get a fine grained look at



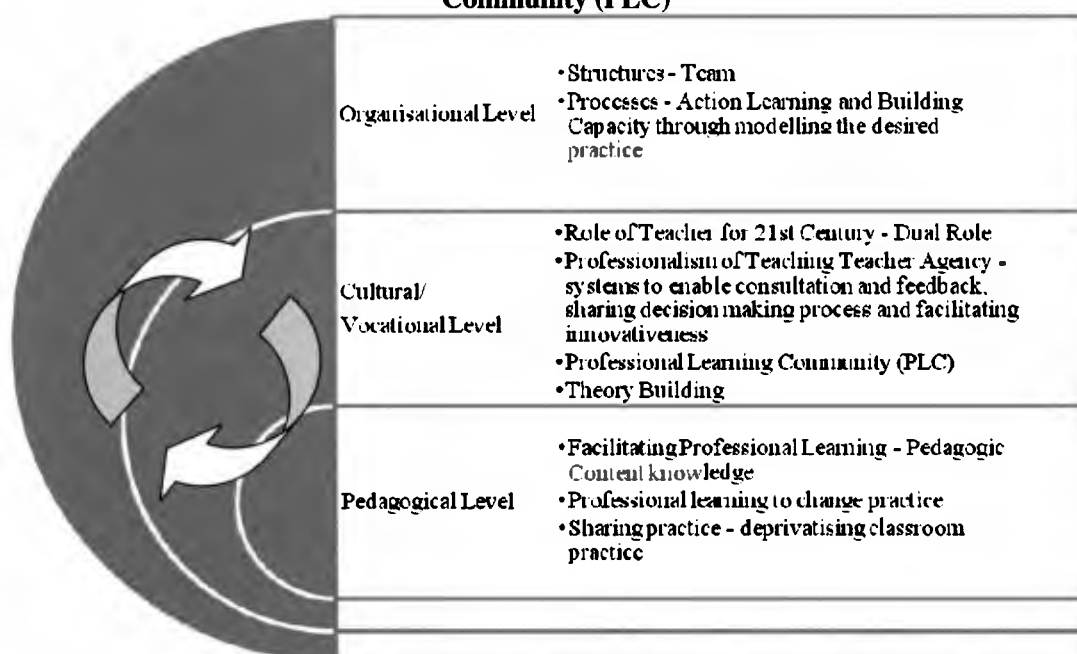
the new frameworks of understanding that were emerging. I suggest that action research, to change practice at full teaching level, demands an exploratory phase and subsequent phases of looking deeply at individual dimensions of practice. The telling of the research story reflects this difference. The research work of phase two is given more prominence from a research perspective. The methods of data gathering in phase one were general in nature. The purpose of this data gathering was to assess the effectiveness of the different elements of the intervention and identify issues of import in the particular context of this school. Engaging participants in the analysis and representation of those findings served to build trust in the research process itself. I maintain the intimate access to teachers' discourse in phase two would not have been possible without this building of trust in phase one.

Three key dimensions interact in action research: action, research and the people involved (Figure 2.2, p.43). In reporting action research therefore, cognisance must be taken of these interactions, the nuances of which, though influential in shaping actions of participants could remain hidden from the reader of a research report. Action research often means just starting with an idea and allowing next steps emerge. Marian Dadds and Susan Hart describes it as using 'methodological inventiveness' (Dadds and Hart, 2001 cited in McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p. 30). However, the steps that emerge may be indicative of the nature of the interpersonal interactions in a specific context. Therefore, I believe sequence matters in reporting on action research. In describing how I approached this project I do so, not only to demonstrate how in the middle of complexity I have applied a systematic approach to research but also, in the spirit of reflexivity of the action researcher, I do so to make visible my own stance as facilitator/researcher and my responsiveness to the context and the people in question.

In introducing the process of this inquiry I offer the following illustration, Figure 2.4, to outline how I approached facilitating the teaching staff of St. B's in developing as a professional learning community. It involved working at a number of levels simultaneously in an iterative, cyclical process: organisational level in setting up structures and artefacts to support the intervention, cultural level in exploring the concepts

through workshops for full teaching staff and pedagogical level in focusing on specifics of classroom practice. Using a metaphor from photography, to the degree that work at the level of the teacher learning teams was zooming in on the minutia of classroom practice so might the work at full teaching staff level, through regular workshops, be considered zooming out to understand the broader cultural panorama.

**Figure 2.4: Facilitating the Development of a School as a Professional Learning Community (PLC)**



Phase one should be viewed as the introductory year of building understanding around new concepts. I believe, like Hord, that ‘trust is the first level at getting to a professional learning community’ (Hord, 2004, p. 77). This was done mainly through facilitating teachers ‘acting’ their way into understanding. Like Burnette, I found the best strategy was ‘to provide teachers with experiences that allowed them to begin functioning as a professional learning community’ (Burnette, 2002, p. 2). At an organisational level the teacher professional learning team (TPLT) was like Dufour suggested, ‘the fundamental building block’ (Dufour et al., 2006) upon which the intervention was based. These

teams were formed around teachers of same class level (three teachers) meeting monthly<sup>5</sup> with the explicit purpose of engaging in collaborative inquiry to improve the teaching and learning of writing in the school. Initially there were six teams. Each team nominated a facilitator.<sup>6</sup> TPLT Meetings took place during the school day. The principal facilitated the release of teachers from their normal teaching for this one hour meeting through deployment of other staff, including him.

I met the facilitators' team (FT) monthly<sup>7</sup>. This early morning meeting was held outside of the school day because the team deemed after school too busy with extra-curricular activities. This meeting had three main purposes: to catch up and share experiences and learning of previous month, to co-create the agenda and process of the next TPLT meeting and to build capacity of the group as facilitators of peer collaborative practice. I modelled the facilitation skills that in-school facilitators would apply in leading their own meetings.

At the cultural level, learning from the research of Donovan et al (2000), I included opportunities for surfacing preconceptions based on the themes numbered one to six below, with a view to co-creating new frameworks of understanding. Katz et al support this approach and claim that unless preconceptions are worked through change will be short lived (Katz, Sutherland and Earl, 2002, p. 2). Senge talks about 'deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action (Senge, 1990, p. 8). Senge calls these mental models. Like Noonan, I believe that 'we can greatly benefit from examining and testing our mental models – and revising them if it turns out that they have outlived their usefulness' (Noonan, 2007, p. 25). So, in each workshop held at the beginning of each new term, there was a section dedicated to professional dialogue at this level. The themes were:

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<sup>5</sup> It was the intention to meet monthly but in practice it did not always work out. Due to the 'busyness' of school life and the contingency nature of freeing up time – TPLT teams met on average 6 or 7 times each year.

<sup>6</sup> Later these teams linked up to create three learning teams with two facilitators – one each at senior, middle and junior levels in the school. The facilitators felt more confident as co-facilitators.

<sup>7</sup> Meetings of FT team did take place as planned – mainly due to the fact that they was scheduled as early morning meetings for one hour prior to school commencement.

1. Why did I become a teacher and what is my role? What are schools for? (Workshop One)
2. Am I a professional? What does teacher professionalism mean to me? (Workshop Two)
3. What does the concept of the school as a professional learning community mean to me? (Workshop Three)
4. Why travel the journey from bonded to bridged? (Workshop Four)
5. How do we learn together to share practice? (Workshop Five)

At their first meeting the facilitators identified the need to develop what Shulman (1987) calls pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman argued that a combination of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge – *pedagogic content knowledge* – plays a crucial role in leading school improvement (Entwistle and Smith, 2002). Teachers with expertise were identified and invited to share that expertise. External expertise was also brought in by inviting guest speakers as needed. It was decided to adopt the genre based approach to teaching writing (Kress, 1994). Assessment for learning was identified as an area for expert input and a workshop was organised for that purpose. The school intra-net was used to share resources. A notice board in the staff room was dedicated to genre writing and was updated regularly throughout the research. Website resources were shared and used. In the absence of any national standards on teaching writing in the English curriculum in Ireland, teachers developed their own assessment rubrics. Each meeting gave as much time to ‘how’ as to ‘what’ of teaching writing, keeping in mind the advice from Joyce and Showers that ‘the content needs to elevate what is taught, how it is taught and the social climate of the school. A good innovation that simply replaces a good practice is unlikely to increase student learning capacity (Joyce and Showers, 2002, p. 5). As a result, at the end of year one, having experienced collaborative inquiry in practice and examined their own understandings, participants could make a more informed choice to continue or not with the intervention and the research.

The process of phase two is explained in the preface to phase two and in chapter four. While deepening the work initiated in phase one of ‘incremental internalisation’ (Katz, Sutherland and Earl, 2005), phase two could be summarised as creating new frameworks

and the data gathering exercise was based on surfacing and reflecting on those frameworks.

## **2.6 Methods of Data Gathering in Phase One**

The methods of data gathering in phase one must be understood within the context of the overall research question: what can be learned about facilitating in-school professional learning through leading a whole-school teaching staff to engage in collaborative inquiry to improve practice? The exploratory nature of phase one of the research, is reflected in the open-mind, inductive approach to data gathering and analysis. The idea was to throw out a wide net in the hope of identifying the teachers' reactions to, and perspectives on, the effectiveness of the strategies adopted in phase one. The strategies were built around and into: the TPLT meetings, FT meetings, workshops and a seminar. A further intention of the data gathering was to identify issues that would need to be addressed in phase two. The process of the data gathering involved working with the teachers to:

1. Assess the impact of the strategies used in phase one on:
  - a. Participants' knowledge, skills and dispositions around the teaching and learning of writing in the school?
  - b. Participants' understanding of the concept of collaborative inquiry within the context of the school as a professional learning community?
  - c. In-school capacity to lead professional learning in the future?
2. And to examine my own learning about external facilitation of in-school professional learning.

I used a variety of methods of data gathering to assess the impact of the programme and in the interest of triangulation a number of methods sometimes overlapped in answering the questions listed 1 and 2 above. For example when assessing participants' learning I used the interviews, questionnaire and workshop findings. A full summary of all the methods of data gathering and their purposes is summarised in Appendix 5. The variety

of approaches listed below, and included in that summary, offered a number of different perspectives and added to the richness of the overall learning:

- a. Interviews: semi-structured interviews with the in-school facilitators
- b. Findings from workshop 3
- c. Minutes of meetings throughout the year
- d. Outcomes of a full day workshop led by Prof. J. West-Burnham
- e. Teaching Staff questionnaire at end of phase one (Appendix 6)
- f. Researcher's reflective diary.

I will discuss the purpose of each data gathering exercise and how it was analysed. In the seminar led by Professor West-Burnham groups formed by order of where participants were sitting. The purpose of each group session was to explore the questions raised through the process of reflection. A sample of the questions that inspired discussions at various times:

1. Do you accept the idea of a community based on the model of collaboration?
2. What at the moment are St B's strengths/ areas to be developed in the area of social capital?
3. How do we go from bonded to bridged?
4. Should there be a deliberate strategy to build trust?
5. How shared are our norms?

A summary of the day's discussions was written up by me and brought to the participants for their input. Analysis was theme based and categorised according to the questions discussed.

I facilitated workshop three and used De Bono's thinking hats (De Bono, 2000) as a facilitative strategy to appraise their experience of the intervention from a number of perspectives. Participants formed work groups and were encouraged to include a variety of class level teachers and learning support teachers. For each exercise one member of the group was nominated as a recorder. The role of recorder rotated with the different exercises. The purpose of the data gathering was to get a deeper understanding of the

issues that emerged through the questionnaire and particularly to improve my understanding of participants' disposition and attitudes to the intervention. I collected all the recorded findings and cross-referenced with my own notes. I then collated the findings and distributed them to the staff as soon as possible after the event. I also checked my understanding with facilitators and presented the findings with amendments to follow-up staff meetings. This exercise helped my own sense-making by linking themes across a number of sources.

The semi-structured interviews with the in-school facilitators took place during the middle of the last term of phase one. The purpose of the interviews was to identify facilitators' perceptions of the effectiveness of the programme, the sustainability of the current model, their own perceptions of their role within the school as a PLC, and the challenges they encountered. It was important to hear the experience of the facilitators as their role is critical in terms of building in-school capacity. All the interviews were audio taped and later transcribed by me. I adopted an inductive stance to the data using a line by line analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), clustering similar themes into categories and in doing so looked at the different dimensions of each category (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 116/117). By asking 'what is going on here?' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 120), I looked at similarities and differences and explored the integration of the emerging key patterns and categories with emerging categories from other data sources.

The teaching staff questionnaire was based on Guskey's (2000) five-level model for evaluating professional learning. Its purpose was to assess: participants' reactions to the programme, participants' learning, organisational supports and level of change, participants' application of new learning and the impact on student learning. The data was analysed by subjecting the quantitative data to factor analysis using SPSS software and the qualitative elements to thematic coding, searching for relationships with the themes already emerging through the other data gathering methods and then entering this data to the emergent explanatory framework.

I kept a reflective diary as a way of recording insights, comments or particular happenings that I deemed significant at any time. Entries did not follow any particular pattern but were in response to circumstances as they arose. My way of keeping a diary was in a simple three-column table: in column one I noted the date, in column two the incident or reading or thought of significance and in column three some reflections on that occurrence. Sometimes in column three my reflection would note any reference to similar instances from my reading of the literature. I analysed the diary from a learning perspective. I found that initial reflections were primarily about 'How' questions that evolved over time to 'Why' questions. Key themes were identified as patterns emerged. Minutes of facilitators' meetings were also examined from a progress stance. For example, it was noted that rubrics were a repeated item for discussion, indicating slow progress.

In the next chapter I present the findings from the methods of data gathering outlined here and, in and through processes of analysis and synthesis, offer my interpretation of those findings and their implications for phase two of this research.



## **CHAPTER 3: PHASE 1: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Within the overall framework of learning about facilitating in-school professional learning to improve practice, I present the following findings by way of understanding the impact of the strategies implemented in phase one. I do so also, to demonstrate how in exercising responsiveness as an action researcher, I worked with the research participants in exploring the learning gained from phase one to determine the focus of inquiry in phase two.

Using the themes and findings of the questionnaire as the framework, I include the findings from the combined sources of facilitators' interviews, workshop, seminar, reflective diary and minutes of meetings. I developed a matrix of themes that emerged as significant to the extent that they surfaced through a variety of data gathering exercises and the teachers confirmed their validity. Significance was based not only on frequency of mention, and being common to a number of sources, but there were also instances of individual observations, for example that the intervention raised the expectations of both teachers' and students' regarding the quality of work that, when checked with others, were confirmed as so. I present, by way of an example of what this matrix looked like, Table 3.1 in the next page. The left-hand column identifies the themes that emerged and the following columns give sample extracts from the different sources of data. Repetition is used by way of showing the support for a particular theme. In addition to those themes shown in the sample, the other themes that emerged were: school as a PLC, capacity building, theory building, pedagogical content knowledge, issues around changing practice such as teachers' fears, timing and pacing and the impact on children's learning.

**Table 3.1 SAMPLE of Matrix of Analyses from Various Sources of Data: Phase One**

Themes	Questionnaire	Interviews	Whole Staff Workshop	JWB Seminar	Minutes of Meetings
<b>Organisational</b> Creating artefacts to support and facilitate collaborative inquiry Team Structure Workshops	.....Direct focus of the team meetings on the task of writing..... good to meet and discuss with colleagues at own class level.... need to involve LS teachers	Overall structure works in PLT meetings varied in practice ... Need to involve LS teachers	In-School expertise important .... Sharing of ideas and writings – feedback from other teachers (4) Led to improved planning LS teachers not involved	Developing collaborative practice involves: Professional generosity Building trust Building dialogue	Teams are effective Team meetings prescriptive Sharing resources and sharing ideas ... using children's work as starting point
<b>Communication</b>	Important to communicate with whole staff -avoid the risk of dilution of information	Lack of agendas being circulated - The best thing was that it got people talking		Lots of social networks Informal conversations very effective	Some teams communicate between meetings, others not
<b>Time</b>	Time consuming process – but it had to be done. It did get easier Time taken away from other areas.	Time is a real problem At the start they happened regularly – then things got busy. Had to cancel a couple of times We were used to doing our own thing	Took time away from other things ... A little rushed in planning		Very rushed
<b>Previous norms of practice</b>				Isolation - Bonding	Collaborative planning
<b>Emerging Professional Norms of Practice</b>	Enjoyed sharing and exchanging ideas	There was great teamwork ... teachers taking extra responsibility to move things forward.	Feeling less isolated (4)Forum to discuss ideas Enablers: certain staff with expertise and enthusiasm... Team work	Bridging Developing social capital THE TEN COMMITMENTS	Inquiry based -Asking questions - Looking for evidence - Agreeing norms and standards - Consistency of approach in methodologies

In presenting the findings I address the issues in the order of the research questions as listed in page 52.

**1a. Impact of the strategies implemented in phase one on participants' knowledge, skills and dispositions around the teaching and learning of writing in the school.**

A detailed report of the findings from the questionnaire is available in Appendix 6. The questionnaire had five sections following Guskey's (2000) model. Twenty questionnaires were distributed, one for each teacher in the school. The principal participated in all whole-school data gathering exercises as a member of staff but was not given a questionnaire as it was specific to the teachers' role. Of the twenty two teachers, five were learning support teachers and seventeen mainstream class teachers. Seventeen questionnaires were returned: fifteen of the seventeen mainstream teachers and two of the five learning support teachers did so. Some of the learning support teachers who did not return a questionnaire offered by way of explanation the fact that, as they were deployed to release class teachers for their meetings, they did not then participate themselves in a base learning team. All teachers participated in the other data gathering exercises as illustrated in Appendix 7.

Section A of the questionnaire contained items designed to gather teachers' opinions about the impact of the intervention on their knowledge, skills and dispositions and the influence of the programme on the level of application of new learning in their practice. It also included an item gathering suggestions for phase two of the programme. Where specific numbers of teachers are quoted the source is generally the questionnaire.

Overall the findings showed that:

The majority of teachers said that they benefited or greatly benefited<sup>8</sup> from the programme. There was unanimity around the features they most enjoyed as shown in table 3.2:

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<sup>8</sup> The questionnaire followed the Likert model, respondents noted their opinions based on a five level scale that ranged from 'greatly benefited' to 'benefited' to 'not sure' to 'didn't benefit much' to 'didn't benefit at all' or equivalents

**Table 3.2: Teachers Opinions on Impact of Phase One on their Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions**

What teachers most enjoyed	What teachers did not enjoy	What teachers learned most about	What teachers applied	Suggestions for strategies to improve practice in phase two
Eleven teachers said <b>sharing with and learning from other teachers</b> and five teachers said trying out new ideas.	Three teachers mentioned <b>time as a pressure</b> – either the programme taking up too much time or time being taken from other areas	Sixteen teachers said they learned a lot to a little about <b>genre writing</b> , fourteen learned a lot to a little about <b>assessment</b> and about giving <b>feedback</b> on writing. <sup>9</sup>	Fifteen teachers said they applied a lot to a little of the learning in the classroom context	Suggestions with number of teachers who made them in brackets: visiting each other's classrooms or team teaching (6); videoing practice (4); continuing sharing ideas/resources (5).

A sample of comments in support of these findings:

*I enjoyed sharing ideas and opinions with staff members I might not usually discuss such topics with.*

*I liked working with teachers to a shared goal.*

*I thought there was great teamwork. It was one constructive thing that as a staff everyone was part of, everyone bought into and everybody tried it out.*

*I did new genres this year and learned a lot about them.*

*I am more confident in teaching the various genres.*

*I just felt that English was taught a lot better this year due to clearer personal understanding on how to approach the various genres and to take a lot of time to prepare each genre- each genre results were consistently better.*

*I learned how to assess writing in terms of quantifiable criteria.*

*[I learned] how to give children feedback to improve their work.*

*I feel I made a great effort to introduce and teach the three genres this year.*

*I used rubrics once or twice for the different genres.*

*I tried to follow through on ideas suggested, planned ahead, prepared work. Read!*

*As things were a lot clearer in my own head it was easier for me to explain exactly what I was looking for. Giving examples of each genre also made it clearer for the pupils to understand what exactly I was expecting.*

<sup>9</sup> There was agreement that while they had learned a lot about assessment there was still a lot of confusion around rubrics, manageable assessment and feedback for large classes and for the very weak writer at senior level.

Section B of the questionnaire explored teachers' perceptions of the impact of the programme on students' learning:

**Table 3.3: Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of the Programme on Students' Learning**

Impact of the programme on children's learning	Criteria by which teachers assessed children's writing	Areas in which teachers saw improvement in children's writing	That to which teachers attributed the improvement in children's learning
Thirteen teachers believed students' writing had improved  (Rubrics were deemed to offer a structure but to be highly time-consuming in practice in class sizes of up to thirty children).	The thirteen teachers identified some of or all of the following: Creativity; fewer mistakes; effective use of the genres characteristics; pupils' use of interesting, descriptive language; evidence of self-editing; progress in the mechanics of writing (layout, grammar etc); and motivation.	Oral, social and personal skills; school wide displays of children's writing; children able to see own progress; peer assessment.	New teacher awareness; improved pedagogical content knowledge; higher expectations of the children; Focusing on just three genres for the year led to improved understanding.

A sample of comments in support of these findings:

*The children benefited greatly, for example in following through in a structured way on the poetry genre.*

*I have a better idea of where the pupils are at.*

*It facilitated the pairing of children, enabled them to work co-operatively, motivating them to achieve and to appreciate the comments of peers.*

*I have introduced writing targets for each child – children can visually see them. They are more aware of their own learning targets.*

*One thing that this work has done is that in terms of children's writing we are now focusing on quality and the children have that focus as well. The whole school is sensitized to the notion of writing and the quality of writing. Just walking along the corridor you pick that up.*

**b. Impact of the strategies implemented in phase one on participants' understanding of the concept of collaborative inquiry within the context of the school as a professional learning community.**

Section C of the questionnaire investigated the teachers' own understandings of professional learning programmes in terms of content and the theoretical foundations of the school as a professional learning community. Teachers were also given the opportunity to opt in or out of researcher's data gathering for phase two. Workshop three gave teachers the opportunity to explore their attitudes to the theoretical concepts as they were unfolding in practice.

**Table 3.4: Teachers Understanding of a PLC**

The TPLT as basic building block of a PLC	How teachers described their experience of a PLC	Teachers' understanding the theory of action of collaborative inquiry	Teachers' commitment to continuing with the programme	The organisational structures that were established
<p>Fifteen teachers found the team meetings (TPLT) either helpful or very helpful. Groups varied in their level of engagement, preparation and follow through.</p> <p>Two groups tended to prepare before coming to the session, brought samples of children's work to help focus the discussion, one group discussed common standards of assessment.</p>	<p>Fifteen teachers cited sharing of practice, on-going learning through co-operation and discussion of methodologies with a particular focus on helping children's learning.</p> <p>Teachers' engagement was progressive, described as moving from talking about 'What' was being taught to 'How'.</p>	<p>Sixteen teachers said that the seminar with guest speaker proved good to very good in developing an understanding of collaborative inquiry; developing a professional vocabulary and being motivational.</p> <p>'The boundless energy and enthusiasm' of one teacher was cited a number of times as being influential.</p>	<p>Fifteen teachers said they were committed or very committed to continuing with the programme next year. Two teachers were unsure.</p>	<p>Fifteen teachers were happy with the organisational structures in place. Time taken for meetings was deemed a negative by three, while a number were concerned that the learning support teachers were not included in the TPLT meetings</p> <p>The fact that once or twice meetings had to be cancelled, particularly in the final term broke the flow and consistency of the initiative.</p>

16 teachers found the workshops helpful to very helpful in developing their understanding of professional learning and the school as a PLC.

A sample of comments in support of these findings:

*[The TPLT meetings] offered a purposeful professional forum for teachers to meet.*

*The experience of working together at this level led to improved planning practices and improved team work.*

*It gave us a positive feeling of moving forward.*

*I think the teacher learning team meetings worked in that they got people talking. It also gave people a forum to vent frustrations and that happened in our case. But that was valuable and that meant that we could then move on. In the beginning there may not have been much constructive work done but right away people started to talk. Different groups are at different levels and the starting points are different.*

*We met as a group of five with two facilitators. S. was a great resource – she kept us on track. The meetings ran for about an hour. There was plenty of material, everybody shared and people reflected and talked about what worked for them. We brought examples of children's work and talked about it.*

*I think it was once in all the meetings that we looked at children's work. What I liked about my group ...as the year went on we stopped talking about WHAT we might teach and began talking about HOW we might teach and that's when it all started to change. Teachers did start asking questions about their own practice....maybe there are some pockets yet but it certainly happened in mine.*

*People shared more than they expected.*

*Meetings were cancelled a few times...the first term was not a problem as we had student teachers in the school. We need a system that will hold.*

### **The Significance of the Theory of Action and Theory Building**

Theory building was a significant part of the seminar led by J. West-Burnham and resulted in the co-creation of the conceptual model of Learning Collaborative Practice. Teachers were highly positive about this seminar. However, theory building did not feature in teachers' responses and was only mentioned once in the questionnaire when the teacher described it thus: '*Understanding the theoretical background is important so that you know why you are changing*'. A number of negative reactions to the inclusion of a theoretical dimension in the programme did surface through the workshop findings: 'too much theory', 'too much information at once'.

**1c. Impact of the strategies implemented in phase one in-school capacity to lead professional learning into the future.**

In this section I look at findings in relation to the effectiveness of the programme in building in-school capacity of the in-school facilitators and general in-school expertise:

**Table 3.5: In-school Facilitators and Capacity Building**

Teachers' response to the overall facilitation of the programme	What helped the facilitators gain confidence in exercising their roles	The facilitators' perceptions of the challenges they encountered	Facilitators' perceptions of the important elements in developing in-school capacity
<p>Sixteen teachers were happy to very happy with the overall facilitation –both external and internal and the deadlines they set.</p> <p>Facilitators' own experiences of their role at the level of the TPLT meetings varied. Two groups were deemed to have worked very well, while a third was slower to get started. The reason given for the 'slow start' was the resistance of some members.</p>	<p>The facilitators identified: teamwork; the changes in peoples' attitudes; the benefit to the children; the social dimension and the focus on quality.</p> <p>Facilitators working in pairs was identified as positively contributing to the success of the TPLT. (This happened because facilitators expressed a wish to do so).</p> <p>The facilitators' meetings with external facilitator were deemed very important in that they modelled the follow up TPLT meeting.</p>	<p>For the in-school facilitators, allaying people's fears was a challenge in the early stages. These were mainly about: fears of overload; fears of being shown up as not knowing enough about the curriculum; fears around deprivatisation of practice and resistance to change; fears that this would be another aborted initiative.</p> <p>All facilitators' responses were positive, though one observed that initiative overload was an impediment to following through in his own classroom practice.</p>	<p>Developing knowledge and skills featured highly.</p> <p>Identifying in-school expertise, and encouraging its sharing.</p>



A sample of comments here:

*There was the worry that this was going to be something else with talk, talk and more talk and then move on to next new idea....as the year went on people began to see that we were doing this one properly.*

*The tension in the beginning ... certain teachers pushing this and others weren't as interested...it took time to get over that.*

*No-one really facilitated we did it together. I would talk about the two or three points that we had decided at our team meeting. I would refer to them again at the end of meeting and...It was about decisions: make sure the decisions we had agreed on at the facilitators' meeting were followed through at the teachers' meeting.*

*In our group there were no tensions at all – it was a really positive experience. The big fear was overload; the big fear was that we would have so much to do we wouldn't be able to cope with everything. I think we sorted that out...the fact that we took little steps and we discussed each step as we went...it meant that everybody understood what was involved.*

*The major challenge would have been for people who are used to going into their own classroom to open up...and at the start that was a challenge. Some teachers felt at the beginning that their own way was working fine so why change it.*

*The knowledge component is very important ...if we hadn't had S in the group we might have been struggling a bit. She brings great clarity...when I work in her class and she is teaching the children she is also teaching me.*

*I think in the beginning it took a while to get used to...I know the staff gave us permission to act as facilitators, but it takes a while for that to filter through because we are putting our heads above the parapet and we are not used to doing that. The fact that you are not there as everybody else, you are taking extra responsibility to move things forward.*

*I didn't feel any different; I didn't see myself as facilitator. I would bring feedback from our facilitators' meeting and it went from there.*

*I did feel challenged as a facilitator....working with a second facilitator certainly helped...Having another facilitator to bounce things off, recall things together.*

### **Identifying future directions for the intervention.**

The decisions agreed at the whole day seminar led by West-Burnham, were highly significant and signposted the way forward in phase two. These decisions were encapsulated in what became known during the course of the intervention as 'The Ten Commitments' (see P. 76). These agreements, made as a staff, affirmed their

commitment to developing collaborative practice, but doing so in a way that would respect difference and allow for incremental learning. It called for an acknowledgement that pacing and timing matter to people. One of the teachers described it thus:

*What I picked up from our day's seminar is that trying to keep the whole thing neatly organised won't work because people are different. We need to differentiate for the teachers as much as we do for the children.*

### **3.2 Discussion of Findings: Facilitator's Learning in Phase One**

The understanding of facilitation of professional learning that informs this study is one of creating the conditions for learning with and through others. It is interchangeable with the concept of leadership of learning that is expressed as 'learning together toward a shared purpose or aim' (Forbes, 2004, p. 2). It necessitates opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information, and assumptions through continuing conversations; and to create actions that grow out of these new understandings (Lambert, 2003). To locate the above findings within the context of this research I bring the reader back to the beginning of the story drawing on my own reflective diary as a guide. Getting started took time and a great deal of professional dialogue. The meetings with the leadership team at the early stages of the initiative had identified a number of features on which both the school leadership team and I were in accord:

1. School life should incorporate structured professional learning opportunities for teachers.
2. Our experience within the Irish primary education system to date offered no models of a whole school systematic approach to in-school professional learning that we could follow.
3. This initiative would be a pioneering effort and nobody could say what it would involve – we were taking a risk on learning and in the spirit of action research we were in agreement that the initiative should be participative, respectful of all involved and firmly focused on improving teaching practice leading to improving children's learning. From the beginning there was a willingness to learn in the doing.

At the end of the previous academic year, the staff had decided to focus on improving the teaching and learning of writing in the English curriculum and in the process put systems in place that would facilitate such on-going professional learning. At the September staff meeting, the teachers were brought up to date with the discussions that I'd been having with the leadership team and it was agreed that I should give a presentation at the next staff meeting. At the October staff meeting I presented a proposal to the teaching staff. The structure that I proposed was built around the concept of learning teams (Dufour et al., 2006; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006; Watkins, 2005). The nucleus and 'building block' upon which the learning programme would be based would be the teacher professional learning team (TPLT). However, based on my own experience and that of research, I suggested we needed facilitators to lead those teams. I had concerns that teams would need guidance in learning how to work together to promote their own professional learning. My experience reflects the advice of Watkins:

...a common mechanism is that of creating teacher teams, which does have a positive impact on teacher empowerment and teacher collaboration, but it does not necessarily lead to a greater focus on learning... one of the reasons suggested for this is that teachers do not have the experience and models for how to do it (Watkins, 2005, p. 190).

As external facilitator my role would be to work closely with that team of in-school facilitators (FT) in building their capacity to work with their own peers at the TPLT meetings. A couple of weeks were given for the staff to consider the proposal and come back with suggestions. If the basic team structure were acceptable, I suggested that each team nominate a facilitator. The proposal was accepted. From informal conversations I concluded that, not unexpectedly, it was accepted enthusiastically by some, tentatively by others and a small minority simply went along but didn't outwardly voice any opposition. I met with the nominated facilitators, who in most cases also happened to be what are called in Ireland, post holders, or members of the middle management team. Though holding 'management' posts, they had certain tasks to do but didn't feel that they had any leadership role in the school. During the meeting we discussed their role in the intervention. I presented it as that of fostering the learning of the five PLC dimensions as outlined in chapter one: taking a 'balcony view', identifying resources

that could help achieve their goals and reduce distractions that might take them off course (Hord, 2004, pp. 62-63); encourage diversity of viewpoints and an atmosphere of open inquiry (Leithwood, Steinbach and Ryan, 1997, p. 319); ask important questions (Hord, 2004, p. 149).

Here we met the first hurdle of cultural norms of practice. Teachers felt it would be too presumptuous of them to put themselves forward as in-school facilitators in such a role. Knowing from personal experience the cultural binds that influence our practice, I suggested that at the next staff meeting I would lead a workshop on our professional learning initiative during the course of which I would raise the issue of the role of facilitators. I felt this was a critical point in building trust in, and consensus for, the project. The teachers needed to trust me to negotiate my way through the cultural norms of practice that would not leave anyone exposed and at the same time raise issues that needed to be tackled. The facilitators accepted this suggestion, some with reservations.

At this stage I was becoming aware of a dual level of engagement at which I needed to operate as facilitator of the process: work closely with the facilitators but also at the level of the full teaching staff. I needed to open a full staff discussion on what Barth calls the non-discussables in schools (Barth, 2001). I facilitated a staff workshop in which I opened a professional dialogue around the purpose of schools, the role of a teacher and teacher professionalism. With the explicit intention of building trust, I talked about my own experience as a teacher and the challenges that I found on that journey, including the mistakes I made. I asked their opinions on why it is claimed that teachers as a general rule are reluctant to assume leadership roles (Barth, 2001). As an external facilitator I felt the freedom to name issues that an internal staff member could not easily do. Naming the 'non-discussable' and identifying it as common to many schools, created a space for teachers to engage in the discussion with frankness and honesty. The teaching staff gave their full support to the in-school facilitators to fulfil their leadership role in the intervention. I took three key learnings from these instances that were further confirmed in the findings mentioned above:

1. Developing teacher agency involves simultaneous facilitation at all levels. The teaching staff exercised agency in giving the facilitators the authority to work on their behalf. The exercise was mutually empowering.
2. Roles created to support the developing PLC must make explicit their leadership dimension to avoid individual incumbents having to negotiate the space to do so.
3. Initially, I had considered that my role as external facilitator should focus on the in-school facilitators, now I realised that I also needed to work at the level of the full teacher team for two key purposes: a) face the cultural impediments that may reside there and, b) to draw out the fundamental aspiration of the individual teacher, the moral purpose that underpins actions.

Bringing the research timeframe in harmony with the school year involved avoiding weeks on either side of holidays, midterm breaks, weeks coming up to Christmas or end of year. In trying to fit the research around established practices in the school, I found that in-school time for staff to meet is highly limited. The initial plan, good in theory, in practice resulted in six meetings with facilitators and about five at level of TPLT meetings (Appendix 1). In total for an academic year I had six hours targeted time with facilitators, who in turn had five hours targeted time with their peers. I was also aware of a pressure to 'get a lot into' each meeting thus impeding the fundamental inquiry-based, collaborative approach to moving forward. The intensity of the school day has to be experienced to be understood. In each visit to the school I felt the 'busyness' – there were choir practices, sports events, Green Schools initiatives, student teachers, health personnel, practising for Christmas shows, fund-raising activities, to name just a few. All of these activities impacted on the core business of learning and teaching, all called for adapting timetables and 'fitting things in'. When it became progressively evident that some recommendations were not being implemented I had to re-examine my attitudes. From this I learned that the intensity of the school day demands that any new initiatives must identify key points through the school system in order to make best use of time and opportunities offered. I found Senge's description useful: 'seeing where actions and changes in structures can lead to significant, enduring improvements ...often...best results come not from large-scale efforts but from small well-focused actions (Senge, 1990, p. 114).

### **3.3 Learning from the Findings**

A significant number of teachers found the experience of developing as a PLC highly motivating. In motivating teachers to engage in professional learning, the facilitator must respect teachers' initial fears around overload and professional exposure. My experience would suggest that these fears are a legacy of isolated professional practice. The introduction stage is critical. I found a 'Loose-Tight-Loose' approach worked. This is a play on Thompson and Wiliam's 'Tight but Loose' approach to change management (Wiliam and Thompson, 2007). Facilitation involved the teachers setting the pace in the beginning, even if it didn't match my own. I learned through practice when to 'tighten up' expectations and actions to model good practice, then loosen up again to allow space for teachers' creativity.

Adoption of an appreciative inquiry stance throughout the process helped, for example, enabling differentiation of roles and levels of participation within the process, empathic understanding of the obstacles that arose, maintaining a relentless commitment to what Habermas calls communicative action (Habermas, 1998). By that I mean the expressed intent to reach a respectful, shared understanding of how to engage in professional learning. This dialogue was by word and action. Modelling and professional dialogue at every opportunity (Southworth, 2004; West-Burnham and Coates, 2005) was a fundamental strategy.

References to theory in the findings above suggested that frontloading theory alienates teachers but when reflection on practice leads to theory generation about that practice, as was done through the seminar led by John West-Burnham, it is perceived differently and teachers even found it motivating.

I also learned that leading change is a long term commitment and needs time to embed. The findings from phase one confirm that, at the level of teachers' engagement in, and understanding of, collaborative inquiry to improve practice:

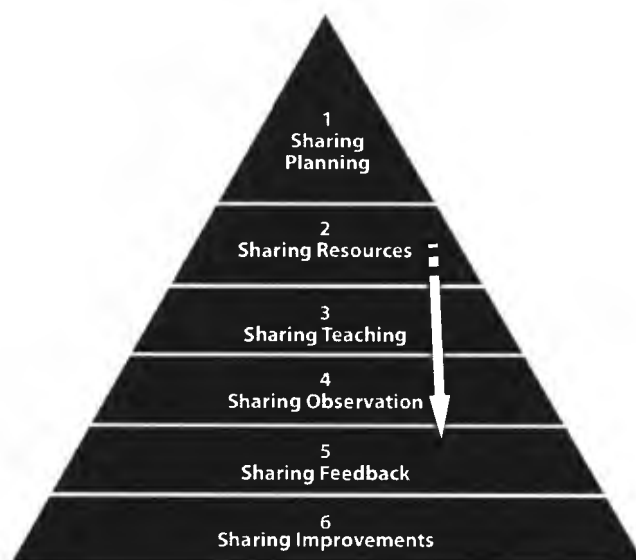
- all mainstream teachers had participated in systematic investigation of practice, albeit at different levels of engagement

- almost 90% of mainstream teachers said they applied new learning in their practice
- nearly 80% said that children's writing had improved and
- 95% of all teachers were committed to engaging in collaborative inquiry.

### **The Emerging Model of Learning Collaborative Practice**

However, the possible gap between perception of having changed practice and actually having changed practice needed further examination. The findings also showed the depth of inquiry-based practice was varied as was the level of implementation. The model illustrated in Figure 3.1 below offered a developmental pathway to each teacher. Teachers engaging at level one are at the stage of sharing planning but this is only the tip of the iceberg. As teachers build their professional capacity to journey downwards they deepen their understanding of their practice through incrementally sharing learning and feedback about that practice to finally lead to shared improvement as a school.

**Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model for Learning Collaborative Practice**



(Co-constructed by teachers and West-Burnham, May 2008)

The evidence from phase one suggested that while there was a significant level of systematic inquiry, it was predominantly at the beginning stages 1 and 2 of the model

above. It had still to open up the classrooms for observation and feedback. There were however, indicators that some teachers were ready to take the next steps in phase two. The creation of the model proved highly significant in that teachers saw this professional learning programme as involving incremental learning. The idea of collaborative inquiry as something teachers need to learn, as involving the creation of new norms of practice, as potentially confidence-building and incremental were also key findings in this research. The symbolic representation of the concept helped to:

- a) Clarify where the process was leading – map the journey
- b) Make visible the inherent opportunity for teachers to make a professional choice to move from one level to the next as they were ready to do so. This is significant in the context of Irish education where engagement at this level of professional learning is a professional option.
- c) Facilitate the teachers' making an informed choice when committing themselves as a staff to engage in the collaborative inquiry process.

### **The Influence of teacher to teacher talk**

In terms of teachers' learning in relation to the specific intervention, key categories emerge from the data analysis.

1. Teachers rate their learning through teacher-to-teacher talk as highly significant in influencing professional practice. Teachers highlighted opportunities to share ideas and engage in professional discussions with colleagues, among the main contributory factors to their enjoying and benefiting from the programme.
2. The improvement in teachers' pedagogical content knowledge was highly rated by teachers in phase one. However the areas of assessment and feedback, central to learning, remain problematic for most teachers. It is also evident that the exercise of professional judgment, central to the teachers' capacity for assessment and feedback, is contingent on the quality of that pedagogical content knowledge. From this research it is clear that teachers shape such knowledge in each other, but the nature of that shaping is not well understood.



3. A third key finding is the power of influence of one or two voices on a staff. There were a number of references to a teacher whose 'boundless energy' and 'generosity' in sharing powerfully impacted on the success of the intervention.
4. Furthermore, the role of the teacher learning team, in this case the TPLT, is pivotal to changing practice. From this research I suggest that upon the quality of professional dialogue within this 'building block' will stand or fall all efforts to improve the teaching and learning in the classroom. Building capacity at this level is critical.

The findings outlined above go some way to answering the question: What can be learned about facilitating in-school professional learning through leading a whole-school teaching staff to engage in collaborative inquiry to improve practice? However, the findings also showed that there was still much more work to be done and the learning gained from this phase provided the platform upon which to build the second cycle of inquiry. That is the story of Part II of this thesis.

## **PREFACE TO PHASE TWO**

The focus of the intervention in phase two, based on learning from phase one, was on continuing to build individual and collective capacity to improve the teaching and learning of writing in the school by using the Conceptual Model of Learning Collaborative Practice (CMLCP, see p. 18) as a guide. Moving to the next stages of that model would involve teachers pushing out current boundaries by sharing observation and feedback on professional practice. One of the challenges for me as facilitator of professional learning was learning to safely co-lead the teaching staff through that process. Phase one highlighted the influence of teacher to teacher talk in shaping pedagogical content knowledge, and in shaping peer attitudes and dispositions. Given its influence, I deemed it important to improve the collective awareness of the nature of that 'shaping', the assumptions and values that such talk promoted, in light of the commitment to sharing feedback to improve each other's teaching and learning. I proposed that the research focus in phase two would try to answer the question: How can we improve our understanding of the impact of the normative frameworks that underpin teachers' professional dialogue when sharing feedback on observed practice? The concepts of 'mental models' (Senge, 1990) and preconceptions were already familiar themes as they had surfaced during phase one workshops. Therefore, in the spirit of action research, the focus of the data gathering emerged from the practice with the clear purpose of improving understanding of that practice. It also reflected a progression from my role being the primary focus in phase one, to the teachers' learning being the focus of phase two. A commitment to action research for professional learning can involve collecting data in all manner of ways. In phase two, I recorded and analysed teacher post-observational discussions of their classroom practice. These discussions were analysed and fed back to the teachers as part of the on-going action cycle. In offering a frame of reference, to outline the steps that brought the intervention to this point I will briefly describe its background story.

Year two began with my meeting the leadership team in the school. Based on teachers' recommendations, evident in the research findings but also expressed to the leadership

team, it was agreed that the intervention should continue with the focus on the teaching and learning of writing in the English curriculum. Reflecting on phase one, all agreed that the overall strategy of working simultaneously at the three levels of intervention: organisational, cultural and pedagogical content (see Figure 2.4) was effective and should continue. Some of the leadership team suggested that at the organisational level, the initiative needed in-school drivers, members of staff who could focus more explicitly on what was described as ‘research and resource building’, an ‘R & R’ team for the initiative. Three teachers, who had emerged during the course of the year as in-school drivers, were invited to form the R & R team. I then met with them for the purpose of identifying their role for the year and to formulate a proposal in this regard to bring to the staff at the upcoming staff meeting. Their role was identified as a supportive one:

- To disseminate resources and develop teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge of the genres. This would be done prior to the introduction of a new genre, ideally at a staff meeting.
- To maintain a notice board with regular updates on the theme of the month.
- To gather simple data to inform decision-making, as needed during the course of the year.

At this meeting we discussed and agreed the findings from phase one, particularly those suggestions for enabling teachers to look critically at their practice to improve children’s learning which included videoing each other’s teaching. The R & R team could be described as intrinsically motivated teachers whose interacting energy ignited fresh enthusiasm and excitement about the project. They decided to lead the process of opening up classroom practice by using video to show an instance of planning, teaching and reviewing a lesson on the new genre to be introduced. This video, to be called ‘Explanation Writing’ was to be a ‘homemade’ project. Two of them volunteered to team-teach while being videoed by teacher three. The purpose of the video exercise was not only to ‘lead by example’ but also to model an approach to lesson planning for the

new writing genre. The video<sup>10</sup> would be shown at the staff meeting in October and used to engage staff in a discussion on teaching the genre. I facilitated the October staff workshop. Its purpose was:

1. To introduce the initiative to new teachers (due to staff turnover, there were four newly qualified teachers on staff).
2. To present my understanding of the findings from phase one and open them up for critical interrogation by the teachers.
3. To agree the research focus for phase two.
4. To introduce the R & R team who would then lead the discussion based on their video.

The findings were presented, discussed and agreed. The only recommendation was that due recognition should be given to the fact that a number of non-school related variables influence children's learning, such as home environment. During the course of the session, by way of renewing the moral purpose that was driving this intervention, I presented again the ten commitments agreed by the staff at the end of the phase one workshop with Prof. J. West-Burnham:

**As a staff in St. B's School we will:**

1. Be open to new ideas and learning from each other through sharing planning and pooling resources.
2. Be proactive in engaging in team building activities to help build trust between ourselves as a staff, our pupils and parents and into the wider community.
3. Adopt a 'brick by brick' approach in building community to eventually include all staff in the bridging process.
4. Build consistency through building whole school norms of practice around lesson planning, effective implementation of code of behaviour, agreement on rules and application of rules.
5. Reflect on the effectiveness of the delivery of a lesson.
6. Practise the Assessment for Learning (AfL) approach to learning.
7. Develop understanding of our own learning styles and the children's learning styles.
8. Discuss the implications of Shallow – Deep – Profound learning for us as a school.

<sup>10</sup> This was an in-house exercise and not a direct source of data gathering for this research, in which case the school leadership took responsibility for informing parents and securing permission for the children to be videoed.

9. Discuss our progress as a staff on the Bonding to Bridging Spectrum.
10. Use the Collaborative Model to build a professional learning community.

In trying to live by the above intentions we will continue to create a positive ethos in the school through shared hope and aspiration

The outcome of the workshop was that we agreed to focus on points 4, 5, 6 and 10 of the Ten Commitments for year two. The focus for phase two would be to:

1. Continue to build the practice of collaborative inquiry following the Conceptual Model for Learning Collaborative Practice (CMLCP, see Figure 3.1).
2. Focus on lesson design and review in recognition of the importance of consistency of school norms, and lesson planning as a key leverage for change.
3. Explore together how to engage in sharing observation and feedback, (stages four and five of the CMLCP) on professional practice and that I would collect data in relation to that learning.

The R & R team introduced their video and invited feedback. Comments were supportive and affirming. I consciously kept the tone and depth of the analysis at a comfortable level to build confidence in video as a medium of professional learning. The focus of attention was descriptive not evaluative and directed at the children's learning: for example questions included which children stayed or didn't stay on task? What were the factors that contributed to them staying on task? The exercise was presented as professionals engaging in reciprocal learning (Askew and Lodge, 2000; Robertson, 2005; Watkins, 2005). Teachers were reluctant to offer any comment that might be construed as negative until the teachers of the lesson did so first. There was a genuine appreciation of the courage and generosity shown by the R & R team.

At the October staff meeting an open invitation was issued to all teaching staff to have one of their lessons videoed for professional learning purposes. I considered this a legitimate invitation as a number of teachers had suggested it in the questionnaire taken three months previously, and the R & R team had led the way. It was explained that if anyone were interested in doing so, they would have the power of decision on whether to share the video with colleagues or not, after they themselves had seen it. I did not

invite responses at the meeting but said that I would talk informally to people during the course of the coming weeks.

Routines and practices, set up in phase one, such as team meetings became embedded in phase two. This time the learning support teachers each joined a different teacher learning team (TPLT). The principal again sought 'creative' ways to release teachers for their in-school meetings, by taking classes or bringing in extra personnel. Lesson planning was seen as creating consistency in quality and delivery of lessons through the engagement of every teacher. Having learned the importance of pacing, each term of phase two was given one specific learning intention:

1. Term 1: How can we improve our practice in lesson planning for teaching writing? The R & R team played an important role in sourcing resources. For example a template was drawn up including elements that should be incorporated to teaching a writing genre over a period of weeks. This template was based on material available from the national curriculum support service.
2. Term 2: How can we improve our practice in assessing children's writing? Assessment remained a challenge throughout the research. Rubrics were used to measure standard. For example teachers used the rubric they created to monitor children's writing of persuasive genre before and after the teaching of the genre. The results at every class level were shared at a full staff meeting as explained in chapter six.
3. Term 3: How can we learn together to share feedback on observed practice? The focus for the rest of Part II of this thesis is on this learning intention.

Following the public invitation in October, to share their practice through video and engaging with others in a post lesson conference of observed practice (see below), I informally spoke to teachers about the invitation, confident of having one volunteer from each macro level in the school: junior (X) , middle (Y) and senior (Z). This confidence was based on my awareness of what was happening at school level. I was beginning to know the teachers reasonably well and they me. When asked directly: Would you be interested in having a lesson videoed? A number of teachers declined and

three teachers said they 'wouldn't mind' or would be willing 'to give it a go'. These teachers were given time to think about it and before Christmas I met with each to have an informal talk about how it would be done. It was agreed that one of the R & R team would video the lesson at a time convenient for the teachers and the school timetable. The principal secured the permission of parents to video the lessons on the basis of it being a staff learning exercise and only used within the school. The teacher who recorded the video also transferred the video onto a DVD disc and this was given to the teacher of the lesson. The original recordings were destroyed. All three teachers were happy to share the video with their own TPLT for the purpose of reciprocal professional learning.

Simultaneously, at whole school level, by way of learning to improve teachers' practice in assessment, (the learning focus of term two), teachers were invited to record their 'dilemmas'. By dilemmas is meant those instances that continuously challenge teachers' professional judgement and for which they themselves didn't have a manageable solution. Eight of the eighteen mainstream teachers responded with dilemmas. Upon being invited to do so, four of the teachers brought their dilemma to the February staff meeting by way of exploring peer learning from stories of practice. In the interest of creating a safe space for deprivatising one's practice, I offered a structure that I call the Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC, Appendix 2). This model of practice is rooted in theories of coaching/mentoring, based on the work of Egan (Egan, 2001) and informed by the work of Carnell, MacDonald and Askew (2006). Following the practice of: DO - REVIEW - LEARN - APPLY (Dennison and Kirk, 1990) that has typified this research, I acted as facilitator of the cycle of dialogue in which the teachers, working in groups, each led by a teacher with a dilemma story, followed four key stages as described:

Stage One: Exploring the dilemma: group actively listens, asks open questions, and uncovers blind spots.

Stage Two: Verbalising new understandings: brainstorming the desired future.

Stage Three: The action plan: What? When? Where? How?

Stage Four: Reviewing the process: how the session has helped everybody's learning.

The process was warmly received by all the teachers without exception. In fact, a number of teachers came forward to express their appreciation of the opportunity to discuss real issues within a non-threatening, solution focused framework. This positive experience of engaging in professional feedback was not only beneficial in itself, but modelled the format of the post-observation conference introduced later in the intervention and explained in the following section.

The next month, having previously secured the consent of the teachers whose practice would be the subject of the post-observation conference, I visited each TPLT. I explained that one of their colleagues was willing to have a lesson videoed, and would like to invite their learning team to view and give feedback on the lesson in what we would call a post-observation conference. I also explained that the post-observation conference would be facilitated by me and would follow the format already piloted at the previous staff meeting. I suggested that the teacher with experience in this area would video each post-observation conference. I offered this suggestion within the context of the agreement at the September staff meeting that I would gather data in learning about sharing professional feedback. I further explained that I would carry out an analysis of the discussion with a view to answering the research question: How can we improve our understanding of the impact of the normative frameworks that underpin teachers' professional dialogue when sharing feedback on observed practice?

I asked the teachers to take time to consider my proposal, explaining that participation would be voluntary and that the full complement of any TPLT would not be needed. I also explained that neither the intervention itself nor my research would be contingent on this happening. Teachers responded very quickly and more teachers presented themselves at the early morning meetings for the purpose of the post lesson conference than was expected. The learning gained from analysis of those post conference meetings is described in the next chapters.



## **CHAPTER 4: PHASE TWO: METHODS OF DATA GATHERING & ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The methods of data gathering for phase two of the research must be understood within the methodological framework and concern of this action research as described in chapter two. Thus, the overall purpose of the research of this phase was to deepen the learning about facilitating in-school professional learning through leading the full teaching staff to engage in collaborative inquiry to improve practice. This second cycle of data gathering, building on the shared trust gained through phase one, was about facilitating teachers' learning about their own professional learning. In that sense it was a meta-analytical exercise. The research question, that the data gathering was planned to answer was: How can we improve our understanding of the impact of the normative frameworks that underpin teachers' professional dialogue when sharing feedback on observed practice? I use the term professional dialogue here to mean sustained, purposeful, professional conversation, during which contradictory judgments are suspended in the interest of mutual understanding and exploring ways to improve practice.

Two of the three class teachers, who had volunteered to open up their practice to their TPLT colleagues, showed pre-recorded videos of their lessons as a lead in to engaging in dialogue about that practice. In the third instance, a team of two teachers taught a writing lesson that was observed by two colleagues from their TPLT the previous week. In all cases the post-lesson conference was consecutive to observing practice. Each post-observation conference was facilitated by me, and video-recorded by the same colleague who had recorded the lessons. In total there were three such conferences, involving three different TPLT groupings and fifteen teachers. Each conference represented the junior, middle and senior class levels in the school which I will refer to as conferences X, Y and Z respectively. Each case involved a mix of newly qualified teachers, teachers of eight to ten years experience and teachers with more than twenty years experience. As shown in the table below, eleven of the fifteen were under 35 years of age and ten were female and five male.

**Table 4.1: Profile of Participant Teachers in Post-observation Conferences**

	Age				Gender		Number of Teaching Years			
	<25	25- 35	35-45	>45	F	M	<5	5-10	10-20	20+
Conference Z	1	3	1	1	3	3	1	4		1
Conference Y	2	1	1	1	3	2	1	2	1	1
Conference X	3	1	0	0	4	0	3	1	0	0
Totals	6	5	2	2	10	5	5	7	1	2

Meetings Y & Z were scheduled for 1 hour and 15 minutes, allowing for 30 minutes lesson viewing time and a forty five minute discussion. Meeting X, based on a previously observed lesson was scheduled for 45 minutes. It is important to note that only the videos of the post lesson conferences are included in the data gathering for this research, the video of the class lesson is not.

## **4.2 Method of Data Gathering and Analysis**

Video was the agreed tool for gathering data in phase two. Using video for professional learning is now a well established medium (Santagata, Gallimore and Stigler, 2005).

Like Plowman and Stephen I believe that from a research perspective, video is:

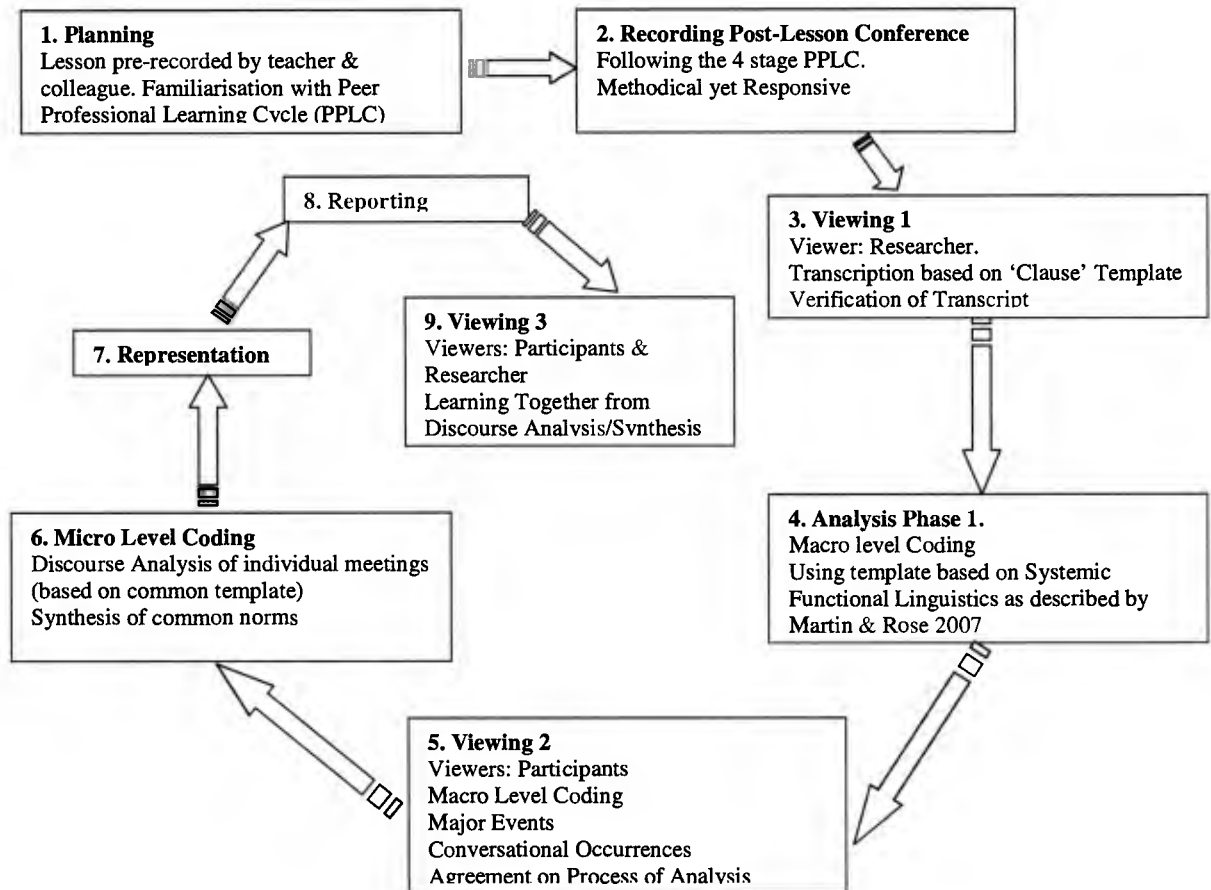
... an attractive medium for recording data for researchers who believe that the interactions between people, artifacts and their environment offer insights into learning. .. is considered to provide more potentially illuminating data than questionnaires, interviews or field notes because it appears to represent the complexities of social life and so lend itself to capturing the 'big picture' (Plowman and Stephen, 2008, p. 541).

The potential of video to open up the 'big picture' and perhaps reveal that which teachers may have hitherto been unaware, highlights the sensitivity of the approach needed in video research. Suchman (1997b, p. 109) says that video offers a means of considering 'those fleeting circumstances that our interpretations of action systematically rely upon, but which our accounts of action routinely ignore'. I suggest that it was in those very 'fleeting circumstances' that the teachers and I found significant learning.

#### ***4.2.1 The Stages of Video Practice***

Given that video is a relatively new medium of data gathering in schools, I outline in some detail my approach to data gathering and analysis. My frame of reference is the guidelines for the use of video in educational research of the Data Research Learning Center (DRDC) Chicago, published in a report edited by Derry (2007). My synopsis of those guidelines is outlined below in Figure 4.1. The synopsis also includes my approach to analysis of the discourse captured on video. Having studied the different pathways to discourse analysis I chose a model informed by the work of Martin and Rose (2007a) which is grounded in the specific systemic linguistic approach known as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). In this research, teacher professional dialogue is the focus of inquiry, video is the tool for gathering the data, and analysis of that data is based on the SFL approach to discourse analysis. Figure 4.1 reflects my interpretation of the DRDC guidelines on video analysis, merged with the principles of discourse analysis informed by systemic functional linguistics (SFL). I provide a fuller description of SFL and the rationale for using it as method of analysis later in this chapter.

**Figure 4.1: Nine Step Model of Data Gathering and Analysis**



### **An Explanation of the Nine Step Model of Data Gathering and Analysis created for the purpose of this research**

The above model demonstrates the iterative process that video and discourse analysis has involved in this research. I developed a process that involved recursive loops of gathering and analysing, involving multiple viewings, interspersed with deepening levels of transcription. It also involved getting different perspectives, including participants', leading to identification of significant events or sequences of conversation leading to more detailed transcription for the purpose of coding. The learning gained from working on the first video informed the second.

### **Step 1: Planning the Video**

Planning the post lesson conference with the teachers involved two main dimensions:

1. The class teacher was invited to identify an aspect of the previously taught lesson that they would like to improve, perhaps through identifying a dilemma that their viewing of the videoed lesson raised for them.
2. Familiarisation of the teachers of each TPLT with the Peer Professional Learning Cycle (Appendix 2). The four-stage PPLC is the framework within which the professional conversation is to be understood and analysed. Given the difficulty of finding opportunities to meet collaboratively, the teachers' only prior experience of using the PPLC was at the February staff meeting already described.
3. My role as facilitator was to guide the conversation through the four different stages of the cycle.

Planning the video recording involved:

1. A briefing conversation between the video maker and her colleagues in which she outlined how she would go about the recording, where she would be positioned, and agreeing a signal from them to her if anyone wished to stop the video at any time. Though, in fact, nobody did ask to stop the video, it was a reassurance that the teachers appreciated.
2. The ethical issues pertaining to the teachers' participation were again outlined and consent forms distributed (Appendix 4). Teachers were given the freedom to wait until they had seen the video recording before signing the consent form.

### **Step 2: Recording the Post-Observation Conference Video**

The post-observation conferences were each recorded in the early morning prior to formal teaching time. The room was a small classroom used for small-group, learning support teaching. The teachers sat as a group on children's chairs around a cluster of children's tables. The room size did not allow for camera mobility. Only one camera

was used as this was perceived by the teachers to be less intrusive. In each instance, the video maker was the same colleague who had previously recorded the class lessons and the relationship between her and colleagues could be described as very comfortable. One of the conferences started late and ran overtime. The result was that the teachers were needed as classes had begun. The conference was brought to a close more quickly than we would have wished for. After the meeting the video maker transferred the recording on to a DVD and, with the teachers' permission, it was given to me to transcribe (A transcription of each of the three conferences is included in Appendices 8, 9 and 10). From there the cycle of actions followed those outlined in Figure 4.1 above. I chose an approach to analysis informed by systemic functional linguistic (SFL) theory as the most appropriate analytical tool to help me discover the normative frameworks that underpin the teachers' professional dialogue in these post-observation conferences. I outline below why I chose SFL for that purpose.

### **4.3 Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis may be viewed as a continuum spanned by the work of linguists such as Halliday (2007, p. 3; 1976) on the one end and sociologists led by the work of Harvey Sacks (1977) on the other. I wish to clarify that my approach to discourse is neither that of a linguist nor a sociologist but of an educator who appreciates it as a medium to understand learning. Like others who apply discourse analysis to educational issues (Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth, 2000; Little, 2002; Wenger, 1998), I see it as a relevant analytic tool to help understand teacher interaction through professional discourse in a dedicated learning context. In phase one, language had been shown to be central to professional interaction in school. Martin and Rose claim that:

Social discourse rarely consists of just single clauses...rather social contexts develop as sequences of meanings comprising texts. Since each text is produced interactively between speakers....we can use it to interpret the interaction it manifests (2007, p.1) .

It is in such interactions that professional learning happens in schools. I am looking at these learning interactions from the stance that learning is about meaning-making (Askew and Carnell, 1998; Watkins, 2005) and that professional learning is context

relevant (Carnell, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Day, 1999). Therefore to engage critically with the quality of professional meaning-making in context it is important to understand the dialogic interaction that underpins it. Since 'each interaction is an instance of the speakers' culture, we can also use the text to interpret aspects of the culture it manifests' (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 1). In summary, in order to understand teachers' learning, to understand the new frameworks that teachers are creating in the process of learning, we need to understand how teachers are interpreting and talking about that learning in practice. Discourse analysis facilitates this understanding.

Discourse analysis encompasses a variety of approaches as outlined:

1. Ethnomethodological: Conversational Analysis,
2. Sociolinguistic: { Ethnography of Speaking,  
Interactional Sociolinguistics and  
Variation Theory
3. Logico-philosophic: { Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics,
4. Structural-Functional: { Birmingham School,  
Systemic Functional Linguistics
5. Socio-semiotic: { Critical Discourse Analysis  
Critical Linguistics (Eggins and Slade, 1997, p. 24)

Many researchers in the field of education, like Little (2002), would attest that, though there are established approaches to discourse analysis like those listed above, there is no one uniform method. Clarke too acknowledges this and recommends adopting an eclectic approach

There is no single agreed method for doing discourse analysis; analysts therefore need to adopt and adapt linguistic methods and tools (Threadgold, 2000) in order to analyse the ways in which discursive practices are embodied, or 'language'd', to borrow Stuart Hall's term (Barker and Galasinski, 2001, p. 156) in a particular situation or context (Clarke, 2008, p. 66).

Discourse analysis does also have its critics. Linguists like Widdowson (1998) criticised it on the basis that it lacks rigour while Blommaert (both cited in Clarke, 2008, p. 67) argues that discourse analysis has such a linguistic bias that it is 'so aridly grammatical' that it misses the bigger social picture. Aware of these views of discourse,

however, my experience has been that SFL offers a rigorous analytic tool, yet keeps the bigger picture in mind through its emphasis on semantics and the social context of discourse. By way of giving the backdrop against which my analysis may be understood I give a brief explanation of SFL.

#### **4.3.1 *Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)***

As its name suggests SFL looks at the function of language as well as the meaning it creates. In its functional dimension, SFL sees discourse as purposeful, and in its semantic dimension it understands language as a process of meaning-makings. It is, therefore, an appropriate tool to apply for the purposeful dialogue that this research examines. Also significant is the fact that:

... language is viewed as a resource for making not just one meaning at a time, but several strands of meaning simultaneously. These simultaneous layers of meaning can be identified in linguistic units of all sizes: in the word, phrase, clause, sentence, and text .....These three types of meaning, or metafunctions, can be glossed as follows:

Ideational meanings: meanings about the world

Interpersonal meanings; meanings about roles and relationships

Textual meanings: meanings about the message (Eggins and Slade, 1997, p. 48)

Given that there are different strands of meaning running through any discourse, analysts need to look at the talk from different perspectives:

Thus different analytical techniques are used to uncover each strand of meaning. For example, to explore the ideational meanings in a text, the analyst focuses on patterns which encode the who, when, where, why and how of a text. These patterns are seen in the analysis of lexical cohesion (Eggins and Slade, 1997, p. 48).

Martin and Rose offer a toolkit for SFL analysis that can be seen as a menu from which the analyst can choose depending on his or her purpose. SFL has been described as an 'extravagant' theory; its extravagance has evolved to manage the complexity of the phenomenon it describes (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 3). It is this 'extravagance' that made it an ideal tool for my research purposes. It straddles both the structural-



functional<sup>11</sup> approach to discourse analysis and the socio-semantic<sup>12</sup> which enabled me to explore not only the subject matter of what teachers talked about in their learning teams (ideational level of meaning), and their attitudes to their practice (tool of appraisal within the interpersonal level of meaning), but also how I as facilitator negotiated progress through the various stages of the dialogic model: Peer Professional Learning Cycle (negotiation level of meaning).

SFL, in its realisation of discourse analysis, 'employs the tools of grammarians to identify the roles of wordings in passages of text, and employs the tools of social theorists to explain why they make the meanings they do' (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 4). It is 'rich in analytic techniques, allowing the analyst to focus on those patterns which are most relevant to specific data and research interests' (Eggins and Slade, 1997, p. 48). In acknowledging that SFL presents a broad and 'extravagant' gateway to analysis, I wish to establish that I did not apply the SFL approach in its totality. Guided by the parameters of my research question I looked at teachers' professional dialogue through the lens of a genre based view of discourse (Eggins and Slade, 1997; 2007b). I deemed the genre based approach to be ideally suited to the Peer Professional Learning Cycle upon which the professional dialogue was structured. Beyond generic structure, I looked at three particular dimensions of discourse analysis as outlined by Martin & Rose (2007):

1. Ideation, focusing on the content of a discourse ( pp. 73-114);
2. Appraisal, focusing on the kinds of attitudes and values that are negotiated in a text (pp. 25-71);
3. Negotiation, focusing on interaction as an exchange between speakers and how moves are organised in relation to one another (pp. 219-254).

I am supported in my decision to employ some, but not all, the tools of analysis that SFL offers by Martin and Rose who suggest that:

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<sup>11</sup> Structural-functional approach looks at how language is structured for its purpose e.g turn-taking or genre in discourse

<sup>12</sup> Socio-semantic approach views 'language as a social semiotic resource ; a system for making meanings through which language users both reflect and constitute themselves as social agents' Eggins, S. and Slade, D. (1997), *Analysing Casual Conversation*. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd.

Some applications will call for the full set of analytical tools ...others may require analyses from just one or other (pp. 21/22).

I now elaborate on each of these dimensions and how I applied them in this research.

## **Genre**

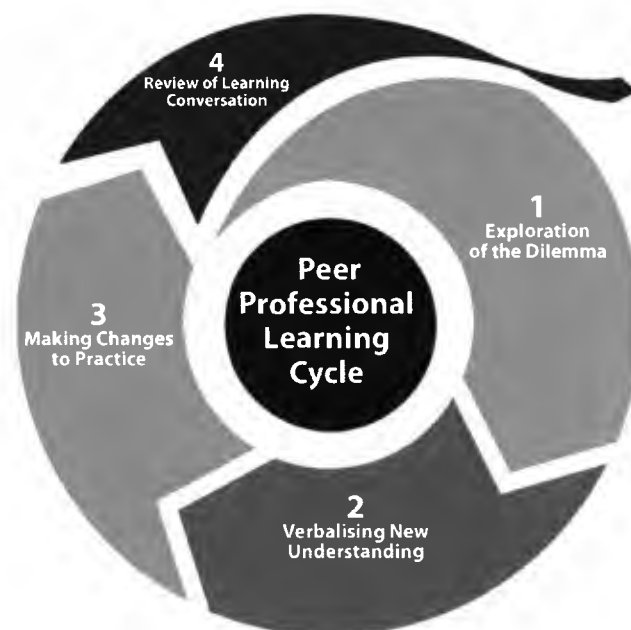
The focus of my study, and the context that gives meaning to the discourse being analysed, is teacher professional dialogue to improve practice within the conceptual model of Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC) illustrated in Appendix 2. This discourse occurs in a formal context as distinct from casual professional conversation. By genre I mean the overall defining purpose of the dialogue as 'it is the purpose that predicts the stages the text will go through to achieve this goal, i.e. its genre' (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 261). Therefore the dialogue is analysed in relation to how it realises its purpose in respect of each stage of the conceptual model of dialogue. An understanding of the stages of this model leads to understanding the pattern of meaning that become more or less predictable within each stage. In everyday usage a genre may be demonstrated in how we meet and greet people. Within that scenario, there are a number of ways that we can predict how the dialogue may go. Martin and Rose describe a genre as:

a staged, goal-oriented social process. Social because we participate in genres with other people; goal-oriented because we use genres to get things done ; staged because it usually takes us a few stages to reach our goals (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 8).

In the analysis it is important to make explicit that, in this study we are not working with participants using a well established genre, but teachers experientially learning a proposed generic structure which serves the specific purpose of sharing learning on observed professional practice. Therefore it is to be expected that there was certain tentativeness in predicting how they dialogue might go.

**Figure 4.2: The Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC)**

after Carnell et al (2007), & Egan (1998)<sup>13</sup>



While the four stages outlined in Figure 4.2 can be considered as constituting one genre, each stage may be viewed as a micro-genre, in that each stage has a particular purpose with specific activities to realise its purpose. As facilitator of the process my role was to guide the dialogue through the generic stages of the PPLC from exploration of the dilemma, through verbalising new understandings and defining the new desired practice, to articulating a clear plan of action. The cycle is open-ended with a view to continuing the cyclical nature of the learning at future meetings. I explain how I applied the negotiation level of meaning at the end of this chapter.

### **Ideational Level of Meaning**

The analysis tool that enabled me to analyse the dialogue from the point of view of its content, is termed the ideational level of meaning. To explain ideation I refer to Halliday (1994) who sees human experience as ‘made of processes involving people,

<sup>13</sup> This is a genre consisting of four stages or four stable components: A. Exploration of the issues, B. Verbalizing/eliciting growing understanding, C. Identifying and committing to a course of action and D. Reviewing the process

things, places and qualities'. Martin and Rose (2007, p. 74) say that these processes are verbalised in discourse through what linguists term 'the grammar of the clause'. From a discourse semantic perspective the clause constructs an activity involving people and things (ibid). The clause is based on the spoken usage of language as distinct from the more formally constructed written format, and in this analysis the breaking up of the dialogue into clauses is based on my viewing of the videos and the natural breaks that people made in their discourse. Taking the clause as the unit, with the ideational tools of analysis I examined what people talked about, and how they viewed what they did talk about. Table 4.2 illustrates the process involved.

I transcribed each meeting and checked its validity with the teachers by sending them a copy of the transcript to match against their viewing of the DVD (Appendices 8, 9 & 10). In transcribing, I coded participants as follows: T= teacher of the lesson, Colleagues were assigned a number and F= facilitator. Each participant's contributions to the dialogue were numbered, for example 3.2, signified colleague number 3's second intervention in the dialogue. I then took the transcript and divided the discourse in the four sections corresponding to the four stages of the Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC). Based on viewing the videos, I divided the discourse into clauses (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 190). The symbol '/' was used to signify a break between one clause and another guided by natural breaks in teachers' own utterances.

Table 4.2 below shows the fine-grained analysis that followed this transcription. I systematically examined each utterance for the following:

What is presented first? What is the utterance organised around? This I called the Theme (highlighted in blue in the text and identified in column 2 below), which often corresponded to what in grammar terms would be the subject of the sentence. Where the subject matter was elipsed as can happen in discourse, I filled in these ellipses in square brackets [ ] (Martin and Rose, 2007a, p. 190).

I looked at what processing words, or activities, were used in relation to the themes (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 104). These are highlighted in red in the text and identified

in column 4 below. Using the three resources of repetition and synonym or contrasts, I identified how themes or processes were described (column 5).

I began a preliminary exercise in categorisation by looking for patterns in how topics were foregrounded. By foregrounding I mean the ‘tendency for text to make some meanings stand out against others’ (Martin and Rose, 2007a, p. 266). I then clustered these patterns under what I termed Macro Topics (column 6 below).

**Table 4.2: Sample of Ideational Analysis**

Speaker	Theme (Subject of the clause)		Processes	Synonyms/ Contrasts Association	Topic - Macro/Micro
<b>Stage one: Purpose To explore the issue: Analysis &amp; Diagnosis</b>					
F.1  <b>Professional Learning</b>	‘We’	Ok, listen//, thanks a million for coming back and <b>looking</b> at the video again// So// just for a starter, em, // because <b>we</b> have seen the video before// <b>we</b> might just have a <b>quick run around</b> //and say what are the things that <b>strike</b> us //..... and are there things that <b>strike</b> you now //that didn’t strike you before? So, <b>T</b> , will you <b>open</b> it ? [turning to the teacher of the lesson] //and then <b>we’ll</b> leave <b>you</b> to close this section, // Is that ok?..so we’ll <b>just talk a little bit</b> about ‘what do we <b>see</b> ’ when we <b>look at</b> the video of T’s lesson.//	This exercise involves:  ‘Thanks’  ‘things that strike us’  ‘looking at’ ‘talk a little’ ‘remember’	Open & close for beginning and ending a discussion Sharing as ‘having a quick run around’	Reflection on observed lesson  (one of the purposes of the feedback exercise)  <b>Professional learning</b>
T.1  <b>Theory of Learning</b>	‘T’ ‘they’ [the kids] ‘co-operation’ ‘one’ [child] ‘they’ [children]	Em, again, just looking at it a second time.// <b>I think</b> it’s great to <b>see how the kids worked together</b> , //just to <b>see them</b> totally engrossed, //([they were] <b>helping each other</b> and <b>working in groups of threes</b> //and, em certainly a fair bit of <b>cooperation</b> <b>going on</b> there //again there’s one previous scene //where you <b>see one</b> helping [another] with the spelling of some particular	This exercise involves teachers: Looking Thinking Seeing  Children’s learning	Learning= Working together= helping, working in groups, sticking to roles	Social Engagement with task Social structure Constructivism Co-constructive learning

Continuing the process of synthesis I again examined each discourse, stage by stage of the PPLC through the following questions:

A. What is the dominant semantic motif in Stage one of this discourse? I answered this question by:

- a. Counting the number of interventions (excluding the facilitator's) in Stage one of each discourse, I identified dominant themes based on the percentage of the interventions in which these themes were foregrounded.
- b. Taking a dominant theme, I examined what was said about this theme. I looked for, and then categorised, emerging patterns into categories and tested those categories through comparing and contrasting with the interventions in the other two dialogues.
- c. Critically examining the emerging picture and asking the question: what is going on here? I identified a final level of categorisation as seen in column 1 above.

B. How did the teachers use language to create this semantic motif?

I returned to the early analysis to identify the language the teachers had used when talking about the dominant themes and asked how the choice of language led to the overall meaning that was created.

This process was repeated at each cyclical stage of each dialogue.

### **Interpersonal Level of Meaning – Appraisal:**

The tool of appraisal is used to evaluate 'the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced' (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 25). I believe that illuminating teachers' attitudes and beliefs is pivotal to understanding the norms that underpin their conversation and facilitating learning to change practice. Furthermore, teachers' values are key to nurturing teachers' intrinsic motivation, of which I have already spoken as one of my own guiding

principles in this study. Martin and Rose, when speaking about the choices people make in discourse, describe it as follows:

The pattern of choices is thus 'prosodic'. They form a prosody of attitude running through the text that swells and diminishes, in the manner of a musical prosody. The prosodic pattern of appraisal choices constructs the 'stance' or 'voice' of the appraiser, and this stance or voice defines the kind of community that is being set up around shared values (2007, p. 59).

I undertook the analysis of values that underpin teachers' dialogue under the three main attitudinal appraisal systems: affect, judgment and appreciation. I include a sample illustration of how I went about this analysis in Table 4.3 below.

- a. Affect: People's feelings are analysed on a basis of being positive or negative, directly expressed or implied. Martin and Rose recommend examining affect guided by whether the instance was a surge of emotion, reacting to some external agency or an on-going mood and the degree to which they were more or less intense or involved intention or reaction (2007, chapter two).
- b. Judgment: Judgment reflects norms about how people should or should not behave. In that sense it can be thought of as the institutionalisation of feelings on what is or is not normative behaviour. In examining the text for judgment norms I focused on what was admired, criticised, acknowledge as normal or special.
- c. Appreciation: reflects norms about how products, things or performances are valued and in this sense can be thought of as institutionalisation of feeling on how these things are valued. In assessing what performances were valued I identified what people deemed useful or helpful or simply what they did or didn't like.

The manner in which I approached the analysis of attitudes is shown in Table 4.3:

- a. I systematically examined each text on a line by line basis and identified words or phrases that reflected any of the activities identified above under affect, appreciation and judgment. I entered these in the respective columns three and four.
- b. A distinctive feature of attitudes is that they are gradable (Martin and Rose, 2007) and to that end, I measured the intensity of force (strength of feeling:

High, Medium or Low) and/or the clarity of focus (Sharp, Medium or Soft) of each instance of affect, appreciation or judgment as shown in column six below.

- c. Finally, in column five, I identified the source of the feeling and any issues around modality. Modality may be viewed as another way of introducing additional voices into a text. Halliday (1994, cited in Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 53) describes modality as a resource which sets up a semantic space between yes and no, ‘a cline running between positive and negative poles’ (ibid). Modality may be negotiated through a text by using words such as ‘usually’ or ‘might’ or obligations about what must be done. Modality can open up a space for negotiation.

**Table 4.3 Sample of Appraisal Analysis**

Speaker		<u><b>Attitude – Affect</b></u> Feelings Positive/ Negative Direct/ Implied <u><b>Attitude– Appreciation</b></u> How products / performances are valued	<u><b>Attitude – Judgment</b></u> How people should/ shouldn’t behave Moral/Personal /Social/ Professional Esteem/Social Sanction	<u><b>Source of Attitude</b></u> Speaker or other Other: projection/ modality /concession	<u><b>Graduation of attitude:</b></u> Force or Focus  Force: High – medium-low  Focus: Sharp – regular- soft
3.8	I was just going to say that I think, particularly at the beginning when you open the letter [from the ‘Minister’]//, every single one, they were fully engaged,// they really took this to heart,// you could see that, //they were, they all found this topic really interesting //and that was a really good starting point... you have something that	Positive Appreciation of the colleagues practice  Positive appreciation of the children’s interest	Tentative: ‘just going to say’	Colleague	Focus: Sharp: ‘every single one of them’  Force: High ‘they were fully engaged’ ‘they really took this to heart’



By way of synthesis I then looked for patterns and created provisional categories which I tested against the emerging patterns in the other two dialogues. I examined the emerging picture in each discourse, individually at first then collectively through answering the following questions:

1. What are the dominant attitudinal motifs of this dialogue?
2. How have these attitudinal resources been deployed to position listeners?

### **Negotiational Level of Meaning**

Martin and Rose (2007, p. 219) describe negotiation as being concerned with 'interaction as an exchange between speakers, how speakers adopt and assign roles to each other in dialogue, and how moves are organised in relation to one another'. It is the tool of analysis to examine the back and forth, or turn-taking of conversation. As this is a self-study action research and I am the facilitator of the cycle of dialogue that is the source of the discourse I examine my own role through the lens of negotiational level of meaning.

By way of putting this tool in context it is important to remember that in any discourse we typically use different grammatical structures to realize the same speech function but how we phrase it is significant. For example: 'What is your name?', 'Could you tell me your name?' or 'Tell me your name' are three different grammatical constructs that could have different impacts on the interactional relationship. The different effects of realising this simple social interaction phrased in a question form or used in a command format could be quite significant in the social relationships that are formed. Thus one dimension of this analysis was about how I phrased my interventions.

The questions that guided my analysis of my facilitating role are informed by the generic purpose of each stage of the Peer Professional Learning Cycle. These I have outlined in representing the findings in the next chapter. Little (2002) claims that discourse analysis offers an important resource in this area. I suggest that SFL offers one window through which to view that discourse. In the next chapter I describe what I saw through that window.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS FROM PHASE TWO

### 5.1 Introduction

The findings from phase two of the research identify the normative frameworks that underpinned the teachers' professional dialogue when discussing observed practice. By framework I mean 'a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that constitute a way of viewing reality'<sup>14</sup> and I use 'normative' as 'a standard, model or pattern regarded as typical'<sup>15</sup>. The findings from this study focus on a) the concepts and assumptions that were typical of what teachers talked about, b) the values that characterised their dialogue and c) the practices that defined how I, as facilitator, negotiated the application of the model of Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC). I do not claim that the following findings exhaust the range of possible interpretations that a linguist would elicit from the dialogues that constitute my data base. I do, however, claim that the findings are valid, and verifiably fit for the purpose for which they are intended. The focus of the analysis is to identify teachers' assumptions, values and practices as they shape their own and others' learning in the context of a professional learning community. Taken within the context of this action research, the purpose of such identification is to offer teachers an opportunity to 'unpack' their own assumptions, values and practices with a view to making the hidden visible and leading to improved, more informed awareness in the collaborative inquiry process. Engaging the teachers in the analytic process also offered the opportunity for building their capacity as leaders of their own reflective processes within the school. As facilitator, engaging in self-study action research I also focus on what the findings reveal about my facilitation of the intervention in phase two.

While Creswell (1998, p. 188) suggests that in the case of qualitative analysis the balance of accountability leans more towards verification than validation, I draw on both dimensions in support of the integrity of the research. I base my claim to validity on a) my interpretation of the tools for analysis as promoted by Martin and Rose (2007), and

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<sup>14</sup> (source: dictionary on-line accessed 01 May 2009)

<sup>15</sup> (source: dictionary.com accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May 2009)

b) the teachers' acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the findings. I base my claim to the findings being verifiably fit for purpose on the fact that a) the dialogue upon which the analysis is based has been video-recorded, viewed by the participants, who have confirmed that the transcription is a faithful recording of what took place, b) large extracts are offered as validatory evidence in the appendices, and c) that any interpretations I offer are supported by direct references from the transcription. In the interest of ensuring the anonymity of the participants, any references that could identify the school or the teachers have been removed. However, given that discourse analysis is primarily an interpretive exercise I take responsibility for the overall analysis of this study and stand over the findings. I take confidence in doing so from the advice of Halliday for whom 'the value of a theory, lies in the use that can be made of it, and I have always considered a theory of language to be essentially consumer oriented' (Halliday, 1985a, p. 7). However, in claiming validity I do not claim exclusivity on truth. I am, like Wodak & Ludwig (1999, p. 13) aware that readers and listeners, depending on their background knowledge and information and their position, might have different interpretations of the same communicative event.

All teachers participated in the discussion as illustrated in the following tables:

**Table 5.1: Record of Participants' Interventions in Post-Observation Conferences**

<b>Conference :</b> Z <b>No. of People in Group:</b> 6 + Facilitator <b>Total Word Count:</b> 3609 <b>No. of Turns Taken in Discussion:</b> 90				
Speaker	Number of words spoken	Percentage of total word count	Number of turns taken in discussion	Percentage of total turns taken
Facilitator	1108	31%	25	28%
Teacher (T)	995	28%	22	24%
Speaker 3	437	12%	14	16%
Speaker 4	162	4%	4	4%
Speaker 5	158	4%	9	10%
Speaker 6	484	14%	9	10%
Speaker 7	265	7%	7	8%

<b>Conference: Y</b> <b>No. of People in Group: 5 + Facilitator</b> <b>Total Word Count: 3767</b> <b>No. of Turns Taken in Discussion: 115</b>				
Speaker	Number of words spoken	Percentage of total word count	Number of turns taken in discussion	Percentage of total turns taken
Facilitator	619	16%	26	23%
Teacher (T)	883	24%	24	21%
Speaker 2	534	14%	16	14%
Speaker 3	436	12%	9	8%
Speaker 4	952	25%	26	23%
Speaker 5	343	9%	14	12%

<b>Conference: X</b> <b>No. of People in Group: 4 + Facilitator</b> <b>Total Word Count: 4858</b> <b>No. of Turns Taken in Discussion: 120</b>				
Speaker	Number of words spoken	Percentage of total word count	Number of turns taken in discussion	Percentage of total turns taken
Facilitator	969	20%	25	21%
Teacher 1 (T1)	1329	27%	28	23%
Teacher 2 (T2)	1364	28%	33	27%
Speaker 3	472	10%	14	12%
Speaker 4	724	15%	20	17%

By way of clarifying the process of the conferences, I open with how I, as facilitator, negotiated the application of the model of Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC, see 5.2 below). I will then present the concepts and assumptions that were typical of what teachers talked about (see 5.3 below), and the values that characterised their dialogue (see 5.4 below).

## **5.2 The Role of Facilitator in Negotiating the Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC)**

I interpreted my role as one of creating the conditions for the dialogic intention of each stage to be realised. Using the tool of analysis that Martin and Rose call negotiation, two key dimensions of the process came to the fore as being significant and typical: how the dialogic intention of each phase of the cycle was realised and my facilitator's introduction at the opening of stage one of the cycle.

### ***5.2.1 How the Dialogic Intention of each phase of the PPLC was realised***

In this section, I present the findings in the cyclical, generic sequence of the model itself.

#### **Stage One**

There were four generic parts to stage one, mirroring its dialogic intention: a description of the 'issue' or 'dilemma'<sup>16</sup> by the teacher of the lesson; an exploration of the issue from different perspectives through colleagues' questioning for clarity; and an analysis of the root cause of the issue to answer the question: what is the problem and what is its root cause?

The issues presented for discussion were: In conference Z, the teacher wondered if modelling the writing genre would have improved the lesson or would it have 'affect[ed] creativity'. In conference Y, the teacher asked 'how can we help the children peer assess'? In conference X the focus of the teachers' problem was on the weaker children for whom the lesson seemed, 'to just go over their heads'.

In all three conferences the 'dilemmas' were explored to different degrees. The teachers did question their teacher colleague for clarity. Typically such questioning tended to be more closed than open, often including possible answers within the question itself. This could be intended to ensure that the colleague would not feel such questioning was by way of challenge. Examples from each conference follow:

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<sup>16</sup> Dilemma as used in this thesis, reflects the meaning that participants came to attribute to it over the course of the intervention: a difficulty that was puzzling and for which the person did not immediately have a manageable solution.

*So, rather than picking on their spellings ... Were you hoping ...through the piece that they would show they understand by...explaining 'hibernation'? So what do you make of that? Is it a recall issue? A retention issue? Find out maybe with a new lesson?*

All three conferences indicate teachers' uncertainty in how to analyse examples of children's writing. The comments tended to be general such as *'this boy seems to have a problem'*. Samples of children's writing were brought to two of the conferences and in the third instance the written work was shown in the video in close up being read by the children. However, there was no agreed approach to examining children's work. In conference X the teachers came close to an analysis by clarifying the steps that the teachers had followed from introducing the task to the end of the lesson. A number of ideas were surfaced but the conference did not lead to an agreed articulation of the root of the problem for the 'weaker' children. My facilitation of the conference sometimes led the teachers away from deep analysis rather than toward it. This tended to happen when instances of silence led me to intervene instead of allowing for thinking time. *'We'll move on then...'* was typical of such an intervention.

## **Stage Two**

The dialogic intention of stage two was to: articulate the learning gained from stage one; visioning the desired future and answering the questions: Where do I want to go? What supports do I need to get there? The realisation of stage two varied across the three conferences and reflected a difference in how I as facilitator negotiated the dialogic intention:

In Conferences Y and Z, I introduced stage two as *'moving on'* and *'reflecting on ...any new insights we might have gained'* and also flagged where we would be going in stage three. By referring to 'new insights' in this general way its unintended effect was, again, to move the discussion away from the specific dilemma identified at the start by the teacher. In articulating their learning the teachers picked up this cue and all referred to a range of pedagogical themes such as: integration, sequencing ideas and sourcing background information. A number of teachers said they drew personal learning from the stage one, not just the teacher of the lesson.

In conference X, I also asked if the teachers could identify ‘the nub of the dilemma’ which merged in the interventions that followed as that the weaker children ‘were overwhelmed’. It is not clear if they were overwhelmed by the task or the fact that there were a number of extra adults in the room during the observed lesson. The facilitation did not lead to clarifying this uncertainty. There was only one instance of visioning of the desired future, and an attempt at identifying supports that teachers would need, to get to that desired future in conference X.

### **Stage Three**

The dialogic intention of stage three was that the lesson-teacher would set out their own goals, their colleagues would then brainstorm strategies with them leading to an action plan in the form of: What? When? Where? How?

In conferences Y and Z, I introduced stage three by inviting the group to think about what they might try to introduce in their own teaching as a result of the discussion. The responses identified a range of teaching strategies around integration and group work. Conference X offered more focused suggestions in terms of scaffolding learning.

### **Stage Four**

The dialogic intention of stage four was to review the process of the conference and answer the questions: How has this session helped my learning? Might it have been better if...?

There was agreement across all three conferences that teachers appreciated the opportunity to ‘share ideas’ and ‘agree practices’. The exercise of videoing lessons was deemed very helpful by the teachers whose practice was videoed. One of the teachers described it as follows:

*I didn't really mind having the video in the room, I'd have to say. I hardly knew it was there...but you know afterwards it was very helpful...when I looked through it again, you know you could follow things up ...it was good for me to look at myself in that way I suppose.*

In conference X, one of the observed teachers challenged the honesty of the process:

*I think people hold back on anything that they think they would have done differently...I'd say with colleagues they will tell you the good things'.*

This was refuted by colleagues.

In analysing the degree to which the facilitation of the PPLC model of post-observation meeting led to teachers' reflection on practice the findings show that reflection being focused on the children's learning rather than on what the teachers did or did not do. In each case there were brief comments by the observed teachers, such as in conference Z when referring to something he noted about his own practice in relation to the learning support colleague *'I could have involved her more.....I could have ...let B expand [on the topic] a bit more'*. The dominance of the children's learning as the focus of reflection could be directly linked to a suggestion I made at a staff meeting two months previously. By way of building confidence in sharing feedback and making it less threatening by taking the emphasis away from the teacher's 'performance', I assured teachers that the 'gaze' would be on the children's learning. However, in these conferences the children's learning was always viewed against the backdrop of how the teacher led the class as illustrated in the following comment

*We talked about giving a different worksheet for the weaker students but we didn't do it.*

### **5.2.2 The Facilitator's Introduction**

As facilitator, my introduction in all three instances<sup>17</sup> involved: expressing gratitude to the teachers for attending, setting time boundaries, outlining the format, flagging to the teacher of the lesson that he/she would be opening the dialogue and gaining his/her permission for that to be the case. The introduction also served to reduce the formality of the occasion, given that it was the teachers first time engaging in the PPLC and in the awareness that it was being videoed.

This was achieved by using understatement phrases such as: 'talk a little bit about', 'have a quick run around' and 'what are the things that strike us?'

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<sup>17</sup> The extract from conference Y is not included as it was not captured on video, however it followed a similar pattern to other two.



*So it's a quarter to nine now<sup>18</sup> ... We should be finished by about half nine, is that ok? Perfect.... And if you think I'm staying too long at any one point just say so, Ok?... good morning folks, and I genuinely thank you for coming in so early in the morning, I appreciate it. So again, we're going to follow the model of feedback for professional learning, that we've been talking about and we're looking in particular at T1's & T2's lesson Ok? would you two [turning to the two teachers who co-taught the lesson the previous week] like to start and talk a little bit about what the experience was like for you, in general, you know, the story from the beginning, from planning it together etc.? [Conference X]*

*Ok ...thanks a million for coming back and looking at the video again. So just for a starter, because we have seen the video before we might have a quick run around and say what are the things that strike us and maybe even the things that struck you the first time you know.....So, T. will you open it and then we'll leave you to close this section. Is that ok?* [Conference Z]

As facilitator I used the introduction to let the teachers know that it was in their gift to participate or not in this conference, and that it was outside of their normal school day: 'coming in so early in the morning... I really appreciate it'. I also reassured them that I knew their time was limited by giving them a finishing time. The use of 'we' was by way of identifying with them in the process but from a discourse analysis perspective, it could also be interpreted as involving the group in a relationship of coercive compliance with me as facilitator: 'we'll leave you to close this section'. Likewise, the repetitive use of 'Ok?' intended by way of reassurance could equally be interpreted as paying lip service to participative practice. I clearly wanted to reassure the teachers in their first experience of using the PPLC that they could trust me in the process. While there is a strong sense of the facilitator being in charge 'we're going to follow the model of professional learning that we have talked about', I experienced a limit to that power of agency. It could be said that in all three conferences to the extent that the facilitator exercised power it was over the process of the conference, but it was the teacher of the lesson who determined the nature and depth of the inquiry that was engaged in.

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<sup>18</sup> Formal teaching time in the school begins at 8.55. This meeting had started late and the principal facilitated 'cover' for the teachers to allow them have the meeting.

From a discourse perspective a number of common patterns emerged in all three conferences:

- The facilitator was usually the person to make the first intervention after a pause in the conversation.
- Sometimes the interactions between facilitator and the group resembled that of a teacher and class in terms of the directed nature of the language or in situations of question–answer interactions.
- Teachers did engage at all levels of the dialogue and stayed on task throughout the conferences.
- There was no evidence of conflict in any of the dialogues.
- All teachers indicated that they had learned through the process, not just the teachers of the observed lessons, as expressed: *‘all of us took away our own learning’*.
- The facilitation set the tone of being protective of a peer’s professional reputation through regularly ‘flagging’ sequence of the discussion to the observed teacher so that he/she would not be caught unawares. Similarly regularly checking with *‘Ok?’* reassured the teacher that they had control of the process.
- There was no clear evidence of the facilitation leading teachers to engage specifically in self-reflection or meta-learning.
- The teachers did not take notes while viewing the video, and while they only referred to it infrequently, it was at all times ‘present’ in the discussion. It also offered a neutral point of referral between the classroom and the discussion that was taking place.
- As facilitator my stance in general was tentative and did not often challenge or attempt to ‘elevate’ the discussion.

### 5.3 What Teachers Talked About: Concepts and Assumptions

All conferences looked at pedagogical issues. Conferences Y and Z focused on methodologies: the concepts of peer assessment and modelling writing respectively. Conference X concentrated on how to engage the ‘weaker’ learner in the context of a large class size and no classroom assistant. There were high levels of convergence in terms of the underlying concepts and assumptions in all cases.

There was evidence of a shared terminology when referring to the pupils in all three dialogues as demonstrated in the following table:

**Table 5.2: Terminology Used by Teachers when Referring to Pupils**

	Pupils	Students	Learner	Child/Children	They	Boys	Lads	He	Kids
Conference Z	2	0	0	15	61	1	3	2	3
Conference Y	1	1	0	21	65	1	0	0	0
Conference X	0	9	0	20	75	0	0	0	3

The opening observation, in each dialogue is from the teacher of the lesson and places the children at the heart of the discussion:

*I think it's great to see how **the kids** worked together* (Conference Z)

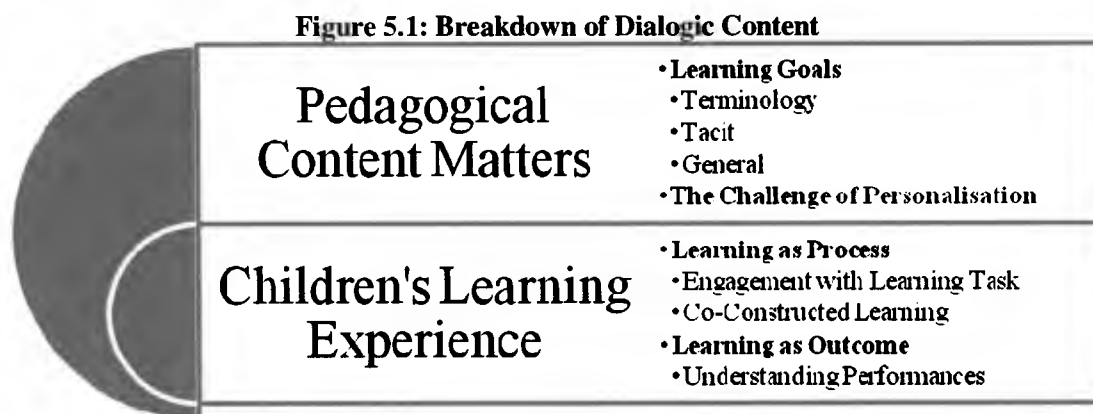
*What I thought we might look at was ‘how can we help **the children** peer assess?’*  
(Conference Y)

*We'd been doing the genre for a little while, for a few weeks. We'd had a bit of a break ..., so it was really going back to it about six weeks later...**re-assessing what the children knew, what they'd remember** and really our learning intention for this lesson was how to use the **skills they'd learned**, how to use persuasive writing as a genre* (Conference X)

It was so taken for granted that the students were at the heart of the dialogue that the term ‘they’, used about two hundred times throughout the course of the dialogues never needed explaining. The use of the terms ‘children’ or ‘kids’, I suggest, positions the listener into a relationship with the person of the learner. It is fair to say that the children dominated the dialogue in all three instances. The nature of the relationship between child and teacher is discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

### 5.3.1 Children's Learning Experience

The following figure captures the essence of the dialogic content across the three conferences:



The dominant theme around which all three dialogues were built was the children's learning experience, and the concepts and assumptions that underpinned the content of those dialogues pertained to pedagogical content matters (Shulman, 1986) and professional learning. The following table illustrates the percentage of interventions in each dialogue that are organised around this theme.

**Table 5.3: Percentage of Interventions that Foregrounded Children's Learning as a Theme or Topic**

Stage of PPLC	Total Number of Interventions (excluding Facilitator)		Children's Learning in Conference Z	Children's Learning in Conference Y	Children's Learning in Conference X
Stage one	1	30	a)43%	a)44%	a)47%
	2	59	b)30%	b)14%	b)20%
	3	36			
Stage two	1	8	a)29%	a)67%	a)100%
	2	7	b)29%	b)17%	b)0%
	3	4			
Stage three	1	17	a)53%	a)83%	a)30%
	2	6	b)12%	b)0%	b)18%
	3	17			
Stage 4	1	11	a)0%	a)17%	a)0%
	2	6	b)18%	b)0%	b)5%
	3	20			

a) = when children featured as the dominant nominal theme around which the interventions are organised, b) = when children were included or implied in the intervention.

A number of constants emerged through the analysis of all three dialogues. These concepts and assumptions focused on children's learning experiences in the school and may be categorised under two main headings: Learning as Process; Learning as Outcome.

### **5.3.1a Learning as Process: Engagement with Learning Tasks**

In conference Z, the whole opening intervention by the teacher of the lesson was about the children's engagement in the learning task, in response to being asked by the facilitator about what 'struck' him when he saw his own practice on video:

*... I think it's great to see how the kids worked together, just to see them totally engrossed. [they were] helping each other and working in groups of threes and certainly a fair bit of cooperation going on there again there's one previous scene where you see one helping [another] with the spelling of some particular words... and they seemed to stick to the roles they had, which was secretary, reporter who wrote down [what was said] and a captain who made sure everybody made a contribution and the person who looked up the dictionary or just checked the book. Again the vocabulary they used... I thought was quite impressive as well because it's a follow up to a science lesson and it comes across very well, they picked up a fair bit of knowledge*

Through the language choices made, the teacher sometimes positioned himself within the scenario and sometimes outside of it, indicative of an uncertainty in how to look at one's own practice. Placing oneself outside the events may be interpreted as allowing for objectivity in viewing it while protecting oneself from any negative reactions. Positioning oneself as a participant may be construed as identifying oneself closely with what happened.

In conference Y the first colleague's intervention identified the children's engagement with the learning task as an indicator that the teacher had successfully introduced the lesson with a clear explanation of the genre and the task that was to be done.

*I thought T. explained it [explanation writing] very well yeah -, it really was very clear, and watching them [the children] doing it, they were very focused and they were busy and they were enjoying it, which is important*

Likewise, in conference X

*... particularly at the beginning when you open the letter [from the 'Minister'], every single one, they were fully engaged, they really took this to heart, you could see that, they were, they all found this topic really interesting and that was a really good starting point*

In terms of SFL analysis the teachers use the resource of identification; they identified a variety of indicators showing how the children engaged in the learning task. In all cases it builds a picture of a very busy, active classroom emanating energy. Momentum is built up by the repetition of strong processing words like: 'totally engrossed' 'working', 'doing it', 'were very focused', 'were enjoying it' and 'were fully engaged'. The level of detail captured by the teachers reflects a habit of alertness to reading signs of the learners' body language as a source of on-going feedback. The intervention in conference X signals that this level of engagement did not continue using phrases like: 'particularly at the beginning' and 'a really good starting point' to flag the difficulties that later arose.

The learning tasks in all cases, were defined by the teacher and time bound by the teacher's daily or weekly timetable. It is assumed that learning happens within blocks of time and completion or incompletion of the learning task within the allocated period of time is a factor in gauging learning as indicated in the following extract from conference X:

*He [showing a sample of a child's writing] was given extra time... later on, he did a bit more, so he wouldn't have actually done all that...*

It seemed to be assumed that each new block of time involved a new learning task. The incompletion of work within the time allowed was a significant concern in the conferences.

Conference Z

*They'll just put down one or two sentences and not fully develop the points. They know how to explain it, they just don't write it down*

#### Conference Y

*... the stronger boy wrote it, and the other [boy] felt he was contributing, but he [‘weaker boy] wouldn’t have been able to do it on his own – he wouldn’t have been able to write anything*  
*Their ideas are often mixed up...in that case there [referring to a pair working together on videoed lesson] It was the speed at which J. was trying to get it down on paper really was the problem for the weaker partner. He was very slow ... and rubbing out, which is a thing weak children tend to use as a cover up., and just getting it on paper was his problem*

#### Conference X

*So in the lesson they were doing independent writing, I was working with, I sat with the weaker children but even still they didn’t really complete the work so we..., we don’t have a learning assistant either*

The language used by the teachers suggests that the problem of incompleteness of the learning task was not simply characteristic of this lesson but a pattern. In some instances, by changing the verb tenses teachers suggest this is a regular occurrence: ‘they’ll just put down one or two sentences’ ‘he wouldn’t have been able to write anything’. Other issues are introduced almost unconsciously in the add-on manner that Martin and Rose (2007) describe as ‘HyperNew’: The child who does not complete the task is aware of its implications and tries to hide it ‘*he was very slow...and rubbing it out, which is a thing weak children tend to use as a cover up*’. A further issue for the teacher is the challenge of personalising learning in the context of large class sizes (thirty children in this case), as she adds ‘we don’t have a learning assistant either’ almost as a throwaway comment.

#### Co-Construction of Understanding

The explicit use of the words ‘learn’ or ‘learning’ is infrequent across all conferences:

##### Explicit Use of Words ‘Learn’ or ‘Learning’

	In teachers’ interventions	In facilitator’s interventions
Conference Z – 6 instances	3	3
Conference Y – 5 instances	2	3
Conference X – 11 instances	5	6

In all three conferences, the dominant image of learning is of engaging with others in co-constructing meaning and understanding. Interventions referring to groups of

children engaging in a joint task were interspersed through all three conferences, creating an impression of classrooms in which the teachers create opportunities for the social dimension of learning to be realised. A typical comment:

*For people that are into sport, or computers, it's a great opportunity to share it....kids working a lot in groups, working together rather than on their own, they're getting in to the habit of it now...(Conference Z).*

However, when the teacher adds 'they're getting into the habit of it now' it lets the listener know that this is a relatively new norm of practice in the context of teaching writing.

Other times co-constructing meaning is of the 'stronger' learner helping the 'weaker' learner:

*...a stronger boy was with a weaker boy. And the other boy [weaker] actually helped an awful lot, and he just talked out his ideas to his partner and the other [partner] wrote it down (Conference Y).*

And finally of a joint activity between teacher and learner:

*We'd done that as a class so.... and so then we talked about how we'd start that together.*

*...We had done a lesson on the ear using SCSE, again they knew from the piece of explanation writing we worked on at the very start, we went through what makes a piece of explanation writing. Again they came up with...*

Just as I did as facilitator of the group, teachers invariably moved in and out of using 'we' and 'they' throughout the dialogues, sometimes including themselves with the learners and other times not.

### **5.3.1b Learning as Outcome: Understanding Performances**

In all three conferences the learning task served the dual purpose of being the medium of children's learning and constituting the evidence of learning. Learning for understanding featured highly in all three conferences. Understanding, and understanding performances (Perkins, 1992), were identified as the ultimate teaching objective in all three instances, as evidenced in the following responses to being asked about the learning goal:



*...that they understand the requirements of the genre... The whole idea...is... to explain how, so I suppose the question is: Did they explain in their piece of writing? (Conference Z)*

*Were you hoping ...that through the piece that they would show they understand by ...explaining 'hibernation'? (Conference Y)*

*Our lesson intention was how to use the skills they had learned – how to use the genre in a real context. (Conference X)*

The intervention from conference Y noted above, introduces a new element of variability into the discussion when the colleague asks of the teacher 'were you hoping...?' Learner understanding is seen as a fundamental objective of teaching but the understanding outcome is not solely achieved through the teacher, it is achieved through the learner. In a class context that could potentially mean that the teacher's objective could be realised in thirty different ways. Spanning the gap between teacher intention and learner realisation was a strong feature of the dialogues.

### 5.3.2 Pedagogical Content Matters

Children's learning was explored predominantly through pedagogical content matters.

Their incidence in each conference is shown in the following table:

**Table 5.4: Percentage of Interventions that Foregrounded Pedagogical Content Matters**

Stage of PPLC	Total Number of Interventions (excluding Facilitator)		Pedagogical Content Matters in Conference Z	Pedagogical Content Matters in Conference Y	Pedagogical Content Matters in Conference X
Stage one	Conference Z	30	a) 50%	a)51%	a) 36%
	Conference Y	59	b) 13%	b)7%	b) 8%
	Conference X	36			
Stage two	Conference Z	8	a) 57%	a)83%	a) 50%
	Conference Y	7	b) 0%	b)17%	b) 25%
	Conference X	4			
Stage three	Conference Z	17	a)35%	a)67%	a) 47%
	Conference Y	6	b)23%	b)33%	b) 24%
	Conference X	17			
Stage 4	Conference Z	11	a)0%	a)17%	a) 5%
	Conference Y	6	b)27%	b)17%	b) 10%
	Conference X	20			

a) = when pedagogical content matters featured or co-featured as the dominant nominal theme around which the interventions was organised,

b) b) = when pedagogical content matters were included or implied in the intervention.

Within the band of pedagogical content matters the two dominant issues pertained to i) learning goals and ii) the challenge of personalising learning.

### **Learning Goals**

In all three conferences the dialogue included a number of references to learning goals that indicated a lack of shared meaning and suggested a degree of confusion. The following terminology was used: In conference Z the teacher spoke of *'the objectives that were set out at the beginning were met'*. The use of the passive tense suggests that the criteria by which the lesson was deemed a success were on a global, whole class level more than at the level of the individual learner. In conference Y the reference to learning intentions was indirect and implied. The lesson was deemed to have worked because *'they engaged in the activity'*, *'they worked hard and knew what they were doing'* and the overall purpose of the lesson was that the children would *'at the end ... [have] a few good sentences that indicated what hibernation was'*. Conference X was the only instance in which the term 'learning intention' was specifically used and was identified as showing how the children might:

*...use the skills they had learned, how to use persuasive writing as a genre to communicate opinions and ideas in... [in response to] a letter from ... the Minister for Health, banning Easter Eggs.*

In reference to learning intentions, the findings show two constants: In the first instance, teachers' learning intentions were often left tacit rather than made explicit. In conference Z, in response to being asked if the children knew the learning intention, the teacher's response was that they knew what to do because *'The title was called 'How do we hear?'* and they had *'gone through explanation writing'*.

Secondly, interventions that referred to learning intentions were usually general learning goals rather than specific ones and focused on applying the writing genre within a simulated real context. In conference Y the teacher of the lesson identified the lack of specific focus or criteria in teacher assessment.

*... we're looking for perfection. We're looking for handwriting, spelling, grammar.... content!*

Again using identification, she emphasises the ‘catch all’ nature of the teacher’s assessment of a piece of writing.

### **The Challenge of Personalising Learning**

All three discussions were based on whole class teaching methods. All children were set the same task and were assessed by the same criteria. The children worked in mixed ability groups in the case of two lessons and in the third case the ‘weaker’ children sat in one group to enable the co-teacher ‘to work with them’. I discuss how teachers categorised learners in the next section, but for now I discuss those categories in relation to the challenges that teachers frequently referred to in conferences Y and Z. Teachers spoke about the pedagogical challenge of responding to a wide spectrum of abilities in large class context and the concept of scaffolding learning. Scaffolding learning is based on Bruner’s (2006) work on Vygotsky’s ideas around the zone of proximal learning (Vygotsky, 1978). A number of ‘vignettes’ capture instances of teachers talking about, but not specifically using, the term scaffolding:

*...and our problem the dilemma we found was that... the weaker children, it kind of seemed to just go over their heads. So in the lesson they were doing independent writing, I was working with... the weaker children, but even still they didn’t really complete the work, we don’t have a learning assistant either.... We had talked previously about doing a different worksheet where they could outline less opinion points. The rest of the class had three arguments to give. Three FOR and 1 AGAINST. We talked about giving a different worksheet for the weaker students but we didn’t do it, thinking they could just do one of each reason [1 argument for and 1 against] ...*

Supporting individual children’s learning is viewed in the above extract from conference X, as intentionally about differentiation:

*... we had talked previously ....we talked about giving a different worksheet for the weaker students but we didn’t do it thinking they could just do one of each reason.*

The original intention was clear: ‘we had talked previously’ and again ‘we talked about’. The use of the conjunctive ‘but’ flags the change of mind that resulted in the ‘weaker’ children doing the same worksheet as all other students.

In conference Y supporting children's learning was again presented as a staged activity over time:

*Initially you start them off you give them [the questions] and then maybe eventually they can come up with their own...or even maybe using key words that they, you know for hibernation, we could do that.*

The use of 'initially' followed by 'eventually' captures the time span over which learning happens for some learners but again there is a lack of certainty that learning will result in learner understanding through the use of 'maybe' and 'eventually'.

#### **5.4 Values that Underpinned Teachers' Professional Dialogue**

To look at the values that underpin teachers' dialogue, I focus on the key topics about which teachers typically expressed strong feelings. The teachers appreciated when children '*worked hard*', were '*busy*', '*knew what they were doing*', could work '*independently*', '*were very focused*', could '*think a bit more*' '*had their own opinions/ideas*' and '*enjoyed*' the learning tasks.

In terms of pedagogical practice, the teachers spoke enthusiastically about '*a well structured lesson*', '*getting through a lot of work*', '*protecting children's self esteem*', '*clear*' explanations, teaching for '*understanding*', '*applying learning to real life context*'. Teachers did not appreciate comparing one child's work with that of another. Two foregrounded themes emerged in the dialogic analysis in terms of their frequency and the strength of feelings they engendered in the speakers.

##### **5.4.1 The Learners**

In all three conferences, teachers expressed strong feelings around two categories of learners, which they described as 'the stronger' and the 'weaker'. The term 'weak' or 'weaker' was used thirty one times across the three conferences, while the term 'strong' or 'stronger' was used twelve times. One teacher captures the shared nature of the underlying 'struggle':

*...remember they all have weak students in their class, they all have strong students in their class, and something that we all struggle to do is meet the needs of all*

*... so in a lot of ways, you know we could sit in on them [colleagues] ... and it would probably be the exact same outcome that we'd still be sitting here discussing 'are the weaker ones the ones that maybe need the focus of our attention?'*

The impact of the above intervention is to normalise the experience across all participants and thereby reduce the tension that could lie within exposing difficulties with practice. There is a certain inevitability, and helplessness in face of that inevitability, in the teacher's claim.

In conference X the teacher of the lesson described her ideal scenario for the 'weaker' learner as follows:

*That they independently come up with some argument in some form whether it's in writing or pictures, that they're getting their opinion across and taking part in the class as much as the stronger students...I think completing work [is] important ...And if they can do it with a bit of independence.*

The behaviours and performances that are identified as valued in the above extract were repeatedly echoed in the other conferences and were the behaviours and performances typified by the 'strong' learners: Teachers appreciated and encouraged children's capacities to work independently, to think for oneself, to articulate one's own opinions, fully participate in the lesson, and complete assigned tasks within time boundaries.

Two distinct learner profiles emerged from the analysis. Martin and Rose's (2007) analytic tool of appraisal facilitated identifying the performances or behaviours that teachers did or did not value, appreciate, or admire. In column one of Table 5.5, I identify the two learner profiles as the 'weaker learner' and the 'stronger learner' with the respective descriptions that emerged in the dialogues. In column two I focus on what the findings reveal as the teachers' assumptions about each and in column three the dominant feelings expressed by the teachers in respect of each learner profile.

**Table 5.5: Summary of Learner Characteristics as Described in the Dialogues**

<b>Learner Profile</b>	<b>Teacher's Assumptions about this learner</b>	<b>Teachers' dominant feeling in respect of this learner</b>
<p><b>A Weaker Learner Profile</b> as implied in teachers' dialogue, these learners have:</p> <p><b>difficulty in conceptual understanding;</b> : [it] 'went over their heads'</p> <p><b>difficulty in retaining learning;</b> <i>I don't actually remember the weaker children finding as much difficulty with it six weeks ago, as they did when we revised it recently</i></p> <p><b>difficulty in articulating opinions;</b> <i>they had to come up with the ideas but I think it took that bit longer for them to – to express them</i></p> <p><b>are not engaged – outside of the main class activity the weaker students were a little overwhelmed</b></p> <p><b>do not complete learning tasks</b> <i>he['weaker boy] wouldn't have been able to do it on his own – he wouldn't have been able to write anything</i></p>	<p><b>They are dependent on others to engage them:</b></p> <p><i>How can they be brought into the class when you don't have extra help? but this time... I sat with them in the group...</i></p> <p><b>They need to be protected:</b></p> <p><i>So I think you need to be very careful how you pair a weaker child, especially if their writing is kind of...</i></p> <p><b>They have a passive role within the learning experience</b> and learning may be more incidental:</p> <p><i>Even the weaker ones seemed to have picked up on a few of those things ... sometimes the weaker ones, they don't contribute too much but I think they're listening and learning and they'll be picking it up</i></p> <p><b>Require targeted support</b> within each lesson</p> <p><i>We'd had a lot of discussion with the weaker group</i></p> <p><i>you had the weaker students at one table so you would be able to work with them</i></p> <p><b>Need scaffolded learning to achieve</b></p> <p><i>And even the weaker children if they only put one sentence into each section they will feel they have achieved something which is very good</i></p>	<p><b>Overwhelmed:</b> by the width of the gap between expected and realised learning:</p> <p><i>...it's because of literacy skills, writing skills, everything!</i></p> <p><b>Empathy &amp; Protectiveness:</b></p> <p><i>they could have understood exactly what was being asked of them, but ...their writing [skills] might not be as high standard as their cognitive skills. 'you don't want, every piece of work to be incomplete, for them' ..that's quite daunting actually to be given a blank page ...getting to go ahead straight away when; you know there's too much going on...</i></p>

<b>A Stronger Learner Profile.</b> These learners are or have: <b>conceptual understanding;</b> <b>capable and work</b> <b>independently</b> <i>'knew what they were doing'</i>	<b>The stronger learner can be challenged</b> <i>while it may have challenged the more capable children, it was too far above the weaker children all together...</i> <i>I would like to see about stretching the better pupils</i>	<b>Appreciation</b>
<b>have opinions, are articulate and think logically:</b> <i>These are the very capable students who were able to produce quite concise arguments</i>	<b>Helps the 'weaker' peer</b> <i>the stronger boy wrote it and the other [boy] felt he was contributing, but he['weaker boy] wouldn't have been able to do it on his own</i>	
Most of what we learn about teachers 'assumptions around 'strong' learners is by contrast with the 'weak' learner. Strong learners: <b>Complete tasks, active learners, engage, retain learning and achieve</b>	<b>The stronger learner is the benchmark that determines whether a lesson 'worked' or not:</b> <i>overall we thought the children had done very well</i>	

Findings from the analysis identify two key values that underpin the teachers' practice when working with the children in their classes:

Firstly, a strong egalitarian desire to offer equality of opportunity for all learners added an edge to the struggle as outlined above –

*Of course they both have to give an opinion, and even have the strong one write it so that they get something down, but they both have to give an opinion.*

And in another instance when describing roles within the group activity included was

*... a captain who made sure everybody made a contribution.*

The repetition of '*both have to give an opinion*' emphasises the importance in the eyes of the teacher and in the second instance the phrase '*made sure*' stresses the inclusiveness of the role in involving everybody.

Secondly, the relationship with the children emerged as a strong bond for the teachers in the three conferences as admiration for the children in their classes:

*They're amazing [referring to children in class] because it didn't bother them at all, I was self-conscious; I just wanted to get out of the way!*

The warmth of their personal relationship with their children was caught in a moment in conference Y, when one teacher referred with a smile to:

*... the faces of the boys who they were assessing! They were very good! [Group laugh] well N. particularly who was sort of saying and "who are you to know?"*

In conference X, the teacher who co-taught the lesson in her colleague's class found it difficult:

*I think it was a little strange because it wasn't my class, so not knowing the kids I think effects in one way how you teach them because you don't know what they're used to, you might have certain ones putting their hands up all the time, and I liked in my own class to draw in some of the other ones, ...I mean you don't mean to make anyone upset in any way..... The biggest thing for me though was that it wasn't my class.*

The above extract suggests a caring relationship, based on personal knowledge, between teacher and learners and a teacher's strong identification with one's own class. The repetition of 'it wasn't my class' reminds the listener of how family members talk about 'my family' and the loyalty and caring that that relationship implies.

#### **5.4.2 Teacher Collaboration**

Teachers working together to improve their learning engendered strong positive feelings in the participants. Sharing practice was described as 'reassuring':

*I suppose sharing, sharing what has worked in lessons .....and agreeing a practice ....I know personally that, if I feel I'm doing what the other teachers are doing, I suppose there is reassurance in that, so that would mean that we're all singing from the same hymn sheet.*

Sharing among teachers of the same class level was helpful as 'It's more specific because all the children, all our children are the same age' and this was deemed important to teachers given that:

*... time is so precious, there are so many things going on after school, P.E, music, dance, recorder. And to find that time, it's getting harder and harder. And a smaller group is more focused.*

Focus was again a factor in that 'the video is a really good idea as well...to have it to actually focus on talking about something... and we've seen what worked...'



The experience was equally positive for teachers of many years experience as it was for teachers of few years experience:

*I love the idea because over the years of teaching, I've not had it ...yeah looking into things more deeply...or 'it was a very positive experience; you never get a chance to work alongside your colleagues.*

The relationship between the team members was a factor in the effectiveness of the learning teams and was highlighted as follows:

*I think it matters as well that ... I feel I would have a good working relationship with all of the... [teachers]....chat to them informally in the staff room or whatever.*

In the next chapter I reflect on the implications of these findings and the lessons that can be learned from them to improve collaborative practice in the school.

## **CHAPTER 6:DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS FROM PHASE TWO**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I reflect on the findings from the analysis of the post-observational conferences. I do so to improve my own awareness, and that of the teachers', of the impact of assumptions and values in shaping another's professional practice. Integral to this reflection is the articulation of my new learning about facilitating in-school professional learning in an Irish primary school. In presenting the frameworks outlined in chapter five, I selectively focus on what I perceive to be three major categories within the findings: The learning frameworks; the teaching frameworks and the facilitating professional learning frameworks. I propose to discuss each in turn. In doing so I first make my reflections 'visible' by way of demonstrating how I have reached my conclusions.

### **6.2 The Learning Framework**

The findings highlight an anomaly related to learning frameworks. I call this the intention-manifestation gap. This refers to the disparity between teachers' 'hoped-for' or intended learning frameworks, and the manifested frameworks of children's actual experience as they were disclosed in teachers' exploration of their 'dilemmas'. Pfeffer and Sutton write of the 'knowing-doing' gap: when what we know is not always reflected in what we do (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000). However, it is pertinent to keep in mind that a teacher's effectiveness in realising his or her stated intentions, is always mediated through multiple others, each with a variety of variables. This phenomenon has been the subject of consideration by Lortie (1975), Richardson and Watt (2006), and Serow & Forrest (1994). I propose to discuss both an intended learning framework and a manifested learning framework under the two key sub-sections identified in the findings: Learning as Process and Learning as Outcome. In the interest of understanding the following section is presented in two columns to facilitate contrasting the 'Intended Learning Framework' on the left with the 'Manifested Learning Framework' on the right.

### 6.2.1 Learning as Process

#### **The Intended Learning Framework: Socially Constructed Meaning Making**

The dominant intended learning framework identified in the findings would, at first glance, seem to correspond to a social-constructivist learning framework. As expressed it is close to that developed from the work of Vygotsky (1978) who promoted the idea that children must be active agents in their own learning, and is similar to what Watkins describes as co-construction:

Learning = building knowledge through doing things with others....It recognises that all learning has a social dimension, and that knowledge is constructed socially rather than individually (2005, p. 17).

It was also clear, from teachers' comments that this was an emerging framework, not an established norm in terms of teaching writing.

There was some evidence that knowledge was being constructed socially, and certainly 'the crucial role of language and conversation in the creation and negotiation of shared meaning' (ibid) was emphasised in all meetings. Much emphasis was placed on the process as the main focus of the learning experience. This framework reflected teachers' values related to learning being 'enjoyable' involving children being 'busy', 'focused' and 'helping each other'.

#### **The Manifested Learning Framework: Learning Power and Powerlessness**

The findings reveal classrooms where children's learning is characterised by contrasts of opportunity and experiences, a manifested learning, based on a spectrum of competences that were described in terms of power, going from 'strong' on one end to 'weak' on the other.

In all cases the teacher was the one holding the ultimate power in the classroom. However, the children who were described as strong, were also deemed capable and had the power to work independently. Their relationship with their 'weaker' peer was described as that of a helper. Because they usually completed their task, they experienced a sense of achievement that arguably contributed to their sense of worth in the class context. By contrast the 'weaker' learner was dependent on others, he was the one who was helped, and rarely experienced the sense of achievement born out of completing the learning tasks in class. In terms of belonging, the 'stronger' learner was the insider, at the heart of the activities, fully engaged, active and articulate. When the teacher reflected on a lesson it was deemed successful because the stronger learners had actively engaged and completed the task. By contrast, the 'weaker' learner assumed a more passive role, listened a lot because he had difficulty expressing himself with speed and learning was more about 'picking things up'. The weaker learner seemed to position himself outside the main social learning experience and needed to be brought into the activities. Yet it was the 'weaker' learner who received most attention in the meetings.

Given the intended learning framework of socially constructed learning in which the learners engage in 'generative rather than passive learning activities' (Watkins, 2005, p. 17), and in which the learning capacity of each child is understood to be developmental not static, there are many lessons to be taken from this finding.

## 6.2.2 Learning as Outcome

The Intended Learning Framework – Learning for Understanding	The Manifested Learning Framework: Non-Reflective Learning
<p>Learning for understanding was a much repeated learning goal in all cases in this research. In fact in all three meetings, the on-going struggle of teachers striving for learners' understanding could be described as the 'song beneath the words' (Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009, p. 76). As such it could be claimed that students' learning was judged by 'understanding performances' that demonstrated they had understood what had been taught.</p> <p>There was evidence that teachers' intended framework incorporated internalisation of the conceptual understanding that would lead to application of that understanding in a different context (Prawat, 1989). Furthermore, teachers' values including learners being 'independent', and 'thinking for themselves'.</p> <p>This is the point at which the intended learning framework became the manifested learning framework.</p>	<p>Although the teachers spoke of independent learning as a value, their dialogue did not suggest that they incorporated the identifiable practices that lead to reflection and meta-learning in their classrooms. This suggests that what teachers perceive to be the pathway to independent learning, made observable in completing a learning task, may not include reflection or meta-learning. Crick would say if it is to mean anything, 'What I learn' must <i>include</i> 'How I learn' and 'Why I learn' (Crick, 2009, p. 76). Yet, the manifested learning framework seemed to stop at the point of completion of the learning task. There was no evidence of any real opportunities for learners to learn how to reflect on, and draw learning from, the process of learning. It was also implied from the dialogues that completion of the task was completion of the learning. However, Askew and Carnell suggest that 'it is only when action comes about as a result of reflection that learning has occurred' (Askew and Carnell, 1998).</p>

This finding raises questions if teachers' understanding of learning is about giving back to the teacher what they have taught (typical of the transmission of knowledge model of learning as being told) or if it involves pushing the learner to generate new knowledge about her/himself and the learning concept.

### **Commentary: What I have learned from these findings about facilitating in-school professional learning**

Since the 1970 Primary School Curriculum was launched in Ireland, active learning and group work have long been highly promoted as desirable learning experiences for children in developing mastery learning. They have most likely featured in every in-service programme for most teachers since then and are often seen as combined activities. It is my premise that despite such promotion, the dominant model of group work practiced in Irish primary schools is one of children sitting in groups on a common task. I propose that without learning how to co-construct meaning together such experiences are limiting the potential enhancement of learning together, particularly in the case of a struggling learner. It seems little attention has been paid to Greeno's (1991) advice:

Knowledge-centred environments also look beyond engagement as the primary index of successful teaching (Prawaf et al., 1992). Students' interest or engagement in a task is clearly important. Nevertheless it does not guarantee that students will acquire the kinds of knowledge that will support new learning. There are important differences between tasks and projects that encourage hands on doing and those that encourage doing with understanding (cited in Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000, p. 24).

I also suggest that what these findings reflect is that while teachers may have been exposed to the concepts, they have had little opportunity to explore the theory of learning that underpins them. It has also been shown that neither have they had many opportunities to subject interpretations to critique through supportive feedback, purposeful reflection and meta-learning. Without testing understandings in practice teachers can only rely on their imagining of the desired practice. A case in point in this instance is the teachers' use of a co-operative learning strategy for assigning roles within the groups. When asked, the teacher said she had picked it up from talking to a colleague. Taken in isolation the inclusion of roles within a learning activity is unlikely to lead for example, to the positive interdependence that is the building block of co-operative learning (ibid) and a desired practice of co-constructed learning (Watkins, 2005). I have frequently heard facilitators at in-service courses urging teachers to introduce co-operative learning into their classrooms while giving little or no input on this teaching strategy. I have studied co-operative learning and attended summer school

given by the Johnsons (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec Johnson, 1984). At that summer school we learned about co-operative learning by doing co-operative learning. It took practice, informed feedback with time for reflection. I have taught using the co-operative learning approach. I believe it greatly enriched my practice, but I consider myself still a learner of the methodology. I also believe it is important to bear in mind Shulman's (1986, 1987) advice that different disciplines call for different approaches to learning and teaching. Therefore transferring one unexamined model of group work from one discipline to another may undermine rather than further learning.

Learning for understanding is intrinsically linked to active learning and socially constructed learning as promoted in the literature on learning (Entwistle and Smith, 2002; Marzano and Kendall, 2007; Perkins, 1992; Watkins, Lodge and Best, 2000). Furthermore, demonstrations of understanding involve extending learning to some degree as suggested by Blythe et al:

It is not enough for students to reshape, expand, extrapolate from, and apply their knowledge in the privacy of their own thoughts . . . Such an understanding would be untried, possibly fragile, and virtually impossible to assess (Blythe *et al.*, 1998, p. 63).

Integral to learning of self-regulatory learning in the individual learner is the concept of meta-learning which Watkins describes as 'learning about learning' (Watkins, 2005, p. 39). Watkins emphasises that meta-learning makes a significant contribution to individual performance, including learners deemed 'learning disabled' or having 'learning difficulties'. Furthermore, Watkins suggests that the classroom practices that nurture such meta-learning are identifiable and include practices that: develop pupil and teacher agency; examination of roles within classrooms, examination of relationships and routines in classrooms to ensure that they foreground all as learners. The practice of reflection is fundamental to developing meta-learning capacities (Askew and Carnell, 1998).

Research in the field confirms that 'new learnings in the science of learning ... emphasise the importance of helping people take control of their own lives' (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000, p. 13). Many educationalists see such learning as essential, for example:

A fundamental goal of education is to equip students with self-regulatory capabilities that enable them to educate themselves. Self-directedness not only contributes to success in formal instruction but also promotes life-long learning (Bandura, 1997, p. 174).

The learning about facilitating in-school professional learning that I take from these findings includes that professional learning experiences should incorporate:

1. Professional learning through the methodological approach that the intervention is promoting. Given an earlier finding that teachers, though experiencing front-loading theory about collaborative inquiry as alienating, enthusiastically engaged in articulating their learning at the end of phase one seminar as (having lived the experience they then found findings from research were meaningful and expanded their understanding). If socially-constructed learning is a valuable experience then professional learning must create such opportunities for teachers to so engage with each other as they learn. Through creating opportunities for reflection on practice and on research in the field, facilitation must also model meta-learning. Teachers cannot be expected to create socially constructed learning classrooms if they have neither personal experience of it nor clarified their thinking through co-articulating what it means.
2. Surfacing assumptions around learning, for collective critique with a view to reaching a shared understanding. I see such an exercise as fundamental to building capacity at the most basic level. Understanding learning is central to teachers' professional knowledge as professionals. The capacity to engage in reflection that will lead to such understanding needs to be learned.
3. Regularly checking emerging frameworks for clarity of understanding through classroom based practice and in-house coaching when introducing new methodologies. It is important to do so as early as trust in the process enables it to happen, before misinterpretations become embedded in practice.
4. Improving one discipline or subject area or methodology at a time and putting systems in place to develop deep learning, based on practice-led theory exploration. I suggest that, for the last decade, initiative-overload has been a feature of primary

level in-service in Ireland. Facilitators of in-service, seconded teachers, through no fault of their own, were required by the system-led intervention to 'cover' as much as possible on any one day's in-service. Given the economic reality that is understandable. However, one outcome could be described as on-site paralysis with an over-riding anxiety about compliance with follow up paper work to produce the individual curriculum plan. The same teachers were expected to lead whole-school collaborative evaluation, target setting and planning of the curriculum area. Between 1999 and 2008 this was repeated for every one of the eleven curricular areas of the primary curriculum.

5. Being reflexive in examining unequal power relations between the facilitator and the facilitated. I believe this is important given that 'power relationships affect perceptions of individuals as learners and affect how they learn' (Askew and Carnell, 1998, p. 57) and the unquestionable value that teachers place on equality of opportunity.
6. Encouraging teachers to undertake their own personal action research to answer the question, associated with Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006): How can we learn together to create learning environments that enable us to live more fully in the direction of our values of justice and equality?

### **6.3 The Teaching Framework**

Phase one of the research identified lesson planning as a key activity through which to mediate desired changes in the teaching of writing in the school. Learning how to design and facilitate quality lessons in the teaching of writing was the focus of professional learning in the early stages of phase two. It is indicative of the dominant discourse in the school that the concept of the lesson frequently surfaced in the dialogues across all three meetings. Taking the lesson as a unit of analysis two particular frameworks emerged as significant: 1) learning intentions and 2) teaching multiple learners. Because in these instances, intended learning frameworks were not significantly foregrounded, I will not talk about intended and manifested frameworks separately, but as interwoven in the many dimensions that emerged.



<b>Learning Intentions</b>	<p>The intervention included discussion, research and examination of good practice in terms of lesson design and a seminar on Assessment for Learning (AfL). Based on the work of Dylan Wiliam, Paul Black and others (Black et al., 2003; Black and Wiliam, 1998; Wiliam, 2008; Wiliam and Thompson, 2007), making learning intentions explicit, specific and clear to pupils and teachers, was promoted as fundamental to changing practice in teaching writing in the school. However, the research findings highlighted on-going vagueness and uncertainty about the learning intentions as manifested in teachers' difficulty in articulating those intentions. Learning intentions, as they were described in the dialogues, were closer to being general end-product goals, often tacit and difficult to assess. The impact of the 'fuzziness' of learning intentions permeated through the entire lesson and learning experience of the children: it impacted on the structure of the lesson from the nature of the introduction, to the teachers' explanations, to the task that was assigned and, particularly, to the difficulties around constructive feedback and peer assessment. The findings showed that those learning intentions about which the teachers were explicit were to do with the mechanics of writing – punctuation, neatness and presentation. As a consequence, these in turn became the criteria by which children peer assessed in conference X. The work of Wong (1999) shows that struggling learners often see writing as being about the surface dimensions of grammar and presentation. By contrast, teachers found it difficult to break down long term goals into specific writing intentions that could be achieved by children in a developmental process. These findings mirror the findings of Timperley and Parr in their report of an empirical study that examined the quality of writing goals and how well they were understood across a number of schools in Australia (Timperley and Parr, 2009). In that instance, 'the teachers realised that part of their difficulty in being more explicit was their limited pedagogical content knowledge related to writing (ibid, p. 56).</p>
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<b>Teaching Multiple Learners Simultaneously</b>	<p>The teachers in the research school were each responsible for an average of 29 to 30 learners in their classes. They were also accountable for teaching a national curriculum that consists of eleven different subject areas. A number of issues emerged through the findings in relation to the teaching framework that I believe are significant and upon which I focus this reflection. The teachers' planning was built around whole class teaching, irrespective of whether the children were working individually, in pairs or in groups. It was one lesson for all, mediated through the same task for all. Overhanging this practice was the 'ought' of differentiation: in conference X, the teachers suggested they ought to have given a different template to the 'weaker' group. Teachers 'thought about' differentiating but didn't do differentiation. What teachers meant by 'differentiation' was implied as ability grouping.</p>
<b>Time-Bound Learning</b>	<p>The findings implied that each new lesson involved a new learning task. Generally, learning tasks were planned with the expectation of being completed within the lesson timeframe. Evidence would suggest that the benchmark used to determine the length of time within which the task was to be completed was the 'stronger' learner. That all children learn differently has already been discussed. A small number of children generally do not complete their learning task within the time allowed. One of the criteria for judging a successful learning experience in this research was ensuring that the work was completed on time. Completion of work was also deemed to effect a sense of achievement in the learner. Therefore, based on the teachers' reasoning, some children do not succeed in their writing tasks on a weekly basis. Since this was noted in each conference, it raises the question if a certain number of children go through school never finishing a piece of writing<sup>19</sup>.</p>

<sup>19</sup> When this finding was shared with the teachers they immediately discussed the value of introducing portfolio practice in the teaching of writing in the school. Another teacher did suggest that such learners do get opportunities to finish written work and offered as an example the fact that children's written work is frequently displayed and teachers always ensure that all children are included in such displays.

### **Commentary: What I have learned from these findings about facilitating in-school professional learning**

Issues around teachers' learning intentions in classrooms of multiple learners operating within a broad curriculum and traditional timetabling emerged in the above findings. In bridging the findings under the learning framework above with those under this teaching framework I draw on the work of Timperley and Parr (2009). They show that unless learners understand the task's intention it is unlikely to lead to mastery learning:

Closely aligned to learning goals is the power of mastery learning, which involves the learner having an understanding of what success in that task might look like and receiving instruction and feedback directly related to it (Timperley and Parr, 2009, p. 45).

The findings indicate a lack of clarity around teachers' learning intentions. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that this lack of clarity around learning intentions and assessment pervades the entire educational system in Ireland as noted by Anne Looney, CEO of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA):

In Ireland, the goals of both curriculum and assessment tend to be vague in nature and generic in form (OECD 1991; Looney 2001; Hall and Kavanagh 2002 (Looney and Klenowski, 2008, p. 178).

I link the vagueness around learning intentions and the difficulties that teachers experienced with personalisation of learning and what they called differentiation. I believe the concepts of personalising learning or differentiation may be conceptually debated by academics but for practitioners they are closely aligned and well summed up as 'following the needs and interests of the learner' (GTC, 2007, p. 3). I also make the link with the concept of scaffolding learning (Bruner, 2006) – creating opportunities for learners to build understanding incrementally. Scaffolding learning demands a deep understanding of pedagogical content knowledge on the teacher's part. Keys reminds us that 'The knowledge that the teacher holds will ultimately determine the shape and direction of the new curriculum' (Keys, 2007, p. 44). I suggest that the pedagogical content knowledge that a teacher holds can/should shape the learning of each individual in the class. Unless that knowledge is deep, learning intentions will remain vague and 'catch all' in nature, resulting in incidental rather than intended learning being the usual experience of the children in our classrooms. The challenge of differentiation is not

unique to the teachers who participated in the research, but mirrors a general national pattern according to the NCCA's reports. The NCCA recently carried out a review of the implementation of the Revised Curriculum (NCCA, 2008). The findings show whole class teaching to be the norm in Irish primary education and that differentiation is poorly understood and poorly implemented (NCCA, 2008, pp. 159-163). This 2008 report reflects similar findings from the NCCA's 2005 report.

From these findings I have learned that facilitating in-school professional learning must include:

1. Bringing in expertise to build in-school capacity in pedagogical content knowledge and assessment for learning (AfL). Given the criticality of both in improving learning, any attempts to improve practice without such expertise will be insignificant. By expertise I mean educationalists qualified to lead professional learning in the field.
2. Building in-school capacity to gather and analyse data. Sensible data gathering is required to identify the professional and physical resources needed to personalise learning. One of the areas on which such data gathering should focus might be how time management impacts on learning within the school.

#### **6.4 Facilitation and the Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC)**

In this research I have followed a particular model of meeting inspired by the work of Egan (2001), Carnell et al (Carnell, MacDonald and Askew, 2006), Dennison and Kirk (1990) that I named PPLC. As a result of the learning gained through this inquiry I offer a revised version of that model:

**Figure 6.1: Revised Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC)**



It has been my experience that teachers need support in learning how to see each other's practice (Watkins, 2005). Teachers also need to be 'eased into' the practice of sharing observation and feedback. Furthermore the evidence from this inquiry suggests that the quality of outcome from using this model depends on the quality of analysis carried out at the first stage of the above cycle. Thus I recommend that 'exploring the issue' be applied in three steps: exploring the issues around the children's learning, exploring how the teacher's practice impacted, positively or negatively on that learning and finally exploring any school wide influences that contribute to the issues raised. When teachers are being introduced to using the PPLC it may be that the 'gaze' of inquiry focus on children's learning but incrementally to build confidence to look at teachers' role in shaping that learning and finally to critically look at school wide practices in light of this critique. I acknowledge a certain degree of contrivance in the manner in which this model of meeting was introduced in the research school. However, my lived experience confirms Carnell's testimony when she says:

I see a major difference between contrived beginnings and coercion. Teachers need support to change classroom or school practice, an approach which allows them freedom to identify their own changes, rather than have change imposed (Carnell, 1999, p. 72).

I propose that this revised model merits further study in practice.

The participants found the Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC) to be professionally respectful and yet potentially powerful in providing the conditions for peers to ask the big questions of each other that lead to systematic inquiry to improve practice. Critically, at the early stages of learning collaborative inquiry, when frameworks of understanding are being embedded, the quality of facilitation will greatly determine the norms of inquiry. Based on the findings of this research and my experience of applying this model in a group context I have learned that:

1. Engaging in professional collaborative inquiry requires informed and experienced facilitation to get started. Unless such qualified personnel are available to schools it is unlikely that any real advances will be made in developing our schools as professional learning communities and trying to do so may simply be a waste of time.
2. To reap rich learning participants' understanding of the theory of action underpinning the PPLC should be developmental through practice and reflection on that practice. I suggest it is adaptable to whatever is the business of the meeting, be that examining student data or discussing an issue of practice.
3. To ensure follow through on decisions made each group should devise its own system of accountability.

A key learning that I take from this research is that teachers' daily struggle for students' understanding hovers uncertainly between their intended learning outcomes and the manifested learning outcomes of the children. I believe that teacher collaborative inquiry, as demonstrated in this research, has the potential to improve that reality. I do not underestimate the challenge that that poses for teachers in simultaneously leading multiple learning journeys. Black and Wiliam remind us that:

the changes in classroom practice that are needed are central rather than marginal, and have to be incorporated by each teacher into his or her practice. ... reform in this dimension will inevitably take a long time, and need continuing support from both practitioners and researchers (Black and Wiliam 1998, 62).

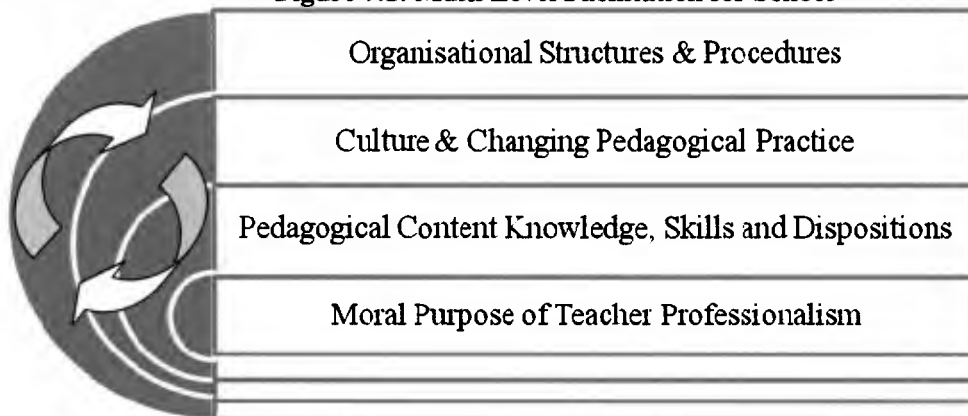
In the next chapter I consider the implications of the research findings for in-school professional learning at system level.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Introduction

Schools are complex systems (Senge et al., 2000). Facilitating adaptive change that challenges deeply held values and beliefs (Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009), recognises the complexity and inter-relatedness operating at multi-levels throughout the school. The following figure captures the framework that I developed to help me see through that complexity. Rooting the intervention in the context of teacher professionalism (Freidson, 2001), led to teachers finding uncontested ground as they engaged in exploring together their values and beliefs. This offered an entry point to all other conversations throughout the intervention. The concept of the moral dimension of the professionalism of the teacher became the anchor that kept the intervention on track.

**Figure 7.1: Multi Level Facilitation for School**



At the heart of such multi-level facilitation lies an unwavering commitment to dialogic action and inquiry (Freire, 1970; Habermas, 1998; Wells, 1999; Yankelovich, 2001). By dialogic action I mean a commitment to on-going egalitarian discussion and critical inquiry resulting in participative negotiation of the theory of action itself and of all actions to be taken. The facilitator, in my view, keeps multiple conversations alive and in dialogue throughout the process, even when that means simply holding them on 'pause'. I propose to discuss the findings of this research through examining the learning I have taken from facilitating each level within the school system.

## **7.2 The Moral Purpose of Teacher Professionalism**

I suggest that facilitating teachers' professional learning is firstly opening a conversation about what our schools are for and teachers' role in achieving the schools' purpose. Facilitating in-school professional learning involved in this instance, an iterative process of zooming in on the specific to zoom out to ask the big questions of 'what' and 'why' of teachers' practice. In this research the concept of professionalism provided a framework within which to ask the big questions. It was a concept that I brought to the table as an entry point in the absence of precedents. However, what emerged is that, in the Irish context, the concept of teacher professionalism is largely unexplored territory in professional learning experiences. In workshop two, (see chapter two), the theme of the dialogue was teacher professionalism at the end of which teachers, in expressing their appreciation, said it was the first time they had had such a discussion as a staff. Based on the teachers' feedback, professionalism became the subject of evolving learning and an inner driver throughout the research. I suggest that any intervention to improve teachers' practice that includes a collective exploration of the concept of their professionalism creates a momentum that is motivational because it creates a space for examining values and beliefs that shape practice.

Exploring what Freidson (2001) calls the 'soul of professionalism', the spirit that places the client's needs before one's own (Schon, 1983), created an opportunity for teachers to share previously unvoiced inner drivers and aspirations. I suggest that the finding in phase two, that identified the warm, personal relationship that teachers develop with their students gives meaning to the moral purpose of teaching. Such a collective exploration validated the need to critically examine practice in relation to how the teachers hold themselves accountable to standards of competence and morality (Schon, 1983) for the good of those children. Furthermore, by placing such collaboration within an understanding that 'a professional field, as opposed to a technical one, is one that prizes constant dissatisfaction with one's own practice with current clients as the core to better service to clients in the future (Glickman, 2002, p. 4), made it less about the person's performance and more about learning to do better. Finally, the collaborative exploration of professionalism led to an appreciation that 'regular structured interaction



between or among peers over substantive content is one of the hallmarks of a profession and is viewed by other professionals as essential professional nourishment rather than a threat to autonomy (Joyce and Showers, 2002, p. 75).

The moral imperative of the professional commitment to live up to the 'promises' made to the children in our schools became the anchor that held the intervention together. This research highlights that such commitment, because it is personal, is what motivates teachers to change practice. This is highly significant in the Irish context given that the teachers' 'legendary autonomy', noted in 1991 by OECD observers (OECD, 1991), has changed little and there are no formal systems of appraisal nor of accountability in practice. I suggest that exploration of the big questions of teachers' practice, whatever framework offers the platform to open such higher order thinking, offers an entry point to open the change conversation in schools. It has been one of the failings of change initiatives in the past that such conversations did not happen and may go some way towards explaining why:

One of the great paradoxes of modern Irish education is that, while the official discourse is replete with references to change and reform, much of the available evidence suggests that little change has occurred in teachers' beliefs and values (Gleeson and O'Donnabháin, 2009, p. 37).

### **7.3 Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions**

It is already well documented that pedagogical content knowledge, skills and disposition matter when it comes to changing teachers' practice (Guskey, 2002; Keys, 2007; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006). The work of Grossman et al adds intellectual stimulation to the list of components that should constitute professional learning to improve practice (Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth, 2000). The findings of this research support these claims that pedagogical content knowledge, as well as intellectual stimulation, are necessary elements in any professional learning programme worthy of the term professional. What this research adds to that body of research is a number of insights into the nature of the normative frameworks about pedagogical knowledge, skills and dispositions that underpin the prior knowledge that Irish teachers bring to professional learning experiences. I suggest that such frameworks have remained silent

influencers in the Irish context as unexamined layer upon unexamined layer are accumulated over time, old putting its stamp on the new and continuing to be both a product, as well as a shaper of teacher professional learning in Ireland. Such frameworks, like mental models, 'serve as guides to making both big and little decisions, but they are also constraints because they are the first screen through which new information must pass' (Anderson and Riedel, 2006, p. 278/279). If left unexamined, they not only constrain children's learning but also that of the teachers' learning.

Taking my inspiration from the work of Bransford et al (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000), it is my premise that facilitating professional learning should create opportunities for such frameworks to be surfaced, as well as collectively and critically examined with a view to co-creating new frameworks that reflect the advances in understanding about learning and pedagogy. My learning from this research leads me to link teachers' conflicting frameworks about learning, with a) the detrimental effect of time bound learning on both teachers and children and b) the difficulty that teachers experience with scaffolding learning. Scaffolding learning demands mastery of the pedagogical content knowledge but also understanding the processes of learning. The absence of clarity around any of these issues leaves both teacher and learner struggling. The failure of off-site professional learning to translate into improved learning and teaching in the classroom (Weir, 2003), is a stark example of the inability at system level to scaffold teachers' learning post in-service.

Teachers' understanding of learning is a fundamental building block upon which their practice is constructed. A number of pertinent issues emerged in this research in relation to teachers' beliefs and understanding around the nature of learning and the challenges that such beliefs pose when trying to create learning experiences consistent with their intended frameworks. The research highlights a number of living contradictions in teachers' practice between intended frameworks and manifested frameworks. I also suggest that the research confirms that such contradictions are equally characteristic of my practice as facilitator of professional learning and at system

level characteristic of the providers of professional learning in general in the country. The contradictions that I have in mind are for example: instances of where teachers' practice reflects an understanding of learning as 'being told' while espousing learning as co-constructing meaning (Watkins, 2005), teachers' practice demonstrating unreflective learning with no attempt at meta-learning while espousing learning for understanding and mastery learning, a view of 'weak' learners as always being there while teaching to a national curriculum that sees intelligence as developmental and all children learning to their full potential.

I suggest that, as a result of unexamined learning frameworks, one of the findings of this research is that the most common experience of learning across the system is of unfinished learning or 'cut-off' learning. Learning experiences that do not include surfacing prior learning, little reflection and no meta-learning, result in shallow learning (West-Burnham and Coates, 2005) that creates dependency across the system. Deep and profound learning takes time. For teachers who are statutory bound to 'get through' a very broad curriculum, or for professional learning providers who have to 'cover' (Loxley et al., 2007) a lot of work to justify their existence, the outcomes are learning experiences that are the proverbial 'mile wide, inch deep'. This may account for the fact that one of the findings of Loxley et al (2007), when they carried out an evaluation of the primary curriculum support programme, ( DES initiative to support implementation in schools), they found that after five years of intensive in-service, with the exception of planning, there was little evidence of increases in teacher and school capability to advance their own teaching and learning processes. Learning is a complex activity, understanding learning is challenging and should include continuous professional learning on new research on cognitive science. Watkins, when describing the complexity of teaching suggests that:

Teachers are sometimes slow to describe these aspects, and sometimes feel hesitant to do so lest it divides them from the lay person. But their professionalism is founded on that complexity (Watkins, 2005, p. 10).

It is my claim that the significance of teachers' understanding of learning is comparable to surgeons' understanding how the body works and has the potential to have far

reaching impact on our system as a whole. Teachers' personal understandings of learning inform their discretionary judgment on a daily basis. Clearly it is important that their understanding is made explicit and examined. That teachers should understand the scientific knowledge that underpins their professional status (Eraut, 1994; Freidson, 2001) is no longer an option, but I suggest a requirement for the knowledge society in which we live, and the future society in which our children will live. It is my contention that the theory of learning must consider all available research in the field given that:

A successful theory of learning needs to integrate both sides of three common dualisms. They are: the mind-body dualism, the division between the individual and the social, and the split between structure and agency. This is an essential step in incorporating individual learners into a participatory understanding of learning (Hodkinson, Biesta and James, 2007, p. 417).

#### 7.4 Culture and Changing Pedagogical Practice

Facilitating in-school collaborative learning for professional practice in an Irish primary school involved major cultural change given the 'legendary autonomy' (OECD, 1991) and dominant culture of non-interference in teachers' practice (Little, 1990) that still prevails in the Irish context. During the course of the seminar at the end of phase one, the teachers, picking up on a discussion on Putnam's work on social capital (Putnam, 2000), identified the greatest cultural change of this intervention, as moving from a view of teaching as private and personal (orange band in Figure 7.1) to one of teaching as public and collaborative described as a culture that nurtures experimentation and sharing (outer blue band in Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2: From Bonded to Bridged



As external facilitator, I saw my role as creating opportunities for the teachers to actively determine how 'opening doors' in going from bonded to bridged should be negotiated. An external facilitator has to be alert to the danger of mandating a personal agenda of change. In this instance I find Morimoto's advice very apt:

When change is advocated or demanded by another person, we feel threatened, defensive, and perhaps rushed. We are then without the freedom and the time to understand and to affirm the new learning as something desirable, and as something of our own choosing. Pressure to change, without an opportunity for exploration and choice, seldom results in experiences of joy and excitement in learning (Morimoto, 1973, p. 255).

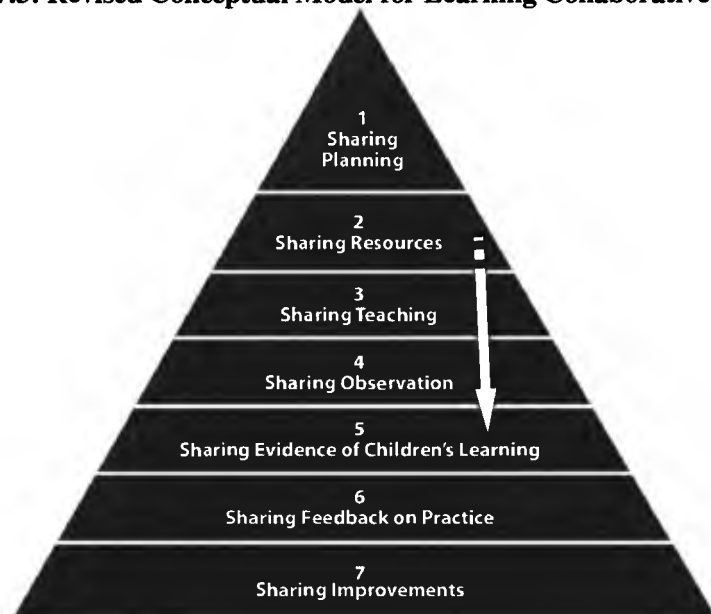
Creating the freedom and the time to understand the new learning was critical in this intervention. The relentless pace of school life, resulting in time being fastidiously protected, places significant pressure on agents of change to produce early evidence of improvement. I suggest that this is detrimental to a process of deep adaptive change that involves interrogation of long held values and beliefs. Heifetz and Linsky warn that leaders of change should resist the leap into action without due time for analysis (Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009). Pacing and timing is of the essence in learning, yet our school system, I suggest, militates against intelligent pacing for deep change. Vision and courage is required if school leaders are to choose the long range view and resist the short fix.

In leading the journey to teachers' collaborative learning and inquiry to improve practice, two potentially emotive issues emerged: a) The Power of the Non-discussable, b) Fears. The power of the non-discussable, (Barth, 2001), was foregrounded at the very beginning in the in-school facilitators' reluctance to assume an explicitly defined leadership role in the intervention. As an external facilitator, with some experience in facilitation, I was in a position to bring the issue into an open forum, name it and create the opportunity for a non-threatening dialogue in the school. Similarly, making student-achievement data public in the school was equally the focus of dialogic action. The experience has confirmed for me Barth's claim that a school's ability to surface and

examine the non-discussable is indicative of the health of its culture. Non-discussables, while they remain so, are powerful impediments to improvement.

Teachers' fears focused on overload, fear of exposure when deprivatising practice and fear of engaging in yet another unfinished learning initiative. Empathic facilitation that focuses on collective learning, not judgment, created the conditions for teachers to trust the process. Developing teachers' agency through dialogic action resulted in their creating their own model of learning collaborative practice as outlined in chapter one. In learning from this inquiry I offered a revised version of that model as illustrated below:

**Figure 7.3: Revised Conceptual Model for Learning Collaborative Practice**



That the teachers were actively involved in creating the scaffolding for their own learning to engage in collaborative practice and inquiry, was highly influential in the process that followed. Furthermore, it greatly reduced the fears that teachers had expressed about the process as their own agency was supported. The progression from one stage to another involved learning the processes and procedures that are needed to professionally engage at each level. However, as already shown in chapter six, (p. 130), given where teachers in Irish primary schools are starting from, and in the spirit of adhering to dialogic action, peer observation of practice was found to be best approached as an incremental process in itself. Thus I suggest the inclusion of another

stage in this model: 'sharing evidence of children's learning'. This is the stage reached by teachers in the research school at this point of their developing collaborative practice. The next stage would involve their examining the role of the teacher in influencing the learning experience observed, reflection on own practice and meta-learning.

Finally, it has long been claimed that teachers hold a vice grip on their autonomy and that the privacy of their practice is a deeply held value (Johnson and Donaldson, 2007; Little, 1990). The findings from this research suggest that in fact, when professionally negotiated in a process that respects their professionalism through building their capacity to exercise agency, teachers place collaborative practice above privacy. I also suggest that it is individual and collective agency that is valued by teachers rather than the proverbial autonomy (Lortie, 1975). Given the pressures of the knowledge society in which we live, and the pressure on schools to be inclusive of all learners, the job of teacher of multiple learners is no longer within the capability of any one person. The accountability-driven policies of current times further contribute to teachers valuing sharing responsibility across all professionals in the school and engaging in collaborative learning to live up to the expectations of today's society.

## **7.5 Organisational Structures and Procedures**

Creating organisational structures to enable collaborative practice was one of the first initiatives to be undertaken in this research. It was important from the outset that these structures would be carefully developed given that:

It follows that people are subject to structures even as they take agentic actions, and that any such agentic actions contribute to the on-going learning/change/reinforcement of the social structures that are part of them... (Hodkinson, Biesta and James, 2007, p. 418).

The main structures were built around the basic unit of learning teams. The Teacher Professional Learning Team (TPLT) was the basic building block (Dufour et al., 2006) of this research. The facilitator's team was created to support capacity building and lead the TPLT. Any other structures that were established were done to enable these teams to

function to their potential as the medium for significant learning and change in the school.

Timetabling meetings was critical to ensure that such meetings would not get lost in the daily need to adapt to changing circumstances. In so doing, we had firsthand experience of the time difficulties experienced at school level when teachers' hours correspond to children's hours in school. I add my voice to that of Coolahan (2003), Hogan (2007), Murchan et al (2005) and others to call for policy level initiative to tackle the political non-discussable of time in school. It is simply not humanly possible to develop sustainable, collaborative, professional practices in an Irish school when there is no time available to do so. Leaving such initiatives to the creativity of the individual principal or board is a major injustice to those schools that do not have the financial resources to pay for substitution to release teachers to meet.

Based on the model of the school as a professional learning community (PLC) (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Dufour et al., 2006; Hord, 2004; Lieberman and Miller, 2008; Louis, 2006; Stoll and Louis, 2007), the team was the unit of change. The findings of this research highlight the influence of the teachers' dialogue in those meetings in determining how espoused changes are interpreted and then implemented in the classrooms. The experience of this research highlights the importance of on-going data gathering for intelligent monitoring of these meetings to surface misunderstandings and emerging frameworks early in the process. Surfacing the emerging frameworks proved highly significant to enable the teachers to critically examine those embryonic frameworks before they became embedded norms of practice. Thus a key finding in this research is that such meetings need structure and follow through procedures; otherwise they run the danger of simply involving storytelling and not leading to purposeful action for improvement. I propose the following model of meetings, practised in this research and inspired by the work of Egan (2001), Carnell et al (Carnell, MacDonald and Askew, 2006), Dennison and Kirk (1990) as offering a flexible peer coaching structure to adapt to any focus of learning and inquiry.



**Figure 7.4: Revised Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC)**



## **7.6 Summary**

It is my thesis that, in the spirit of the 1991 OECD report, there should be a variety of pathways to professional learning but that all programmes must have the expectation of improving learning outcomes in schools. Therefore, all programmes must sooner or later be brought back to the school setting for the practice, feedback and embedding into practice that is critical for change. In order for that to happen, schools must develop the structures and capacities to become professional learning communities.

It is the premise of this research that developing such cultures of collaborative inquiry is a viable proposition in Irish schools despite the absence of formal systems of appraisal being established. However, the absence of a mandatory requirement for teachers to engage in professional learning is a different matter. In Ireland, its absence creates unnecessary difficulties at school level where there may be a desire to develop as a professional learning community. The lack of such a formal expectation will, I believe, continue the experience voiced by Fullan that:

Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when teachers returned to their classrooms” (Fullan, 1991, p. 315).

Based on the above premise, learning how to facilitate whole school initiatives to improve practice is central to the future wellbeing of our schools. Joyce and Showers (2002) make the claim that the reason professional learning continues to fail to make a significant impact on classroom practice is that we have not learned how to support teachers’ change at the school level. This research goes some way in showing how that can be done in the context of an Irish primary school.

From the learning gained in this research I propose the following model as a guide to the facilitation of in-school collaborative inquiry to change practice:

**Figure 7.5: Facilitating In-School Collaborative Inquiry to Improve Practice**



The findings of this research suggest that whole school facilitation of collaborative inquiry is very different from leading singular, self-initiated learning communities where the restraints of the daily impediments of everyday school life are not present. Given the research on in-school variability (Konstantopoulos, 2006), this research also highlights the moral responsibility of school leaders to engage the full staff in improvement initiatives and the importance of empathy, timing, scaffolding and pacing that that demands at school level. The above model captures the process of this research. While recognizing that much of the success of this model, such as it was, lay in the fact that the teachers themselves were active agents in setting their own agenda, nonetheless I offer this model as a guide from which others can draw learning if they wish.

Stage one: It was very important that the initial approach to opening the conversation with the teachers was characterised by empathic understanding and appreciation of their daily work load. Therefore, this stage, inspired by the principles of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003) involved a lot of listening and collectively exploring the inner motivations that drive teachers practice.

Stage two: Like Burnette, (2002) I believe that providing experiences that allow teachers begin to engage in collaborative inquiry, and modelling the desired practices keeps everyone on track. A major signpost was the teachers' learning of their own model for learning collaborative practice as shown in figure 7.2 above. The power of that signpost was felt throughout the journey in visually identifying for each teacher where he/she was at on the pyramid.

Stage three: Building capacity as the initiative evolved was central to recognising different talents among the teacher body supported by on-going simple data gathering to assess progress.

Stage four: In year two small improvements were made visible and some teachers advanced to deeper levels of the collaborative learning pyramid. Learning how to engage in peer coaching dialogues was a key imitative at this stage of the journey.

Stage five: It was recognised by the teachers that it was important to embed new practices as normative practice within the school with the learning of a simple policy statement capturing their ten commitments on the journey from bonded to bridged.

The findings from Phase 1 demonstrate that teachers' professional conversations with each other are highly influential in any new initiative. Teachers' understanding of the nature and impact of that professional conversation has the potential to improve the collaborative inquiry process and significantly improve teachers' professional practice. I also argue that facilitation of in-school professional learning is based on unwavering commitment to keeping the professional conversations alive and purposeful through communicative action. Such professional conversations are opened, I suggest, through emphatic inquiry rooted in the moral imperative of education to improve the learning of every child.

## **7.7 Recommendations**

Finally, this research goes some way towards focusing on ‘the teacher learning opportunities and possibilities that reside within ordinary daily work (Little, 2003, p. 104). It shows the potential that resides within that ordinary daily work to powerfully shape the quality of teaching and learning in Irish schools into the future. To support schools in making this happen I offer the following recommendations at system level:

1. The question of time in school must be resolved. The need for schools to develop as professional learning communities is no longer an option but a necessity. In order to do so, teachers must have the time to meet and collaborate in a formalised manner.
2. Facilitation of whole school collaborative practice for professional learning requires qualified facilitation by facilitators who understand and can incorporate best practice to create the conditions for professionally respectful and agency-building learning. I suggest that access to such qualified facilitation should be made available to all schools. Such qualification should include the learning of expertise in coaching and mentoring for professional learning in education. I see this as keeping learning on track through an independent voice continuing to ask the hard questions and thus avoiding the danger of complacency.
3. The expectation that all teachers engage in meaningful professional learning should be made mandatory through the teaching council. The current situation, where the school is statutory bound to provide professional learning with no corresponding obligation on the part of teachers, is untenable.
4. Teacher professional learning should incorporate the knowledge, skills, dispositions and intellectual stimulation to lead to on-going learning throughout their careers. It must include deep understanding around learning and how people learn. In addition the skills for today’s teachers must include learning how to gather and process appropriate data to inform a more evidence-based practice.

I believe there is a vagueness around the concept of teacher professionalism in Ireland. I suggest that the lack of an informed membership in this regard leaves both the profession as a whole, and the teachers as individuals, the poorer for it. I suggest that this is something to which The Teaching Council might give consideration.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Phase 1: Calendar of Actions

1. External researcher/facilitator meets monthly with school-based facilitators (FT) : 1 hour
2. Teacher Professional Learning Teams meet monthly: (TPLT) 1 hour
3. All participants are looking reflectively and reflexively at own practice with a view to improving it.

	September 2007	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June 2008
			Midterm 1 wk	Christmas 2 wks			Easter 2 wks		Midterm 1 wk	
	Whole Staff Discussion Led by In-School Leadership		Whole Staff Workshop Led by Researcher/Facilitator 07 Nov			External Speaker on Assessment for Learning AfL – with a focus on writing		Whole Staff Workshop Led by Researcher/Facilitator 02 April	Full day Workshop facilitated by (JWB) on School as a PLC	Whole Staff workshop Led by Researcher/Facilitator 04 June
		Facilitators' Meeting 05 Oct	Facilitators' Meeting 09 and 30 Nov	Facilitators' Meeting 04 Dec	Facilitators' Meeting 17 Jan	Facilitators' Meeting 22 Feb		Facilitators' Meeting 04 April		Facilitators' Meeting
			Teacher Professional Learning Team (TPLT) Focus: Narrative Genre	Teacher Professional Learning Team (TPLT) Focus: Narrative Genre		Teacher Professional Learning Team (TPLT) Focus: Report Genre	Teacher Professional Learning Team (TPLT) Focus: Report Genre	Teacher Professional Learning Team (TPLT) Focus: Recount Genre	Teacher Professional Learning Team (TPLT) Focus: Poetry Genre	
	28 Sept met Leadership Team				11 Jan met Leadership Team			Meeting Leadership Team		Meeting Leadership Team
Researcher/Facilitator Focus		Introduction of ideas	Modelling a TPLT meeting	Raising Questions	Getting a standard	Rubrics		Assessing children's work		
Data Gathering	1. Personal Reflective Diary 2. Whole School Discussion 3. Conversation with Liaison Person (LP)	1. PRD 2. Minutes of meeting 3. Conversation with LP	1. PRD 2. TPLT written feedback on first meeting 3. Questionnaire	1. PRD 2. Summary of term's work shared and agreed with facilitators 3. minutes of meetings	Personal Reflective Diary	1. PRD 2. Minutes of meetings	1. PRD	1. PRD 2. Findings from workshop 3. Minutes of meetings	1. PRD 2. Record of workshop and findings from group work	1. PRD 2. Questionnaire 3. Interviews



## Appendix 2: Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC)

### Key to Professional Feedback Cycle

#### 1. Exploration

- Teacher gives background story, identifies dilemma and learning intention for this session.
- Colleagues actively explore the issues with teacher through questioning for clarity, uncovering blind spots, taking the 'balcony' view to open up different perspectives.
- Description of current context.
- Analysis of the causes of the 'dilemma'.
- Big Question(s) to be answered by end of this stage: What is the problem and what is its root cause?

#### 2. Verbalising New Understanding & Desired Future

- Sharing understandings of the analysis.
- Visioning the desired future.
- Verbalise the challenges inherent in achieving that desired future – technical or adaptive challenges.
- Big Question to be answered by end of this stage: Where to go and what supports are needed to get there?

#### 3. Planning Changes to Practice

- Teacher sets goals.
- Colleagues check for commitment to/realism of goals.
- Together brainstorm strategies.
- Big Question to be answered by end of this stage: The Action Plan: What, when and how? Agreeing & recording.

#### 4. Reviewing the Process of the Professional Feedback Cycle

Big Question to be answered at the end of this stage:

How the session was helped by my learning by...it might have been even better if...

### Peer Professional Learning Cycle (PPLC)

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

This model is built from work done by a number of researchers: Carnell, MacDonald and Askew (2006), Dennison and Kirk (1990) and Egan (2002).

#### DO:

- Practice active listening & questioning skills – the secret is in these two!
- Be Genuine, respectful and empathetic

#### DON'T:

- Jump in with solutions – the role of the professional colleague is to help clarify the other's thinking to the extent that the teacher recognises what he/she needs to do in his/her circumstances

### Appendix 3: Letter to the Chairperson of the Board of Management

Dear .....,

I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Education, University of London.

I write to ask your permission to carry out research in St. B's school. The study is expected to be carried out over a two year period and involves close examination of how the school may develop as a professional learning community. The theme is Facilitating Professional Learning through Collaborative Inquiry.

During the course of this study teachers may be asked to participate in workshops and seminars, complete assessment tasks and questionnaires designed to measure their learning and belief change, they may be interviewed and their interactions in relation to this project may be observed, audio-taped or video-taped.

The data will be analyzed by me in consultation with the staff of the school to help us evaluate and improve educational professional learning programmes.

Video recordings of teachers' professional conversations may be made for the purpose of the research. Prior written consent will be sought from the teachers and I attach a copy of the consent form which they will sign.

Most of the tasks will be scheduled as part of the normal school day and will be designed to improve classroom learning and teaching.

The findings created from this project may be used for educational purposes.

No names will appear in any report or publication resulting from this study unless it is the explicit wish of the school authorities and the teachers concerned.

As a Board of Management I acknowledge that you are free to withdraw consent at any time, and that no penalty or prejudice shall result.

Further questions about this project are welcome and should be addressed to: Helen O'Sullivan, c/ School's name and address

---

(Signature)

---

(Date)

#### Appendix 4: Consent Form for School Staff

##### **Facilitating Professional Learning through Collaborative Inquiry**

In signing this document I agree to participate in a study of teacher professional learning through collaborative inquiry being conducted by Helen O'Sullivan for the purpose of doctoral research. In so signing I do so in the knowledge that:

My interactions in relation to this project may be observed, audio-taped or video-taped

I may be asked to complete assessment tasks and questionnaires designed to measure my learning and belief change, and that I may be interviewed.

I understand these data will be analyzed by Helen in consultation with the staff of the school to help us evaluate and improve educational professional learning programmes.

In addition, I understand that video recordings containing my image may be made available on the school's intra-net. The intra-net site will be password protected.

I authorize the use of such data and recordings as described above only for the scientific and educational purposes specified above.

I have been told that my name will not appear in any report or publication resulting from this study. I authorize the mention of only my first name in video recordings.

I know that during this project I am free to withdraw my consent and decline to be interviewed or recorded at any time, and that no penalty or prejudice shall result.

Further questions about this project are welcome and should be addressed to: Helen O'Sullivan, c/o School's name and address

---

(Signature)

---

(Date)

## Appendix 5: Evaluating Professional Learning

**Table 3.1: After Guskey (2000) Evaluating Professional Learning**

Evaluation Level (Based on Guskey, 2000)	What questions were addressed? (Link to theoretical framework in Chapter 2)	How was data gathered?	What was measured or assessed?	How was data analysed?
1. Participants' Reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did they like it?</li> <li>• Was their time well spent?</li> <li>• Are they interested in continuing with the programme? (End of phase 1: Informed consent)</li> </ul>	<p>Informally: impromptu chats</p> <p>Formally:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Interviews</li> <li>2. Questionnaire administered to all teaching staff at the end of Phase 1</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial responses</li> <li>• Willingness to continue with the programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content analysis of interview data</li> <li>• Factor Analysis of Questionnaire using SPSS</li> </ul>
2. Participants Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well did the teachers acquire an understanding of what is collaborative inquiry? (theory in action)</li> <li>• How well did the teachers learn to collaborative inquire into their own practice? (application of theory in action – changing practice)</li> <li>• How well did the teachers acquire the intended knowledge and skills and dispositions to improve the teaching and learning of writing? (Pedagogic content knowledge)</li> <li>• How well did the in-school facilitators' acquire the intended knowledge skills and dispositions to lead professional learning in the school? (Capacity Building)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Questionnaire</li> <li>• Minutes/Agendas of facilitators' meetings.</li> <li>• Whole staff workshop</li> <li>• JWB Seminar: Evaluations and Feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial demonstrations of understanding through observation of levels of engagement, discussions at meetings, through language used and descriptions of activities at team meetings and in classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above +</li> <li>• Triangulation using findings from the variety of sources of data.</li> </ul>

Evaluation Level (Based on Guskey, 2000)	What questions were addressed? (Link to theoretical framework in Chapter 2)	How was data gathered?	What was measured or assessed?	How was data analysed?
3. Organisation Support and Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How effective are the organisational supports? (Structures, Artefacts)</li> <li>Were problems addressed quickly and efficiently?</li> <li>Were sufficient resources made available</li> <li>Were successes recognised and shared?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflective diary</li> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Whole staff workshop</li> <li>Minutes of JWB Seminar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observations of organisational issues such as regularity of meetings, attendance, availability of resources and follow through on agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observation</li> <li>Analysis of workshop findings</li> <li>Content Analysis of interviews</li> </ul>
4. Participants' Use of New Knowledge and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How well did teachers apply new knowledge and skills? (changing practice)</li> <li>How well did facilitators apply new knowledge and skills? (changing practice)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questionnaire</li> <li>Semi-Structured Interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What new practices have been implemented as a result of this programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify new practices through factor analysis of questionnaire and checked with content analysis of interviews.</li> </ul>
5. Student Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What was the impact on the students learning?</li> <li>Did it affect student's quality of writing?</li> <li>Are students more confident writers?</li> <li>Are students more confident learners?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers evaluations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvements based on agreed criteria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers' analysis</li> </ul>
6. My Own Learning about Facilitating Professional Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What did I learn about facilitating in-school professional learning?</li> <li>What did I learn about collaborative inquiry?</li> <li>What did I learn about engaging in self-study action research?</li> <li>What did I learn about living in the direction of my own values?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback from teachers and facilitators through questionnaires, interviews, Reflective Diary</li> <li>Overall analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How my learning has been extended and what values have been challenged/affirmed/extended</li> <li>How I engage in reflexive practice?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of reflective diary</li> <li>Analysis of feedback from teachers through interviews, questionnaires etc</li> </ul>
7. My own Use of New Knowledge, Skills and Disposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How well did I apply the new learning of knowledge, skills and dispositions</li> <li>How well did I apply my learning about living in the direction of my values?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-Reflection</li> <li>Reflective diary</li> <li>Feedback from teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What new practices have I implemented as a result of on-going learning?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comparing end of year decisions with initial approach.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 6A: Questionnaire to Review Phase 1

### SECTION A: TEACHERS

<b>1. Teachers' Reactions to the programme</b>				
How much did you benefit from the programme? (please tick as appropriate)				
Greatly benefited <input type="checkbox"/>	Benefited <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't benefit much <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't benefit at all <input type="checkbox"/>
What did you enjoy and what didn't you enjoy about the programme?				
<b>2. Teachers' Learning of knowledge and understanding</b>				
<b>2.1 In terms of <u>new knowledge and understanding</u>, how would you rate your learning?</b>				
<b>a. Art of Writing</b>				
Learnt a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Learnt a little <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn much <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn at all <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>b. Writing Genres</b>				
Learnt a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Learnt a little <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn much <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn at all <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c. Motivating Children to Write</b>				
Learnt a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Learnt a little <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn much <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn at all <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>d. Resources for teaching writing</b>				
Learnt a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Learnt a little <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn much <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn at all <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>e. Please describe any new knowledge and understanding you gained through this programme on any of the above.</b>				
<b>f. How would you rate your application of that new learning in your practice in the classroom?</b>				
Applied a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Applied <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not applied much <input type="checkbox"/>	Not applied at all <input type="checkbox"/>
Please explain:				
<b>2.2 Teachers' learning of <u>skills</u></b>				
In terms of <u>new skills</u> , how would you rate your learning? (please tick as appropriate)				
<b>a. Planning a Writing Lesson</b>				
Learnt a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Learnt a little <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn much <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn at all <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>b. Assessment of children's writing</b>				
Learnt a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Learnt a little <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn much <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn at all <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c. Giving children Feedback on Writing</b>				
Learnt a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Learnt a little <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn much <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn at all <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>d. Organising a class for a writing lesson?</b>				
Learnt a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Learnt a little <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn much <input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't learn at all <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>e. How would you rate your application of new skills in your practice in the classroom?</b>				
Applied a lot <input type="checkbox"/>	Applied <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not applied much <input type="checkbox"/>	Not applied at all <input type="checkbox"/>
Please explain:				
<b>f. In terms of attitude to teaching writing, has your attitude been influenced in any way by the year's work (please tick as appropriate)</b>				
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>g. How would you rate the level of influence?</b>				
Very influential <input type="checkbox"/>	Influential <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not very influential <input type="checkbox"/>	Not influential at all <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2.3 Learning gained through different activities:</b>				
<b>a. Team Meetings:</b>				
<b>i. How helpful were the team meetings in helping you look at your own teaching and improve/change your practice?</b>				
Very helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Very unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>b. Whole Staff Workshops</b>				
<b>i. Presenting Proposal to Staff (November staff meeting)</b>				
Very helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Very unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>ii. Professional dialogue on the concept of the professional in a professional learning community (April staff meeting)</b>				
Very helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Very unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>iii. Review of Phase 1 (June Staff meeting)</b>				
Very helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Very unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c. Assessment for Learning (AfL) Workshop with Guest Speaker</b>				
<b>i. How did you rate this workshop?</b>				
Very helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Very unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>ii. Did you change your practice in your class as a result of this workshop?</b>				
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>	

iii. Please explain the main learning points you took from this workshop
<b>3. At a personal level:</b>
a. What specific challenges does this initiative hold for you?
b. What other suggestions could you offer that, in your opinion, would enable teachers to look critically at their practice to improve children's learning?

## SECTION B: STUDENTS

<b>1. Student Learning outcomes</b>				
a. Has the students' learning of writing improved in any way?				
Greatly improved <input type="checkbox"/>	Improved <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not improved <input type="checkbox"/>	Not improved at all <input type="checkbox"/>
b. By what criteria do you judge whether or not students' writing has improved? Elaborate on your answer				
<b>2. Student Data</b>				
a. How many students are there in your class?				
b. According to your experience, and in terms of the rubrics devised during the school year, what percentage of the pupils in your class are:				
i. Level 1: _____				
ii. Level 2: _____				
iii. Level 3: _____				
iv. Level 4: _____				
c. How many students experience serious difficulties in writing				
All (90+) <input type="checkbox"/>	Most (50-90%) <input type="checkbox"/>	Some (10-50%) <input type="checkbox"/>	Few/none (less than 10%) <input type="checkbox"/>	
d. How many students are advanced writers?				
All (90+) <input type="checkbox"/>	Most (50-90%) <input type="checkbox"/>	Some (10-50%) <input type="checkbox"/>	Few/none (less than 10%) <input type="checkbox"/>	
e. In a typical school week, how often would your students write?				
Frequently every day <input type="checkbox"/>	Daily <input type="checkbox"/>	A few times a week <input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>3. How often do the students engage in the following:</b>				
a. Genre writing as in formally scheduled writing time				
Frequently every day <input type="checkbox"/>	Daily <input type="checkbox"/>	A few times a week <input type="checkbox"/>		
b. Writing relating to other areas of the curriculum				
Frequently every day <input type="checkbox"/>	Daily <input type="checkbox"/>	A few times a week <input type="checkbox"/>		



c. Writing for fun/or Writing a story				
Frequently every day <input type="checkbox"/>	Daily <input type="checkbox"/>	A few times a week <input type="checkbox"/>		
4. Do your students use computers for writing?				
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>	
If yes, do they use them:				
a. At home	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>		
b. At school	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>		
c. What software do they use on the computer for writing?				

### SECTION C: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

<b>1. How would you rate the following elements of a professional learning programme? Please give reasons for your answer.</b>				
a. Content knowledge about writing in the school				
Very important <input type="checkbox"/>	Important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important at all <input type="checkbox"/>
b. Skills of teaching and learning writing				
Very important <input type="checkbox"/>	Important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important at all <input type="checkbox"/>
c. Developing a positive attitude, motivation about improving practice				
Very important <input type="checkbox"/>	Important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important at all <input type="checkbox"/>
d. Understanding the theoretical background to what we are doing?				
Very important <input type="checkbox"/>	Important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important at all <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>3. Developing a Professional Vocabulary</b>				
a. How important is it to you to develop a common professional vocabulary with colleagues?				
Very important <input type="checkbox"/>	Important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important <input type="checkbox"/>	Not important at all <input type="checkbox"/>
b. Are there any key terminologies that you feel helped you in clarifying your thinking and communication with colleagues about the initiative?				
<b>4. Concept of a Professional Learning Community</b>				
a. How well do you understand and the concept of the school as a professional learning community?				
Understand very well <input type="checkbox"/>	Understand well <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Understand a little <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't understand <input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain				
b. What does looking at your own practice with colleagues mean to you?				
<b>4. How would you rate how well the full-day workshop with Prof. J. West-Burnham did each of the following:</b>				
a. Develop your understanding of a professional learning community?				
Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Ok <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>
b. Develop your professional vocabulary				
Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Ok <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>
c. Motivate you to continue to participate in the programme				
Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Ok <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5. How intellectually stimulating have you found the programme to be?</b>				
Very stimulating <input type="checkbox"/>	Stimulating <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Not very stimulating <input type="checkbox"/>	Not stimulating at all <input type="checkbox"/>
Give reasons for your answer				
<b>6. Are you happy to engage with the process during the next school year?</b>				
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>7. How would you rate your commitment to the project?</b>				
Very committed <input type="checkbox"/>	Committed <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Uncommitted <input type="checkbox"/>	Very uncommitted <input type="checkbox"/>

## SECTION D: ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

<b>1. Organisational Supports</b>				
a. How would you rate the level of support offered in the school to <u>facilitate your engaging</u> in collaborative activity with your colleagues				
Very high <input type="checkbox"/>	High <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Low <input type="checkbox"/>	Very low <input type="checkbox"/>
b. How would you rate the level of investment by the school in terms of providing expertise?				
Very high <input type="checkbox"/>	High <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Low <input type="checkbox"/>	Very low <input type="checkbox"/>
c. How would you rate the level of support offered by the school in terms of <u>resources</u> to support your learning about the teaching of writing in the school?				
Very high <input type="checkbox"/>	High <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Low <input type="checkbox"/>	Very low <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2. In terms of the <u>organisation arrangements</u> put in place in the school to facilitate colleagues working together, what elements were satisfactory, and what elements were not satisfactory? Why?</b>				

## SECTION E: FACILITATION

1. Facilitation of the programme by outside facilitator:				
How would you rate the facilitation of the programme in terms of each of the following elements?				
a. Ongoing Consultation with the staff?				
Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Ok <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>
b. Introduction and Explanation of the Initiative>				
Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Ok <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>
c. Facilitation of whole staff workshops?				
Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	Ok <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>
d. What elements of the facilitation helped your participation and what elements hindered your participation?				

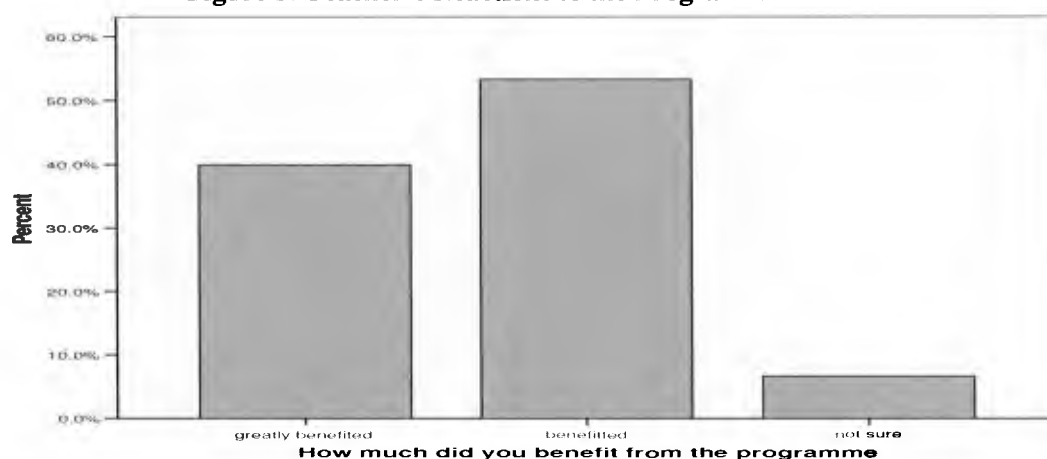
## Appendix 6B: End of Phase 1 Questionnaire Findings

The results are broken into 5 sections, based on the sections of the questionnaire: (1) teacher's reactions to the programme, (2) students, (3) professional learning, (4) organisational supports, and (5) Facilitation.

### 1. Teacher's Reactions to the Programme

Table 1 shows that a majority of teachers benefited or greatly benefited from the programme this year. The main items that they said they enjoyed were sharing time/ideas and learning from other teachers (n=11), and trying out ideas/new ideas (n=5), though 3 teachers did mention time pressures, or time taken away from other areas by being involved in this programme.

Figure 1: Teacher's Reactions to the Programme



### Teachers Learning: Knowledge & Understanding

Teachers were asked to rate their learning or acquisition of knowledge in a number of areas. A majority said they learnt at least a little, with more than half the teachers having learnt a lot about writing genres.

Item	Learnt a lot	Learnt a little	Not sure	Didn't learn much	Didn't learn anything
Art of Writing	33.3%	46.7%	20%	-	-
Writing Genres	53.3%	40%	6.7%	-	-
Motivating Children to write	40%	40%	20%	-	-
Resources for teaching writing	40%	46.7%	6.7%	6.7%	-

### **Describe any new learning**

In terms of describing new learning from the programme, the main themes emerging were a greater insight into the teaching of writing, and awareness of the different genres, and the unique skills involved in each of these genres.

### **Application of this Learning**

Figure 2 shows the extent to which teachers said they applied this with most teachers having brought new awareness/insight into the classroom. In describing their learning, a variety of answers were given, ranging from teachers applying each genre, to focusing on one genre for 4-6 weeks, through descriptions of how specific genres were applied, to finally one or two teachers saying they were too busy to dedicate much time to specific genres.

**Figure 2: Teacher Ratings of Application of New Learning in Practice in the Classroom**



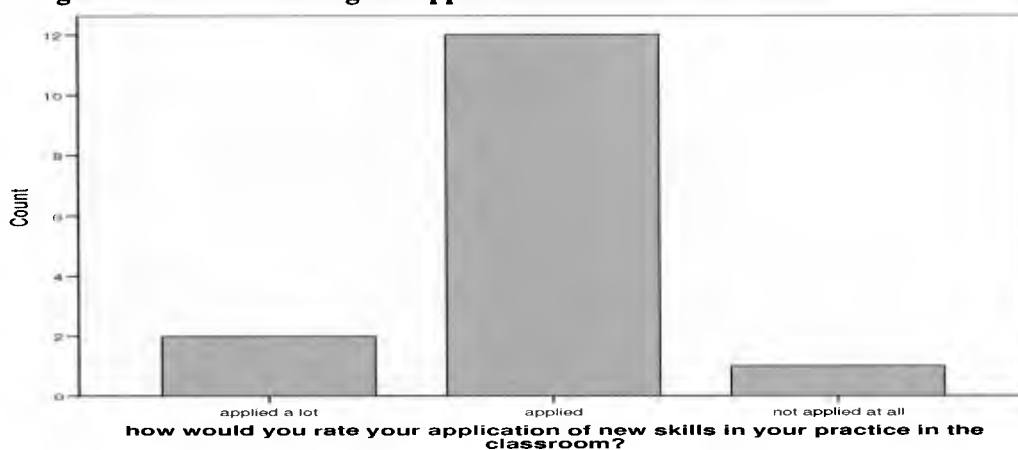
### Learning: Skills

Table 3 shows teachers' learning of skills. Most had learnt at least a little about planning a lesson, assessment of children's writing, feedback on writing, and organising a class for a writing lesson.

Item	Learnt a lot	Learnt a little	Not sure	Didn't learn much	Didn't learn anything
Planning a writing lesson	33.3%	46.7%	6.7%	13.3%	-
Assessment of children's writing	20%	60%	13.3%	6.7%	-
Giving children feedback on writing	40%	46.7%	13.3%	-	-
Organising a class for a writing lesson	26.7%	53.3%	6.7%	6.7%	-

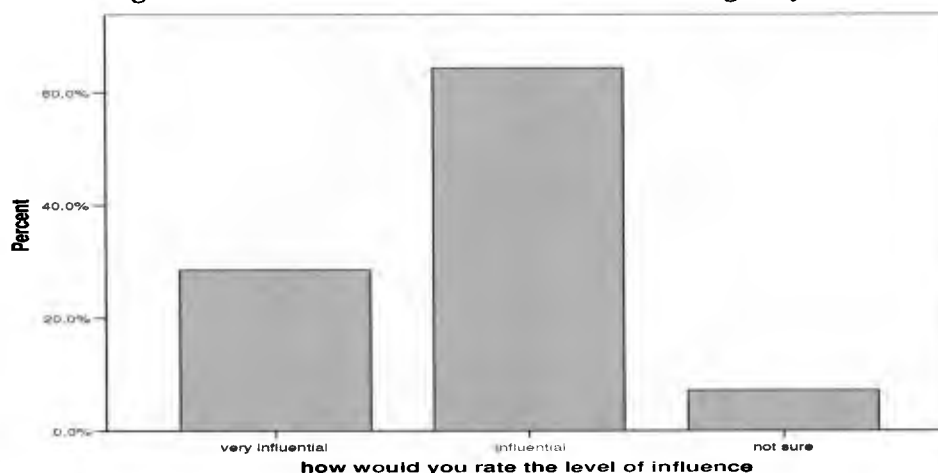
Figure 3 shows that a majority of teachers have applied these newly learnt skills in the classroom.

**Figure 3: Teachers' Ratings of Application of New Skills in Classroom Practice**



When asked to explain this, teachers gave a variety of answers, including the importance of student feedback, and the desire to focus more on assessment, and how it can best be done. Ninety three percent of teachers said their attitude has been influenced by the work done in this project. Figure 4 shows the extent of the influence of this project, with over 60% finding it influential, and none of the teachers finding it not influential.

**Figure 4: How influential was the work done during the year**



The next item focused on how helpful the individual team meeting were. Table 4 shows that most found all the workshops helpful, with only 1 teacher finding any one of the workshops unhelpful – the assessment for learning workshop with guest speaker.

Item	Very Helpful	Helpful	Not sure	Unhelpful	Very unhelpful
Team meetings	26.7%	60%	6.7%	-	-
Presenting proposal to staff	20%	60%	20%	-	-
Professional dialogue on the concept of the professional in a professional learning community	6.7%	86.7%	-	-	-
Review of Phase 1	6.7%	86.7%	6.7%	-	-
Assessment for learning workshop	40%	33.3%	13.3%	6.7%	-

When asked if they changed their practice as a result of this last workshop, 66.7% said yes, and 20% said no. When asked to explain the main learning points from the workshop, teachers replied mainly focusing on the importance of feedback and how it is given to children, as well as the importance of the structure of lessons, and assessment of learning. Only one teacher felt that the workshop moved too quickly and was confusing.

The next question asked the teachers what specific challenges the project held for them. The main issues raised were time taken up by the project; fitting in the new work etc. no single issue was raised prominently, though a few again mentioned the importance of how children's learning was assessed.

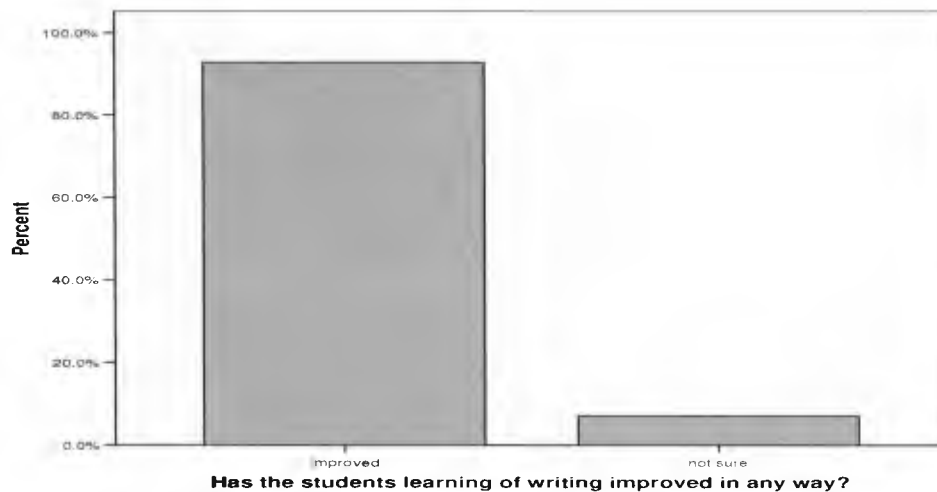
The following question looked at suggestions for enabling teachers to look critically at their practice to improve children's learning. The main ideas arising from this were that teachers should co-ordinate with each other and be open to new ideas and models which they can gain from discussing issues or observing each others' practice. Use of video to observe practice was mentioned a number of times.

## **2. Students**

Section 2 focuses on student outcomes. The first question asks whether students' learning of writing has improved in any way as a result of the project, with a majority of teachers again saying that it improved. When asked what criteria they used to judge improvements, a number of items were mentioned, including assessment, changes in creativity, lessening of mistakes, and use of the aspects of the genres.



**Figure 5: Impact of Programme on Students' Learning improved**

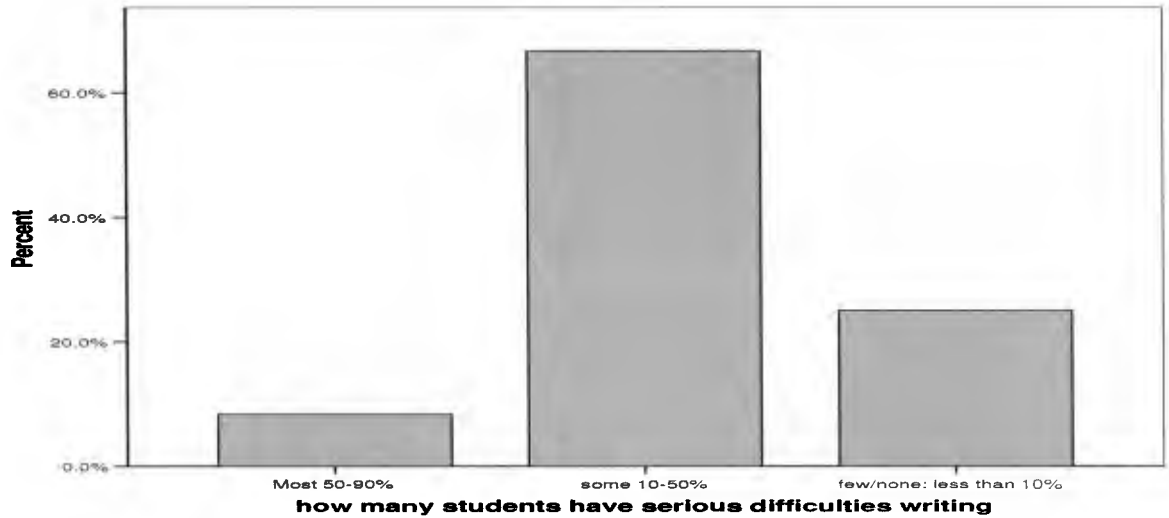


Teachers were asked how many students were in their class. The range of students was between 24 and 37, with a mean figure of 28.46 (standard deviation = 3.92).

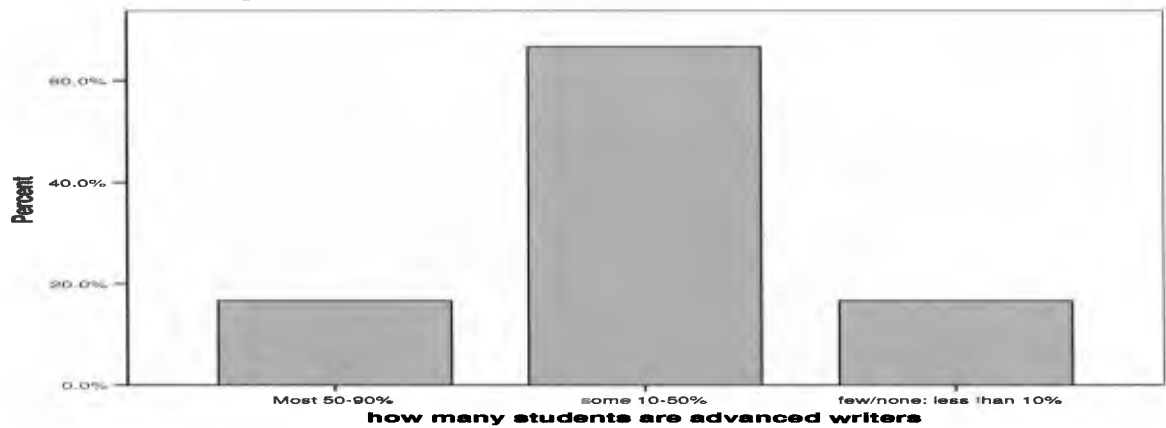
When asked how many students were at specific levels in terms of writing ability. For level 1, all were less than 25% of the class. For level 2, five teachers said that more than 25% of the class were at this level. For level 3, 5 teachers said that over 25% of the class were at this level. Finally for level 4, none of the teachers said that over 25% were at this level.

When asked how many students had difficulty writing, figure 6 shows that only 1 teacher had more than 50% of the class having serious writing difficulties, with most having a smaller proportion of the class experiencing difficulties writing. The same pattern shows in figure 7 for advanced writers in the classes.

**Figure 6: How many students have serious difficulties writing**



**Figure 7: How many students are advanced writers**



The next set of questions deal with how often children engage in particular types of writing. Table 5 shows that most students engage in writing at least once a day, with genre writing happening on a weekly basis, and writing in relation to other subjects happening on a daily/weekly basis..

	Frequently – every day	Daily	A few times a week
How often students write	46.7%	26.7%	13.3%
Genre writing in formally scheduled writing time	6.7%	26.7%	53.3%
Writing relating to other areas of the curriculum	13.3%	33.3%	40%
Writing for fun / writing a story	-	6.7%	73.3%

With regard to the use of computers, 66.7% said that the children used computers for writing, with 40% of them using computers for writing at home and 53.3% saying that the children used the computers for writing at school. The most frequently mentioned programme was Microsoft word and notepad.

### 3. Professional Learning

The next section focuses on professional learning. Teachers were asked to rate the elements of the professional learning programme. Table 6 shows that all elements were deemed important, particularly the skills of teaching and learning writing, and developing a positive attitude.

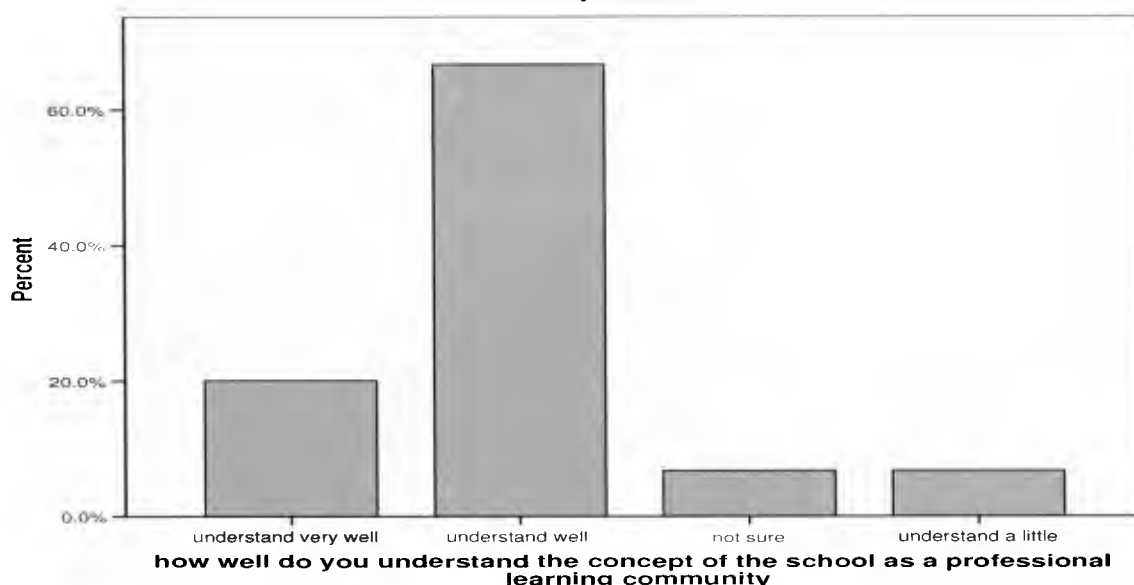
#### Rating of elements

Item	Very important	Important	Not sure	Not important	Not important at all
Content knowledge about writing in the school	46.7%	46.7%	6.7%	-	-
Skills of teaching and learning writing	60%	33.3%	6.7%	-	-
Developing a positive attitude, motivation about improving practice	60%	40%	-	-	-
Understanding the theoretical background to what we are doing	6.7%	73.3%	13.3%	6.7%	-

Similarly, 6.7% of teachers said that developing a common vocabulary with colleagues was very important, with 80% saying it was important. When asked what key terminologies they felt helped in clarifying thinking and communicating with colleagues, few answers were given, though one did mention familiarisation with the different genres, and one mentioned rubrics.

The next question asked them whether they understood the concept of the school as a professional learning community, figure 8 shows that a majority of teachers thought they understood the term. When asked to explain it the main patterns of answer were the importance of sharing/ongoing learning through co-operation and discussion, with a particular focus on helping to aid the children's learning. When asked what looking at their own practice with colleagues meant to them, the main pattern again related to the importance of openness and sharing ideas, advice, discussing teaching methods and problems, and similar.

**Figure 8: Understanding of the concept of the school as a professional learning community**

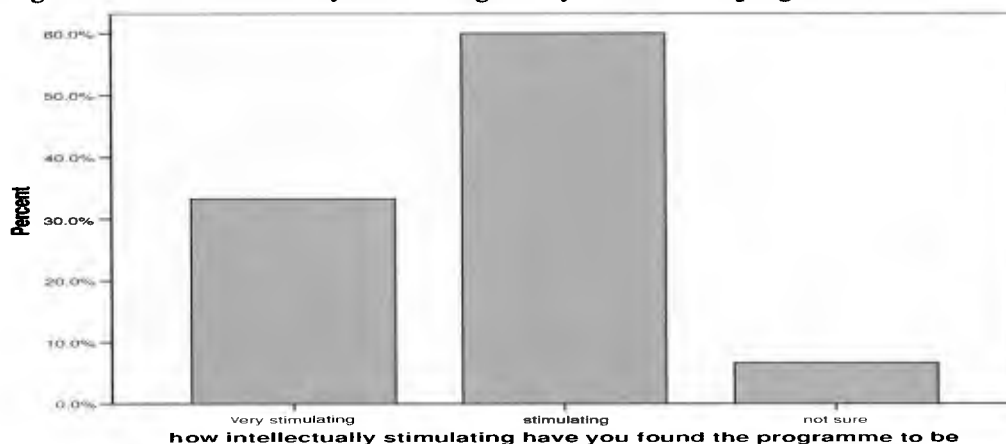


The next question focuses on the workshop run by Guest Speaker. Teachers were asked to rate the course in terms of the items laid out in table 7. It proved good at developing understanding of a professional learning community, developing professional vocabulary, and motivating the teachers to continue with the programme.

Item	Very good	Good	Not sure	Fair	Poor
Develop your understanding of a professional learning community	46.7%	53.3%	-	-	-
Develop your professional vocabulary	33.3%	40%	20%	6.7%	
Motivate you to continue to participate in the programme	46.7%	46.7%	-	6.7%	

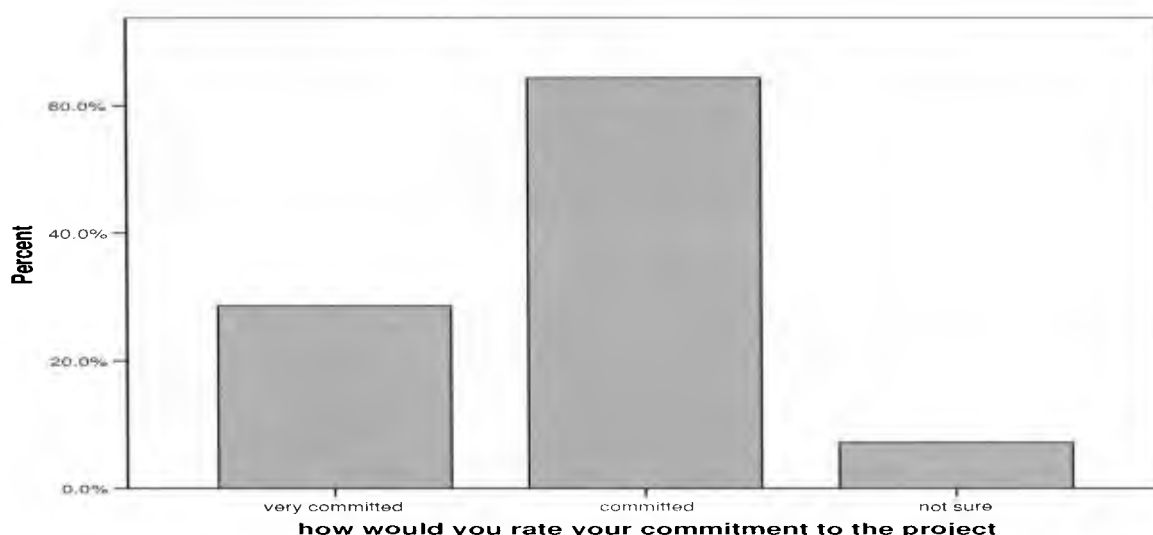
Figure 9 shows how intellectually stimulating the teachers found the programme, with a majority finding it stimulating or very stimulating. When asked to explain this, a number of teachers mentioned getting inspiration from the programme – either through getting new ideas, being encouraging and enjoyable, a number commented on the importance of group meetings.

**Figure 9: How intellectually stimulating have you found the programme to be?**



When asked if they were happy to engage with the process during the next school year, 86.7% said they were (with the other 13.3% not responding). When asked to rate how committed they were to the programme, figure 7 shows that a majority were committed or very committed to the programme.

**Figure 10: Level of Commitment to the Programme**



#### **4. Organisational Factors**

Section 4 focuses on organisational factors. Table 7 shows the level of support the teachers felt they had. They felt that they were supported in engaging in collaborative activity, that there was good investment in school in providing expertise, and the level of support offered in terms of resources to support learning of teaching of writing in the school.

Item	Very high	High	Not sure	Low	Very low
Level of support offered in the school to facilitate engaging in collaborative activity	26.7%	66.7%	6.7%	-	-
level of investment by the school in terms of providing expertise	40%	40%	13.3%	-	-
Level of support offered by the school in terms of resources to support your learning about the teaching of writing in the school	6.7%	60%	26.7%	-	-

When asked what elements of the organisation of the programme were satisfactory and unsatisfactory, the meetings were said to be satisfactory, but a number of teachers

mentioned problems with time – the amount of time taken up with meetings, and the need for substitute teachers to cover while they are at the meeting.

## 5. Facilitation

The final section looked at the facilitation of the course. Table 8 shows teachers' rating of how well the following elements helped the programme, with all the elements being positively rated, especially facilitation of whole staff workshops.

Item	Very good	Good	Not sure	Fair	Poor
On-going consultation with the staff	53.3%	46.7%	-	-	-
Introduction and explanation of the initiative	60%	26.7%	13.3%	-	-
Facilitation of whole staff workshops	73.3%	26.7%	-	-	-

When asked what elements of the facilitation helped their participation and what hindered their participation, the main issues raised were the structure which was in place, and they were in general very positive, particularly about the facilitators, the deadlines. The only hindrance mentioned was time.

## Appendix 7: Record Of Teachers' Engagement In Data Generation

(In the interest of confidentiality participants on the programme are referred to by coded number known only to me.)

No	FT	W'Shop 1 Intro	W'Shop 1 PCT	W'Shop 2 DeBonoHats	TPLT Meeting	Interview 2	Written Review of Writing	Summary Update of Term 1	April Review	JWB DAY	AfL	End of Year Questionnaire
01		•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•
02		•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•
03	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
04		•	•	•						•	•	
05		•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•
06		•	•	•						•	•	
07		•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•
08		•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•
09		•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•
10		•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•
11		•	•	•	•		•		•		•	
12	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
13		•	•	•							•	
14		•	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•
15	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
16	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
17	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
18		•	•	•						•	•	
19	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
20		•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•
21	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
22	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Code: FT: In-School Facilitator' Team      TPLT: Teacher Professional Learning Team Meeting      AfL: Assessment for Learning Seminar



## Appendix 8: Transcription of Post Observation Conference Z

Key: F = Facilitator T. = Teacher of lesson - Speakers 3,4,5,6 & 7 = Teacher

Colleagues

T. 1= Teacher's (of lesson) first intervention in discussion. 3.5= Colleague No.3's fifth intervention in discussion (Colleagues are numbered according to order in which they initially intervened in discussion)

Speaker	Contribution to Discussion
	Stage one: Purpose To explore the issue: Analysis & Diagnosis
F.1	Ok, listen//, thanks a million for coming back and looking at the video again// So// just for a starter, em, // because we have seen the video before// we might just have a quick run around //and say what are the things that strike us //and, maybe even the things that struck you the first time// you know, There would be no harm in remembering them //and are there things that strike you now //that didn't strike you before? So, T. will you open it ? [turning to the teacher of the lesson] //and then we'll leave you close this section, // Is that ok?...so we'll just talk a little bit about 'what do we see' when we look at the video of T's lesson//
T.1	Em, again, just looking at it a second time// I think it's great to see how the kids worked together, //just to see them totally engrossed, //(they were) helping each other and working in groups of threes //and, em certainly a fair bit of cooperation going on there //again there's one previous scene //where you see one helping [another] with the spelling of some particular words //and they seemed to stick to the roles they had, //which was secretary//, reporter who wrote down// and a captain who made sure everybody made a contribution //and the person who looked up the dictionary //or just checked the book.// Again the vocabulary they used I thought was quite impressive as well //because it's a follow up to a science lesson //and it comes across very well, //they picked up a fair bit of knowledge//
F. 2	Yeah, I think the vocabulary was great! // if there's anything that strikes anybody else, //and then we'll come back to T, // If that would be alright with you T? //
3.1	I thought, //em using explanation writing really lends itself to the whole SCSE area // and I wouldn't have thought of using it as much in that subject, //but they [children] responded very, very well to what explanation writing was, // and they were well equipped with all the information, //it [the explanation exercise] was second nature to them //so they didn't, // they weren't as focused on the technicalities. // They had that //and they were able to just apply it.//So I'd definitely use it more with SCSE, // history, //geography, // whichever, // I suppose in geography, science, history//
F.3	What was the main feeling that you were left with // after seeing that video?
4.1	They really enjoyed it // yes you could see that -//having them in groups is probably a little bit more exciting than having them do it by themselves, //so...
5.1	Very successful lesson. // The objectives that were set out at the beginning were met. //
F.4	Did you have learning intentions, // ...oh they knew them already? // you had already explained to them? // They seemed to be very clear on what was...//

T.2	The title was called 'How do we hear?' // We had done a lesson on the ear using SCSE, //again they knew from the piece of explanation writing we worked on at the very start, //we went through what makes a piece of explanation writing. //Again they came up with use of the present tense, // time connectives // and then you had your introduction, //main part, //conclusion... so they had a format //
F.5	Ok, // and if you [addressing T.] were to look at... //let's say a lot of things were happening, // There were a number of people in the classroom. // If you wanted to explore that area with us //or, the whole idea of children assuming roles //and understanding roles and //how does that contribute to learning? We can look at any of those issues that might strike you... // or if there's anything in particular... //I know the last day You were concerned about modeling.//
T.3	Yes...[I was concerned about]//a total modeling lesson //
F.6	Maybe if we talked about that for a while, // Because I'm not quite sure, // maybe you do, [speaking to others]// what you mean by a model lesson? // maybe if we tease that out a little bit // through questioning around that for a little while. // Well what does A. mean by that?
6.1	Was it to create a whole piece of explanation writing yourself ? //, on the board? // Is that it?
T.4	Yes, // it was to give them an example, // And then just, as it was their first time working as groups [for writing] //so I was wondering //would it affect the creativity of the whole thing. // I don't think so //because even with some bullet points //they still...//I did put the introduction up // having listened to various introductions from the children.// One particular one that appealed to me...// so I feel in the beginning //they always need models to look at and //just see and explore what was good about it...//
F.7	So //they hadn't seen a model of explanation writing before? //- They would have-? //they would have, // ok/?
T.5	But this [lesson] would have been their third or fourth lesson in explanation writing, // So...//
4.2	Is this the first one they wrote themselves? //or had they written other ones? //
T.6	Oh, they had// they had written other ones//
3.2	Sorry, //when you say modeled writing, // do you mean that you would put up something you'd prepared on, em 'how we hear' //or would you guide them though it // or get them to give you the writing, //em, I don't quite follow //
T.7	Em, // I would have listened to their views, // [I would have] written it out in sentences and paragraphs // using time connectives and present tense. // And afterwards //they'd just stand back from it //and say highlight things...// just point out...things.
7.1	So would it be the kids themselves, [that would create the piece]// they're actually giving you the ideas // and you just give it a structure then? // - ok //
F.8	And what would you see as the advantages of that?
T...8	Em, again it would be sort of // just something they could refer to, // hopefully it [modeling the writing] would highlight things like time-// connectives, // the present tense, //use of paragraphs // and then just putting it all together.//
F.9	You mentioned creativity, // Ok//, is creativity important to you? // Yes? //so how creative do we think, // or how successful was the lesson in developing creativity? // You might like to comment a bit on that as it's an important issue for you //
T. .9	Eh looking at the end product, // there was //.....a certain amount of creativity//
F.10	ok, // what were the other's thoughts in terms of creativity?
4.3	Well it was quite successful, //the fact that you did your science lesson... //I would think you wouldn't have gotten as good a feedback if that wasn't done // because it [topic]was difficult enough you know, //

	so it was good in that respect. //Even the weaker ones seemed to have picked up on a few of those things //
5.2	Even in that genre of writing, // it's not the most creative genre. // It's quite rigid in its structure so...//
6.2	Yes // I agree with that. // It's a different type of creativity to the type you'd have in narrative or something. // You know this [explanation genre] is very functional, // it's a very functional type of writing, // so it requires a certain knowledge base or something, // and obviously the boys had the knowledge base, //as A said having done the science lesson beforehand....
3.3	You say their creativity may be more in the facts or extra information that they may have contributed themselves // and the conclusion that you mentioned for 'did you know that' // and the facts, things like that. ..// It's a good opportunity to show their individual creativity. // Is the dilemma kind of, // if we model a lesson are we sacrificing creativity? // Is this kind of thing, the question we're looking at?
T.10	Well I suppose as K said here, // the fact that it's an explanation lesson, // you're limited in creativity, // because it is, // the whole idea is to explain, //to explain how, // so I suppose // the question is : Did they explain in their piece of writing?...//
4.4	I'd be worried if you modeled that lesson, //if you modeled that piece of writing that there wouldn't be much else that they could give you, // only what you had given them. //When they came up with bullet points etcetera, //it gave them the vocabulary //and they had to, //you know, //put the flesh around the bones...
7.2	So, // did not modeling it, restrict their creativity? ///I think not really, //Because, It is a functional genre, //so would modeling actually have helped? // They had all the background information in points.//
T.11	There is a website, //an Australian website by Jane Eater, // and again she does model lessons, //just showing pieces of explanation writing //and all the different genres as well, //and I find it very helpful // Because again clicking on one thing will highlight this area, //present tense// highlight time connectives, //and just the different paragraphs // and different points being made, //so, //modern technology is great that way. //you just visually see it. //
F.11	So what then is the essence of a good piece of explanation writing? //we have said that it explains something--// ok // so if it's not creative thinking in the way that we'd associate creative thinking with a story telling or a narrative, //what is it then we're looking for in the way they tell it?//
6.3	That they understand the...formula maybe is the wrong word, // that they understand the requirements of the genre, //that they have got a template, //or got a formula they have to follow // and they've included as T. put up on the board, //at least your introduction, //at least your middle bit //and your conclusion //and maybe to follow that..
F.12	If somebody is explaining something to us, What makes a good explanation?
5.3	That we know what to do at the end of it..
F.13	Ok, // ok //and that it usually has logic to it? //Is it that it has a logic? //
3.4	I suppose it's how they explain the points as well. // Yes, // sometimes they'll just put down one or two sentences //and not fully develop the points. //They know how to explain, // they just don't write it down, // and there is a lot of information, // so I suppose....//
F.14	Ok, //so is that [logical explanation] something that we need to work on in terms of explanation writing? //to identify where the gaps are in children's logic,
6.4	No, //I suppose it involves grouping, // grouping their knowledge and their putting ideas together, //and helping them to structure it in the right order maybe, // sort of ...//That you'd come out with a clear --clear explanation //yes, // clear explanation at the end yeah.
F.15	And to what extent can we bring explanation writing into, ...//we have seen it there // with, how T worked it there with SCSE.// If you wanted to see now, //how much children have learned the concept, // Where else might they use it, throughout the week, /// in a school week? //Are there other

	areas that, //because one of the things I think we often find is that //children will write well within the...//I think people have made this point before //that they'll write very well in the structure of a lesson, //but when they have to use it elsewhere they forget, //because they associate the discipline of the writing with the writing lesson //
7.3	I think that it [explanation] would cross over into many different genres, // more oral language, //I mean but you can't just stop explaining various things....//
7.4	Yeah, it could be endless the amount of things you actually cross into. // You could use it in geography, // science, // specific things, // explaining how a volcano erupts, //and typically something in SCSE, clearly // but, oral language, //developing oral language, //explaining their status, // various little small things, //you know
<b>TRANSITION TO STAGE TWO Purpose of Stage two: Synthesis, Where to go? What supports needed?</b>	
F.16	ok, //so we'll just move on then just a little bit, // and we might just reflect for a little bit on, em, //having looked at the video again, //having teased it out again //this time, from a different angle, //are there any insights we might have gained, //..if any?//And we'll just talk about that for a few minutes, //have we got any new understandings from the short discussion//and then we'll move on to what were the kind of practical things we might have to do, // in our own classroom context.// Ok if we just think about anything new that struck us today...//... Anything that struck you A. from the conversation? //Sorry for putting you in the hot seat again!
T.12	It's just the last point there about using this outside the structured lesson// ..... it just made me think about what opportunities would I have...to use it in other areas of the curriculum.//...As D said, maybe geography or science. //You wouldn't use it too much, //just maybe linked to the SPSE...//...
5.5	And the importance of order ...//you can see in something as simple as that, how important it is to put it in order, //not the last one first//
F.17	It strikes me about explanation writing// that it has a lot to do with thinking structurally // the sequences ...
6.5	And maybe that's even more important In the younger age groups// even more than for our pupils that we're teaching.// Is it to get them to know, 'this happens first, then that, next comes in and finally. ...//The younger classes, //they might do a lot about that, you know, //first you do this, and this comes next, //you know //to learn the steps in order perhaps...
3.6	It's important that they'd have to have that really, you know//
T.13	You need...//in children's writing to be able to source information as well beforehand//, so that they don't start expanding on just one or two points, and just leave it there//
7.5	You might presume that the reader knows about it as well, //like you said there, //they need to kind of question, //they need to take a step back and realise they're explaining it to somebody who doesn't have a clue at all whatsoever. //So to develop all their points no matter how easy they might think they are. //The person that they're speaking to doesn't understand...//
F.18	Yes, //so another thing that children need to be aware of is their audience, //of who they're writing for... //Em, ok, can we just, // Even if we just thought for a moment // as a result of this chat what particular steps would we each take in our own classroom context, //what would you say: I'm going to try xxx, //or in relation to whatever writing your doing at the moment, //because I know you've moved on from explanation writing.// But as a result of this discussion //what would you like to emphasise in your own teaching during the week /// , is that alright?// we'll just look at it for a few minutes //so, we'll just think about it for a few seconds.....
<b>Stage three: Purpose of Stage three: Action Plan</b>	
7.6	Is it a follow on from what we've just been talking about there?

F.19	Yes, //from this particular discussion, // What might we try to implement in our own teaching as a result of that... // Ok, //any thoughts on that?
6.6	We just need to be conscious and aware, //and just try to link everything, // even though as you say, // we've moved on to other genres now but if something came up, //even though you mightn't have specifically planned it in your SCSE, //you might say: oh there's another opportunity there for us now to maybe do an explanation on that, // and you know //remind the pupils about that again
3.7	It's not limited to just six weeks every year, // it's a live process
5.6	I'd also like to focus on the fact that, //never presume that, whatever is so obvious to you, is also obvious to the people your writing it for
7.7	I'm getting a group of the lads in my class to give short lessons during the week. // One of the lads in my class, he's giving a computer lesson, //just a fifteen minute lesson and --// he gave one a couple of weeks ago, // but he was a little bit presumptuous that the children knew the basics // and so I just reminded him to structure his lesson //and I suppose just to emphasise to him to explain everything clearly...// . So the kids can get the full picture//. Instead of just skipping the little small things?
F.20	That's a nice idea
7.8	The same with a P.E. lesson.//Two of the lads gave a PE lesson yesterday; //it was a rugby lesson, //just doing the skills. // they probably didn't explain what the benefits of the various skills were, //you know before actually starting drills //to give the overview to the player, //this is what we've been doing.
F.21	That's very good – that's excellent.
T.14	For people that are into sport, or computers, // it's a great opportunity to share it //kids working a lot in groups, // working together rather than on their own, //they're getting in to the habit of it now//
3.8	Yeah they learn a lot from each other don't they //--it's amazing yeah
5.7	And then in other subjects also, like...
T.15	Even in maths and spelling //it's great, // and again they're hoping that....//...they can move on a bit quicker....//., and the writing I feel , the whole idea of sharing ideas, //sometimes the weaker ones, they don't contribute too much but I think they're listening and learning //and they'll be picking it up. //
F.22	And in that lesson //as a matter of interest, // B's role, //how did that contribute to the lesson? // how might that be developed? //Sorry I'm gone into a different area... //but, it struck me...
T.16	I suppose I could've involved her more really, //she was there, // she was helping me... //even from the video you could see X there, [referring to a child] //his concentration...//. He seems to take things in //but he's not focused, you know //and even B got him to read out...word for word
3.9	[B working with] two weak children? //--two extremely weak yeah --//that's good, // they do need the focus of the teacher himself.
5.8	And how did you group them actually, Was it by? //was it – just randomly?
T.17	It was, //most of them were as they were sitting, //three on either side.// C then worked with Y...//.So again in fact, I forgot actually just to get feedback from them //just to see – what were they doing on the computer//-- They were just following a lesson...on the ear. //
3.10	oh, so it was all tied in, that's a great idea
T.18	But it would have been nice just to, //with B, if I could've sat down for a while, and B, expanded...//

F.23	And now and again it might be an idea to call on B during the lesson..?
T.19	Because in maths we do, //B comes in, if there is something that strikes her, she would say... //it's great//
3.11	Yeah, it is, // having two teachers, makes a huge difference
Stage four: Purpose of Stage four: Review the Process	
F.24	Ok ...in terms of how this process works //and the idea of teacher –professional conversations in this context, // Just some feedback from you people on whether it is worthwhile? // em, just some of your thoughts on that, // is it worthwhile? //What aspects of it helped make it effective? //what aspects of it would be in danger of just turning it into another chat // that actually has little impact on our classroom practice? //you know those kind of ideas. // ....
3.12	I suppose sharing, //sharing what has worked in lessons and that //and agreeing a practice that we have found has been positive // and organising the lesson.//I know personally that, if I feel I'm doing what the other teachers are doing, // I suppose there is reassurance in that, //so that would mean that we're all singing from the same hymn sheet
7.9	I find it productive //in the sense that working in a small group like this, that, you know, //bouncing ideas off each other, // whereas if it was a larger group it probably wouldn't work as well, //you'd probably tail off, //lose the point of what you're actually trying to do, // trying to go through the teaching methods we use...//So I find these type of session very good
6.7	Yeah, //I suppose there is more of a formality to it, //I think maybe teachers need an informal setting as well //to kind of let off steam a bit to each other, // but I suppose for this one, // as you say to be more beneficial and productive, we probably should follow the model //you know //and maybe confine ourselves to the time and one or two particular dilemmas that you want to discuss with your colleagues, // so that there will be,...// it won't be just another talking shop session//saying that, yeah, // it would be beneficial.
T.20	I suppose time is so precious, //there's so many things going on after school, //P.E, //music, //dance, // recorder.// And to find that time, it's getting harder and harder.// And a smaller group is more focused. //When its large groups like in a staff meeting sometimes, you switch off, //whereas here...
3.13	It's more specific because all the children, all our children are the same age.
5.9	And the video is a really good idea as well A, //to have it to actually focus on talking about something. and we've seen what worked...
T.21	And for the person who did the lesson, //the feedback has been great! // [laugh] I know who my friends are! // [laugh] But from that point of view it's encouraging//. Kind of a sense of reward as well for the work you've done//
6.8	It's probably great for you to do a bit of assessment as well in a way. //You know //when you actually watch your own children on the video //or DVD, //you'll probably see something you wouldn't see when you're standing at the top of the classroom
T.22	They're amazing [referring to children in class] because it didn't bother them at all, //I was self-conscious, //I just wanted to get out of the way!
3.14	You were very natural!
6.9	Yet it didn't interfere with the children's focus at all --//no-
F.25	No, because you were yourself! // Right so we'll just wrap it up at that, OK? ... thanks a million.

## Appendix 9: Transcription of Post Observation Conference Y

Key: F = Facilitator T. = Teacher of lesson - Speakers 3,4, & 5 = Teacher Colleagues

T. 1= Teacher's (of lesson) first intervention in discussion. 3.5= Colleague No.3's fifth intervention in discussion (Colleagues are numbered according to order in which they initially intervened in discussion)

Speaker	
	<b>Stage one: Purpose To explore the issue: Analysis &amp; Diagnosis</b>
F	[thanks everybody for coming, sets out time frame, explains format from model on the wall – not picked up by video]
T.1	What I thought we might look at was //‘how can we help the children peer assess? //And that we might have a chat about it. //That’s my dilemma <sup>20</sup> for this session.... (Pre-recorded lesson plays out on video and group watches)
F.1	So, let’s just get some general feedback for T. // And then we’ll ask her for her own thoughts...
2.1	I thought T. explained it [explanation writing] very well //yeah -, it really was very clear, //and watching them [the children] doing it, //they were very focused //and they were busy //and they were enjoying it//, which is important.
3.1	Yeah, [it was] super!
2.2	I thought //it [lesson] was a great presentation, well done.
4.1	I thought// it was really good, like you// I would have left out the first little bit//, other than that it was perfect, really good.
F.2	I loved the structure [of the lesson]
4.2	They [children] worked hard during it//, and they knew what they were doing// which is the main thing.
T.2	They were eager to learn, you know.
4.3	You got through a lot of work as well, //Well done!
F.3	When you look at the end result.//....[looking at samples of writing], and [you] see the learning! // And I think// when you had groups of two or three, //they really worked. //... We found the same the other day //- two or three seems to be a good number in a group.
4.4	What I might have done.....//..... what you could have done there maybe,... //possibly was,...// you know when you were getting their ideas, // if you got them kind of peer assessing others, // and [you] get one child, have a look at another child’s list, //and get them to mark their best ones //and then kind of focus on those ones//. Maybe four from a group, //The way you do it is really good though, // just something else you might do//. It’s just to get them to kind of assess each other //and see, // because then //they’re actually seeing the other boys ideas as well as their own, // ...and so, might be an idea, I suppose
F.4	So maybe // we’ll... will we start looking at it //and we’ll try to follow that format //if that’s alright? //and would you like to, say first of all, // what you think worked, //what you would like to focus on? //
T.3	Eh, I think overall it worked, // and listening to it, you know, // they engaged in the activity//. I was focusing on the end bit, [of the lesson]// when they had to assess each other’s work, //and obviously it all was my fault too at the start// saying, to them //[you] focus on neat handwriting and all that stuff//. But then afterwards//, when I was looking back over that, [the lesson on video] //I should have paid more attention to explaining hibernation correctly// and checking that they did get it.// Did it come across in their piece that they knew what hibernation was?// instead of saying: neat handwriting, // need more connectives //...because you could see the last one



	[referring to sample of a child's writing]// did use connectives// and they [those who peer assessed] were just .... nit-picking //...So that's where I needed the help// yeah.
F.5	So //you'd like to explore, // how can we get the children to show they understand the concept of persuasive writing// as much as looking at the external presentation?
T.4	Yeah .....Perfect presentation, I know it's important and everything but...
	Break
4.5	I don't really understand what you're trying to...
5.1	So// rather than picking on their spellings //or the connectives// Were you hoping more that //through the piece that they would show they understand by writing down those points //...explaining 'hibernation'?//
T.5	Yeah, //I wanted them to, //I suppose at the end // [they] to kind of have a good few sentences //that indicated what hibernation was.
5.2	And that's what you would have preferred they focused on?
2.3	Yeah, // would it be better for them [children] to have a question for what you're looking for from each section, //say take your introduction// and you ask them a question, // "is hibernation explained" //and they go through the questions //that you want to ask before you start assessing// before you ask them to start assessing.
5.3	And the children know that they're the questions that they have to focus on //...yeah -....
2.4	Initially you start them off //you give them [the questions]// and then maybe// eventually// they can come up with their own//, would that be better idea? // - Yeah exactly.
T.6	Or even maybe using key words// that they, you know// for hibernation, we could do that.
5.4	I thought it was interesting though, //when they were given their assessment, // the faces of the boys who they were assessing// They were very good,[laugh] //well N. particularly //who was sort of saying// and "who are you to know" //It's hard on children isn't it, to do something like that in front of others? // Do you think doing it in front of the children is a good idea? //
T.7	Yeah, possibly [not a good idea]
5.5	Well //it was teaching them how to do it//I know you have to do that //in order to teach them how to do it, but
F.6	So// it's exploring the whole thing about peer assessment//and why is it important// do you think that it is important?
T.8	Eh, //I think it is good for the children to see other people's work definitely// and, you know //why would you consider that piece of work to be good //... I wouldn't have made them compare [one child's writing with another ] like // why would that piece be better than another piece?// ... but a way for them to see as a teacher what you're looking for//
3.2	Would you not then be able to give them a piece with no name on it// and say to them// "now assess it and pick what's good, what's not good" -yeah.
4.6	Yeah that'd be a good idea
3.3	24
F.7	Why is peer assessment important?
4.7	I think it's important //because they're not hearing it from the teacher all the time// they're hearing it from a different voice: //their peers and their friends who they play with in school yard// and as you know //children would be honest on things// and they don't really go back on stuff// but they'd also.... they praise more easily than adults as well// so they criticise and praise//. It's important that they kind of get feedback from each other//
3.4	We might look for too much as well sometimes
4.8	Yeah, that's what I mean, // we're looking for perfection. //We're looking for handwriting, // spelling, // grammar, //do you know what I mean? Content!
5.6	Yeah but they [the children] did as well!
4.9	I know they did as well, //but sometimes it's good for them to hear from each other//, because it's not something they're used to as well// it's something different, maybe they'd be more likely to listen to each other sometimes //I wouldn't use it all the time
5.7	I think //the more they do it probably the better they get, //the more constructive.....
T.9	They had never done peer assessment before// - it was their first time. // Maybe if we developed it further than that then//, maybe focusing on the correct question //, like as you said then, focus in



	on a certain area rather than presentation, //you know.
4.10	The only problem though // is a sensitivity issue, // like some children would be very sensitive //, and– well in fairness, you know, // someone is correcting someone else’s work, // you know, it [correcting work] can be negative//, it can have a positive effect and a negative effect//. You can kind of see some of the potential pitfalls...//
5.8	And children too mightn’t be inclined to see any fault with their own work// but [children] could see a fault in the...//
T.10	Here’s some of the, [referring to sample of children’s work] it’s not actually from the end of the lesson...
2.5	Can I just raise the point there //that, the difficulty that I would see for the weaker child in peer assessment //– we would need to be careful...// ... So I think //you need to be very careful how you pair a weaker child, //especially if their writing itself is kind of...
T.11	Yeah, being aware of who you are putting with who// That’s very good, ...
4.11	It is very good because, it works//, peer assessment would work better // because in pairs you’re not directly criticising one child, ...//...they’re evaluating both their works, which makes it kind of, takes the sting out of it.... It is a great idea mixing the strong and the weak//
T.12	Ok, //I did that just before Christmas// ‘Why are we sending shoe boxes? //...[referring to the school’s participation in a ‘Christmas Shoe Box’ initiative to help others at Christmas] //And I put the strong one and the weak one together.// And this case here [referring to sample of writing] a stronger boy was with a weaker boy//. And the other boy [weaker] actually helped an awful lot //, and he just talked out his ideas to his partner// and the other [partner] wrote it down//
F.8	Which piece would you like us to look at? [referring to the samples of writing on the table]
T.13	Em, //I’m just saying this one here, // yeah, the stronger -weaker pairing, //and there is a huge gap there, // the stronger boy wrote it //and the other [boy] felt he was contributing, // but he[‘weaker boy] wouldn’t have been able to do it on his own //– he wouldn’t have been able to write anything
F. 9	So //you want us to see, if children were peer assessing this piece what would we like them to pick out from this piece of writing, //is that right?// –yeah.
5.9	Well he made his points very well, // and he’s separated them out into paragraphs...//.
F.10	So how could we help children to do that ...to peer assess?
5.10	Well //like you were saying earlier, // would you put the questions [that they would focus their assessment on ] on the board// – yeah, I think that’d be good
4.12	Maybe, I suppose, //I’m actually just looking at the poster there [reading a piece from a wall chart in the classroom]//‘who? What? Where? When? How’. //We could put those questions on the board//. Who’s it for? When are we going to get it done? Where are we going to? // Why do they need it so badly? // That’s what I mean, //it gives them a nice kind of a framework, // Instead of asking direct questions,... that’s basically doing the work for them, // but when you give them, those questions, it does make them think a little bit more as well...// and they can make their own conclusions.
5.11	And take the focus off the spellings and the full stops//, I mean I found that was my first thing too//...! –everyone’s is!
F.11	Does this piece show us the child has understood explanation writing?[referring to a sample of writing]
5.12	I think it does yeah.
2.6	He’s introduced it //and he’s introduced it quite well, // and then he developed on that explanation, //and his conclusion is great// –very good.
F.12	So how would we help that child improve?
4.13	Yeah, in light of some of the ideas he could expand on them a little bit more, //‘why is it an act of kindness?’ //Do you know what I mean?
5.13	It’s just that when they’re young, //you’ve to make the call early on whether or not it’s points you want, from as young as this, //or if they’re ready then to go further...//That sometimes is the hard one, // where you have the mix of ability//... you might expect it of X but not of Y.
4.14	it’s a very good standard for third class, // the content is excellent
T.14	29
2. 7	11

4.15	The only thing you could do, // you could correct it in front of them and you could explain where you could expand on things, // and how you do the whole process again and see if it, explain where you could expand on, //
5.14	Show him –yeah, exactly...//–yeah. I think the small children need to see that rather than be told it //– yeah...
4.16	49
<b>TRANSITION TO STAGE</b>	
<b>2 Purpose of Stage two: Synthesis, Where to go? What supports needed?</b>	
F.13	Ok, can we spend a few minutes now pulling together the issues that have been raised? // What issues have we talked about? //What insights might we have shared? //We might start with T.. // and if anybody wants to add then just do so// Has this helped you in any way? [Addressing T]// Has this cleared any understandings// or given you any insights?
T.15	I think the, Who? What? When? Did they answer the questions in the piece, you know? // And.... I suppose the children to be a bit more specific ...for the younger ones anyway...
F. 14	Anybody else have any other insights?
4.17	Well I like the idea of the person not knowing who's work they were assessing, // then it's not a personal thing! //–yeah, I think that's good //– but again I think that that is a lot more work thrown back on the teacher
F. 15	Does anybody around the table use peer assessment?
2. 8	Yeah, I do, //but again you have to watch how you pair the children//, but it's very good for them to notice things//. They wouldn't be focusing on spelling// or say 'oh you're missing a full stop here', // ... they wouldn't notice the capital letter, // where as I would be straight to it, so you know...
3. 5	I started using peer assessment actually since around Christmas// but I've been using questions...// just before they come up with their writing or their finished work, //Have you checked this or that? //you know a checklist//. And then I'd actually get them to give over their copybook to their peer beside them// ,if they're finished their work as well, // And then I'd get them to not to correct their mistakes //but to point out where there might be some spelling mistakes// or full stops// or grammatical errors or whatever// It kind of makes them stop and assess their own work a little bit more// before going 'oh teacher I'm finished' and running up and giving it to you//. And it also gives you a bit of time you know as well...
4.18	I wonder too would the weaker child be able to assess another child's work.
2. 9	I've had problems with that yeah -it's hard
4.19	If a weak child has only handed up a line or two to another child...
T. 16	they're going to compare his work to their standard
F. 16	And what do the children learn by peer assessing? //Would we have any experience of that? //What do you think the children learn themselves?
2. 10	Well like E. said, just that they learn to re-read their work before they go 'I'm finished I'm finished'
T. 17	I think it is for the middle to brighter children level //...for the weaker children, it's very difficult.
F. 17	Ok so is it that you're saying they need guidance to see another's piece of writing?
T. 18	And then how does the peer help the weaker child?
4.20	Their ideas are often mixed up...in that case there [referring to a pair working together on videoed lesson] It was the speed at which J. was trying to get it down on paper really was the problem for the weaker partner. He was very slow, and the whole thing, and rubbing out, which is a thing weak children tend to use as a cover up..., and just getting it on paper was his problem
2.11.	They don't have the language to express themselves often,
T. 19	30
2.12	18
F. 18	17
4.21	56

2.13	There are definitely advantages and disadvantages with peer assessment. The disadvantages are it potentially can have a negative impact on the weaker child but the positive thing it can slow down the stronger students, to assess their own work better. By getting them to read other people's work it's giving them a different point of view as well.... But I think you've got to be careful. I think the best way to peer assess is through the pair work, but that takes a lot of organisation
T. 20	Em, I've done a good bit of pair work before so then they would be quite used to it// –but, you know sometimes if it's not done properly it can just be a time to have a bit of fun and stuff like that...//
F. 19	6
2.14	12
Stage three: Purpose of Stage three: Action Plan	
F. 20	Ok let's think about what we might take from this discussion.// What strategies do you see you might try out? //If you were to identify two or three strategies that you would commit to trying out, // that you might feedback to this group next time? //
4.22	I would like to see about stretching the better pupils - as we were saying earlier about getting them to expand on their ideas...
3.8	I'm definitely going to try some of the pair work that A. did. // I thought it was a great idea, // you know, they seemed to get a lot done//. My only reservation about it is just whose going to work with whom...
T. 21	They worked with who they were just sitting beside– I moved a few of them...but really it was just who they were sitting beside.
3.9	54
4.23	You didn't have any trouble in that regard did you?
T. 22	Most of them were sitting beside each other but there were a few I moved.... I was quite aware of that like, you know say M. would be very open and be patient with R. and stuff like that '
F. 21	46
4.24	10
Stage four: Purpose of Stage four: Review the Process	
F. 22	Ok and in terms of the session, were people happy with it? Is there anything else that you think should be part of a session like this? Just any comments on the session, and then we'll leave you [referring to the teacher of the lesson] with the last word.
2.15	Doing something like this before we teach explanation writing again , I think would be good, looking at what problems we might come across –ok very good
4.25	I love the idea because over the years of teaching, I've not had it ...yeah looking into things more deeply...
F. 23	43
4.26	10
2.16	73
F. 24	33
T. 23	Did I find the session helpful? – This session? I did yes yeah, it was helpful and I think the fact that you know, it's very much an open forum .... and people just gave their points of view and it was fine, helpful more than anything else
F. 25	Ok, and how did you find the whole experience of videoing your lesson and sharing that?
T. 24	I didn't really mind having the video in the room I'd have to say. I hardly knew it was there ... but you know afterwards it was helpful...When I looked through it again, you know you could follow things up...., but you know it was good for me to look at myself in that way I suppose as well.
F. 26	Well done folks! Thanks a million-

## Appendix 10: Transcription of Post Observation Conference X

Key: F = Facilitator T. = Teacher of lesson - Speakers 3 & 4 = Teacher Colleagues

T. 1= Teacher's (of lesson) first intervention in discussion. 3.5= Colleague No.3's fifth intervention in discussion (Colleagues are numbered according to order in which they initially intervened in discussion)

Speaker	Contribution to the discussion
	<b>Stage one: Purpose To explore the issue: Analysis &amp; Diagnosis</b>
F.1	So//it's [time] a quarter to nine now yeah.//We should be finished by about half nine, //is that ok? // Perfect.// And if you think I'm staying too long at any one point // [You] just say so, // Ok, good morning folks, and I genuinely thank you for coming in so early in the morning, // I appreciate it. //So again /we're going to follow the model of feedback for professional learning, that we've been talking about// and we're looking in particular at T1's & T2's lesson // Ok? //would you two [turning to the two teachers who taught the lesson ] like to start //and talk a little bit about what the experience was like for you, in general, //you know the story from the beginning, //from planning it together etc.//
T1:.1	Planning went well, // we had a clear idea of what we were at, //we'd been doing the genre for a little while, //for a few weeks.// We'd had a bit of a break since we started it, so// it was really going back to it about six weeks later, //so going back, // reassessing what the children knew, //what they'd remember// and really our learning intention for this lesson was how to use the skills they'd learnt, // how to use persuasive writing as a genre //to communicate opinions and ideas in a stimulus which we used as a letter from MH, Minister for Health, banning Easter eggs, this Easter.//
T2:.1	So// [learning intention] just applying it really to a real life situation //
T1:.2	Yeah, //and ...to recap on what they knew //and also to consolidate the key features of persuasive writing, // a clear title, // their opinion, //their arguments //but also recognising the arguments on the other side's as well, // so that was our learning intention//
T2.2	We shared our intention with the others [colleagues who were observing]; //3,4 & 5// so they kind of knew what we were hoping to get out of the lesson, //and then afterwards T1 and myself, //we talked about how we thought it [lesson] went//and overall we thought the children had done very well in it, and our problem the dilemma we found was that.../ the weaker children, it kind of seemed, to just go over their heads. //So in the lesson they were doing independent writing, // I was working with, I sat with the WEAKER children, // but even still they didn't really complete the work, //so we just kind of were wondering how to present that to the group, // how we might cater for that in a class, //we don't have a learning assistant either//
T1.3...	We had talked previously about doing a different worksheet // where they could outline less opinion points. // The rest of the class had three arguments to give. //Three FOR and 1 AGAINST. //We talked about giving a different worksheet for the weaker students but we didn't do it, // thinking they could just do one of each reason [1 argument for and 1 against]//and that would be enough, // or that they would do it orally with 2// but even throughout the lesson //and at the end of the lesson// we still thought it [seemed, <i>to just go over their heads</i> ] ...//so I don't know if that was something you guys would talk about.//
F.2	And do you..., // by any chance // have samples of the children's work? //
T1.4	yeah we do//[have samples of children's work]

F.3	Well people will find that helpful.....//...maybe if we looked at, what you mean by...//
T1.5	Just that they didn't complete it at all, //even though they'd given their ideas //and I'd transcribed them [on the board]//. We'd had a lot of discussion with the weaker group, //but...you probably saw me transcribing after they'd given their ideas//, so they weren't my ideas. //But even so //I think a lot of their focus was getting the writing down, rather than, actually....//
F.4	Maybe if we took one each...//[referring to samples of work]
3.1	If you tried to XXXXXX maybe from what was up on the board
T1. 6	These are the very capable students who were able to produce quite concise arguments //[showing one set of samples]
T2.3	I was working with these....[showing sample of writing]//
T1.7	He [ child] was given extra time //later on, he did a bit more, //so he wouldn't have actually done all that //
F.5	So, // if this is the evidence of what the children have learned, //what does it tell us about their learning? // I suppose if we look at it from that point // people might just ...// what do you think the children have learned? //and what have the children not learned? //from the evidence of their work//, what would you think? //
3.2	Focusing on the weaker children exactly, or....?
F.6	Yeah,// is that your...// is that the area you'd like to look at?//yeah [checking for agreement from teachers]
T2.4	Do you mean comparing?
F.7	What does it [evidence ]tell us about what the children learned?// What they did learn and what they did not learn//
3.3	Well I suppose from one perspective...//they could have understood exactly what was being asked of them,// but just when it comes to them actually writing it//, their writing [skills]might not be as high standard as their cognitive skills
4.1	This boy looks like he had a problem//
T1.8	Yeah //sorry there should be two other samples, //I don't have them with me //but, and they would have been in between this and this. //They would have had slightly more written// but it wouldn't have had say ....the last bit//
4.2	When you were talking to them, // did they seem to understand the problem? //
T2.5	They understood the problem //and they could give their arguments, //in terms of having a title that's a question // [a title written as a question] like the actual format that we're looking for, // they didn't really get that, //I had to guide them in that. //But they had the ideas, // they knew the question, // I had presented the question 'Should we ban Easter Eggs this year? //And they had strong opinions on it. //Verbally they could engage in the discussion about it, // and they could try to convince me or could give solid reasons for why they thought that. //... So I find that when we were introducing the last one before[referring to previous lessons on persuasive writing] //I was

	setting the script//, they didn't really ... not engage but, they didn't really take part in it as much, // but this time when I sat with them in the group they had to come up with the ideas, // but I think it took that bit longer for them to – to express them// – I think they got a lot from the other kids in the class//, listened to what was said, // and that's where their ideas were similar to others ...//
4.3	Ok// so you weren't sure that they were their own ideas, //you thought maybe that they could have simply taken them from others?...//
3.4	Well there are a limited amount of possibilities in fairness//, you know like 'why should we like Easter', // 'because we like chocolate' //you know that's going to be what most of them automatically think, // so, ok //they may have listened to the others, //but what I think is that there's only a certain amount of....
T2.6	//I think the other children ... kind of sparked off ideas in their head, //where they took some of the other children's ideas, //and then they related it to themselves// so some children said having Easter eggs are fun. //Then I said, 'well what you mean by that?' // and in the group two of them gave clear reasons, //like one said 'because we play games and we look for them at home with my family. //So they related it to themselves, //they did have an argument, //but they couldn't put that down in writing, // so how can we give them a feeling that their ideas are their own and also just the feeling of completion of work, //because I don't think it's great for the child to have that[incomplete tasks] all the time//
T1.9	Also our question was as well// 'is the whole idea of persuasive writing almost lost on these children// because cognitively they're not even really understanding the concept behind it? // at second class are some of those children /still at a stage where persuasive writing is almost too abstract? //
3.5	I think maybe that a formula [ would be helpful] like you know, //we have our title, //so somebody might be wondering what does t-i-t-l-e mean, // and then we have our 'then' and 'next' and 'my opinion' //the formula that we have to kind of, ...//it is a lot to expect someone at this early stage// to be able to think about it and write...[without some formula]particularly at the lower end of ability//
T1.10	Yeah, // the idea was that we had already done this, //we'd spent a lot of time on it, six weeks ago, // so it was a case of, what do they remember, //I don't actually remember the weaker children finding as much difficulty with it six weeks ago//, as they did when we revised it recently// so I don't know whether one...
T2.7	Was that because...// this time they were given a bit more freedom with it?
T1.11	Yeah// and because it was slightly more challenging...//instead of we saying 'we're doing persuasive writing', // we didn't feed them that // it was how would we respond to this letter? //... while it may have challenged the more capable children, // it was too far above the weaker children all together...//
4.4	I remember seeing in one of your lessons, //not sitting in //but being in the classroom to kind of help with some of the weaker ones with one of your final persuasive writing lessons.// So I would agree with you, // a lot of these kids were able to formulate their opinions quite well [then]. //I don't remember seeing, this level of difficulty.
T1.12	I'm missing samples, // sorry that should be kind of in between these two //
4.5 L	So what do you make of that? //It's a recall issue? A retention issue? // Find out maybe with a new lesson? //
T1.13	It's a recall issue I think for some of them, //for about two or three.// Well it's a recall issue for, I suppose all of them, //but I suppose some of them can manage it, and some of them can relate the skills to more real-life situations//
T2.8	Originally we thought about giving them another free sheet,...to help with ideas, // find some other way for them to present it//
F.8	So if I hear what you're saying, // and[you] correct me if I'm wrong, //what you're saying is that

	they had plenty of ideas, //but you didn't know whether the fact that for some if they originally didn't come from them , then they couldn't actually get them down on paper, //is that an issue? // and just let that rest for a second//. And then the other one is that, for those that have ideas, there is some kind of a block between verbalising the idea and actually writing it down// Is that a hurdle that they can't get over?// They are able to voice it but when it comes to writing the same idea down they have a difficulty?//
T2.9	There's two [difficulties]I think// some of the difficulty with writing is just their actual motor skills. // The others seems to be actually getting the idea and putting it into a sentence you can write//
4.6	I noticed just for that lesson //when you had the weaker students at one table// so you would be able to work with them. /// That table seemed to have a bit of a stunned expression on their face, // in relation to the lesson, //so I wonder if, //if what we're seeing here is, kind of like, a slowness to take it all in, //.....there's all these teachers in the room, [referring to the observing teachers] // two teachers instead of one. ...//
	pause
4.7	And that's quite daunting actually //to be given a blank page // and that getting to go ahead straight away when, you know there's too much going on there for them.//...
3.6	Although this is not in any way a bad one.....[showing sample] //you know, this is,... you have the title , //'I think' [indicator of personal opinion] // there and they have 'also' .....[referring to suggested vocabulary]//
T2.10	For the title and opinion, //like for the title it was quite ok, //we'd done that as a class so.... and so then we talked about how we'd start that together.// They needed, one or two of them needed help, //they knew what their opinion was, but to come up with a sentence, they found difficult//
3.7	XXXXXX
<b>Purpose of Stage two: Synthesis - identifying new understanding</b>	
F.9	So maybe if we could summarise the issues that have surfaced, //and what new understanding in terms of, what new insights might we have got now from this /and particularly for the two people who observed the lesson // maybe, you have something from the experience of observing, //what did you notice that might help us to bring new understanding to the issue, //can we talk a little bit about that, [new understanding]// what is the nub of the dilemma? sorry [referring to a teacher who wished to speak]
3.8	I was just going to say that I think, particularly at the beginning when you open the letter [from the 'Minister']//, every single one, they were fully engaged,// they really took this to heart,// you could see that, //they were, they all found this topic really interesting //and that was a really good starting point for those at the lower end you have something that draws them in as well as those at the other end//
4.8	If you're looking for a key, //maybe it's that the weaker students were a little overwhelmed, //is that, kind of a...
T2.11	How can they be brought into the class when you don't have extra help
F.10	Maybe... are we clear that we have got to the nub of the problem?// Does it resonate with our own experience in the class for all of us//
T1.14	It resonates with every English class we have as well doesn't it? // [it] not just, particular to a writing lesson.// ...and maybe we could get them to represent pictorially, or is that no longer persuasive writing?
<b>Purpose of Stage three: Brainstorm ideal scenario leading to action plan</b>	
F.11	We'll move on to maybe the ideal scenario//, what is the ideal scenario that you would like to see, //that any of us would like to see, //so that we can all relate it to our own practice, //
T2.12	That they independently come up with some argument in some form whether it's in writing or



	pictures, // that they're getting their opinion across // and taking part in the class as much as the stronger students – // completion was an issue for you wasn't it – I think completing work was important //
F.12	And that was important to you?
T2.13	No I think for them, not every lesson, you don't want, every piece of work to be incomplete, for them
F.13	For their sense of achievement. / It's important for them to feel like they can have something completed //
4.9	And if they can do it with a bit of independence
3.9	So what about closed procedures in your class? // I was just thinking that would be a possibility // but then you're not leaving scope for their opinions maybe, ... // ... this is a set thing where you have to put words in, into the correct slots as such, so it's not really creative. // Would something like having a strong student working with weaker students, ... // ... would pairing work?
T2.14	That's a tricky one; // either it can work brilliantly or the stronger one can just take over the writing and the ideas //. At that age I think you'll find that // the older one, the stronger one will do it and the other one will copy. // It's not ... you still need to kind of facilitate the conversation between them // to make sure they're both taking part
3.10	You'd really want to make sure that it is the weaker child who really does write it down // ... you could get a discussion on that with the parents or whatever //
T2.15	Of course they both have to give an opinion each, // and even have the strong one write it so that they get something down // they both have to give an opinion //
T1.15	The weaker group did have opinions //, we did do a joined up, paired, or with your partner // you had to give them an idea, // and I did hear two of them saying 'actually milk is quite healthy for you' //
4.10	And did that idea come out [in the written work]
T1.16	I'm not sure – yeah I'll check. // But the ideas were there // and it's like the difficulty with any English lesson then. // ... it's because of literacy skills, // writing skills, // everything, // and it's impossible to get it down on paper, and ...
4.11	So if we broke that, "getting down on paper", into smaller steps
T1.17	Yeah, if that's what our ultimate aim is, to get it down on paper or is it?
4.12	But then you both mentioned, T1 and T2 // just in passing // that it seemed like an idea ... maybe to get the weaker ones to draw bits of it or something. // I wonder if that breaks the "getting it down into writing" process just into smaller steps for them. // It's another idea that I noticed you guys had in your minds. // Because it would still, in my mind work toward the goal of persuasive writing. // Because it's still getting their ideas down // when they're at a different stage of writing //
T2.16	They have their ideas there // they could still present them // and still talk about them // – and whatever key words they have
3.11	Key words yeah, put those down
4.13	Maybe three key words beside each picture
F.14	So that's another idea to think about // what we're looking at is, how do we bring this child [referring to sample of child's writing] to the next stage, // so there a few ideas around. // and all we need to do now is look at definite actions that you might take to scaffold this child's learning to bring him to the next stage, // you said your hopes were for – greater autonomy for this child. ....
T2.17	Greater autonomy, and I suppose an understanding of the concept of persuasive writing
F.15	9
T1.18	21
F.16	17



T2.18	34
F.17	8
T1.19	25
T2.19	10
4.14	9
T2.20	26
4.15	9
T2.21	26
4.16	8
T1.20	80
4.17	101
T1.21	47
F.18	4
T2.22	50
F.19	13
T2.23	26
T1.22	32
T2.24	2
<b>Purpose of Stage four: Review the Process of the meeting</b>	
F.20	I'm conscious of the fact that we are needed elsewhere. //So if you're happy to move on maybe you two [referring to two teachers of the lesson] would tell us what the experience was like having people in your classroom //and then the whole thing about observation//, and then we'll look at how this chat went, //whether it works doesn't work ok? //
T1.23	Em, it was a very positive experience, // you never get a chance to work alongside your colleagues// so it was a positive experience// and it makes you more conscious when you have people observing of I suppose the way you phrase things, //but having said that I think that I constantly have people in and out of my classroom in a lot of ways so// I would be quite used to it// but I'd be aware that for some people it would be a bigger issue//and it would be something that would take time across the school... to introduce//
T2.25	I don't know what to say. //I think it was a little strange because it wasn't my class, //so not knowing the kids I think effects in one way how you teach them //because you don't know what they're used to, // you might have certain ones putting their hands up all the time, // and I liked in my own class to draw in some of the other ones, //but when you don't know the children //you're afraid; 'what child am I trying to draw in here, //I mean you don't mean to make anyone upset in any way.// It was good though, to do it with someone/e else.// If I thought that you [turning to colleague]had forgotten something// I could come in/. If I was busy with someone you could come in//...
F. 21	And the experience of being observed?
T1 & 2:	We didn't really notice...
T2.27	I think //it's coming from last year// I had some observation experience, //but like I knew you were there but it didn't really effect anything//. The biggest thing for me though was that it wasn't my class//
F.22	So, we might look at then, this process today, //what kind of learning, //is it helpful? //is it not helpful? // is the model helpful, Do we get to give each other real feedback that matters? is the question ok, see what you think
3.12	I think it's always good to reflect on your practice, // because sometimes you're just like 'ahh that's a day's work done', // and actually thinking, how can I make that better and how actually might I go about it.// That's where the real improvement //in our own teaching and our learning about how we teach, really comes out//
T2.28	Not just reflecting on yourself, I think it's really good to talk to someone about it, whether it was us, because we both taught it, [the lesson] because we might both have different opinions about how it went
4.18	The other thing, it's funny as the observer, I can see how it would be intimidating maybe, //both

	of you said no which was interesting //because you both used other experiences //and said well that's what made me comfortable with it//. But as an observer// I noticed that all of us took away our own learning //even apart from the lesson//. Just by you opening the door and letting us in//, even though you said 'come help me' or come help us, //we all went away helped because //I know, C. was looking at the posters// and kind of getting her own ideas for class and comparing because you both have second class, //and I thought that as I heard you [turning to a colleague] walk up the stairs you said 'well I know that next year I'm going to do' whatever... // and I know for myself that I too went away thinking okay, // and so I think in the observing process, // even though we were there to help we went away having learnt ourselves//
T1.25	I think it matters as well that you know, I feel like I would have a good working relationship with all of the girls or whatever, and you'd chat to them informally in the staff room or whatever. I would imagine that possibly with other people would feel a lot more intimidated, you know people with twenty years experience or whatever.... I suppose that the fact that we are all at same class level well remember...// they all have weak students in their class, // they all have strong students in their class, and something that we all struggle to do is meet the needs of all of them, so in a lot of ways, you know we could sit in on them [colleagues] doing it and it would probably be the exact same outcome that we'd still be sitting here discussing 'are the weaker ones the ones that maybe need the focus of our attention?'
F.23	With children you never know how a class is going to go anyway, // you might have bit more confidence as you get older// but it's still exposing yourself in that way as a teacher no matter what age you are. // But how have you found this process //– has it been helpful, not helpful?.....//. And for people getting the feedback, //does it lead to really honest feedback that will make a difference to what you are doing? //
T2.29	I think// people hold back on anything they think that they'd have done differently //–do you? [turning to the group] – I don't know. //I think //people do and it's different when you've got like someone in assessing you because they'll give you objective criticism, // but I'd say with colleagues they will tell you the good things, //I don't know, not in a negative way!
3.13	Well I think we're being very honest in this conversation
T2.30	No I'm not saying.....!
3.14	But I think it was very honest...
T2.31	I suppose people would keep focused on what went well ...which is probably the right thing to do as well...
4.19	I think you are underestimating your lesson. It was a very good lesson and...
T1.26	I think though, // I wonder possibly...// had we not raised the issue of differentiation, // maybe the two girls wouldn't have// like maybe it needs to come from the two people first for other people to respond to it and say 'actually' I agree //maybe that was a problem//
T2.32	45
4.20	Well you kind of open a door don't you, by saying that this is a problem, gives you freedom to be honest
T1.27	Yeah , I think that has to be there otherwise we might not have gotten that from you
F.24	And the model of learning that this is based on, as a wrap up, is that we learn best when we take ownership of our own learning, so the idea is not us telling another colleague how to do it, it is all of us helping to clarify, to get to the nub of the issue so that the colleague sees for themselves where they want to go with it
T2.33	But the colleague kind of has to persevere with it – yeah.
T1.28	And if there was something like that, say differentiation issue had sailed over our heads completely, would it be that we should expect people to say it
F.25	Might be interesting to see it like that, I think we better wrap up, thanks a million